



A G O R A

A G O R A

...καλέσασθε δὲ θεῖον ἀοιδόν,
Δημόδοκον· τῷ γάρ ῥα θεὸς
περὶ δῶκεν ἀοιδήν,
τέρπειν ὅππῃ θυμὸς
ἐποτρύνῃσιν αἰεΐδειν.

*...and summon Demodokos,
the bard divine, / Whom
God gave song: the power to
delight / However his own
soul urges him to sing.*

Homer, *Odyssey* VIII, 43-5

Translated by Gerald Malsbary, Belmont Abbey College



AGORA

Volume XLVII
Spring 2014

Agora is the literary publication of
Belmont Abbey College, funded by the College.

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



Cover Art:
“Departure”
by Camille Carlross



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Winter Bouquet
Anja ROY

The Better Life

Tyler HORN

What's out to kill us makes us more alive.
Let's go, escape with me, forget our fear,
So run with me my brother, let's survive.

We just have to get in the car, and drive
As fast as we can, racing to the clear.
What's out to kill us makes us more alive.

The fire will always burn, but we must strive
To reach the coast, looking off the pier,
So run with me my brother, let's survive.

We can make a new life and simply thrive,
Just you and I, for at least one more year.
What's out to kill us makes us more alive.

It's here, this vast coast where we can revive
The lives we dreamed of, and not shed a tear,
So run with me my brother, let's survive.

When we arrive, we can start to derive
Safety and comfort, for you are my spear.
What's out to kill us makes us more alive,
So run with me my brother, let's survive.



Desert Reflections

Kyrie WATSON

The desert palette
Burns brown and blue and bone-white,
Breathing in the sun.
Beneath these hazy streetlamps,
I see it still, but dimmer.

Fate's Fluid

Rajive TIWARI

It won't gush forth
as if artistic epiphany struck
a vein or a dam
got tired.
Toss away your cups
it said
for slowly
it will seep through
the maze of cracks
all your cups have sprouted
slowly, it said,
they will hold
no more
fluid's fate
in a perfect curvature.
The tea you'll brew
at daybreak with care
measured carefully timed
will not belong
to you
it said to me.

Dreamer

Joseph YELLICO



Lying on a bed of tufted grass,
Gazing at the lanterns of the sky,
Day retires creepily for the darkness to pass,
Sun bids moon a fond goodbye.

Pools of twilight swirl in the night,
Echoes of past memories begin to hoot and croak,
Crests of crimson slumber dampen light,
Enter creatures of thought and fairy folk.

Twinkling lights of imaginary creatures glow,
Streams of mist grab you by the hand,
The world sways like reeds in water-flow,
Great tides of stone reshape the land.

Flying high above the cottony pools of clouds,
Whirling forests grow like towers of wisdom,
A sea where night shines and daylight shrouds,
For good or ill the slumber crimson.

Splashed and thrown these dreamy creatures,
Like puppets hanging from a velvet string,
Light and dark their faceless features,
Garlands of roses blessed with a sting.

Down is up and up is down,
Frothy snow burns with fire,
Wealthy pauper rules penniless crown,
Ocean bed is above austere spire.

Soaring through blankets of brilliant darkness,
Shadows chase behind with careful ferocity,
Bearing wrathful smiles and joyful frowns,
A peaceful animosity.

They draw closer towards the world's end,
Fabric of luminescent universe must break,
For morning cannot merge with the darkened light,
So now the dreamer has to wake.



“Listen then, Jane Eyre, to your sentence; to-morrow place the glass before you, and draw in chalk your own picture, faithfully, without softening one defect; omit no harsh line, smooth away no displeasing irregularity; write under it, ‘Portrait of a Governess, disconnected, poor, and plain.’”

Jane Eyre

Jane Eyre
Kyrie WATSON

Bjorn

Caitlin CLANCY

They came from the doors
Of the deathless realm
And salted our fields behind

Grey smoke wafts about
The mist-shrouded helm—
A new scar upon a young mind

The dragon-head rocks
Like the world we lost
Like the home-hearths they broke and burned

Too late did we look
Through the piercing frost
Our lesson by fire would be learned

Red ripples brush my stiff shoulders
Green folds blow, wave-wrap my waist
God's tears drench down from the Heavens
Would that my word had been "haste"!

Black haze belonged to that morning
And bronze-heat consumed the fast night
Too long lay the day in their trusses
Too short sped our trial and flight

The strike of the cold on my temples
The taste of the newcomer's scent
Surely the Temple was gladder
When God's own high garments it rent!

Leaning on pine-hewn post-prison
Fast-tied hands begging for help



Knights *Felix DU SABLON*

But none here will heed Supplication
Unless for to drown it a whelp

In chains for cold priestly silver
Bound tight for beloved Freyja's tears¹
Sword-sleep² strewn about like the ashes
The sun hewn down by Thor's spears

A sigh escapes the prisoner
The dark boy turns to read
He finds her face is open
Unmarked save fear and need
Whate'er he sees her hiding
His own lips do conceal

¹“Freyja's tears” : A Norse kenning meaning gold.

²A kenning: death.

Perhaps after long waiting
Her fresh-made wound will heal

His hard thoughts fight inside him
His feeder-of-raven³ heart
Begins to learn the question
That makes all lordly art
But ignorance is blinding
And he has none to tell
The wound-hoe⁴ at his side
Has marked the world as fell

Brown hide of Gunnr's horse⁵
Enslung⁶ about his form
Dark eyes breed black hist'ry
Which ash fires still keep warm

The sky-jewel⁷ fades
The west is caught
In the slumber-storm of night
The helmsman nods upon his oar
And stirs to keep them right
The winter ices over them
The tall mast and the side
But still the boy looks onward
And thought, if she had died...

A flicker of the bane-of-wood⁸
Wakes gently in his breast

³The kenning for “warrior.”

⁴The kenning for “sword.”

⁵“Gunnr's horse” – a wolf.

⁶A coinage of mine. Means “slung about” – as in, a cape that is hung about one's shoulders.

⁷A kenning denoting the sun.

⁸The kenning meaning “fire.”

Of sleep, food, home, her kinfolk—
Of all she is bereft
Dark windows to a lighter soul
Glance from prow to stern
None will see it, none will know
But only one will learn

She shivers in the ice-blast
Enwrapping her soft form
Then sudden, light and tranquil—
Wolf-skin to keep life warm
She wakens and she wonders
She aches to turn her head
But sees nothing save starlight
From eyes long dry and red

A sigh once more
And then a tear
And then the world is gone
Her white neck arching slowly
Head drooping like a fawn

Beneath, the swan-road⁹
Breathes away
And blows to other lands
Wanderers bearing precious hoards
And girls with gentle hands

Beneath the prow
New warrior's heart
Bleeds like the birds he slew
Dark eyes give out cold burning drops
Recalling slaughter-dew¹⁰

⁹“A kenning meaning “the sea.”

¹⁰A kenning: blood.

Faces flicker in the night
Children he never knew
He turns and then recoils—
His image in a shield
Was this, then, why he toiled?
For this broken, blemished yield?
Hard hands unloose the woven belt
'Round ancient, sterner sword
A clatter strikes upon the deck
Of steel and broken cord—
Repulsed his one day's hist'ry
He inhales the life restored
And in that still salt darkness
He made a girl his lord



Hollow Eyes

Randi OLSON

Born with a slight distinction,
A second chromosome X.
Mystery coeXists with the feminine,
Elects her the weaker seX.

Given, taken, and forbidden,
She is shed of Identity.
There is no value in possession,
No claim for what is free.

No shore remains to conquer.
I breathe with my own breath.
I am burning. I am sorrow.
I am dying a hundred deaths.

Hollow eyes avoid the glass.
I am missing and have no name.
A voice internal and silent cries.
Choice is consumed, blamed.

Passion is doused in aggression.
Submit to the Y. Yield.
Defiance must be defeated.
Hell's fury? Her face revealed.

Dominance disfigures justice.
Jewels do not buy the dream!
We, our fathers' beloved daughters,
Ablaze in an acid stream.

I am only one drop in an ocean.
Let the waters cover my head.
No longer afraid of the undertow,
I am burning with the living dead.

Goldfish on Your Mantle

Jaquelyn KING



Slip down
The ragged slopes
Of quickly fading dismal hopes
A star is born
Which awaits the ending light
Roots stretched deep
Into the superficial surface of the ground
Spread outwards,
A network of loosely scattered hands
Grasping with furled claws
Clinging to the semblance of the Dawn
Reflections marred, mistaken
For Ultimacy and Constancy
A lesser-changing sought to be Unchanged
And where then wilt thou go?
To another distended, dreamed of end,
Which shall end for you again?
Furnish not your mantle with the goldfish
His living colours, moving gills, and pounding heart
Do you not see his bones, the end which is decay?
His gold shall cease, life-breath depart
And animationless he shall end
Is this where you begin, with the living goldfish?
And what is your hope?
That by some miracle unknown, he shall ne'er depart from thee,
A constant, firm, lasting companion for company?
But when I see his gold fins, I see also his death
And for this I am grateful
For I see your mantle-decoration for what it is
A mutable, finite entity
I do not grasp with greedy roots at the rocky sand beneath
And see! I have not been uprooted as thee!

Pick up thy tender tendrils and sink into That-Which-Lasts!
Oh blessed skeleton that hath taught my soul to see!
Oh happy death that has wrought my Marriage to Eternity!
I do not curse or question, for there is a Truest Constancy!
He-Who-Is: the nourishing dirt in which I grow and come to be!

Leaves

Anthony WYATT

Compare: as leaves, after their falling
Do lie upon the cold earth and scatter,
And when the wind, with gentle breeze blowing,

Does shuffle and strew and make to flutter
The auburn or golden gauze, they lie thin
Always shifting atop one another,

Similarly, with many a clock's spin
And calendar days passed away slowly,
My fingers have flipped through pages within

Three books of poetic verse so lovely,
And have shuffled sheet after sheet of sweet
Terza rima rhythm, unceasingly.


Both hold a secret; one of nature's deep,
The other of Man and God, low and high.
At autumn's close, an end they both do meet:

Books returned to shelf, leaves to rot and die.

Good Morning

Richard WILSON

I love breakfast, always have. Nothing perfects the beginning of a good day nor ameliorates the weary start of a bad one so well as a hearty breakfast followed by a cup of joe. Even from my earliest childhood memories, I can recall considering the meal which laid claim to such incomparable delicacies as eggs, waffles, and bacon as a feast among feasts. I took breakfast for granted—a silly, simple pleasure—until, after dedicating myself to a life of service to Christ as a missionary to the impoverished inhabitants of China's Guizhou province, I suddenly realized just how much I missed it.

I missed other things as well of course—painfully—hot showers, movies, my house, my dog, and especially my friends and family, but there was something about the fact that I pined for breakfast in the morning that made it that much harder to accept. It was as if,  subconsciously, my mind saw the prospective sufferings of the hard day ahead and conceded only halfway, impudently declaring, "Alright God, I can endure this for you *if only* I can first have myself a decent breakfast!"

Well, apparently God knew better, for yet another morning began with me staring at a meagerly rationed plate of rice

and fried cabbage. I mumbled a quick blessing that was really less a prayer of thanksgiving than it was a petition for divine assistance in being thankful, and took a few bites. The food tasted as expected but, knowing that I would need my strength if I was to be of any help working on the chapel later, I grimaced and cleaned the plate. I lay down my chopsticks just as Jason, one of my fellow missionaries and brother in Christ, sat down next to me.

"Good morning," he said. I nodded. "Have you heard the news?"

I frowned, "No."

"We just got word that six more from the States will be joining us in August."

"Really?"

"Yes," he repeated looking into my eyes, "And since the chapel is progressing so well already, there's the opportunity for four of us to return. Most of us have already said that we want to stay, and I know that you've had an especially difficult time adjusting to life here so I figured—"

"No." I shook my head, "I'm staying too." It *had* been hard, but I wasn't about to desert my God-given post.

"I know how you feel," Jason responded sympathetically, "but don't answer so quickly.

You've performed your duties here admirably. We are all given particular talents and abilities; if you can serve God better in a different part of the world, there is no shame in that. It wouldn't be desertion to leave—God may be giving you this chance for a reason.”

Seeing the uncertainty still on my face, he continued, “All of this happened kind of suddenly and they want a response by tonight, but you still have all day to make your decision. Just think about it and pray, okay?”

“Alright,” I conceded. He clapped me on the shoulder.

“Let's go.”

*God's spirit was
definitely moving
among these people . . .*

The chapel construction was indeed moving right along, I realized as we approached. The project had been in the works for quite a while, and all the missionaries were eager for its completion. As we waited, we led worship services for the poor locals in the basement of the mission house. God's spirit was definitely moving among these people and, despite the cramped conditions, an abundance of conversions filled the basement from wall to wall every Sunday. The need for a larger facility had come and gone long ago but, unfortunately, God worked faster

than did His servants.

Nevertheless, after countless services had been performed in the crowded conditions, the Chapel's frame was finally up. As soon as the walls and roof were finished, it would be possible to begin using the place for more spacious—although austere—services.

I worked on the roof along with two native farmers—Liwei and Mingli—who volunteered their time on the project, tacking down what seemed to be an endless number of shingles. It was dangerous work, as the walls were high and the protective scaffolding that would normally line the edges of the roof in a more civilized country had been neglected in favor of high ladders and intrepid souls.

“It's so hot,” Liwei complained, and it was. Working on our bellies, the sun beat mercilessly against our backs. I offered up the heat and the pain in my muscles as a sacrifice, but could not keep my mind from drifting back to the comforts of the States. Perhaps Jason was right: mentally, I wasn't suited for this life. Maybe it was time that I did go back where I could more easily focus on my faith progress. In truth, it didn't matter how many times one offered up his sufferings, they still distracted him from deep contemplation—and in Guizhou, sufferings abounded. It was hard to listen for the voice of God when your body was screaming from sunburns and

strenuous labor. I talked to Liwei about it:

“What would you think if I left here?”

“For good?”

“For good.”

“I would be sad, I would miss you.”

“But do you think that the others could attend to the village's needs?”

“Maybe. You are good men, I think the more of you the better.”

We sat in silence for a moment, then I asked, “Do you think God naturally inclines men toward their vocation?”

Liwei blinked.

“I'm sorry, do you think God wants us to work hard or be happy?”

The farmer laughed. “I am happy,” he said and went back to work.

As the sun began to set, Jason called for me to come down off the roof.

“Well?” he asked as I reached the ground, “have you decided?”

“No,” I answered hopelessly, “I still don't know what to do. I've been praying for a sign all day, but haven't gotten one. I feel like I'm supposed to be here, but I also feel like I've reached my breaking point.”

“God knows. Ask for strength, He will give you the grace you need.”

“I have, but He hasn't. I want to stay, but this may be my last chance to return in a long

time. It's hard here, so hard, always one trial after another—I just don't know how many more days I can take.”

“So, should I tell them that you are—”

Jason was cut off by an unhappy voice from the roof. It was Liwei who had just come from inspecting the shingles on the far side of the roof where Mingli had been working.

“They're all upside-down!” he shouted. “Mingli put the nails in at the bottom! The roof is real tight in some places and loose in others, it is terrible!”

“Are you sure?” asked Jason. I closed my eyes and exhaled deeply. We had been working on the roof for days.

“Yes! I think we will have to take them all up and redo them. What should we do?”

I sat down on the ground and covered my face.

“Yes, Liwei” confirmed Jason, “That is what we must do. Tell him to stop and we will look at it in a minute.”

“Alright,” he answered and was silent.

After a moment, Jason laid a hand on my shoulder. I was trembling.

“It will be okay. We will just do them again. I will tell them that you will return to the States.”

“No,” I said, looking up at Jason with tears in my eyes. “No! There is work to do here. Tell them that I am staying and pray that God gives me the grace to persevere to the end!”

Jason looked uncertain, but before he had a chance to protest I grabbed my hammer and climbed the ladder.

*Men do not get here
on featherbeds; they
find the beds here
waiting for them.*

I reached the roof and climbed to the far side. A pocket of loose tiles gave way under my boots and I fell twenty feet onto a pile of lumber below. Jason and two other missionaries performed CPR, but when the doctors arrived, they declared that I had died upon impact.



I woke up in a soft bed with the warm sun on my face. The room about me was bright and perfect. A man dressed in white gazed on me from a chair in the corner of the room.

“Good morning,” he said, and it was. “I’m Sebastian.”

“Where am I?”

Sebastian smiled.

“Did I choose rightly?” I asked, not anxious but merely curious.

“Yes,” the man nodded, “you would have found your way here either way, but it would have taken longer. As Thomas says, men do not get here on feather beds; they find the beds here waiting for them.”

I ran my hand along the

immaculate sheets.

“Now, follow me,” he said, turning to go, “Many want to meet you, and breakfast is waiting.”

“Breakfast?” I asked, surprised.

“Of course,” he strode toward the door.

“Wait,” I said, and he paused, “Not just rice and cabbage right?”

Sebastian only laughed.



The Swan of Lake Luzern, Switzerland
Emily COLKER

Floating in the pool
Languid strokes propel slowly
A dying frog god

Dew on verdant leaves
Lies still until a flutter
Of wings; the bird flies



Her Soul and the Night

Raphaël DU SABLON

The sudden woman
A huddled angle

Her spirit makes.
Hear-it, herein ages

Halted sight I
See-it start.

New angle sinner
Youth and winter

Her, world, all
Together fallen.



Gallery of Night

Emily COLKER

Leonardo, would you paint me a moon?
A full, midnight moon to fill the dark sky
Michelangelo, would you paint the stars?
One for each child watching the sky tonight
Artists of the past, paint the rest of the Night
Fill it with the silhouette of the sunless
Show me the time captured in black
And accented with glittering white
Capture the stillness and mystery
Found only in the beauty of Night
With gentle strokes and bold blotches
Paint the Night once more
Frame it with the art of darkness
Create for me a silver masterpiece
To hang in my gallery of Night



Partial Eclipse of the Heart
Paige DUREN

Invader

Sister Jane RUSSELL

A furtive blur of brown
rounds the corner into gloom,
spells trouble. Rosie cries “Mice!”—
seen before in basement room.

But the next apparition, stock-still
on stairs, is in fact a chipmunk—
outside, cute and charming;
in the house, one alarming

pest. No brooms can touch him
who huddles under hutches.
Romps through rooms get us
slamming doors, yet he ever
evades our clutches.

For a princely sum Jake comes from
Wild Things, armed with gloves and net.
His practiced eye finds the beast beneath
the furnace. A carbon monoxide death?

Perimeter search for access points
turns up hardly a clue;
but until we can find the rodent-port
we’ll play more rounds of this unsought
sport. What would St. Francis do?



The Lamp of the Body

Brother George RUMLEY

Sunday again. Just past noon, the old man pulled the car into a small driveway near the church's side door. He put it in park and left it running. A few folks were already leaving, although most of them had gone out the front door where they were probably flattering the preacher, he guessed. He jerked his straw hat down a bit to cover his deadpan eyes and hoped for a quick getaway.

The side door flew open, and two children bolted out and ran down the steps. The boy, nearly eleven, took the steps two at a time while yanking off his clip-on tie and untucking his wrinkled dress shirt from his khakis. The girl, about four years younger, struggled to keep hold of the bag with her Bible, crayons, and sketch pad. Her brown curls bounced with each step.

"Jack, make sure you close that door good and tight this time," said the old man as the boy climbed into the backseat. One of the reasons he said this was to get Jack to wait outside and let his sister enter first, like a man should, but instead Jack clambered in with the girl behind him and reached across her and slammed the door.

When the children had buckled up, the old man drove ahead, dodging the same pothole that had been in that driveway for years. He loved that pothole because it meant the church did

not have enough money to fix it.

"Granddaddy, what are we eating for lunch?" asked the little girl.

"Fried bologna sandwiches. Some vegetables from the garden, too," he replied.

Jack rolled his eyes. Granddaddy wasn't exactly the cook Granny had been.

"So what'd y'all learn in Sunday School today? Jack?" asked the old man.

"Teacher told us that anyone who starts plowing and looks back ain't fit for the kingdom of God. I told her she was a fool, 'cause if you drive the tractor with a plow and don't look back sometimes, you end up with crooked rows."

The old man stifled a smile. Jack got his contrary spirit from his side of the family. "Well, that's probably not what Jesus was talking about, but don't call anyone a fool. Remember what the Good Book says about calling folks fools. What about you Sue?"

The girl's brown eyes met his in the rear view mirror. "Lot's wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. I colored her picture," she said, holding up a sheet from her pad.

Jack piped up. "You dummy, salt's white, not gray."

For a moment, the old man was too distracted to reprove the boy. He remembered that time when his wife had complained that she may as well be a pillar of

salt, for all the attention he paid her. That'd be fine with him, he quipped, since their cows could always use another salt lick. He had laughed. She had not. Oh, how he missed that fiery look of hers! It had only been a year since she passed, and it was she who always took the grandkids to church with her. He used to go himself, until he realized what a great bunch of hypocrites they all were at that church, how they had lied, gossiped and turned traitor. The details of it all were sharp as a blade in his brain, and he gazed clearly on that abyss. So for many years he had sat at home on Sunday mornings, just him, his Bible, and Jesus. No hypocrites there.

It was a point of pride to evangelize others with his personal gospel. Other churches were probably no better, he reckoned. Despite his wife's protests, he had convinced his son, who no longer did anything apart from the TV on Sundays. But his son's children—well, their grandmother had fought like a wild animal to see them “raised right,” and on her deathbed she had made the old man swear to keep them on Sundays and make sure they went to church. It was the last time he had seen the fire in her eyes. He couldn't refuse, but he could make sure those church people didn't ruin them. They would not inject their Pharisaical venom into any kin of *his*. These kids would learn better.

The road took them well into the country, near the farmstead where the old man had been

raised. Things had been different for him growing up. People had respected each other. They had been honest and forthright. They had known the fear of the LORD. But he roused himself from the reverie and told Sue she did a very good job.

The girl was grinning and holding her hands over her mouth as she eyed her brother.

Things had been different for him growing up. People had respected each other. They had been honest and forthright.

“Granddaddy, Jack got into a fight at church!” she exploded, squirming to avoid the inevitable retaliation.

“I told you it was nuthin’,” said Jack with a shouted whisper, and a shove that would have pushed her out the door had it been open.

The old man removed his hat and wiped his brow with a handkerchief. “Settle down. What is she talking about, boy?”

“It was nuthin’. I was arguing with one of the Langley boys. There wasn't no fists or blood or nuthin’.”

The Langleys. The ringleaders of the whole misbegotten mess. It hardly mattered which one you were dealing with; they were all of them a brood of vipers. Their youngest ones, about Jack's age, were likely no less poisonous than baby copperheads.

“Oh? What were you arguing

about?” inquired the old man, carefully straddling a line between pleased pride and feigned disapproval.

“I told him some of the things you been telling us, about them lying and pretending to be what they ain’t. I told him about you and Granny and that he and the rest of ‘em better come clean. He said he didn’t know anything about it, that as far as he knew, Granny was a good woman and he didn’t know you at all. I knew he was a liar before he opened his mouth. I told him they better all repent.”

“Yeah, they better,” the old man muttered with half a smirk. “I hope you see what sorta folk y’all will turn out to be in that place. You don’t need none of ‘em, and yer better’n all of ‘em.”

The boy snarled, “I told him I’m glad they’ll all burn in hellfire. I damned his whole family right there in front of him.”

The old man started. The boy’s voice had shifted; it hardly seemed his. The old man stared at him in the rear-view mirror and for a second, noticed something he had not seen in a year. Could it be? He turned his head around toward the child and indeed, noticed a flash like that fire of his grandmother’s, like it and yet unlike it, passionate and glorious but bleak, barren, and chock full of hate: a blazing shadow.

Sue’s scream brought him back to his senses and he whipped around, but not soon enough. Then came the jolt, the crushing of metal, the bursting of glass, the wrenching of sky and earth, and

all was darkness.

The old man woke to a heavy thumping in the air. The wind came in pulses, blowing bits of grass and dirt all around. The paramedic told him to keep still. His eyes finally adjusted in time to see a medical helicopter soaring eastward.

A sheriff’s deputy squatted in front of him, hat in hand. “Take it easy, sir. That’s it, don’t try to move much. We’re airlifting the little girl to Chapel Hill. We’re all praying for her. I seen her at church on my weekends off. Sue’s a darlin’.” His voice choked. “I’m sorry about Jack. It looks like he went pretty fast. Ain’t likely to have suffered much.”

The old man noticed “Langley” on the deputy’s name badge. His focus drifted toward the wrecked car, and beside it, Jack’s broken body mostly enshrouded in a black zipped bag. His bloodied head lay on its side, turned toward his granddaddy. There was no more fire in those eyes as the bag was closed.

The old man’s face was transfigured from a pallid white to an ashen gray as he groped for his voice. His vocal chords twisted and knotted themselves like a tangled python and denied him so much as a sob. What he wanted to say, what he would have asked if he had ever regained his powers of speech, was what had he been looking at?

I, Chimera

Alejandra MOUCHA

The eye of the body is a lamp
Collared about the neck of our Chimera soul.
Acquainted are we with the dark wood damp,
That neither hides laughter in the brush
Nor lamentations of a world not world.
But is home to the lion, snake, and lamb
That we were, are, and will be.

In time gathered,

Like the beat of a jailer's eye
We descend the still of the Frosted road.
With Nous and noose in paw, scale, and hoof
We inch and die as omegas do.
And in this death we re-call
The hidden choir heard and sound,
“Knew Us. Know Us.”

Lovely Lassitude

Rebekah STEGMAN

Eternal, timeless contentment,
The hours of which pulse by in heartbeats
Blossoming from its keen knife wound, aching dully
With each new lethargic rush of blood



Perspective
Paige DUREN

The Itch

Tyler HORN

My prize is flaunting me while I just watch.
My eyes grow larger as I observe my prey;
I am beginning to obtain the itch.
Without my fuel I have begun to stray
From my norm and turned instinct up a notch
My mind has begun to lie and betray
Me, while I wait for the freedom to thrive,
And not give my prey a chance to survive.

My limits, I already plan to slaughter.
All I desire to do is fight for air,
Enjoy the privilege to taste fresh water,
Bathe in my own sweat and not even care,
Feel blood escaping from my wounds hotter
Than a starving wolf's deadly piercing stare
Into the inevitably doomed eyes
Of the prey that will be the alpha's prize.

I have become dependent on this game.
The hunt has become all that I know.
Stalking patiently helps me see my aim:
To become the deadliest in the show.
At the first chance I get I will lay claim
To success and will never let it go.
When I am in the court's cage, I am free,
And my instinct is locked in with no key.



Motherless

Tomeker WILLIAMS

There is a battle raging within
Breathing with the untrue belief that I will not win
I cracked the door and the enemy busted in
I'm in pain because of her sin.
For years I've tried to live
For years tears was all I could give
For years I've feared
Afraid to think
Afraid to even blink... my eyes
Remain wet, tired, they will never forget
Things they've seen
The moans, groans and silent screams.
I'm feeling the labor pains of depression
Her love has always been in a recession
The lack of a relationship has me stressing...out
Of my mouth, there comes a shout
In my head, she's really dead
Yet somehow in my mind I desire the kind...
You know the kind of relationship that shouldn't be hard to find
The one that happens at birth
You know..
When your mother welcomes you to this earth.

L's Love

Nikole BRAND

My first memory is of you looking straight at me, staring into my soul. How could I resist falling in love with you? A shining star, you filled my life with light. My days were bright when I saw you, and the world seemed as dark as night when you weren't around.

I wasn't the only one who loved you, of course. Your brilliance attracted all types, and you showed no favor to me. But I didn't mind. For hours at a time I was content to bask in your presence, silent in your praise. My fellows threw themselves at you, but eventually lost everything as they fell from your grace. I was determined in my contentment: I didn't want to lose what little relationship I had with you.

Until one day, I looked around and realized that I was the only one left in love with you. My whole generation had moved on, while I alone remained a steadfast admirer.

Now I alone receive your gaze. Do you love me? For standing firm and true to you? I must know. I must risk it. I must leap.

So I do.

The winds of fortune draw me closer to you for one brief, lovely moment.

Then let it pass. I fall.

Then I saw the whole, terrible lie. My world was just one of millions. My lonely vigil was not the last, not a chance. I lay on the corpses of my brethren, and felt only pity for you. Though love of you has killed us, I weep not for our plight, but yours. You will outlast me, and my successors, for many generations. You cannot dare to love, for your beloved cannot last. Trillions of my lifetimes will pass before you go grey. Oh my Sol love, be well. From my branch birth to my dying decay, you were loved.



The Pilgrim's Statue

Timothy TANKO

Sizzling teardrops bane the skies
In the manse's courtyard
Masking marbled visage eyes
From the angel-marred

Hail shards crush his Spanish castle's
Trails of opaque life long past
Leaving silver-soiled metal
Strained of nettled miscast

Stone-iced tics drain down his face
The sculpture pities his roulette
Melting under passion's taste
And the drizzle-filled cruet

Reminiscence joins the brook
Trickling by his windowsill
The seraphic might cry forsook
While Heaven watches still

But stars race rainbows in the flood
Sparkling despite darkened dreams
Dappled diamonds catch his blood
And paint his own hopes' themes

My Laddie's Girl *(to the tune of "The Rising of the Moon")*

Robert WILSON

My lad has joined the army sure
Though he's but seventeen.
We'll wait beside the lonely shore
My laddie's girl and me.

Our lad has gone away my dear
But he'll be back, you'll see.
When he returns he'll find you here
Dear daddy's girl, with me.

My lad and I've a secret shared
I carry it with me.
A foolish, joyous chance we've cared
My happy girl, for thee.

Yet Papa's eyes have frozen o'er
Hand on an empty knee.
And now I cannot hear you call
My lovely girl, to me.

The room is cold and sterile dear
I'll hold you warm and free.
But they won't let me keep you here
Oh sleepy girl, with me.

What have I done, what can I say
I'm broken and empty.
Our secret gone, and all is grey
Oh laddie dear, in me.

My lad has gone away to war
He's left the grand army.

And we will wait upon this shore
My darling girl, for thee.

One fine day you'll find us there
My little, bless'd lady.
You'll hold our hands without a care
And swing beside the sea.
And we shall hold our baby fair
My laddie dear, and me.



Sonnet

Montana RINDAHL

Sonnets of Sidney show a world golden—
At least, the *Apology* says they ought.
While the subjects are varied and olden,
Perfection on Earth is a lovely thought.
In Stella he finds the epitome
Of Virtue, and Beauty, and Goodness whole.
Sonnet Seventy-One shows her truly
Lacking nothing in body or soul.
To pedestaled Woman: object of love,
Courtly Tradition gives honor and praise—
She has no faults, as if sent from above.
She bends men to virtue for all of their days.
But honestly? Sidney's Stella is false;
Poetry takes us on her lovely waltz.

An Ode to Dr. Weir's Rhetoric Class

Timothy TANKO



The crack of dawn finds foreheads on desks
“Good morning, humans,” Dr. Weir will profess
As the role call starts with “God bless ya, Tim”
The doodles on paper and touchscreens begin

“Oh Katie please, please get off of your phone”
Dr. Weir loses to button-click tones
“Oh dear, it seems we've lost the back row”
Snores echo gently in the room's glow

“Did anyone read the passage I assigned?”
Stares mixed with panic are all that she finds
“Well, let's get started, turn to page forty-eight”
Twenty students leave on a bathroom break

This all in a day, though the work of a year
On Dr. Weir's sanity in her career
Weeks pass by slowly, quizzes forecast
And red F's stay common as Z's in the class

“This paper is due on the fourth of November”
“Can I get an extension?” cries every last member
They plead ignorance and they beg Dr. Weir
“Well, I don't know. You've had half a year”

The final comes up as attendance comes down
Week one papers still roll into town
Dr. Weir's warnings go unheeded past
“Study hard, now; you can still pass!”

Final grades post and emails fly quickly
“Oh, Dr. Weir; give me a break please!”
“Well I would if I could, my dear Mr. Lin
But this entire semester you handed nothing in!”



C.S. Lewis at the Abbey

Kelly MOORE



A Sweet and Dark Sound

Raphaël DU SABLON

At a late-night hour in wetted groves old as the moon
Beckon Dryads to my wood-lived affections,
And ere awhile now I'll go, *mon chemin allumée par la lune*,
To wait while all else sleeps
For the dark, damp, midnight hour.

Were there still some Dryad king's daughter whose face,
Scratched as torn her forest-frayed dress, still
Weighed upon my mortal heart as heaven's grace,
Her voice would accompany my wait
For the dark, damp, midnight hour.

Would that I had a power strange to stretch across earth
And ply all soils with my soul, seeing men,
Seeing with every man's sorrow his Silenus-mocked birth,
That I could come back to you alone
For the dark, damp, midnight hour.

Portrait of a Lucid Dream

Timothy TANKO

The wall was screaming.

That was the first thing I noticed. From my bed, I could watch it dilate in the glow of my single window. The dark blue strip, bathed in moon's eye, rippled seductively. It invited me to step closer. Yet I clung tighter to my sheets, buried my head into my pillows. That infernal noise that the wall made—it wasn't a normal sound. For whatever reason, I was sure that only I could hear it. Something about how it doesn't make physical vibrations, I'd assume.

The din grew louder, and since burying further into my downy cist failed to give any relief, I crawled out. I trembled at each movement towards what resembled liquid disturbed by a body. My room, when I visit it, is a very large Victorian type, and my bed sits in the far left corner of it. Therefore, I had an ominous dark void between me and the wall. I couldn't see much of my room besides what the thin moonbeam illuminated, and the ceiling and floor were almost entirely invisible. As I took one, two steps, something flashed in the corner of my vision, and I whirled towards it.

Somewhat chagrined, I met myself staring back from my full-body mirror. My white clothes caught the pale light just enough to be noticeable. After the initial rush of relief, I realized that

something was wrong with my face, and so I walked closer to the mirror without due caution. When I was near enough to examine myself properly, my relief quickly turned into horror: my eyes were nothing but bloodshot orbs. My reflection let out a low croaking sound which neither a beast nor man would make. The neck snapped like a decayed tree branch, which let my head tumble to the invisible ground. But it continued to croak. And that croaking was moving along the floor towards me. Like the child I was, I threw myself back into the comfort of my sheets, listening to the approaching knells as they slithered to rest somewhere in the dark.

Croak. Crawl. Crack.

*I felt a tug on my bed sheet.
The rasping thing was
coming, getting louder.*

To make matters worse, I became paralyzed. Whether from mindless terror or some dark power, I know not. Either way, all I could do was continue to look into the depths of darkness. I watched shadowy shapes that may or may not have been real lurch around, avoiding the divine moonlight.

Still paralyzed, I felt a tug on

my bed sheet. The rasping thing was coming, getting louder. A black, spidery finger the length of a man's arm appeared over the edge of my bed, and it latched on with a horrible strength. Then another. The mirror-head began climbing out of the darkness, its neck connected to the two dreadful fingers. Our gaze met, and the croak turned into spectral laughter as I stared into my own possessed creamy eyes. The skin of my face looked like it was out of a cheap marionette play, made of wood or plastic with peeling paint. But it twisted with dreadful unnaturalness into a grin full of crimson-stained wolf fangs. It was what I imagine an incubus would see in its nightmare.

Whether my fervent prayers were heard or I was given a reprieve by these forces of the night, I suddenly managed to move. I tried to kick the mirror-head, but it vanished. Hysterical, I gasped for breath and tried not to look back at the mirror that I knew held some ancient evil. Myself.

When something faintly humanoid scurried across my ceiling and down one wall, I nearly passed out. I'd gotten one slanting look as it crossed the streak of light. It had four limbs, but there was a horrible, hanging apparatus on its back that dripped. Some footsteps sounded outside my door, and for a brief moment my hope returned: someone had come to check on me! Then that vile croak came where the steps ceased.

Taunting.

Laughing at me.

As I lost hope for survival, I faced the still-moving wall, obscenely fascinated, until I became aware of a new white thing in the mirror. When I tried to ignore it, two clammy hands twisted my head to look. I never saw them, but I know what I felt. My eyelids refused to close.

There in the glass, an incredibly aged woman gazed back at me. She hung in a noose, and her limbs all ended in abominable stumps. There was a hole through her heart. She opened one half of her mouth with a scream, while the other half was forever aghast—slashed into two parts.

She swayed there, wailing, until the mirror shattered. It flew at me like grenade shrapnel. I fell over from the force, sure that the shards had ended my torment. However, I opened my eyes again and found several lacerations through my sleepwear but no wounds. Something else caught my attention then. A man was standing in front of me, dressed in a fashionable tuxedo. He wore a wide-brimmed top hat that hid his features.

Reduced to the level of brute instinct, I backed away from the thing. I snarled while I did. It lifted its head, and I was treated to the visage of a true spawn of Satan. Half of a nose sat in the middle of its face, the severed part leaking blood into its lipless, cracked mouth. Long, thin upper teeth slashed down through its jaw with the appearance of a ghoulish beard. They dripped a foul mix of

fluids. Each eye had two different irises in it, the pupils as thin and as deadly as one of the teeth. It made no noise; the echoes of silence were terrifying enough for it. Then it turned its head to a ninety degree angle and reached for me. My arm was caught despite a brief struggle. It brought me into the air, then hurled me down with a crack that left me seeing white. I was sure that my spine was snapped from the supreme pain, but I still had consciousness.

The satanic avatar began to work some sorcery. It turned to the wall and uttered bestial noises. I assume they were words; whenever he appears, the sounds seem more intelligent.

For a moment, I heard the screaming wall let loose a different note, a growl. The liquid splashed, allowing something to crawl through. It slithered forward on its hands, every movement unleashing a symphony of scratching, as if its skin were made of small knives. There was no face, nor hair, despite its human form: just smoothness as innocent as a baby's arm on half of a naked body. No lower half existed, but it left a trail of something shiny and dark where legs should have been.

Perhaps I understood the demons, or maybe it was instinct, but I knew this new intruder would try to drag me into the mirror, and if it succeeded, then I was lost. With what must have been divine intervention, I remembered the small Bible under my bed, and its stories of demonic

oppressors. With a supreme effort, I managed to whisper a single word: "Jesus!"

What little faith I had in the name was enough. The walls grew veins and pumped with some coarse life-liquid as the two demonic trespassers stumbled back. They shrieked and fell to pieces. They were gone in a moment, and the wall ceased its pulsing shortly after. I was alone, but my eyes fluttered, and then that consciousness forsook me.

I woke up. This wasn't my home, nor was it even a place I remembered. The ground was soft, ugly grey padding, and so were the walls. Everything was padding, with no furniture or windows. I couldn't move my arms: I was wrapped in a white straightjacket. Even when I opened my mouth to yell for help, I found a constricting cloth that prevented it.

The visit was over, but I remembered why I'd fallen into it. Some said this was the real world, but I found myself far more heavenly in the world of demented night-terror. Someday they'd come to understand that that room was real, and that this world was only an illusion. But for now, left with no choice, I returned to the nightmares.

To the self-portrait that emerged in the world of my lucid dreams.

To the mirror that didn't lie.





To M. D.

Kyrie WATSON

I would not venture half so far
Against high crags and vengeful seas,
But I have glimpsed the Northern Star
And—gasping—clutched eternities.

Train

Anthony WYATT

I did not hear the train,
its whistle blowing,
or its heavy wheels
grating upon the tracks.

I did not feel the earth
quake and shudder
beneath its tons of
steel and freight.

I did not see the plumes
rise from its smokestack
and dissipate in the
red morning sun.

I did not hear the train,
till one day, I listened.



Two Leaves and a Bud

Daniel KURTZ

What does it all mean?—call it quits
Pipe the pipes low
The clowns are dying left and right
No one man show

What is is?—consequence is all
Chains links breaking
No more mean, we flirt with extreme
Rethink something

And how we thought we knew it all
Science awry
What we were told, surely the truth
Would mother lie?

We knew right from wrong, gods and men
Payments now due
Allah counts his money below
Edicts he threw

Now scattered, we the fragmented
Guttural moans
Those enlightened few above us
Judged from thrones

“Think for yourself and question all”
No median
Mental inertia plagues the land
Where to begin?



Capitol Reflections
Paul TOSCANO

When Night Has Come

Kyrie WATSON

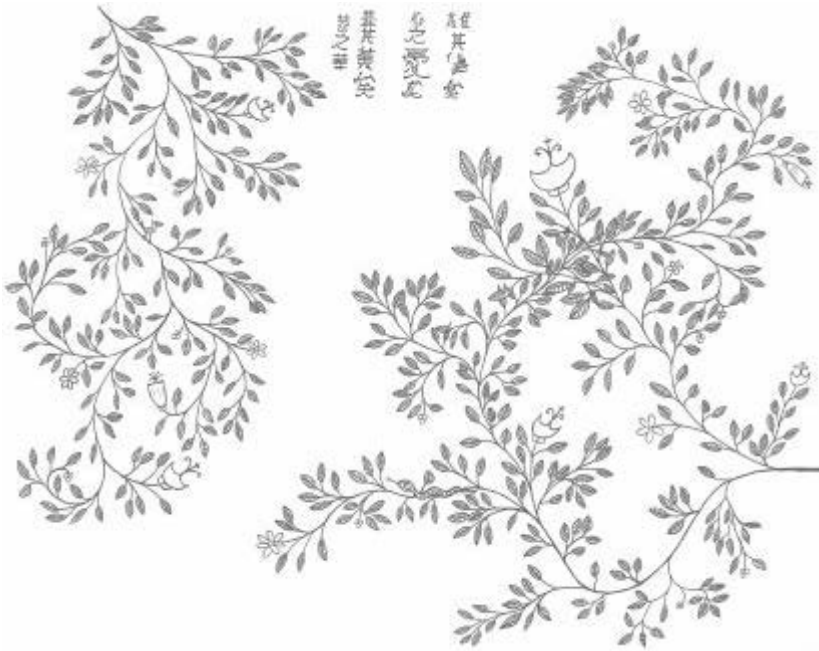
When night has come and all the stars have fallen,
No moon remains to light my troubled way.
I stumble on the bramble and the thorns, then
I reach for you and cry out in dismay.

No moon remains to light my troubled way,
And still the fearful dark is all I know.
I reach for you and cry out in dismay;
No answer comes descending with the snow.

And still the fearful dark is all I know;
I wander and I call your name in dread.
No answer comes descending with the snow,
For like the stars, your twinkling light is dead.

I wander and I call your name in dread.
No hope remains within that mournful cry.
For like the stars, your twinkling light is dead.
I only stay to follow you, to die.





Begonias

Daniel KORYCKI

*"The flowers of the
bignonia,
Are of a deep yellow.
My heart is sad;
I feel its wound."
~Shi Ji Zhuan*

The Ministers

Anthony WYATT

"Do you remember Pastor Wharburton?"

"Wasn't he the one who did Aunt Claudine's funeral?"

"Yep, that's him. He gives the best sermons."

"I reckon he does. He gave a great message about passin' and grievin.' Made Maw cry."

"Hit shure did. I's always said Pastor Wharburton had pure spirit. That's what I's always said. Pure spirit."

"Did you ever hear Reverend Yancey?"

"I don't suppose I ever have."

"Well, he was pastor over at Pleasant Grove, mine and Gracie's church."

"Okay. Ain't that up there in Pike's Gap?"

"That's the one. Well, Reverend Yancey is what they call an 'expository' preacher."

"I don't believe I've ever heard of that."

"He's called that on account of he explains all his sermons clearly with points."

"Oh, okay."

"Well, he'll get up there and preach and say what subject he's gonna talk about and then go through hit point by point. He'll lay it out there real simple: one, two, three, four. Hit doesn't always have to be four points though."

"I always like it when preachers make things simple."

"I sure do too. Yep, Reverend Yancey is what they call 'expository.'"

"Sounds like a good preacher."

"He sure is. An' sometimes he quotes Scripture that'll make you scratch your head and wonder how could he pull a message about God

"I always like it when preachers make things simple."

out of that one, but he always does. An' afterwards you're sittin' there like this thinkin' well I'll be."

"Pastor Goodson was like that over there at Calvary. He could always make you see things in Scripture you'd never thought was there."

"I don't believe I know any Goodsons."

"Well, he came from somewhere down in South Carolina and preached for four days at our revival. I believe he saved a good three dozen folks."

"I've seen Reverend Yancey do that before."

"It was somethin' to see. He'd tell you things from Scripture to make your jaw drop. An' we was all lookin' at him thinkin' now there's a preacher of God."

"It sure sounds like he was."

"Pastor Goodson certainly was a God fearin' preacher. An' he was smart as a whip too."

"They hain't always like that though."

"You said that right."

"I remember one time we had a preacher from over round Kentucky come and pastor for a year or so. Nobody liked him. Pastor Gregory was his name."

"He must of done somethin' to upset a congregation so."

"Well, he would start preachin' and makin' good sense, but he'd go on so that everybody done fall asleep by the time he finished."

"Some preachers just don't know when to stop."

"That's true. He sure didn't. But more than that, he wasn't trustworthy."

"How so?"

"Well, one day I went to talk to him about somethin' I can't even remember what, and I wanted it to be private, you know, just between us two."

"That's how it should be. Hit's part of his 'ministerial responsibility.'"

"I know'd it is. But he didn't."

"That's no way for a preacher to be. Ain't nobody can trust him."

"Well, I told him I wanted hit to be kept private, an' you know what he told me?"

"What'd he say?"

"He said, 'I can't promise you that 'cause I tell my wife everything.'"

"Good Lord! That ain't how a preacher's supposed to be."

"Well, I told him right then and there that I couldn't talk to him none."

"Of course. You can't confide in nobody like that."

"No you can't. You can't trust him."

"Well, I'm not surprised he didn't stay long. He probably said the same things to other folks."

"He probably did. But, you wanna know what I said to his wife right before they left?"

"What did you say?"

"Well, I saw her in the church and I says, 'You're not doing the Lord's will because even God didn't tell his Son everything.'"

"You're right. He says hit right there in Scripture."

"Hit sure does."





Southeast Gastonia Barn

Bill POWERS

Vision

Richard WILSON

Four dreamers lay atop a hill,
Gazing at the sun.
“It's bright.”
“It's full.”
“It's Quetzalcoatl.”
One said, “Day is nearly done.”

Four maidens perched upon a stair,
Speaking of their swains.
“He's tall.”
“He's fair.”
“He's devil-may-care.”
One cried, “Oh! I'm very plain.”

Four generals stood about the king,
Talking strategy.
“Attack.”
“Defend.”
“Don't over extend.”
One moved, “Lord, send me.”

Four readers passed around a poem,
Arguing its meaning.
“It's deep.”
“It's cant.”
“A tad discordant.”
One is yet still reading.

Sullivan's Island

Don BEAGLE

This is the land of lost years left in shells.
Each day, I walk to the ocean to say nothing,
my mouth is the shell of something that swam away.

And here we walked, that day, my daughter
and I, into a future as uncertain as the sand,
sprawling with complex, perplexing patterns

of surf and sandpiper trails. One: wide as the world's
smooth and shifting cursive; the other: a stick-toed
code of quickly intermittent indecisions.

Such is the island of our memoried destination
where we searched for Poe's gold bug mystery
in the gnarled reliquary of a dead live oak.

Now she is long married, far off as the sun
over an ocean with her naval officer on tour,
on an island nation where all destiny is written
in Kanji, like the stick-toed prints of sandpipers.

Where to Start...

Robert WILSON

Light before, light below, light above to burn the eye,
Investigate or contemplate, or burrow to the sky.
Scrape and shovel in the muck, or gaze into her eyes.
The savior you are looking for was never in disguise.



Pacific
Anja ROY

The Neighborhood

Peggy MCPHERSON

Breezes are blowing through the windows of this century-old house; the air smells fresh and clean as a bath feels. There is still enough daylight left to see the treetops blowing, gently being tossed back and forth by the air. Rain has come to cool down the earth and air of this hot summer night. Lightning is startling while thunder rhythmically equilibrates; erasing the troubles of a long day, and the rain is washing away all thoughts through sandy soil. My mind is transitioning to a place of peace that can only be found the wee hours of morning. Now that the berserk ranting from voices of the good and bad sides have stopped clanging out of tune, I can breathe deeply, calmly and let my mind go quiet. I can sleep now.

This morning, overgrown bushes, and debris thrown about the yard by littering passers occupied my mind. As I chopped and cut, sweat rolled down my face like marbles. I call to a familiar face, “Hey, ya’ll! How you doin’ this mornin’!”

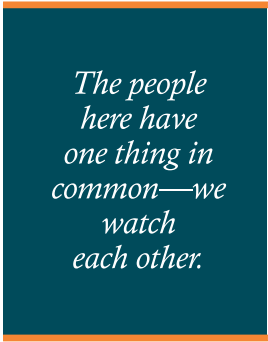
The kooky woman breaks free of her caregiver and cries, “That’s my mama!”

I don’t know her name, but every morning I watch her walk to the store located beside our house. The routine gives Miss Kooky a sense of being with the world, she

goes to the store to talk and laugh with people. Her long graying hair is tattered and thin; it could use a good trimming. She wears it held back by a carefully folded colorful scarf, her ears adorned with bobs that dangle as she walks. Although Florida summers are humid, she wears a sweater. She comes happily skipping and kicking empty cans, paper and other rubble along her path. The sound of my voice made her cry this morning. “Are you my mama? Are you from Tennessee?” She breaks from her caregiver’s restraining tug at the sweater, and stretches her hands to my face; her touch grinds sweat and dirt into my skin. Discerningly, she jumps back realizing I am not her mother. She sustains in a world that fades in and out of reality; some days are better than other days.

We live in a transitional neighborhood; the City of Tampa sees financial promise in our section of town, if we change, get a good cleaning, let the good outweigh the bad. Beautiful houses are bought for cheap, some for cost of taxes due. Buyers spruce them up, move in, and begin transitioning. Because of transition, buyers will be on guard until the transition is over. Nurses and doctors live here; lawyers and police officers too. Prostitutes and drug dealers know the ins and outs

of this place. Homeless addicts and felons walk through the neighborhood, trying to find work or handouts. Vietnam vets and preachers of unknown denominations canvas the streets and abandon Spanish-style churches looking for brothers who did not make it to the shelter last night. Many cultures trying to harmonize a life live in this community. Old residents remember the first Section-Eights built down the street, and the transitions that came with them, some good, and some bad. Tennis shoes now hang on electric wires; there is other evidence of the neighborhood's activity, the state of it. Panhandlers annoy many people, but some don't mind them. The homeless come with a variety



*The people
here have
one thing in
common—we
watch
each other.*

of stories to tell: "I choose to be free," "We are victims of circumstance," while others are just plain feared.

People here have one thing in common—we watch each other. Everyone is always looking back to see. Vagabonds know who is good for a cigarette; I can even

tell when a prostitute needs to find a place to pee. The brave-hearted buying into this neighborhood quickly learns the bartering system. Service for odd jobs is paid for with food, cigarettes, beer, and other things. For one beer, the tall man with big muscles will disassemble four discarded pallets for making a raised-bed garden. One cigarette buys help bundling cut brush. I carry a pack with one smoke left in case I need it. Once I paid a muffin to Will for helping me gather thorny clippings left on the side of the road; the locals called them sticker bushes. Will says skin pricked from the thorns will leave a mark that itches for days. We strategically stacked the long gangly limbs building a barrier along the path made by the neighborhood prostitutes to my back door; they hide there and squat to relieve themselves. When word got out about sticker bushes, barriers went up all around the neighborhood. Now, I give Will muffins for nothing; we are friends. The city put lime all around the house, and the store to help eliminate the smell of urine. We were transitioning.

Transition is a journey from one position to another. Residents are acclimating, adjusting to each other. Each has their own perception of good and bad. Laws draw lines showing the good side is here, the bad goes over there. Therefore, in a *transitional* neighborhood, the line *must* be in the middle. The people are assumed to be somewhere in

between good and bad. They watch to see the car one drives, or the bicycle one rides to determine good and bad. My bike, a custom-painted blue and white traditional, has cool artwork burned on a brown leather saddle. I am good. Will's bike is one he built himself using old discarded parts. He painted his a darker blue than mine. He'd rather have it black to match the fancy top tube he found, but black bikes are not good. "People think I deal, if'n I paint it black, so I do da nex best thang, dark blue be almost black."

"I think it's beautiful, Will!" I said to my friend.

High-school-age boys carrying backpacks meet at the store at six-thirty each morning. Their bikes are black. Special watchers stand in strategic positions, and if a rider runs late, cell phones fly out and watchers pace back and forth until they spot the black bike. The fancy car man meets them in the afternoon. The first of every month, fancy car man pays one-half the dollar value in cash for food stamps. At times, he gives food to the poor who live nearby. Sometimes he brings oranges and strawberries from the farmer's market; occasionally, cabbage heads line the trunk of his car. Often, he has cold pop he shares. He is bartering. The majority of people agree; their perception is that he stands on the good side of the line beside the four watchers. They smile and greet factory workers as they walk to and from the bus stop. Dozens

ride buses to honest work, for not enough pay to afford a car. They never accept any offerings from the trunk; they do not smile at the watchers. They walk by the car faster in the afternoons, especially on food-stamp day.

Will painted his bike blue instead of black because he wants people to know he is good; poor Miss Kooky is so far removed from reality that she cannot find her way back, and the police here surely know the gifts of food are simply keeping the peace, for now. Some transitions are best done slowly. Food stamps coming from the good side, crossing over to the bad side is transition, but which way is hard to tell. This neighborhood is changing too slowly for some. Will's sister, a minister who helps unwed mothers, says, "When things changed around here, most good people took their children away, and DSS has the rest of 'em. I pray for a change." She prays for transition; she prays for the children. Me? I worry about the homeless and the kookies.

Bam, Bam, Bam! What is that thunderous pounding on our door! What wakes the peace I found this calm, rainy night? We stand at the top of the stairs with trembling fear; what do we do? Scared to move, we see fiery lightning flash and then a voice on the other side of the door cries out for mercy, "Please, please let me in, you remember me, don't you? Please! I don't want to be out here, Lady, please help me!"

Mister, do you have a dollar to spare
I need a dollar to buy the will to care
Is your dollar good, my hunger bad
This line where I'm standin'
Makes some of 'em mad
It ain't what I know, or who I go see
That makes a dollar define
The you's and the me's
So, Mister if you help me see how to be
And share the dollars you have
'tween you and me
I might help my brother
I might turn him out
'cause a dollar only buys
Some people some clout
Clout can take a bully
Turn 'im into a fool
And it's the only difference
'tween me and you





Dansk
Emily COLKER

The Kentucky House of an Eight Year Old's Grandma Who Loves Garage Sales and Buying in Bulk

Rebecca GERLACH

Sunflowers dance in the summer sun.
They sway their heads,
Drop their seeds,
And shine in the heat.

Birds fly and chirp, landing on the clothes line.
The garden glass globes shine brightly.
The gnomes sit by the lamp post.
My hands stand in the 2004 pavement leading to the front porch.

The heat rising from the street makes waves like the ocean before me.
Sweat drips from my hair to my shirt.
The porch swing creaks as it sways under me.
The tomato in my hand is firm and ripe.

Mimi's garden has burst this afternoon.
A car passes, a squirrel jumps,
Blondie the cocker at my feet whimpers a pitiful excuse for a bark.
Tomato juice runs down my chin, staining my white shirt.

Judge Judy resounds throughout the house,
Making her way to the porch with a murmur.
Clanking, cooking, a cacophony comes from the 1970's kitchen of knickknacks.
The coo coo clock bursts to the 2 o'clock tune.

The tomato on my shirt roasts in the heat.
The Kentuckiana air is filled with summer smells.
Summer dances with a summer sun,
Shining down on me and my summer family.

Riddle

Anthony WYATT

Is it a seed planted in fruitful soil
From which springs forth
A vigorous sapling fit
For fruits and for flowers?

Or, what's more, may it be
A mighty ship on course
With fortune's wind,
Ever forward in its motion?



A poem or a song,
Hoped for all along;
A journey never ending,
Pure joy from the beginning?

Does it work for what's true
Through time, not waiting
To bring about wonderful
And unthought of blessings?

Does it neither lack
Nor long, leaving all
Notions behind about
Past or possible lives?

An idea or a thought,
Conquering vices wrought;
An elixir or a pill
Curing every ill?

Will it never rot
Like a withering

Rose, dried up
Without any rain?

Won't it triumph
Time and again over each
Travail, which tries
To block its way?

A compass or a map,
Evading every trap;
A vision and a hope,
All within its scope?

Is it?
Does it?
Will it?
Can it be anything else?

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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.

– **Richard Wilson is the 2014 recipient of the Jean S. Moore Award for his submission “Vision.”**

Agora Art & Photography Award

Each year, the recipient of this award 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.

– **Camille Carloss is the 2014 recipient of the Agora Art & Photography Award for her submission “Departure.”**

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AGORA

Volume XLVII
Spring 2014

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