

# AGORA



Belmont Abbey College  
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Photograph by Michael West, taken during the  
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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*

**Volume XXVIII  
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## Contents

Shells .....	Gilbert Allen .....	3
Sing and It Will Pass .....	Michael Pesackis .....	4
Child .....	Rory Fosberry .....	6
Plinks .....	Rory Fosberry .....	7
The Hound from Petaluma, CA .....	Julian Fitzgerald, OSB .....	8
Sorry to Say Hi .....	Pam Newton .....	9
the stars have poured into our mouths .....	Mary Ellen Weir .....	10
"I write on moonlight paper" .....	Rosa Langevin .....	11
"My dreams of yesterday" .....	Rosa Langevin .....	11
Here I Sit .....	Brother Leo Fowler, OSB .....	12
"If light no longer entered her eyes" .....	Julian Fitzgerald, OSB .....	13
"When the storm of darkness" .....	Rosa Langevin .....	13
The Name .....	Rory Fosberry .....	14
Paths of Peace .....	Michael West .....	15
Wildflower .....	Michael Pesackis .....	32
After .....	Gilbert Allen .....	34
"As I walk with my Lord I imagine" .....	Matthew H. Seltzer, NSJ .....	35
At an Impasse .....	Rosa Langevin .....	36
We Greet .....	Brother Leo Fowler, OSB .....	37
"Wavering reflections within" .....	Rosa Langevin .....	37
Thoughtful .....	Joel Jargstorf .....	38
The Men Who Rule Us .....	William Lindsey .....	39
God Sent .....	William Esser .....	40
Taxpayers' Ode to a Congressman .....	Margrete Anderson .....	41
"The balmy air..." .....	Newley Purnell .....	42
The Lone Heron .....	William Lindsey .....	43
Another World .....	Michael Pesackis .....	44
Krystallnacht .....	William Lindsey .....	45
"I watched you walk briskly" .....	Mary Ellen Weir .....	46
After the Fight .....	Rory Fosberry .....	47
"The monk decays..." .....	Julian Fitzgerald, OSB .....	48
Howard Finster .....	Michael Lillard .....	49
Ruminations of a Sometime Player .....	Camille Hopkins .....	50
The Tale of Phoebe Robin .....	William Lindsey .....	51
"If this sole dark cedar" .....	William Lindsey .....	66
On Looking at Vermeer .....	William Lindsey .....	67
Bill .....	Russell Fowler .....	68
Candlemas .....	William Lindsey .....	69
Surface Tension .....	Michael Lillard .....	70
Arcade .....	Gilbert Allen .....	71

## Shells

Gilbert Allen

1. Driving to the post office  
looking for blue lights  
between the bushes

I saw a turtle only inches  
out on the left  
shoulder, head pointed right.

Four-fifty-three  
so I told myself I'd pick  
it up on the way

back, put it safe  
on the other side.

2. I pointed at the clock  
through the glass doors  
and smiled. Sighing

the clerk let me inside,  
relocking before she accepted  
my yellow slip.

The hard canister  
held my father's  
ashes, which I'd promised

to scatter where  
he'd scattered my mother's.

3. I put it on  
the passenger's side  
and wondered about strapping

it in. But it was too small  
and too heavy to go anywhere, even  
to the floor. Instead

I studied the road, slowing down,  
trying to save something  
for my own sake.

But it had already gone  
back, or crossed over, you couldn't tell.

### **Sing and It Will Pass**

Michael Pesackis

*Dedicated to my grandfather*

Graveyards  
are fertile ground  
not necessarily  
for daisies  
but for

the memories of  
those who live  
in graveyards  
there are some  
who wear black  
and cry or  
strike their breast  
I sing  
*Chante che ti passe*  
my memory retells  
your stories of  
fire trucks and  
football games  
Death has taken  
you from those  
who wear black  
but I know that  
standing still  
is for fools  
and that what  
you've given me  
is far too  
valuable  
to be drained  
from my body  
by tears.

## Child

Rory Fosberry

I was nine years old and  
I relished  
pushing my dirty feet into the dew-soaked grass,  
at nine in the morning.  
I could look into the sun,  
and it felt like a burner, red and urgent,  
on High.

Running never made me tired and  
I could feel  
a well of adrenaline burst through my veins  
and flood my head.  
I didn't have to think  
and my thoughtlessness gave me the power  
of high,

happy boredom that adults craved, and  
I had no need  
for cold decision-making skills or debts,  
that adults have.  
I thought they were dumb,  
like spoiled princes, whose power made them  
high.

But their high was no high compared to the high  
I could master  
in a sprint from my house to the corner.  
I didn't have to stop,  
but could keep right on running to the creek and  
leap high

Into the air, fresh and pungent, like dog licks, and  
I would crash,  
disrupting the motionless surface, like  
I was God,  
destroying the serenity of after-dinner walks  
from on high.



## Plinks

Rory Fosberry

Sitting here, I hear  
trickling drips as  
water dips into  
its near basin.

Dream-like streams  
of liquid crystal  
tinkle through little cracks,  
like tears through wrinkles.

Splashes sprinkle tiny crashes  
as spraying flashes mingle gladly  
reflecting madly the sunlight beams,  
seeming spectrums of prisms.

Drifting circles widen, lifting  
centrally shifting waves curving  
toward its wet mission, reaching  
sides of slippery brick.

Quietly teaching, the fountain preaches  
of thinking of trees and raindrop-drinking,  
wishing for night-time words to cheer  
and sighting sea-birds in flight.

In my ears I'm listening to these high plinks sifting.  
Hinting and pensive, the fountain sits glistening,  
and, hearing her misty drizzle, I'm missing  
the gifts so clearly dear.

**The Hound from Petaluma, CA**  
*Reclaiming My Pillow*

Julian Fitzgerald, OSB

Emily (Dickinson, as she was named) sat enthroned upon the pillow which I had only just abandoned, as I made my way to the bathroom to do my business as I did each night. This Basset looked like an under-stuffed tri-color version of a cartoonist's caricature, or perhaps a sculptor's gargoyle. She was all flesh and ears—*long ones*. She tried to ignore me as I returned from my nocturnal journey, her moist brown eyes looking casually away from my descending figure. Hopeful that I would be able to again quickly re-enter the warm spot which I had only minutes earlier left vacant, I approached the bed.

"Emily, move!" I groaned, but she lay like a mountain. She reminded me of a cow patty in a pasture: she wasn't moving, and I was afraid to touch her. The next step was to try and push this 50- pound mass of hound, who was all span and no altitude, off MY pillow. I put one hand on her bottom and with the other I grabbed her front paws and PUSHED. She didn't budge. This low, vibrating rumble came from that canine face that, only minutes before, I had been kissing.

Okay, the direct, commanding, I'm-the-boss-and-you're-the-dog approach wasn't working. It was four in the morning; I was cold, standing in only my BVD's, staring down at a dog who had once again claimed my pillow and my spot in the bed and was not moving to let her beloved master get back to sleep. Time to try "plan B"—that's right—the rational discussion. Have you ever tried to have a rational discussion with a dog? The problem is they are smarter than us and infinitely more persistent. I calmly tried to explain to Emily, who by this time was pretending to be asleep, that I was the master and she the dog, and that she was on my pillow, which was not her spot. I also submitted to her that it was I who had to work in the morning; she could sleep all day if she wanted (she mostly wanted). I was, of course, ignored.

My strategy once again failing, I resorted to another approach, again lowering own integrity in the matter: *I pleaded before my dog*. Suffice it to say that this approach didn't work either—I'll spare you the embarrassing details.

By now it's 4:10 a.m.; I'm tired. The beast is still in my spot, and the only thing changing is the passing of the time. And I'm stuck in a philosophical conundrum regarding the supposed superiority of man over animal. Something's got to give. Well ... it is a queen-sized bed. Obviously, the queen has chosen her place of repose. So I choose the solution that any man in my position would choose: I climbed over my basset hound, careful not to wake her as I passed my form over hers, and made for the other side of the bed. It was cold, hard, and most unfriendly. But there was no hound there. Our little exchange had left me even more tired than before, and sleep came after I turned three or four times.

## Sorry to Say Hi

Pam Newton

Another ten years has passed  
and I drive across hills of

bright green and daffodils,

down half-paved roads  
too numerous to count,

watching the sun, evasive  
as a lost thought, disappear  
yet again.

I grope for maps in the glove compartment,  
smell farmyards and honeysuckle,  
and pass an occasional Greyhound

headed for Tuscaloosa or Kansas City  
or Detroit.

I have waited the long hour

until I appear in the doorway and face  
greetings, saved like unused coupons,  
for years and years.

With many wrinkles on my face (and yours),  
we will have all-night chats with moonlight  
on our cheeks,

and race the second hand with talk of

children, marriages,  
divorce and sex,  
deaths, weddings, affairs,  
love and God,

cramming it all in,  
like a shoplifter in a supermarket,  
until we bulge unnaturally.

Many dawns have come and gone  
and we have earned every wrinkle  
without each other.

And though I have wanted you to see each  
line appear on my brow,

now I am almost sorry to touch the door,  
to enter and say hi.

**the stars have poured into our mouths**

Mary Ellen Weir

Once, when the night  
pulled down silver  
from the speckled moon,  
we watched snow. And talked  
of how that lunacy could

could

could very well  
grab each flake to kiss.

Later, during a noon, we left the room  
that sipped of death. We walked  
through a dissolving brown town  
we saw the roads, the rise, the whimpering  
trees.

We knew then the the stars held language —  
ranting and tender,  
boiling and iced,  
sweet-word tensions —

inarticulate.

Rosa Langevin

I write on moonlight paper  
Use the dark of night as ink  
And punctuate my sentences  
With the twinkling of the stars.  
My life falls in and out of shadows  
The thoughts they always flow  
But sometimes the ink runs out.  
I sing a song but my voice grows weak,  
Still my heart carries on.  
I love to write, yet it seems  
Ink is most precious when it's gone.

My dreams of yesterday  
Are like a firefly  
They glow dimly through the night  
And catch my soul's lonely eye  
It spies upon them then  
Catches them in a jar  
Every time the lid opens  
Memories illuminate the night  
While wishes of tomorrow  
Do brighten their soft warm light

## Here I Sit

Brother Leo Fowler, OSB

Here I sit upon this rock,  
No shoes no shirt no socks,  
No tanning block  
To stop  
The sun's burning shock!

Here I sit upon this bed,  
Burning from toe to head,  
My skin's lobster red.  
It's dead!  
And I'm filled with anxious dread.

You would think that I would learn  
Or at least be able to discern,  
Come summer's turn,  
Not to burn  
For health's concern.

If I sit again upon that rock,  
It will be with ample stock  
Of tanning block  
To stop  
The sun's burning shock!

Julian Fitzgerald, OSB

If light no longer entered her eyes,  
would she see? If she was then blind  
to still forms and shapes and shades,  
would all known things seem strange?

Would she stare into  
wild nothingness,  
at dark floors,  
gazing,  
blind?

Sounds.

Hear shapes:

Bright walls breathe,  
Floors sigh and sing.  
Hear her own sure breath,  
far flip of a book's page,  
relief of an opened can,  
air drafting warm and cold caress,  
swell and slow fade of never still light.

Rosa Langevin

When the storm of darkness  
comes and rises all around

When the lightning calls  
and thunder sounds

When the rain beats steadily  
upon the ground

When devils come to pound  
upon my heart

There's a small wavering light  
of hope and faith that refuses  
to die

Love comes to surround me

There I will be found  
amidst the pain  
a small flickering flame

## The Name

Rory Fosberry

The girl in the window has no name,  
but suddenly, I can't take another step.  
I feel like a bum, holding a tin cup,  
begging for some attention or some change.  
She is a hundred feet away, behind two doors of glass,  
drinking either coffee or water.

A crashing sound, like waves on the water,  
smashes against my mind until her name  
is swept away from my tongue like shattered glass.  
I'll talk to her, I think as I step  
through the first door. In case I change  
my mind, I'd better grab a cup.

Yeah, she'll think I'm just filling my cup.  
My department is out of water,  
I can tell her, in case I change  
my mind, but I've got to find out her name.  
Like office gossip, I hear, as I step  
down the hall, lights buzzing in fluorescent glass.

My boss called her a charming lass  
at last week's office party, where over a cup  
of wine, we talked about her when she stepped  
past. My thoughts got me in hot water  
when he told me that forgotten name,  
because lust is forbidden at the Exchange.

Oh, God, man! You know you can't change  
your mind now; she sees you through the glass  
door. A guy from accounting (I know *his* name)  
is talking to her and pointing at me with his cup  
of coffee. They're standing by the water  
bottle. I freeze in my steps.



I can't seem to force my legs to step  
through the open door. I can't change  
my mind. Just go get some water.  
The noise of the bubbles in the glass  
bottle and the water landing in my paper cup  
will break the silence. Just ask her name.

I change my mind and forget about the water.  
I turn away from the glass doors, holding my stupid cup.  
As I retrace my steps, I hear her call me by name.

### **Paths of Peace**

Michael West

"The Eagle has landed!" Brian bellowed as the bow of his Bayliner touched the soft sand of the tiny island. We had been traversing the winding waterways of the Wilmington River for pretty much the length of this Saturday, learning its secrets, its bends and its currents. Brian, the quintessential sea-captain, decided to take a tiny tributary off the larger river. "I've been this way before," he would always say whenever we participated in these summer weekend excursions. Without much debate Cole and I would always trust him. Brian had grown up on these waters, as did Cole, so there wasn't much reason for me not to trust him. Our lives together had been short, but enriching; the three of us had become like brothers, steering our way through the academic system at USC, graduating in 1990. Brian and Cole hailed from Savannah, Georgia, and were roommates in Moore Hall. I was stuck in with them that year. I was from Columbia, and received a scholarship to Carolina, opting to study the roots of American literature. The scholarship allowed me to move on campus and forge this quirky relationship with these two Georgia crack-ers.

Through this friendship, I had been introduced to Savannah. I had visited the beautiful seatown on many occasions, travelling there with my friends, and had experienced everything it had to offer: the unending

supply of tantalizing seafood, the hedonistic lure of nightlife on River Street, the green beer and green grits on St. Patrick's Day. I fell in love with the city, and I was fortunate enough to land a job teaching English at Coastal Georgia State College in Savannah. 'Fortunate', I suppose, is not an accurate description; after all, I shamelessly put so much energy into finding a job in Savannah. I had adopted it as my surrogate hometown.

My love for Savannah began and our friendships firmed when, in the summer of 1986, the summer after our freshman year, the three of us took a camping trip to one of the millions of tiny islands which dot the riverways of the coastal city. It was to become a staple in our relationship.

It was June, a sweltering month in Savannah. Brian, a former All-SEC third baseman for the Gamecocks who was now an assistant coach with the South Carolina baseball team, had led us once again to a new island, virgin soil, at least to us. It was amazing — the ease with which Brian seemed to discover a new, uninhabited frontier each and every year. Brian, more so than the rest of us, lived for these summer get-togethers, and I believe he took it upon himself to explore the waterways ahead of time. He wanted it to be a perfect time. And it usually was.

This year, however, it would be different. Cole had invited his girlfriend, Hannah, and a friend of hers, Megan. Hannah and Cole had known each other since their days in high school in Savannah. They dated through college, despite the fact that Hannah had attended Georgia Southern in Statesboro, some three and a half hours from Columbia. When Hannah called off their engagement last summer, just three months before the day, it almost wrecked Cole. He delayed his return to the University Law School for a semester, seeking the solace only his hometown could offer. Brian told me Cole was so devastated by the whole situation that he had started seeing a psychiatrist. Cole isolated himself from all of us to such a degree that not even Brian could confirm this. It had, in fact, been a very difficult year for Cole. He never told any of us why Hannah called off their engagement. I knew why she called it off, but I don't think she ever told Cole. And that was probably what made it so much worse for him. She never gave him a reason. I guess I didn't help the situation by not telling him why. But I couldn't do it. It would jeopardize our friendship, and I wasn't — and am not — willing to compromise that. He alienated himself from all of us, seldom made contact with anyone. It was only after he and Hannah began speaking again in February that he would return to his usual ways. He seemed happier, but it concerned all of us. And in many aspects, it only made me feel worse. I knew the truth that Cole would never — and should never — know.

Cole was a large man, about 6'5", 215 pounds, yet he possessed the most delicate and fragile personality I had ever known anyone to own. His father drank himself to an early grave, but not before he could tear down and

destroy the ego of his oldest son, never to make any efforts to purify the bad seeds he had sown. A naturally defensive young man, he was very moody, able to easily laugh at others' flaws or goofs one minute, yet able to tear the head off of an aggressor the next. He always felt he had to prove to himself and others that he was a decent person, yet he could never do it. His self-esteem was totally linked to those around him, hence his strong affection for Hannah. And the more I think about it, the more I believe that Cole's feeling for her wasn't so much affection as it was an attempt to root himself into something constant and consistent, an attempt to balance his turbulent life. Hannah's rejection severed the man from his ego, upsetting the balance that he had found. Strangely, it was completely replaced when Hannah took him back, and that was good for him, he thought. He was so intent on finding a peace for himself, he neglected to recognize that this peace he found was artificial, totally dependent on another human being. Although Hannah had not promised to marry him, Cole was just happy to be in her presence again. Brian and I weren't sure how to react to the situation. We were pleased that Cole was happy, but we knew that he was a mere 'no' away from slipping completely out of our reach. I was sick to my stomach about it, for I knew that there was a certain futility in whatever we did. And I knew why.

In the past these summer gatherings of ours were events, sacred benedictions of our college lives together. This year, there would be some tension, a symptom of Hannah's presence. Tension, at least, for me. The five of us plopped onto the wet beach that bordered the minute sanctuary of trees and shrubbery. Standing there like Columbus and his crews making their first landfall, we started to unload our cargo and to search for an area that would be a suitable temporary homestead. The island we had discovered was about the size of a little league baseball field, occupying a space in the tributary that was only a couple of acres at the most.

With camping gear in tow, we made our way to a clearing among the brush that Cole had found. Brian stayed behind to tie up the boat. The sun was setting into the western skyline, and its rays seeped through the boughs and branches of the green kingdom of pines, palmettoes and oaks, and a sundry of other trees and plants shrouding the island. The branches towering over our heads seemed to form a natural roof, offering a sense of protection. This was my favorite time of the summer and my favorite place to be at a time like this. The air was filled with marsh gas, wafting on the gentle summer breeze that seemed to incessantly swirl around the river this time of year, stirred in with the man-made odor of coconut suntan lotion, a remnant of our day on the river. I

stood in a soothing awe as I watched the spanish moss, dangling from the limbs of the mighty oak trees, blow in the breeze and tickle the sunlight making its way through the intertwining web of oak tree limbs and palmetto branches as it sunk deeper and deeper into the horizon of trees on the other side of the river. The glowing orange of the sun seemed to explode off of the wide waterway. It was scenes like this that proved to me that there had to be God.

"Damn," I said out loud, standing among Hannah, Megan and Cole as they started setting up camp. "Why the hell wasn't I born here?"

"Beautiful, isn't it?" came the unprovoked reply from Hannah.

"Yes, it is," I replied, startled, realizing that Hannah was witness to the same scene of grace.

"You know, David, there was a time in my life when I wouldn't have even appreciated something like this," she said, motioning to the picture before us with one hand as she held a bag of tent poles in the other.

"Get out of here. How could you possibly take something like that for granted?"

"It's really very simple," she explained as I began to help her unpack the tent poles. "When you live somewhere your entire life, you don't see certain things, you believe that everyone has a place like this. It's only when you move away that you truly appreciate it. What's the old saying? 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder.'"

"Yep," I grinned. I had never truly given that cliché much thought. "I guess you're right."

"Just ask Brian," she said.

"Ask Brian what?" was the third baseman's defensive reply as he entered the conversation carrying the tents into the clearing.

"Have you ever taken this for granted, you know, just being here — the river, the sunset?" I inquired.

"Absolutely not."

"Oh, come on, Brian," Hannah charged. "Twenty-some years of living here and you've appreciated every minute?"

"Absolutely. When I was younger, I guess about ten, my father took us up to New York City. He had a job interview, and we made a vacation out of it. We were up there for a week, and he almost got a job up there. But, just being up there, with the crowds, the buildings, the tension — it all made me realize what I had down here." I was enraptured by Brian's hometown pride and appreciation. "I had loved living here before that," he continued. "Being up there just reinforced it: this is the best place on the earth."

"That's damn poetic," Cole deadpanned as he unloaded the last of our equipment: the cooler of beer.

"Go to hell," Brian quipped.

"Oh yeah? Make me?"

"Make you, hell. I'll make you swim back on Sunday, that's what I'll make you do," Brian snorted. Hannah, Megan and I giggled as we watched the two tumble into a mock wrestling match, which ended with Cole tossing Brian, a big man himself, to the ground with no visible strain.

"I don't trust you, you bastard," Cole giggled as he planted a heel on Brian's chest. "Give me the keys to the boat."

"Come get them, you gorilla," Brian snickered as he took the keys and threw him down his shorts.

"AAAAAAHHHH!" Cole screamed in a Banzai-like attack frenzy and leapt at Brian, grabbing at his shorts.

"Well, while you two lovebirds settle this, I'm going to get dinner," Megan said, propping open the cooler and wrestling a beer from the chilly ice.

"Good idea," I laughed, watching Brian and Cole tussle on the ground.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dinner was blue crabs caught fresh from the river and boiled to a steaming orange glow. Brian poured a batch into the giant pot that rested on a grill propped over our fire. He didn't add any seasoning, though, saying that the sea-water in which we boiled them would serve as a natural spice. I always felt a little sorry for crabs whenever I dined on them. What a terrible way to go, I thought, being boiled alive then having some redneck feast on you. But the smell was so delicious I loosened the thought from my mind, and when I took that first bite, I didn't think about it again.

The sun had long since sheathed itself into the western horizon, and we sat around the campfire, ashes licking the stars above us. Brian continued to stir another large pot of crabs. Our skins reflected the orange glow of the flame, and the aroma of the crabs boiling draped the air. It was about 10 pm, and Cole and Megan were making their way easily through the cooler of beer. I sipped my beer and watched from my perch on a dead log, slapping at the occasional mosquito the Skin-So-Soft failed to repel. Cole and Megan were playing High-Low with a deck of cards, a drinking game we learned in college.

I watched them for amusement at first, but then I caught myself inspecting Cole, scrutinizing him, wondering if he knew the secret I

hid from him, at Hannah's request. Did he know? He couldn't have known. A fragile ego like Cole's would never permit him to understand. If he did know he was hiding it extremely well, and if he was hiding it, well then that scared me even more. If he was hiding it, what was he waiting for? What was he going to do? Did he plan to just forget about it, live with the transgression his two friends had committed against him? No. No way. Cole's ego was much too volatile and had been beaten way too often and too harshly to ever permit that. There would have to be some sort of retaliation. Which made me realize, if he indeed did know then there would've been something by now. He would have had to do something by now. He didn't know. "Good," I comforted myself.

"Hey. Want some company?" Hannah asked as she found a spot next to me on the log.

"Sure, why not?" I said, glancing briefly at her, then staring into the fire.

"What are you doing over here by yourself?"

"Well, I noticed you're not doing much hobnobbing," I retorted.

"Yeah, well, how much beer and fun can one person take?"

"Never enough," I responded, taking another sip.

"Hell, yeah," she said, holding up her bottle for a toast. A strange silence overtook us after we clicked our bottles. I peered into the flames, hearing Cole and Megan roar with laughter as Cole finished another of his infamous stories about our college days. I heard the ending of the story and it made me grin. He was such a storyteller. Always the master showman, he didn't hesitate to embellish his story if he knew it would make it funnier. I looked up in time to see Megan spit beer through her nose as she roared with laughter and then fall backwards out of the lawn chair she was sitting in, resulting in another uncontrolled eruption of laughter from the duo. Brian took a second away from his cooking chores to join in the fun, pouring some beer into Megan's wide-open mouth as she lay on her back screaming in laughter.

Hannah and I laughed, too, which was something that we did rarely together. We glanced at each other. Hannah stared at me, but I couldn't bare the pressure of her stare. I turned away uncomfortably and took a quick sip of beer.

"You don't really want me to be here, do you?" She turned her stare to the label on her bottle, picking at it nervously.

"It's not that —" I shook my head.

"Well, what is it then?"

"Look, I don't really think this is the best place to talk about it, you know," I answered, bracing my upper body with my elbows on my knees, not making eye contact with her.

"Why not?"

"What do you mean 'why not'?" I snapped, making sure my voice didn't raise loud enough to be heard. I grinned so no one who wasn't a lip reader could decipher that what we were talking about was not very pleasant for either of us. "Cole is here, everybody's here. I just don't think this is the best place in the world to hold this conversation," I said whimsically, yet sternly enough that she would get my point.

I continued to listen to the trio's frivolity. Hannah was silent for a full thirty seconds, but it seemed like an eternity. Brian had turned on a tape player that was almost as big as his boat and was probably powered by a small-sized nuclear power generator, selecting Bruce Springsteen, *Born in the USA*, as the evening's soundtrack. I grinned a little when the first chords rang through the air.

"I am sorry, David," Hannah interrupted my daydreaming. "I don't know what else to say to you."

I said nothing in reply. I didn't know what I wanted to hear her say, and, in fact, wasn't quite sure if I wanted to hear her talk at all.

"Hey, guys!" Cole shouted. "We're going down to the river. It's low tide!"

"Don't kill yourselves, you idiots," Brian ordered as he emptied the last batch of crabs onto an old card table that was covered in newspaper.

"Hey, man, come on with us," Cole beseeched Brian.

"All right, dammit," Brian snorted.

"You guys comin'?"

"No thanks, Brie. I'm gonna hang here," I said, hoping that Hannah would pick up on my hint that I wanted to be away from her.

"Me too," Hannah said.

"Suit yourself," Brian said as he trailed behind the others, heading down the path to the shore of the island. I saw Cole give us a drunken, suspicious glance as they headed down the path.

"Cole still doesn't know," she said.

"Dammit, Hannah —"

"— and I don't plan on telling him."

"—you just don't get it do you? I love you, for God's sake," I blurted.

"David —"

"No, don't 'David' me. You know — I just don't know what to say. Okay, maybe making love with each other was not the best idea in the world." I sensed the sarcasm dripping off my words and noticed Hannah wince as they came out of my mouth. "But I love you. I loved you before we made love, and I love you now —"

"David —" she tried to interrupt.

"— and the worst part is," I pushed on, "I will never be able to show



you, because of Cole. His friendship means so much to me —" I interrupted myself. "Jesus. I'm in love with the woman that he loves more than anything in this world."

"I love you, too, David."

"Hmmpf," I huffed, as I turned away from her and walked towards the creek. Needing to get away from her. It was too painful to be near her. I cherished her, yet I cherished Cole. So many thoughts sped through my head as I shuffled down the path that led to the spot where we tied the boat.

Reaching the end of the path, I stood on a small hill some six feet above what used to be the beach, but was now a mere sand basin that was part of the dried creek. Low tide had come and had taken with it every last bit of water from the tiny tributary. The boat, which was once safely in the creek, now rested on black mud, the dry creek bed. It was an astonishing site. The very rail of life we followed to arrive here had disappeared. Part of me wanted to panic, but I was well aware that by morning time, the water would be back.

"Hey, goober!" I heard someone yell. It was Brian's voice, and I turned to his voice but was met by a flat, smelly glob of mud, smacking me on my left cheek. The slimy substance stung my face and the shock threw me off balance. The glob shot across the entire left side of my head, feeling like someone had rifled a slug at me.

"What a shot!" Brian screamed. His arm had been strengthened by millions of throws from third to first base, and it had not lost a bit of its strength. As my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I could see that Brian and Megan were standing about 30 feet from shore in the middle of the creek bed, sunk in the mud up to their waists. They waded around like a pair of baby ducklings learning to swim. It was downright hysterical to watch them swing their arms, their limbs, their ears — anything — to move through the swampy currents of Savannah mud.

"Come on in!" Megan shouted, through a thick mask of glop.

"Are you kidding me?" I asked, "I ain't had enough beer, yet."

"Ah, get your butt muddy, you wimp!" Brian challenged, heaving another soggy missile at me, which I dodged this time.

"I don't think so."

"What if we make you?" Megan snickered.

"I don't think you can, smart ass," I proclaimed boldly. I realized Cole was not in the creek bed with them, and as the thought was speeding through my head, I heard the underbrush behind me rustle. I turned to meet Cole, standing directly behind me. All six-five, 215 pounds of him.

"Oh, I think I can," he grinned, and before I could run away with my life and dignity still in tact, Cole had wrapped me up in his bulking arms and lifted me over his head from atop the hill. With a loud grunt, he tossed me like a bean bag from the hill out into the middle of the creek. A flying squirrel would have been proud of me that evening had he seen me. My body



scorched through the darkness like a Mercury 7 space capsule re-entering the Earth's atmosphere. I tried — in vain — to gain some ounce of control of my flight path and the speed and the form in which I would inevitably strike the mud. I flailed my arms like a baby sparrow being tossed from its nest, shaking and twitching violently and screaming loud enough to be heard in north Florida. My head struck the mud first and the rest of my torso followed sinking like an anchor, all the way up to my waist. Brian wrestled me from the muddy womb and stood me upright, but even standing the mud came up to my ribs. I came up sucking for air and laughing like a madman at my first experience with self-flight. It was a wonderful feeling, the feeling a young child gets when daddy playfully throws him across a pool.

"That's gotta be some sort of world-record!" Brian screamed, sucking for oxygen in between his violent fits of laughter.

"In what? Wimp tossing?" Cole asked.

Cole did a cannonball into the deep mud, starting a furious mud fight. I stood there dodging small bullets of mud, hurling my own projectiles at whatever moved and thinking to myself "This is as good as it gets, and this is how it should be." It was a relief to forget, albeit momentarily, the situation I had gotten myself in with Hannah and Cole, and to enjoy a moment reminiscent of our days at Carolina.

I fell asleep in my sleeping bag that night underneath the moonless sky. The limbs of the trees seemed to stretch forever as they etched themselves into the dark, dotted with white specks of stars. I drifted off with a grin on my face, invigorated by the mud fight and the thought that maybe somehow things would be okay, that all this would just vanish away with the night.

On our way back in the next morning, with the wind speeding through my hair and the sun bouncing off of the waves, I was sick. Something told me that I would never come on one of these trips again. I knew that last night was as good as it was ever going to get.

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The two weeks following the camping trip were difficult for me. First of all, as the low man on the totem pole in the Department of Languages, Literature and Dramatic Arts at Coastal Georgia, I was selected to teach a remedial English class during the summer session. These sessions were so much more difficult to conduct because, first of all, most of the participants were dreaming of the beach just a twenty minute drive away, and secondly, most people in remedial English classes are only in there because they have to be.

What bothered me the most was the fact that Hannah had indeed told Cole about her feelings. According to her, she had no choice. Cole had once again asked her to marry him. In the emotional confrontation which ensued, he pressed her for a reason, and in the stress of the moment, so she claims, the only reason she could give was what had happened between us. Cole's reaction as quick and fiery. He one day barged into my English class and confronted me in front of my students. Screaming a line of obscenities, and charging me with the break-up of his relationship with Hannah, he was on the verge of ripping my limbs off, had it not been for the timely arrival of campus police, who then escorted Cole off campus. As I knew he would, Cole had not handled my transgression very well, and I stayed up at nights thinking about it. My classes suffered, my studies suffered, my health suffered, all over this woman that I was hopelessly in love with, a woman who once had promised her hand to my closest friend.

I spent my lunches in my office, ruminating over the course my life had taken and where it was leading. Today was no exception. Propping up my feet, my phone off its hook, I sat at my desk this Wednesday afternoon handling a bologna sandwich and a diet Coke. My office window on the second floor of Gambrell Hall allowed me to witness the day, a passage for my mind to escape from the situation I was in. It was an extraordinarily beautiful day. Not much wind, but the skies were the bluest I had seen in a long time. College in the summertime always served as a peaceful haven. Without the shuffling of thousands of feet escaping the confines of another psychology course or another lecture on Chaucer every hour on the hour, without those disturbances that are so commonplace and indigenous to a college campus, I could very often sit at my desk and clean out my thoughts.

But my thoughts this summer day were not peaceful. There was a spectre in my subconscious that had risen out of nowhere. This spectre appeared to me after my first evening with Hannah, and it had grown so large that no amount of freedom or quiet could control it or overcome it. My entire existence was consumed by this spectre that had been a part of me for about a year. "How could I have ever been so stupid?" I chastised myself, literally raping myself with the thought that I had betrayed my friend.

I cherished Cole's and Brian's friendship as much as my own life. There is no way, I would tell myself, that I would ever had made it through school without them. When none of the fraternities at Carolina saw I was fit for any of their organizations, Cole opted not to accept any of the five bids he received. My acceptance into graduate school, to me a small success, was the greatest news Cole had ever received. He was my brother. We celebrated Brian's All-SEC selection in 1989 and 1990 with such abandon the

bars in Five Points were rumored to be closing down for a week, in order to restock their alcohol supplies to which we so easily and proudly laid waste. Room 204 Moore Hall had become a family unto itself. Yet now, just years later, I have come to this. A Judas to my closest friends, my surrogate family. One passionate night had started the eroding of my closest ties. I felt these ties fraying, and my peaceful life coming quickly to a boiling point.

Despite the way I felt about Hannah, I honestly wished she hadn't had said anything. I think I could live without Hannah's heart. But I don't know that I could live without the friendship of my two friends. I guess it was too late for that, though. Hannah's revelation would, to Cole, be a final act of betrayal, of humiliation, and Cole's fragile ego would not permit it and would not and could not free him to forgive me — ever. The saddest part is that I knew that there was no way out of this.

It seemed like forever that I had been sitting at my desk. My rear had become tingly from putting all of my weight on it. I decided to take a walk down to the first floor to get a refill on my Coke. I came down the flight of steps on the second floor, and at the landing, something caught my eye from out of the window. A sharp, glimmer of sunlight bounced off an object in the unpaved parking lot across the street. It was so strong that I backed up to see what it was that nearly blinded me. It was Hannah. Apparently she had just gotten out of her car and the sunlight bounced off her slamming car door. But instead of walking towards the campus, she ran towards the back of the parking lot, kicking up small, frantic clouds of brown dust. I couldn't hear her, but I could tell that she was yelling at someone or something. She rushed on towards the back of the lot until she finally walked out of my field of view, obstructed now by the window pane. I sensed that there was something going on, so I continued downstairs to the building's exit.

The humidity in Savannah is perilous, and as I exited the building I was met by a wave of heat that was so thick that it was like walking through a wall of cotton gauze. As I made my way across the street, I noticed a small gathering of people in the parking lot, perhaps stragglers from the changing of classes. I heard a man and a woman screaming, hidden behind a clump of oak trees, and was trying to make out what was being said. Two young men sprinted past me. I grabbed one of them, nearly yanking his arm out of his socket. "What's going on?" I asked confusedly.

"I gotta go call the police," he panted. He sprinted away from me and headed after his buddy.

"Hey!" I started to yell, but realized that it would have been in vain to try and gather more information from this young man. However, by the look on his face and by the panic in his breath, I realized that something was terribly wrong, and an instinct within me told me that it had something to do with Hannah. I made my way to the other side of the oak trees. There was no way I could prepare myself for what I saw.

There was Hannah, in a white T-shirt, screaming at the top of her lungs, crying with so much passion and pain I never knew anyone could possibly possess. She was bent over at the waist, screaming as if her lungs were being torn in two. There were a few students restraining her, and the anguish she felt was manifested in violent kicks and flailing swings of her arms as she desperately tried to free herself.

"Cole! Please! For God's sake!" Hannah screamed.

And then I saw him.

On the other side of the oak tree was Cole. He held a twelve gauge double barrel shotgun, one hand propping the barrel of the weapon under his chin, the thumb of his other hand held the trigger. Cole's large physique dwarfed the shotgun, making it look like a child's toy.

"Oh, Jesus," I heard myself say and, keeping an eye on Cole, I hurried over to Hannah's side.

"Hannah, Hannah," I said sternly trying to calm her so she could talk to me.

"Hey, man," one of the guys holding interrupted, blocking me with a free arm.

"No, I'm a friend of hers. Hannah —"

"Oh, David," she roared, wrapping her arms around me, and I peered over the curls of her hair keeping an eye on Cole. "He called me and said he was here and was going to shoot himself. I don't know what to do." Every syllable was stifled and intermittent by sobbing that was so uncontrollable she had to heave for oxygen.

"Okay, okay." I whispered, controlling an urge to empathetically kiss the top of her head and wiggling myself away from her, letting her slip back into the grasp of the two strangers. I walked closer to where Cole was standing. My mind was a whirlpool of thoughts. Was Cole serious about this? Why didn't Hannah call me? More frightening, would Cole turn the weapon on others? I noticed that most of the crowd stood well away from Cole, close to their cars, ready to use them as shields if indeed Cole did decide to turn on them. I walked warily towards him, sweat running down my forehead and gliding across my back. My forearms, exposed by the sleeves I rolled back, glistened in the dusty heat with a thin layer of sweat. The branches of the nearby oak tree swayed gently in the short-lived summer wind that had kicked up, pushing a blanket of heat across the dirt parking lot. Sweat damped my lip, and I felt little drops of perspiration stick to my back. Cole was not paying attention to me, if he even noticed I was there. He stood there, face to the crystal blue sky, letting the rays of the sun shower his face, eyes closed. He was mumbling something. I feared that he was not coherent, either because of the sun, or because of a loss of his faculties, and I trembled at the images that scattered through my mind. I saw the aftermath of this seemingly futile situation. So many images, so many possibilities. None of them good. And

they terrified me.

I prayed to God to allow me to find a positive image and for the strength to grasp that image and bring it to fruition. And then our eyes met.

He must have heard me walking towards him. Startled, he glanced at me out the corner of his eye, stopping me approximately thirty feet away from him. He dropped the gun by his side and turned his body to face me. We stared at one another, and a fear arrested my body. Looking into his eyes, I could sense his desperation. I feared that it would be shifted towards me, and that I would now be the one at the end of the gun. But he just stood there, the shotgun draping his thick thigh. He stared at me so long, I thought the pupils of his eyes would dry out. "This is your fault, of course. All your fault," he said as he shook his head. His voice was so tranquil and lucid, but it was the voice of a desperate man. Then he exploded. "Why? Why? *You screwed up my life! Didn't you, you son of a bitch?!*" His voice thundered, and the sound rolled across the wave of heat that blanketed the campus. I jumped when he screamed, paralyzed by terror, and I feared that Cole could sense my fear. He waved the shotgun in the air with his right hand, aiming at no one in particular. The group of people standing around scattered further away and ducked behind their cars. As if guided by an inner radar, I moved slowly to my left, so that if Cole decided to turn the gun on me, then Hannah would not be directly behind me in the line of fire.

"Cole, I..." I stammered and I felt my entire body twitch as the weapon came swinging up from his leg.

Cole's voice died out. He was now in tears, and his body went limp, the butt of the weapon resting on his right hip. "I dedicated my life to this person," he said, motioning with this left hand towards Hannah and the two students still restraining her. "*My entire life!*" he erupted. "And now...now, what do I have? Our future was laid out for us. Now I'll never know what it's like to have you," he sobbed to Hannah. "And I just can't —"

"Cole, please," Hannah pleaded. She was now kneeling on the ground. Her face was drenched, and her body quivered as she gasped for air. The students restraining her had let her go. They cautiously stood around her, wondering what was next, and in the same terrifying wave of emotion, they feared for Hannah's life, and their own lives; who knew what this madman was capable of?

"Hey, Come on, man," one of them said, "it isn't worth it."

"Screw you" Cole screamed, shredding his vocal chords. "Screw you," he panted through his tears, burying his face in his chest and dropping the gun by his side again. "You don't know what it's worth. *It's worth my life, that's what it's worth. She is my life!*" He paused. "It wasn't supposed to be like this, Hannah. Hannah, look at me. It wasn't supposed to be like

this, remember? We promised. You promised. Hannah..."

"Cole, please. Don't do this," Hannah sobbed.

"Why not? *Why the hell not, Hannah?* You know you don't love me anymore! Do you?" He paused and stared at her. "*Do you, goddammit?!*" He pleaded desperately for an answer, but he would not get one, at least not the one he wanted. The shotgun swayed against his leg.

"I want you to know that I love you. I always will. I just don't...I can't think of not being with you, of not talking to you...of not having a life with you." He heaved through the tears. "All of my dreams...everything I did...every decision I made, every..."

Hannah lay on her knees, crying violently, not lifting her head. Something in me wanted for her to say, "Yes, Cole. I do love you, and I will marry you, and our lives will be the same. None of this ever happened." I dreamed of my life before I fell in love with Hannah. It was all normal, and it would never be that way again.

Without an answer from Hannah, Cole was nearing the end. I sensed it. It rested in his cold, blank eyes, shook through his body and hung on his breath. The world around us was frozen and reality had been suspended as everyone nearby asked themselves if this was truly happening. The sun scorched the ground on which we stood, and the heat had drowned out the songs of the birds. Desperately I looked for an out. "Cole, come on. Please. Let's talk about it. We can straighten this out." Something sinister in me wanted to get this over with, even if it meant Cole shot himself. Every second longer I stood out here confronting this madman brought me closer and closer to death. He could easily turn his desperation at me, and I didn't fool myself into thinking that I could overpower him or outrun the buckshot if he turned the weapon at me. This wasn't a brave thing I was doing, I thought to myself, it was pretty goddamn stupid. It was knee-jerk reaction, one that I was now wishing I had controlled.

He said nothing. He stopped crying and dried his face off with one swoop of his left hand. Composing himself, he straightened up and looked at me, turning his body to face me.

I saw it in his eyes. The sweat on my body dried up, my mouth turned to cotton, my eyes stopped blinking and my heart rattled in my chest. "*Get her the hell out of here!*" I screamed to the guys holding Hannah beside me.

"*No, make her stay!*" Cole roared, his eyes on fire with rage and desperation.

"Cole, really," I pleaded, shaking visibly and uncontrollably. "Put the gun down, and let's talk, okay? I know what I did was screwed up. And I know you'll never forgive me. But — it's — I mean — come on. It's not worth dying for, is it? I mean, I'm not worth dying over, am I, a bastard like me? Let's talk about this."

"I don't think we can, Dave. You betrayed me. You, of all people —"



"Cole. I'm terribly sorry," I felt my voice quiver. I was begging for his life, and I was begging for mine. "Please, let's talk about it. We can really work this out." I feared for my life as I looked into his eyes. The tears had stopped, his breathing had evened out, and in that brief second, seeing the futility in his eyes, I realized that Cole had achieved peace.

"No," he said, "No, Dave, I don't think we can." He jerked the shotgun up from its resting spot against his leg and aimed the barrel directly at my head. Simultaneously I heard the hammer on the weapon click back to its firing position, and within a millisecond I dropped to the ground landing on my belly and intuitively covered my head with my hands, as if my feeble limbs would save me from the violence of the impending blast.

"Cole, no!" I heard Hannah scream and then shuffle to her feet. I lifted my head to see her sprinting towards Cole. Cole turned to face her, shocked somewhat to see Hannah challenging him this way. I bolted after Hannah. I covered what seemed to be miles of open ground in a matter of a second before intercepting and tackling her, solidly planting my left shoulder into her left side. With a loud and painful thud, we fell to the ground. I felt something snap in my shoulder, and we tumbled through the dust of the parking lot.

My heart beat out the two seconds which elapsed silently as we lay there on the ground in a dusty, humid bundle. "Dave, you're right. I could never forgive you, either of you," I heard Cole say as my head rang from the powerful collision with Hannah.

The blast from the shotgun was deafening; the earth seemed to shake with the violence and thunder that exploded from the barrel of the weapon.

I knew right away that he hadn't shot at us; the radius of the buckshot would've destroyed me or Hannah, regardless of who he was aiming at. I looked up from the ground, over at Cole. He lay motionless, twisted in a pile on the grass just out of the reach of the outstretched branches of an oak tree. Hannah looked up and saw Cole's body lying there also. She rolled to her feet, shaking with the certainty of what she would see when she looked over at him.

"Cole!" she screamed as she sprinted over towards the body. I tried to grab her with my left arm, but I felt a piercing pain race from my fingers up to my shoulder. I fell back to the ground and squinted through the dust and the bright sun.

Through the dust, I saw the cloudy image of two people embracing on the ground. There was Hannah, kneeling next to a large, hulking mass. Her blouse was covered in blood and she was screaming in agony, summoning the very ends of her soul. Now she held the body in her arms, as if she were nursing a baby. She lifted the headless torso to her breast and cradled it.

The ending I feared had come to fruition, and hopelessly I knew that my life would never be the same. Part of me tried to fool myself into believing

I would be okay, that Hannah and I would somehow, eventually, overcome this. But another part of me realized that the struggle was just beginning for us

Cole, on the other hand, had achieved his peace at last.

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"I hope you understand," I said into the telephone receiver.

Silence.

"Hannah?"

"I guess. Yes, I guess I do," came her somber reply. "I just don't understand — Columbia? Did you really have to go back?"

"I think I did. I'm safe here," I said.

"Safe? Safe from what?"

"I don't know. I just don't know. There are just too many memories in Savannah, my mind gets geared up wherever I go, and I just can't slow it down. I'm just not ready to settle there. I can't settle there. Not now, anyway."

"But, David. I want to help you work it out. I can help you work it out," Hannah wept.

I stayed silent. I knew what I wanted to say, what I needed to say. I had returned to Columbia, moving in with my sister in an apartment on Blossom Street a few blocks away from the University. I needed to forget my life in Savannah, and Columbia seemed like a logical sanctuary. My job at Coastal Georgia could no longer offer the challenges that I needed to stay busy and forget about what had happened. And frankly, just as I had told Hannah, there were too many reminders in Savannah. There would be reminders in Columbia as well; I didn't fool myself into thinking otherwise. But I knew that my life with Brian and Hannah would never be the same. My conscience would not permit me the peace to be who I was before I loved Hannah. I could never truly and unconditionally love Hannah, because of what I had done to Cole.

"David," Hannah shattered the silence. "Let me help you."

"Hannah —"

"Please. I want to help you. Let me, please. Whatever is wrong we can get through this. I love you."

"Hannah, you're the reason I'm feeling like this!" I said sternly. I hated to say that, and I didn't mean to say it, not now anyway, not to her personally. But I felt that way. Right or wrong — I felt it. My psychologist had told me to 'deal with those emotions,' whatever the hell that meant.

"What?" Hannah asked in shock.

"Hannah, if I hadn't fallen in love with you, Cole would still be alive."



"David, that's not fair; he was going off the deep-end before any of this happened. There's no telling what 'could've' happened."

"Hannah, don't you get it?" I asked, realizing that she was, perhaps, right. However, I didn't believe she was completely right. "It doesn't matter what *could've* been! I did this. Cole blew his goddamn brains out all over that parking lot because I betrayed his friendship! I betrayed him! I betrayed him, Hannah." I cried hysterically. Hannah was quiet, and I wanted her to stay quiet, because I wanted to hear myself cry again. I found comfort in the tears I shed for my friend, the acknowledgement of my personal culpability. I was able to admit that I was guilty for my friend's death, and that, in some perverse way, comforted me.

"David. You cannot control who you love," Hannah said. It was so damn cliché, such a stinking Hallmark kind of thing to say. I just wanted to reach through the phone and strangle her, and make her understand how I felt.

"Hannah, don't you feel any guilt, any responsibility whatsoever?"

"Of course I do!" she screamed. Her sudden aggression startled me. "Of course I do, dammit. I feel just as low, as guilty, as dirty as you do. I betrayed him, too, David. I promised to marry him, to stay with him forever — but I lied! Dammit, I lied," she broke down. "None of us are clean in this, David. Not even Brian. We all had some role in this! But you just know what *you* feel. You're so damn busy being a martyr, that you haven't even stopped to notice the pain that we all felt at the funeral. Stop being a martyr, David," her voice lost its anger and returned to a cathartic calm. "Stop. And let someone in."

"Hannah, I can't," I squinted. Her accusations of me being a martyr stung. "As much as I try, I just can't. I just cannot cope with any of you right now. I have to sort things out by myself, without delaying with any of it."

"Maybe dealing with it will be good."

"I can't," I said bleakly. "I've been dealing with these possibilities for a year now. I dealt with it too much. I'm too weak. I can't. Not now."

"When, then?"

"I don't know."

"A few months?" she asked, hope decorating every syllable.

"Maybe. I just don't know."

"David —"

"Hannah, just give me time, okay?" I interrupted sternly.

"— I love you."

I hesitated in saying, "I love you, too," but I did say it, and I meant it. "I really — have to go," I said. I meant that, too.

"I know. I hope to see you soon."

"Maybe you will."

I hung the phone up knowing that she would not. At this moment, there wasn't enough time in the universe to heal the pain that I was feeling. It wasn't just the pain of the loss; that would be simple enough to deal with. It was the guilt, the anger, the knowledge in hindsight that this all could have been prevented. I stood on the balcony of my sister's eleventh floor apartment, my left arm in a sling from the broken collar bone, overlooking the rush hour traffic creeping down Blossom Street, each of the cars cautiously steering its way through the rolling mass of mechanized steel. I envied each and every driver because their lives were normal, and I wanted so badly to be that way again.

So I spent those last few months of the fall in Columbia. No job, no income, just living off what I was able to save. I would worry about a job when my savings ran out. I relearned Columbia, spending countless afternoon and evenings in the bars in Five Points. Yesterday's, Stuffy's — all of my favorite spots to hang out during college. It was difficult. After all, there weren't many places in Columbia that the three of us hadn't gone to. Like in Savannah, the memories were everywhere I looked. But it was easier to handle, because unlike Savannah, Columbia truly belonged to me. Savannah, no matter how much I tried, would never belong to me. The beauty of the squares as they exploded with azaleas in the spring would never belong to me. The intricately woven paths of rivers and creeks would never belong to me. The spanish moss, the history, the heritage - none of it would I ever own, I could only adopt it. It would never belong to me. It belonged to Hannah and Cole.

And I realized that, no matter how badly I wanted her to, despite the pain in my soul that let me know I needed her, I knew that Hannah would never belong to me. She would, painfully, regretfully always belong to Cole. And rightfully so.

### Wildflower

Michael Pesackis

If you were a flower  
you would be a dandelion  
not a floral shop

FTD fresh cut  
delivered to your  
door arrangement of  
roses  
a little yellow flower  
not the garden variety  
the kind you see  
Spring up overnight on  
lawns and in fields  
bound to be stepped  
on by cowboys and  
Indians or strung  
into necklaces  
therefore not too  
proud  
sometimes I wonder  
if dandelions feel  
beautiful  
if they realize  
the simplistic joy  
they bring  
I wonder if  
you realize  
how beautiful you are  
in my eyes  
like mirrors  
I long for the day  
I can lift you up  
and let you see yourself  
the way I do  
then maybe you'll be  
happy and  
free  
like dandelions  
exploded into Fall  
by the exuberant  
breath  
of children

## After

Gilbert Allen

*"We love the sound of American planes overhead."*  
—Newsweek, April 15, 1991

After the bomb in its awesome  
intelligence determined  
the ventilation shaft of the mother  
of all bunkers;

after the cruise missile  
paused, translating  
over the streetsign  
before turning right to the palace;

after the good enemy groveled  
across uncharted minefields  
to offer their simple thanks;

after the little boy  
wouldn't believe that man  
in front of him  
really was the president;

after the President showed him  
his driver's license  
and more successfully  
his credit card;

after the collateral damage  
inspired us all to reload  
every plane with our beneficence;

after the parachutes  
descended, settling  
over the crates of C-rations and bandages  
as if nothing were beneath them;

they stepped over their own bodies  
throwing fists at the sky  
with a Babel of blessings  
fit only for the gods.

Matthew H. Seltzer, NSJ

As I walk with my Lord I imagine  
A scene of tragic desolation:  
I stand bound and gagged, observing  
Silent executioner.  
Pistol's crack; bullets sing,  
Rotating slowly,  
agonized  
waiting  
ends

Blink!  
A hand  
Has reached out;  
Projectiles cease  
Their merciless path —  
Stopped in the nick of time.  
That hand belongs to my Lord,  
And I need not look up to see  
That connected to trigger, to hand  
And arm is the face belonging to me.

## At an Impasse

Rosa Langevin

*Dedicated to Ethan Frome*

No longer Self-Reliant  
No longer inspired  
A victim of my weakness  
I must now be resigned

In Resignation like defeat  
I must somehow draw my strength  
Continue on the path of life  
While entwined to the marrow in briars

Seem Stealthy and Strong  
Courageous and kind  
Make life smile do good  
While indecisive evil of self-corruption burns inside

Fail oneself  
Lose one's life  
To gain it one must give for a cause  
So hard to do when heart and soul are lost

In this place  
Weakness and Indecision do dine  
Bread of guilt sustain them  
Fear of failure are their wine

No excuse made can justify  
Yet to move on one must come to terms  
Without a question pick up thy step  
Walk forward proudly and fall into the pit

Stand where you are  
Fix your heart repair your pride  
Impossible for where you stand  
Causes them to continually self-destruct

## We Greet

Brother Leo Fowler, OSB

We greet the day of Resurrection, O Lord!  
We greet you, our Salvation!

Our spirits rejoice in you, God our Savior,  
We who have life by your mediation.

For you have conquered death,  
Restoring our heavenly station.

And shed abroad,  
By your life as beacon,

The light of immortality<sup>+</sup>  
To those accepting new Creation.

You are life's completion,  
The Great I AM's manifestation.

Rosa Langevin

Wavering reflections within  
a liquid mirror  
Ripple with remorse  
I need not cry  
The night sky does it for me  
Insult I meant not  
Sorry I am not  
Only emptiness and a treelimb next to me  
Water falls between the cracks  
It does not mean to ruin the road  
It falls honestly with no pretense  
No malice intended  
a drizzling beauty of its own

Does not matter damage is  
still done the road  
Time will not erase its scars  
Only t'will leave bigger ones  
And so it goes, so it goes  
So down pours the rain  
So down pours the innocent injury  
Down it pours

### Thoughtful

Joel Jargstorf

Darkness prevails, evening hours have been spent  
Moon luminous, proudly standing aloft  
Sprinkled across the sky, stars burn dull and bright.

Leading on, paths seem awkwardly bent  
Feet carry body and heart, walking soft  
Each road taken, marked by candle's light.

At center, a fountain gives a gracious gift  
Tenderly falling waters, their tranquil splash leaving peace  
One fish swimming captures all attention.

In this presence, spirits could only lift  
A wonderful walk, this fascinating fountain, beauty never to cease,  
Captivated, always by God's every creation.

Especially the beauty of a new found friend which has graced this  
earth,  
causing the emotions to have a new found birth.



## The Men Who Rule Us

William Lindsey

You see them everywhere.

They straddle airplane seats  
Casting words from lips bonetight and cutting,  
Aimed to whip and cow  
With illusions of power unspeakable.

Outside the plane the wet Louisiana clay  
Secretes its honeyed humors,  
Mists that wreath the grass in light  
And seduce the eye to inward grace.

The girls, they say.  
I had three girls typing all day  
Stewardess honey give me *real* magazines,  
*Success*, something I can sink my teeth into  
Ate too many damn steaks  
Sat around the bar and drank too many damn drinks  
Gotta lose weight.

The world's enchained in power  
By men who talk slantwise, crosswise,  
And not at all,  
But shoot words out like missiles  
To spin their meaning into nothingness.

Redemption?

How,  
Save through a language  
That drives clean  
And homes the heart to wonder  
Like a fog-enshrouded field?

In this world,  
The only coming God  
Is one who walks in haze  
Outside the plane.

## God Sent

William Esser

From out the silent voice it stole  
A dream, furled in its name.  
Through weary tunnels dank with sin  
It sought the human shame.

Bestride its form, a cloak was slung  
Of azure mixed in silvery floss  
And 'pon its every fold was writ  
"Liberator Ex Veritas".

What its mission, none could tell,  
'Twas hidden from mere earthly sight  
Yet filled it was, when at its prey  
It shot the arrows of the night.

Drawn down to fatalistic depths  
The victim fallen at the duel,  
For on his brow, in scarlet fire  
The brand, alas, had dubbed him "Fool".

But so anon, the dream waxed strong  
And curtained living sight  
For 'midst the twilight of his wit  
There crept the hope of light.

What once was seen and felt as true  
Is cast down from its throne.  
The wise man owns he is not so,  
By folly shall be known.

So as the day comes nigh its hour  
The dream wends on its way;  
This task complete, it travels on,  
The divine word to say.

And him to whom the dream reveals  
The path of truth to heed,  
Then not as fool shall he be known  
But truly wise indeed.

## Taxpayers' Ode to a Congressman

Margrete Anderson

We're up at five to get to work by seven;  
as hard as it is this job is heaven.  
If we work all week and a day or two more  
we may achieve the goal of being poor.  
With all of our paychecks and our spouses, too,  
we may pay some of the bills and we get some food.  
All our clothes we buy at the local thrift shop  
and our kids drink water, not kool-aid or pop.  
We've never had a vacation, we haven't the cash,  
and no one goes to the doctor for a bump or a rash.  
We have patches on patches on hand-me down jeans,  
and our evening meals consist of fatback and beans.  
Being too sick to work is our biggest fear,  
and we haven't had a raise in more than a year.  
You say that you are there to help us get through,  
but somehow that statement just doesn't ring true.  
You ride in a limo, have lunch at the club —  
I'll even bet that your shoes never rub.  
Your children wear clothes that were bought in a store,  
and you've a house in the mountains and one on the shore.  
There you sit in your three-piece tailor-made suit.  
You represent us? Now ain't that a hoot?

Newley Purnell

The balmy air of a tense summer evening  
is upended by the force  
Of passionate loathing.  
Feel the ocean of nameless faces, permanently wrinkled  
and warped  
By ages, generations, of untempered spite.  
These profiles, partially obscured by a facade of weaving,  
stride on to perpetuate their chosen roles.  
In the name of defense they slay themselves —  
their insides are  
Consumed by the licking flames of their torches of slant.  
For they have no heart or soul save the ones they burn in effigy.

## The Lone Heron

William Lindsey

Wars and rumors of war,  
And one lone heron on the bayou shore.

It stitches the shallows,  
Here a silent sentinel,  
There a shadow sliding over the still dark water  
To stand again nearer, then past, the bridge.

At each cycle  
My dogs lunge in mock fury,  
Strain their leashes out towards the teasing game.

All along my walk,  
I think, try not to think, of our latest little war.  
I shut mind room  
To what's better left unthought,  
But back again it comes:

Live oaks sporting jaunty yellow ribbons,  
Car antennas flying tiny flags,  
And—most startling but not unexpected—  
Police motorcycles swathed in red, white, blue,  
As if the flag extends the power of the driver  
Out, behind, to all the world and space  
One could ever dream.

The heron comes as a welcome antidote  
To my shadowboxing with futility,  
Keeping apocalypse at bay.

It, this one thing perfect and complete, invites me  
To consider the healing promise of the everyday,  
The never comprehended fullness of the flight,  
The shore, clouds floating, sinking  
To water's mirror.

## Another World

Michael Pesackis

rebels point their loaded causes  
into windows where you breathe  
they don't grieve the empty losses  
they don't stay to see you bleed  
silent threats, they scream in the night  
and the wind cries out in funeral tones  
you kneel down and pray for the light  
this darkness of ruin won't leave you alone  
conversation on our porches  
dead man lying at our back door  
while the blind men carry torches  
to light the way for another war  
school boy dressed in battle fatigues  
has some ancient theory to defend  
he just got finished playing make-believe  
now he's trading stories with the men  
a loyal soldier knows his order  
and takes his promise to the grave  
the battle rages on the border  
and we send money in freedom's name  
more and more black boots on stakes  
in front of houses filled with tears  
we can learn from our mistakes  
or just let them pass away with the years  
a soldier plays a bamboo flute  
a song he used to sing at home  
for a fifteen year old prostitute  
and he teaches her to sing along  
the song sounds like a lullaby  
she sings the words of quiet love  
they could sing that song all night  
but a knock on the door says time is up

## Krystallnacht

William Lindsey

Heat marries sand  
And glass is born.

Flashing swords of light,  
It spirals to the sky in windows,  
Or traps the gazer's eyes in mirrors,

brazen eyes,  
lovelorn eyes  
soft deep eyes.

It cups cool clear water  
Or shelters pictures on the wall.

But here,  
Broken always  
In these screams of pain,  
Here glass can be just one thing  
And one alone:  
The irretrievable shattering  
Of a human heart.

Mary Ellen Weir

I watched you walk briskly  
into the lostness of black sleep,

shrinking before me  
in sound and silence,

through doors through which I cannot peek.

(space opened up  
a darkempty yawn  
like dusk to dawn:

the sun blazing, blazing  
then gone.)

I only wish a glimpse of the  
place you have gone

to call it a name,  
to say, "She is home."

1994



## After the Fight

Rory Fosberry

Like chocolate on a candy-lover's face  
your words stick to your mouth  
reminding me  
that your insults were no accident.

My anger slips down my spine like a snake,  
twisting around the bones,  
leaving me cold,  
reptile blood, that icy frustration.

If only we could take back the words that  
we spit through grinding teeth,  
maybe this time...  
But right now, I wish you were hurting.

I wish that your joints would ache and be stiff,  
locking them into chains.  
But please tell me  
that after all this you still love me.

Julian Fitzgerald, OSB

The monk decays who does not raise his hands  
In prayer, or clasp his fingers plowing dirt,  
With muscle, sweat, re-opening old hurt.  
Like broken earth, his settled soul expands;  
He pushes through the rocky clay and sands.  
As soil in mud, his hidden self converts;  
For work and prayer his hands and voice are girt;  
Within them both toward God, the man-monk stands.  
How sad for him who stokes no inner fire,  
or blisters not with joy, his hands well-worn;  
He stands still—numb in speech and heart's desire,  
For this poor man, no inner life's re-born.  
His spirit thrashes weakly in the mire;  
The monk decays in bitterness and scorn.

Howard Finster

Michael Lillard

from 20 March 93 to 11 May 93

*"But I can't paint!"  
"How can you know until you try?"*

Visions floated constantly across my mind  
In everything, in everyone the dormant Bible images  
Sprang from their written sleep. On the side of the barn  
Sodom's children appeared screaming in their last hour.  
The Evangelist St. John, who came from Patmos,  
Dreamed the final battle of good and evil, as I do —  
Destruction I sometimes saw, as if in visions  
God foretold his purpose, or showed me that art could  
preach.

Salvation in the common: folks like angels,  
Ascending Jacob's ladder towards Heaven,  
God's gift, where commoners tasted the eternal.  
I took objects of refuge and decorated them.  
With God's help I made them holy.

Decipher the messages  
between the images  
see new worlds

JESUS IS COMING

## Ruminations of a Sometime Player

Camille Hopkins

The piano keeps a solid vigil along the wall,  
smiling evenly. Its keys are cold  
and chipped at the edges,  
faint under the lamp, but patient  
with my groping and pressing for harmony  
between the inky symbols  
and the sound.

This is not work,  
exactly. The jagged notes flutter  
like the stamp of a butterfly's static path,  
and the sound jars along, a train  
of discordant whistles — but, at a certain  
point, each note passes through,  
ceases to falter, flies upward and sings  
its name to the lamp. The name is foreign,  
but not the tongue.

Someone first heard this song  
in his head, a whisper maybe;  
someone wrote this mystical sanskrit  
up and down the bars. This is the labor:  
the song it sells is prettier than words,  
and harder.

## The Tale of Phoebe Robin

William Lindsey

Everyone knows that robins' eggs are blue, not white, like eggs of some birds. But does everyone know *why*? For that matter, do you ever wonder about such insignificant things at all? If not, let me tell you a secret: wonder is the key to understanding anything. Whatever it is that we want to know, we have to start with wonder. And nothing should be too insignificant to wonder about.

In a lifetime of thinking about the reasons for things, I've learned that for everything there's a reason, and that we find most reasons only when we let ourselves become completely quiet in the presence of whatever we're trying to understand, and let it speak to us — whether it's a robin's egg, a lichen-covered rock, our pet goldfish, or old Mrs. Bardelheiser next door. If we want to understand anything, we have to let it teach us that its nature is also our nature, for *all* nature is our nature, because we ourselves are nature as much as anything else is.

And so robins' eggs. Why are they the color of the sky? Here's what I've figured out after years of listening to their faint voices and trying to decipher what they're telling me. They're blue to remind us to look up, not always down, to discover that more is possible than rich dark earth and somber trees would have us believe. In the sky is the sun, which robins wear like a badge on their bright breasts, to show us that there's hope when night seems longer than we can bear.

Much that I know about robins I learned from one special robin named Phoebe. For several years Phoebe came to nest in the firethorn shrub outside the window of the room in which I'm writing this tale for you. She loved its thorns that kept out intruders, its little fragrant star-shaped blossoms in the spring, its fuzzy summer leaves and glowing orange berries in the fall. When her young were hatched, she taught them to fly in and out of the branches of the firethorn and to hunt for worms in the moist ground at their feet.

One spring Phoebe did not return to her nest, and I have never seen her since, though I watch her children and grandchildren gambol outside the window spring, summer, and fall. Look there now, in the cedar! See the robin trailing her wing to make a cat think that she's wounded, so the cat will leave her chicks alone? That's Phoebe's granddaughter. Maybe one day she'll tell us what became of her famous grandmother, Phoebe Robin.

I miss Phoebe, but even as I long for her to nest again one spring in my firethorn, I turn over and over in my head all that she taught me, and I

realize that as long as I continue to discover new nuggets of wisdom in the treasure trove of thoughts she left with me, she is never far away. Sometimes I turn my head to the window and I'm sure that I see, just barely see from the corner of my eye, a blur of red breast, a flick of gray wingtip, passing across the sky. Phoebe is still here.

The lesson that Phoebe Robin taught me above all is this: that everything and everyone is different, and every difference shows us something very precious. Many differences startle and confuse us, make us want to turn our backs on those who are different or throw rocks at them. Phoebe showed me how to stop, look, and listen instead, and as I did so, to find that the difference that at first frightened me could delight me and make me a bigger person than I had been before.

At first glance, nothing — nothing at all! — made Phoebe herself seem different. A plainer little bird you've never seen. When I met her, one of the first things I noted about her was that she was not only red-breasted but red-headed, with hair that dull brown-red color that makes one think of overspent pennies that have circulated too long and need to be retired. How they dragged and scraped forlornly in the high spring wind!

But I quickly learned that there was more to Phoebe than her appearance suggested. I did so immediately, on the remarkable night I met her. I plan to tell you that story in a moment. But in order to do so, I have to tell you a story Phoebe told me first on the night when we met and then with more details some years after that night, as she nested in my firethorn. This is the story of how Phoebe Robin school teacher became Madame Phoebe *chanteuse* and stage celebrity.

Phoebe's story went this way. Because she appeared to have not a scrap of beauty about her, Phoebe's clan, the Robinsons, had assigned her the unenviable task of being schoolmarm to all the tribe's fledglings. Now, as giddy as children can be, and as heady as they make adults feel for a few days, I am sorry to have to tell you that no one wants to spend her life *only* with children. And especially not with children growing into that tiresome wing-trying, air-testing age, when their big beaks are all sassy lip, and their puny feathered bodies all sashay and primp.

Stuck as she was with her flocks of early adolescent birdlings, Phoebe fumed incessantly and hopelessly. As she worried her covey into shape, she muttered dark curses on all the world — the March breezes, the early worms that maliciously slipped back beneath the sod as she pecked for them, the rain that came just as

she started her class's flying lessons and let up just when it was time to end recess.

Grumble, frump, and *oy ve!* Such a scold you've never seen nor will. Imagine her on the balmy spring morning that changed everything for her: an unbecoming yellow bonnet atop her plaintive hair and skewed over one eye, she sits on her school-room perch, nagging mercilessly.

As we focus our attention on her, little Phoebe is chirping a song she chirps constantly, her "if only" song. "Ah if only if only if only," it goes, that sad endless incantation that the neglected and overlooked sing. "If only my hair shone like my breast. If only my beak turned jauntily up and not dolefully down. If only I could do nest weaving duty, or egg-laying. If only someone could see me, really see me. If only someone cared." Thus the plaintive litany of Phoebe Robin, of the shut-out and ignored, yesterday, today, tomorrow, to the end of all time.

But look again, closer. Didn't I just tell you? There's always more to anyone than meets the eye, and if you care enough, you'll find it in the end. And so it is with Phoebe. On closer inspection Phoebe has one tiny feature that no other robin has or will have, world without end. Look very closely and you'll see that she has one eye ever so slightly different from the other. One eye has a cast and hue that the other does not have. All robins' eggs are blue, and all robins' eyes are black. Everyone knows that. And yet one of Phoebe's black eyes — the left — is lightly tinged and speckled with a delicate, dreamy trace of blue, so lightly tinged that you have to look again to be sure it's not just the sky you've spotted, reflected in her eye. Despite her ordinariness and frumpy ways, Phoebe is no ordinary robin. And she herself is just about to discover how much this is the case.

"You there, Aloysius. You, I say sir, you! Get your grubby wing off Terina's back or I'll get it off for you." And down Phoebe flutters from her perch for the eleven-hundredth time today to drag the always offending class bully from yet another victim.

But as she does so, something happens. Across the forest floor skitters a thing she has never seen before, a bright and shining thing she just has to see more closely. After it she flies and hops, hops and flies, till she has it in her beak.

In truth, the glittering piece of detritus is only a wisp of tin foil that some careless camper has let fly away as he broke camp and

stamped his fire out. But one person's trash is another's treasure, and Phoebe soon has the little square of foil at her podium, where she hangs it carefully to catch the sun next to her schoolroom picture of George Robington, the father of his country, who had pecked the cherry blossom off its limb and refused to lie when quizzed about it.

Once hung, the foil gleams and glints so alluringly in the hot sun's rays that Phoebe watches entranced, forgetting her lowly occupation, and (honesty demands, alas! that I report it) her entire class. And then, as the spell-bound Phoebe draws closer and closer to the pool of light floating in the tin patch, until her class is beginning to wonder if she will drown herself in it, she has the surprise of her life. Suddenly in the small mirror there is a flash, and behind the flash a dark globe of lustrous black, with azure threads floating in it.

What Phoebe is seeing — and this for the first time ever — is her own eye, her special eye, with its glowing colors. For unlike humans, robins have no looking glasses, and all she has ever known about her looks are the ugly things her parents have said about her, the derisive taunts her playmates used before she had fledged and grown to womanhood. And yet here is such beauty! Such beauty that a minute fragment of discarded trash mirrors a world exotic and full of mystery, which is Phoebe herself, her own incomparable self, her irreplaceable, unsurpassable self.

And now I must inform you of a rather strange twist in the story of Phoebe Robin. Have you felt it coming? For most of us, the realization that our bodies are put together imperfectly would cause sadness or shock. But for Phoebe it was quite the contrary. So long has she lived in the shadows of her elders and betters that, until the revelation of her unmatched eyes, she has never even thought of herself as a person, a unique feathered being in whose breast beats a distinctive heart, with its own unique little drummer. For Phoebe, the discovery that she is not quite normal is exhilarating.

So exhilarating, in fact, that as she continues to peer into the tin foil mirror and fix in her mind's eye now her black, now her speckled eye, she begins to do what no ladylike robin (and particularly not a prim little schoolmarm) would ever do. She crows. Positively crows! First one wing beats, then the other, and before she knows it, Phoebe has launched into a wild whooping dance whose steps she hasn't even realized she knows.

Phoebe's class is, of course, aghast. Can this strutting, high-steppin' virago be *their* Phoebe Robin? Could this crowing *chanteuse* with bonnet flung jauntily back from her brow be *their* schoolmarm?

But neither sticks nor stones, whispers nor giggles, can quell Phoebe today. Once hurled into her dance, she dances until she is danced out, and without a word of explanation or apology, she peremptorily orders her class to open



their old blue-backed spellers. And open they do, with a shock that gives them a new, if temporary respect for their teacher, and a school day that has been very curious indeed comes to a rather ordinary and solemn close.

Next day, Phoebe rises with the sun. Not, mind you, as she usually does, to be the industrious little drudge out before anyone else to catch the early worm. Heavens, no! Today Phoebe Robin is up with the dawn with one intent and one intent alone — to dance and crow the sun into the sky. As Phoebe frolics, her mother scolds and cries from the door of the family's nest. Her father bullies and berates. Does our Phoebe cower? Does she come inside? I should say not. She crows the louder, and as windows of neighboring nests open with a surprised bang, she sings and twirls every way but Sunday.

It is then that Phoebe stumbles onto an unusual fact about herself that is destined, like the discovery of her eyes, to change the course of her life forever. (And it often happens this way. If we welcome one thing about ourselves, no matter how unconventional it is, then other, equally startling, things occur to us). As Phoebe spins about, growing dizzier with each spin, she suddenly realizes that she is seeing not one, but two versions of her family's low-slung bungalow nest. There on the one side the red chimney leans jauntily to the left. Here, on the other, the chimney is now green and veering to the right.

Since she never had any secret to hug herself and gloat over, Phoebe very wisely decides not to tell anyone what she has discovered about herself. Not for the time being, that is; not until she can be sure that the person to whom she discloses her secret is able and willing to appreciate her confidence. She goes inside quietly, parts her dull hair and twists it into the tight bun she always wears, puts on her hideous mustard-colored bonnet (imagine that color on red hair!), and wends her way slowly down the lane to the school room.

For the first time in her life, Phoebe *knows* that she, the real Phoebe, is not necessarily the role she plays every day, that of a put-upon, beaten-down teacher of sullen teenagers in a podunk village. Knowing that she has the option to wear a yellow bonnet or a pink one or one of every color of the rainbow, if she chooses; knowing that she is somebody inside, even if the world thinks differently; knowing that she has a special power which she can access when and if she wants to: all this knowledge makes the Phoebe who enters her classroom on this spring morning different from the Phoebe who entered the room yesterday, when we picked up her

story.

As Phoebe hops through her classroom door, out of the corner of her eyes she notes her students exchanging sly grins, grins that say "crazy" and "told-you-so, knew-it-would-happen-some-day" and "ha-ha-what'll-she-do-today?" She also registers that her two most intransigent pupils, Aloysius MacRobinson and Bert Redbreast, are reared insolently back in their desks with their feet in the empty seats before them, and with baseball caps turned backwards on their heads. Their expressions clearly say, "I dare you to teach me anything today, you little nutcase."

Now the old Phoebe would have handled the situation something like this. Hoping to avoid a direct confrontation that she would probably not have won, she would have announced to no one in particular that gentlebirds do not wear caps indoors, that well-mannered chicks do not prop their feet on the chairs in front of them, etc., etc., and blah blah blah. She would then have called on the class to open its books, hoping against hope that Aloysius and Bert would miraculously obey her this time, but knowing that her pleas would have fallen on deaf ears. Then, caving into the inevitable, she would have tried to ignore the two teenage thugs as she pulled yet another refractory class through yet another dull, meaningless math/geography/literature lesson, wishing madly all the while that the clock would run a little faster today than the day before.

And, curiously enough, this is exactly what the new Phoebe sets out to do today. Except. Except that, when she speaks obliquely about gentlebirds and caps and manners and feet, she looks directly at the slouched, hulking bodies and squint-eyed, leering faces of Aloysius and Bert. And, when the bodies continue to slouch and the faces to leer, she says quietly and firmly, "Mr. MacRobinson and Mr. Redbreast, I have asked that you remove your caps and take your feet from the desks before you. The class is waiting for you to comply with my request. We shall begin our lesson when you oblige us."

At this completely unexpected announcement, Phoebe's students run the gamut of emotions. The sensitive hold their breath, expecting a bloody showdown that Phoebe will lose. The histrionic sit on the edge of their chairs with barely suppressed excitement, awaiting the unfolding of a drama that promises to be ever so much more interesting than a recital of the major imports of the Canary Islands. The belligerent smile knowingly, hoping for the nerdish little teacher to receive her final comeuppance.

Among the latter are, of course, Aloysius and Bert. Who slowly turn to each other, smirking confidently, then face the teacher and

drawl in unison, "Like to see you make me, *Miss Phoebe*." Whereupon Phoebe strides purposefully towards the two, firmly snatches a cap from each head, and pushes each pair of yellow clawed feet in hobnailed boots to the floor.

Though they are very much surprised at the turn the events have taken, Aloysius and Bert still think themselves in control. First Aloysius leaps out of his desk, then Bert does, and both proceed to glower down at the dowdy little teacher. Each has for so long succeeded in quenching any opposition by the sheer force of his height and his ability to scowl menacingly that neither has a plan beyond this rudimentary intimidation tactic.

Phoebe has a plan, however. Drawing herself up to her full height of four and one-half inches (the extra half comes from the purple high heels she has inexplicably matched to her yellow bonnet today), and puffing her breast feathers out to full length, she moves slowly, meaningfully, towards the two bullies as she opens her eyes to their full width. Such a look of purpose you have never seen. Neither has Aloysius or Bert. As if spellbound, each stumbles to his desk mumbling, "Yes Miss Phoebe. Sorry, Miss Phoebe."

For Phoebe, this is not enough. As does any superb teacher, she wants to teach lessons that will *stay* learned. It is high time that Messrs. MacRobinson and Redbreast learn that bullies eventually meet their match, that bullying is a cheap way to bolster one's ego at the expense of others. Advancing right up to the desk of each, Phoebe leans down and stares, simply and serenely stares, full into the face of the first one, then the other, until both hang their heads in shame. Then she walks silently back to her podium, quietly announces that the first lesson of the day will begin, and holds the class spellbound through an hour's detailed study of the conjugation of the verb to fly.

After this, if I tell you that Phoebe never again had a bully or a bored pupil in her class, would you believe me? If you do, you would be foolish indeed, for it is in the nature of things that every gathering of people or birds has at least one bully, one or two bored persons, and for that matter, one good and one bad, one who likes cinnamon and three who detest it, several who wouldn't dream of eating a cookie without nuts in it and others who pick out every last nut. And so it was with Phoebe's classes, and so it continued to be.

But with a vast difference. *Now*, bullies in Phoebe's classes did not remain bullies, but became pliant and exemplary students in class. You know the type well. They're the ones who always hop up in a flash when the teachers ask for volunteers to clap the erasers. They empty trash can, come on Saturdays to help wax desks, natter on endlessly about the virtues of the teacher, and earn the everlasting loathing of everyone else

in class. This is how both Bert and Aloysius ended their career in the little country school Phoebe taught.

Nor did Phoebe ever again have a bored student in her classes who *stayed* bored more than a few days. For the bored, she became Sarah Bernhardt and Sir Laurence Olivier wrapped up in one. She had only to begin a lesson on the geography of the Near East for students to see, outside the window and in the misty green of the forest, hot sand, herds of goats, and men in bur-nooses. They could positively *hear* the dry desert wind howling across the sandhills around them. After her transformation, no student who had the privilege of being in Phoebe's classes ever forgot her, and her important lessons remained a part of their lives throughout adulthood.

But this story is primarily about what *I* learned from Phoebe. To get to that point, I want to skip some years beyond these parts of her story, to a time when Phoebe had stopped teaching, left her little village behind to make her way in the wide world, and had not been heard from for some time. To be specific, I want to tell you about the day I met Phoebe and learned my most valuable lesson from her.

The day began as most do. I got out of bed, put on the coffee-pot, and sat down to page through the morning paper. I buttered my toast, boiled my egg, and sipped my coffee.

I imagine you know the kind of morning — the kind when you wanted to scream (silently and very politely) at the predictability of adult life, as you watch your parents go through motions they have gone through every single day of your adult life and theirs, while you mouth your cereal and long for something new, *anything* other than this same old same old on a fall morning that absolutely shouts excitement. I must confess that excitement was the last thing I had in mind as I downed my coffee and lazily turned over the pages of the newspaper. But excitement is what happened.

It all began with a little item that caught my eye in the classified columns of the *Gazette*. "The redoubtable, the renowned, the death-defying Madame P.T. Robin will make a long-awaited appearance at Old Town Hall in Galesburg next Thursday evening. If you have unanswered questions about the future; are lovelorn and out of sorts; find yourself lost and clueless: **YOU** are material for Madame Robin's fabulous experiments in transformation. Come one, come all, 8 p.m. sharp." Then, in very tiny print underneath, "Donations taken: turban will be

passed."

Needless to say, this ad very much piqued my curiosity. Who could P.T. Robin be? What made her redoubtable, renowned, death-defying, able to foretell the future, solve love problems, and guide the lost? I had to go. I had to see.

As Thursday rolled around, excitement built like a flotilla of gaily colored balloons rising inside me. On Wednesday I tossed and turned all night in feverish expectation. Thursday morning, I could hardly swallow my coffee and toast. Lunch tasted like sawdust. Dinner was out of the question.

At 5:30 p.m. I put on my most elegant evening jacket, polished my wingtips, slicked and combed my hair, and got out my grandfather's gold-tipped walking stick, which I reserve for special occasions. At 6 I was striding up the lane to town. At 7 I was at the door of the Town Hall. First in line! I could hardly believe my luck. To while the time and quell my nervous anticipation, I hummed and tap-danced and didn't even know I was doing so, until I saw the horrified looks on the faces of my neighbors as they walked across the town common. But such censoriousness could not stifle my high spirits. Not tonight. I was, after all, soon to see Mme. P.T. Robin perform every trick in the book. I hummed the louder.

As 7:30 came and went, however, I began to be somewhat anxious. Not only was I the *first* person in line; I was the *only* person in line. Could I have misread the advertisement? Had the performance taken place *last* Thursday? But there was the announcement right before me under the marquee, sprayed in bold black letters across a large white rectangle. It stated plainly that Mme. P.T. Robin was to perform tonight.

As the clock struck the third quarter of the hour and no one else had shown up, I resigned myself to being the only human at the performance. I say "human" quite deliberately, for there were, of course, as always in Galesburg, a few mice skittering about underfoot. These particular mice were rolling tiny cheese balls around in front of the door to the Hall, chattering excitedly among themselves. Who knows about mice? They might be prospective audience members. Then again, they could just as well be members of the Rodent Odd Fellows' Bowling League out for a night of skittles and beer.

And then, just as the clock chimed 8 and the Old Town Hall door swung open silently and mysteriously to reveal the dark, cavernous interior of the auditorium, up came running a very unexpected thing, an exceedingly out-of-breath and slightly overweight penguin. With a crushed bowler hat perched incongruously (and precariously) atop his pointy head and a screamingly red bowtie cinched so tight around his

neck that he could barely talk.

"Pl-pleasure to meet you, sir," he managed to stutter between gasps. Then, holding out a flipper, "Plummit's the name, sir, Thomas Andrew Marvell Thumb Plummit. My friends call me Tam T. Plummit for short. That's T-a-m-t-y, you understand," he wheezed out in sonorous letters, with a wink of complicity, as if we had just shared a prime joke.

All this in puffs and snorts as the lights went on and the curtain began to rise in the theater, and I almost beside myself to get inside and be seated. I replied as courteously as I could under the circumstances, then turned and fled—veritably fled!—down the aisle to the front row, accompanied by a deafening horde of mice, each bouncing in its paws a ball of cheese, who immediately plopped themselves down in *every seat* in the front row and proceeded to toss their cheese balls back and forth to one another with great whoops of amusement.

Necessity being the mother of invention, I consigned myself to the aisle seat in the second row, where I sat with a sigh of relief as I smoothed my hair and plucked specks of lint from my evening jacket. Just as I had gotten myself settled and put back together after the harrowing experience of fighting an army of rodents for theater seats, and just as the orchestra had struck up its entrance song ("Mockingbird Hill"—always a crowd pleaser), who should appear in the aisle beside me but (need I tell you?) Mr. Overweight and Short of Breath Tamty Plummit, wanting the seat beside me. With the entire room full of seats! Who without so much as a by-your-leave except for a small smile of apology, and practically projecting himself into my lap, pushed across me to occupy the *whole seat* (and then some) to my right. And who then, though the stage was still utterly empty, proceeded to clap his flippers together with furious excitement and so loudly that the whole auditorium rang with the noise.

"The theater outing from Hell," I sighed to myself as the lights dimmed and a gold-lame turban began to hop across the stage. When it reached center stage and the orchestra had played its final tra-la-la tweedle-de-de, the turban tipped slowly back to reveal, disconcertingly, one shining black eye. Nothing else. All else was lost in the shadows of the stage which swallowed up the tiny figure underneath the turban as an unbroken desert swallows up a grain of sand.

That is, if there was anything more than a huge eye underneath the turban, it suddenly occurred to me. Though my rational mind knew the thought was absurd, once it got ahold of me, it wouldn't let go. I could think of nothing else than how shocking it would be if the

turban tipped off to reveal a naked eyeball rolling around underneath it.

This night was taking its toll on my sanity. Evening jacket, indeed, I sniffed to myself, trying to dismiss the horrible vision that had taken complete possession of my mind's eye. Juvenile-delinquent mice and crazy penguins were more like it.

But, yes, there was someone inside the turban. As the spotlight zoomed in, I could barely make out, framing the shining eye, a wisp of red hair. Just when I had noticed this, a husky voice with more than a trace of French accent began to swim out of the darkness inside the hat: "Mes amis et mes amies, mah leetle fwahnds, let me entertain you!" Whereupon the turban's wearer doffed the sparkling hat, tossed it casually to the side of the stage, and threw herself into a sinuous invitatory dance in which her wings wove intricate come-hither motions in the air, while her red hair veiled one eye. Unfortunately, however, I was unable to enjoy this charming performance as much as I would have done under ordinary circumstances since, the minute it began, Mr. Tamty Plummit became so beside himself with enthusiasm that he leapt onto the back of the seat in front of me and pummelled his flippers together frantically — so energetically, in fact, that I could see only what the tiny spaces between each clap permitted me to see.

As if this were not enough, when Phoebe concluded her dance with a daring *pirouette* that caused her to rise several feet from the stage, Mr. Plummit's applause got so hot that he completely overbalanced himself and dropped with a satisfied sigh into my lap. I do believe he would have lain there all night in blissful exhaustion had I not "helped" him back into his seat (with, I must confess, perhaps more of a push than the situation warranted).

Having finished her dance, Phoebe watched this commotion with the patience of a seasoned teacher waiting for her class to quiet itself. This required her to fix the mice with a freezing stare until the squeaky exchange of cheese balls that was occupying the attention of the entire front row had stopped. When she was satisfied that she had the complete attention of the audience, Phoebe began her performance.

Do you know how one little thing—a story, a rock in the bottom of a clear mountain stream, a shack in a bare field just glimpsed from your car window—can change your whole life completely? Like the day you finished that book that ends with the boy sitting on the steps eating ginger ice cream as the sun goes down? The sadness of it. The strangeness. The ginger ice cream, for goodness' sake! Until you had read that book, you hadn't known that other people like you existed in the world. Knowing that made you want to go places and see things, find people with interests and outlooks like yours.

That's how this performance was for me. When it began, I was just



another over-the-hill literature professor who would do practically anything to break the tedium of yet another day begun with the crack of yet another boiled egg, who was seriously doubting his mental stability for having come out on such a night to such a performance. When it was over, I walked out a new man, one eager to scale mountains and swim seas, to go places and see things.

My transformation began with a crystal ball that rolled suddenly across the stage from the discarded gold turban. As this occurred, I was still in such a blue flunk about the dreariness of the whole evening that I began to wonder idly where Phoebe's stage helpers were. If she had any helpers at all, they were pretty darned clever. But if there were helpers, *where* were they? And if not, who had opened the theater door at show time? Who had just rolled the ball to her?

As I mulled over these questions, Phoebe picked up the ball with a dignified flourish of her wings and a sweep of her hair from her eye. "I can see you," she intoned slowly in her best French *chanteuse* voice, lifting the ball first to one eye, then the other.

The effect was electrifying. Not only could she see us through the crystal ball: we could see *her*. That is, we could see her eyes at least. There they were in all their strange glory, magnified thousands of times by the ball and the light shining on it, one a globe of liquid onyx so magnetic that it seemed to draw me up to the stage to be drowned in its depths; the other a brilliant orb of darkness shot through with blue veins like milky lightning bolts shimmering across a storm-inhabited sky.

"And I can make *you* see," she concluded, her voice rising to such a thrilling high note that the hair at the nape of my neck stood on end. "Who will volunteer to be my first subject?"

Tamty (of course; who else?) tore from his seat to the stage. He did not even bother to step over me and walk down the aisle as any self-respecting penguin would. No, indeed. Tamty propelled himself directly from his seat onto the stage, so terrifying the mice in the process that one furry little mouse doctor with a tongue depressor sticking up from his front pocket had to be called to wave a vial of sal ammoniac before the noses of his swooning companions. To this day, I can still catch faint whiffs of ammonia emanating from my evening jacket.

"Your name, sir, is?"—but even before Phoebe could get the question out of her beak Tamty had begun to babble a stream of words that not even a court recorder could have separated from one another:



"ThomasAndrewMarvellThumbPlummitMadamePhoebeandIadore-youadoreyouadoreyouworshipthegroundyouwalkonwillyoubemineforever?"

Phoebe smiled graciously as if she had received such unexpected proposals every night of the week. "Thank you kindly, Mr. Plummit. But permit me to ask you a question in return. If a robin married a penguin, what would their children be called? Robguins, do you imagine? I hardly think a name like that would do for our charming little progeny, do you? And reflect for a minute about the fun other birdling would have at the sight of little robquins that couldn't fly, but who flapped their flippers up and down hopelessly as they plummeted from their nest in a flurry of black, white, and red. Would you really want to subject innocent children to such torments?"

Phoebe said all with what appeared to be the utmost seriousness, but the entire audience could see that she was having a whopping good laugh at Tamty's expense, because she punctuated her statements with stage winks and coy grins in our direction. Not meanly so, but goodnaturedly, as if she had perfected the art of teaching/acting to such a pitch that she could well afford to suffer fools gladly. Not surprisingly, her humor fell on entirely deaf ears in the case of Tamty. He beamed at her all the more, with eyes so full of adoration that they rounded to the size of pizza pies. As he did so, he shuffled one black patent leather shoe back and forth in a gesture of shy infatuation, and unconsciously stuck the tip of one flipper into his mouth and began to suck on it. This fatuous display, combined with the pungent smell of sal ammoniac, made me begin to feel profoundly nauseous.

"Well, Mr. Plummit, let us see what you can see." Phoebe put the crystal ball to her black eye.

Tamty jumped straight into the air and spun around, over and over, in ecstasy. "Mama. And fish, beautiful, tasty fish. And cold water with ice in it. Oh, Mama, take me home with you." And then broke into tears.

For the first time, I felt sympathy for the rather silly little penguin. I had begun to see something more than the surface of him.

"And now?" Phoebe asked gently, as she raised the glistening sphere to her other eye, the mottled one. Tamty's reaction was completely different. As if the crystal ball had become a mirror, he suddenly took his flipper and began to smooth back what little hair he had on his head (his bowler had remained on the seat beside me), straightened his bow tie, and smirked slyly to himself, as if he had become Casanova reincarnate. He remained in this self-satisfied state until Phoebe slowly, carefully, laid down the ball. Whereupon Tamty dropped heavily to the floor, assisted by what seemed to be an unseen stagehand, and fell into a deep, snoring slumber.

"What you have just witnessed, ladies and gentlemen, madames et messieurs, is an experiment in seeing. We see what we wish to see. Which is to say, we see what we train ourselves to see. Let me explain."

She walked to the edge of the stage and took a very surprised mouse by the paw, lifting him up in her wings. "I am now holding in my wings a mouse, a representative of the biological species *Mus musculus*. To some of you, this mouse may appear to be just another mouse. Not so. I shall show you that a mouse is never just a mouse. A mouse is a..."

And, placing the mouse in front of the crystal ball, which had risen mysteriously from the floor to hover in front of her face, she looked through the ball with one eye, then the other, so that we in the audience could see the ball, eye and mouse all at once.

Titters, then gales of laughter, broke out from the front row. "Hew, she done gone an' made ole Alf into a unbrella," whooped one mouse about Alf's age, wiping tears of mirth from his eyes. And as I looked, I did see, or *thought* I saw, for just a split second of a second, Alf's paws extend over his head and assume the shape of an umbrella.

"Now, Alfie's a cheesestraw, you cracking idiot," shouted another. And as he said it, I did think I saw, might have seen, a succulent orange cheesestraw in Phoebe's hands.

"Y'all all gots it wrong. Alfred's my nephew, and I tell you, he done become a chicken. Look at the fool, just a-peckin and a-peckin at what he think be corn." And sure enough, for a minute I saw Alf extend his neck at a non-existent grain on the stage, or believed I saw.

"And you, professor, what do you see?" Phoebe abruptly turned and looked me straight in the face, as if I were the only person in the entire room. Or student in the classroom, it felt more like.

"You came here tonight bored, feeling vastly superior to your fellow rodent and avian theater-goers. You came to be mildly amused, entertained, taken from the ordinary grind of things. Do you see anything unusual in this mouse?" Phoebe's words exposed me as decisively as if I had been taking a shower in a makeshift stall, and the whole kit-n-caboodle had suddenly fallen down around me, revealing me to a mob of bystanders.

"You see an ordinary mouse, do you not, Professor?" Phoebe continued mercilessly. And I had to admit it. All I could see—could *let* myself see—was one very plain and slightly grubby teenage mouse, grinning to beat the band at the attention he was receiving. I hung my head in shame.

"My point, ladies and gentlemen. My point precisely. I have not called on the professor in order to humiliate him, but to teach him and us what seeing is all about. Now let me tell you a story to illustrate the point."

And Phoebe launched into a detailed and very moving account of how she had discovered that she was different, not an ordinary robin. How no one was ordinary. How finding that she had one eye different from the other had led to

her discovery that she could see different things out of each eye. How this disclosure had led to another: that she could handle refractory adolescent robins and teach classes so masterfully that they *learned*. How all this had brought her to the most important finding of her life and career—that Phoebe Robin school teacher was also Phoebe Robin stage performer and Phoebe Robin *chanteuse* and Phoebe Robin fortune-teller and Phoebe Robin...

As she got to the last "Phoebe Robin," Phoebe stopped and allowed the sentence to trail off, as if there were *innumerable* Phoebe Robins in the one little feathered body with its gold-lame turban. And this was the point, of course—that we can be many selves, if we stretch beyond the one self that we have stuck with for too long. That who we are and who we become depend largely on our ability to see possibility, to see at all. That there are also many selves in everyone around us, if we train ourselves to see, to listen, to care.

While the audience sat pondering these thoughts in rapt silence, she slowly donned her yellow turban and began to creep, hop, back across the stage. When she reached the stage exit, turned slightly and twitched her wing in goodbye, I could swear she looked straight at me and beamed. The corner of the stage was dark. The turban shrouded her face. But I could *see*! And what I saw was one very lovely little robin smiling for all she was worth at me, and me alone, as if she could see in my heart what she had accomplished there this evening.

Maybe everyone in the audience felt the same thing. *Probably* everyone did, for the gift of a talented teacher or actor is to make the entire audience or classroom think that today's performance, today's lesson, is for each person alone.

I don't know. All I know is that this evening's performance changed my life forever. I'm not sure *how*. Except for little things. Like how much I see. Before, I could look out my study window and see only gray skies and another day of drizzle. Now, I see the drops of water collecting on my windowpane, and I realize that each is in its own way a crystal ball, a world in and of itself that opens the outside world to me in new ways. Before, I thought I was only an aging professor whose days were done, whose contributions had long been made, and whose existence mattered to hardly anyone at all. Now, I know that I can do many things, if I want to.

Like go behind stage after the performance and invite Phoebe to live in the firethorn outside my window, rent free, for as long as she wishes. Or like answer this letter from one Thomas Andrew Marvell Thumb Plummit, Esq., inviting me to go on a cruise to the Antarctic.

The letter is on pink stationery very much smudged with raspberry jam. It's written in purple ink and signed Tamty, as if we're old

friends, with a happy face drawn under the name. I can hardly bear to touch it.

I may just go. I probably *will* go, God help me. Wait till I get back and tell you all about it.

William Lindsey

If this sole dark cedar  
Did not relieve the vista to the hill,  
The brown and gray of winter  
Would creep interminably,  
Triumphantly on,  
Until ice had claimed  
The summit's very crown,  
The crest from which sun leaps  
Each day into the cold, astonished sky.

But there the cedar lurks,  
Huddled and shaggy  
As a bag lady on a city grate,  
Crazy-wise and sovereign,  
All the world's wants  
Twisted in her gnarled old hair.

Without her, sun could not come up,  
Moon not pour dreams upon the stillborn earth.

But for this cedar, the hill's feet would crumble into dust,  
For it only holds death at bay,  
Bent within the branches of its head,  
Where birds find respite from the wind,  
And peace sleeps like a cradled babe,  
Waiting for the day when lords and masters meet  
The mothers they have driven to the streets,  
Nursing life inside their frost-torn hands.

## On Looking at Vermeer

William Lindsey

Women care for bodies  
As for saints' shrines,  
The snot and piss and puke  
Of dying spouse  
And broken child.

Women read the world  
With fingertips adept at breaking  
The secret code of love  
That comes, can only come,  
With touch and feel

And triumph:

Surprising, that word;  
It leaps forth  
From mind's womb  
Already born,

To tell me what I hadn't seen  
About the insight of the dispossessed,  
Who know as bones know,  
As flesh sings:  
Of death in life and life in death,  
The only resurrection that this  
Fractured earth can find.

## Bill

Russell Fowler

Today, because I find no hope  
in mirrors, I noticed, after all  
these years, an old man's hand  
lying close upon my book,  
spotted and creased with veins,  
my father's hand again so long  
forgotten, yet mine still.  
The flesh can not lie, nor  
misconceive the years ignored  
or decried, but testifies like  
parchment to the slow truth  
of the matter. "Where was I  
when this happened" is always  
the guilty's lament. The years  
were purchased, the time  
was spent, and that most patient  
and abiding of creditors lies  
quiet and extended before me.

## Candlemas

William Lindsey

No need to kindle light *this* morning.  
High sky, high wind, cold with glinting steel teeth  
Have done it for me, long before I awoke.  
And now on the back deck,  
As I bobble the birdfeeder perched in the Judas tree,  
Where furry squirrel tracks mottle the porch rail,  
Suddenly I see a face there,  
Where it always is, where I forget to look.

*Not* sun itself, but Chinese wind bells  
I hung there, to toy with the breezes and wrest from them  
The spring that blows from distant mountaintops  
We dreamed about in youth, where sun is born in milk  
And green so verdant our grass passes, only,  
For its shadow and its mime.

The bells twist around a smiling, faintly derisive  
Sun face with eyes and mouth and nose  
To reassure us of the god we are,  
Ourselves alone, not the shine  
We hold our breath to find  
When morning comes again  
Surprising in its homely splendor,  
In its fire and feather off the deck.

The bells, however, never ring.  
Wind coaxes sound from them,  
Their tiny, flangelike throats and clappers,  
Only with my help, a jangle of the limb  
To set the sun to dance, the bells to sound.

But now, this candle day, the sunshine billowing  
In waves around my feet,  
I see what it really is about the bells:  
Rust consumes them with an appetite  
More beautiful, more furred than any bark,  
In whorl and intricacy that only rust can etch,

On metal cheaper than the paper  
I pen my poems on, for you to see.

And I know: rust is after all  
The radiance that outlasts, outshines  
The tinder we cast up for wealth and show,  
The splendid gauze we build against the fire,  
The rain and dearth of ecstasy,  
The only beauty there is or will be  
In this world of woe.

**Surface Tension**  
(Near Crowder's Mountain)

Michael Lillard  
from 12 August 92 to 18 June 93

Slithering lines of white  
flash across the lake's dark  
surface,  
Each vibrating beam  
crashes into another.

A neverending series of collisions,  
constant interaction,  
this vibrating web holds  
the body intact.



## Arcade

Gilbert Allen

*What kind of poetry could be consumed as avidly as  
video games? What kind of citizen would come to  
value Pan over Pac-Man?*

—Sharon Shuman

The blond in the black leather jacket  
could be the son I don't have, leaning  
forward as if he were gunning a Harley  
through a Saturday evening  
of stalled cars

of people like me staring  
at his shoulders through the safety glass  
savoring the balance, the  
intensity needed to keep  
his quarters alive. Sharon,

why should they have the good sense  
to love you or me?

They have enough already.  
Here, they're the experts,  
and grace, after all, is grace.

They need it as much  
as we do—or as much as the old goats  
lined up for Cinema Classique, the ones  
all the power pills have forsaken  
after their long, uphill doddering to the  
Apollo.

## Contributors

**Gilbert Allen** has published two collections of poetry, *In Everything* and *Second Chances*. He teaches at Furman University ... **Margrete Anderson**, who lives in Stanley, is circulation manager at the Abbot Vincent Taylor Library and a frequent contributor to the *Agora* ... **William Esser** is a junior Political Science major at the Abbey. He is active with the tennis and cross country teams and the the Abbey Players theatre group ... **Julian Fitzgerald, OSB**, is a monk of Belmont Abbey. A poet and musician, he can usually be found on campus with paint brush in hand.

**Rory Fosberry** is a native of Charleston, SC, and a senior English major at the Abbey ... **Br. Leo Fowler, OSB**, is pursuing a master's degree in library information sciences from USC. He is master of ceremonies at the Abbey Church ... **Russell Fowler** is chair of the English Department at Belmont Abbey. His poetry has been published most recently in *College English* ... **Camille Hopkins**, a senior English major from Gastonia, NC, is looking for a few good graduate schools.

**Joel Jargstorf**, an "air force brat," claims no particular hometown. He is a very philosophical Abbey freshman ... Abbey freshman **Rosa Langevin** lived in Pensacola, Florida, before moving to Belmont with her husband, David ... **Michael Lillard** received a Bachelor's degree in English last December from UNC-Greensboro. A frequent *Agora* contributor, he is a member of a performance art ensemble, Odal, which has performed at the Moon Room in Charlotte ... **William Lindsey**, author of *Singing in a Strange Land* and numerous other publications, is currently at work on another book.

**Pam Newton**, a 1989 graduate of the Abbey's English program from Hamlet, NC, works in the communications office at Sacred Heart and is assistant director for House of Mercy ... **Michael Pesackis**, a 1992 graduate of St. Andrew's College, initiated the Big Brother/Sister program in a small Georgia town through his work as a VISTA volunteer. He lives in Georgia and permanently substitute teaches at a junior high there ... **Newley Purnell** is a freshman at Belmont Abbey ... **Matthew H. Seltzer, NSJ**, is a trumpet-playing monk living in Grand Coteau, LA ... **Mary Ellen Weir**, a Sister of Mercy of North Carolina, teaches English at Belmont Abbey. She is a Ph.D. candidate at UNC-Greensboro and has been published in several journals ... **Michael West** is director of student activities at the Abbey. He divides his time between sports, Nintendo, the Abbey Players, and writing.

## SUBMISSIONS

The *Agora* is published by students every spring at Belmont Abbey College. Submissions of fiction, non-fiction, poetry and pen-and-ink artwork are accepted between October and February, with notification of acceptance in April. Copies of the magazine will be mailed to those accepted.

Please remove your name and address from your submissions and include, rather, a cover sheet listing your name, address, telephone number, and a brief biographical profile along with the names of your submissions (or, if untitled, the opening lines of the work or a description of the subject). This will help us in our selection process, which involves reading "anonymous" submissions and voting on them as a group.

To submit work or ask for more details, write

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