



agora



*“Birthplace of Democracy, the Agora dozes at the foot of the Acropolis.
Athenians thronged here to discuss, harangue, litigate, philosophize.”*



Agora

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*Belmont Abbey College
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Let It Catch Fire

*Hold your glass to the sun, let it catch fire.
Dark liquid turned to ruby, glowing gold,
Becoming clearer, living, no longer cold,
Crushed, fermented and dead.*

*Hold your glass to the sun, let it catch fire.
A halo on the rim reflected
From the rays by which earth is fed,
Tints of purple like power, crimson like blood.*

*Hold your glass to the sun, let it catch fire.
As color transformed into spiritual food
This drink becomes when with the light infused,
Lifted to the sky, now is change made visible.*

*Hold your glass to the sun, let it catch fire.
The deep, deep red speaking a riddle
Of the essence of vine poured out to enkindle
The eyes of those who—in this raised glass—see fire.*

- Annemarie Maimone



Shining Image by Timothy Gill

“A Very Modern Tale”
“A Very Modern Tale”
“A Very Modern Tale”
“A Very Modern Tale”

There, is that centered? I'm not too sure if it is. Well, here I go with the story anyway. When I was just a young boy I was a swinger of birches and I would go up to a place on a hill to drop flies in the stream. My friends joked with me about my nature excursions, but I'm not a damn Romantic. I sure as hell am not oding to a night-ingle or wishing for death because my thoughts are too much to handle. And I most definitely am not writing for some farmer or fast food restaurant employee. I just like a good fishing trip.

I'm now an aged man, just a tattered coat upon a stick, and I'd like to tell you about something that happened to me last week. I've recently moved to Chicago, the hog butcher of the world, for my retirement. This tale, more or less, is about what I did and saw last Sunday. I had spent the morning enjoying coffee and oranges in a sunny chair. After those pungent oranges I headed outside to see how my garden was growing. In my old age I have found much delight in following every new development of leaves and flowers. You know, I've found that those little unexpected things in life are the things that change your whole way of thinking. The surprise green tomato that's there one morning or the two-leaved basil that appears overnight. These little unexpected occurrences can have a great impact on your day and even on the way you think. That morning I was surprised by what piece of my garden really caught my eye. No, not the little holes in the soil from the birds, or the dew on the path, and not even the new flowers of the strawberry plants. I was intensely drawn to my dirty, hard-working wheelbarrow. It leaned against an old oak tree, glazed with rain water, stealing all my attention. Really, so much depends on it: moving the soil to the nursery for the winter plantings, dispersing Autumn's compost over Spring's plowed earth, transferring the seedlings from the nursery to the garden, and collecting the discarded weeds pulled in the summer's heat.

Anyway, I've digressed. I decided to venture out that Sunday, so I headed to the station of the metro (is it “metro” in Chicago?) so

that I could ride to the...well, damn, I can't remember where I was going. I remember the half-deserted streets of Sunday. Oh, yes, I remember now. I had this inkling that I should explore the streets of my new home, the places of one-night cheap hotels and sawdust restaurants with oyster shells. There I was, amongst the faces of the crowd, when I saw a man with a cardboard sign: "Hay aqui mucho catholicismo y muy poco reliHion." Why the capital "h," I wondered. He assisted his English speaking reader in the pronunciation of "religion" in Spanish, but not "hay" which is similar to the English "T" in sound, but looks to the unfamiliar eye as "hay." I approached him, not to discuss his proclamation about Catholics, but to question his "h." But his passionate disdain for the commuting Catholics in the metro on Sunday overshadowed my question about his spelling technique. "Why the capital 'h?'" I asked him.

"Why the hypocritical 'Catholics?'"

This answer that he gave me, in the form of a question, went on much longer than "Why the hypocritical 'Catholics?'" But I won't bore you with his irrational, neglectful answer as he did me. As he stood there, rambling on about nothing, I saw behind him a striking piece of art done in spray paint. I was amazed at how beautiful it was: just spray paint on a concrete wall! Like my wheelbarrow, it was so surprisingly eye-catching. But this man, this overly passionate man, stood with his sign blocking the art. He just stood there, blocking my view of a great work. That was when I had the realization: it is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing.

- Christopher Lux

Lost Key

*That's what I get for losing my key.
Angry roommates and a bruised body.*

*A small campus with a small population.
Lose something important? Damnation!
Lost phone, lost laundry, and a lost key.
How long will it be before I lose me?*

*In through the window for nearly a week.
Hiding the fact, and acting quite meek.
I kind of need pants, "Start the washer, please?"
Southern accent works a charm, with ease.*

*Brown mottled skin from elbow to knee.
Creeping through the window, a sight to see.
There's red mud on my blinds and on the floor.
This didn't happen when I could use a door.*

*Found my phone and Res. Life calls,
I told them I'd find it, darn it all.
Said I have to report this?
I think I'll say the call was missed.*

*That's what I get for losing my key.
Angry roommates and a bruised body.*

- Ashley Faye Miller



The Plowman's Trade

*I want to learn the plowman's trade
Lest, ignorant, I walk the glistening wabe.
Furrows traced and distance displaced
Then settling, Pan's pipes be played.
As if I prayed; oh! that hallowed space.*

- Raphaël Du Sablon



Underwater by Paul Toscano



In the Room the Women Come and Go

*And they go riding
on their honeymoon stallion.
Cicadas chirping.*

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*Sonlite threw wendoes
skatterd by the bugspladder.
And a Green Castle.*

*Yellow leaves pile,
and the sun sinks beyond as
fire fades darkly.*

*I watch the Star spin
and then it stops. Perfectly.
Pointing to the House™.*

- Nicholas Rees

The Unemployed Economist

*I'm sittin' on a capital crisis,
loosenin' up my liquidity
chillin' on some deficits
dreams of opportunity costs now lost.*

*But I ain't sweatin' it,
Laffers curve was a Frown.
The proof is in the pudding
and its average elasticity over time "t"
divided by the marginal disutility
of bringin' home the bacon.*

*It's OK though, maybe it's just my fate
to relax and enjoy my unemployment rate.*

- Mitchell Button



Freedom by Betina Bilodeau

Infidelity

“Are you coming, Dustyn?” Dustyn turned, focusing on a small, slender girl in front of him. Her dark eyes danced playfully. “Dustyn, are you okay?”

“I’m just thinking,” Dustyn’s voice seemed deeper for some reason. More husky. It must be all of that black coffee. He vaguely wondered if that could even be a possibility. More likely the cigars he smoked by himself in his office. That made more sense. He went to kiss her forehead, but pulled back. She noticed and frowned, but said nothing. Instead she took a few steps backwards, turning to face the dying sun, sinking out of sight behind the tall gray buildings, warm orange light trying to escape around the surfaces, but being reeled back in slowly. Not that they were putting off any sort of heat. They were just dying embers of what used to be a victoriously hot summer sun. “Kady, don’t look so upset.”

“I’m not upset,” Kady said, though she clearly was. Why do women say that, when they so obviously are?

Dustyn sighed and straightened his back. There was no way to salvage the mood now, so he decided to keep quiet in order to stay out of trouble. “How was work?”

“Fine,” she answered shortly and turned away from him again. “I guess you’re going home tonight?”

“I guess,” Dustyn answered slowly.

Kady puckered her lips. “So I’m not good enough to stay away from home?”

Dustyn shook his head, unsure. “Do you want me to make everything seem more suspicious than it already must be?”

“I like the suspicion. I don’t think we’d like each other half as much if it weren’t for the secrecy issue.”

“I hope you don’t mean that.”

“You know it’s true,” Kady smiled, her eyes dancing. “Isn’t that what drew us together in the first place?”

“I’d like to think it was just a little more,” Dustyn said, eyes shifting slightly. “Such as how beautiful you always are and how happy I am to see you. I mean, before you came up, I was sitting here thinking about your coffee—”

“My coffee?” Kady interrupted. “What’s wrong with my coffee?”

“Nothing! It’s the best coffee I have ever tasted. Amazing coffee, no doubt. The best.”

“You’re just saying that now,” Kady said, shivering as the last orange fingers of sun curled up into a fist and then sunk out of sight.

“You know I don’t just say things.” What a horrid lady, one who could control a man’s feelings by merely withholding her graces. But if you couldn’t have your lady as bitter and dark as the coffee you drank, you weren’t really a man. “I think I should be getting home now,” Dustyn said, finally. Kady didn’t answer. “Well, I hope to see you soon,” he stuck out his hand and Kady tried to mask her disgust as she shook it. “Don’t worry, I will find a way to be with you as quickly as humanly possible.”

“You always take for granted I want to see you as quickly as humanly possible,” the smile was gone again. The woman replaced by a beast, never solaced. “I may be off for a business trip tomorrow and be gone for three months solid, you know. You never ask.”

“Are you?”

“Maybe.”

“That’s not a real answer,” Dustyn said earnestly. “You’re just trying to make me sweat a little, I know you are. You are quite cruel at times, Kady.”

Kady turned away from him, haughtily. “I will see you soon, then.”

“Soon,” repeated Dustyn. Kady started off towards her downtown flat, furnished expensively with high taste and dark wood. Dustyn watched her round a corner, envious he wasn’t joining her. He almost wanted her to invite him, but she never even glanced behind her as she disappeared from view.

Olivia was there to meet him when he got home. She was so skinny, you could almost make out where one bone ended and the other began. Her black hair was short and cropped, close to her ears and forehead, sticking out everywhere because she hadn’t brushed it. Dustyn couldn’t help but think of how unhealthy she looked—so miserable, so upset and anxious—so unlike Kady. “How was work?” she asked.

“It was work,” Dustyn answered, simply. It was nice, though, for someone to ask, even if they didn’t mean it.

“I made you some coffee while I was up waiting for you.”

She disappeared into the kitchen, only to reappear suddenly, holding a blue ceramic coffee mug that she had painted somewhere in the south of France during her college years. It had always been his favorite. “Cream and sugar, just like I know you like it.”

The first sip he took, he had to force himself to swallow. “Just what I needed,” he said finally.

She stood up and closed the robe around her body. “I’m going to get some sleep. I’ve been very restless.”

“Anxiety?”

“Yes.”

“You know it’s not good for you,” Dustyn chided.

“I was worried,” Olivia said, pointedly. She was used to his long nights away from her. The nights he used to spend all their money at bars.

He took another small swig and gulped it down, trying not to blink as he watched her, standing there so rigidly. “You see I drink coffee now—not alcohol. Don’t you have any sort of faith in me, Liv?”

She just turned and walked away. He sighed and went to the guest bedroom where he had been sleeping for almost two whole years now. He just wanted something more—something more than work; something more than cold houses; something more than cigars and black coffee. His phone buzzed as “Kady” flashed in big block letters. He ignored it as he poured himself a shot of whiskey and allowed himself to shut out the world once more.

- Lauren Stepp

The Long Winter

*Cold hands now will be touched by
A January hearth's woozy glow.
This fire burns high and bright,
Though the wind batters the windows.*

*As the flames dance, so will your heart—
Leaping for joy, twisting apart.*

*Flames flicker and fly, tickle
The grate, and you can almost
Feel the fire in your bones.
Though these flames be fickle
And inconstant, it seems—
They will not falter now, and
Infiltrate your dreams.*

- Morgan Castillo



Smoke Lady by Robin Taillon

Flowers and Stones

*A name 'writ in water' upon a slab of grey,
Rose-petals scattered on the tomb,
Scents so sweet of flowers in bloom
Hinting, 'death is not only decay.'
A gentle quiet that seeps between stones
Carries the memories in lines engraved
Of loves gone and poets grieved—
Names whispered in silent, graven tones.*

*Into the 'sweet dream of love' passed one
Before earthly love was gained,
An epitaph of surrender gentle but pained.
Another, after fame was won,
Lies in a shadowy corner overgrown
With such flowers as in his life inspired
Many lines of wistful praise admired.
And over all, an Angel of Grief in flowing gown
With head bowed before the thought
Of souls separated and sorrow wrought.*

*Yet here abiding peace pervades, torments flee,
Years have swept sadness into sweet time's flow
And, where they are brought no more, roses grow
On tombs faded and names read only by travelers such as we.*

- Annemarie Maimone



Serenity's Mystery

*A puzzle—
With colors shaded like those of the cube of Rubik,
Are shadowed, yet brightened
As the Loving Hand reaches
To soften these into
The water colors of the dawn*

- Katie Carl

*2011 Recipient of the Agora Art & Photography Award***



A Window in Tuscany by Annemarie Maimone

2011 Recipient of the Jean S. Moore Award*

Géricault

*Black and rough
Green with grime
Sharp and tough
Soaked in brine*

*In dark maw
Cavern, lair
Beauty's Law
Born so fair*

*Hard old shell
Sad and coarse
Tired, unwell
Worn remorse*

*Through pain born
Pearl so bright
Sacred thorn
Dark or Light?*

*Unrefined
Fast asleep
Heart unkind
Sunken deep*

- Ross McKnight

*Pile on pile
All alone
Groupings vile
Ocean's bones*

*Current stirs
Sand drifting
Noisome burs
Sink, sifting*

*Settling bane
Fortunate
Heaven's rain
Rending nets*

A Dance in Justice Halls

I. In the Concert Hall

*On a shrill note, a structure heaves skyward
And Gershwin's baton glides up, to the side and down,
Filling the unreal city with bluish concrete
That spills as sludge in the streets,
Splattering on the rebar.
The Rhapsody grows louder,
Each note stretched. Screeched
The violin, snapped the chord.
But profit worms and sweats, pulsating
Like the flesh of illicit love.
The symphony is broken,
Crumbling like velvet cake.
I ask, 'what to do?'
'Build it back, build it back,'
They said.*

*Crows circle above
Waiting to eat the flesh of illicit love.
I thought to pity the bleeding creatures
Who live down in the pit.
'It's their treason, their wages,' said a TV prophet.
So I listen,
And send the man a check.*

II. A Misfit Plays Chess

*At the violet hour, Roxanne in her red dress
Emerging from a black pit.
Only, she will be bound with chains,
Like desperation, depravity,
And followed by a gunshot.
The crack-whip sound of a 9 mm, she writhers,
Lays still.
The sharp red rise on her neck and shoulders,
The night's wages.
The red bullet hole, the prophet said,
'The night's wages.'*

*'She would have been good woman
Had someone been there
To shoot her every minute of her life.'*

III. Reason in the Court

*An old gray wig sat on his honorable place.
The sleek black pinstripe suit arguing still.
'Order in the court.'
They waited,
He smiled.
'Come, let's see, you and I
What the blue sirens brought from the pit today.'*

IV. Rain on the Church

*It was the best of times.
It was the worst of times.
Justice, hear their cries.
These are our children,
You're one of my children.*

*Ding-dong, ding-dong,
And the rain splattering on the stone.
Take stone from stone and wash them!
In a dark corner, Szpeilman plays
A sad memory.
Tears, tears, tears,
And last rites, an honorable burial,
Not for a dress, or torn jeans,
But a man and woman.*

*- Raphaël Du Sablon
Honorable Mention*

Winner of the Agora Justice and Law Poetry Contest

House of Cards

“Look at my name,” Gregg said, “it should tell you everything.” He was doodling in a sketch book. We were sitting next to each other in study hall, trying to kill the last few minutes before lunch. “See, I’m one big ‘G’ on top of two little ‘g’s.” When he stacked the letters, I could see what he was getting at. Gregg could draw anything and make you a believer. “I’m a tree stump on top of two smaller tree stumps.” He was, in fact, what some people called a fire plug.

“Your name is your destiny, man.” He wrote my name, crossed out the “h-o,” which left “ratio.” “You’re all about ratios. That’s obvious. You’re 1:1 when it comes to brains and brawn, about a 2:5 between head and heart, but you’re really whacked in the girl department. I’d say at least a 7:0. Big urge, no results.”

“Okay, smart guy, what about the missing letters?”

“That’s easy. They’re free radicals. Because we’re friends, they just fly to each other and give us our window to the future. My ‘r-e’ and your ‘h-o’ naturally join up to make ‘hero.’” He drew “HERO” in big letters with seraph wings lifting the “O” toward a shower of light from the sun.

“Or, what if it’s h-o-r-e instead?” He looked puzzled. “You know, ‘whore.’ What about that?”

But he had already tuned me out and was busy sketching a fireman saving a little girl and her teddy bear from a burning building. By the time the bell rang, he’d pretty much fleshed out the details. The little girl’s face showed someone being crushed by forces out of her control. So I had a couple of bad moments because that sort of thing really gets to me. I want to resist, but can’t. When I try, I see a hand from my higher self reaching down into this bubbling pit of my lower self trying to pull me out. “Hey, jerk face,” I hear the voice saying, “stick up your arm and don’t be such a girl!” But I’m covered in ooze, and my hand slips loose from his dry, reasonable grasp or my arm flies out of the socket, and I sink back into the abyss. The first time I remember going under was when my cat, Punky, died. I must have been about nine and didn’t know a time when she hadn’t slept on my bed. My father, who’d grown up on

a farm and gave little thought to the comings and goings of animal life, looked at me like I'd grown a pink bow in my hair.

When I went off to college, I majored in English. "What can you do with a degree in English?" my mother gently asked. I really couldn't give her an answer, not the real answer anyway. I couldn't tell her that it allowed me to secretly indulge my lower self in a safe, vicarious way, that this was why Plato hated the poets and kicked them out of the Republic, or that I wanted to avoid the cold calculus of the adult world forever. My father never said a word, but I knew how he felt.

After my freshman year I lost touch with Gregg. But his mother told me he'd decided to be an architect. I really couldn't see him designing strip malls or office buildings, and putting all those little fake, puffy trees around the parking lot on the mock-up for some client who was going to bulldoze the neighborhood. In fact, I didn't see him again until several years later, after I had graduated. I was standing in line at a Starbucks when someone shouted, "Ratio! Hey, Ratio!" It was Gregg, looking even more like his old fire-plug self. "You're just the person I wanted to see. I need your advice on some Robert Frost poems. What do you say?"

Over coffee and a couple of greasy blueberry muffins, he told me about his project. He had dropped out of grad school—too many straight lines he said—and had recently done a series of water color scenes from Frost's poems. He was going to use the paintings for greeting cards, but needed advice on which lines to excerpt from the poems for inside the cards.

"You've gotta be crazy," I said. "You'd traumatize little kids and send adults into depression or back to rehab." He looked incredulous.

"I just thought he was like the Norman Rockwell of nature poets."

"Did you bother to read the poems?"

"Sure, but I was just reading for the scenery."

"The 'scenery' is not there for its own sake, you know. What Frost is struggling with, to use his words, 'is what to make of a diminished thing?'"

"What do you mean?"

"Here's the straight dope, okay?"

So I described "Out, Out—" for starters. You know, the one

about the little boy who dies after his hand is ripped off by a chain saw and everyone just gets on with their day. The title, as I explained, comes from the darkest soliloquy in the universe. I did a little more on death and dismemberment, and then hit the themes of alienation from self, others and nature, just to give him a whiff of what was blowing off the Modernist pond. But I also pointed out that for most of these guys, art is salvation. Art saves—hallelujah!—art saves.

“Then you’ve got to see my watercolors.”

Gregg’s place was a dive, but his paintings were stunning. They beckoned, they invited, they pulled you into the landscape promising some kind of purposeful, redemptive experience. He had done scenes from Frost’s most popular poems. There was the stone wall from “Mending Wall,” fallen stones with pine trees on one side, apple on the other; two roads diverging in a yellow wood from “The Road Not Taken”; the apple tree and two-pointed ladder leaning toward heaven in “After Apple-Picking,” and so on. There must have been over twenty paintings spread out around the room.

“You come too,” I whispered. I couldn’t help it; it just came out.

“I beg your pardon.” He gave me a funny look.

“It’s a line from ‘The Pasture.’ I can’t believe you don’t know it. Frost unclogs a spring and then helps a new-born calf. Each stanza ends with ‘You come too.’ Where’s your Frost book?”

I read him the poem. “Again,” he said, “read it again.” I thought he was going to swoon or something.

“What you need to do,” I said, “is put ‘you come too’ on the inside of each card. Use the same line for each setting.”

“That’s brilliant!” he shouted, as he jumped up and did a little dance waving his arms in the air. After that moment Gregg and I were partners.

Okay, I know what you’re thinking. I’m certainly not a hero, that’s for sure, but now I’ve crossed the line into whoredom. All right fine, but what’s so bad about greeting cards? Each person in the Western world sends an average of fifty-five cards per year at the tune of about ten billion dollars annually just in the U.S. Sure the sentiment is canned, and most people are so imaginatively impoverished they can’t think up something on their own, or take a few moments to

actually write a letter. But here's my point, their instincts are right. What is a greeting card anyway, but a reminder of the dualistic nature of reality, mind and body, spirit and flesh, transcendent world and material world? It's the road the West has been traveling down since Plato divided reality into being and becoming. I can't help it if the greeting card is just one more variation on this theme. The card front is the garment the spirit wears, the note on the inside a kind of essence, giving meaning to the apparent accidents of our sense knowledge. So when we receive a card, it's something like a mystical experience. For one moment we see through the things of this world into the reality behind them. If mass-produced cards, say of the Hallmark variety, have this capacity, engendering a moment or two of reflection and meditation, how much more so for the cards Gregg and I would fashion!

And fashion them we did. After getting Gregg's paintings digitalized, and selecting card stock and envelopes, the printer was ready to roll. Within two weeks we had samples in nine different outlets. At the end of the first month, we gave the okay for a second printing. Because the cards called out and beckoned people to them, just like the paintings did to me when I first saw them, we couldn't keep them on the shelves. That's why we decided on "Inscape" for the company name. By the end of the third month, we were compelled to hire an office assistant to work half-days just to manage the orders.

Her name was Leslie, someone Gregg had known in college. She had just gone through a messy break-up, so her big doe eyes haunted the office (Gregg's apartment) and me, especially me. Since she was so far out of my league, I could relax and tend to what was really bothering me. So I began leaving little surprises on her desk, anything to cheer her up, an origami swan, a bar of Belgian dark chocolate, a box of chai tea, and, yes, a card I did myself. I drew a pen and ink rose with stem and leaves, daubed red watercolor on the flower and green on the leaves. It was actually pretty classy. On the inside I wrote: "A rose is a rose!" and signed it "R."

"The card was beautiful," she said. I had just come back to the office after being out for the morning making deliveries. Before I could set my order book and samples down to make a proper response, she was giving me a hug.

"I thought the other gifts were from Gregg, but they were from

you, weren't they?"

"I just wanted you not to be so sad."

"I'm not, now. Did you really mean what you said in the card?"

"Yes," I said, looking down at my shoes, "how could I not help it?"

"I was just going to lunch," she said as she leaned into me again, "you come too."

I couldn't believe what was happening. I'd just been "inscaped," incontrovertibly "inscaped," like being swept, pulled, yanked into one of Gregg's paintings. Nothing in the office looked the same. Even the light switch which I turned off as we left the room was transformed, magical.

I don't need to give you any details, but you know how most romantic comedies have the montage sequence where the lovers, after they've reached their little understanding and are in the first blush of infatuation, go around doing fun things like feeding pigeons, crossing a busy street, or flying a kite. Each of these scenes takes place, of course, against the backdrop of a pathos-laden soundtrack. Leslie and I did all of these things, but my favorite scene, even though it's probably a cliché too, was my old tom cat, Roscoe, jumping up on Leslie's lap, turning around a couple of times and settling in.

Leslie became my inspiration, my muse. Because of her, I created a whole series of cards, one card feverishly followed after the other. It was like Balzac who'd finish one novel at five in the morning and begin another before breakfast. I called the series "Real Time" by Inscap. Instead of paintings for the covers, these cards had photographs which Leslie and I shot on location. One featured a sleeping infant in a crib (Leslie's niece), and the inside read, "Whatever you've done, you still need a good night's sleep!" Another pictured a fire ravaging through a large suburban home; it read, "Sometimes you just have to walk away!" Then there was the one showing an underpass with a large cardboard box. "Home Sweet Home" was written in uncertain letters on the side. The card read, "Remember, someone is always worse off than you!" My favorite was a photograph of a shooting star, which read, "Even when you're flaming out, you're entertainment for somebody!"

With the new line of cards, which Gregg dubbed the "Loser's Collection," we were doing so well we rented an office with two small rooms. Leslie had a new desk in the outside room, so she was

now both a receptionist and secretary and was working full-time. In the second room, Gregg set up his studio, and we put Leslie's old desk in the corner for me. This phase, which lasted for several months, was probably the high point of my life. Leslie and I were together, business was booming, and Gregg's interest in painting had intensified. He wanted to branch out and do other American poets such as Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson and T.S. Eliot. I knew I'd have to keep an eye on these projects, but what could go wrong? We were young, smart entrepreneurs on our way to making a fortune.

That's when the Cease and Desist Order showed up in the mail. It was from the Frost Foundation, which informed us that we couldn't use the line, "You come too," without their written permission. If we continued to do so, they would sue. When we asked for permission, our request was curtly dismissed, and we were sternly warned again about being sued for more money than I would make in a life-time, at least now anyway.

We met around Leslie's desk to develop a plan. But it was clear when we consulted the financials that the "Loser's Collection" could not carry the company. Since the poetry of nineteenth-century writers was in the public domain, Gregg got busy on Whitman, but nothing gelled. He just couldn't get a fix on a scene because in Whitman's long line, one scene gave way to another in dizzying rapidity. The only thing he could come up with was a painting with huge, rolling, grassy hills in the foreground and a small, distant sky being pushed out of the frame at the top, which, to be honest, looked like a Microsoft screen-saver. When I suggested that we use the last line of "Song of Myself," "I stop somewhere waiting for you," nothing happened. Even though it was similar to the line from the Frost poem, it just died on the vine. Emily Dickinson presented other problems. She was far too abstract and he couldn't pin anything down. I thought he was going to cry when he said, "How am I supposed to paint 'the heft of cathedral tunes?'" Maybe like some writers who have just one novel in them, Gregg had only one card.

After that, things began to fall apart. Gregg would come into the office late. He was hung over and looked like he'd slept in his clothes. He refused to be consoled; there was nothing I could do to take him out of himself. He'd go into his studio and just stare out

the window until it was time to go home. Leslie quit coming in altogether. She wouldn't return my calls, and the one time I went by her apartment she wasn't home, or wouldn't come to the door.

I was anxious and didn't sleep well. I think I was experiencing what psychologists call free floating anxiety because my future was now a blank slate. But I also knew I'd been used by Leslie and that made me heart sick. Is that how a greeting card feels right before it hits the trash? "I thought I was something special," it might say, "to be valued for my own sake, but now I'm covered in coffee grounds, stained by tomato sauce and cast into darkness at the bottom of a landfill!"

I found Leslie's card when I was cleaning out my desk. She must have slipped it under a pile of papers on her last day. "I'm sorry to have to tell you this on a card from the 'Loser's Collection,'" she wrote, "but I couldn't find anything else to write on." It was the card with the burning house. "You have to understand that I can't be around failure; it makes me physically ill. I feel like I'm being buried alive or falling down a black hole and can't breathe. I hope you'll understand. Have a good life. Leslie." Some cards *should* end up face down in the landfill.

Then one afternoon, the day before we had to be out of the building, Gregg showed up shaven and in a clean shirt.

"I'm going to finish my degree." He looked apologetic.

"It'll be fine," I said. "Don't worry."

"It was fun while it lasted, right? Look, man, I'm sorry about Leslie. I wanted to say something, but things were going so well. I thought it might work out. Now look at this." He flipped open his sketch pad. There was the faint outline of a cathedral at the top.

He wrote "Leslie" in big letters. "What do you get? It's 'l-e-s' plus 'l-i-e.' That's French for 'the lie.' What more evidence do you need? Well, I've got more! Go to the inside, to the soul of the name. It's 's-l-i,' 'sly.' I rest my case."

I couldn't tell him that "lie" wasn't French for "lie" or that articles had to agree with the nouns they modify. And I know I should never have asked about the free radicals.

"That's easy," Gregg said. "When you factor out the 's-l-i-e,' it just leaves 'l-e.' 'H-o' (that's you) added to 'l-e' (that's her) says it all, or do I have to spell it out for you?"

That night Roscoe spent the evening on my lap. His weight and warmth helped me relax, to let it all go. Sometimes after I get seated on the couch, and as he's getting ready to leap, I pat my lap and whisper, "You come too."

- Michael Hood



Balance

*I've seen you swinging to the market,
baskets loaded high, wide, and
deep, heads held tall, babies
slung at sides, on backs,
bound close in bright
cloth, slumped in
sleep, while your
hands speak,
wave, point,
reach up to
touch,
straighten,
lightly,
firmly,
balance
the load as
you sway, bend,
follow the red rough
paths, barefoot with the
others, with the women, with
the children, under the blazing sky,
poised in your grace and strength:
it is the weight creates the dance.*

- Rebecca Munro

Poem on My Birthday

*Gray hills, gray sky, gray rain
Stippling the river.
Gray everything again,
Gray everything forever.*

*November feels this way:
Drearly unshriven,
Ten miles from Christmas Day,
A hundred miles from heaven.*

- Sally Thomas



What Sees the Moon

*The moon is such a sly old thing.
What does he with his days,
When he does slink below the sun
And we go our separate ways?*

*I work from when we part until
He rises yet again,
And sits afresh on Heaven's brow
To be my silent friend.*

*I ask of him, "Why sir, do tell
Of what it is you see
When below the Sun's bright belt you sink
And are apart from me?"*

*But bright and silent back
He stares with ever fixed grin,
And still refuses that tale of his
To finish or begin.*

- Carolina Warden

A Christmas or Epiphany Hymn

*Hearken! Angel choirs sounding
Songs, all mortal ears astounding,
Hush the humble shepherds' fears.
Then the silence turns to singing—
Lo! The blessed magi bringing
Gold, and myrrh, and frankincense!*

*Light! The darkness overwhelming—
See! The very stars are helming
Sinful men to Palestine.
O'er Bethlehem, in heaven hanging,
Behold the guiding fire, flaming,
Dispels the nightly shadows grim.*

*There! Our fairest lady bending
Unto men, a savior lending
In that grotto, cold and dim.
Can we but fall in adoration
Before the Deity's oblation
Of his own, beloved son?*

*Behold him in the stable laying,
Amidst the lowly asses braying,
Clad in simple swaddling clothes.
Prepare the lamps, the vigil keeping
Be not like wicked servants, sleeping
Go forth to greet the child-king.*

- Charlie Jackson

Shadow Keeper

*If I were to dare dream of a moment of solitude
I might surely find it in the shadows of leaves;
when rushing torrents of colorful display frolic about my feet,
truly, they are but remnants of their former selves,
cast upon the soil for the very first time,
discarded by their keeper.
And, as I shuffle through their multitudes
I dare dream that I shall find
that shadow
which has been softly
laid behind.*

- Marshall Lindsay



Back to the Future

*Set on sturdy pedestals,
delicate sculptures dot
Indiana fields
as far as eye can see—*

*trifolds turning lazily,
leisurely
leveraging Brother Wind
as future fuel.*

- Sister Jane Russell

Another World

*Would I could fall softly into that mountain valley
Through the cumbersome clouds and sunray splashes
Find the tail ends of unfinished sentences—
The inexplicable bursts of mirth,
A genuine grin that spreads, the open palm—
And the inimitable tracings that line it.*

*Into those deeps I'd gladly fall
To grasp the shining fog that slips
Through and over my fingertips.
Finally, to let go of my tugging mind
Where a new wind stirs ageless leaves
And untouchable time.*

- Morgan Castillo



A Slower Pace in Life by Betina Bilodeau

Prophetic

My high

*beams reflect on the violently
fluttering wings of a moth
right before my engine consumes its life
and I wonder as I drive
towards your captivating light
blinding
what possesses me*

That night I dreamt

*bay leaves flew out of my mouth
I remember playing them like cards
stacking them in brittle piles*

I dealt them out

*later all crusted over and awake
you and I looked in the dream book
bay leaves: considered a symbol of prophecy
We laugh
I was once many women
over and over*

from chrysalis to flying form

but once your brightness found me

I saw you illuminated me

*I inhale sweet abandonment
and exhale vulnerability
I am different
but proverbial
in your rays of white*

- Robin Taillon

October Wasps

*Inside the storm
glass, their gray*

*pastry swells.
Still medium-warm*

*in late-midday
sun, it crawls*

*with scissor-wings.
The work progresses:*

*pattings, chewings.
Some abscesses*

*are fitted already,
each with its cottony*

*warhead. Inside,
the infant, folded,*

waits wide-eyed.

- Sally Thomas



Bright Skates in the Streets

*Neon skates light up the streets
Funky sounds moving his feet
Making the night electric
With his style and his smooth tricks
He gives the night a heartbeat*

- Matthew Bradley

Night Prayer

*We do not see the saints at night
Holy faces hide, but pray
These reminders out of sight
yet heaven has not gone away*

*Glass robes blackened without flame
dim wicks over shadowed pews
each paragon stands in their pane
housed in home of joyous news*

*Voices of the heavens sing
through blackness of the night
A light still shines sparkling
the Star of Queen's delight*

- Ashley Faye Miller



Dreams Fall Silently

*Dreams fall silently, soft, unspoken,
Caught for a moment in the glow
Of a lamp-light's broken
Flicker—an uncertain show—
Then vanish in the dark
Like snowflakes in the night.
But, lost to sight, they land and mark
The ground with visions bright
And cover the old, weary ways
Of past paths and trampled foot-steps.*

- Annemarie Maimone

This tale was inspired by Charles Camille Saint-Saens'
Cello Concerto No. 1 in A minor, Op. 33

Deafening, beastly thunder roared over the waters, as torrents of rain fell from the dark sky. Buffeting the *U.S.S. Charger*, the furiously churning sea constantly threatened to destroy the little boat and its fearful crew. Feverishly, the drenched sailors pitched buckets of water out of the lurching craft, as they struggled to keep from being swept overboard. Just when they thought that the worst was over, several vast, looming forms rose out of the water and latched onto the ship. Stricken with terror, the men froze in their work, transfixed by the sight of a gigantic beast boarding their craft with its long, deadly tentacles. “*To arms!*” yelled the captain, as the sailors scrambled for their javelins. Cautiously, they inched across the slippery deck towards the beast. On the captain’s signal, every man hurled his weapon. Shrieking in pain, the monster swatted at the spikes piercing its flesh. As the crew cast another volley of javelins at the creature, it relinquished its hold on the ship and sunk beneath the foaming sea. A hearty cheer was sounded and the sailors danced about in their victory, but the captain knew that the beast was not finished. Arrogantly, one of the men spat over the edge where the monster had disappeared, and a tentacle suddenly burst out of the water, nabbed the screaming sailor, and dragged him overboard. The monster re-emerged in a blood-chilling rage; it was too late for the panicking men to escape. In a rush of fury, the creature snatched fleeing sailors and bashed them against the deck, chucking its victims into the sea or crushing them in its fierce jaws. With a loud crack, the mast shattered to splinters at its base and came tumbling down upon the chaos. Desperately, the captain searched for a weapon, but the only thing that hadn’t fallen into the sea was a glass oil-lamp. He wrenched it from its hook on the wall and charged the creature, ducking and dodging the deadly tentacles. Leaping at the beast, he smashed his weapon repeatedly upon the monster’s weak underside with such a vengeance that the monster released the ship. The beast screeched in agony, focusing all its dying energy on dragging down this last opponent, who still hacked and struggled against the creature’s mighty grip. Horrified, the bedraggled crew watched as both man and beast sank below the dark, churning sea.

- Katherine Pajor

Southern Requiem

*The night breathes forgotten perfume
Drawn from flowers' lips.
Tears of borrowed blaze drip from the Moon
Drowning magnolias in her misery.*

*The summer air is thick, recovering from
Heat's burning gashes of pain.
Whining cicadas make known their loss
As whispers rustle magnolia leaves.*

*The wind moans far off cannon booms
And trembles with men's screams.
Red clay pools with blood of dead,
Thousands lost in senseless quarrel.*

*"Follow the Drinking Gourd" voices mutter,
Find your freedom they intone.
Trees' roots hold long memories,
They know what happened.*

*Tall houses remain, standing witness,
Fading proof of pain and suffering past.
But until her petals bud no more,
The magnolia secret keeper will be,
Fairest flower of the South.*

- Ruth Hymel

Uncommon

I thirst

*For eyes with eternal gaze
Shudder when to my lips is raised
Bitter, mocking, spoilt wine*

*This, lips resist, are pursed
Op'ning only to sweetest springs
Sealed again, only, on binding rings
Mine and thine*

- Ross McKnight



Unsung Heritage

*I used frozen strawberries
on my blue bruised knees*

*tying a tart knot of globalization
around the knobs used
mostly for right angled perfection
in this modern age*

*it is unifying me and all
to an unconscious paramount*

*and yet culturally suicidal paradox
held together by thin silken
webs and satellites
a generation at a disconnect*

from what was

*the dirt from which we swelled
we blossom and attack
the very roots that dwell
beneath our skin*

*a separation from the veins
that knot our body together*

*unable to hear the thump of God
flowing through the rich warm earth
anymore*

- Robin Taillon

Blink

Trying not to force it he stared straight ahead into the glow of the blank *Word* document. It was not unlike all the unsaved blank documents before it. He pushed them out of his mind. There was a time when creating art was easy. He used to write short stories and poetry too. He used to look hard into the veins of a maple leaf. He used to sit by clay-stained lakes and watch Garr prowl beneath cracking, sun-baked planks. He hadn't much else to worry about.

He sat and remembered his youthful convictions: when it was more important to create than to study. Much more important than work. It was still less vital than love, but not by much. Late in the night he used to rub her head until she fell asleep. Sliding his hand out gently, he would grab up a notebook and scribble feverishly. It had been important to chronicle his experience because he understood something that people who spent their time sweating, and toiling, and worrying could not. He was devoted to something that was rare and infinitely more beautiful.

Now all that was gone, and late in the night *Word* was still there, but words seemed not to be. The blue glow off the screen stared at him. He glared back; it was not beautiful. The blank screen reflected his own emptiness. The staring contest continued. On his side: darkened circles. On the other: a clean, mocking void. It was empty but for the ticking cursor. It occurred to him that it was a mirror that the cursor danced in. He tried to recall when he took beauty from inside himself and stained the mirror with its image. Somewhere, he had lost all his beautiful things.

Focusing he tried to remember what had happened. He still wrote after college; he valued it beyond most everything else. He remembered working to pay the rent on their first apartment, but he had still made time for the art. He was sure if he dug up any of his older journals he would find screeds condemning the "real" jobs he blundered through. He figured he had less time to do it when he had gotten married but he had been forced to find a job that would afford a mortgage payment. They had a daughter shortly after, so why not accept that first promotion? He had earned it after all. Hard work and sacrifice. Why not accept the ones that followed? A career that would provide the money for their security was a minimum.

Career, promotions, years, time.

Now it had been so long since he had written anything. His muse had left him and sent in her place a letter from The Law Offices of Michael G. DeMayo. He felt like a fool now. Sitting at his desk trying to force what used to be so natural, trying to conjure her. He closed *Word* and instead opened a desk drawer. His fingers prowled the depths of a folder filled with pink, crinkled invoices. Tallies of the expendable expended. Furrowed and forlorn his eyes moved from line item, to clock, to spreadsheet. Then he stopped.

He pulled his hand back from the work papers. He could see himself clearly, as men get to do very rarely. Sometime though, in a moment of epiphany, one discovers oneself. Usually looking rather foolish and naked, but always quite obvious. The profit margin had also become the border of his life. The Net held him fast. The cost of goods appeared poised to include his marriage. With fourteen companies demanding his resourcefulness, his focus, his creativity, fourteen companies controlled it. Dividing him equally, pouring out fourteen shots, the bottle was empty. And so was the damn computer screen. He sighed, conceded, and rose from the desk.

He normally liked the cold tile on his bare feet. But he wasn't in a mood to like anything now. He slid on his slippers. He crossed his office over to the books and ran his fingers along the shelves of heroes. Here were men who championed not Masterkraft or Mercedes. Here were men who could not be bought, who could be sold only in paperback. He thought about Thompson in Puerto Rico and Bukowski at the liquor store, escaping where they could from the machinery. He thought about himself behind the desk on a phone, he thought about himself on a sale, on the phone. He thought about himself on the phone, on the phone.

Across from his desk he sat down on the leather chaise. He exhaled with the upholstery and allowed his eyes to meet those of his little girl. She was staring at him from behind the glass of a mahogany frame he'd bought on business in Madrid. That trip had trumped her U17 soccer finals. And now she reminded him from the glass in her Umbros. Under the weight of her smiling photo and his failures, he decided it was time for a beer. He got up and headed for the kitchen. He realized he knew nothing of the luxury he found himself in and, alone there, he despised it. The place was big enough

when they bought it, but now it was empty most of the time.

Dragging his slippers into the kitchen he followed the granite countertop with his knuckles. Reaching the stainless steel refrigerator, he pulled it open. The sticky suck sound of the seal being broken preceded the cool air rushing into his face. He lingered in the chill and ran his hand across the different six packs before settling on an Abita. The beer was delicious and finished like strawberry cheesecake; for a moment he despised his money less. He stalked the hallway taking care to avoid the mail from his wife's lawyer sitting on the table. Then he slipped out the back door and onto the porch.

The wooden planks in the hot Georgia night contrasted sharply with the cool tile. He settled finally on a teak patio chair. The chair was pollinated and he could feel the shifting granules through his clothing. He didn't mind the dirty chair. He preferred his porch, which seemed always to escape the attention of the Dominican immigrant he had found on Craigslist to clean the place. He pulled at the bottle. He surmised that he hadn't had some great understanding in college. What he had was time and a penchant for collecting debt. Great foolish hope, and a misunderstanding of talent. He had a drinking problem and attention deficit disorder. Then he grew up, and that was all.

He thought his daughter would understand. People grow apart, after all. And if he hadn't put himself into the businesses like he had, where would she be? She certainly wouldn't be attending the school she was at. He knew there was no way some failed writer's income or tenured English professor's salary would afford her the private school in California she had so desperately wanted to attend. The thought of his only daughter scoring goals he'd never see on the other side of the country pained him, and he pushed it away.

He cleared his throat and his mind. It was late and he thought about the sales meeting he had the next morning with his team leaders. He rose from his ancient patio chair and took a step toward the house, but then he froze. Something small, some experience unseen gripped him. Had there been a witness it would have gone unnoticed altogether. But he had caught it. He took off and crashed through the door. Incensed with some tapestry, life resonating through his thought, his body, he charged into his office. The race

to the keys over, heart pumping fast, it was all back. Mural vibrating, dancing from his fingertips, he tapped out the colors. Focused, poised, it was beautiful. It was perfect. He was there, where he belonged. Perched at the keyboard, pounding out the art, off the rafters of his soul.

- Patrick Shea



Humility by Ashley Faye Miller

Polarized Frost

Book One: Santa and the Fallen Elves

*Of Santa's disagreement, and the toys
Of that secularized day that he brings
In opposition to our dear Jesus,
I now wish to narrate with your guidance.
Christmas Spirit, I invoke you to fill
My page with truth that will clarify the
Holiday that we celebrate this month
And justify the ways of Babe Jesus.*

*Arising from his lake of snow and ice,
Santa, with his angels, prepare for war,
Knowing that the baby will fight with them
As he did in the skies above last year.
Every Christmas Season Santa vows he'll
Conquer that swaddled child of the manger.
This cold season Santa arose and spoke:*

*Misery has joined us, my fallen elves!
Again I tell you that it is better
To make toys in the freezing North Pole
Than to pray in the crowded manger!*

*Lying in disguise was the Lord Jesus:
Hey there Santa! I have infiltrated
Your not well guarded Pole so that I may
Argue with you a while about Christmas.
You were defeated by the host and me.
My Father kicked you out because I won.
Now you try to take my best holiday?
I think you and your fallen elves need to
Abandon this sacred day of my birth.*

*Whereto with speedy words Santa replied:
My red outfit allows me to stand out,
And the presents don't hurt to win the men,
Women, and children over to my side.
Baby Jesus, know that you lose on this
Special day of gifts, lights, wreaths, and parades.
The mind of men is its own place and in
Itself can make the mall a holy place.*

- Christopher Lux



Rippled Sky by Robin Taillon

Placidus

(In an address to the Lord Abbot upon his rescue from the water)

So to please thee, holy father,
And perhaps too eagerly, down
Ran I to the big water's edge,
Desiring so to gain thy love
And favor with cooling drink that
Should quench thy rest's temporal thirst.
Striving hurriedly to fill our
Burdensome bucket's boundless breadth,
I felt a tugging and pulling
As like our Baptist's hands as I
Recall my cold and humbling birth
Into this joy-filled Paradox.

So, too, did I—amazed—find the
Entirety of my small frame
Enveloped in silvery folds.
However, upon my rising's
Spluttering spittle, I heard not
The strong, redeeming peal of thy
Presbyter's firm exhortations,
But rather seemed to be with Paul
At Troas. Lulled—as the young boy—
Into a state of calm from the
Water's coolness, I fell from soft
Slumber's sill into dreaming depths.

Content, and at the Gate of Bliss,
I tumbled with toiling torrents,
When, lo! I was gripped with bitter
Sweetness, feeling purgatory's
Lapping tongues at my loopéd locks.
Thus contentedly discontent,
I saw—distant—a burning light
And St. Peter's eyes like thine own.

*Startled, then, finding his firm grip
Upon the roots of my fairly
Downéd head, I came to full sense,
Preferring that Eutychus' fate.*

*Yet, so tempest'ously 'wakened,
Was I but then new befuddled
At sight of thy soft tread, father,
Upon old River's wily wilds
And varying surface. We had
But barely gained the hoary bank
When, in dreadful awe, I beheld
This changeling shade seem to shift shape
Into the mild, belovéd mold
Of our benign brother, Maurus.
Chast'ning me with tranquil gesture,
He hurried hence with eagerness.*

*So to please thee, holy father,
And indeed too eagerly down,
In untempered youth's favored folly,
Ran I to Praise's pois'nous edge,
So seeking to please only thee,
In chasing a wild and childish zeal,
Fearless for blesséd Three that Be.
I plead for thy prayers that I
May show to our God loving fear,
to thee, unfeigned and humble love,
to Christ nothing prefer, and may
He bring us to e'erlasting life.*

Amen.

- Ross McKnight

Red Innocence

Rust scabs the yellow paint, blisters
The porch like blood soaking the sun and
Splatters across picnic tabletop below—
Smearing white innocence in violent strokes.
Murder, *murder*.

My young arms are empty remembering:
Soft fur, soothing purrs, silken whiskers.
Days pass and suspicion grows, seeping into
Red accusations. As yellow and scarlet flow in my head.
Murder, *murder*.

The boy gave me the evil eye, staining
And drowning himself in crimson guilt.
I threw him in a sea of blame, watched
Him choke on its feverish tide of burning truth.
Murder, murder.

Justice smeared in dried blood, baking into rust under
Scorching rays of unforgiving truth.
Blotches of experience drip red. Onto
The white plane of my innocence.
Murder, murder!

- Ruth Hymel

A Southern Lullaby

*She falls asleep,
Beneath the moon and stars.
The night air rocking her gently.
Blanketed under magnolias and Georgia pine,
She slumbers dreamlessly.
Waking to bluegrass damp with dew.*

- Sharon Stahl



Sursum Corda Canebreak at Daybreak by Mark Newcomb

Lilacs in Bloom

*Jesus has fallen.
He is on his knees
looking up the road
in front of him, the cross
too heavy to lift.*

*I am watching.
The yellow cat sits
on the roof of the black car.
The black cat sits in the grass.*

*I am walking
with heavy steps.
I am thirsty.*

*After days of rain
I want to know the joy
of this cool sun filled dusk,
but I keep seeing Jesus
under the weight
of his heavy cross.*

*The cars and trucks
wind up the hill.
Someone plays a flute
in the valley below. It sounds
Japanese, bamboo.
Clouds cross green mountains
bright in blue sky.*

*I stop to look at the lilacs in bloom
along the unpainted picket fence.
My eyes fill with color,
my nostrils with fragrance,
my ears with the buzz of bees.
I am walking.
Jesus is in the garden.
His weathered finger
points to his heart.*

- Kevin Bezner



Beyond by Paul Toscano

Haunted

Some people swore the house was haunted.

These were the same people who believe reality television is real and that the X-Files were actually onto something. But even if you weren't one of those people, the house made you a little wary.

When I was five, I stood outside its gate, studying its graceful dilapidation. I was in awe of it, as I was in awe of my shawled grandmother, herself gracefully dilapidated. When I was ten, I ventured inside the property. When I was twelve, I lay out in the grass and the wildflowers. When I was fifteen, I stood at the foot of the porch, close enough to see that the fading paint showed the grain of wood beneath.

And now I am eighteen, about to leave for college, and I am standing in front of the peeling door.

It swings open too willingly at too light of a touch. I would have rather it protested at my invasion, but no. It draws me in to its ruined sitting room, where broken boards allow ferns and flowers to grow around the mildewed couch and sagging chairs. The plants are fed by the patches of sunlight from the ceiling. I believe the owl perched on the armoire in the corner is stuffed until it turns an accusing, amber eye to me. "Who?" it asks, startling me and knocking me off balance.

Nobody, I think to myself.

A giggle whips me around, but I don't see anything, and I laugh. I test the boards, and despite their broken neighbors they support me. The house holds up its secrets to me, like my grandmother offering custard, and I ignore what frightens me and continue on.

The rest of the first floor is a kitchen, with serving spoons still hanging neatly above the stove. A staircase leads the way upstairs, but I hesitate on this dark and dusty passage more than on the floorboards.

There is nothing else on these subsequent floors other than old and broken furniture, but soon enough opened file cabinets begin appearing, their contents strewn about the floors and stairs. Most are in English, but the one torn book I take up looks like Italian. Who had lived here, and where had they gone?

I lose count of the stairs. I climb a long time before I come to

the hallway, a stretch of a poorly lit corridor covered with pictures. Many of them have fallen and grown dusty, the glass of some is broken, and they hang crookedly. I can't see a single face through the obscuring shadows.

At the last picture, however, I pause. The wire breaks when I take it from the wall, and I realize that it is my grandfather as a young man in his twenties. The albums from that time were buried deep in my house, and it is discomfoting to find this here.

A creak brings my head up, and I see that the door at the end of the hallway is slightly ajar. Picture still in hand, I step towards it and outstretch my arm to push it open. Unlike the front door, it protests loudly and rust falls in piles to the floor.

I am greeted by the smell of disinfectant. This room is nothing but pale blue and white, the central focus being a hospital bed against the one window. IV lines and oxygen machines attach to the figure in the bed.

“Grandma?” I ask, taking a step towards her.

Her eyes open, like I haven't seen in months, and she sits up. The disinfectant is replaced by Tide. Her smile is as warm as the sunlight that is suddenly streaming in, and it can only mean that she recognizes me again. I step forward to sit on the four-poster bed covered with layers of thick and faded afghans, but as I do, she vanishes from sight, and her disappearance takes the color out, leaving the room bleached in the sun.

I walk from the room into the brightly lit hall of pictures, which are all now clear. They reveal my family, beginning with my great-grandparents and ending with my sister and me. I replace Grandpa's portrait on the wall and continue back down.

There are not as many stories as before, and I see all the rooms as I pass are swept and bare, the papers and torn books cleared away. The sunlight drifts in through the windows, and all that frightened me has disappeared.

On the dirt path, I turn around to gaze at the house once more. Its lifeless stare has no hold on me anymore, and my ghosts have left that place.

- Susan Ritchie

Areopagus: Jerusalem in Athens

I.

*I think no: this rock cannot be chipped;
cannot be loosened; cannot be sculpted:*

*so how did the ancient steps get there?
harrowing one two three four up and up
and not steady:
the wonder is that hard hard rock did ever
accept that ancient cutting*

II.

*to the top. sunset riven
clearer view.*

*High, objective, as a place of trial, weighing
the case, reasoning all angles right left
going at the twists and mounds of truth*

III.

*There they brought Paul
up those steps to that highest point the clearest point
and there—*

filled—

*from his breath and from his feet and from his bursting womb
that hard hard rock did bellow*

did grow its living lungs

- Ellen Weir

"I am accustomed to sleep and in my dreams to imagine the same things that lunatics imagine when awake." – Rene Descartes

Meditations

*I remember. I remember the scarlet skies and indigo clouds.
The widening smile of the earth, full of the tears of gods and goddesses—
The soft sigh of the troubled nymphs as they pushed and pulled;
Artificial prayers drifting by; prosthetic memories drifting by.
The ocean guided me from above as I circumnavigated the stars.
Whispers of dissonance; gothic portrayal of nighttime—
Stormy, raging sunlight changes my course
As laughter falls and breaks on the deck;
Drenching me, covering me, submerging me, consuming me.
The horizon never faltered; never changed.
I remember.*

- Lauren Stepp



Disjointed by Robin Taillon

Agora Editorial Staff

Katie Carl
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And a special thanks to Jillian Maisano.



Awards

*Jean S. Moore Award**

The Jean S. Moore Award was established in 1998 in memory of the late Jean S. Moore, an Abbey English Professor. Each year, the recipient receives publication in Agora and a cash prize. This award represents top submission as judged by the editorial staff and is based on creativity and originality.

–Ross McKnight is the 2011 recipient of the Jean S. Moore Award.

*Agora Art & Photography Award***

Each year, the recipient of this award receives publication in the Agora and a cash prize. The award represents top submission as judged by the editorial staff and is based on creativity and originality.

–Annemarie Maimone is the 2011 recipient of the Agora Art & Photography Award.

About the Contributors

All contributors are members of the Belmont Abbey College community.

Students & Alumni:

- Betina Bilodeau is a Senior, majoring in Psychology.
- Matthew Bradley is a Junior, majoring in English.
- Mitchell Button is a former Belmont Abbey College student.
- Katie Carl is a Junior, majoring in History.
- Morgan Castillo is a Junior, majoring in English.
- Raphaël Du Sablon is a Freshman, majoring in Mathematics.
- Timothy Gill is a Freshman.
- Ruth Hymel is a Sophomore, majoring in English.
- Charlie Jackson is a Junior, majoring in both History and Theology.
- Marshall Lindsay is a Senior, majoring in Applied Psychology.
- Christopher Lux is a Senior, majoring in English.
- Madeline Madrid is a Sophomore, majoring in English.
- Annemarie Maimone is a Junior, majoring in English.
- Ross McKnight is a Sophomore, majoring in English.
- Ashley Faye Miller is a Sophomore, majoring in History.
- Katherine Pajor is a Freshman, majoring in Mathematics.
- Nicholas Rees is a Senior, majoring in both English and Philosophy.
- Susan Ritchie is a Junior, majoring in Biology.
- Patrick Shea is a former Belmont Abbey College student.
- Sharon Stahl is a Freshman.
- Lauren Stepp is a Senior, majoring in History with a double minor in Theatre and English.
- Paul Toscano is a former Belmont Abbey College student and is currently the Distance Learning Coordinator at CSM.
- Robin Taillon is a Junior, majoring in Psychology with a minor in Justice & Peace.
- Carolina Warden is a Freshman.

Faculty & Staff:

- Kevin Bezner is an Instructor of English.
- Dr. Mike Hood is a Professor of English.
- Dr. Rebecca Munro is a Professor of English.
- Dr. Mark Newcomb is the Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs.
- Sister Jane Russell is a Professor of Theology.
- Sally Thomas is the wife of Dr. Ronald Thomas, Assistant Professor of Theology.
- Dr. Ellen Weir is a Professor of English and the Chair of the English Department.



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Belmont Abbey College
100 Belmont - Mt. Holly Road
Belmont, North Carolina 28012