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Pulse

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**Department of English and Foreign Languages
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the family of Eleanor Perlstein Weinbaum

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Awards

- Eleanor Poetry Award** for best overall poem
Beverly Williams, "Wildflowers are Free"
- Barnes Poetry Award** for best poem in traditional form
Gayla Chaney, "To Drive to Flint Again"
- de Schweinitz Poetry Award** for best poem in open form
B. Herrington, "Teaching"
- Rowe Poetry Award** chosen by Pulse staff
Melissa Hudler, "Life Drawing"
- Pulse Fiction Award** for best short fiction
Stacey Norwood, "At the Millennium"
- Pulse Translation Award** for best foreign language translation
Clayton Miller, "Romance of the Moon, Moon"

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Eleanor Poetry Award

Wildflowers are Free

She kneels beside the stream, long skirts
trailing, gathering a wildflower rainbow
in her apron, then plods homes, inhaling
their sweet perfumes while their morning
dewiness seeps through the faded cloth.

Buttercups, lazy daisies, and purple
verbena standing in an old fruit jar
ornament a kitchen that has lost
all trace of paper and paint.
Wild irises in a green depression
glass vase color her small parlor
with its threadbare sofa that
hints of multi-hued tapestry.
Delicate pink and white phlox
in a blue willow coffee cup
adorn the tiny nursery where
a newborn briefly slept.
The scarlets and fiery oranges
brighten the chamber where
she celebrated love in
all its fierce burning.

Beverly Williams

Barnes Poetry Award

To Drive to Flint Again

To drive to Flint again would be my dream—
if I allowed myself to wander from
this institution I now call my home.
At ninety-three, to wander is a dream,
a fantasy where I am free to run.
“Escaped old woman on the loose. Beware!
Last seen in blue housecoat and fuzzy slippers,
she answers to most anything at all:
Hey you! Old Gal! Grandma! It doesn’t matter.
She’s past the point of mother, wife or friend.”
They won’t inform the public that I’m harmless
because they fear that part might not be true.
They’ve seen me throw a plate across my room
to watch creamed spinach splatter on the wall.
I may be old, but Jackson Pollocks’ art
reverberates within my heart and head
and on my wall sometimes, when I’m inspired.
They’ve labeled me as senile and I don’t argue.
Why dignify their error with debate?
I’d rather spend my time in contemplation
of the palette I might find in my next meal.
Most artists live their lives misunderstood,
or so I’ve always heard, and that’s a comfort
since the nursing staff refuses to acknowledge
the masterpieces done on their behalf,
preferring instead, to classify my paintings
as tantrums while they wash away my work.
Oh, if I could steal a car and find a highway,
I’d drive due north to Flint to kiss the stone
that hides the man I used to love and then...
I’d turn the car around and head for home.

Gayla Chaney

High Noon

It falls from lofty angles, illuminating galvanized lampposts,
heating up dark, asphalt streets, casting shadows with
its brightness. Sun visors, baseball caps, even sombreros
cannot block the reflection that is everywhere,
spotlighting our cities, our towns, our quiet spans of emptiness:
All that is America.

Millions of traveling photons, scanning skies, glaring at our
night-washed secrets, flapping on clotheslines in the
middle of the day, undergarments, over-garments, strung like
flags across Main Street, displayed for any eye to see,
on the front pages of the Daily News or on television networks:
A blaring, mirrored megaphone.

We are not allowed to hide our sins, our virtues, our least
becoming pose. Even our weakest moments are
examined by our enemies, our allies, our children’s children and
their friends. Documented accounts flash on screens in
brilliant hues—It’s High Noon
twenty-four hours a day.

Gayla Chaney

de Schweinitze Poetry Award

Teaching

Mothers teach their sons
To weep like David
Fathers teach their sons
To put their tears
In hidden places.

My Mother taught me
To draw Heaven and Angels
On a great scroll and call it
GOD.

My Father taught me
To see the swallows and bats
That in the evening
Gather over mown fields,
Making long, suspicious swoops.

A rotund, red-faced evangelist
Ripped through town
And shouted that Hell
Is a fierce whore
With a wide mouth
Full of rotten teeth.

My grandmother
Inadvertently demonstrated
That dying is as simple as
Getting old
Or falling asleep.

The Son of Man
Taught me that faith
Is a cobweb-
Strong in its own way,
But broken by the wind.

Walking alone in the dusky fields
Where bats and swallows swoop,
I surely know that I prefer
The lessons learned at home.

B. Herrington

The Evening Paper

The Evening Paper comes
When the eastern sky is rent,
Straight down its middle,
Exposing its solar heart,
Ripped cleanly like so much
Uninvited mail-
Subscriptions
To *Beekeeper's Monthly*,
The Home Journal
For Today's Single Woman
(How to find a man,
What they want, and
What they like. The all new
Recipe for carrot cake),
And the *Southern Horse Rider's*
Circular.

She, standing by the stove,
Moving her bed slippers quietly
On the green linoleum floor,
Steams her coffee and hums
Inaudibly almost.
Dammit if there's no
Cream for the coffee,
She thinks and sways
Her cat-faced head,
Pony-tail sashaying to and fro.

At the door, a thump,
As if a pouting, clumsy child
Has fallen in the doorway.
She opens the door
To the thin cool-hotness
Of Summer's night air-
Amalgamation of rustled leaves,

Scent of lightning looming distant
And grass grown too high.
She observes how nice
The lawn appears
When the grass is free.

The Evening Paper rests
In the doorway, tightly rolled,
Like a swaddled babe.
She takes it up in her arms
And strolls to her rocking chair-
Aunt Emmie's old one,
Been in the family for years,
Maybe fourth generation.

"And in the news
This evening-
Thousands dead
And more divorced,
Others found in roadside
Ditches, settling in their blood,
Slightly unprepared for their
Demise.
But on the lighter side-
The Ladies Society
For Biblical Conscience
Announces this evening
A program in the gymnasium
Of St. Joseph's School:
A lecture by the Very
Most Reverend Theo. Moore
Entitled
**'THE POPISH DUNGHILL
OF DETESTABLE ENORMITIES.'**
And do stay afterwards
For cold meats on rye bread,
Cold tea and strawberry cake.

See Lady Eloise
For more details."
Enough of this useless
Conversation-
Words that tell nothing,
Pictures that shout enough
To make the eyes bleed.
She folds up the paper
And hurls it to the rug,
Disturbing Mr. Bloom,
the calico cat.
He sets himself
Up on haunches
And sulks off
Toward the cold-floored
Kitchen.
Only later, of course,
To return and caress
Her tired legs.

B. Herrington

A Different Life

When Sammy and Della
Got an apartment on the river front
They paused on the Seventh Day
And said,
"It is good."

Sammy played the hell
Out of their clunky upright,
Scattering his furious songs
On the linoleum floor.

"Play that once more
For your Honey,"
Della said.

Sweet, thin thing
Was she, slinking
By the bay window,
Perpetually reading.

"Oh, that Brahms is fine,
Big fine chords
And sweet, sweet melodies.
Play that once more
For your honey."

October, November, December
Rolled in a helpless,
Tumbling fall.

Invariably,
Her pillow fell quiescent
Like an angel to the floor,
Because her head was slumbering
On his chest.

That is where she heard his songs-
They sonorously churned
In his chest.

And in the mornings
Before the apartment
Was fragranced with coffee
And eggs made on the stove,
He sleepily held his head
Against her breast,
Listening to her words
And small regrets.
They should have been there
Sooner, resting so
In Solitude's repose.

B. Herrington

Rowe Poetry Award

Life Drawing

Here she is
on your silk-
shrouded table.
Here, boneless,
for you to pose.
Should she lie
on her side?
Pull her knees
to her chest?
Close her eyes?
Suck her thumb?
When you turn
to sharpen pencils,
gulp instant peach tea,
she rummages
through your pad
to see herself
cartooned into tits
and ass and wonders
when you'll learn
to draw her face.
She smiles a secret:
if she flips the pages
quickly enough,
She can stand up
and walk away.

Melissa Hudler

In the Iron Quarry

sitting
forearms pressed
on granite thighs
eyes close
head hangs

He rises

deep inhale fills
dry mouth
hands
wrap iron
nails
puncture palms
eyes
worship raw
reflection

He strikes

veins bulge
muscles quiver
beneath bronze
shimmering skin
exhale
He chisels

Himself
mythical ecstasy
stone
artist
art

Melissa Hudler

Praise

If I stand on the roof of the church, he told me,
God will hear me better. And if I bow my head,
raise my hands and flail them about, He'll take me
more seriously.

"So if I stand on the bed and bounce like a drunk
doing jumping jacks," I asked him, "you'll take me
more seriously?"

His smirk and arched eyebrow told me
either he thought I was comparing him to God,
or he'd like to see me jump up and down naked.
Since then

I've stopped praying out loud.

(God bless this house, this marriage, my impure thoughts)
I've realized recited words won't do anymore.

We're past simplicity, past taking each other's words
as gospel. We'll get back to that when we're too tired
to get excited, when we can sit silently
across from one another—the venerable man and woman
who watch each other's eyes fade.

Melissa Hudler

Trespassing on Insanity

Where's that state of mind
that breeds poetic genius?
I've flipped
through my alphabetized anxieties
but I can't find it. Maybe if I slam
my file drawers a little harder
needed chaos would come.
But I'm in a square room sitting
at a square desk looking
out of a square window tapping
my pen on square paper waiting
(tap tap) for (tap tap) madness.
I can only trespass on it
because it's not mine.
It belongs to the crooked pictures
that antagonize me from restaurant walls,
to the intrusions of instant coffee
in my sister's sugar bowl,
to the erratic branch that taps
on my bedroom window.

Someone please tell the little brat
it's not *cheese* and macaroni!

Hey You
you raving madman
who smashed his windows
last night with bare fists
who warned me the Nazi-dog
would bite me
who howled at the government
satellite above His house

let me in.

Melissa Hudler

Warning to a Romantic

He who has paper,
he who has a quill pen,
he who can rhyme you with her
is a poet.
He who has a soft voice,
he who has spare time,
he who owns a thesaurus
is a poet.
But knowing what shines brighter
than the sun
and what tastes sweeter
than cherries
doesn't make him the bard
of your blank face.
Composing iambic lines
to the ticking of a metronome
doesn't license him to synchronize
the beating of your hearts.
Packing Roget in his pocket
doesn't justify his surplus of words.
How many synonyms does he know
for *only* and *you*?

Melissa Hudler

Impostor

I'm waiting
slump-shouldered, cross-legged, caffeinated,
waiting for the ominous voice behind the beard
to resurrect death from an ocean,
to mummify life in a melting candle.
In clove-scented fog, I silently dare him
to prove my first look was more sensual
than my first touch.
With closed eyes, I beg him to teach me
why metaphors are the best way to explain
an old man's lust:
*Forget human nature. Consider a Spanish fly
trapped in a bottle of whiskey.*
His words slice the haze and suck me
into his tongue-wet vortex,
but I feel more in the way his mustache flutters
when he says *petrified, panacea, penetrate.*
I hear more in the way he waves his demanding hand
to stress each word in the opening and closing lines
as if to say, *Savor this like stuffed mushrooms
and Grande Marnier, an elegant beginning and end
to a gut full.*
I swallow greedily and pick at what I can't finish.
He's done. I smile when he looks my way
and discreetly scrape the leftover philosophy
from under my nails.

Melissa Hudler

A Parenthetical View

Everyday events like conversations
in living rooms, changing positions
on sofas, and water rings forming
on coffee tables
become metaphorical musings
when a poet peeks through windows.
Words become seed offerings.
Uncrossing of legs promises acceptance.
Water rings bring temporary eternity.
Conversations plant relationships
that root on both sides of coffee tables,
wind around legs, and bloom
until the iced tea is gone
and no more water drips
from the bottom of cups.

A couple stagnates at the kitchen table.
The paper didn't come, there's only one egg,
and she bought orange juice with pulp.
He hates it, but that's all the store had
she swears. Coffee's weak.
It's Colombian, so it shouldn't be.
Let a poet sip it, and she'll swear
the marriage is over.

As he rushes, a loose thread catches
on a nail, his sweater unravels
along the bottom.

*(Snag a few more and you're home free.
Just be careful where you throw your tie
when you get home. If it lands on her pillow,
you're not going anywhere.)*

Melissa Hudler

Everybody Else's

She makes room for everyone
when she remembers to push
her books off the bed.
Give her a minute.
She'll want to smooth the sheets
before you crawl in
because women hate wrinkles
and men don't like anything
coming in between.
Look at her feet.
She paints her toenails
with everyone's favorite colors.
They'll soon be black.
Listen to her voice.
She sings everyone's special lullaby.
She'll soon be incoherent.
Try to lose yourself in her eyes.
If there's white around the iris,
she has room left for you.

Melissa Hudler

Pulse Fiction Award

At The Millennium

Smoke curled upward and haloed just above her head as the young woman emptied her glass of Malibu and Coke. Digging through the melting ice, two slender fingers grasped the stem of the cherry resting at the bottom of the glass. She ate the cherry, rolling it on her tongue for a few minutes, as she slid the empty glass to the table's edge. It clinked with the other two already waiting there. The club was already packed tonight. Usually it didn't starting jumping until midnight. Drumming her red nails on the black marble tabletop, she looked around for a waitress to take the empty glasses away.

She never ordered from waitresses. It was always best to get drinks straight from the bartender. That way you get to know the person who makes your drinks and, if you tip well, they aren't stingy with the good stuff. Besides, tonight Ben was working. If the club wasn't too busy, Ben always had time to talk. Plus, he wasn't bad to look at either. She took a slow drag off the cigarette that had been burning away in her hand. Head tilted back with eyes closed, she let the smoke drift out to join the silver-gray haze hanging just above the club's patrons. Swaying slightly to the music's throbbing beat, she sang the words in her head, "Once I ran to you, now I run from you. This tainted love you give me I've given all a boy could give you..." She had a slight buzz going and decided to enjoy how she was feeling. Club Millennium was the place to be in downtown Clarksville. It took up an entire street block between San Jacinto and Park. She liked to spend at least one night here if not two or three on the weekends. The relaxed, smoky atmosphere helped her relax after a week full of dealing with the public.

Opening her eyes, she focused on the dance floor a few feet away. Red and blue lights flashed in sync with the music. Strobe lights flickered on and off, flaring occasionally to emphasize particular notes. As with most clubs in Texas, a few cowboy hats floated among the crowd gyrating on the black and white

tiles that made up the dance floor of the Club Millennium. While, to her, there was nothing wrong with a real cowboy, the ones who just played at it got on her nerves. And it was always easy to tell the difference. She took a quick drag and exhaled as the song was ending. She noticed that there were a lot of people on the floor already. According to her pager, it was only ten thirty. Free drinks were still on. She never even thought about getting on the floor until at least eleven.

Examining the small groups scattered over the floor, she noticed a gangly cowboy dancing with a tiny Barbie doll-like girl. Taking another pull off her cigarette, she watched them and rolled her eyes. The poor girl's face was pressed into his belt buckle, which appeared to weigh as much as he did. His brightly colored shirt was an eyesore even in the dark with its orange, electric blue and white vertical stripes. This particular cowboy seems to have no rhythm, she thought, watching him thrust his pelvis and wiggle his hips while keeping his knees bent and grasping his four-foot tall girlfriend's behind. She figured that he must think he was being provocative. She shook her head, trying not to laugh out loud. The song playing now was one of those crappy disco-dance beat remakes that made her gag. Crushing her cigarette in the ashtray, she decided to get another drink.

Making her way toward the stairs to the club's second level, Anna looked around the club. It was hard to imagine that this place wasn't here just two years ago. The owners tore down the warehouse that previously housed a shipping company that went belly up and built the club, much to the displeasure of the downtown small business owner's association. They were unsure about the crime element that usually came along with a night club, but when all night coffee shops and trendy clothing stores started popping up in the area they stopped complaining. Now two years after the Millennium's opening, Fifth Avenue was an entertainment strip with a piano bar along with a blues and jazz club added to the two coffee houses and the two story Barnes & Noble bookstore. Now downtown was the place to be. And she, along the students that attended Lee College there in Clarksville, thanked the Lord for this place. Before the

Millennium opened, the only thing to do in Clarksville was hang out at the Sonic or make out at the old abandoned drive-in movies. The thought of making out made Anna look around furtively. She hoped to God that Dave wasn't at the club tonight. That was one guy she hoped to avoid.

Anna really dug the gothic cathedral motif. The club's owners really did the place up right; complete with stained glass windows and a large chandelier over the main bar. In keeping with the gothic motif, the club was also adorned with gargoyles presiding over the crowd from ten-foot pedestals. Anna had named them Stinky, Scarface, Moe, and Tito. Tito had always been her favorite Jackson brother.

Many of the walls had huge arched insets. Some of them were painted sky blue with fluffy white clouds floating by and others were painted black with the moon and stars in bright yellow. The black lights in the club made the clouds and other heavenly bodies glow. The main bar was located on the back wall in the largest arch. Anna watched the three bartenders behind the black marble counter scurry back and forth grabbing bottles from the several rows on the shelves. People crowded around as they hurriedly poured drinks.

Ben usually manned one of the registers at that bar, but tonight he was running the bar upstairs on the balcony that wound around the upper part of the club. The balcony put you on eye-level with Stinky and the boys. The DJ booth was also upstairs. The atmosphere was even more relaxed up there. Purple velvet couches lined the walls and chairs lined the railing for those who wanted to look out over the happenings below. Upstairs, she noticed that the bar was almost as empty as the balcony itself. Two guys were getting beers. They laughed and clapped each other on the back over some private joke. Ben evidently did not share their humor, because he rolled his eyes when he noticed her coming toward the bar. As she reached the bar, the two guys were leaving. She felt one of them grab her arm. She turned to see who it was. Dave smiled. She smiled back, suppressing a groan.

"Hey, Anna. How've you been?" he said in her ear as he wrapped his arms around her waist.

Pushing his hands away and stepping back a few steps, she said, "I'm fine. How about you?" He wore the same tight black jeans and stripped button-down sweater vest. Tonight though he wore a white T-shirt underneath. Last time he hadn't worn anything under his vest. She wasn't sure which was worse. The T-shirt's sleeves sculpted his toned biceps. As he stumbled toward her, she smelled alcohol.

"Hey, you know me. I'm always great," he slurred, wrapping his arms around her waist again. He pulled her close, kissed her neck, and ran his tongue up to her ear to growl, "So, when we going to get together again?"

"I don't know. Maybe I'll call you sometime." She managed to push away enough to look at him. A black curl had fallen onto his forehead over his left eye. He was smiling; his eyes half closed. She had been here before. His hand was caressing her stomach. It had somehow made its way under her shirt. Quickly, she stepped out of his reach, throwing him slightly off balance, and leaned against the bar.

"OK, you still got my pager number, right?" he said, running his hand through his black curls. "Save me a dance later?"

"Sure," she said and turned toward Ben's smiling blue eyes. "Hey, Ben."

"Jesus, I don't know how you put up with meatheads like that." He had already filled a glass with ice and was pouring Malibu into it, while splashing Coke over the rising level of coconut rum.

"Oh, I don't know. Guys like him have their uses." She pulled her pack of Marlboro Reds from her pocket, took out her lighter and lit up, inhaling and exhaling quickly several times while she tried to stop her hands from shaking.

"Yeah, I know what they're good for. I didn't think you were that kind of girl." He dropped a cherry into the glass and pushed it toward her.

"I'm not. At least not usually." She turned her head to the side to exhale and took another slow drag.

"Oh, come on. You disappoint me. That guy?"

After taking a long drink, she said "Why not?" She inhaled the last of her cigarette, put it out in the ashtray and, as she exhaled, she pulled out another one and lit up. "Can we change the subject, please?" She exhaled and took a drink.

"OK, ok. I didn't know it was a touchy subject." He leaned on the bar and smiled.

"It's not. Just an old one." She drained her glass and ran her fingers through her hair.

"I thought you quit." He eyed her cigarette as she took another drag.

"I did." She exhaled.

"How many times is it now?"

"Too many to count." She smiled as she put her cigarette out. He smiled, too.

"You do something different with your hair?"

"Yeah. I cut it," she said, lighting up again.

"Looks nice. Real sexy how it brushes your chin light that." He smiled and arched his eyebrows, reaching under the bar for the glass of water he kept there and took a sip.

"Don't get fresh." She smiled and blew smoke in his face when he leaned on the bar again.

"Hey!" he coughed, "you know I hate that." He ran his long tanned fingers through his blonde hair.

"Yeah, that's why I did it." Taking another pull, she said, "So, it's awful quiet up here tonight." She looked around at all the empty couches.

Ben looked surprised. "How can you say that? The music's loud enough in here to wake the dead." He rubbed his temples. "I swear, I wouldn't recognize your voice if you weren't shouting."

"That's not what I meant." She smiled at him and took a short drag. She blew the smoke out slowly and said, "There aren't any, uh, business transactions going down."

"I didn't think you were into that scene either. Damn, but you're full of surprises tonight."

"Oh, I don't dig on that shit, but if I did, this is usually the place to come."

"Yeah. I guess we'll be open for business-so to speak-later." He looked disgusted. His blue eyes traveled over the chairs and couches. A few people had come up top to lounge in the laid back atmosphere. Returning his gaze to her he said, "Man, it sucks up here. I don't get jack in tips. Except when you come around, of course." He smiled wide, a dimple showing in his right cheek.

"Of course." she stuffed two dollars in his tip jar. It was covered with stickers boasting sayings like *I Look Better Naked*. Looking down at his tanned thighs just barely visible behind the bar from where she stood, Anna thought that that particular sticker just might be true. "You know, you're getting kinda lippy. Maybe I shouldn't be so nice."

"But you always are. That's why you're my favorite customer."

"I bet you say that to all the girls." She smiled at him in mock adoration and fluttered her eyelashes. "How long till free drinks end?"

"About ten minutes." He looked at a shiny gold watch on his caramel colored arm.

"OK. Give me one for the road." She picked up her pack of Reds and her lighter and began stuffing them in her shorts pocket.

"Oh, you can't go. I'm not doing dick up here. Stay and talk a while." He poured her another drink.

"How am I supposed to meet men if I stay here with you?"

"They'll start coming up here pretty soon."

"Well then," she said, patting him consolingly on the arm, "you don't need me hanging around up here do you? You'll be too busy to talk then." She wiggled her fingers in farewell, smiled and walked toward the stairs. She felt a slight breeze on her midsection. She looked down and saw that her shirt was still hiked up from her encounter with Dave. Smoothing the blue and white stripped cotton, she stuffed the end into her frayed blue-

jean shorts and continued her descent to the bottom floor. She rolled her eyes and shook her head when she thought of Dave, hoping she could avoid him tonight. He was such a big mistake. What did she end up with? That morning she woke up with a banana instead of a man. And she hated bananas; they made her throat itch. But, at least he left breakfast.

Making her way around the club, she caught the eyes of several men. A tall dark-eyed, dark-haired god with a devilish smile and gold hoop earring, a stocky blonde with a cleft chin and beautiful lips and a lean brunette with olive skin and sexy hands all looked her way as she looked for a seat and bobbed her head to the music. The DJ had improved. The melancholy lyrics of a Depeche Mode song floated over her. She needed a cigarette. She spotted an empty stool at the dance floor's edge, just below the slightly raised area where she sat before. She could see that her empty glasses were still waiting on the abandoned table. After setting her drink on the ledge in front of her, she took out her Reds and lighter. Twirling it between her fingers, the clear peach plastic sparkled in the flashing lights above her.

She spotted Dave across the floor trying to coax an unwilling young girl onto the floor. She could not have been more than nineteen and for a moment Anna began to feel old. That girl was in junior high when she graduated. At the moment she looked annoyed by the way Dave had his arm around her waist. He whispered something in her ear. Typical Dave. When he wasn't drunk and sometimes when she was, he could actually be fairly charming. Anna pulled out a cigarette and lit it while she continued to watch his unsuccessful bid for a dance with the pretty young blonde. She was currently removing his hand from her waist. Dave was too drunk and concentrating too hard on whatever borderline lewd comment he was whispering into her ear to notice. Just as Anna blew a stream of gray fog into the air, the blonde managed to escape from Dave's grasp and yelled some angry words in his direction before walking away very quickly. Anna laughed as she watched the comical episode come to its climax and Dave's disgruntled look as he watched her run back to a group of four other girls—all just as young and just as blonde.

Dave recovered quickly and began scouting out the crowd across from him. As his eyes moved in her direction, Anna leaned back into the shadows, hoping to elude his glance. Luckily, just as his brown eyes reached the spot where she sat desperately trying to hide, a curvy girl and her overly affectionate companion stopped to dance in front of her, obscuring her from view. The voluptuous brunette wore a tiny shirt that hid nothing from view. The word "Milk" spread across her large chest. Her friend, a tall frat boy, wore a T-shirt bearing his brotherhood's letters and a corduroy baseball cap purchased at the Gap, she recognized it because she worked there. She was the daytime manager. Funny, it seemed not so very long ago she had just started as a clerk behind the register. She had no idea how taking a year off before college had turned into a career. Sighing, Anna focused on the show being put on in front of her. Frat boy was currently grinding his groin into Milkmaid's stomach. She seemed to be enjoying it because she smiled up at him in invitation as she placed her stubby hand on his ass. She put out her cigarette, picked up her drink and swiveled around on her stool to see what was going on behind her.

A very tall blonde guy was leaning against the side bar ordering a drink. She looked at his body clad in a pair of tight blue jeans and a green Polo shirt. All she could imagine was whether or not his ass felt like sponge cake. He turned as if sensing the dirty thoughts coming his way and smiled when his large almond shaped eyes met hers. He stared at her for a few long minutes and looked as if he might want to come over and talk. Just as she was going to meet him half way, she felt a presence at her side. She groaned when she heard the familiar voice.

"Anna, just the girl I was looking for." His arm snaked around her waist. She swiveled around to get her drink, draining almost the entire thing in one long swallow. She kept her eyes closed for a minute while the sickly sweetness went down.

"Dave."

"So how about that dance?" He smiled and moved forward as if to help her up. She leaned back out of his grasp and put her hand up to halt any further efforts to help her.

"Gee, you know, I would, but I was just on my way to get another drink."

He seemed in thought for a moment, then said, "But, you just..."

"Well, I'll catch you later." She hopped up and started walking back toward the balcony stairs, leaving him no chance to protest. She ignored the slight dizziness from getting up so quickly and climbed the stairs. Once she reached the top, she sat at one of the empty tables near by. Resting her head in her hands and closing her eyes she willed her head to stop spinning. The dizziness passed after a few minutes. Anna turned her head to see what Ben was doing.

A very young auburn headed girl was at the bar trying to hide the large black X's spanning the tops of her hands. She was obviously lying about her age, either to score some alcohol or a date with Ben. Either way, Ben wasn't biting. He just stood there, a semi-amused smile on his face, while she tried to get as close to him as she could without putting her hands on the bar. Anna started walking toward the bar just as the girl figured out that Ben was not going to give her what she was after. Her disappointment was palpable as she shrugged her shoulders, turned, and walked away. Anna smiled as she reached the bar.

"She was cute. Not your type?"

"Please." He ran his hands through his hair. "Anyway, she wasn't interested in me. She just wanted a drink. Thought I wouldn't notice the big-ass X's."

"I don't know. It looked to me like she was trying real hard to give you a peek at what's under her shirt."

"I'm an old man to her."

"You look pretty good for your age. Tell me, do you still have all your teeth?"

"Don't be cute. You know what I meant." He took a drink of water. "Do you want a drink or did you just come up here to harass me?"

"I guess so. I've just about had my limit."

"Coming up." He smiled while he poured the sweet coconut rum in a glass and squirted a little Coke on top. Adding a cherry he pushed it toward her. "What happened to that girl who used come out with you? I haven't seen her in months."

"Sherra got married about two months ago." She took a long drink, and started digging in her pockets for her cigarettes and lighter.

"Wow, I can't even imagine being married." Leaning with his elbows on the bar, he rested his chin in his large hands.

"If things had worked out, I would've been married for a little over a year now." The thought had just occurred to her. She lit a cigarette, and took a slow pull, then quickly exhaled the silver cloud.

Ben looked surprised. "What happened?"

"I decided that I wasn't ready to give all this up." She made a sweeping motion at nothing in particular.

"You're kidding, right?"

"Only partly." She took a quick drink, and ran her fingers through her hair. "I guess I wasn't totally sure, and I figured if I was ready to get married, I'd know." She shrugged and took a drag off her cigarette.

"Well, if you weren't sure, then I guess you did the right thing."

"Yeah, that's what I keep telling myself." Inhaling, she put her cigarette out in the ashtray as she let the smoke slip slowly from her mouth.

"Aren't you happy?"

"Yeah, I guess so." Anna drained her drink and gave him a five dollar bill. She smiled slightly, turned and moved to go downstairs. The DJ was playing one of those club songs that last thirty minutes without words. The beat was throbbing inside her head. She rubbed her temples and walked out into the flashing lights. Anna leaned against the wall, and watched the pulsing mob on the dance floor. The club was getting a little crowded. Groups gathered at the edges of the dance floor made it increasingly hard to walk round the club. Luckily the growing crowd would make

it hard for Dave to find her. Maybe she would make it until she was ready to go without dancing with him. She left her place on the wall to make one lap around to see if someone she knew had shown up. Kelley and some of the girls from work had said they might come out, but hadn't made an appearance. If she didn't see anyone, then Anna decided she would head home. She weaved in and out of the people standing in her way. She put her hands on a guy's shoulders as she squeezed in between him and a rather tall woman. Just as Anna got out of the tight spot, the guy turned around and she found herself staring into familiar brown eyes. Dave smiled.

"Hey, great. We can dance now." He circled her waist with his arm and pulled her close while walking toward the dance floor.

She put her hands on his chest. "You, know I'd really rather not. I was just about to head home."

"Hey, you promised. You manage to avoid me every Saturday. What's the big deal?"

"Dave, my head is killing me, take a raincheck, huh."

"Come on, one dance." He smiled, and looked really pitiful. "Please."

"Fine, one dance." She smiled and let him lead her onto the floor. She turned to face him. The floor was really crowded so there was barely any space between him. He was smiling down at her and gently moving to the music. Slowly she started to move, too. Anna closed her eyes and dropped her head back. Her hips swayed from side to side. The DJ was playing Nine Inch Nails. She let the music move through her. She felt his arm around her waist pulling her closer until there was nothing between them. His hips touched hers and urged them to follow their lead. Then both arms moved up and down her back, his chest brushed against her and she could smell his cologne mixed with the salty smell of sweat. His lips feathered against her neck and move toward her ear. She let her head rest on his shoulder. His arms wrapped tightly around her waist, crushing her more fully

against him. They moved hips grinding, bodies rubbing with the music's pulsing beat. Anna didn't notice when the song ended, or the next one, or the next.

"Let's get out of here."

She raised her head when he said that. He took her hand and lead her off the floor and toward the door. Her head was getting heavy, so she let him lead.

Stacey Norwood

The Rug

Why do I sleep alone every night
and wake up every morning to lilac
perfume, *her* scent, clinging to your
lukewarm pillow? Should I wait for you
to admit what I already see, what you wave
like a banner in my face?

If I lay my bare back on
chipped Spanish tile, would
you walk by and grind mud
from your boot soles into my silken flesh?
One day, you may find a rusted nail sharpening
itself among the crushed soiled fibers.

I just wait for you to come, to slide
and slink reptilian coils into my bed.
I listen while your liar's tongue
tempts with quicksilver words while you
squeeze right until I relent –or else–
I'm dead.

Stacey Norwood

Drawing Life

I

When a woman glides
by a man real slow, it's
just so he'll know she's there
and she's dangerous. She'll give
him the eye—like a D.A.
gives a guilty man about
to plead innocent. He'll want
to look, but he can't and it takes
every ounce of blood and bone in him
in to stare. But if you look him
straight in the eye,
she'll be staring out at you.

Every sleek inch of leg sheathed
in black nylon. The silken red
the shimmered over the curve
of her hips and seeped
into the crease between firm breasts.
He'll feel the golden velvet skin over
her collarbone, and glisteny dampness
of sweat from the August sun.
And when her slender hands sweep
over tanned shoulders
and around the delicate dip
at the base of her throat with an ice cube,
he'd die to be that cube—just to know
if her skin smells like fresh peaches.

II

What is it about that man?
Why do I always find him
so damn irresistible?
As if he drizzled honey over
every inch of skin or

dipped himself in chocolate,
which isn't a bad idea.
*(Sometimes, though, I wish
he'd dive in head first.)*

Is it the way the skin between
shoulder and neck smells
like honeysuckle, begging for me
to taste? Or is it the way the rough
skin on his palms feels like brushed
suede rubbing over my cheek
and down my neck? Perhaps
it's how little shivers pool
at the base of my spine before
swimming out over my body
when soft pink lips and velvet
tongue slide around each freckle
that makes me want to crawl inside
him and paint dying beasts
and fertility rites on the caves of his chest.

Stacey Norwood

Beautiful

He has black hair.
I love his crooked nose.
He bites his nails
and smiles at me with liar's lips.

I love his crooked nose,
while he caresses me with callused hands,
and smiles at me with liar's lips.
He calls me Beautiful.

While he caresses me with callused hands,
he seduces me with Mozart.
He calls me Beautiful
with Ella singing in the background.

He seduces me with Mozart
and hurried garbled poems.
With Ella singing in the background,
his touch is warm.

And hurried garbled poems
tell me he doesn't love her.
His touch is warm,
and I am beautiful again.

Stacey Norwood

Moo Shu Shrimp

I'll be spooning Moo Shu Shrimp,
but when I turn around
there you are, lurking
leaning against cranial walls
legs crossed at the ankles—wearing black.

When your brown eyes melt
into my green ones
as if to say, "Come on, fall into me,"
I think, "Why not?" Why not try you on.

Just once. For size.
Close my eyes and feel your velvet
palm cup my cheek—or
rub of your thumb
achingly slow across my lips.

You talk, but I don't hear words
only sounds. Your sounds
clear words raining off your tongue.
Would they taste like coconut rum
if I caught each syllable with my mouth
before it fell?

Stacey Norwood

Romance De Le Luna, Luna
A Conchita Garcia Lorca

La luna vino a la fragua
con su polísón de nardos.
El niño la mira mira.
El niño la está mirando.
En el aire conmovido
mueve la luna sus brazos
y enseña, lúbrica y pura,
sus senos de duro estaño.
—Huye, luna, luna, luna.
Si vinieran los gitanos,
harían con tu corazón
collares y anillos blancos.
—Niño, déjame que baile.
Cuando vengan los gitanos,
te encontrarán sobre el yunque
con los ojillos cerrados.
—Huye, luna, luna, luna,
que ya siento sus caballos.
—Niño, déjame; no pises
mi blancor almidonado.

El jinete se acercaba
tocando el tambor del llano.
Dentro de la fragua el niño
tiene los ojos cerrados.

Por el olivar venían,
bronce y sueño, los gitanos.
Las cabezas levantadas
y los ojos entornados.

Cómo canta la zumaya,
¡ay, cómo canta en el árbol!
Por el cielo va la luna
con un niño de la mano.

Romance of the Moon, Moon
translated by Clayton Miller

The moon came to the forge
with her bustle of spikenards.
The child watches her, watches.
The child is watching her.
In the stirred air
the moon moves her arms
and reveals, lubricious and pure,
her breasts of pewter.
—Flee, moon, moon, moon.
If the gypsies come,
they will make your heart
white necklaces and rings.
—Child, leave me so I may dance.
When the gypsies come,
they will find you on the anvil
with your little eyes closed.
—Flee, moon, moon, moon.
I can sense your horses now.
—Child, leave me be; do not trample
my starched whiteness.

The horseman approaches
playing a simple drum.
Inside the forge the child
had closed his eyes.

They came through the olive grove,
all bronze and dream, the gypsies.
Their heads raised
and their eyes half-closed.

The tawny owl sings,
Oh, how the tawny owl sings!
Through the sky passes the moon
with a child by the hand.

Dentro de la fragua lloran,
dando gritos, los gitanos.
El aire la vela, vela.
El aire la está velando.

Inside the forge they are crying,
yelling, the gypsies.
The air watches her, watches.
The air watches over her.

Aquí
Salamandra, 1958-1961
by Octavio Paz

Mis pasos en esta calle
Resuenan

En otra calle

Donde

Oigo mis pasos
Pasar en esta calle
Donde

Sólo es real la niebla

Here
Salamandra, 1958-1961
translated by Jacqueline Rolfes

My steps in this street
They echo

In another street

Where

I hear my steps
Passing in this street
Where

Only the fog is real

Vida retirada
by Fray Luis De León

¡Qué descansada vida
la del que huye el mundanal ruido,
y sigue la escondida
senda por donde han ido
los pocos sabios que en el mundo han sido!

Retired Life
translated by Jacqueline Rolfes

What a restful life
that one who escapes the world's noise
and follows the hidden
path along which have gone
the few wise men that have been in the world!

A white petal floats
like a single silken snowflake
caressing me in the moment of freedom
of its one lone flight
to the ground

Dianne Elise Loomis

Do Babies Dream?

Do babies dream
of their mother's heartbeat
or the warm fluid weightlessness
of the womb
Do babies dream
of their mother's voice
unintelligible familiar song
rising and falling
in its tides of emotions
Do babies dream
the sensations of suckling
of comfort and nurture
being fulfilled
as tiny thumbs
fill tiny mouths in sleep
Do babies dream
of warm gentle pressure
spread across their back
in the intimate connection
of skin on skin

Dianne Elise Loomis

The Climb

The little giant stops, and squinting
up against morning rays,
never sees the top.
Turning in defeat, he slumps on
a lonely petrified log.
Morning fog brushes past
grabbing at his collar,
tugging airily. Nikes
and dirty fingernails scrape
up the steep slope above him.
Determination flexes tired muscles,
and Baldy's gleaming top spurs their
will. Sweat, pull—punished
calves burn till gasping
they break through the brush
barrier and stand, miniature
men on the top of the world.
Freckled noses glance back
at the scarred path,
only one pitiful human in view.
Screaming and waving their hands
they toss thin shouts into the air.
The figure so small in the distance
never looks up, his view of the top
obscured by the clarity of the bottom.
The shouts of the boys hit an invisible
wall and like a boomerang
return to echo encouragement to the
conquerors.

Elizabeth Mahana

Aethra at Sunrise

The boulder lies as always it has lain,
immovable, a massive ton or two
of granite, salmon hued and iron-hard.
What makes him think he has the strength today
he lacked 'til now, he lacked since first he walked,
the strength to best this test of manliness
his father left a score of years ago?
As every day he does at dawn's first glint,
he walks the boulder round three times or four,
appraising every handhold, every hole
by which he might gain just a bit more grasp
of leverage upon this stubborn stone.
Then, choosing carefully the perfect spot
in which to work, he settles to his task.
He wraps his lanky youthful muscles round
as far as he can reach and grips it tight.
A second's pause he waits, but nothing more,
and then he heaves, as he has done before.
I stand here at the window quietly
afraid to watch, but terrified to turn
away. For ten long minutes there I watch
him straining, locked in combat with the beast,
and then my son collapses on the stone.
His muscles loosen, black-curved head bends down
to touch the cool, uneven surface there.
His heart's desire frustration wracks his chest.
I feel his pain, but feel my own deep down;
for twenty years this day I dreaded most.
I know that loneliness is drawing near;
I know full well I saw the boulder budge.

Roger Cline

Oh! Susanna

A yellow acorn flies across the moon
Inside the blue and humble shawl of sky.
I sit wrapped up in night and wonder why.
I whistle long and shrill a Foster tune
In unmown grass while dandelions bloom.
I ponder acorns, ponder key lime pie.
The yellow acorn flies.

The moon is bowing, will be setting soon.
The oaks hum, "Oh! Susanna don't you cry..."
While amidst the stars the acorn buzzes by.
I ponder the moonlight, ponder Brigadoon.
The yellow acorn flies.

Roger Cline

Don Coyote

I'm standing on the side of the road in front of McDonald's trying to catch a ride and this truck, one of them real big eighteen wheelers, comes hauling toward me and first I think that mother's gonna run right over me, but then he slows up and stops right in front of me and this hand waves at me, so I climb up inside.

The driver's this big fat ass guy — I mean this guy's huge, like that big Jabba snail looking thing on Star Wars — and his hat says, "Mack," so I figure it's his name or something but I don't say nothing about it. His face looks like a bulldog cause it's all wrinkled and his cheeks flap down and wiggle around when he moves. They got a word for dogs' cheeks like that, but hell if I know it.

So I get in and he looks at me out the side of his eyes and pulls back out on the road and says, "Where you headed?"

"Nowhere," I tell him.

The truck smells all sweet inside like a Dunking Donuts I used to hang around and sure enough there's a box of donuts next to Mack's seat. He's still watching the road so I just reach in and take a donut from the box. Mr. Brent used to bring donuts to our class. He was always trying be all friendly and telling us how we got to improve ourself, like I think he really gives a rat's ass. But I knew he was full of it. He always had them donuts with that cream crap in the middle. That stuff makes me want to puke.

But Mack's got plain donuts, so I figure he ain't all bad and maybe I ought to say something. "I never been in one of these big trucks like this," I say.

He don't look at me, but them big cheeks kind of raise up like he's growling. Only he ain't, he's smiling a little. Then he says, "You got a name, kid?"

"Don," I tell him. Then I remember what Mr. Brent used to call me so I also tell him, "But I ain't Don Coyote."

He cuts a look at me, then turns back to the road. And he kind of laughs and them big cheeks jiggle around like he's got some of Mr. Brent's cream donuts stuffed in his face. "Got you. Don — not Don Coyote — who's going nowhere," he says.

"Yeah," I say.

I just got to make sure Mack knows that ain't my name cause Mr. Brent used to think it was. He called me that all the time after I told him about when I got picked up for attacking this pay phone cause it kept ringing and it pissed me off and I needed some cash anyway. But those pay phones are hell to bust open and the cops picked me up. So when I told Mr. Brent about fighting that pay phone, he laughs and calls me Don Coyote or Cojones or some stupid shit like that. I can't remember cause it was stupid and he was always laughing about it, and he'd always ask me if I attacked any more phones or windmills or whatever. He thought he was real damn funny, but he's a dumbass.

I used to have to put up with his crap in high school cause they sent me and a bunch of idiots to his class all day instead of real classes. But it was cool. We didn't do nothing but screw around in there and eat donuts and watch TV. We saw this show one time where there was a bunch of guys acting like old knights and talking all funny and going around looking for this magic cup or something and they got tore up by this rabbit and then they blew it to hell with a grenade. It was crazy. They was just going all over the place looking for this stupid cup and whacking around with swords and talking like weirdoes. But it was cool cause we made some of them swords out of cardboard and whacked around with them and talked like them guys and acted like we was looking for that magic cup.

Then Mr. Brent said something about them guys was on a quest or something and he would get all serious and tell us we had to figure out what our own quest was and we got to get our shit straight or we'd end up wasting our lives. He was always saying stupid stuff like that. That's when it sucked. But I ain't even lying, you got to be a real idiot to just go around all over the place looking for some stupid cup just cause that's your quest or whatever Mr. Brent said you got to have. I figure quests are for morons and Mr. Brent can just get bent if he thinks I'm going to go around doing something stupid like that. But I ain't got to put up with him no more so it's nothing.

Then I see Mack's kind of looking at me and I stop thinking about Mr. Brent and I finish that donut and lick my fingers where they got sticky from it and wipe the rest off on my jeans.

"So Don — but not Don Coyote — why are you running the roads?" Mack says. "Out looking for work."

"Naw, man," I say.

And he kind of laughs and he looks even more like a bulldog with them big cheeks scrunched up and them teeth showing. Then he takes the last damn donut in the box and shoves it in his mouth and says, "So you're just out cruising around."

"Yeah, you know how it is," I say. I don't say this to Mack, but I was tired of hanging around the house hearing my momma bitch at me about something stupid like leaving a mess or not doing some crap for her or hanging out with Jimmy. I don't got to listen to that. I can do what the hell I want.

I hang out with Jimmy all the time. He's real stupid, but he's all right. There was this one time when me and Jimmy were hard up for some cash and my momma wouldn't give me none and his momma wouldn't give him none, but he knew this little meat market down the street he figured we'd hit up. So Jimmy rips off with this car, cause we ain't got one, and comes pick me up and we roll by that little store a couple times and check things out. We figured it was clear and we go in there with a couple pistols Jimmy had got from some guy he knew. Mine didn't work and I don't think Jimmy's was loaded anyway, but you just got to point at them kids behind the counter and they go to pissing their pants.

So we go in there yelling and showing them our guns and they give us the money and we run out like we figured on, but that heap of junk car Jimmy had got us won't start up again. He was jerking with the wires and all but it flat won't start. Course I was cussing him for getting us a piece of shit like that cause if I was going to run off with a car I'd least get a good one. Jimmy just kicked it and told me it was dead, and I told him we was dead if we didn't get out of there cause right then we could hear the cops coming. So we hauled ass, but the sack they gave me had busted open and quarters and dimes and nickels and pennies and even some dollars was falling out all over the place, and I was going in circles trying to pick it all up cause I sure as hell wasn't going to leave it. Then I seen the cops coming down the street and I took off around back of the store and I seen Jimmy waving at me from inside this dumpster

and I jumped in with him. Man, I want to kick Jimmy's ass every time I think about that dumpster cause it was full of blood and guts and meat and stuff from that store. I ain't even lying, that thing smelled like something died. And the cops found us anyway, and then they laughed at us when we got out of it cause we had meat and blood all over us and we smelled like a dead dog's ass. We both got busted for that and didn't even get to keep the cash. But that's done with now, and it's nothing.

I was kind of pissed that Mack took the last donut, but then I seen a bag of Cheetos between the seats and I see Mack ain't messing with it so I grab it before he does and start in on it. Then Mack says, "So, what's got you out wandering around? You running away from home, kid?"

"No," I tell him. "And I ain't a kid."

"Okay," he says, and he gives me another of them bulldog face smiles and says, "Don, I'm sure you're in a hurry to get nowhere, but I'm not going much further. Just right here to the toy store to drop off this load."

"That's cool," I tell him.

And right then he pulls into Toys-R-Us, and I remember there was this one time me and Jimmy got kicked out of there cause sometimes when we didn't feel like hearing Mr. Brent tell us what we got to do, me and Jimmy would hang out in the toy store for a while and play around with the video games and balls and stuff. They had this thing with a bunch of football helmets and pads and stuff in it and this other thing with some baseball bats in it and me and Jimmy put all that junk on and went to acting like them guys on that old knight show when this one guy cut off this other guy's arms and legs and stuff. We was whacking each other with them bats cause we had on the pads and helmets, and it was cool cause it didn't really hurt, and I was making like I had to get past Jimmy so I could find my quest or whatever, and he was telling me I had to tell him a bunch of stuff like my name and my favorite color and I had to give him some money or something, but I wouldn't do it so we had to fight just like on that show.

Then this rent-a-cop guy comes up to us all like he's big and bad, and he tells us, "you kids get the hell out of here before I call the cops," and we was laughing already but it makes him even madder and his face is all red and he just stands there staring at us like we give a shit if he calls the cops cause it ain't like we done nothing. But he squinches his eyes all tight and points at us, and we drop all that stuff on the floor cause it was starting to suck anyway, and Jimmy says we ought to go get something to eat, and that guy tells us he'll get the police to pick us up if he ever sees us in there again, so Jimmy flips him off and we haul ass. I bet that guy's still pissed.

I had done finished all them Cheetos and I was licking all that cheese off my fingers and Mack stops the truck and kind of looks at me so I wipe the rest off on my jeans, but I don't say nothing.

Then he says, "Well, here we are." And he gets out.

I was going to go in and play around, but I think about that rent-a-cop and I figure I'll just wait right where I am. While I'm waiting on Mack I find a bag of them peanut butter cups shoved way up under his seat, and I figure he don't care if I eat them too cause he ain't said nothing about the donuts or the Cheetos, but it don't matter cause he ain't even in the truck right now and I can hear him screwing around in the back. So I just go to eating them and watching the little kids running around in the parking lot and chasing and fighting with their new toys and stuff.

And I finish the bag right as Mack comes back and gets up in here with me, and I put the empty bag up under my seat and wipe my fingers off on my jeans cause the chocolate's all melted all over the place.

Mack kind of looks at me and shakes his head, and his big bulldog cheeks get all red like he's mad about something, so now he looks like that red dog on the beer bottle, and he's real quiet for a minute, and I figure that rent-a-cop's done pissed him off too. Then he says, "Don, I'm just going right back the way I came."

"That's cool," I tell him. "I ain't going..."

"Yeah," he says. "I know. Nowhere."

Then he goes to put something behind the seat and I see he's got a doll and I say, "What's that?"

"Nothing. Just a doll for my daughter," Mack says. Then he puts it behind the seat and starts the truck back up again.

"You got a kid?" I say, and I try to think of Mack screwing, but it ain't nothing I want to see. "Yeah, she's been wanting one of these for a while," Mack tells me. "Supposed to be some cartoon character, I think."

When he says that about dolls and cartoons and kids it makes me think of this one time when me and Jimmy was both doing some time cause this judge was a prick and told us, "if you kids are old enough to do the crime, you're old enough to do the time," and it was in Christmas and they called us all in the cafeteria cause they was going to hand out all the gifts people sent, and they had all this junk laid out on the tables, and they was calling us up to get our stuff. Mostly it was crap like cookies and food, and me and Jimmy was standing there waiting and I didn't figure on getting nothing, but Jimmy said he'd split what he got with me cause his momma had said she sent something.

Then they call Jimmy up there and all the guards was laughing and when he gets up there they shove this Goofy doll at him and then everybody's laughing and whistling and throwing cookies at him and calling to Jimmy saying they going to make him their doll and all that. I hauled ass before he got that thing over where I was, cause I don't want no part of it. Goofy, like on TV in the cartoons. There we was in jail and his momma sends him a damn Goofy doll. He like to got his ass kicked every day after that, and so did I just cause we was friends. They called him "Jimmy the Kid" and then they'd say, "and here comes his little friend Donnie-boy." I ain't even lying, we got tore up just cause they thought he was a kid and I was a little boy. I'm still pissed about that but it's done with now and it's nothing, so I don't tell Mack about it.

Mack's done hauled ass out the parking lot, and he's booking down the road again, and I figure he's in a hurry to give that doll to his kid. I don't see nothing else to eat in here, so I just kind of check things out cause like I told Mack I never been in one of these big trucks like this. I ain't even got a car at all, but I'm going to get

one cause people laugh at you walking all over the place and I'm sure as hell not riding a bike. If I had a cool ride I'd cruise around everywhere.

Me and Jimmy was talking about that and he says he knows some guy who's got a car we might could get, but I think it'd kick ass to get hold of a big truck like this cause then nobody could jack with us. So I say to Mack, "How much is a truck like this?"

And Mack doesn't even look at me, but he says, "How much have you got?"

"Don't know," I tell him.

Then he looks at me and shakes his head, and them big cheeks jiggle around but he don't say nothing for a while. I figure he's just trying to think how much it cost so I stay quiet too and just watch outside. Then Mack slows down and stops and looks at me and gives one of them bulldog face smiles that looks like he's growling but he ain't, and he says, "Well, Don — but not Don Coyote — here you are."

And we're right back in front of McDonald's and I figure I got to tell Jimmy what I done today, and I bet he's going to be pissed he didn't get to go too, and I tell Mack, "That's cool."

And I get down out the truck and he takes off. I figure I'll go fool around on the playground cause Jimmy usually comes to find me there. I ain't even lying, Jimmy's going to shit when I tell him what all I done today. But it's done with now and it's nothing.

Daniel Bartlett

Just Waiting

I suppose some are just doomed
to stumble through a bleak existence—
trying desperately to obtain
that which will never satisfy them.
But it doesn't stop them from trying
night after night while driving by places
where they once felt comfort but
only after the fact.
These are the souls doomed to a
life of "what-if's" and phones that just don't ring.
They reach out to anyone while
no one seems to even notice.
They call cheesy help lines and buy
self-esteem boosting books while
they tear themselves down bit-by-bit.
They stay up most nights reading
impressive novels and thinking less than impressive thoughts—
hoping that one day that all-important
epiphany will finally come to them...
but start the process all over again when it doesn't.

Amy Pousson

Letter from an Evil Woman

So, the question is: was it all enough?
All my money, time, and adoration—
I hope you're satisfied
(especially since you'll get no more).
You led me like the very best shepherd
but were only a wolf underneath the whole time
while I followed like a blinded animal—
knowing only of my desire and attraction to you.
And while I dreamt dreams of "Romeo and Juliet"
my reality slowly turned into "The Twilight Zone"—
I was just a character having the life sucked from her
by the most dangerous of parasites: cupid.
And now our wonderful (HA!) "friendship"—
the one you say you so desperately refuse to ruin (HA again)—
has turned from the most vibrant red rose
to a decomposing black heap of could have been.
But through it all, somehow I'm the "bad guy"
because I'm a mean and vengeful woman
who doesn't believe in platonic love.
(I also don't believe in the tooth fairy—God help me)
So, not letting myself be tormented
with being close to you makes me evil?
Hmm... well, somebody will need to renovate hell
because I just don't think there will be room for the both of us.

Amy Pousson

Insanity

In the horizon, dark clouds are rolling in again.
No more warmth or light—
only the deathly stillness of night
to keep one company.
Yet, in the stillness,
a disturbance is felt—
a break in the normalcy of
calmness and sanity...
a trip into the unyielding torment
and horror of the unknown.
The sounds of surreal laughter
shrieks and crying
bombard the senses until your own
screams accompany the montage.
You run from that which cannot be escaped
you pull at your hair—
you plug up your ears—
you close your eyes and pray—God, let it all stop.
And then there's nothing...
nothing but the sound of release.
Nothing but the sound of
dripping blood in the bathtub.

Amy Pousson

Intelligence

I got the job of going through the dead man's pockets
who died trying to kill me.

Death before breakfast—a nameless Vietnamese
blasted from life when a black-market grenade cooked off
short.

Ruby Queens and Player's cigarettes
along with a can of mackerel
and little else for he traveled light.
Inside the wallet of the dead man

I found a clipping of a Playmate,
but not the naked centerfold.

Instead the homey, next door shots of a blonde girl
cooking king crab—smiling, reading, reaching across an ocean.

Mike Dunklin

Anniversary

I don't know why I don't sunburn much, even though I have fair but freckled skin. It's one of those questions that if I ask Jim, he smiles that quizzical shark-grin and says, "it's shin, or luck, or maybe God's will."

He usually avoids mentioning God much because that'll provoke an invitation from me to come to church.

On our tenth anniversary, Jim had surprised me with a trip to Galveston. I had come home from work with a pounding headache because Mary Chambers, the only other secretary in our little two lawyer firm, had picked a fight with her boss. Naturally, I had tried to mediate what quickly became a cat fight. Jim met me on the porch with a packed bag.

"Car got gas?" He asked.

I nodded dully and got back in without any question, tired to the bone and not caring, going to sleep in the front seat of the Taurus with the radar detector beeping off and on, and Jim chain smoking Marlboros and alternating between 72 and 95 miles per hour.

I only awoke when we crossed the causeway, and I looked down and saw a full moon reflecting off Galveston Bay.

"Where in the hell are we?" I asked groggily.

"You'll see," Jim replied, his face illuminated by an orange glow from a dangling cigarette.

"Motel used to be Jack Tar's," he said a few minutes later as we wheeled into a motor court that couldn't have been new even in 1963. I walked to our upper floor room in my stocking feet, hearing the sound of waves from across Seawall Drive, carrying my dangling flats in one hand, my headache now just a dull throb. I only hoped the bed sheets had been changed sometimes since the Johnson Administration. I was surprised to see two of those little airline bottles sitting on the night stand atop a laminated card telling you how to use the ancient dial telephone and what the rules were. Three would have been better, I thought, but tired as I was, two stiff drinks still made me high as a kite.

I began to run a hot bath into the rust-streaked bathtub and stripped off my clothes. I heard banging in the neighboring room and loud music coming in from the far wall. I glanced at my watch. Mickey's hands showed it was after nine.

I stepped into the tub and slipped down into the steaming water, still too numb to feel much of anything. I lay there, hearing a young woman's voice screeching in the next room.

Jim popped in and handed me a drink. He had mixed what he thought was a Margarita, but he'd neglected the salt.

"Thanks, sweetie," I tried to coo, but my husky voice sounded like a chain saw hitting a ten penny nail.

"Happy anniversary," Jim said.

"Ain't quite there yet," I corrected him with a smile, trying to ignore the loud music, the woman arguing next door, and the rusty tub.

He's trying, I thought, don't ruin it. I climbed out of the tub a few minutes later and he handed me the second drink, towed me off and began to rub my neck and shoulders as I slowly finished drink number two and lay down naked on the lumpy mattress.

"Eagles?" I asked, nodding toward the far wall.

"Yeah," Jim answered. "Sounds like 'Hotel California.'"

He moved my braid and began to rub the back of my neck. I was gone in seconds.

Happy anniversary.

"Coffee?" Jim asked, gently waking me up and standing over me already dressed and handing down a Styrofoam cup.

"God, I'm sorry," I muttered, rubbing my head, as I reached up and took the coffee with my other hand.

"It's okay. Bess and Mary at it again at work?"

"Don't go there."

I got up and padded over to my bag and looked inside. I was surprised that he had actually packed a bathing suit for me. I pulled out the white tank suit and pulled it on. It felt far too snug, but that wasn't Jim's fault.

Jim was dressed in Jeans and a T-shirt and wearing those Redwings logging boots that never seemed to come off his feet.

"You're not going to be felling any trees," I commented.

He took a swig of coffee, ignoring me, and after tearing the tip off the end of his Marlboro and scattering a bit of tobacco in a circular motion into the ashtray, stuck the cigarette in his mouth and lit up. I put on a S.F.A. Lumberjacks baseball cap, grabbed my beach towel, and stuffed my feet into some flat mules from the bag.

I'd have rather had my sandals, but I was grateful he remembered to pack any casual shoes at all. I toyed with the notion he had consulted another woman but quickly discarded the idea, not liking it. I knew I could be a bitch, but I didn't cotton to the idea of Jim having women friends.

The midmorning August air was already hot as we walked out the front of the motel and waited at the crosswalk on Seawall Drive. I watched Jim eye a couple of coeds in bikinis strolling by on the other side of the street.

Before I could elbow him in the ribs a young, tan jogger-- about twenty-six with Tom Selleck dimples and a bared, hairless, chest-- came running up beside me. He stood jogging in place, waiting for the light to change while I tried to watch the bulge in his tight, neon-orange Speedos bounce up and down without being caught at it.

"Nice hair color," he said to me with a knowing smile.

"It's natural," I replied, briefly establishing actual eye contact. I reached and grabbed my auburn braid and waved it over my shoulder, stroking it like a prize pet.

"Sure it is," the guy laughed, and then took off as the walk light blinked on. I stared at his taut buns, and Jim laughed out loud in a sharp guffaw.

"A hair-dresser!" He chortled.

"I don't care," I snapped, watching Speedo jog away. "He's still easy on the eye."

I leaned into Jim and reached around and thrust my hand down into Jim's back pocket, feeling for that shrapnel scar on his butt, but instead found his pocket stuffed with papers and junk.

"I could get some shorts like that for you," I teased.

Jim only laughed. I leaned into him, feeling him.

"Don't you think it's a tad tacky for a woman your age to be groping a guy like a teenager?" Jim asked. I yanked my hand out of his pocket, miffed.

We clumped over, descended the Seaway, and slogged over the sand and spread our towels. Jim started buttering me with sun screen before I sat down, though he only put a dab on his own nose.

"Aren't you gonna get into your bathing suit?" I asked him, eyeing him still in his jeans and a Jimmy Buffet T-shirt that had a parrot sitting atop a treasure chest.

"Nope," he replied with that deadpan expression of his. "Us *professional* seafarers have a phobia about the *recreational* uses of salt water."

However, he plopped down and carefully unlaced his logging boots. I scanned the beach. There were not many people. I guessed that the August heat had driven everyone to the nearest air-conditioned bar. It was only ten in the morning and already the air felt superheated. I sat down on my towel and watched grimly as my stomach bulged a bit too much in my white swimsuit.

God, I look like a cow, I thought to myself. My long legs were a bit too heavy and my waistline didn't curve in as it should. Jim punched a tape into the boom box and the strains of "Margaritaville" started trilling out into the hot air.

"A good thing there's a breeze," I panted.

"Want to rent an umbrella?" Jim grunted as he stuffed a another cigarette into his mouth and lit up, without any Indian tobacco ceremony.

"No ritual?"

"Sometimes I forget," he said, nodding at a couple of girls that eyed him as they jiggled past. He smiled sort of shyly, glad to be noticed, but embarrassed at the same time.

"Can't an Indian be a backslider like your average Methodist?" He joked, exhaling and watching the smoke drift out toward the Gulf of Mexico.

"Methodists don't backslide, that's Baptists," I said, grumpily rolling over on my stomach and beginning to doodle in the sand

with my fingernails. God, ten years is a long time. We hadn't run out of stuff to argue about, but then we didn't really argue passionately about anything either. Jim had all these kooky ideas. I understood his need to believe in his Native American roots, but he stuffed his little medicine bag full of the worst mixture of New Age and Far Eastern pap.

"I'm surprised at you," he grinned, reaching over and slowly sliding the straps of my bathing suit down, forcing me to rest my elbows on the towel and put both my hands on the top of my suit, "making fun of the Baptists. Usually you only make fun of *my* religion.

He started to rub sun screen on my back. I forgot about getting the book out of my beach bag and lay flat and let the feel of his oily palms kneed the knots out of my week. Bobbie Ann Mason could wait, I thought. Besides, the book was as thick as a doorstep.

I woke up in the shade of an umbrella. Jim had lathered me up with sun screen in my sleep. I sat up so fast I got a headache.

"Don't sit up so quick," Jim said in a parental tone that instantly irritated me as I rubbed my throbbing temples. A string of five empty O'Douls bottles sat in a straight line just off the edge of Jim's beach towel. Four bottles were buried neck down, the fifth empty sat upright and contained a collection of cigarette butts in the bottom. Buffet was singing "A Pirate Turns Forty." Jim nursed the last O'Douls.

"I feel terrible," I said, rubbing my head. Why do I feel tired all the time, I wondered.

"You need to eat something," Jim muttered like he was my grandmother. He had been developing a mother hen attitude lately, and I suspected Susan, my doctor, had talked to him. It bugged me that Sue figured that medical confidentiality didn't apply with first cousins. I steeled myself for a ten minute lecture about my health and was primed to bring up his smoking.

"Ever think we'd make ten years?" Jim asked, brushing sand off my shoulders. That was sharp, I thought, he changes the

subject like a pro. I knew he hadn't let go of it. He'd slide back to the subject of my being a borderline diabetic at *just the right moment*. I could count on it just as surely as the lapping of the Gulf waves.

Ten years, I remembered, trying to recall every last detail of that important and yet low key day. I had worn a blue denim skirt when we got married, determined not to embarrass Mister Casual. You don't get married in white on your second go round anyway. I wondered what had happened to that skirt. I guess I'm not sentimental, but it nagged me that something that connected to the best day in my life could just get lost, mislaid, or tossed out. I had borrowed a little crucifix from Mary Chambers, a high school friend for the ceremony, and Joyce McCrae, another classmate and my ex-sister-in-law, had helped me pick out a red and yellow Navaho-looking western shirt I'd worn in honor of Jim's Indian blood. The shirt was a garish and brightly colored geometric scheme of diamonds flat-topped zig-zags, and thunderbirds.

Though I didn't wear it much, that shirt still hung safely in the back of my closet but the skirt had gotten away from me. I had worn that stupid get-up to get married in and there in the bandstand in the middle of the town park, Jim had been totally spiffy in his old Marine dress blue uniform, wearing so many ribbons that he had looked like General MacArthur. I think I would have turned around and bolted had Mary and Joyce and Susan not been right behind me.

Who says it doesn't matter who your bridesmaids are in a second wedding?

What had happened to that skirt? A girl should keep track of stuff like that. Jim's dress blues were safely folded in a plastic bag in the bottom of my grandmother's cedar chest, but that blue denim skirt had somehow slipped away.

Jim picked up our trash and returned the umbrella to the nearby rental stand. His boots made soft prints in the sand as he came back to me on the towel. He reached down and pulled me to my feet.

"Let's get something to eat," he said, nodding inland. "Landry's got good seafood."

"You're beginning to sound like Susan," I snapped, then shut up. I knew *he* would order. He would get me something that Sue had probably written down. He had probably studied her scribbles while I slept. The diet-menu was probably stuffed in his back pocket, filed away in his jeans like the little pebbles and bits of junk that he took for signs and picked up throughout each day. I knew he would secretly look at that restrictive menu at every opportunity to order my life. He will order for me, and I will hate it, I thought, but he's being a sweetie, so I won't say anything.

I picked up my blue beach towel and shook the sand off of it. Jim hadn't changed the position of the umbrella and the back of my legs looked pink while the front skin looked like cinnamon peppered white bread. I still wouldn't peel, I thought, as I wrapped the towel around me like a skirt, knotted it, thrust my feet into my brown mules, and let Jim take my hand and lead me across the beach toward the seaway.

I looked back. Two sets of footprints marked our spot halfway to the water. I knew the wind would cover the prints, but I felt some kind of comfort in having our path marked, at least for a short time.

Mike Dunklin

Returning Home

I wasn't surprised to see Gran waiting for me on the front porch when I pulled onto her well-worn dirt driveway. She had always had an uncanny way of knowing when I'd arrive. When I had called her from Austin that morning to let her know that I'd be on my way as soon as all the papers were signed and the divorce was final, she told me that my room was ready and that she'd be waiting for me.

As I turned off the ignition and opened the door, she got up and started walking toward the car. I shielded my eyes from the sinking sun blazing over the roof of her white-washed house, and I squinted to make out the silhouette of her familiar figure—a large pear shaped torso supported by spindly legs—beneath her light cotton dress. Neither she nor the house had changed much since my mother had brought me to live with her.

She hadn't been waiting for me on the porch the day my mother pulled onto her driveway. I had slept most of the way from Houston to Fannett, but the change from the smooth pavement of the road to the uneven dirt tracks of her driveway woke me up. I looked out at the little white house in a daze. It was early morning, and the sun had barely risen above the roof of the house.

"We're here, darling," mom said as she turned off the ignition and sighed heavily. "Now, I want you to be on your best behavior, you hear me. And, I want you to be cheerful. No sulking around or making those faces of yours. My mother hates surly children, and we've got to make sure that she likes you." She glanced over at me and shook her head. "August, sit up straight, darling, and fix your hair. It's all tousled." She reached over and flipped open the mirror on the sun visor. "Make yourself presentable, darling. I can't have you meeting your grandmother looking like that." She got out of the car and walked around to the back to the trunk.

I looked in the mirror and re-arranged my hair. I tucked it behind my ears because mother hated it when I let my hair hang in my face like a "blond mop." I didn't know why she was making

ing such a big fuss. I'd never met my grandmother, and I really didn't care if I impressed her or not. But, I did what I was told. I could tell mom was in no mood to argue. I got out of the car and walked back to the trunk for inspection.

I shut the door of my car and walked to the back to open up the trunk. As I emptied the trunk and Gran got closer, I noticed that she had changed some since I had last been to visit. Her gait was slower, and she favored one leg more than the other. I went to meet her halfway and offered her my arm. She smiled up at me and guided me over to my car.

"So, how did everything go?" she asked.

"It's all final and official. I'm once again Ms. August Taylor."

"Well, that's a good thing. I never did like the sound of August Oberth anyway." She looked down at my bags. "Here, let me help you bring some of this stuff up to the house. I'm sure you're tired from the drive down," she said as she picked up the handle of one of my rolling suitcases and looked around for something else to carry.

"Thanks, Gran," I said as I gave her a hug.

She took the small bag I offered her and started walking toward the house as I finished emptying the trunk. I heard the suitcase thump and scrape and looked up to watch her drag it over the stepping stones leading to the house.

"Don't drag the thing, carry it," my mother had said giving me a dirty look as I dragged one of the suitcase across the stepping stones.

"Don't drag the thing, carry it..." I had mimicked as I lifted the suitcase off the ground and carried it the rest of the way to the porch. I placed it next to the rest of my bags. "There..."

My mother grabbed my chin and pulled my face close to hers. "I told you to be pleasant, so you better improve your attitude, missy." Her grip softened as my eyes began to tear. "I'm sorry," she said as she let go and looked out into the yard.

"I'm sorry, mom. I know you're upset about Daddy, but..."

"It's okay, darling." She turned back toward me and stroked my chin. "I know this is hard for you too." She brushed my bangs back, so they weren't covering my eyes. "You should show off your eyes; you have such beautiful blue eyes, just like my mothers. She'll like that." She arranged the bags neatly on the porch, ran her hands through her hair and readjusted her clothes. "Now remember, say 'yes, ma'am' and 'no, ma'am.' My mother hates children with no manners."

She breathed in deeply as she knocked on the door three times. "Listen, love. Don't tell your grandmother about last night. She never liked your father, and this would only upset her. Promise?"

"I promise."

"That's a good girl. Now, give your mother a hug." She hugged me close to her and then turned me around to face the door. "Your grandmother isn't expecting us, so don't pay attention to anything she may say at first. She's bound to think the worst, and she probably won't be too receptive to our visit."

I could feel her breathe in deeply as we heard footsteps approaching the door. "It'll take her awhile to adjust. She hates surprises." Her body became rigid when the door began to creak open. She pulled me closer to her when the old lady I knew to be my grandmother from pictures my mother had shown me peered out from behind the wooden door.

"Hello, mother," my mother's voice came out as a raspy whisper.

My grandmother gazed at her for a moment like she was trying to place her face. She looked from my mother down to me, over to the bags stacked on the porch, and back up at my mother. "Come for a visit, have you?"

"I thought it would be a good time for you to finally meet your granddaughter." She nudged me forward and said, "August, say hello to your grandmother. You can call her Gran, that's what I called my grandmother." She spoke so rapidly that it took me a moment to interpret what she had just said.

I looked at my grandmother's confused scowl and didn't say a word. She looked like we had just woken her up from a dream, a bad dream. She looked down at me, and I felt another nudge from my mother. I looked back at my mother and then up to my grandmother and said, "Hello... Gran. It's nice to meet you."

"That is okay with you with isn't it mother?" my mother asked, though I wasn't sure whether she was referring to the name choice or the fact that we had come to visit unannounced.

My grandmother looked down at me and then over to the bags again. "Do I have a choice? It looks like you've already made up your mind to stay for awhile." She smiled down at me and said, "Anyway, it's about time you brought this lovely child out to meet her grandmother."

She stepped down onto the porch and walked over to me. I hadn't noticed how petite she was until she stepped down. I wasn't a tall 11 year old, but she and I stood eye to eye. She reminded me of Mrs. Claus with her gray hair rolled up into a bun on the top of her head and her round belly protruding from underneath a red pinstriped cotton house dress. I met her smiling eyes, and I couldn't keep myself from genuinely smiling back at her.

"It's nice to finally meet you August. You're much prettier in person than in your pictures. And taller." She and I had both giggled at that last statement. She looked back up at my mother. "So, what brings you here after all these years?"

"Well..." My mother faltered. Apparently she hadn't thought up an excuse for our visit.

"Let me guess, you're having problems with that..." Mother looked toward me with pleading eyes, and my grandmother stammered, "no good... husband of yours. I told you he'd bring you nothing but heartache, but you were too damn stubborn and too 'in love' to listen to anything but his sweet talk."

"Gran," I said as she reached the porch, "I appreciate you letting me stay. I..."

"Nonsense, child. You're always welcome here," she said as she lugged the suitcase up the porch steps. "This is your

home, and it'll be nice having you around again." She carried the luggage into the house and then poked her head out the screen door. "Besides, I've already made up a list of all the things I need you to help me do around the house."

The mischievous expression on her face made me laugh. One of the reasons Chad didn't like to visit was because she always had a list of things for him to do around the house like rearrange furniture, trim branches, chop down trees, clean out the stables. My tasks were always more pleasant and sanitary than his. Gran always had me help her work in the flower bed or garden. Feeling the cool dirt beneath my hands was always something I looked forward to on my visits home because Chad and I lived in an apartment and only had potted plants. In Austin, I spent a lot of time at Zilker's botanical gardens, especially when I was upset or depressed, but it wasn't the same as having a garden of my own.

"I'll go over and play by the garden," I had volunteered when my mom and grandmother had started talking about my dad. I really didn't want to hear my mom recap what I had experienced the night before, so I walked over to the flower bed and sat down.

I was so still and quiet that a butterfly landed on one of the flowers in front of me. The glint of the sunlight off its translucent wings mesmerized me as it flew from flower to flower, but fragments of conversation kept drifting down from the porch invading my peace.

"Well, it doesn't surprise me. I never liked that boy to begin with. No manners, that boy had absolutely no manners," my grandmother said.

The butterfly flew closer and closer to me, and I held my breath as it landed on the tip of a rose right in front of me.

"He claimed she was only an old friend from high school, but..." my mom's voice trailed off.

When I let out my breath, the butterfly flew away, and I watched it flutter down the street. I stared down the road at the place where I had last seen it.

"Stupid, the man must have been plain stupid. All men cheat, but only the stupid ones get caught," my grandmother said.

I looked back at the flower bed and started collecting the fallen petals. I made different piles for each type of flower, and I tried to reconstruct the shape of each flower with the petal.

"I'm going to call a lawyer when I get back to town."

I made a pretty decent daisy. I used the petal of a yellow rose for the center.

"Of course August can stay with me while you get things settled."

I brushed all the petals together and threw the pile into the air. Colors showered down on me, and I watched them scatter as they fell to the ground.

I heard my mother walking toward me, and I looked back to watch her approach. My grandmother was standing on the porch looking back and forth from my mother to the suitcases. She seemed to be waiting for something. My mother sat down beside me and started picking at the grass.

"It's a beautiful garden, isn't it? I know you've always wanted a garden of your own. Maybe your grandmother will let you help her sometime."

"I didn't think we were staying that long."

"Well, I was hoping that you wouldn't mind staying here for awhile. You're father and I have some things that we need to straighten out."

"But daddy says he didn't do anything. Don't you believe him?"

"It's not that I don't believe him, darling. It's just... it's just complicated, and I really don't know how to explain it to you."

"Is it one of those things I'll understand when I'm older?"

"Exactly. Right now, I think it'll be best if you spend some time with your grandmother. She'd really like to get to know you better, and I know you'll like it here." She stroked my hair, but she wouldn't look me in the eye. "You won't have to stay here long. I'll come back for you as soon as everything gets settled. You will do this for me, won't you darling?"

"Of course I will," I told her with a smile, but I knew I really didn't have a choice in the matter. I knew how my grandmother felt when she saw those bags stacked up on her front porch.

My mother looked back at her mother and nodded, and I watched my grandmother carry my bags into the house. "Don't cry, August. I promise everything will work out." My mother lifted my chin and kissed my forehead. "Breathe in the country air, darling. It'll refresh you," she said as she released my chin and breathed in deeply.

Thinking about that day gave me chills. I tried to shake off the memory with a shiver and absorb the heat of the summer air by inhaling the heavy air. I had come full circle in my life. Now I was returning after a failed marriage, but thankfully I was alone. The only person I had to explain things to was Gran, but she already knew enough. I had married a stupid man.

I closed the trunk of my car and took in another breath of the refreshing hot air. Then I picked up my two suitcase and followed my grandmother into the house.

Amber McClintock Rigney

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PULSE

Pulse is a student publication intended to exhibit works by student writers. It is distributed once each long semester. Cash prizes are awarded in each category. Entries are judged by a panel of qualified professors. All submissions are subject to editorial discretion.

Rules for Literary Submission:

1. Entries should be typed and double spaced. Clear photo copies will be accepted. **ENTRIES WILL NOT BE RETURNED.** Keep a copy of all work.
2. Author's name should NOT appear on the submission. One submission form should be used for all entries by a single author. Forms are available in the Maes Liberal Arts Building in offices 03, 04, or 08.
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FOREIGN LANGUAGE TRANSLATIONS

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Titles and Categories (poetry, fiction, essay, translation)

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