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Western Kentucky University
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Contributors:
Leigh Borders – Maybe They’re Wrong
Christopher Bratton – Time Capsule
Paul Bush – A Message
Lisa Frye - Neighbors
Beckie Hendrick – Polly
  Untitled poem
  Denim
  On Driving To Beaver Dam, November, 1985
Brett Hoffman – Insomnia: Swan’s Island – Summer 1985
Susan Hollis – Driving Home On Labor Day Weekend Guilty
Doug Logsdon – Biplane
  Prayer of the Riverbound Whale
  Inside the Kozmosdale Baptist Church
C.W. Mayes – Traditions
Alicia Neat – Someone
  Buttering Up Miss Valmy
Tony Pennington – Cool Notes Remembered
Terri Pullen – Prayers While Smoking
  A Handful of July
Jason Smith - Loser
LaNita Stinson – Progression
Amy Wallace – Moth Dreams
  All the Leaves
  In Defense of Becoming a Plastic Ice Tray
  The Weight Lifter Asleep
Martha Zettlemoyer – Easter Film, 1964
  To Their Daughter, Navigating Sunday
  Saturday, Rising at Six
  Settling in to the New Place
  Philodendron
  The Bridge Over Trammel Creek

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AWARD WINNERS

Geoffrey McCalvey Memorial Award
Martha Zettlemoyer

Browning Literary Club Poetry Award
Doug Logsdon

Ladies Club Prose Award
Alicia Neat
TRADITIONS

To be a miner is a matter of pride and tradition in my family. My father is a fourth generation miner following the steps carved by his great-grandfather who moved north from Tennessee to scratch a living from the hard Kentucky coal late in the 19th century.

My earliest memories of Dad are those of a giant but gentle man in workshirt and overall blackened with coal dust returning from a day’s work at the mine. It was his job to ensure that slack was separated from the coal at the tipple. When the tipple was down, he would clean the railroad cars and ride them down the hillside to be loaded. On those days he would often bring home stray animals he found in the cars or near the tracks. Through the years he brought me baby skunks, coons, rabbits, birds, and even a collie I named Lassie.

Many times he would find me waiting on the front porch steps when he came home, and he would often emerge from the old Buick grinning, throw his hat and lunch pail aside, and lunge for me in feeble attempts to pull me into his dust-covered arms. Screaming, feigning terror, I would always run away. Always he would stop at the edge of the house, and his voice would bellow in mock anger, “Next time boy, I’ll get you next time.” Then his grinning face would disappear through the front door, and he would make his way through the unfinished rooms of the house to the space reserved for the bath. There, behind walls of uncovered 2” by 4” studs, he would cleanse himself of the day’s accumulation of dust and grime in a large galvanized tub.

Twenty-seven years have passed since the baths in the large tub. Ten have passed since his last shower at the Kirkpatrick Mining Company. Shortness of breath and a weakened heart have forced his body into retirement, yet the ritual continues as daily bouts of coughing attempt to clear the dust adhering to the moisture in his lungs.

Tonight, in the darkness the farmhouse becomes a crosscut deep within the hillside. Overhead, the lowest branches of the oak scrape lightly upon the metal roof, faint echoes of the picks of my forefathers. In the kitchen, the hum of the ceiling fan is transformed into the electric whine of empty shuttle cars, and below, the coughs echo like mini-explosions through the 100 year-old beams. I lie quietly in the darkness, digging for words.
EASTER FILM, 1964

Too bad this is black and white and
Gees! aren't we turn-of-the-Century sober,
at least by photographic standards.

Here's Mom now in the dress she made
and her drill-toed pumps nearly rooting up
the tulips she wanted in the picture
because they surprised her, bucking up so early.

She's corked down tight beneath her
demi-veiled pillbox hat and how fortunate
Kodak was there to capture that instant when
Art was screwed entirely out of her life.

And here's the brothers, devil babies
wrapped in schoolboy flannel, bow-ties
crooked birds that would carry small boys away
if they weren't holding each other so desperately.

If you looked close enough you could see the
chocolate bunny residue around their mouths
where Mom rubbed it in as much as wiped it off.

Now this is a shot of sister and me, presaging
womanly elegance, mingling white-gloved hands
cool together. You can't really tell, but
those are frogs-on-lily-pads blurred on my skirt
and I can't understand why I look so unaffected,
remembering how giddy I felt looking down on them,
seas of tulle buoying them up just for me. I
thought even a ballerina would be jealous.

Looking back on this series, Mom always asks
of her two-dimensional children, So where was
your father in all of this? Before anyone answers,
she pictures him standing behind the tin box
in which he's trapped us all flat forever—
whistling at first, then colored all over by
some stark realization, stunned and dumb, then
peevled as a wet cat by the time he announces
he's all out of film.

TO THEIR DAUGHTER, NAVIGATING SUNDAY
FOR M & G

Cindi wants to not go to church again
so she's out back, half-dressed,
spin-dipping in the clover.

Dad sights her out the kitchen window
and scowls. He wants to reel her in,
get some religion into her before
it's too late. Then he gets scared,
thinking maybe it already is.

Mom comes over to prod Dad.
He shushes her. They watch Cindi
maneuvering deeper into the meadow
by what might, on stage, be called
flying arabesques. Out there,
under the purple constellations
of towering thistle heads,
her dance is strictly interpretive.

By the time church would have started,
Cindi's travelled so far they can hardly
see her. They huddle closer over the sink.

Turning away, Dad says with a part of his voice
he doesn't use very much any more,
"My Dear, we've raised a gyroscope."

"Not exactly," Mom says to the window
because she understands their daughter has
more axes than they'll ever know,
and she's rehearsing them all.
SATURDAY, RISING AT SIX

1
Years of training make the body do this
on its own. Not wanting to be left behind,
the night life of the mind waxes diurnal,
strolls around, unaware of its own nudity,
in the lily-of-the-valley-colored aura
of morning.

You sleep on. I'll meet myself,
clandestine, in the chair by the window.

We spy the package of cookies you left
open on the bedside table last night.
We think about that.

We are smoking cigarettes.
We are eager to talk.

2
Something I never told you:
I fear thick-bodied men the way
pigeons fear rubber snakes on a roof.

This is why you're thin.
Not why I picked you, but
why I don't work harder
at feeding you better.

3
Your dreams rise from the bed
leaving a trail of morning glories
I'll never see. They bloom inward.

4
If you woke up this instant,
you'd catch me in the middle of something,
slurring, as if I'd suddenly forgotten
how to speak or sing.

While you sleep, I can say anything.
If I want I can say it twice
the way I talk to my cat in duplicate:
Kitty wanna bite a Fig-a Newton?
Kitty wanna bite a Fig-a Newton?
As if I hadn't made myself clear
the first time.
Martha Zettlemoyer

SETTLING IN TO THE NEW PLACE

While the cat studies the views from all the new windows, I reunite lamps with their shades.
The table legs uncramp from the ride, explore the warp of unfamiliar floors.
Pots and pans nestle into each other, the same ones, same as before.
It will take days to establish equilibrium in the closets, to make over the old curtains.
And many more days to get the pictures not to tilt, to be satisfied, finally, that I’ve put the right things in the medicine chest, the right things in the cabinet below the bathroom sink, the right things in the right drawers.

Martha Zettlemoyer

PHILODENDRON

I’m no green thumb, so naturally, in the beginning, it inspired jokes: I’ve tried everything I know, but I can’t kill the thing.

It had a life of its own and meant to live it out spectacularly in my living room.

First it traveled up the strings that held it to the ceiling.

Then it crept down the nearby shelving choosing, as if it were reasonable, a book here and there for support on its jointed way down insinuating who knows what.

After a while it was embarrassing, I quit tending it at some point but it sent a tendril nonchalantly over the door to the hallway down into the aquarium where it rerooted itself in the 78 degree, chlorine-free water.

It had plenty of nerve, all right. It wasn’t the least bit frantic living out in broad green detail the manifest destiny of philodendron.
Martha Zettlemoyer

THE BRIDGE OVER TRAMMEL CREEK

Overdone, an engineer would say of it, seeing it in the off-season for bridges. Too much metal over too little creek. But in the spring, half the water in Allen County would find its way under the bridge over Trammel Creek, and we wondered whether or not it would just give out one sunny day. The way to find out was to sit on the bridge all afternoon after school, dangle your bare toes over the water, dip in from time to time, and let your body be the judge. A few of us were not content to just dangle. We’d climb over the side of the bridge where water goes away, lace our small legs, gelatinous still, around a lower brace, and lean out hard on the wind like an Irish Setter. The only reason this worked at all is that we had faith in our bones then.

There was not much to see, really. Occasionally a flotilla of fish rolling belly up and over, would pass by, looking surprised the way fish always do in death. We would wonder why didn’t these particular fish find a deep, still place somewhere up the creek to wait out the violence of spring, while others did. Others must have, because there were always fish. Were these defective or just unlucky? But the water went by so fast with its hundred visible, shifting currents that we couldn’t entertain ourselves with such questions for very long. As hard as we tried, we couldn’t keep up with the water. When we gave up trying, we would suddenly float back and up; then we’d be riding backwards as fast as the creek was running forward. Pure sensation carried us out to dusk, by which time we were satisfied the bridge would hold another season.

When I got home, clammy with creek bottom and fish atoms, Mother could smell where I’d been—even through liver and onions frying or cabbage stewing. It’s good she wasn’t worrying herself sick for nothing. Directives flew. Off with those awful clothes, into the tub, before your father gets home. Don’t ever do that again. And threats. If I ever so much as suspect you’re on that bridge in the future... Then there was the list of quirky effects I had on her body—her hair, her palms, her knees, her cardiovascular system. I loved her and I didn’t want to put her through that again. In the interest of Mother’s longevity, I vowed never to go to the bridge again. But I knew I would, just like she knew she would retake this scene again and probably again and again.

We hear about the joys of motherhood, the heartbreak of motherhood, the triumphs and despair of motherhood; but what we don’t hear much about is the goal of motherhood, the serious work, the ultimate measure of mother’s success: keeping her children alive long enough for them to appreciate her having done so. This accounts wholly for the methods mothers use to teach their children about the world. They must exaggerate the dangers of life to be obeyed: always there are worms in the dirt between your toes; the limbs of the willow tree are weak and gravity is double; that boy you like is an octopus if ever I saw one and he drives like a maniac. There are lists of safety regulations involving electrical appliances and water and thunderstorms. Everything we learn comes with its own warning. And we must do this: memorize the medical histories—including causes of death—of every member of our families three generations back, both sides. Just in case. In case what? She doesn’t say. All mothers teach from the same manual, give or take a few hometown pages.

I absorbed these bone-hardening lessons so prodigiously that I thought I’d never grow up. Adults were supposed to know everything every minute, know what to do in any situation, and be unafraid to do it. Even when I was twenty, something as simple as driving could become an exercise in terror. I would panic if I met an oncoming car in a narrow street. All I knew to do was move as close as I dared to the cars parked on my side, close my eyes three-quarters of the way, take a deep breath, and keep going in hopes the other driver knew what he was doing. At least he was an adult. I didn’t have any wrecks, so I concluded the method was sound. I extended this technique allegorically in my life for years. I guided relationships by it; I followed every piece of sturdy advice my parents, teachers, and friends gave me. After living this way didn’t make me happy, I decided there was a secret passage to adulthood and I couldn’t find the entrance. I took to adventure, thinking I might stumble across the door by blind bravery. I took up skydiving. Landed in a tree once. I went to Atlanta for breakfast on the spur of the moment. But still, I had dreams in which the Trammel Creek Bridge would appear, hovering vaporously over absurd scenes from my life as I looked on, knees knocking.

Then one day while filling out an extended medical history form in a doctor’s office, trying to recall which grandmother died of phlebitis and which from cancer of the colon, it occurred to me that one of those drivers of one of those oncoming cars might have been doing the same thing I had been doing. Then I’d be equally
responsible for catastrophe. I was scared all over again. I had the bridge dream night after night, months on end. The last time I dreamed that dream, my mother and I were arguing over some life-decision I was struggling with in my waking life then. She was red in the face. Her hands and hair were flying. The me observing the scene looked up at the bridge and was suddenly embarrassed, having missed the blatant symbolism all these years. Both of me in the dream climbed up on the bridge and took our places side by side, “Look Ma,” we said in unison, “no hands.” Now we’re riding the bridge over Trammel Creek again, like we should have been all along: full steam ahead and ignorant.

Alicia Neat

SOMEONE

All my life I’ve seen myself as the dark star on my parent’s horizon. When I hit my teens I started feeling sorry for myself. You know; poor unappreciated me. I even thought about killing myself to make everyone sorry. But I didn’t for two reasons. Number one, I hate pain. Really. Killing yourself with pills is the sissy way at my school. Blowing your head off or hanging yourself is more manly. Although it seems dumb to care about what people think about you after you’re dead, I didn’t want to go through time thought of as a sissy. I guess if I hadn’t cared what they thought, I wouldn’t have thought of doing it in the first place. I wanted them to care, even if it was too late. Number two is an extension of number one, sort of. I decided that if everyone around me really was such a bunch of cruds, then I would be killing myself over a bunch of cruds. It seemed dumb to die for such a lousy cause; I’m an idealist, I guess.

The Alpha Centauri on my parents’ horizon is my brother Phil, who is one year younger than me. Last year as a sophomore in high school he was the president of Future Business Leaders of America, and he got second place in a nationwide computer competition. After that, Harold and Maude, my mother and father, bought him this Apple Computer with a modem and and monitor and lots of software for his birthday. He’s always on it when he’s at home, word-processing or making charts for things, or getting in touch with other computers by phone. Actually, Harold said that it was for our birthdays, Phil and mine, because we were born a year and three days apart. But I’m not into computers and Harold knows it. I wanted a typewriter, because all writers have typewriters, and I thought having one would make me an official writer (i.e. worthy of respect.) Harold says a word processor would work just as well, and maybe he’s right, but I saw it as an excuse to get me into a more “marketable field.” “A writer is someone who tells people things they already know and who sponges off his hard-working parents and brother for the rest of his life.” That’s Harold’s opinion of writers.

Phil has offered to teach me how to use the word processor for my writing. He doesn’t make fun of me, because I’m not into the capitalism he and Harold embrace. I guess that’s one of the worst/best things about Phil from my point of view. I’d hate him if
he weren’t so damned nice. Everyone likes Phil, and Phil likes everyone. He’s clean-cut, blond good-looking, and he’s got “a future.” Harold calls me “The Other One.” So naturally I’ve made myself as different from Phil as possible.

I wear my black hair longish and feathered over my ears instead of trimmed high, and I have this perpetual razor stubble, thanks to an abnormally fast-growing beard and a lack of interest in shaving more than twice a week. My eyes are very pale grey beneath wooly eyebrows, and I heard one girl say that I look like a wolf because of my dark skin and light eyes. It was nice to be noticed, for any reason. Phil always wears socks-ties with corduroys and oxford-striped shirts, so I dress like a bum in faded denim jackets, old blue jeans, and tee-shirts. One time I put on a tie for a school picture, and Maude beamed and said, “Oh, you look just like Phil,” so I took it off. Whenever Maude buys my clothes they end up on Phil, because he and I are the same size. He doesn’t even ask if he can have them anymore. He gets the “Best Dressed Male” award every year, thanks to me. I get the lectures. From Maude. “Not another tee-shirt, Lee. Where’s that new Ralph Lauren sweater I bought you the other day?” Then Phil walks in wearing it, and he looks so good in it she shuts up. Then, as I got older, she began to try new persuation: more crafty, calling out to my hormones. “You’ll never get a girlfriend if you dress like that. Look at Phil, a new girl every week.” And, “I bet some girl would find you more attractive if you dressed more like Phil. Look at Phil. He’s dating the Homecoming Queen.” Look at Phil. Look at Phil. Look at me, Mom, look at me.

A few nights ago Phil was going to be presented with an award by some big-wig company in town as the “Most Promising Young Businessman of the Future” in Louisville, Kentucky. There was going to be this big ceremony with him getting a fancy plaque and having his picture made with some famous corporate president for the newspaper, and there was even a reception afterward. Harold said that morning at the breakfast table that there was a good chance that they’d want a picture of the “proud family,” and I heard warning sirens go off in my head.

“You mean, you want me to go,” I asked. “But I’ve got a short story to write for class tomorrow.”

“Your brother’s future is more important than an assignment in some sissy writing class. I expect you to be waiting at the door ready to go at five-thirty sharp in a suit and tie. Are you listening, Lee?”

“But it doesn’t start until seven,” Phil said, with his mouth full of pancake.

“I intend to make sure that your brother is wearing something suitable for the occasion. We can’t let him spoil the family picture,” Harold said with his mouth full of pancake. He tends to blow food when he talks with his mouth full, which is often. Phil too. It still makes me a little nauseous, especially when I was getting bawled out for a breach of proper conduct.

“Then forget about my going,” I said, looking down at my plate. “By Lee lacocca, you’ll be dressed and ready at 5:30 with a smile for the photographers,” Harold threatened.

“One big happy proud family,” I muttered.

“Cheer up, Lee. I’ll let you borrow some of my clothes,” Phil offered. His hair was combed and hair-sprayed and his face clean-shaven every morning, although he really didn’t have much of a beard. Even across the table he reeked of after shave.

“They’re my clothes. Some of them, anyway. May I be excused?”

“Yes you may. Five-thirty sharp,” my father said, and a sudden bit of pancake landed in the sugar bowl.

I went to my room to get my books, and before leaving I stopped in front of the mirror. Unshaven as usual, hair too long in the front, even for my taste. I’d probably have to borrow some of Phil’s hairspray to get it to stay back. No way. Too pansey, I wasn’t going.

“Hey, Lee,” Phil said, coming into my room without knocking like he always does.

I turned away from the mirror, embarrassed at having been caught looking at myself. “Hey, Phil. Knock sometimes, why don’t ya?”

Phil nodded. “Sure, Lee, you don’t have to come. I don’t even know if they’ll recognize my family in any major way, much less take your pictures. So you don’t have to come.”

“You ashamed of me, Phil?” I looked at him closely, and he looked a little too astounded at the question to be sincere.

“No, Lee. You know that’s not it. I just know how you feel. I mean, I know how you hate to dress up. I was letting you off the hook.”

I nodded in feigned appreciation and said “Well, I’ve changed my mind, Phil. I want to go. I was just thinking about stopping and getting my hair cut for it.

Phil started, as though I’d said something really radical—like I was thinking of becoming a priest or something. “You don’t have to, Lee. You look fine like you are.”

I smiled a little. “Sure I do, Philly. It’s not every day that my genius brother gets an award. Just every other day.”

“It’s no big thing,” Phil lied nonchalantly, and I felt a surge of anger streak across my chest.
“It’s everything to Harold and Maude, Phil. But I guess you’re getting jaded, huh? Does it ever stop feeling good to be a winner?”
Phil smiled, and for a moment I considered hitting him. “Not yet,” he said. “But then I’m not always a winner.”
One for the modesty award, folks, I thought. You’d even win that.
“Well, I’m going. And I’m getting my hair cut.”
“Short like mine?”
“In spikes all over my head. With a shaved line down the middle,” I replied. Phil looked a little fearful. I thought about letting him stay scared, but then he’d have gotten Harold in on it, and this time getting my hair cut was my decision. “Ha Ha,” I said.
“You’re always such a kidder,” Phil said, slapping his knee with laughter. “You had me worried there for a minute.”
“It was bound to happen sometime,” I drawled. “Ready to go?”
We rode to school together then, because Phil’s Camaro was in the shop...again. One thing about my Volkswagen, it was as ugly as a bulldog and twice as tough. “Can you get a ride home with Susan, Phil? I’ve got to go by the barbershop on my way home.”
“It’s Jessica now, Lee. And yeah, I’m sure she can manage.”
The Jessica? Whatever happened to Susan, Phil?” Jessica Clarke was a football cheerleader who gave new meaning to the word “gorgeous.” I’d lusted in my heart for her for years. Susan was last year’s most popular sophomore girl, although she wasn’t exactly one of the intellectual bright lights on a dark horizon of ignorance.
“Susan was too clingy,” Phil made motions of pushing her away.
“You break my heart. I’d like to give her someone to cling to.”
“Here’s your chance, my man.” Phil self-sacrificially gave me permission, which would have ruined it had I really been interested. I didn’t want my little brother’s leftovers.
“Fat chance,” I muttered. “Let’s go.”

I looked into the mirror and gave up trying to tie my tie. I would have to have Phil do it for me. That’s how often I wear the “nooses,” as I call them. Anxiously, I looked again at my hair. It was short all right. For the first time in years my ears were exposed, and they looked pale in comparison to my face. I furtively tried to pull a few wisps down over them, but the hair was too short. I had locked the door to my room when I got in, and although Phil had been anxiously banging on it trying to get in, it was still locked. I didn’t want him or anyone else saying anything before I decided what this haircut meant and whether I liked it. It was the first haircut I’d volunteered for, and I liked it better than any of the others for that reason, anyway. And I was going to this thing because I wanted to, I told myself. Nobody was going to spoil this by pretending this was their idea.
“Five-thirty, Lee,” Harold said from the other side of the locked door. “Open up.”
I thought about making him bang on the door and then decided against it. I opened it up, and Harold stood there with his mouth opened wide, preparing to yell. I wanted to laugh, but instead I smiled as sweetly as I could without getting cavities.
“Yes...” I said.
“Lee. You got your hair cut?” You’d have thought the sky was falling.
“Today. I decided that it needed it.”
“That’s what I keep telling you...” Dad began. “Maude, come and look at Lee.”
This was too much. Phil was standing in the door smiling, relieved, and Maude was staring at me like I was the transfiguration of Christ. I wanted to rip off the tie and run, but at the same time I was enjoying it. Phil was too, acting like he’d had a part in it. But as my parents beamed at me, Phil’s face clouded and he said “Dad, does my suit look alright?”
My parents’ eyes turned to him, and I felt both a sense of relief and loss. “You both look so fine,” my mother declared, and there were tears in her eyes.
Oh, for Pete’s sake, I thought. Now she cries.
“Maybe you’ll turn out alright after all, Lee,” my father said. “It’s a start.”
“Harold,” my mother scolded him. “Don’t start with all that again. Don’t you boys think that your father looks sharp in his new blue pinstripe,” Maude asked. “You look so handsome and distinguished.”
Harold basked in the flattery. “Got it at Saks. Five hundred dollars on sale.”
We all made the necessary sounds of admiration. I was always appalled at how much he spent on clothes. But tonight was a night of compromise, even for an idealist.
After the awards ceremony, we were riding home in my parents’ Mercedes. “You’d have thought,” Harold complained, “that they would have wanted to take our pictures. And I had bought this blue suit, too.”
“It’s a lovely suit, dear,” Maude chimed in soothingly.
“And Lee even got his hair cut,” Harold continued.
“It’s okay. I was going to get it cut anyway...”
“Lord knows when he’ll get it cut again. And did you see that
scrawny little plaque they gave him? Not big enough to use as a cheese board. And the speaker was terrible. Who was he anyway," Harold asked.

"The president of the EAMC Corporation," I answered, smiling. EAMC was one of the biggest computer corporations in the country. "He probably can’t write either.

"Probably not," Harold grumbled, not really hearing what I’d said but angry enough to agree with anything negative about the guy. "And the worst of it is that he got our last name wrong. No one but a fool would mistake Miller for Muller. He’ll regret it. Someday Miller will be the big name in computers. Then he’ll remember us...you, son. Phil, I’m sorry that you were so disappointed." Harold reached for a cigarette.

"I wasn’t really. Not much," Phil began. "I mean, I still got the award, even if he got my name wrong." His voice sounded pleading, tired.

"Is it wrong on the plaque," Harold asked.

Phil looked down. "No," he said quietly.

"Good, then we don’t have to have it changed. Son, without a name you’re no one out there. They’ve got to hear the name Miller, and they’ve got to hear it often and get it right. Then you’ll really be someone. It’s not enough just to get the awards; it’s in the name. You understand?" Harold puffed, winded by his long tirade. He was smoking a lot lately.

"Yes, sir," Phil answered, looking out the window for a moment. I saw him look down at the plaque on his lap, and saw the name "Muller" inscribed on it before he could cover it with his hand. He looked at me, and for a moment I thought I saw his eyes glitter, but it might have just been the lights of a passing car.

"It’s yours, Philly," I said, pressing his fingers against the cold metal plating. "You’ve earned it."

"Yeah," he said, but his fingers loosened as soon as I took my hand away, and he turned to stare out the window again.

The next day Phil’s Camaro was out of the shop, so we drove to school separately. I waited until after he had left, and then I went into his room. I had a policy against doing that, because I cherished my own privacy so much I didn’t violate his. No one did. I looked for the plaque, but I couldn’t find it on the dresser where he kept his other plaques and ribbons and trophies. They gleamed brightly copper and golden in the morning sun, because Maude kept them polished. Harold had wanted to put them in a display case in the den, but Phil had insisted that they be kept in his room. I guess he knew that my one academic award from seventh grade and the Librarian of the Year Award from eighth grade would make a paltry showing against his hardware. I had yet to win any awards for writing, as Harold often pointed out.

Finally I found the plaque hidden beneath the shirt Phil’d been wearing last night. He must really be afraid Harold’ll find out the truth, I thought. All the more reason to get the name changed and fast. I took the plaque and drove to the nearest sporting goods store where they engraved trophies and other awards.

"I need the name changed from Muller to Miller," I told the old man behind the counter, "and it needs to be done by three o’clock this afternoon."

The old man didn’t look up from his work. "I don’t do rush jobs. It’ll be done when it gets done."

"How long’ll that be," I asked.

"I’m real busy. A week at least," He looked up at me from beneath his bifocals. "Maybe longer."

You old skinflint, I thought. I shouldn’t have betrayed my anxiousness to get it back. For once I wished I had either Harold or Phil’s business sense. "Five bucks extra for it done today," Bribery should work, I thought.

"Next week. Maybe."

"Up yours," I said, picking up the plaque in disgust. I don’t respect unrespectable elders.

"Eight," he demanded, still not looking up.

"Five," I shot back.

"Seven," he said.

"Six," I hissed, but I felt elated. He was coming down.

"Cost you that much in gas to take it anywhere else plus labor. And they wouldn’t get it to you today. Seven," he said firmly. I walked toward the door. "Six-fifty," he called.

"By three o’clock," I asked, turning around.

"Sharp," he replied. "I am an honorable man." Like a card shark, I thought. I paid him the flat fee. "I’ll give you the extra six-fifty after you hand it back done as I’ve specified. At three o’clock."

"Having the extra money here makes me do an extra good job," he said, holding out his hand again.

I snorted, "Not having the money will help you do a faster job," I replied. "Change Muller to Miller. By three o’clock. By the way, who runs this place?"

"I do," I sighed. "Figures. Will the change show?"

"Not too much," He smiled a little, looking down at his empty
hand.

I gritted my teeth, tired of arguing. "Try real hard not to make it show, old man. There'll be a few dollars extra for a good job." Before he could ask how much, I left the plaque on the counter and ran outside. I shook my head in shame. I was going to end up paying ten bucks for a one-letter engraving change. As I was driving off, I realized that my father, Harold, probably had stock in this sporting goods chain. Maybe I could have threatened his job a bit by waving Harold's name around. But I was glad I hadn't used it, hadn't even been tempted to because I had thought of it too late. Like Harold had said the night before, there was a lot of power in a name.

I went to pick up the plaque at three o'clock sharp. The old man smiled proudly and handed it to me. "It dos not show at all. I am good at what I do. Now pay."

"It shows," I protested. There were still faint scratches where the "u" had been.

"I am good. I am the best. I am not God to make all mistakes perfect. Now pay." He held out his hand.

The strangest people talk about God, I've noticed. I handed him six dollars and fifty cents.

"Where is the extra for the wonderful job," he asked, rubbing his thumb and first finger together, a greedy look on his face.

"Mister, my father...." I burst out, and then I stopped myself just in time and lowered my voice. "My father will be very pleased." I handed him another five. "Keep the change."

"Phillip Miller. Don't know him," the old man said, his hands closing like vises and crumpling the bills.

"You will," I promised. "Remember it." I took the plaque and left.

When I got home I went into Phil's room and put the plaque onto Phil's dresser with the other awards. For the first time, I felt proud that my brother could win so many awards. Maybe I could even try for a few myself someday, I thought. Nobel prize for fiction, something distinguished.

I sat down at Phil's computer desk and turned on his Apple computer. I'd had a computer class my freshman year before Phil had come along and been such a whiz at it. I hadn't touched one since. I wondered about the word processor, if I could use it to write better. Maybe I'd take up Phil's offer to teach me how to use it. I opened the desk drawer to get one of Phil's multitudes of computer manuals out, and beneath the one on word processing I saw some pieces of paper. For some reason, I pulled them out and looked at them. They were report cards for the last three semesters. That was strange, I thought, because we always had to turn them back
Alicia Neat

BUTTERING UP MISS VALMY

Dear God,

Help! I'm trapped in here, and I'm all alone, and I'm starving to death. Dad locked me in here so that I can talk to you and pray for you to forgive me for what I did to Miss Valmy this morning. But, God, I think that you must be hard of hearing, 'cause I've been praying at the top of my lungs for over an hour now, and you haven't said anything back. I realize that you are very old, and you probably don't have any teeth now like Old Man Bledsoe who gums his food when he eats, but I would think that being God, you could at least read lips like other deaf people. If you can make a tree, why can't you read lips? But, anyway, I'm writing you this letter because Miss Rachel Pearson of our church prayed for some spectacles and you gave her some, so I figure that you must at least have a spare pair you can read with that you haven't given away. Please put them on and be quick about it, 'cause I don't have all day.

God, I hope that you have a sense of humor. I think you do because you made farts and stuff, and those are really funny. So I hope that you won't get real mad at what I'm going to tell you and strike me with lightening or not let me eat supper or something bad like that. Well, here's what happened today between me and Miss Valmy. You remember Miss Valmy, don't you God? She's the organist at our church. Her first name's Alexandria, if that helps, and she has lemon yellow hair that she pulls back in these flowerly-looking combs that attract bees. She was the one who got stung at the Labor Day picnic. Remember now? Old Miss Reynolds can't remember her children's names anymore, but I hope that you can still remember yours. Mine's Herbert Martin, in case you've forgotten that too. Anyway, Miss Valmy is always making eyes at my daddy as she shakes his hand on the way out of church, and whenever she comes over to talk to Dad about the hymns she'll screech out next Sunday on the organ. Mommy bites her lip and stares at the closed door like it was the door to Hell itself. She doesn't like Miss Valmy either, and I heard her tell Dad one day during one of their grown-up discussions that Miss Valmy probably prays more on her back than on her knees. I heard that, and I laughed, and Dad sent me to my room although I didn't do nothing wrong. It isn't my fault that Miss Valmy has arthritis like Old Miss Richards who has to sit on pillows every Sunday. I had to do that once too when I asked Miss Carlson how come she was hiding a baby under her dress, and Dad wore me out. But when I saw the baby later, I understood.

Anyway, Mom doesn't like Miss Valmy and I don't either, 'cause she thinks that she's so good, because she can play the organ with two hands, and she can sing and play at the same time which I don't think would be so hard, because I can eat and talk at the same time, only nobody seems to want me to. So I decided the other day that I would play a trick on Miss Valmy, and then maybe she'd leave my daddy alone, and Mom could stop having damned headaches and making Dad sleep on the couch. So I thought and I thought, and I almost got a damned headache myself, thinking, but finally I thought of the perfect trick to play on Miss Valmy. It was so good I kind of thought you'd given it to me yourself, so if you did then please don't let me have to miss supper because of your idea.

I went into church this morning with a crock of butter under my arm right before Miss Valmy comes in to play that music that is so mournful-sounding that nobody bothers to sing to it. I tried to once, but I got in trouble. And I carefully buttered the keys like they were toast. Lucky for me, today Old Miss Shermin was singing a solo (not so low that we couldn't hear her) first, so that Miss Valmy wouldn't be playing until the part where Dad prays for everybody to give lots of money, and the organ makes them forget all the things they'd rather spend it on. It doesn't work for me though. With all the gold streets in heaven, God, I don't see what you want with my nickel. I think it's kind of selfish for you to want more instead of being so thankful for what you have, but then I guess if I was a god then I could be selfish and nobody'd spank me.

I could hardly sit still from excitement as I waited for Miss Sherman to wail through "Peace Like a River" and for Dad to welcome visitors. Then Miss Valmy glided up to sit in front of the organ, her lemon yellow hair gleaming and a bee buzzing around her head combs. From my seat on the front row, I could see her nod her head to Dad before her hands touched the organ keys. My daddy's voice began droning in time with the bee, and Miss Valmy's hands disappeared from view. A few lonesome notes sounded, and then a note so horrible that it set my teeth on edge sounded. Dad didn't notice, because she'd fouled up a few notes before. But a few more of the forty-sounding notes caused him to glare at her. Her eyes bulged in her face, and she began to sniff suspiciously. "Butter! Some brat has put butter on the keyboard," she screamed, and her face was so bulgy and red in contrast to her yellow hair that
she looked like a ball you played jacks with. At first she had looked like the Devil's wife come straight from hell, and I was scared, but then she jumped up and started pointing to the organ, and hopping on first one foot and then another. Her always neatly anchored hair fell down, disrupting the bee that was perched precarious-like on her flowered comb, and it stung her on the cheek. With a scream, she reached out towards Dad screaming for him to save her, and then she fainted clean away, her arms hitting the organ keys as she fell, making the best music I'd ever heard her play. I heard a funny sound in the pew next to me, and I turned to see Mommy laughing so hard that tears were streaming down her cheeks. I started laughing, too, and the whole congregation stared at us in horror through their bifocals you gave them, but we couldn't stop laughing, because Miss Valmy was praying on her back.

It didn't take long for Dad to find out who had buttered the keys, and he dragged me here and there so I could pray for forgiveness. But I'm not sorry, God, and I wish that I could see her face again when Dad glared at her. All I am is hungry. I can smell the smell of food coming up from under the door, and I can hear the stairs creaking as someone comes up them. The door rattles as it is unlocked, and then it opens and I see not Dad with a switch but Mommy with a smile and a plate full of my favorite macaroni and cheese. So I'd better go, God, because I'm terribly hungry. I don't care much about being forgiven anyway, 'cause I don't guess that you can spank all that hard—you being so old and all.

Respectfully yours,
Herbert

Doug Logsdon

BIPLANE

On nights like this, when the air smothered
like a wet rag,
I prop a fan at the foot of the bed
and bathe in the running air

It oscillates and buzzes like a saw
Or maybe the engine of an old biplane
Pulling me through darkness to Topeka
The show tomorrow, and tomorrow night Marie

Who has seen every show in Topeka
And found the one she likes best—
Oh, those circus clowns are nothing serious
And I'm only through there twice a year
PRAYER OF THE RIVERBOUND WHALE

Why I am chosen I cannot say
I am, and that is enough.
A glowing squid, my father
appeared to me in sleep.
He chose me, and showed me the path
I must take, to save my brothers.

They are killers of my kind, but
when father looked at me anger vanished
like the octopus in a haze of dye.

At the mouth of the river I say a prayer
a prayer my father taught me.
Then I begin my journey
up this river, Sacramento.

I am so large
and this path so narrow
but to be reborn, I must pass
through my mother, water.

This water is like slicks of oil
in the North Sea.
It is filthy, but (my father says)
it will cleanse me.

First only small scales of flesh
then larger bits flake off my body.
The blubber melts from my ribs,
my ribs in turn topple.

My tail begins to split
and my sidefins stretch.
More skins shed
each flaying a penance, each worthwhile.

I shrink as the river narrows.
I paddle and kick
to a place where the water is shallow.

I rise in the sand and breathe
the old air through new nostrils.
I wade ashore on young toes,
pale hairy legs, and faith.
INSIDE THE KOZMOSDALE BAPTIST CHURCH

Inside the Kozmosdale Baptist Church
Reverend Robert Flame spins messages
between his fists
and sprinkles them like dust on the crowd.

Some, unbelieving, call his the Church of Genial Sin
but the members smile knowingly.
They shake their heads at such notions
like dying dogs laugh at rifles.

The sloped steeple, pyramid-shaped,
topped with a radio dish,
points to a strange galaxy—
one invisible to the eye.

But—sending or receiving?
None will say. They only smile
shake their heads and stare
like men stare at dying dogs.

Beckie Hendrick

POLLY
for Debra

Khaki skirt and loafers, you stand
beside the pickle barrel, taking checks
that resemble nothing you want
to think about. And it bothers you
somehow that the people all look
the same: fat red-faced man with
a joke or two; small child trying
his first sucker and not understanding
the motion; young man on motorcycle.
If you tasted wine on a rainy Monday,
you probably wouldn't think the taste
uncommon. But if you wore those bright
clothes you admire through the shop windows,
would you understand the pain any better?
Slip into something like black lace with matching panties or a frame of mind wet with something which cannot be P-h balanced, and fall backward into an Olympic-sized swimming pool.

You cannot swim.

While looking through your highschool yearbook, you noticed how the people all grinned the same—Married, divorced, married, two kids. And the girl next door is marrying a blonde-headed swimmer, and you lay beside someone who holds you in sleep like leaves hold rain.

You used to wake from sleep, sheets twisted around your arms, and he wouldn’t touch you, would he?

He is drinking down a Busch in some seedy bar. My friends, he says, are all around. You don’t see clearly inside because there are words on the ceiling. Ha. It is too hot for words.

So you slip into something cool, like the lake, full moon tattooed in the reflection like a dropped charm from the bracelets you always lost.

The black marks across your chest are real, and the fall is as soft as stepping into the river flowing by your house.

And you cannot swim.

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DENIM

He brought her gifts of strawberries—fruit so plump the redness stained her hands as she ate each delectable bite. His then pale Levis needed patching, but who could spread denim upon denim to cover such a remarkable hole? Not she.

or even the blonde at the drive-in concession stand. The girl’s breasts rise and fall with each lisping breath as she calls out the orders: “Two hot dogs, hold the mustard. Hamburger and on the double.” He dreamed of the waitress, her legs hanging out the window of the old Chevrolet, and it reminded him of her somehow: beauty framed in the suddenness of things. The quick intake of breath in bed, the whispered farewells, the promises, were never enough. He wanted her to ponder the way the berries exploded in her mouth.
Leigh Borders

MAYBE THEY’RE WRONG

I need a cigarette. Badly. If I have a cigarette, maybe it’ll go away. But it never does. Smoking is a temporary escape that is said by the entire medical profession and most of society to be an inadequate one. Maybe they’re wrong. Then again, maybe not. I know that after all the long luxurious draws, the arrogant smoke rings, and the last crimson ashes are out, all the anguish and headaches of life reappear as full-fledged residue. Who’s to say that there’s a better alternative? Some may hide with the tip of a rum glass. Are they wrong? I know from experience they are. Both are best. But after all the soothing draws absorb into flesh, the arrogant smoke rings haunt nearby skylines, and the last crimson ashes do their last funeral march, what do you have? The same as usual.

"Ice cream!" the kids shriek from three houses down. I know their greed will be on my doorstep within seconds. My two explode through the front door like Hurricane Frieda, palms open to the ceiling, begging. Why not? They’ve taken everything else from me this morning, including my sanity. It’s not their fault.

I send them off for things that I’ll end up paying for later anyhow, in the form of teeth craters. Cavities. So what? My life is a cavity. Empty and vast, dark as an Egyptian tomb with the riches extracted. To look at me you may not agree. My face wears a series of masks which could start their own line of halloween wear if fried off. My external appearance reveals no demi-goddess, nor a wretch, but that’s not the point. My interior is.

As I attempt to move my middle-aged body, it feels like I’ve taken a layer of paint off the kitchen chair with my shift in direction. “Upward we go, Rita.” There that’s better. Wrong again. The pain is not physical.

A noise. When I turn, my action confirms my vision. Our dog, Laster, is sitting on the couch, lying rather (I’m not an expert on canine’s typical chewing positions), hunting for the best parts of the evening paper. He sits there shredding it into pieces until he finds the ads. “Looking for coupons, Les?” It’s just another mess to clean up. Maybe I won’t clean it up. Maybe, just maybe, I’ll let it sit there along with the half-eaten peanut butter and jelly sandwich on the counter, the broken pieces of Barbie’s dreamhouse loft or whatever the hell it is on the floor, and John’s dirty tennis socks on
the couch, until they blend in with the homestead. Dissappear I mean. Rot away—like me.

That's silly. I'll get busy and clean this up right away. I'll clean the house, put the kids to bed early, and spend an evening home with John. My dearest John. So kind, so understanding. "I-work-so-hard" John. John the reptile is more like it.

In the last sixteen years, I am quite uncertain how or when I lost sight of him, but it was as nonchalant as a common thief. He just picked up my heart, and soul I might add, somewhere along the way, and put it in his desk at the office. He locked it up years ago and now it's trying to pick the lock. But it has no key, no file, no credit card, or combination. Somehow this bitterness has to end. If I could eat twelve packs of sweet-n-low, maybe that would help.

For the next two hours, I work diligently. During the timeout sessions, the home team calls for a huddle. I make a few phone calls and talk to neighborhood carpool mothers; bridge partners and the like. Our talks are casual, usual, and if falsical were a word, I'd add it too. Are they just like me, or am I one of the jokers in a half-deck of cards? I put my masks back in their respective boxes as I hang up the phone.

"Well, Rita, you really did it this time. Everything looks fantastic!" The smell of delectable homemade Italian pasta reeks my underworld. When I return to my seat, only to put back the lost layer of paint for awhile, I have to light a cigarette. Not as badly as before, but nonetheless necessary.

And there you have it. My life burns away like tobacco—too fast for its own good. And don't look now, here comes John up the sidewalk, finally home from work. Briefcase in hand, he comes through the front door. Maybe he has my heart in it. Then again, maybe not. I want this cigarette to last forever.

Susan Bingham Hollis

DRIVING HOME ON LABOR DAY WEEKEND

A face in the moon
peers curiously at me
from behind darkened pine trees
& floats a milky shadow
across the water
in strip pits along the highway.
Paradise is behind me now.
LaNita Stinson

PROGRESSION

She used to be one of the most industrious and complacent people in the world. Jesse Burns, but as time and circumstance wore her down, her energies failed and so did her spirit. Born in the year 1900, she had witnessed the many transitions each new decade brought—from indoor plumbing to air conditioning. And in all the people whose lives were touched by these new inventions, values changed. People began to have higher aspirations, higher expectations of their futures. Jesse was no exception.

When her husband Paul died in 1957, Jesse was decidedly altered. At first, her moods vacillated between loneliness and sadness, and then these turned into contrition, followed by deep depression. After a few months' passing she became almost a completely different person from that old reliable, unchanging self that she had been distinguished by all her life. She still experienced a kind of sadness, but the nature of this sadness was somehow modified. Her loneliness became an obsession with her inasmuch that she began to enjoy it; she grew so accustomed to solitude itself that she desired to be left alone to constantly reminisce about the past and all its futile longings. In short, she became reclusive and quite cynical, and she dared anyone to penetrate her self-made prison. Only those pleasant memories of her eight children were of any real importance to her. Everything else somehow was swept away by the undercurrent of reveries and other vain thoughts. Other memories could not be retrieved without bringing pain, so she just let them all lie there, floating somewhere just under the surface of her consciousness, rotting away like dead seaweed, and just as tangled.

Jesse had been the oldest of two children raised in a family of four in which self-indulgence was silently categorized as blatant sin. While growing up, she witnessed several occasions which reinforced this unspoken law—her parents gave until it hurt, and then some. They simply abided by "The Golden Rule," and stamped every action—whether done in word or in deed—with a "Thus sayeth the Lord..." Perhaps hers wasn't the most thrilling childhood that a person might recall, but she had had a full dose of sacrificial living to grow up on, the effect of which proved to be quite lasting. It followed and permeated her very being...at least
until Paul died in the winter of ’57.
She was still attractive enough at fifty-nine. That was when she first was considered “available.” Her complexion was still as smooth as silk, as they say, despite the cold winters’ winds and the hot summers’ heat. Extremes were as nothing to Jesse. She was used to being put to the test; she had been tested all her life, as doubtless she would continue to be...

There were all kinds of men in the small, stifling town who knew Jesse and who also knew of her husband’s death in the still recent past. John was only one of them, and he, like all the rest, hoped with all earnestness that he’d be her second husband. He only needed the right time and place to begin his maneuver, and it came at a time most unexpected and unappreciated in her life.

John Baxter was a small business man who had moved in from Texas at the time of her husband’s death, and who had never married despite all his good looks and success. He had never found that certain someone who “suits his needs” so to speak, so he just remained a bachelor who got richer and fatter off each year’s surplus. Jesse and John found themselves together one day at the annual Mason County Fair, which was like most small town fairs in that one had to be watchful for charlatans and the like. At one of the booths displaying homemade quilts and other made-from-scratch items, Jesse sat with her back against a colorful log cabin quilt which spread its hues around her like the honeysuckle vine wraps up a tree until the tree itself almost disappears from view. To her right was a Texas-Star quilt made with pale blue calico prints and soft solids of yellow, a spectacle which caught John’s eye almost at first glance. As she shaded her face from the noon sun, each quilt played tricks on her face—half being made soft and radiant, the other half more darkened by the deeper shades of the log cabin quilt, and streaked somewhat by the same quilt’s intricate pattern. John strolled over in his squeaky-tight cowboy boots.

“Hello, Jesse,” he said, looking over the display. “Have you won any blue ribbons this year?”

“Well... hello, Mr. Baxter,” she returned. “Why yes... as a matter of fact I’ve won two to be exact... one for bread-n-butter pickles and another for a chocolate pie.”

“Oh that’s just marvelous, and please call me John... after all, all my friends call me John, and we are friends, aren’t we?” He glanced at his gold pocket watch, which was suspended on a generous ten inch, 14-carat chain, and which read half past one, and she didn’t bother answering his question. “Say...” John started. “... you don’t know where a man might get a bite to eat around here do you?” While he looked again at the quilts on display, paying particular attention to the straight, even stitches which were admirable to say the least, Jesse answered.

“No, I’m afraid not, but I’ve got some cheese-n-crackers here if you’re in a really bad way... I’ve had all I want of them, so you’re more than welcome to them!”

“Oh, no, indeed I couldn’t impose on you,” he said, with a slight wave of his clean, soft hand. “Besides, a man’s gotta have a little something to wash it down with, and cheese binds me up so, that I...” His face colored some and then he added, “Well, you know what I’m trying to say...”

“Well for heaven’s sake!! I’ve got lemonade too!” she insisted with a smirk.

“Oh, well you’ve got it all then! I like a woman who plans ahead and thinks things out before time to worry about things,” he blurted. He stepped around to the side of the booth, entered, and opened up a wooden folding-chair beside her, boots squeaking all the while. She wondered what he meant by his statement. “... you’ve got it all...” and looked up momentarily to find him sitting within a breath’s distance from her.

With some difficulty, due to their close proximity, she opened her basket and produced cheese, crackers, and a slice of fruit cake to her guest. When he accepted the lemonade in a fruit jar, John thought to himself... “Hmmmn... good-natured, economical, practical, and to the point of things... I like that in a woman. Yes, I like that right well...” He bit into a hunk of cheese and followed that with a noisy “C-R-U-N-C-H!” into a cracker. Crumbs scattered all over the front of his drab green work shirt, making him look like a frog that forgot to hibernate when the snows came.

Jesse sat there fanning herself with the fan she always carried. It was the one she’d borrowed from a church revival when she was about thirty or so. She stopped fanning momentarily and looked down at the one side of the fan which showed Jesus on the cross, with his mother and brothers looking on with obvious grief, but unable to help him in any way. “Just like me,” she thought to herself. She flipped it over, and the verse jumped out at her, demanding recognition, “He was led as a sheep, dumb before his shearer and he opened not his mouth.” She fanned quickly and glanced out across the fairgrounds. As the ferris wheel turned slowly, she saw couples, arms entwined around waists, looking intently into one another’s faces. She smiled a quick little smile and cleared her throat gently.

“So, Mrs. Burns, how long has it been since your husband died?”
John asked.
Jesse stopped fanning and answered with slow, precise articulation, without looking away from the ferris wheel, “Almost two years now...”

“How was it done? Was it tuberculosis? It seems like that’s what I heard a while back...was that how it happened?”
She glanced at him as cracker crumbs flicked slovenly out his mouth between the syllables of tuberculosis, and she almost laughed, but instead she got very serious just before answering. “They said it was a cancer,” she said, “…a slow, oozing cancer, just above his...his...WELL! his groin, for heaven’s sake, if you must know! On the left side,” she added quickly.
Oh, I didn’t know that...I had no idea, Ma’am,” said John, who was almost as embarrassed by her answer as she had been in having been made to give it in such explicit detail. (Somehow she knew he wouldn’t have settled for anything else than a complete explanation, so she felt compelled to tell him the whole nasty truth about it.) A short silence ensued.

After a bit of recollection Jesse added, “Yes, I nursed him for almost a whole year before it finally got him.” (“Not counting all those other years he wasn’t sick...” she thought to herself.)

“That must’ve been awfully hard on you just to have him waste away like that right before your very eyes,” John said, trying to make up for his usual suave manner of inquiry.
Jesse swallowed. “Yes...very hard.” She sat there, looking at the same couples over near the ferris wheel. She sighed, frowned, grunted a pessimistic grunt, and resumed her fanning abruptly.

“Well tell me Jess...that is, if I’m not being too pushy, I mean...Well, I’m just curious about something...”

“Well, come on man, spit it out! What is it?” she asked, now facing him.

“You ever think of marrying again?” he prodded, trying to seem only passively interested.

“Who me?” she asked, blushing a little. She cleared her throat and sat up in her chair, for a moment forgetting her past but remembering the couples which had been the objects of her day’s observation.

“Why sure!” said John, putting on his best smile. “You’re still young!...I mean, you can cook, you can sew, you can...well, there’s no telling what you could still do! Come on now, what are you, about fifty-three?...fifty-four?” he asked tauntingly.

“Oh lordy mercy, John Baxter! I’m fifty-nine, and soon to be sixty in three months!”

“Well, hey, that’s not very old. Oh for sure, Jess, you’d make somebody a mighty good wife one of these days...Well that is, of course, if you so had a mind to...” John winked at her subtly, and she would’ve missed it had he not been picking crackers out from between his big stained teeth—a gesture which had been an annoyance to her all afternoon. It was a gesture too much like some she’d seen before, and so was the wink.

She sat there looking at him for a minute or so, seeing him for the first time in his true colors, or so she mused. But as she stared at him in disbelief of his forwardness, his lewd glances making her cringe with the remembrance of former suitors, she blushed and was for the moment, half speechless, and as she was so bewildered by it all, she had lost all control of her faculties, and the fan which had been resting peacefully on her lap now slid off onto the ground with a thud—Jesus side up...She bent over to pick it up and now noticed something else for the first time: Jesus had begun to peel from his chest, at just about where his heart would’ve been.

Time had worn away his facial features so that he hardly looked the same as he looked thirty years ago at the revival. He just didn’t have the same appeal anymore. It had been hot that night, and as the old-time Baptist preacher’s voice cut across the tense night air, she had borrowed this very fan from her neighbor, in order to have some relief...“And if you ain’t got the Lord when you die brothers and sisters, you’ve lost it all!!!...” The amens had floated out across the night air, making the humidity seem as nothing. She had felt faint; she felt herself choking under the weight of all he had. She believed every word the preacher had said, and as she pictured herself there at the revival, trying to do what “Thus saith the Lord...”, she also pictured her husband lying on the couch, at home, “reviving” himself in his bottle. The heat was unbearable that night, it was true, but so were her husband and marriage. She could hear him now as she remembered loading the kids into the car for church services, “Now you hurry home tonight, Jesse...We gotta get to bed early tonight...” She felt all those same feelings of the past come rushing back in as the tide on the ocean rolls forward, with nothing big enough to stop it. And as she remembered him winking at her and squeezing her behind firmly, she fought back the tears of disgust and choked back her sobs which had been so prevalent in the past and were back again now after so many months of absence.

She began to tear slowly at the cardboard protrusion, ripping it downward in one slow, even movement, taking half Mary’s face off as she went. Jesse felt her own face burn with anger and sorrow at
the same time. A flood of emotions had welled up inside her breast, and she could not restrain them as easily as she restrained the tears which had now puddled up in her big, blue, Pacific eyes. She felt anger, resentment, and much, much more. Another old verse from the past came to her mind: "All things work together for good to them that love the Lord." And she could not help but laugh a little at this verse's timely appearance.

John, who had been sitting motionless for awhile, knowing he had said or done something offensive to her, got up and walked over to one side of the booth, not knowing what to do next, and really afraid to ask. When Jesse finally regained her composure and looked at him, he could not help noticing the reflection of the evening sun's rays as they cast dark shadows against the log cabin quilt, which, in turn, caused a change of color in her face. She spoke at last, giving him well-spoken words to consider.

"No, I've got better things to do with what's left of my life than to look after some man with more appetites than can ever be satisfied...I guess if I were twenty years old again, I'd think about it, but since I can't make myself young again, I've got no use for courtin' nor marriage either!"

"Oh...uh...that's too bad, then...Hey, I'm sorry if I said something wrong," said John, trying to hide his dejection.

"Yes...well, it's just like the horse and buggy, I guess..."

"Huh? What do you mean? I'm not real sure I understand what you're saying, Jesse," said John.

"No...YOU WOULDN'T!" she snapped. "It's like this: Before the car came along, we all used the horse and buggy to get around in, but when the car came...getting around got a whole lot easier for everybody who had sense enough to get one, RIGHT? Well, it's the same thing, except nowadays people call this vehicle by a new name, and they use it in their marriages. Want to know what it is? It's called divorce, Mr. Baxter, and only those people who's got sense enough to get one when things 'jus' ain't gettin' anywhere anymore' ever get to the road of peace of mind! It's really very simple, see?"

John didn't know what to say to this, and when he happened to look down to see Jesse's fan all twisted and crumpled between her two tight fists, he decided he'd better not say anything. He just walked away slowly, without saying good-bye, and without looking back.

Jesse didn't say good-bye either, although she was glad to see him finally leave. She laughed a strange laugh, picked up his trash, and turned around to look at her handiwork in the quilts for a moment. The sun was down now—past the point of casting shadows and images on anything. The only thing left on her face now was the reflection that thirty years' time and circumstance had stamped there. All those tears, all that faith in Jesus which she had poured out all her life were now only wrinkles and dark circles under her eyes.

"Crucifixion..." she mumbled, "HUMPH! That's only one kind of slow, agonizing death..." She stood up and took down her quilts. And as she folded up her chair with one very brisk and determined motion, she glanced one last time at the ferris wheel, which had stopped revolving. The couples weren't there any longer, but she didn't care. She breathed clearly for the first time in years without having to clear her throat to swallow, and slowly, with decided footsteps, she headed for the gate which read, "THIS WAY OUT..."
MOTH DREAMS

For all the things you have loved and named none has built such a hollow for you in air laced with wings

the moths dream of lights and our house

while we return to other houses adding stairways to rooms that were never there and climbing them

ALL THE LEAVES

Even though it was summer, your body froze, slowed down in the woods where they found you. There’s no way to fill twelve mouths in a depression, so you halved your heart on its own knife those nights out walking drunk. Nothing was more right than forgetting when everyone was asleep and something of your own ideas could come out. Mostly I think of all the leaves you must have seen that night they took you under their shadow that saves them against the black air like a blanket which was not warm enough for you. And I wonder if you ever saw an eclipse where leavesillion in shadows, little crescent moons on the ground.

There are more leaves than we thought, if we can believe that every umbra, every shift of scent of leaf makes a new one out of rain and memories. And the difference makes you warm up and keep walking because it’s late and you’re alone. I love whatever is still in your pockets. I love the hills you came from.
Amy Wallace

IN DEFENSE OF BECOMING A PLASTIC ICE TRAY

Blue as breath on winter light, and

Marilyn waiting in the night snow
on a park bench for Joseph
who fills and frees the molds
of her emptiness,

a dozen embraces for a heart
(remember the dozen hearts without embrace)
nothing opaque to save
for sanskrit messages,

It's night on the frozen tundra,
but the world will be here any minute—
you can fall asleep if you want to.

constantly awakened by contractions,
multiple deliveries,
more water, the laying on of hands

THE WEIGHT LIFTER ASLEEP

Impossibilities of the body,
the delicate motions of silence lie above
the bed, curling from your open mouth
as you sleep. That circle
of breath you would tell me rests
smooth as the crimson on a glass
window; its clarity and its shattering
separate the same air. Also a circle,
our pasts are a weight we must
pull towards us in pain without
dropping, with the same proud
strength that poises the world
along your wrists—or a woman’s shoulders,
your heavy chest riding its own beams.
The skill is in not lifting her,

not holding on so tight she might become
the pillow you bury your face in.
If I could ever carry you

far enough, you would stretch out like now,
relaxing your elbows and

putting all your weight on me.

(This poem was erroneously attributed to another
writer in the Spring 1985 ZEPHYRUS.)
PRAYERS WHILE SMOKING

I sit,
smoking, thinking,
watching ghosts rise from ash tip
toward the metal moon
above the barren field of my desk
littered with skeletons of thoughts.

Smoke curls.
and rises up in rolling waves
of my breath, billowing up in prayer.

I sit,
smoking, thinking,
burning my offering of tobacco
to Hawennega, god who will only
hear me through haze,
So that we may commune
in wispy breaths
aspiring higher and higher.
Tonight at least the smoky spirits
roll in love under the electric moon.

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A HANDFUL OF JULY

The light tap of my hand
on the back burner
that wears its cool grey mask,
leaves blisters spiraling up from my palm.

I dance, and scream for Daddy
grasping the wrist of a hand so hot
it turns cold tap water warm.

I run outside where July meets me
like a heaving, popping woodstove
fighting a February night
in a riverbank town.

July rises from its hot concrete bed
to perch itself in my palm.
I hold a sphere of pure heat
as my hand draws to encompass the orb.
Pure, shimmering heat circles in my palm.

Tears turn to steam on my face.
All of me evaporates,
joining the orb of heat in my hand—
a single, glowing, breathing hand.

New stanza

I then clutch ice for an eternity,
until I filter back to visible form,
until my hand leads to an arm,
than a shell of a head, hollowed, numb.

There was something I was to do...
Daddy, didn’t I call for you?
There was something I was going to do...

There fire recedes into the ice.
I clutch a handful of coals.
Paul Bush

A MESSAGE

I'm not sure what kind of wood my office door is made from, but I like it. It's solid, not like the new veneer ones. I can lean on it: inside I often do because it brought with it a coolness from the earth it was grown in: maybe the red clay of Oklahoma, or the cold dirt of the Catskills, or probably just the good black soil of Kentucky—somewhere along the banks of the Green River, I suspect.

It swings quietly on its hinges, allowing me to "come on in" or leave, but the mechanism jams most of the time when I try to close it. I sometimes think it is loath to close anyone in or to shut anyone out. But that's just me.

Other office doors advertise for the Smurf Club (only $8 for a year's membership if you live in the United States), for Boy George, or for a new Scrabble partner. Stoically accepting the thumbtacks that hold on the easy-to-clean note pad for felt tip pens, my door is content to wait patiently for the messages that no one ever leaves.

Lisa A. Frye

NEIGHBORS

Big hill
little girl
going up, up, up
to Mrs. Downey's
Virginia Lee waiting
Snake in the Gulley, Lemonade
dolls, dresses, and Old Maid—
crawling on the polished wood floor
in search of missing crayons
me and Virginia Lee
laughing at her jokes
not knowing
she was twenty-three
and retarded
LOSER

The man was a disgrace. He was not very tall. I'd say that he was five foot three if he was an inch. The suit he wore was a bland, dun color. It was wrinkled. He took an uneasy breath and ran a hand through his thinning hair.

Yes, the man was a disgrace—but an unremarkable disgrace. You see his kind every day and pay them no heed. What was remarkable about this man...this loser, was that he was standing on the east ledge of the twenty-sixth floor of the Liberty Insurance Co. building. Around this quaint little village it has always been an established fact that this was my ledge. Needless to say, I was rather miffed at this loser for his impertinence. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed that my friends were looking on. In order to save my dignity, I knew that I would have to inform the loser of his gross error.

"Hey, Loser!" I shouted. Loser looked around, doubtless shocked that there was someone on the ledge besides him. I yelled again.

"Hey, Loser! You're taking up my space!"

"Where are you?" he screamed pathetically.

"I'm down here you wretched worm! Are you blind or just stupid?" I gave him a sharp peck on the ankle.

He let out a howl of pain and misery so sorrowful that it was really quite sickening. Finally, Loser ceased his whimpering and looked down.

"You...You're a...a..."

"A pigeon. Pig-eon (pij'en) n. 1. A bird having short legs, a small head and a sturdy body, esp., the domestic pigeon or rock dove."

That's amazing!" Loser piped.

"Thank you." I said that with all the modesty I could muster. I've always been quite proud of my vocabulary. An idea was taking shape in my head. It was incredible and useful, but if it could work...shades of My Fair Lady...

"Wow! A talking bird! This is just the best!"

"Right, buddy, now shut up and let me think!" Don't get me wrong. I'm not a mean or abrupt guy...You just have to shut these people up before they get started. Once they know who's in charge they become nice and docile. Now where was I before Loser interrupted me? Ah yes, My Fair Lady. "What's your name, pal?"

"Francis. Francis Pithinabottle."
Francis?" The silence only lasted several seconds but it was deafening. "You have had a raise haven’t you, Francis?"

"Well, actually, I never quite got around to asking him for one. You see, the boss can get pretty darned irritable at times and I do have my future with the company to consider."

"Your future?" I squawked! "Look down there and see your future! Think you’ll be the first to reach the sidewalk across the street?" Loser slouched down on the ledge and began to cry. He didn’t get through to me though. I kept my heart hard. "Now you listen to me, Loser. This is what you are going to do. You are going to take a minute to compose yourself, climb through that window, walk into your boss’s office and demand a raise! Do you understand me? Do you think that you can make that one small accomplishment in your low, wretched, miserable excuse for a life? Accomplishment. (e kom’plishment) n. 1. The act of..."

"I know what accomplishment is you horrid little beast and I resent you for rubbing my nose in the fact that I have yet to make one!"

"Oooo! Anger! That’s a good emotion. "There you go, Francis! That’s the spirit! Now stand tall and demand what you have coming to you!"

"Yes! I will! By gum it I will! Tomorrow. Yes, I will most certainly do it tomorrow."

Tomorrow? Where did that come from? "No, not tomorrow. That’s Wednesday. The boss just hates Wednesdays. In fact, he hates Wednesdays so much that he’s still in a pretty bad mood on Thursday. That leaves Friday, but gosh darn it all, whoever heard of asking for a raise on a Friday. That leaves next week. I will most definitely do it next week. Maybe. Oh no! Look at the time! I promised to mow the lawn today. Honeybunch will kill me. Drats, am I in the doghouse now."

I could take it no longer. I must have been a fool to think that I could turn this wishy-washy wingle into a man. A package of unbridled fury, I flew into Loser’s face. I watched with the utmost satisfaction as he felt twenty-six stories. The colors really looked quite nice from up here. Letterman should try this sometime, although I doubt that the same effect could be achieved from a five story building. I looked down again and was shocked when I saw that Loser had made an accomplishment—he was the first person to reach the far sidewalk.

Omgosh! Look at the time! I promised Honeybunch to line the nest today. Honeybunch will kill me. Drats, am I in the doghouse now.

Brett P. Hoffman

INSOMNIA: SWAN’S ISLAND—SUMMER 1985

("Young men don’t get much sleep here."

—overheard from a native Swan’s Islander)

Jeff was called out late last night
To help fight a fire at the landfill,
And he stayed up till sunrise,
Knee-deep in garbage, turning it over
With a shovel, dousing every little spark.

And last week some schooner owner
With a photographic memory—underexposed—
Beached his antique whale in the darkness;
Jeff went out on that one, too.

Thing is, he told me, I don’t mind staying awake;
Just the other night I got a call
To take old man Mooney over to the undertaker’s—
Just him and me on that ferry to the mainland—
No, he said, I don’t mind staying awake at all.
Tony Pennington

COOL NOTES REMEMBERED

Momma's chill tunes stirred the marrow in your bones
Before she died back in January of '83 when it spit
And rained ice all over the trees and the road.
She's sleeping under the ground in a cold quiet
Place where good old boys don't grow corn or tobacco.

Now Daddy's boys are men, not the boys
He drove like donkeys bearing the burden of authority.
(Born in '42, maybe he saw a need to
Relive dictatorships now dust).

But Momma showed him and the rest of us when
She blew herself away,
Like so much powder off the face of a clown.

Christopher Bratton

TIME CAPSULE

1
The sound—
and they were only sounds—
came from a distant barn
penciled in gray on my memory.
With my child's ears I heard
a whip
and the cry of a horse
and with those same child's ears
I heard my father,
standing next to me, say in assurance
"He's not hurting the horse.
He's only cracking the whip
to scare it."
With my child's mind I thought
"Well then, that's O.K."

2
When my family extends
to include many older people
I sit empty of stories
being filled by theirs.
My father says to his mother
Without any thought of contradiction
or protection for I am older now,
"Do you remember when Carl
beat that horse until it dropped?"
These words uncover,
from within my mind,
a time capsule
bursting to the surface
to remind me of how
I've changed
and to give me a story
to tell my father.
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