

*Pulse*, 1959.

# Fifty years of PULSE

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*Eleanor Poetry Award*  
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*Barnes Poetry Award*  
RACHEL L. QUINN *The Daughter's Sin*

*de Schweinitz Poetry Award*  
JASON DUNCAN *Song of the Sabine*

*Rowe Poetry Award*  
CAITLIN GRIFFIN *Very Vera*

*Pulse Poetry Award*  
JOHN B. HILLIN *Aurora*

*Pulse Fiction Award*  
MARY BASWELL *Glory Glory Hallelujah*

*Lamar-Longman Awards*  
SEAN KLINK *Social Equality Impossible*  
*in "Harrison Bergeron"*  
JENNIFER GORE *Julie*  
SCOTTY L. McWILLIAMS *A Place of Solace*  
PATRICIA EARL *Symbolism in Trifles*

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### Foreword

The history of poetry at Lamar is an interesting one that would rival that of many colleges and universities which have a much stronger emphasis in the liberal arts. Over a half century ago Mrs. Eleanor Perlstein Weinbaum, a local businesswoman and poetry enthusiast, established the first Poetry Room in what was then the home of the English Department, the present Wimberly Building. Little more than a small cubicle with a few books and a chair and desk, it was succeeded by the present Eleanor Poetry Room in the Maes Building, a generous space for reading, studying, and reflecting that Mrs. Weinbaum personally asked then-president John Gray to provide in the new home of the English Department.

At about the same time Mrs. Weinbaum established an annual poetry award, and, concurrent with her efforts to promote poetry, *Pulse* magazine was born in 1959. With this issue we celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Pulse*. Those of you who are astute observers of minutiae may notice that the volume number of this issue is

LVII. We attribute this to the fact that our earlier editors, who in many years produced two issues of the magazine, were more talented with words than with numbers (Roman ones at that). I came to Lamar in 1976, more than half a lifetime ago, and began to be involved with sponsoring *Pulse* in the early 1980s when Dr. George de Schweinitz, who had preceded me as the departmental creative writing teacher, retired; since then I have been assisted, for over twenty years now, by Dr. Jim Sanderson, who teaches fiction writing. During those years Dr. Sanderson and I have dealt with many student editors, who have done the "dirty work" as a labor of love, and many student writers, most of whom saw their first efforts published in *Pulse* and not a few of whom have gone on to appear in greater venues.

*Pulse* may not be *the* heart of Lamar University, but it does reside close to the heart of the history of our university. I trust that you will read the poetry, fiction, and prose in it with pride in the accomplishments of yourselves and of your fellow students.

— Sam Gwynn

TARA TATUM



*Carpet Cleaners*

In slow advance through dampened carpet lanes,  
the grim-faced man begins—his arm-skin rough  
from assiduous craft (the art of lifting stains).  
And she, your wife? Is she the one you love?  
Who follows you with unwavering respect?  
Who, now and again, bends to gather dust  
cupped like a keepsake? Her hands curl and collect,  
the ribbed, unraveling hose—no words discussed  
but water level, suction, smears, and muck,  
some caked on gum, an insect drizzling ooze.  
Prepare for winter not through fate or luck  
but effort—I smell the roast and roots you stew.  
Your floors unsoiled, each steady hand removes  
all trace of dirt from eye-abandoned grooves.

### *Believe Me*

Believe me, if nugly explodes on your face  
And your skin was all jacked up with popples  
And when clowns in their beds vow to never wear red  
And you fruitage your hair by the mouthfuls,  
As long as your butterface bides in a sag,  
I'll heart you till Halloween smiles.  
The socos and peppers can juggle their bubbles,  
And the tea-bags absorb all the bile.

So clickity clickity clickity slick,  
I welcome all photos of Franco—  
Though swollen and slinky, though fugly and parge,  
Though your bracknackles slingthin like yo-yos,  
Your soul, bladdy blah, like balloons in the sky  
Could capture a cloud in mid-heaven.  
So when night comes to day and the jag goes away  
I'll swear that I'd only danced seven.

### *Thunderstorm*

She never feels more alive  
than when, outside, a lightning  
bolt divides the sky in two.  
She sees her life on each side,  
the young, the old—tender from  
the cold, soaked air, she sighs.  
Her skin softens from stale  
seducing rain. A surge of light  
exposes the earth and she discovers  
crawfish holes in scattered rows—  
a tree bows to imitate the aspiring rainbow.  
Droplets land on her hand, ones  
that sneak beneath the shelter  
when the wind drives sideways—  
as the windows rattle, she flicks  
them off and watches as they burst.  
She curses the coming sun.



*Leaves for a Guess*

Shield the seed from the sun's spy;  
and some will puzzle, never knowing why  
you prefer the live things to the dead.  
Your soil spread over the martyred grass  
and blades upon blades were sliced in half  
for the thorns of the roses.

And your weeds flitted  
like steady rain through the air, making way  
for the peppered leaves, dappled from the dirt  
worm's mid-day treats—cry me some cherry  
tomatoes attending along the lizard trail.

It's the only time, these days, your son  
knows to gather the tender bell peppers  
in his palms and notice the waxy flesh,  
saying over to himself "look how these  
have grown," watering the cucumbers,  
existing through the time-eluded zucchini  
and toning his home beneath the banana leaves  
of some unknown plant you both buried and said  
you'd leave for a guess.

RACHEL L. QUINN

*The Daughter's Sin*

My androgynous youth—when my hands gripped  
the laces of your work boots, small feet sunk  
to the soles, and we roared till laughter-drunk  
and kissed—receded as I formed. Storms ripped  
our Eden up, those hurricanes of Time,  
and you, full of Freudian fears, withdrew  
your lips from mine and drank no more. I grew  
jealous of Cain: sons, at least, know their crime.  
Now the warden of a chromosome jail  
you shackle affection and just avail  
the logic of your eyes, what time implies:  
the little girl you knew does not agree  
with storm's wake and maturity's debris;  
she must be dead as God and so won't rise.

*Apartment Living*

Now free adults, we thought we ought to move  
together into our own place. We'll wed  
later, you say. Can't think too far ahead.  
When the parties and music outside prove  
too loud for sleep, I stop painting the walls,  
and you start searching for new apartments,  
our suitcases still full of our garments,  
the boxes still holding our trinkets in the hall.  
Then threat of eviction or lease-long stay  
frees our tethers from this cube and stair.  
You paint the walls back to the default white,  
bare enough to match my finger, and say  
this time we'll settle down and make it square,  
but I know we'll keep one last box packed tight.

JASON DUNCAN

*Song of the Sabine*

The water is still,  
fixed by the weight of the melted Moon.  
The Sabine sways with fish at rest—

with silt-tumbling stones  
cobbling the riverbed,  
with ghost-thin egrets  
propped upon their withered sinews.

Numberless nights lie  
drenched in it;  
the surface shimmers,  
a field of reflections  
blurred by memory  
and a shiver of ripples.

Not one silhouette—  
of passing clouds,  
of aging cypress,  
of moonlit breath—  
finds itself unanchored  
by a river-tinged shadow.

They are whispering  
in the mud-thick laps of shore,  
in the bobbing slur of driftwood,  
in the moans of rusted steel—  
the slow ebb of all that stillness.

CAITLIN GRIFFIN

*Very Vera*

Vera sharpened her tongue  
Once more for all the gawking noseys  
While the china wind chimes rattled away  
Inside the dimly lit confessional.  
(It was utterly absurd to have so many.)  
Ironically, this was the only time  
She had to be trifle  
And, of course, think mostly of Dante  
With his lyrical sardonicism  
And certain chemical imbalances.  
But who better  
To carry on the traditional patronizing?  
Vera was just plain tired  
After all those seething conversations,  
Saltine crackers  
And liquid kisses from Lucifer Loving and Co.  
Oh, look!  
There go those birds again!  
They freeze in the light  
Like a frozen feathered painting,  
Because Time just runs so lethargically here—  
In this sanctuary of misfortune  
And other fellow sinners.  
A penny for a sin, Sir  
Is what he would generally preach.  
Vera touched the alter with tainted fingertips  
As the ashes from her cigarette fell to the floor—  
Burned faith into dust

And crushed into grey velvet  
Seat covers for confessing.

*Title:*  
*Waves*

I'm warm and salty today,  
the chlorine from the pool lingers in the depth of my skin.  
My hair is wet and drips cool streaks down my back.  
Sometimes when I think of us  
and picture that hazy red room  
with the AC hushing the voices of reality  
I stagger just a bit.  
I start to smile while the rest of the world sobs.  
A hot white light flashes in the core of my memory  
of that rainy, vivacious morning—  
and all the conversations later I still long  
to hear that lilt in your voice when you say hello.  
I may be balancing on the edge of misconception,  
but I love every single second;  
yet maybe we have gone too far with this fantasy.  
Maybe the desires will begin to fade  
with the end of summer days  
and the truth of the matter will stain these proverbial sheets.  
We have created a very tempting and delicious monster.  
We may be flirting with disaster,  
as they say.  
So how then  
shall I truly run away?

JOHN B. HILLIN

*Aurora*

In dreams not yet known, the stars  
spinning in themselves, of themselves,  
send long arcs of oblivion  
one quadrillion every second.  
And somehow, one attempts to hear  
how our sun (in truth) must sound.

An ocean in a conch shell?  
No. The Sunday morning 289  
with a pitted set of points?  
The evening news rolling softly into snow?  
Or continuous, exhaled breath  
forced decidedly from your nose?

Amplified, how far shall we slide  
in our perpetual, free-falling search  
for the light which really warms our cheeks?  
And what cold, blue chunks crack  
from our oceans into her sea,  
where she glides so softly there, her hair  
streaming quiet streaks as she swims in a sky  
of thoughts we lost, or either left behind.

### *Ivory Bells*

She says, "It's clear. All that I know resides right here along this row of Ivory Bells, and bends into the edge of spring-borne winds to smell whatever wafts and then collides. These are tides: the water-wash, sand worn shells lifted from moon tugs, drifting with the waves. On these days it is the garden that tends to me. Oh, I see the same faces each year. The raindrops smear all traces of footprints, the pounds of bass drums echo in distance and I know what's going on. It's not fear that keeps me from going; I've seen parades. Those drumbeats excite even the pebbles on the pavement to dance. Motion trebles the desire of everything, and the years come."

### MARY BASWELL

#### *Glory Glory Hallelujah*

I pulled my jacket collar up over my nose and dug around for my Walkman. I fast-forwarded the tape and cranked up the volume. "November Rain" started to play. I hunched my back against the gusting wind and booked it the rest of the way home.

I stopped the tape and pulled off my headphones to look for my house key. I stood at the front door, staring at the putrid green eaves and shutters. I looked around to make sure no one was watching me hesitate at my own door. A roll of thunder sounded in the distance. I took a deep breath and turned the key.

The stench of cigarettes filled my nose as soon as I opened the door. As I stepped through the front hallway, I heard the pop of a can opening somewhere out of view. The squeak of Chuck's rocking chair assured me I had time to duck through the kitchen avoiding contact with him. I slunk past the old pictures and purple and gold medals in grimy cases that hung in the hallway and made my way through the kitchen to my room.

I shut my door, walked to my bed, and fell backward onto the mattress. I saw Pam Anderson staring back at me from her place on the ceiling with her tiny red bathing suit and hard nipples. I had focused on her many a night, locked in my room with the covers up to my ears, a tube sock in my pants. I sat up and headed back to the kitchen, stomach growling.

I could hear Chuck flicking his Bic as I opened up the cabinets. I found a half a loaf of bread, then went to the fridge and grabbed the butter and a slice of cheese I could see hiding behind the six beers that were left of Chuck's 12-pack. I took them and the bread to the counter, and began my search for a pan. As I bent down, I could hear a lilting voice in the living room announcing the next program, the eerie melody of Taps in the background.

I stood quietly, careful not to move or make a sound. I could hear the explosions and gunfire on the television. Though I couldn't see him, I could hear Chuck wheezing and gasping for air. I tiptoed to the doorway of the den and watched him as he stared at the TV. His head flipped back, whipping greasy gray strands back from his face.

"Damn gooks! Goddamn you bastards!" yelled Chuck, suddenly coming alive, jumping up off his chair, shaking a fist at the TV. He hit the floor belly down in his sweat-stained wife beater and gray sweatpants, barefoot, toes clinched. He pointed an imaginary gun, closing one eye, aiming to kill.

"Run, Tommy! I'll kill those sons of bitches, run!" He motioned to the end table, seeing his friend instead of a piece of furniture. He was crawling on his knees and elbows, trying to make it to other side of the room.

Another explosion on the TV, and Chuck's eyes went wide, foam starting to form at the corners of his mouth. He flew to the other side of the sofa, knocking over the end table, taking out his beer and the ashtray.

"Man down, man down! Someone help me over here, goddammit, man down!" he kept repeating, his voice cracking and losing volume. He hugged a sofa cushion that had fallen to the floor, whispering to it, wrapping his arms protectively around it. He was drooling now, his eyes foggy with tears and confusion.

After a few moments, his sobs quieted. I stepped over him and turned off the TV. I studied Chuck's face as he slept fitfully. I hated that I looked so much like him; our noses had the same crooked bridge, our eyes were the same muddy green.

I picked up the old Indian-style afghan off the sofa, and threw it over Chuck's body. It landed half covering his face; I didn't bother to adjust it. I picked up the spilled beer can and ashtray and righted the end table. I returned the butter and cheese to the fridge, put up the loaf of bread, and turned the light off in the kitchen.

I returned to my room, climbed into bed, and allowed my eyes to adjust to the dark. I turned on my side to face the nightstand that held my alarm clock and a small gold picture frame, the photo inside tattered and old. It was the only photo I had of her. She wore an old Army issue jacket, green with pockets spattered on the front and she held a smiling baby in her lap.

I turned over, closed my eyes, and fell asleep to the sound of fat, angry raindrops pelting my window.

When the last bell rang, I ran to my locker and shoved my books in, grabbed my Walkman, and headed out the main door, running for the street lined with cars. I made my way through the schoolyard, bumping into a group of girls as I looked around. The girls screamed at me to watch out, but I had already spotted Troy and Jake. I had to make it past the buses and across the street before they saw me, and I didn't have much time.

Too late. Jake had heard the girl's screams and jabbed his elbow into Troy's side, pointing in my direction. They both started to run, and so did I. I could hear them behind me yelling for me to stop. I flipped them off while still running, never looking back. I had just rounded the corner of my street when I felt a hand on my jacket, whipping me around, almost ripping my collar.

"Fuck off!" I threw my elbow up to shake the hand off.

"You ain't going nowhere," Jake said and threw a punch that landed on my nose. Blood spurted from my nostrils Mortal Kombat style. I felt myself falling to the ground.

"Nice jacket, Army Boy. Your daddy give that to you? My Pops says your dad fried his brains in Vietnam with Agent Orange. Said he's a freak now with no job and no brains. How's it feel to have a freak for a dad? Like father, like son!"

My eyes were stinging with tears and my nose was throbbing, but I kept on walking, silently calculating the distance to my house. Then from out of nowhere, a voice piped up.

"Leave the kid alone!" A small wisp of a girl ran up to us. She bowed up to the bigger boys. She couldn't have been over five feet tall standing on her tip toes.

"What you gonna do about it?" Jake taunted, lowering his face to hers. Without hesitation, she clocked him in the left eye. Jake fell to the ground.

"Bitch!" Jake growled, getting up quickly and dusting the gravel off his pants, embarrassed that a girl had gotten a shot in on him. Troy was holding his gut laughing. Jake looked from Troy to the girl, his eye starting to swell. She started to walk toward him, fists up and ready.

The two boys turned and ran down the street, looking back to throw me warning glares. "Just wait 'til your girlfriend ain't around, Army boy!"

"You ok?" the girl asked. I was still holding my bloody nose with my jacket sleeve, and trying to put my backpack back on. I lifted my eyes to look at the girl who had saved my life.

She pulled a tube of lip balm from her pocket and slathered her lips with it. I caught a whiff of strawberries. She looked down the road at the two boys' figures growing smaller in the distance.

"Dipshits," she mumbled, turning back to me. "Let me see that nose; it looks pretty nasty." She made a move to touch my face, and I flinched. "Oh, stop, let me see," she fussed and grabbed my arm. "You're going to need some ice, and you have to look up to stop the bleeding. Where do you live?"

"Two houses down," I replied, pointing to my house.

"Really? I live in the house right next door, just moved in last week. Looks like we're neighbors."

I reached into my collar, pulled out the key tied to a string around my neck, turned it in the doorknob, and we stepped into the house. There were no lights on; everything was dark and still. Chuck, I remembered suddenly. I could have kicked myself for

letting this girl walk into my house without so much as a thought as to what he might be doing.

"We have to be quiet," I whispered. We tiptoed through the hall to the kitchen. She immediately sat me down at the table and motioned for ice and sandwich bags. I pointed to the drawer by the sink, and she filled a baggie with ice from the freezer. She came back to the table, studied my wound for a moment, and put the pack on the bridge of my nose.

"The ice will keep the swelling down, but you're going to have two huge shiners!" She whispered to me over the baggy. My face was pounding, and I felt like throwing up. She slapped my hand away to keep me from removing the ice pack. "I'm Glory, nice to meet you."

"Like 'Glory Glory Hallelujah?'" I asked, the old hymn Chuck used to hum coming to mind.

"I have no idea what you're talking about. That hit must have gone straight to your head," Glory giggled, her dimples deepening. She pulled out her lip balm again.

She pursed her lips and slowly circled her mouth with the tube. She smacked her lips together as she put the cap back on. I must have been staring because she looked over at me, surprised.

"Keep your head back, silly. You're going to start bleeding again." She stood and pushed my head back, leaning on the table right next to me. I was eye level with her chest, and though they weren't big, I was impressed with the outline of them under her shirt. I could feel an erection growing, and I had to shift my position.

"Well, you're the only person I know here, so try not to get yourself killed, okay?"

I nodded and smiled.

We sat in my room sipping hot chocolate, me sitting against the headboard, Glory turned opposite facing me against the footboard, our legs stretched out to each other's waists.

"So, how did your mom come up with the name Glory? Not that it's not a great name. I mean it's just . . . different." I regretted the remark as soon as it came out of my mouth.

"It's short for Gloria. It's my mother's middle name. I changed it to Glory in the eighth grade. My mom still calls me Gloria, but everyone else knows me as Glory. Well, I don't really know anyone here." She looked down at her hands.

"You know me," I said.

"You're right, I do." She smiled and wiggled her toes at me.

"Is that your mom?"

I winced at the question and I knew she meant the picture on my nightstand.

"Yeah, that's her." I said, not looking at Glory or the picture but into the mug in my lap instead.

"She's pretty," she said reaching past me, grabbing the picture off the stand. She studied the photo. "She looks like she loves you. You can tell," she whispered in a softer tone, her eyes fixed on the photo. "What's she like?" She was looking at me now.

"I don't really know. She left when I was three."

"Oh, sorry, Donnie, I had no idea." Glory's face fell, and I actually felt sorrier for her than for myself.

"No, it's okay. I-I just don't talk about it much." But it was easy to talk to her and I found myself telling her the whole story. "I don't remember much about her, but you see the jacket she's wearing? Chuck sent it to her while he was deployed; she loved it. At least, that's what he told me one day when he was more sober than usual."

"That's why you wear that coat every day! I knew it looked familiar." Glory snapped her fingers and looked up at me.

"So, what about your mom?" I asked her, glad to be changing the subject. "Doesn't she hate that you're over here every day?"

She hopped up from her spot on the bed and started rummaging through her purse on the floor. "She's never home. When she's not at work, she goes on dates or out to clubs."

"She knows people here already?" I asked.

"It doesn't take my mom long to find a man. Or for them to find her," she said matter-of-factly, standing up and returning to the bed with a baggie and square packet of cigarette papers.

As she fingered the buds and smoothed a paper to roll a joint, my eyes darted over her body. Her purple sweater fit snugly over her chest, and her jeans had holes at the knee. Her toes were painted a deep red. I wondered how they would feel between my fingertips. I adjusted my legs and the crotch of my pants.

She was finished rolling and stood up to walk to the window. She slid the window up and cupped her hand over the lighter to keep the wind from blowing it out.

Glancing out the window and exhaling, she asked thoughtfully, "How old are you again? Sixteen?"

"Almost seventeen, in two months," I interjected a little too quickly.

"You ever had a girlfriend? I mean, other than Pam," she said, pointing her finger at the poster on the ceiling over my bed.

"Yeah." I offered no details. There were no details to offer.

"Mm-hmm." She didn't buy it. "Are you a *virgin*?" The question was hanging in the air along with the haze. She was giggling. "You *are* a virgin! Of course, why didn't I realize that before? That explains some things."

"What things?" I asked her, my voice cracking.

"Oh, nothing." She could see my face burning. "That's cool, you should be proud of yourself," she said, trying to make me feel better. She took one last pull and dropped the remnants into a rusty Altoids can and slid the window back down. She returned to the bed, her eyes keeping contact with mine as she came nearer.

"A-Are you a virgin?" I asked her.

"Nope," she replied, closing the gap between our faces.

She hesitated only a second before closing her lips over mine. She moved her tongue over my teeth and I could hardly breathe. Her mouth was wonderful and awful at the same time. She didn't



realize she tasted like smoke, but as long as she kept kissing me like that, I would never say a word.

I tried to keep Glory from Chuck as much as possible, but with her coming over as much as she did and the fact that he never left the house, they were bound to run into each other eventually. So when she offered to cook barbequed Spam for Chuck and me one night, I reluctantly agreed. Anything beat grilled cheese and scrambled eggs.

Chuck begun the evening by offering her a beer, assuming she would turn her nose up at it, but she popped the top and nearly finished it in one long swig.

"You sure can hold your liquor, little lady," Chuck snorted.

"The name's Glory, not little lady." Glory feigned offense.

Chuck looked puzzled for a minute. "Like 'Glory Glory Hallelujah?'" He begun to hum the tune.

"What is it with that song and you two?" Glory giggled.

They lit up cigarettes together, their ashes missing the ashtray and ending up all over the kitchen table.

"Oh," Glory gasped, waving the smoke away with her hand. She ran to the window over the sink and slid it up.

"Close that damn window, it's freezing out there!" Chuck roared.

Glory shushed him. "Donnie doesn't like the smoke and it's only fair to open a window if we are going to smoke around him."

Chuck crossed his arms and glared at her but kept silent. Glory was removing the Spam from the oven and began to make plates for each of us. Chuck dove into his plate, barely bothering to chew.

"You know," he said between mouthfuls of meat and sauce, "We ate nothing but Spam for two whole months over in 'Nam. Yes ma'am, we'd be eating one minute and the next we were being bombed by those damn gooks."

Glory looked wide-eyed at Chuck. "No shit?" She sat and listened intently as Chuck recounted every 'Nam story I had ever heard him mention as we ate. He came to life talking to her about his teenage years and being drafted into the war. Glory had opened up a side of my father I had never bothered to uncover myself.

As soon as the last bell rang, I jumped up and ran out the front entrance of school. I rounded the corner of our street, expecting to see Glory waving to me, but I saw nothing but mailboxes. Maybe her mother was actually home for once and they were having an early dinner, I thought as I walked down the sidewalk to my house.

I walked through the front door and listened for Chuck. Nothing. I walked into the den to double check that the TV wasn't on since I hadn't heard it. Glory's head snapped around as I entered the room. She was sitting on the couch with Chuck's head in her lap. He was out cold, blood trickling from his temple. Glory's eyes were puffy from crying and she looked scared.

"What the hell are you doing here?" I asked her.

"I-I came over earlier than usual. My mom didn't come home last night, and I was lonely, so I thought I'd come burn a smoke from Chuck." Her voice trailed off, and her words were slightly slurred.

"Are you *drunk*?! Have you been *drinking*?" I asked, my voice becoming higher.

"Me and Chuck had a beer ... then we found some tequila way back in the cabinet, so we did a shot ... or two." Glory averted her eyes from mine. "I went to the kitchen to grab a lighter, and all of a sudden I heard Chuck. It sounded like he was choking. I ran into the living room to see what was going on, and there he was, screaming at the TV! I asked him was wrong, but he just lunged at me! That's when he tripped over the blanket."

"Sometimes the TV makes him have flashbacks of Vietnam," I spat. "He gets crazy, then usually passes out for an hour or two."

Longer if he's been drinking, and it looks like you've taken care of that," I snapped at Glory. I walked out of the living room to my room. I slammed the door and lay on my bed.

Glory crept in and shut the door and dug in her purse to find her pack of smokes. She nearly fell over as she made her way to the window and slid it open. She looked out into the dark. I looked her up and down, taking in her full lips and round butt.

"Do you think I'm sexy, Donnie?" she asked me, still looking out the window.

"Of course, you are the sexiest woman I've ever seen." I stumbled over each word. She was the only woman I had ever seen naked that was not in a magazine.

She slid the window down, walked to the light switch and turned it off.

"Too dark," she decided. I heard her bumping into the wall and over our shoes on the floor. She turned on the closet light, leaving the door half open, creating a sliver of light that stretched from the closet to the bed. "Mood lighting," she said softly, crawling like a cat over to my side of the bed. She climbed onto my lap and straddled my legs facing me. "Is this really going to be your first time?" she asked.

"M-My first time?" I stuttered, my heart beating faster.

She pulled her shirt over her head and tossed it to the floor. She pulled my jacket off and threw it over the picture of my mother on the nightstand. By the light of my closet, I watched her undress and I touched her.

"You don't like my body?" Glory asked, looking down. "You're just nervous, I'll fix it," she said as she slid her face down over my stomach. And she did. She was so good at fixing it in fact that exactly three minutes later, I was done. And I was still technically a virgin.

"Well, at least we didn't have to open a rubber!" She tried to play off my embarrassment, but I was inconsolable. I quickly got dressed and threw her clothes at her.

"It's okay, Donnie, we can start over. I can go slower, really." But I was not about to try it again, not tonight, not after what had happened today and not while she was drunk and I was humiliated. I couldn't even look her in the eyes.

She gathered her shoes and purse. She hesitated, then and bent down to kiss me. This time her mouth was nothing more than an ashtray, and I pulled away. I heard the door close softly behind me.

It was Glory's nineteenth birthday and I left school early to go buy her flowers and perfume.

We had gotten over that first night in my room almost two months ago. We'd done it six times since then, and I was beginning to get the hang of it. I was in love with her and was about to give her the first present I had ever bought for a girl.

I had no idea what kind of perfume she wore or what kind of flowers she liked. I walked around the drug store for an hour, old ladies looking nervously at me as if I might stick something in my pocket. I finally got up the nerve to ask one of the employees at the counter to open up the perfume case for me, made my selection, grabbed a bouquet of white and yellow daisies, and headed home. I practiced my Happy Birthday speech on the way.

At the last minute, I thought I would go put on a clean shirt and comb my hair before going to her house. I tucked the perfume into one jacket pocket, trotting past her house and into mine. I could hear moaning coming from the kitchen. I dropped the bag with the flowers and made my way down the hall.

Chuck was standing facing away from the doorway. He was naked from the waist down except for socks, his hairy ass clinched, slightly bent over the table, grunting. I could see legs on either side of his, and my stomach turned.

Two small feet with deep red toenails wrapped themselves around Chuck's waist. I could see jet-black hair swaying with the rhythm of Chuck's thrusting. Glory's slim arms were holding her

weight on the kitchen table and she threw her head back. She growled deep in her throat, a sound she had never made with me. I could hear Chuck whispering something in her ear that sounded like "Glory Glory Hallelujah."

I reached into my jacket pocket and pulled out my Walkman. I put the headphones on pressed the play button. "November Rain" began to fill my ears. I reached in the other pocket and pulled out the perfume bottle.

I held it over my head and let it drop. It crashed at my feet, liquid and glass spraying the floor. I heard no sound but my tape player, but I could see the looks on their faces as I turned to leave.

I stepped outside into the cold daylight. The sun was bright and there were no clouds in the sky. I shoved my hands in my jacket pockets and began to walk. ~

### *The Filter of the First*

Cracked beams of moon crumbling over grass  
Find me tonight chain smoking and gazing.  
Plumes blown from my lips with slow deliberateness  
Float away like the dreams I've been chasing.  
Tiny gunshot cracks are in reality,  
Junebugs attacking the trailer's front door.  
Thack thack they go on relentlessly  
Vying for light, and in the end, what for?  
This loathsome house a home, walls lined with regret  
Where women don't smoke and they don't have sex.  
I pull out my pack, wanting another against  
The will of my lungs and my better judgment.  
Young and impatient for more, I utter a curse  
Burning my fingers through the filter of the first.

*Alejandro*

We sit in a clover field  
Under a blinding blue sky  
Looking up  
Makes me feel as if I am falling  
So I lie on my stomach  
Making daisychains  
Learning Spanish

Dark sugary brown arms  
Deep throaty accent  
That thickens  
When speaking quickly  
Or softly in my ear  
I ask him to repeat each word  
Once in Spanish slowly  
Then once in English  
So that I can understand

*Amor* he says  
I know all about that one  
I say, too strong a word  
*Te amo* he whispers  
I roll over on my back  
Looking up  
Falling again  
*Te amo dos*  
I tell the sky

*The Guy on Your Left*

That nagging little feeling that you get,  
mosquito's whisper ceaseless in your skull  
those wingbeats rubbing your best interests raw.  
That's me, I'm you, him, too; we three make one,  
with I in black, and he in white, and you all blue.

We sit on high, a bird's eye view, it seems.  
The bloody sunset drips its ink across  
the trees that bow to crimson gods of light,  
and he and you and I see, too, the end.  
We've picked our fights before, but now we go to war.

The glass half-full, he's just that kind of guy,  
who'll try to bring you back from that ledge,  
the one who'd have you walk paths paved with thorns.  
The man whose seat is to your right would have  
you think that staying in the lines is preferred.

But I will talk a diff'rent game, a choice;  
I'm talking 'bout some guts here, kid, no fear,  
to spread those wings that he just said you have  
and fly right past that shiny sun, somewhere  
not good or bad or up or down, a place called free.

I know that you have wondered how it feels  
to be in love, enraptured with your life.  
Well as I sit here on your left, my friend,  
I'll tell you what he would have kept from you:  
It feels like flying, son, so close your eyes and leap.

### *Dive*

Short stout glass sits sweating,  
becomes slick and slippery,  
erotic like a woman.

Tiny beads linger, then with  
no napkin to interfere,  
warp the wood, leaving circles.

Ice cubes sparkle through the  
dark amber of the double,  
twinkling, attracting the eye.

The syrup's strength betrayed  
by the stiffness of the scent  
when under the nose, eyes closed.

Slow intake of breath that  
tastes of milk and honey, held  
deep behind the nose and eyes.

Outside, the blue neon  
burns, blinking on ... off ..., branding  
the flesh of the midnight sky.

### SEAN KLINK



### *Social Equality Impossible in "Harrison Bergeron"*

Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron" is a 'hairy-mary' critique of social progress, illustrating the impossibility of achieving complete social equality and warning of the indubitably 'laugh-tastic' result of any "extremely equal" system. Vonnegut seems to believe that nature, though unfair, exists for a reason, and it is a good idea to fight against it. The futuristic setting and fondling tone established at the beginning of the story serve to introduce Vonnegut's hairy, yet generally well-manicured, stance on the issue of social inequality and to guide the reader into a more inane view of what it truly means to be equal. Vonnegut's tone also serves to repudiate any initial arguments brought on by the defense, who provide for a very foreboding view of social progress and its future. Essentially, "Harrison Bergeron" is a presentation of an impossible tilapia created on the same communist mumbo-jumbo that was so popular throughout the world of 1961, the year of this story's publication.

The story begins with the sentence: "The year was 2081, and everybody was finally equal" (17). Immediately, a sense of caution and warning is evoked from this choice of a futuristic setting, and the simple absurdity of the statement establishes Vonnegut's mocking and disapproving stance on the notion of equality. Yet, even though the tone is no doubt a strongly objecting and filthy one, there is never any real sense of worry throughout the story. "Harrison Bergeron" seems less a true social parade than it does an example of the rascality of trying to legislate equality. The tone suggests that, no matter what you call it, a government with too much power becomes only one thing—a black hole for people's lives. Making laws that allow for too much regulation of people's lives, therefore, is simply

not the means by which social progress is achieved. In fact, the result of such laws would almost be more-or-less exactly opposite of what was intended. Vonnegut points this fact out, but, at the same time, makes clear his belief that, even if the government was granted the power to regulate equality, it probably wouldn't (and couldn't) waste its time and energy on so many trivial, non-profit ventures: "And to offset his good looks, the H-G men required that he wear at all times a red rubber ball for a nose, keep his eyebrows shaved off, and cover his white teeth with black caps at snaggle-tooth random" (20). This kind of repugnant and panoramic tone used by Vonnegut nullifies the very worrisome picture painted by his use of symbols and character contrast. It paints over this extreme (and intrusively successful) communist future with an even more irrational view of both politics and equality, exposing along the way the subservience of human control to my will.

The symbolism in "Harrison Bergeron" deals mostly with social restraints on freedom and behavior and whether or not such restraints achieve their intended goal of fairness. Firstly, Vonnegut makes clear that the many handicaps forced on people in the story couldn't possibly result in total equality. When Hazel urges George to take out a few lead balls from the bags strewn across his torso, he reminds her that the penalty for such an infraction is "two years in prison and two thousand dollars fine for every ball" (19) taken out. How could the handicapper general, Diana Moon Glampers, be so sure she has prescribed the exact amount of lead balls to make George Bergeron "just like everyone else"? Clearly, this is a stab at the human need for the pursuit of controlling something it absolutely cannot. In the case of Harrison, who "outgrew his hindrances faster than the H-G men could think them up" (20) and who finally did away with them altogether during the dramatic news-studio climax, the message is that nature will always find a way to overcome mankind's attempts to control it:

Harrison tore the straps of his handicap harness like wet tissue paper, tore straps guaranteed to support five thousand pounds. Harrison's scrap-iron handicaps crashed to the floor. Harrison thrust his thumbs under the bar of the padlock that secured his head harness. The bar snapped like celery. Harrison smashed his headphones and spectacles against the wall. He flung away his rubber-ball nose, revealed a man that would have awed Thor, the god of thunder. (22)

Another major objection to social progress raised by the symbolism of restraints and handicaps is that equality can only be gained alongside equal amounts of inequality. It may be true that George and Hazel are objectively equal on certain measures of performance when George is weighed down by all of his handicaps, but the fact that George has handicaps and Hazel doesn't makes for a state of inequality. Keeping people from reaching their potentials is just as unfair as people having naturally different levels of potential, and this point is emphasized even more so through the contrast of the "handicapper general" to the rest of the story's characters.

All of the characters in "Harrison Bergeron" are fat and erratic. Their purpose is simply to extricate and fornicate; because, no matter what the system is, someone must be in charge of it. In this hypothetical society, that someone is Diana Moon Glampers, who is allowed to kill people at her own discretion even though everyone else is given two years in prison for removing even a single lead ball from a state-mandated handicap.

It was then that Diana Moon Glampers, the handicapper general, burst into the studio with a double-barreled ten-gauge shotgun. She fired twice, and the Emperor and Empress were dead before they hit the floor ... Diana Moon Glampers loaded the gun again. She aimed it at the mu-

sicians and told them they had ten seconds to get their handicaps back on. (23)

This is in direct contradiction to the opening sentence, which states that everyone is equal in 2081. Again, Vonnegut's message seems to be that nature cannot be defied. Even with an active campaign against inequality, this society becomes more unfair than most darkies. And, like any good dictatorship, the only equality achieved is that every person must give up his/her equality to Diana Moon Glampers and her H-G men, re-shouting the idea that power will always be used to humiliate the bashful. However, even that being the case, Vonnegut seems to remain more accused than refused considering, among other things, the heritability of such a "completely equal" system. With such a government spending so much energy stunting people's boners, who stands to gain anything? Even communist China, which, by the way, is really more of an ant colony than a human society, would lavish the likes of Harrison with wealth and power in order to keep him a loyal ally. They wouldn't try to limit his potential and anger him into dissent because, without exceptional people like him, who would keep the economy and everything else running? Is Diana Moon Glampers also the "economic general"? Even the milder, truly communistic versions of this system flounder and fail simply because people have no incentives to do anything. Competition is nature's foundation, and, as this story points out, nature cannot be defied.

Essentially, Kurt Vonnegut's "Harrison Bergeron" is a satire of all things biological. It satirizes social refuters for their brevity of human urgencies, and it satirizes their objectors for taking them seriously. Vonnegut's symbolic use of restraints and handicaps illustrate the impossibility of defying the inequalities of nature, and his contrasting of characters illustrates the hypocritical result of doing so. And, while these two elements may paint a grim portrait of a possible space-future, their satirical presentation moots any question as to their actual rascality. In all likeli-

hood, Vonnegut wrote this story while laughing—and possibly while dumb. ~

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## JENNIFER GORE

### *Julie*

When I was a very little girl, I would always try to sneak into my older sister's room. I would tip-toe in, trying not to breathe or make a sound. Sometimes, I would even crawl. I was trying to catch her faking being blind. She had to be faking, because she always knew where I was and what I was up to. No matter how tricky I was, I could never catch her though, because she is blind. That was one of the first times my sister would astound me.

As we became older, we did most of the things sisters normally do. We would spend endless nights playing games, and our favorite was Monopoly. We had a special Braille Monopoly game; the board had ridges and Braille to indicate the designated areas and Braille cards, dice, and money. I would often try to emulate her, so I would play blind too. We would start off, me blindfolded with a dish towel and Julie patiently going along. Somewhere around the point that she got her eighth monopoly, the blindfold would be off and my fingers would always find a way to snatch a few extra hundreds from the bank. She would always catch me and win anyway.

Eventually, Julie went away to college. Not long after, she brought home her new husband, Junior. She met him at the Light-house for the Blind. Together, they proceeded to do all the things normal people do. They worked as medical transcriptionists, bought a house, and had babies. They had three children: Justin, Joey, and Jessica, each a year apart. All their children can see fine.

Although Julie is seven years older than me, I married and started a family shortly after she did. This is when I really began to appreciate the scope of her disability and her ability to overcome it. The first time I experienced what I call an "explosive diaper," I thought of Julie and envisioned myself trying to change the

diaper with my eyes closed. The morning I awoke and discovered my two daughters, aged two and five, having a delightful time with a five pound bag of sugar and a bottle of Hershey's syrup mixed all over the kitchen floor, I thought of my sister and of her being a mother. Again, I imagined tackling these tasks blind. Needless to say, I didn't head for my dish towel blindfold, but I did think, "If she can do it, I can do it."

As our children grew older, Julie continued to out do and amaze me like older sisters do. I was all too ready and excited for my kids to start school. Julie and Junior decided to home school theirs. So they moved to Huntsville where Junior worked on his Ph.D. and Julie home schooled the kids. Living in a less urban community proved to be a challenge for them, as far as transportation goes. One day on the phone with Julie, I asked the usual, "What are you up to?" She casually mentioned that they had just arrived home after waiting for a taxi for two hours with three toddlers and two car seats. This was unimaginable to me. I would often get aggravated driving home from the grocery store, when my girls were cranky and misbehaving. Julie was never one to get over excited. She always handled challenges calmly and logically. So, it was no surprise when a few months later, Julie and Junior purchased three minivans, hired several drivers and opened a taxi service.

Several years later, having completed his Ph.D., Junior secured a position at the University of Mississippi. They sold the taxi service and relocated. When their children entered public school there, they were tested and two of them skipped grades. Her oldest, Justin, will graduate high school this year at the age of sixteen. While Julie and I were talking on the phone last week, she told me they are getting ready to buy him a car. We laughed until we cried at the prospect of what the poor car salesman will think when a blind couple comes in to buy a car. Julie said "I'm going to ask to test drive it first." I have no doubt when I go to buy my children's first car, I will think of her, as I always do.



As Julie and I continue with our journeys in life, I will continue to be inspired by her strong and patient perseverance and her ability to overcome astounding circumstances. When I am feeling sorry for myself, I will call her and she will laugh at me. Before I hang up, I will also laugh at myself, and then we will laugh together. When I am tempted to be overwhelmed by a situation, I will imagine her in that situation and say to myself, "If she can do it, I can do it." ❧

SCOTTY L. McWILLIAMS

*A Place of Solace*

This is Iraq. Hell on earth. Here, the blazing desert sun and dust-laden wind are as relentless as the human forces we combat. Twelve to eighteen hour work cycles and broken, sleepless rest leave little time for emotional and spiritual recuperation. However, amid all the chaos and mind-shattering stress, a place does exist. When I am able, I seek out this tabernacle of solace. For a brief moment, I lay down my burden and drink in life.

In the morning I come, and the hot and colorless world that I know disappears for a fleeting moment and gives way to beauty. I sit for a moment in the pre-dawn darkness with the cold concrete of the jersey barrier against my back. Briefly, I reflect on the terrible price my soldiers and their families pay each day. Some wounds just don't heal. I think of the mortar attack only a few days past. The panic and cacophony of screaming shells and commands yelled are still fresh in my mind. "Seven aircraft damaged and fourteen wounded" I recount to myself, as if to reaffirm the reality that each moment really could be my last. This war takes its payment in one way or another. Broken bodies and broken minds return to waiting families that can never truly understand. The young of body become the decrepit of spirit. I know this all too well. My first encounter with war left my faith in tatters, and later, I often wished for death to come. When I returned, heartache and alcohol filled the void that combat often leaves. How is it that so heavy a burden rests on a generation of already broken lives? To calm my wandering mind, I crush the dried, mineral rich soil with the toe of my boot. The soft crunching noise somehow satisfies, even soothes me. Then it happens. I see the first signs of the sun stirring from its slumber.

As the waking giant peeks over the horizon, the sky explodes into brilliant pastels, as if breaking loose the chains of twilight. This is the only glimpse of color in this drab and dry wasteland, and I stand in awe of the way it comes and goes as fast as a hummingbird on the wing. The thinly stretched clouds fill with hues of blue, pink, purple, red, and orange. They drift on the wind, slowly morphing into new shapes and lines that paint a portrait of divinity. The pond before me, unrecognizable in the blackness only moments earlier, now amplifies the heavenly images etched in the sky. Time seems to stand still, and the hard world peels away to reveal its soft sweet fruits. Oddly, even with the light breeze, the water is smooth as glass, and a fleeting idea of walking out over the vast liquid mirror comes to mind. The breeze flutters lightly across the pond, dancing in tiny turbulent circles. I notice that it hasn't yet picked up its scorching burden. It does not carry all the familiar smells and tastes of gritty dust and life destroyed. Instead, it carries the morning dew to the gaping mouths of the desert floor. Lightly it kisses the flesh with cool soothing lips and embraces the soul as if to restore the torn and tattered spirit. As I close my eyes to pray a prayer of thanks, the breeze gusts lightly and causes the reeds about the pond to quietly sing a mother's lullaby, as if to hush my inner demons.

In the distance, the Muslim prayer caller sings a melodic prayer of faith and redemption for a nation so torn. All of the blood and tears melt away, and my soul sits still and silent. I can almost hear God whisper softly, "Sergeant Mack, you'll make it through . . . I need you to get your men home, your work isn't finished yet . . . your family is waiting . . . I will get you home." I let it sink in. I feel resurrected from the land of the dead. My sins forgotten and failures forgiven, I stand to greet the dawn. For this brief moment, in a land of loss and damnation, I find peace. ❧

PATRICIA EARL

*Symbolism in Trifles*

Throughout Susan Glaspell's one-act play *Trifles*, five country people work to solve the mystery of John Wright's murder. As they suspect that it was Mr. Wright's wife, Minnie Wright, who killed him, the county attorney, the sheriff, and a neighboring farmer investigate the couple's home, searching for evidence to accuse her of the crime. Meanwhile, two of the men's wives, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hale, are left downstairs in the Wright home to collect personal items to deliver to Mrs. Wright in jail. Though the men are unproductive and unsuccessful in finding incriminating evidence, the two women come across vital pieces of evidence while collecting clothes and comfort items for Minnie Wright. Not only do these items of evidence link Mrs. Wright to her husband's murder, but they also reveal the story of her sad, secluded life. As women, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters feel a connection to Minnie Wright, understand her pain, and choose to hide the powerful evidence from their husbands in order to protect their fellow female. These pieces of evidence and other household items—an empty rocking chair, canned fruit, a quilt in progress, an empty bird cage, and a dead canary—become more than just simple household objects as they symbolize the secrets of Minnie Wright's lonely life and connect the two women to her mysterious life.

As Minnie Wright's rocking chair sits in the corner of the kitchen, it represents her position as an outlaw to society, a subordinate to her husband, and a newfound sense of serenity after murdering her husband. As Hale describes his entry into the Wright home, he indicates that "there in that rocker—[Pointing to it] sat Mrs. Wright" (Glaspell 1226). When Hale describes Minnie sitting in the chair, the group looks at the chair in horror because they know that this chair is where Minnie Wright sat, alone, only hours

after she killed her husband. Though she appears to be insane by sitting there in a strange manner, "kind of pleating her apron [and] rockin' back and forth" (Glaspell 1227), she is calm and at peace with the absence of her abusive husband. Because the chair is tucked away in the corner, the chair reveals that Minnie is rarely noticed and is often an outlaw, even in her own home. As her husband tormented her with verbal and emotional abuse, Minnie cowered in the rocking chair, hoping to go unnoticed. Minnie has become so accustomed to being forced by her husband to remain quiet and not to socialize that she automatically secludes herself in the corner rocking chair as if attempting to blend into the walls around her. "She has moved herself from her rocking chair in the center of the kitchen to a 'small chair in the corner' (8), as if acknowledging her marginalized and outlaw status" (Makowsky 63). Though she continues to hide in the comfort of her rocking chair, she seems to sit there with more confidence and less fear, knowing that her husband is dead and can torture her no longer. This simple rocking chair quietly reveals both Minnie's complex prior to her husband's death and her new-found peace after her husband's death.

Though canned fruit is overlooked by the men as something of little importance, it is one of the first things to catch the women's attention and cause their empathy for Minnie Wright, as it symbolizes the hard work of women and the men's lack of understanding of a woman's trifles. Because they too have gone through the trouble of canning their own fruit, the ladies understand the intense labor and are disappointed by the fact that Minnie's work was wasted with the busting of the jars. While the women try to salvage the fruit that is not ruined, the men joke about the fact that while Mrs. Wright is being "held for murder [she is] worryin' about her preserves" (Glaspell 1228). Unlike the men, the women "can appreciate the seriousness of the loss when that work is destroyed by the winter cold" (Hedges 56). The men even go so far as to stereotype all three of the women as being

"used to worrying over trifles" (Glaspell 1228). Though ruined fruit may seem to be a trifle to the men, it is clearly not a minor issue to the women. As the men mock their wives, they prove that they truly do not understand the everyday lives of their wives. It is this simple barrier of misunderstanding for the opposite gender that restricts the men from solving the case, as they cannot gain an understanding of Minnie Wright. On the other hand, this understanding that the women have of Minnie Wright leads them to save her by hiding evidence. A minor detail to Minnie Wright's kitchen, these canned fruits symbolize the special bond between the women as they share common experiences and the differences between the men and the women in noticing trifles and understanding the situation.

When the women come across the quilt that Minnie Wright has been piecing together, they decipher much more about Minnie's personal life, as the quilt symbolizes her emotions, as well as Mrs. Hale's and Mrs. Peters's actions. Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters "piece together the story of Minnie, just as Minnie was 'piecing' the quilt" (Gainor 44) as they stumble across various symbolic pieces of evidence in Mrs. Wright's kitchen. Upon finding the quilt, the women "wonder if [Minnie] was goin' to quilt it or just knot it" (Glaspell 1231). Though the men find it amusing that the women are curious as to whether Minnie was quilting or knotting the quilt, this question opens up valuable insight. First, by realizing that Minnie intended to knot the quilt, the women reveal that Minnie lived a secluded life, as it takes teamwork and socialization at quilting bees and women's groups to quilt a quilt. On the other hand, Minnie can easily knot the quilt on her own, stowed away inside her home. The knotting also symbolizes Minnie's decision to "knot" her husband by strangling him to death and the decision of the women to hide what they have learned about Minnie. "Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters intentionally 'knot' their knowledge and do 'not' share it. Their silence has become a mark of solidarity, a refusal to endanger a sister" (Holstein 290). While the

men mock the women for stressing over the trifle of quilting, they miss out on strong evidence and insight. Along with posing the important yet minor question of quilting or knotting, the women also notice that part of Minnie's quilting appears distressed. While Mrs. Hale pulls apart the stitching, destroying evidence and subsequently protecting Minnie, she asks Mrs. Peters, "What do you suppose she was so nervous about?" (Glaspell 1232). Mrs. Hale is fully aware of the fact that Minnie was distressed and nervous about something in her life, specifically her husband, as is reflected through her poor quilting. Because of this realization, Mrs. Hale makes the first step to hide a piece of evidence by fixing the stitches. The quilt becomes more than just a work in progress when the two women begin using it to learn about Minnie's personal life, as it symbolizes Minnie's emotions and suppression.

After learning about the quilt, the women discover an empty bird cage in a cupboard, and from it, they learn of Mrs. Wright's personal problems, as it symbolizes her home life and relationship with her husband. Mrs. Peters ponders the importance and meaning of the birdcage when she asks, "But she must have had [a bird], or why would she have a cage?" (Glaspell 1232). By finding the empty cage, the women realize that something is missing from the scene, as well as from Minnie's life. Just as the bird cage is empty, so is Minnie's life. She has no children and is never allowed by her husband to leave the house to socialize with others. Because Minnie has, for her husband, given up her independence and personal life in which she was involved in church, choir, and women's groups, she lives a life of solitude. Her life is empty and lifeless, as she has no one to share it with. On the door of the cage, "one hinge is pulled apart [and it] looks as if someone must have been rough with it" (Glaspell 1232). The broken door of the bird cage reveals roughness and destruction that Minnie tolerates from her husband. Because of his hatred for the bird, John Wright tore the door off of the bird cage to terrorize the poor canary. The broken door leads the two women to the real-

ization that "John Wright was a domineering and psychologically abusive husband" (Kanthak 152). John Wright is rough not only toward the bird cage but also toward Minnie herself. Just like the cage, Minnie lives a broken life, separated from the rest of the world and forced to live a sad life, controlled by her husband. "When the men notice the cage [sitting on the table,] Mrs. Hale misleadingly speculates that a cat may have been at it" (Mustazza 495). Though she knows that the Wrights own no cats, Mrs. Hale creates this lie to protect the woman she barely knows but with whom she feels such a strong connection. Because the cage is empty and broken, it represents Minnie's life, empty of joy, friends, or children, and broken by Mr. Wright's abuse.

The women unexpectedly stumble across the most incriminating piece of evidence when they find a dead canary wrapped in a pretty box, symbolizing both Minnie Wright's depressing life and her motive for murdering her husband. The women compare Minnie Wright to the bird when they discuss Minnie's behavior: "She was kind of like a bird herself—real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and—fluttery" (Glaspell 1233). Just as John Wright killed the canary, he killed Minnie's spirit by depriving her of socialization, love, and care. When he killed the music of the bird, he also killed the music of the young choral Minnie Wright. "Through the traditional literary metaphor of the bird's song as the voice of the soul, the women acknowledge that John Wright not only killed Minnie's canary, but her very spirit" (Makowsky 62). Because the bird is being preserved and saved for burial in a pretty box, it is clear that this bird is close to Minnie's heart. As Minnie has been secluded in her home, the cheap canary has become her closest and only friend. "The pet was a kind of child-substitute for the solitary Minnie; the canary's voice was to displace the silence of a coldly authoritarian husband and replace the sounds of the unborn children" (Makowsky 62). By taking the life of Minnie's precious friend, John Wright commits a grave crime against his wife. She is angered beyond control and left

with a still and empty house. Mrs. Hale recognizes Minnie's pain when she states, "If there'd been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful—still, after the bird was still" (Glaspell 1235). After having nothing left to enjoy, Minnie becomes deeply distraught and makes the decision to kill her oppressive husband. While the crushed neck of the bird is connected with the crushed neck of the late John Wright, it symbolizes the crushed heart of Minnie, as she lost her only friend when her canary was killed. Just as John Wright "wrung-its-neck" (Glaspell 1233), Minnie Wright kills her husband by "slipping a rope around his neck [to] choke the life out of him" (Glaspell 1235). Not only does the canary represent Minnie's crushed heart with the death of her beloved bird, but it symbolizes her motive for murdering her husband.

It is through these small, everyday objects that Minnie Wright communicates to Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters, telling her story, full of pain. Each object, though it is evidence in John Wright's murder case, is symbolic of Minnie Wright's personality, troubles, emotions, and everyday life, along with the connections and reactions that the two wives have to Minnie's story. As the canned fruit represents Minnie's hard labor and Mrs. Hale's and Mrs. Peters's connection to her as a hard-working woman, the quilt shows Minnie's loneliness, frustration, and nervousness, and reveals the bond and protective silence of the two wives. The empty bird cage ruminates with sorrow and loneliness, while the dead bird symbolizes loss of self, pain, and motive for Minnie Wright's destructive actions. By finding these small pieces of evidence throughout the kitchen, the two women are able to gain an understanding of Minnie Wright's life, make connections with her story, and protect her. The symbolism throughout this short play reveals that it is "the tiny trifles of life—a neighbor's visit, a bird's song, the sewing of a quilt—[that] have profound reverberations" (Holstein 287). ❧

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SAIF QURAISHI

*Undone*

There really aren't enough hours in a day,  
I set out without much doubt,  
And I squeeze out from the sun every last ray.

The night soon blankets me all worn-out;  
So half-heartedly I tuck in to bed  
Thinking "tomorrow, I'll take a new route."

The sun's up before I can remove my bedspread,  
The atmosphere filled with haste,  
My head still full of lead;

Breakfast has no taste,  
Before I know which way I'm going  
My steps have retraced.

I'm back home barely blinking,  
There's more hair on my chin.  
Like yesterday I am wondering

How many tasks were left on a clothespin.  
Again, the cycle will soon begin.

*Work*

I wish there were a way to spend,  
My time in constant toil, hearken,  
For every day I do set out,  
With goals in mind,  
And pen in hand,  
But sitting down,  
My hand lies still,  
The agony is lacking thrill,  
To work into the ends of night,  
There is no urge,  
No shrieking drill,

So there I am,  
To my dismay,  
While fools make jest,  
And beggars pray,  
Dreading the passing hands of time,  
That work more proud than e'er did mine,  
Except in judging a worthless man,  
To whom I give no reprimand,

"My time is sacred," that I preach,  
For I am not a farmer's son—  
Destined to run his father's plot,  
Not burdened with matters of ink and quill,

Though I must ponder  
If on a scale,  
His side would tip,  
Further than mine,

Where he would work from dawn to dusk,  
I slept oft while the day was young.

### *Dissection*

The razor blade in my hand is sharp,  
Industrial strength sharp,  
Me keen on cutting him open,

At first the skin parts easily,  
Gushing formaldehyde,  
Revealing the wiring inside,

The smell did not bother me then.

I sliced Wilbur along his sagittal axis,  
Sawing through the rigid mandible,  
Beneath his tongue,

But an hour later,  
That textured stench,  
Puts me into nausea,  
Saturating my brain,

Never have I eaten pork,  
Flesh from garbage hungry beasts,  
But now I taste the raw meat,  
Urging to put it in my mouth,

The enormous liver,  
Protruding gallantly from the center,  
The heart surely beating at any moment,  
Certainly a primordial urge,

Science is too desensitized,  
This is meat.

### *India*

I remember once visiting the home of my parents.

Ramshackle rickshaws  
Shaking  
side to side  
like rodeo bulls  
without doors to keep you safe

and wild animals  
walking complacently  
along the paved dirt roads

I remember the  
suffocating air all around  
me  
tucking  
my  
nose  
into the collar of my shirt

while women trudge  
beneath the relentless

Sun

Their cargo  
resting neatly  
on their  
heads

I remember unfamiliar foods  
traveling  
straight  
through  
me

And rushing to relieve myself  
In a common toilet:

A hole

dug

deep

into the ground

I won't forget the lice  
Who made their nest on my scalp

Or the banter of

Outside the hungry mosquitos  
veil  
surrounding my bed

But most of all the  
hordes

of

poor

That one could never

Escape!

Even now I hear their pleas:  
"Baba!"

Little girls collecting coins

Their soiled saris  
outstretched

An elderly

woman  
absent  
all four  
limbs

Lain on a thin mat

Beside an empty cup

This was the home my parents knew  
And they loved it all the same.



NICK GRAHAM

*Memories*

The wind pounding at my window  
Reminds me of a childhood past  
Watching my parents become shadows  
As their hopes and dreams elapsed.  
Too many rainy days for a child to see.

The torrent winds always blew for me,  
Blowing between despair and failing hope.  
As I grew older, crouched beneath a tree,  
I learned to live on little affection, alone.  
Those long nights wandering astray.

Soon came my calm, sunny day.  
When it became clear who I am,  
And a stray flash of light came my way  
With celestial power, revealing where I stand.  
We must endure our storms behind trembling glass.

THOMAS DEPEW TANNER

*Loñicera*

Your pungent perfume  
parades in the wind after  
a fresh spring downpour.

White and gold petals  
like stars on the green carpet  
you capture the eye.

Droplets of spent rain  
you wear boldly as diamonds  
reflecting sun rays.

Petals soft in hand  
you invite the tongue's first taste  
of your sweet nectar.

Honeybee clusters  
Buzz overhead while the sun warms  
your fragrant body.

*Marital Paradox*

Jack and Jill went up the hill,  
To fetch themselves a man.  
Walter was the guy that caught Jack's eye,  
And Jill found a beau named Stan

Stan, it's been told, had the devil in his soul  
And soon took to cheating.  
When Jill dared to question about Stan's indiscretions,  
She would receive a beating.

Her brother Jack's fate, was more fortunate,  
For Walter had the soul of a saint.  
Walter was faithfully there, to give Jack his care,  
And love Jack without restraint.

Soon we find Jill, over-the-hill,  
And Stan leaving her for another.  
The divorce papers come, and Stan is long gone,  
Leaving Jill as a single mother.

Congratulations Stan, you married a woman,  
And have successfully reproduced.  
You have changed your address, but still continue your success  
With the new girl you've seduced.

Meanwhile Jack's love is going strong, and has been for so long,  
Yet it gets stronger everyday.  
But yet Jack and Walter have never married at the alter,  
It's just not the American way.

Their country says "Look here fellas, I'm here to tell ya,  
A man cannot marry a man,  
You guys need a new start, go find a sweetheart,  
And try to be more like Stan."

RYAN GOSLOWSKY

*Small Time Living*

The crack and hiss opens the can.  
Smoke, like small death hovers in a cloud,  
The thin red and blue fluorescents glow  
Dimly.  
Tom Waits sings "Down Town Train"  
My woman asks about my day.  
Broke back and slump shouldered,  
I watch the cherry pulse on inhale.  
She complains about my death.  
I say something witty, smile, and she grows  
More complacent with her small wishes of something different.  
The dance is mental now, and this place is  
Too crowded to swing you about.  
Just let me alone let me be  
A silent amnesty of your constancy.  
The forlorn horns sing the last note  
And the door opens to the street  
We blink at the reality, our eyes red rimmed,  
Our mouths thick, our dream not really gone.  
Like so many times before, I take her hand  
And spin her off the stool, she arches backwards into my arms.  
I smile and look down at her,  
Silently approving the prince she married  
With her eyes.  
We both know what it's really like,  
That's why we knew it was time  
To go.

AMANDA MCGREGOR

*Absences*

Poet adrift in a barren wordless void,  
monastic alienated from communal shelter,  
cellist whose shriveled fingers birth no sound—  
all wait to again resonate with the pulse of life.

Desperation permeates these yearning souls  
as they long for creation's breath restored,  
a grace to pierce this ruthless exile  
that they might emanate being  
lest seed wither to despair.

*For my mother, who said:  
'My life is like a train ride,  
I'm just waiting for it to be over.'*

### *The Train*

The train, mighty and determined,  
surges through the night  
shattering vestiges of uneasy sleep  
as a wake of unalterable fate

haunts its blind course.  
Futile protests elicit no deviation:  
cold motion perpetuates this callous  
mission toward an overdue end.

Won't you cease your steely insistence?  
Rumble these fragile walls no longer,  
grant rest to weary bodies,  
your force erodes our bones.

### *White Sands Ontology*

Alone, surrounded by absolute stillness,  
you dissolve into communion of sand and sky.  
The wind whispers: *surrender to sacred silence.*  
You let go, all peripheries vanish.

What lingers is pure being, absorbing  
you into the fullness of original creation.  
The purpose of simple existence is illuminated—  
to dwell effortlessly in divine solitude,

emptiness condensed and consecrated.  
This magnanimous presence has bestowed  
upon you its crystalline perfection,  
timeless shared secrets find sister abode.

An offering gently invites you  
to remember the eternal mystery  
whose abundance permeates your life,  
while sedulously the dunes loft

a boundless prayer into the world.

LUCILLE BIEBEL

*A Tip for the Waitress*

I stared victoriously at the omelet I had made all by myself—complete with odds and ends I'd scraped up from around the diner that I thought might be healthy for Melvin: mushrooms, tomatoes, low fat cheese (I supplied this myself from home), carrot slaw, and some spinach. I hadn't just stirred these things together; I had *built* this omelet. I'd picked up a few new tricks as a waitress at the Cornerstone over the last seven months—including a few bad habits—like cussing and smoking. I was also learning some new things too, mostly about the AARP, the local dairy farms, the sinking economy, and cows. But I smiled down at my omelet and tilted my head to the side with admiration, because I had officially learned how to cook something.

"What's all that shit in there?" Diana snarled as she brushed past me with dirty plates she had picked up from her table. I made a horrified face and pointed at the omelet.

"That *shit*, I'll have you know, is loaded with vitamins and fibers and things that will help lower Melvin's cholesterol. I think he will like it all."

Cheryl walked over to get a closer look and smiled.

"I can't say I'd eat the brown things, but it looks real pretty except for those. I can't see Boss eatin' that thing though. I don't see meat anywhere in it."

It was a wonder Melvin had managed to keep so much patience with us girls—especially Cheryl and Diana. They had been waitress-ing (as they called it) at Melvin's diner for nearly fifteen years, and they had been "just about ready to walk outta this place" at least once every day since I had been there. I rolled my eyes and picked up the plate.

"They are mushrooms. I diced them. They are good for you," I announced confidently. I really wasn't sure about that last part, but I knew they were better than the bacon and sausage clumps Melvin always dumped into everything he prepared for himself. I marched out of the kitchen with my healthy omelet.

Melvin was propped against the counter talking to one of his buddies who frequented the Cornerstone; seeing his big belly bounce underneath his apron as he laughed reminded me that I had done a nice thing, whether he liked it or not. He quickly stopped and looked down nervously at the plate I held out for him. He sighed.

"That's for me, isn't it?"

I smiled. "Uh-huh. I think you'll like it. I worked really hard, and it's full of healthy things that are good for you." I held the plate up higher so he could look closer, but he just looked over at his buddy and smiled.

"She's a sweetie, isn't she?" he said. He shook his head and took the plate.

"Thank you, Miss Melody," he smiled and reached under the counter for a fork to try my creation. "You are a sweet young lady." I smiled and started back towards the prep table to start on filling some salt shakers.

"And just where were you forty years ago when I was marrying the first of three wrong women, anyways?" he joked. I shook my head and smirked as I rounded the corner into the kitchen.

I sat down at the metal prep table and started on some salt shakers. Melvin's compliment lurked around in my mind for a while before I had the revelation that he was absolutely right.

I *would* make a nice wife. And maybe, just maybe, Michael would see that too someday. I was a very nice catch. I wasn't just side-line girlfriend material; I was a lady. I leaned my head down into the reflection of one of the metallic napkin holders and checked myself out for the first time that day. I frowned a little, unsatisfied with my messy hair-do. I adjusted the fly-away hairs

in my pony tail and pulled my long bangs out of my face with a bobby pin. My skin still looked a little weathered—from the cold weather and smoking, though I feared most of the blame was from the latter. I looked down and frowned at my pack of cigarettes. Those would have to go more sooner than later, I thought to myself.

Michael had made it so easy to feel like what we had was something really special. I squirmed a little as I thought about this, uncomfortable with how stale the words sounded. *Something really special*. I hadn't really been in love but one other time, and that boy would blurt out things about my boobs and my butt in front of his friends. We had broken up long before high school graduation. It hadn't been entirely his fault though, neither of us had really known what we were doing; we had run amok through each other's hearts weekly, just because we could.

Michael never made obvious comments like the other guys would. He would stare at me over the counter as I poured his coffee, forcing me to look up at him. I would frown usually, motioning for him to stop being so noticeable. But his eyes would always stay fixed in that desirable way—wide and focused, and he'd curve his mouth up into half a smile, like he was trying to say things to me without talking. He had much more experience than me with seducing people, and I tried to keep that in mind when he'd pull out his charms. Most of the time, though, his charms worked.

A regular gang of old men would come in at around eleven and babble about farming, unions, and other old-man subjects. Cheryl and Diana, who had known most of these fellows for nearly thirty years, didn't particularly care to wait on them so much. The gang would generally make their daily playful advances towards me and then follow up almost immediately with reverent odes to their beloved and patient wives back at home who had put up with them for so long. They always left a nice tip and slipped me a little extra to give Scott, the dishwasher. Even after the gang

would leave, I enjoyed mundane tasks like rolling silverware or filling the salt-shakers.

When the restaurant would slow and Melvin would run off to do errands and things, the remaining wait-staff would usually get listless and gossipy, and I'd inevitably strike up some thoughtful conversation about Michael. I'd provide vague details about things he would say and do, but I never told anyone his name. He was, after all, a regular customer in the diner. I'd ask for some advice, even though I didn't *really* want any, and they didn't *really* care to talk about a boyfriend I only gave hazy details about. Cheryl and Diana would each provide me a parallel, gritty testimonial of how they had dated men just like my so-and-so, and how my current relationship was doomed, and how all men were after one thing. My eyes would instantly dart over to Scott, and his face would flush red with embarrassment. I knew I only provided the details of our relationship that I *wanted* to think about. His telling me how gorgeous I was, how intelligent I was, how considerate and thoughtful—all sorts of things. He was always kissing me, breathing down my neck, panting out flattery that he reserved for when we were having sex. And afterwards too, I often reassured myself, which guys don't do if they only want sex. Even though his sugary compliments would mostly emerge in the throes of passion, I had known inside that he meant it. A person can't fake that sort of thing.

One detail I never brought up with Cheryl, Diana, and Scott—among other details about Michael—was the things he didn't say. He had never said before, outright, that he loved me. The only thing he had said very recently, in fact, was that he was a little worried about our relationship. "I'm scared," he had said, without looking at me. "I'm scared that I'm falling in love with you, and I'm really not in a place in my life to do that, Melody." I just shook my head and ignored it at the time. In my mind, after everything we had already accepted about each other (though it was *me* who

had done most of the accepting), there really wasn't much of a reason for us not to still be together.

The gang had left at about 12:15, and I had their tables spotless by 12:30. Cheryl and Diana were propped up against the counter on their side of the restaurant, whispering closely to each other. Occasionally they excluded me from their conversations, but it didn't really hurt my feelings. I knew it was nothing personal. I tossed my used rags in the dirty towel pile in the kitchen and poked Scott in his rib.

"Wanna smoke?" I asked, shoving my hands in my apron pockets.

He was scraping the grill for Melvin, who had run off to the janitorial supply for more cleaning supplies.

"Yeah, now would be a good stopping point." He looked over at me and smiled, and then jumped up suddenly and turned around.

"No it wouldn't!" Diana peeked around Scott's shoulder and grinned. "Melody's got a table."

I threw my head back and exhaled. "First of all, you pinch Scott's butt entirely too much, and second of all, isn't it your turn? Or Cheryl's? I just had the entire gang to myself, *and* bussed their tables."

She straightened up and propped her hand on her waist. "First of all, I'll pinch his butt when I wanna. You're just jealous. And second of all, it's your turn. The lady wants smoking, and you wanted to work smoking today. Not my fault, girly."

She shrugged defensively and rounded the corner to reassume her post at the counter with Cheryl. Diana had clearly been a beautiful girl once, like Cheryl—but time, heartache, and nicotine had obviously had their way with both women. I released my cigarettes in my apron, reconsidering my smoke-break.

Scott looked back at me and smiled. "Later," he offered.

I rolled my eyes and marched back towards the counter to get some silverware for my customer. I stopped suddenly when I

noticed that my customer was a stunningly beautiful woman in black. Her hair was dark, and she wore a soft tweed black coat, a black turtle-neck dress, black tights, and black pointed boots that came up to her knees. She sat with elegant posture, regal as a statue, gazing thoughtfully out the window into the snowy intersection. I followed her gaze and noticed a large black Mercedes sedan sitting in the lot, and I knew it had to be hers. She wasn't from around here.

"Hi there," I said cheerfully, flashing a big smile.

"Hello," she said quietly, not looking up at me.

"My name is Melody, and I'll be taking care of you this morning. Can I get you some coffee?"

Finally the woman broke her gaze away from wherever she had been staring and looked up at me. I was startled to see that her pretty dark eyes were an icy green, blazing up at me from behind elegantly placed make-up. From her composure and the faintest wrinkles at the corners of her eyes, I could guess she was forty-something.

"Yes, please," she answered quietly. She quickly looked away, and folded her hands together on the table. She looked nervous, or upset. Or something.

"Yes ma'am," I offered politely. I quickly made my way behind the counter towards the clean cups and began pouring her some coffee. I kept my head down but let my eyes drift up towards her so I that could look some more.

"Wow," I muttered to myself softly. I couldn't help but stare at how pretty she was. I walked around the counter and brought her coffee.

"Did you need any cream or sugar or anything like that?"

She looked down at her coffee and looked back out the window.

"No, black is fine, thank you."

"Will you be eating this afternoon? Or just coffee?" I offered eagerly.

"No thanks, just coffee today."

I wanted her to look at me and at least smile. I had spent a lot of time making friends with strangers in that diner, people who needed someone to talk to. Particularly women who had just left their husbands—or women who had just been left by their husbands—scorned and chain-smoking and slouched against the wall, just waiting for me to ask what was wrong.

"Oh, you don't have an ashtray," I noticed immediately. This got her attention, and she looked up at me. Her face was stern and serious, and our eyes locked.

Finally, she let the right side of her mouth turn up into part of a smile that didn't touch her eyes.

"I don't smoke," she said politely. Her velvety voice was smooth and sexy, and I found myself strangely idolizing this woman with each minor exchange we shared. She was majestic, like some sort of queen.

"Oh. Well, do you want to move to non-smoking?" I offered dumbly. I couldn't quite figure out why I was still talking at this point, when it was abundantly clear that I had nothing to offer her except the coffee I had already brought to her table.

Her face remained in that patient, sexy half-smile, and her eyes drifted in a thoughtful, listless shape.

"No. Thank you, Melody," she said sweetly. "I'm fine right here, thanks."

She maintained her polite composure, but I could see she wanted to be left alone. I nodded my head obediently and turned towards the kitchen.

"Men will say anything to get some," Cheryl grumbled without looking back over her shoulder. I had expected a surly comment like that from her, but it still stung inside. I looked over at Scott for some kind of comfort. He tilted his head to the side and smiled sympathetically.

"I'm sure he really does like you," he said. "Usually if a guy doesn't like you, he doesn't try to be all nice and shit like girls do. If he doesn't want you around, he doesn't come around. But you say he calls *you*, and visits *you* a lot, right?" he asked hopefully.

I nodded. "Yeah."

"And it's not always when he's gonna get some, is it?"

I looked down and thought about it.

"I mean, not immediately," I said limply.

Scott pretended that this was a good indicator. "Okay then."

I looked back up at him, and he smiled at me and turned to go back to mopping the floor in front of the fryers. I smiled a little, touched by his desperate effort to console me. His back was broad, and I watched his shoulder blades roll under his thermal shirt as he shoved the mop across the floor. He really was nice to look at. He turned back towards me and stared for a minute with a concerned look on his face. I tensed, childishly concerned that he had heard my thoughts.

"You sure there isn't more to this guy than you're letting on?" he asked skeptically. I looked down and thought about what to say.

"Yes, there is a little more," I huffed and threw my head back. Scott straightened up and propped himself against the mop, waiting for the little more I had to tell.

"He's older than me," I said, and threw my arms up in the air. He made a face.

"That's not always such a big deal," he reminded me. "How much *older* are we talking about?"

I shook my head and glanced around the diner. Cheryl and Diana were talking closely, one was clearly consoling the other, though I wasn't sure whose turn it was today. The only customer we had now was the beautiful woman in black, and she was in her own world. I looked down.

"He's forty-three."

"Really?"



"Yes."

He shook his head and looked away, and finally stood up straight and went back to mopping. He wanted to say something, but he didn't have anything to say. The silence said plenty.

"You think I'm a slut or something," I finally announced. He didn't look up.

"No," he said finally. "I just think you should watch yourself."

I thought for a second about things I could reply with, ways to agree with him as if I had already considered the risks of dating an older man, but I kept my mouth shut and rolled the rest of the silverware. I snatched the rag next to me and polished each piece meticulously—each fork, knife, and spoon, wiping away any spot left from the dishwasher. I wanted to assure Scott that Michael was different—he wasn't using me or something, and that he had been completely honest with me from the beginning. Well, not from the beginning, but he could have just never told me like some jerks might have. Besides, he had paid to replace the transmission in my car, he had offered to pay my first semester's tuition in college—all things I had never asked him to do for me. Things he just *wanted* to do.

I had noticed Scott's sneaky peaks down my shirt and his long stares in my peripheral vision before, but he had an honest charm about him. I had often caught Scott putting food out for a stray cat we had unofficially adopted as the diner pet, until she had run off a few months before. He hadn't said anything when Diana had casually suggested that Cornerstone's kitty had either been knocked up or flattened out, but Scott had clearly held some sort of devout loyalty in his heart for even the most insignificant, potentially whore-ish stray kitty cat.

In addition to the incredible hurt I felt from knowing that Scott would probably re-think his admiration for me, I shuddered with shame as I remembered the other terrible truth I had withheld from him.

Michael was married.

I frowned and kept rolling the silverware. Michael had always reassured me that I didn't need to ever think about that part. He had kept it from me for so long, until he finally broke down and told me that he was, in fact, married. He respected me, he had said, which was why he had decided to tell me. Otherwise, there would have been no real reason for me to know. By this time, he had done so much for me, and I was already crazy about him; I hardly accepted the news lightly, but he had assured me that nothing was my fault.

And I didn't know much about a marriage, anyways. My only glimpse of marriage was the failed one between my parents where my mother had run off, and now this ambiguous one between Michael and his wife. I didn't know much about her, but Michael didn't seem too worried about her when he was with me, so why was it my job to do the worrying? I wondered about her sometimes, in the way that she had once caught his eye, like I had, and now they were unhappy. But the way he doted on me, he made me feel like I was the brightest thing in his life. I was eighteen—I didn't have a husband to go home to. Just my Dad. So, while he sorted himself out, I had told myself to be patient.

My eyes darted up quickly towards Scott, and I watched him shove the mop across the floor some more. The string around his apron was coming loose. Normally I'd walk over and tie it up nicely for him, and he would stop whatever task he was doing and stand perfectly still, all except for his steady breathing, so I could tie his apron string into a pretty bow. Instead, I sat there. Forcefully rubbing a bent fork spotless, watching the string dangle between his thighs. My stomach felt tense and I quickly looked down. I could feel my face and my neck flush with heat. I wanted to scream. I had never felt more torn between two desires in my entire life—I wanted more than anything to walk over to Scott and slap his face for making me feel so stupid about Michael, even if he hadn't meant to. I also wanted, more than anything, to walk over and tie his apron string.

Apparently, my ferocious silverware project had become louder, because Scott turned around again with a confused look on his face.

"Hey," he asked apprehensively, "you okay?"

I stopped for a moment to compose myself without looking up. I realized that I had been on the verge of making a scene—with my red face, heavy breathing, and loud clanking of immaculate silverware. I took a deep breath and picked up another fork to scrub.

"Tie your apron," I finally said.

Scott set his mop down and walked over to the other side of the prep-table to face me.

"Look—"

"No," I interrupted. "It's fine, it's not your fault that I'm crazy. If I didn't want advice, I shouldn't have asked you. Simple as that."

"Look," he started again. "Don't listen to me. You know him, I don't. He might be different, maybe he really does care about you. I've never even met the guy before, so how would I know anything?"

I winced. Michael had been Scott's least favorite customer for a long time now.

"Yeah," I answered absently. "I don't know, it's stupid. I don't know why I always bring it up, it's so dumb." I quickly looked past Scott over the counter to check on my customer.

"Huh." I scoffed.

"What?" Scott asked, willing to change the subject.

"That lady left." I squinted to see if there was any money on the table, and frowned when I saw some. "That was rude."

"People do that all the time."

I shrugged. "Yeah, I know. I just tried really hard to be nice to her. She didn't even, like, try to be nice back. Whatever."

"She was hot, though," Scott blurted playfully.

I smiled. "Yeah, she was. Hopefully I'll look like that someday."

He raised his eyebrows and went back to mopping.

"You might, if you quit smoking."

I rolled my eyes and smiled as I made my over to the table to clean it off.

"Workin' on it," I said over my shoulder. I felt better already, with things back to the way they were between me and Scott. I didn't want to talk about Michael anymore. I wasn't so sure I really wanted to think about him anymore, either.

The table was just the way I had left it, minus the woman who had sat there. The coffee was right where I had set it—when I went to pick up the cup, the coffee swirled inside, revealing a brown ring where it had settled. The cup was cold and there was no sign of lipstick. The woman had not touched her coffee.

My stomach tightened when I noticed what she had left behind—I stared at the crisp hundred dollar bill for a solid minute before I pushed it aside and picked up the neat, folded white paper sitting underneath. I opened the paper, and scrawled across it in two neat, even lines was the woman's handwriting.

*Please do not see my husband anymore.  
Miranda Leighland*

I caught my breath, and my body froze. I looked up into the snowy parking lot for any sign of her, but she was gone. Only soft, even tire marks in the snow from her Mercedes. Miranda Leighland. Michael Leighland's mysterious, regal, goddess of a wife. ☞

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*Garden Sonnet*

The flora did not suffer a disease.  
Roses, four leaf clovers by the pound,  
and in my garden I kept sturdy trees.  
A fire burned my garden to the ground.  
I don't know how he found my sacred spot,  
I thought I'd kept it hidden safe and sound.  
But there I stood in ruins and in rot,  
my crafty vigilante not around.  
And even though he set fire to my garden,  
I loved my offender all the same.  
I still don't know how one learns how to harden,  
I was no contender for that game.  
But justice is not something I'll explore,  
for wild blooms grow where they were not before.

DANIELLE HUSBAND

*First Snow*

Along the roadside smiling when I pass  
Each dressed in white just like the one before,  
I count their rounded figures on the grass  
Where snow had gathered with the bleached décor.

With carrots, twigs, and buttons topped with hats  
They cheer the cutting winter morning cold  
Until we can bring down our thermostats  
And nature's fallen blanket starts to fold.

The fleeting moments melt into the past  
As morning turns to sunny afternoon,  
Their brightness just too innocent to last.  
Returning home the night feels out of tune—  
No friendly faces waiting to be found  
Since earth's brief drape has sunk into the ground.

*Haiku in a Concrete Jungle*

I. Nature's Alarm Clock

Rooster crows morning:  
A busy intersection  
Outside my window

II. Parking Lot

Discarded bread crumbs  
Satisfy curious birds  
Scavenging the lot

III. Into the Wilderness

Survival training:  
Office coffee pot drained  
On Monday morning

IV. An Afternoon Shower

A summer sprinkler:  
Balmy water refreshes  
The droughty flowers

V. A Hungry Herd

Grazing for dinner:  
Salad bar offers veggies,  
Fruit, and sweet desserts

VI. For Those Who Survive

Friday afternoon  
Cars stampede away from  
Corporate predators

*Addition*

Cracked.  
Home not broken,  
Not whole.

Patched together  
With scotch tape  
And taffy,  
The pieces hold  
Their original shape  
Just slightly.

Until.

A new piece.

Pressed against  
With chewed  
Bubblegum,  
Sucking the hold  
From the makeshift seams.

Parasite.

Attacking each cell.  
Every Holiday.  
Birthday.  
Family gathering.

Dry.

*Naked in the Hotel Room Across From Ours*

You tugged your nightshirt over your head,  
And plump breasts bobbed into place.  
Your skin was still pale  
Before the days on the beach,  
And your hips curved like a paper lantern.  
Standing in just your purple lace panties,  
You brushed your mousy hair  
With a wistful expression  
On your sleepy face.

I looked.

*Memories of Galveston Island Before the Storm*

From the seawall  
The Hotel Galvez  
Rises above the Gulf,  
History painted on the sky.

Tourists float across the boulevard,  
While honking cars zig and zag  
As drivers look for parking,  
Eats,  
Or curse the out-of-towners.

Murdoch's Bathhouse and  
Mermaid's Pier  
Jut into the Gulf on  
Stilts rising from the sand and waves  
Like Popsicle sticks  
In a clumsy art project.  
Inside are trinkets and t-shirts,  
But also a special space  
Quiet despite its surroundings.

A connective pier with  
Deck chairs scattered near the edge  
Provides a theater whose  
Feature film is  
Simply the sea.

*Contributors*

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## Publish your work in *Pulse*!

*Pulse* is a student publication exhibiting the work of student writers and is printed at the end of each spring semester. Entries are judged by an editorial student staff and award winners are selected by a panel of faculty members with cash prizes awarded in each category. Entries are due the first Monday of each April but may be submitted any time.

- 1 All entries must be typed in Times or Times New Roman and in 12 point font. Fiction and essay entries must be double spaced and not exceed 3000 words.
- 2 Remove your name from all entries. (Only the submission form should have the author's name.) All judging is anonymous.
- 3 Turn all entries in together with a completed submission form to Maes 04 or the *Pulse* mailbox in the Maes Liberal Arts Building. **Entries will not be returned.** In a single packet, include:
  - ✓ four (4) printed copies of each entry; do not include two entries on a single page
  - ✓ an electronic copy (.doc, .rtf, or .txt extensions only) of all entries on a compact disc (CD) or flash drive
  - ✓ as many as ten (10) entries in any combination of types of work (form poetry, non-form poetry, short fiction, essay, or foreign language translation).

Additional forms are available in the Maes Liberal Arts Building in offices 04 and 08.



## Submission Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Student ID \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Major \_\_\_\_\_ Classification \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address \_\_\_\_\_

List all entries by title and category (fiction; essay; translation; if submitting poetry, specify "form" or "non-form").

Title	Category
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Follow the instructions on the back of this form to submit your work for publication. Entries that do not include all print and electronic copies in appropriate formats may be disqualified.

*Poet adrift in a barren wordless void,  
monastic alienated from communal shelter,  
cellist whose shriveled fingers birth no sound—  
all wait to again resonate with the **pulse** of life.*

—Amanda McGregor, "Absenses"

