Orpheus

A Literary Journal



Orpheus

A Literary Journal
Volume XXXI

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Orpheus is an annual literary journal produced by California State University, Bakersfield. All submissions must be typed, double-spaced, on -1/2" x 11" paper. There are no restrictions n subject matter, length, or theme; however, poems over one hundred lines are rarely published. Any use of profanity must be crucial to the understanding of the work.

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Orpheus

California State University, Bakersfield

Prose / Essays

Ama

J. Nicholas Janssen

CHARACTERS:
NYOKO, a young Japanese girl, an ama, or shellfish diver
NARIKO, a young friend of NYOKO and ama
HISA-SAN, NYOKO's grandmother and ama
OKI-SAN, NARIKO's grandmother and ama
EBISU, a handsome young man
SAKANA-KAMI, a suijin or water-spirit
VOICE OF 0-WATA-TSU-MI, god of the sea

SCENE I

It is about noon and a hot day on the beach. The four women divers sit in the shadow of some rocks away from the water, sharing lunch from a large tray.

NARIKO

This sunomono is really good, grandmother. It's so refreshing after diving all morning.

OKI-SAN

That's pickled plum in with the daikon, it's a summer recipe. Looking at your catch, it's hard to tell you've been diving at all!

NARIKO

Oh, if you'd let me dive as deep as you or Hisa-Dono I'd have plenty more abalone.

HISA-SAN

You know you're not skilled enough for that. Only old women like Oki and I have trained long enough to dive that deep. Look at Nyoko there, you two are almost the same age and look at how much she's gotten today.

NYOKO

Grandmother, please... you're embarrassing me and hurting Nariko-chan's feelings. We're both good divers.

HISA-SAN

Yes, but you'll be even better next season and by the time you're our age you'll be the best in all of Izu. Besides, there's nothing wrong with a little healthy competition between friends.

NYOKO

I don't want to be the best, just successful enough to attract a nice husband.

NARIKO

But all this diving makes us so thin, no man will want us!

HISA-SAN

When you have your own men, you'll no longer have to dive with your grandmothers. Make sure you find someone you can trust and who can handle a boat. When you are down beneath the waves your life will be in his hands.

OKI-SAN

Stop daydreaming about men and get to your lunch. We ama always attract the right men. Your grandfathers will return from drinking soon and it's back to the abalone for us.

NARIKO

Already? I can't believe it's been almost an hour.

A few moments of silent eating pass. After a while, something catches NARIKO's attention.

NARIKO

Look! What is that? Do you all see something over there on the beach.

HISA-SAN

Yes! It looks like a man! He may be hurt or nearly drowned if he washed up on the shore like that.

OKI-SAN

He wasn't there when we were diving this morning. It must have just happened.

NARIKO

C'mon Nyoko, let's go see if he needs help.

NYOKO

(hesitantly) Alright...

OKI-SAN

Be careful, girls!
The girls stand and quickly approach the body on the shore. The older women follow behind them.

NYOKO

It looks like he's dead...

NARIKO

But at least he's handsome!

HISA-SAN

This looks serious. Nyoko, run home and get your father. Hopefully your grandfathers will be back by the time you return and your father can tell us if it is safe to transport him back to the village for healing.

BLACKOUT

SCENE II

About two years later, morning in a small hut on the beach. NYOKO and EBISU wake from sleeping on a small pallet. They are quiet for a few moments, looking at one another.

EBISU

Hello.

NYOKO

Hello.

EBISU

You look pretty.

NYOKO

(giggling a little) Thank You. I don't know how I can this early.

They kiss briefly.

EBISU

Would you like to prepare okayu with me? We have some rice left over from yesterday.

NYOKO

Yes. We can use some of those scallops I gathered too.

EBISU

That sounds good.

They stand and. EBISU moves to a small stove and starts cooking. NYOKO makes the bed then joins him at the stove, putting an arm around him tenderly.

NYOKO

I'm so glad you came to me, Ebisu, like a gift from the sea.

EBISU

I am so glad you were there on the beach that day to save me.

NYOKO

But, you don't even remember that day.

EBISU

All I remember is waking up and you bringing me a steaming bowl of oden. It was the best stew I had ever eaten and the most beautiful face I had ever seen. What other memories do I need?

NYOKO

Oh, but isn't it frightening to not remember who you are?

EBISU

I know who I am. I am your husband and protector. I watch over you while you dive.

NYOKO

I feel so safe when I dive with you. It is as if you are of the sea itself. The weather is always good and the abalone is abundant.

EBISU

Oh, you flatter me. Get some bowls, our breakfast is ready.
EBISU serves the porridge. They take their bowls to the floor and eat in silence.

BLACKOUT

SCENE III

Shortly after breakfast. NYOKO and EBISU are on a small boat in ocean.

NYOKO

Wish me luck.

Ama

EBISU

You don't need luck. Your first dive of the morning is always the best.

NYOKO

I have you to thank for that. I just got anxious all of the sudden is all.

EBISU

Don't worry. You are the best ama I know and, besides, I'm here with you.

NYOKO

You're right. Everything will be fine.

They kiss and NYOKO dives over the side of the boat. EBISU waits silently, peering into the water occasionally. After a moment he looks surprised and steps away from the edge. SAKANA-KAMI jumps into the boat, carrying a limp NYOKO. SAKANA-KAMI drops NYOKO. EBISU goes to her.

EBISU

Who are you?! What have you done to my Nyoko!?

SAKANA-KAMI

Don't you recognize me, Ebisu-Sama? Have you been with this commoner so long that you cannot remember?

EBISU

I don't know what you're talking about. This is my wife! Is she dead?

SAKANA-KAMI

Don't worry, I've only given her a small dose of Black-Ika poison. She will not be asleep long.

EBISU

Why have you done this to us?

SAKANA-KAMI

A better question is why have you done this to me? For two years I've waited in the ocean kingdom, waiting for my beloved Ebisu-Sama to return. Can you not even remember to whom you were betrothed?

EBISU stands, a look of frightened and confused recognition on his face.

EBISU

(quietly) ...Sakana-Kami...

SAKANA-KAMI

Yes! That's right... you do remember.

EBISU

Yes... your face... the ocean kingdom—it all floods my senses.. I went shark hunting... south of the kingdom... there was an eruption under the water... rocks and hot steam battered my body... then everything went black... that's when I must have washed up on the shore...

SAKANA-KAMI

Yes, and that common girl found you. Let us return home, together, to the ocean kingdom. You can reclaim your true heritage as a sea-spirit. I have searched for you for so long and shed so many tears. You do not belong here among the mortals.

EBISU

That is where you are wrong. This is where I belong... I have made a life

here. I'm very sorry, but I love Nyoko and my life among the ama. Our destinies split us, Sakana-Kami, but it is not my fault or Nyoko's.

SAKANA-KAMI

You think after all of the sorrow and despair you have caused me, you can simply cast me aside? I will not be shunned! I never gave up on finding you, Ebisu-Sama, even when the oracles told me to give up.

EBISU

You should have listened to them. I only just remembered our old life after seeing you and hearing your words. We were not meant to be together. I know in my heart that my place is here. I do not know why the gods have made it this way, but it is so. You should have moved on with your life. You have caused your own pain.

SAKANA-KAMI

Then this is truly how you feel?

EBISU

Yes, let us be. I feel for you and I know this is difficult, but if you care for me, you will respect my life and my decision. We mean no harm to you.

SAKANA-KAMI

Then you have made your choice, forcing me to live in misery as the one I love lives happily with another.

EBISU

No, that is your choice. I am not forcing you to dwell on the past. That is what hurts you.

SAKANA-KAMI

If that is how you will treat the one you once loved, then I will destroy that which you love now! I lied to you earlier. The Black-Ika poison I gave her is lethal. Even now she lay dying and I will never give her the antidote. No mortal medicine will be able to save her.

EBISU violently takes hold of SAKANA-KAMI.

EBISU

No! You must save her!

SAKANA-KAMI

It is not I who has the power to save her. Only you can declare your love for me and return with me to the ocean kingdom.

EBISU

I wish I never loved you!

EBISU shoves SAKANA-KAMI violently into the water where she swims away. EBISU then kneels and picks up NYOKO's body in his arms. He cries out to the heavens.

EBISU

Great lord O-Wata-Tsu-Mi, father and god of the seas, please avenge the death of Nyoko, my lovely wife! She is innocent and a victim of cruel jealousy! Her death was wrought by the hands of another of your children. I know I have turned my back on our kingdom, but please show justice! Nyoko was a daughter of the sea... even though she may not have the blood of the spirits in her veins, she respected the ocean and spent much of her life within it. She was undeserving of such a death!

A loud thunderclap.

Blackout.

Ama

SCENE IV

The watery depths of O-WATA-TSU-MI's court. SAKANA-KAMI stands alone.

O-WATA-TSU-MI

What have you to say for your actions against Nyoko, an innocent mortal and lover of the sea?

SAKANA-KAMI

My vengeance was deserved. She took the love of the man I was betrothed to away from me. Such bonds are not broken lightly.

O-WATA-TSU-MI

You yourself know Nyoko and Ebisu did not understand what they were doing. Ebisu's memory was taken from him and Nyoko knew nothing of his previous life. Did the oracles not tell you that pursuing Ebisu was foolish? Did you think that your will was more important than that of the gods?

SAKANA-KAMI

What do you mean?

O-WATA-TSU-MI

For thousands of years, the mortals and the people of the sea have been apart. The gods hoped to unite these two great peoples, using the love of Nyoko and Ebisu to bring the two worlds together. But, your sorrow and jealously were too great that you could not trust our wisdom. Now the wound you have delivered to the mortals is too deep. They will see the sea-spirits as cruel. We may never be one with them again.

SAKANA-KAMI

Forgive me father... I did not know. I thought Ebisu was mine by right.

O-WATA-TSU-MI

You did know. The oracles told you all you needed to know, yet you still followed a foolish course of action. For this you will be punished. You are

forever banished from the ocean kingdom and will forever swim the seas as a common fish. You will remember what you once were, but will never be able to express your true nature.

SAKANA-KAMI

NOOOOO!

BLACKOUT

Sierra Intrigue

JoyceKohl

When my father launched into another story, I felt my jaw tighten, expecting to hear a story I'd heard too many times before. At eighty-five he was in great physical shape, mentally sharp, but not always sensitive as to the state of mind of his listeners. We were recovering from the five rugged, dusty Sierra miles we had hiked into Muir Trail Ranch that day, telling stories as we hiked. My father had wanted to go into the Sierra for what he figured would be the last time. He had taken the train from Santa Rosa, and my husband, Bill, our eleven-year old son, Matt and I had picked him up in Fresno for the narrow, winding, gravel road to Florence Lake. After a boat ride across the lake, the hike in hadn't slowed my father down a bit, and we were sitting in the log cabin dining room after dinner. Some friends had come along on the trip, including a friend of Matt's and our next door neighbors from Vietnam. .

Suddenly Noah, Matt's friend, burst through the screen door, and slid onto the bench beside Matt, looking worried. "The snake is gone! I'm not sleeping in there now!" He had caught a small snake just as the dinner bell rang. Not knowing what to do with his catch, he had thrust the snake into the sink of the cabin he and Matt were to share. Now that the snake had disappeared, he was embarrassed, but unwilling to cope with the thought of a snake sidling up to him in the middle of the night.

Our next door neighbor Hien loved the Sierra, but hiking was new and difficult for his wife, Lin, more recently arrived from Vietnam, and their two year old daughter, Chum. On the hike in, Hien told us the story of how he had arrived in the United States soon after the war in Vietnam. Knowing him as a successful astrophysicist, we were spellbound, listening to his tales about coming over as a 'boat person'. His desire to come had been fueled by frustration at not being able to continue his education in physics in post war Vietnam. Not wanting to desert his country, he had gotten cold feet originally, and decided not to take a boat with his uncle and cousins as planned. "When I decided not to go, my father forbade my brothers and sister from going on that boat. The boat my relatives were on must have wrecked because we never heard from them again." Hien survived a later boat trip, after escaping with one of his brothers. "The guy in charge made me give him my glasses so I wouldn't look intellectual. We spent a day on an island, trying to pass as peasants, before being picked up that night by a

small rickety fishing boat. We ended up in a refugee camp in Hong Kong, and my older brother, who was already in the United States, convinced the U.S. government to fund both my airfare over and tuition for the University of California, Berkeley." His memories had made the hike go quickly.

Beyond our family and friends, the dining room crowd included the astute 88 year-old woman, Josephine who ran the Ranch with her daughter and granddaughter. Now that we'd finished dinner, it was my father's turn to tell a story. "Unlike Hien's tale, which mainly took place half-way around the world, parts of this story took place right near here", my father began, warming to his audience. I watched my son's eyes glaze over. He was suffering from electronic withdraw, and was still resentful that he had not been allowed to bring his Gameboy. My father continued, "In the early sixties, I was working at General Atomic in San Diego. One day my boss, the vice president, called a meeting and asked for someone to volunteer for a special task. I laid low, expecting trouble, knowing how quirky my boss could be. Finally Joe Henry volunteered-he was a lanky guy who would do almost anything to get out of work. The boss handed Joe an envelope and told him not to read it under any circumstance. He was to leave immediately, without stopping at home, fly to Fresno, and then catch a helicopter into the Sierra. He was to deliver the envelope to Theodore Tayor, the director of Project Orion, who was vacationing in Evolution Basin in two yellow tents."

"When Joe Henry got back to work several days later, he was reluctant to tell us what had happened, but we gathered that nothing had gone as planned."

At this point, while some of the audience was fidgeting, Josephine, broke in, her voice distant, her eyes seeing as though through a veil of time. "Could he have been the strange man who showed up here lost, looking for yellow tents in Evolution Basin when my husband was still alive? I think it was 1964 or 65. He was a tall skinny guy, riding a horse, dressed in a suit and tie, and carrying only a brief case. You can't take a helicopter into that rugged area—which must have been why he was on horseback. We laughed at the image for years, but never could figure out what he was up to. He seemed like a man on a mission, but our speculations, including spy and detective got us nowhere."

Matt was suddenly alert, almost as though a switch had been flipped.

"Spy? Detective? What happened?"

My father seemed surprised—his stories didn't usually get this kind of response and this had happened almost half a century ago.

The story took on a strange reality for the rest of us. Before dinner we had soaked in the hot springs which overlooked the creek with views of the snow capped Sierra. The soak had slightly fogged our minds, but we were still stiff from the hike in, and now we sat visualizing this man taking the same dusty route we had, astride a horse, dressed in a suit and tie.

"Well", my father continued, "he must have followed your directions and eventually found the two yellow tents in the lunar-like terrain of Evolution Basin. By then it was dusk, or maybe moonlit. Evolution Basin is still many miles in from here. On delivery, Joe found that the message he had carried informed Theodore Taylor that he was fired! His proposal to propel a rocket to the moon by exploding atomic bombs two hundred feet behind the rocket had been rejected. The space ship he envisioned would have held as many as 150 people, with the initial plan calling for missions to Mars by 1965 and to Saturn by 1970. The government considered his idea too risky. Why the boss couldn't let Ted and his family enjoy their vacation in peace before getting the news is still a mystery to me—but my boss was like that."

Matt was really tuned in now: " A rocket to the moon fueled by atomic bombs! You've got to be kidding. That's lame!"

"It's a miracle they didn't try!" Josephine exclaimed. "They've tried just about everything else!" My father nodded assent. I had imagined my father and Josephine would be instantly bonded by the novelty of age in the remote Sierra, but until now they seemed a bit distant—perhaps protective of the territory of innumerable years.

"Actually they sometimes do use nuclear energy for powering rockets," broke in Hien, "although not on the scale of Project Orion. They are just quiet about it, since environmentalists protest every time they get wind of it. There are scientists today who think it was a huge mistake not to proceed with the Orion project."

Silence was heavy as we made our way out of the log building into the inky night. Josephine left for her house, and Noah and his parents said goodnight and headed towards the cabins. The rest of us stopped to view the densely packed Milky Way, sitting on the rocks of an unlit campfire circle.

Sierra Intrigue

"Do you think there is intelligent life out there?" Matt asked.

"I'm quite certain there is," Hien answered. "The universe is mostly composed of the same elements that make up our body and it is so vast that there is bound to be other intelligent life."

A shooting star streaked across the sky, leaving a green trail, inspiring Hien to continue. "Our sun and Jupiter act as sentinels, with their gravity warding off meteors that might otherwise hit us. Without them, we'd be pretty vulnerable to the impact and radiation of a large meteor. If the earth was the size of a basketball, the crust would be only as thick as a human hair."

"If we have a son, we should name him Jupiter," Lin quipped to Hien.

Matt suddenly realized that Noah must have been serious about not sharing the cabin with him, with the snake's whereabouts unknown. "I don't have to sleep in the cabin by myself with the snake do I?" he asked, his voice sounding tired and vulnerable.

"I'll share your cabin with you and the snake, if you want", my father answered. Matt looked relieved and the two of them started across the clearing. "There's nothing like seeing the stars in the Sierra" I heard my father murmur as they walked off. "I think we can see forever."

Bibliography: If you are interested in Project Orion, check out the book: Dyson, George, *Project Orion, The True Story of the Atomic Spaceship*, Henry Holt & Co., NY, 2002.

Love of Life

Juan Ventimiglia

Those beautiful silver-streaked mist-dewed winter mornings when the fog lazily lifts off the damp streets and your eyes, heavy from sleep, twist open like a wine-cork and the sun-filled windows remind you that today will be one of those days you love. With coffee, the newspaper and a toasted blueberry bagel, you rise with the sun.

Glorious gold-gleaming afternoons when the sun sits high overhead, penetrating your scalp, your back, warming you all over like a warm Jacuzzi. Afternoons when you lie listlessly, reading Dickens or the newspaper, until you feel you are watching a streaming movie in your mind, entertaining yourself in far-off relations: of fictions, of the worlds. Afternoons when you neglect the shower, plunge into the pool, lie out in the sun on your stomach and sleep, sleep, sleep with the cotton-candy clouds streaking through the cerulean sky where jets draw curlicues on an azure canvas. Afternoons when you walk under the arms of century-old oaks on the shaded, spiky blades of buzzed grass in your sandals and swimsuit, never changing, never desiring a change.

Ahh . .. the wind-weeping nights; sensuous scintillating nights when the wind creeps under your shorts and skirts like spiders, tickling your legs like ladybugs, blowing on your arms like amor's lips, waving your long moon-streaked hair like a war-winning flag. Those nights when time exists only to those who sleep: sitting out late in your backyard around a snap-sparkling fire with friends and beer, with girls and misty-melodies on the guitar, singing songs singed with freedom. When the moon, like a cotton-ball coasts wheel-like elliptically onwards and forever. When the pine trees dance with you like Indians, waving their long pine-prickly pin-needles at you like octopus arms, swaying silkily as if swimming underwater. Those nights with timeless conversations and eternal friends: those nights that seem to move with the moon and shine with the stars.

You rise with the sun.

Aiming at Morality

Juan Ventimiglia

My dearest little Sophia, -

This last week has been quite different from the ordinary life you were accustomed to. Presently, as you sit here on my bed, I see a slight gloom in your demeanor as if a shadow has been cast over you, and the sun, radiant though it has been, has ceased to shine on that pretty little face of yours. In fact, what truly brought this to my attention was the drastic weather change this evening: the sky, although behind me still blue, looked ominous to the south as I came home, quite like a painting of a charcoal-black storm without rain: as if the artist had smeared his hand downwards on the canvas. And when I parked, I saw you sitting in solitude by the door, curled up the way you always are with your paws tucked underneath you. You made me sad. The sun won't hide forever, my dear Sophia; your sadness will pass as the wind blows the clouds like sails. Our days will soon be bright again.

You were forced to get along with Chelsea, or at least to coexist cooperatively. This proved arduous; and after seven years, excluding this last month, things between you two, I knew, were never going to get any better. You, Sophia, a homeless girl with a beautiful calico coat, came prowling in my first Bakersfield apartment one serene Sunday afternoon and made yourself at home on my couch. You entered my life and became my companion. You have shown me loyalty I myself never before knew from such a girl. I am sorry, Sophia; moving houses forced a flaming aversion: you invaded Chelsea's claimed territory; she hadn't, until recently, ever stopped scorning you. And from the beginning, Chelsea never spoke to you but glared at you with glowing yellow eyes; and she resented me for being so close to you. This disharmony I understood would never cease: like the relationship of countless remarried women and their sons, forced to live with stepfathers, which fail to function.

Such was life in our home between you girls for the next seven years. You pawed at my door and slept underneath my sheets; you ate Fancy Feast from a clean plate I laid out especially for you; and you made sure not to invade Chelsea's section of the house: her couch, in particular. Strangely, when you two were outside, disputes were unheard of.

Aiming at Morality

I bet you don't remember that most unpleasant evening when Paris, having tried every possible solution, and after four months of serious squabbles, stuck you both in our bathroom and shut the door on you like two enemy pit bulls trapped in an apartment. You, being the debutante you are, could not believe his audacity! You both just sat there and I, worried to death, paced around the house, wondering how long I could take the torture before snatching you out of there like a baby born beneath water. It must have been awfully uncomfortable for you, poor dear. Paris said he had read about this method in a credible magazine, and he maintained this through my endless inquisitions (I assure you), until finally my mother and I could not endure it any longer. I opened the door hurriedly as if rescuing a girl from a fire and to my surprise, you two were sitting there, eye to eye, as calmly as sitting ducks. Chelsea was nearest the door and she curtly reversed out like a date at a drive in movie; you followed right behind, tailgating like an angry ex-girlfriend. It was quite a riot, no harm done, but you could not believe that I—for you assumed it was I—had put you through such an intolerable afternoon. You didn't sleep in my bed for three days.

As I am lying here writing this with a silly smile streaking across my cheeks, you are gazing at me as if I were an uneducated buffoon, with two odd squares of glass hooked around my ears, pressing buttons on a cumbersome object that is taking up too much space in my lap for *you*. Because, after all, everything *is* about you, is it not, my lady?

You *are* the prettiest girl on the block: thin and fit and far from lazy. You have manners, too, (excluding your horrible habit of clawing the arms of our white couch to sharpen those nails of yours): you wipe your feet before coming indoors, you bathe yourself, and you have even allowed me to pet your stomach without scratching or biting, something quite unacceptable when you first moved in. Your only fault, if I may say, is that you yap incessantly when you're hungry, or if I even come *close* to the refrigerator. For heaven's sake: learn to feed yourself! And what's more is that, yes, I eat turkey sandwiches, and I understand, darling, you love the smell because you look at me with those envious eyes, but *no*, you cannot have any turkey! You may be fine but not as fine as peppered turkey! I'm getting off track: I am awfully sorry. Your

luscious calico coat is precious, dear. I particularly love how your paws are all different colors: gray, blonde, black and white, and your cute little fingers are all white, too. Your stomach complements you wonderfully; indeed, it is as white as the milk I give you for your strong little bones. You do, however, have a cowlick in the center of your nose not unlike a mini Mohawk, if I may put it so rudely. Your hind legs look like rabbit feet. And, as of recently, you were involved in a fight with an outsider that pierced the tip of your ear; surely I would not dare take you to the veterinarian to get that sown. You do not wear a collar either, because I would never tie a neon noose around that pretty neck of yours.

But I am digressing because, as of late, your spirits have been quite low. You're being too hard on yourself for that incident you witnessed. It was not supposed to happen so barbarically, I will confess. Try being optimistic, if anything, for me.

You see, I remember Chelsea with respect: she was a tough woman who had seen the world. Do you remember, Sophia, when we moved in and Chelsea, appalled at the thought, hid under the deck in our backyard for a month? We thought she had run away! Finally, she came out scared and skinny and hungry. Poor thing! But that's how I remember her: resolute and unflinching, a good cat.

I made attempts at friendship with Chelsea, although you would have none of it. I sat with her a few times on her claimed couch and petted her gently. She was *not* the friendliest woman. Sometimes, however, she would stand up and sit on my lap, purring like a motorcycle. Every time this happened you were stalking around the corner, staring jealously as if I had just fed her your favorite turkey. And then, when I got up, she would run off and you would chase her around the house as if playing tag.

But then, Sophia, you noticed something strange in Chelsea, because you never again screamed at each other; you even ate from the same bowl during the last catatonic month of Chelsea's life: after she was diagnosed with Lymphoma. I remember brushing my hand down her back, feeling her bumpy spine like rows of knuckles and witnessing her weight steadily decline to a stalking corpse. Her gloom instilled gloom in those who looked at her. She limped around like a hung-over bum, wishing she could swallow just a drop of water, or eat just a bite

of food. Living was too painful for her. She was shrouded by ominous death. He was staring down on her like a stone-gray, ghostly gargoyle.

I'm not sure how you knew, Sophia: Chelsea was dying. You must have smelled it in the air like a ghost. You've always been intuitive. You've doubtless perked me up countless times. You didn't see death like Chelsea, no, but you knew she was on her way to some place far from here: like Perry Smith heading for the gallows. And through this, you learned empathy for an enemy. A lesson you will never forget.

One stormy Monday night, there was a stranger in our house with one eye projecting clear vision and a penny-round mouth that dispensed .22 caliber bullets. His metal-sleek skin was the color of desert-sand. He was dressed to kill. He had come over with good intentions. He did not stay long. I remember my mom was crying; I was despondent. But Sophia: you were fascinated. You knew where Chelsea was going. Death was here in our house that night.

My mom and I couldn't bear to be present while the stranger was over. I remember walking over to Chelsea: it was like confronting a sleepwalker. I massaged her back while she sat on a navy blue bed sheet on the arm of our pastel-pink couch. Her fur coat, with its streaks of black and white, blurred to a ghost-gray. Her eyes were like black moons setting in a silk-yellow sky.

Sophia, when we left, you watched Paris hold the stranger snuggly with an insatiable intrigue, didn't you? You are braver than my mom and me. But Chelsea, she was courageous. She was the strongest of us all. You, Sophia, watched Paris feed the stranger bullets and aim at morality. We learned a lesson through him that cold Monday night. We learned not to act as God. Not to pull triggers when in doubt. You saw Paris point the stranger at Chelsea and fire a bullet through her skull and she—refusing to die instantly—leapt up and ran through the house like a wild horse before collapsing on our bloodied carpet, gasping her final breaths of life. A gruesome, sordid end to what Paris naively predicted would be an instant, painless death. When my mom returned, she sent her off with a prayer.

You remember Chelsea with nostalgia, now, as you lie in the shade; and after years of boisterous brawls, perhaps peace and solitude were not comforts you truly dreamed desirable after all. Hindsight is

always dead-on, dear. Wisdom is not attained without some suffering. Presently, through my bedroom window, the sun has pierced the clouds, and shining in and warming you are beams of luminous light.

With love,
Juan

A Sore Subject:
To My Degenerative Disk

Juan Ventimiglia

I despise you with the formidable force of a furious fire. I loathe you beyond sanity. You have drained youth out of me like a needle drawing blood. I have aged a century since the day you moved in. I constantly dream about digging you out and feeding you to the dogs. But then I think, You can't be that comfortable, either, stuck between two discs: the more I move, the more I work, the more you must hate me the way I hate you.

I was, although you didn't live here then, the number one player on my tennis team in High School—I bet you don't believe me, do you? You think I'm lazy, now, I'm sure. But a year with your relentless presence will cripple anyone's motivation. I would have played in college, but they don't have a men's tennis team at CSUB and for that I am grateful: Can you imagine how depressing it would have been to have tasted the glory of climbing to the top of the team and, just as quickly, fallen off the ladder due to you: you degenerate prick. Flachmann insists on a cure. I've told him I've stabbed you twice with Epidurals; I think those injections hurt me more than you. You just won't die.

Remember Christmas break when I thought you had moved out? I played the best tennis of my life, after three months without practice. Flachmann thought I had been lying to him about my inactivity. He asked for revenge the following weekend, just before my trip to Argentina. I came out with the sun, firing tennis-bullets that cold, serene morning; but I knew there was something wrong. When I woke up the next day, I could not get out of bed. You had woken up from your slumber, too.

The doctors say you are hereditary, that you were bound to move in sometime. Strangely, though, I can't find anyone in my genealogy that has lived with you before.

You are persistent like a permanent paper cut, teeth biting bones, a flame inside of flesh; and yet, each day, with my friends, my books and my writing, is surprisingly pleasant.

Although you are debilitating, and some mornings it's arduous just to slip on socks, you are strangely inspiring. Testing my limits is my only cure. You've doubtless noticed my progress at the gym; and those painkillers they prescribed to forget about you: I've taken only one.

A Sore Subject: To My Degenerative Disk

So make yourself at home. Soon, when I graduate, we'll tour the world. You'll meet my family; my cousins, I'm sure, will be rude to you: clay court tennis is no longer an option, nor snowboarding down Bariloche's slopes; but we'll find substitutes, like swimming in the ocean or drinking expensive wine and dancing with fine Argentine women until sunrise.

This summer, at the US Open, we'll see Roger Federer win his 11th Grand Slam title; and I'll be 21; we'll wake up and drink Mimosas, and think: life's just begun.

that's fine with me."

"For a Jamba Juice," she said, sticking her hand out and shaking mine, then: "Lock your door, son," as she stepped eagerly out of *my* car."

"Mom. I have an alarm that I use as regularly as you brush your teeth"—(my mother, I'll proudly have you know, has the obsessive albeit hygienic habit of brushing her teeth; much the same as an OCD kid on Red Bull has with hand-soap)—"but yes, mother, I will lock my car."

(The echoing honk from the alarm punctuated my frustrated declaration).

We walked into the plain stucco square of Mattress Land. The inside, too, was as boring as the exterior: nothing to it, just beds and more beds. It was like walking into an attic of a millionaire's mansion with myriad mattresses aligned like rows of dominoes.

A slender Hispanic male with black frizzy-curly hair, a loose wide smile, a white tucked-in collared shirt, beige Dockers strapped by a skinny black belt, and church-dressy sleek black shoes greeted us with the alacrity that only an employee on commission has. He wore no tie, though; and this made me wonder if he was a *successful* commissioned employee.

"How you guys doin'?" He asked with a Hispanic accent.

(My mother is a female, I thought, feeling compelled to correct him).

"Fine," we said.

"Good. Good. Do you guys need some help? Or do you wanna look around for a bit?"

"Now," my mother began with the fastidiousness of a PhD professor, "we received a letter in the mail saying that there would be a sale tomorrow. Is that so?"

"Yes."

"And is it true that all the mattresses will be reduced 50%?"

"No."

"I see," she said, shifting her gaze to me: "let's look around, son."

"Just let me know if you guys have any questions," he said with his rheumy, marble eyes as fidgety as a blue bird's.

My mom and I began walking in a clockwise circle in search of the Tempurpedic beds; I was determined to lie on one. We passed the Posturpedic attempts: they were, judging by the weight of my pressing hand, just as buoyant as any mattress; NASA had credited the former as "the only

mattress approved by astronauts"—indeed, its origin was directly related to these astronauts because of the pressure involved in take-off: the memory foam absorbed the departure.

Five Tempurpedic beds were lined up on a wall near the back, beginning with the best and most expensive, The Grand Bed, and next to its royalty, The Celebrity Bed, following its fame, The Rhapsody Bed: the rest I deemed too low on the ladder for my liking.

Mr. Alacrity came commission-coasting in our direction like a cat in search of tuna once he realized our interest in mattresses.

"Do you guys have any questions about these Tempurpedic mattresses?" he asked, pointing his whole hand openly outwards like a model advertising the prizes on Wheel of Fortune.

"Yes. Which one would you recommend for someone with an injured back?"

"This one," he said, pointing to the Rhapsody Bed. "I direct all of my customers—who want a Tempurpedic mattress—to this one. The others are more expensive. And I really can't feel the difference."

"How much of a price difference is there between a Queen and a Full?" I asked.

"You know . . . let me go check real quick," he said, making eye contact with both of us "guys" and u-turning to the front of the store in search of a dictionary-thick black binder which he soon returned with saying, "You know . . . there is no price difference."

"Interesting, (Queen it is)," I thought.

"Now," my mother began, "what is the retail price on this mattress?"

"Retail price is . . . let me see here . . . Uh, three-four-nine-nine"; (I laughed internally at his euphemistic way of making thousands into decimal-dollars).

My mother returned: "Thirty-four ninety-nine?"

"No, ma'am," he said smiling with his loose, losing smile, "three *thousand* four hundred and ninety-nine."

I lay on the bed.

Doubtless in this man's career, when telling his customers the price, camouflaging it contributed to his coasting-commission.

"Is it comfortable, son? Do you think it will help your back?"

"Yes."

Conversating Congenially

"Tempurpedic is the best bed out there," said Mr. Ambivalent—for we now knew the price, and from my experience in this capitalist society, top of the line merchandise hardly ever went on sale.

"So, sir," said my mother, "how much do you think this bed will go for tomorrow?"

"You know, ma'am, I'm not sure. I don't want to mislead you. And they don't tell us the prices until the day of the sale," he said convincingly: "But I think you guys will get a great deal on this bed. This is a great bed. Lie down on it," he said to me as I was getting up."

"Okay."

(It *was* marvelous).

"Put your feet up. Make yourself comfortable man. Don't worry about your shoes," he suggested just as I was slipping them back on to get up.

"Okay."

"What's the difference between these three mattresses?" my mother asked as I reclined for the third time.

"Just the amount of memory foam in them."

"And is that a *good* thing?" She asked inquisitively.

Laughing, "Yes, ma'am. It moulds to your body. The more foam the better."

"I see," she said blurredly.

"Try it out, ma'am. Just lie down—"

"No, no; that won't be necessary—"

"Pretend this is your bedroom," he said sententiously.

"Okay," my mother said, squatting down on the mattress as if sitting on a toilet. "Yeah. Boy! It feels like it is sucking you in."

The other mattresses behind these thrones seemed, presently, to my mother, much more interesting. She u-turned with her eyes spinning dollar-signs.

"Son. Why don't you try some of *these* out?" she said, pointing to the plain ones.

"Okay."

(They were boring).

("You know") I said to my mom in an aside ("if we are going to buy a mattress that is going to last me the rest of my life, we might as well get the best one there is: Go big or go home.")

Conversating Congenially

"What does *go big or go home mean?* Yeah. I guess we can come back tomorrow and see what it goes on sale for. Sir," she requested, "about that letter we received from you. I have had it sitting on my table at home but *someone* has misplaced it. Do we need the letter to get the sale?"

He laughed. "You know what, ma'am, when you come in here tomorrow—if you still can't find it, I'll reprint one for you."

(Now that's commission-talk).

"I could dig through the trash and . . ."

"No. No. No: don't worry about it, ma'am," he said, giggling like a little girl who just sold her first box of girl-scout cookies, "Just come in here tomorrow, come find me, and I will reprint one for you."

"Okay," I said, "I guess we should just wait 'till tomorrow, mom."

(Apparently this tomorrow-talk let our salesman know we were serious, for he proceeded to introduce himself, first name and all).

Swinging his hand into mine as if sealing the deal: "My name's Andy."

"I'm Juan."

"Nice to meet you man."

"Monica," my mom said,

"Pleasure to meet you Monica."

"You know how organized I am, son. Have *I* ever lost anything before? *Someone* is always moving things around in our house and then *I* look like the disorganized one. I am going to find that letter. You watch," my mother said as we left Mattress Land and drove to the grocery store.

"Mom, this is why you cause yourself so much stress. The guy just said not to worry about it. He'll reprint one for you."

"Aww... So haughty. So haughty. Oh!" she said sharply. "That reminds me: I won the bet! *You* owe me a Jamba Juice!"

Hospital Room

David Ryan

The room was painted an unsympathetic white, as all the rooms were. This particular white, being absent of any true color, was the perfect blend of nothingness on nothing. Perhaps, the designers hoped it might symbolize purity. Somehow, it did not translate that way for me. Those walls were a shade of white so spotlessly pure, and incoherently indifferent, they had not the memory to record or reflect what it was that we were experiencing. And, I loathed that color of nothingness for it. It was mocking me in all its blissful stupidity, ignorantly forcing this vile apathy and infectious uncaring into every nook and crevice of the room, like a pervading undying germ that wouldn't be abated. Eventually it crept into my vacant eyes as well, saturating my spiritless and drowned sorrow with a quiet superficial numbness.

"What kind of place is this for my father to die?" I asked myself as I stared at his comatose body lying there strapped to various medical devices; all of which were, as far as I was concerned, quack-inventions that proved as meaningless as life itself. Could these things un-jaundice his stained skin? Or, perhaps, force his liver to un-fail? I demanded honest answers to these ridiculous questions. I looked around the room, citing the various suspects and culprits responsible for such incompetence: the I.V., the life support system, the defibrillator, other various devices with a questionable existence. I planned for an official summons mandating all these bastards into my personal inquisition where I would, one day, wreck havoc upon them all.

Then there were the nurses. And they, being mere extensions of the white-walled hospital, tried to be as stupidly uncaring. They walked past the room with this false pseudo-sympathy. I could see it plainly for what it was. The looks they gave us as we wept at our loss, were underlined with fear and discomfort. They kept away from us, they knew that within the confines of this particular room, where moans and anguish spawned, that their sacred purity of white walled stupidity was not reigning. Perhaps, they thought, its dominance had been momentarily compromised.

Yet, what happened outside of that room mattered not. Within it there lie my broken father, who couldn't see the horrified expressions on our faces, or couldn't hear the broken-hearted voices tormented by a future without him. And in those few moments that I stood in that room, I knew that this

would be the last time I'd see him alive. Why here among such alien devices and uncaring people would this be? As cruel as life could be, I couldn't have imagined seeing him die in such nauseating conditions.

Directions to the Euclid Apartment Complex

Nicelle Hughes

The way I know things is in parts. My apartment complex, for example, is located on the not-through side of Euclid Street. We, who live there, are cut-off from the north-sides triple-trimmed yards by the Euclid Mall. The Mall creates a divide that keeps housing values up and rental rates down. Inside the community divide is a harbor for teen-age finger banging and last chance positions for professional retailers.

Maria, from the top-front-apartment, works at the Mall. She doesn't talk to us. She doesn't even look at us now that we know she isn't making the rent. Every morning I catch her trying to slide through the back door. I see her pass my living room window, turning her body side-ways to fit down the breezeway. Her outfits have the store rack creases still thick in the fabric, because she refuses to be found in the community laundry room. She's probably afraid one of us might ask her questions, but there's no reason to ask questions. We all know what there is to know about Maria. I listen to her struggle past my living room. Her layers of gold plated jewelry give soft applause for her every attempt to go unnoticed. Her body looks worn to me, under all the new she wears.

Charlie, the manager of the Euclid Complex, lives in the bottom-front apartment with his arthritic poodle, Tiger. The blinds to Charlie's place are always drawn in. The archival dim of his room keeps the wall hung photos preserved. A thousand little Charlies are always looking at Charlie from their gray-scale sunny Alameda Race Track were they still jockey the greatest horses ever bread. Charlie doesn't spend much time inside his apartment. He manages the Euclid Complex from the front stoop where he sits on a green plastic lawn chair, with eyes half closed to eliminate the effort of blinking. Tiger dutifully straps himself to the right-side of Charlie's polyester crotch with an ever-flowing sting of yellow drool. There are two services Charlie consistently provides for the tenants of Euclid. The first is use of his ever-ready brown-nipple toilet plunger. The second Charlie benefit is exclusive to women. A Euclid girl short on rent can always rely on Tiger shoving a card under her door. The yellow daisy stationary will have a brief message of concern followed by an offer of monetary assistance for a few good strokes of an old dogs coat.

It was from Maria exploding Charlie's penis that I found out about synthetic-erectile-devices. Charlie's 'incident' began with a set of short,

Directions to the Euclid Apartment Complex

"That's enough", over-heard, "It doesn't go any bigger", sentences that ended with, "bitch", popping out of his room like a balloon breaking. We all stood outside in the patches of grass to watch the ambulance take Charlie off. Later the boys of the Euclid Complex sat on the stoop and drew illustrations to explain the mechanical components of Charlie's Jack'n'the Box. Their tutorial sketches looked like an elephant frosting a cake for a kindergartner's birthday party. I believe such illustrations account for the gaps in my overall knowledge of how things work. How Maria and Charlie managed to patch things back together was left unknown. Maria's presence at the Euclid however is always well acknowledged.

I work past the mall in one of the fancy Old-Town shops. We, workers of Old-Town, are different from the Euclid Mall employees. We're a hyphenated-people. Myself, for example, is a 'barista-writer-server-painter-actor-hyphenated-other'. I entirely avoid the mall, especially walking home at night. The transients come out with the same sudden advent of street lamps. They become a place separate from either side of the divide. They twisted around the buildings peripheral as if they're made from old parts put in wrong places. To get home I go a block out of my way to Arcadia Street, and from Arcadia cut through the open courtyard of City Hall, to the front yard of the Protestant church.

I don't know much about churches but I know this church is Protestant because of Lewis' Sunday night bitches about the place. Lewis is the Old-Italian-American from the front right apartment. He hates the WASPs for blocking up the sidewalks on his spiritual journey to the Dirty-Diver. The WASP's are always standing in the way of his "full glass of Christ's blood and redemption." Lewis likes to offer the ladies rides on his cherry-sparkle-red electric-powered wheel chair. He paints for them a seductive picture of their short blue skirts straddling his one-person bucket seat. They would be welcomed to clutch onto his curly-gray chest as the wind whips through their hair at a roaring 5 miles per hour. They would make their way into Old-Town with three-inch American flags waving hello from the front handle bars of his ride. By the time Lewis is done explaining the highlights of his love-ride, his wife, Donna, comes to pull him in for his mid-day nap.

In front of this Protestant church is a large oak tree. The bark wraps around the thick of the trunk like ropes hung from an invisible anchor. Some nights I stop and press my palm into the strands until the texture leaves an

imprint in my skin. It's only on nights when I'm fifty bucks sort of keeping Charlie's eyes off me that I press myself into the church yard tree. I think to myself that maybe this tree will let me be a part of its thickness, let me wrap myself like a rope around it. It's just on nights when I'm stupid with tired that I think of becoming a rope in a WASP's tree.

Epiphany on a Bike

Callahan

Wow . . . this is a strange sensation. Very much like that day I flipped my bike riding to Howard's house in the rain last year, time seems to have nearly stopped. I must be six, maybe eight feet off the ground.. .My feet are above my head.. .I'm not sure things are actually moving, as if everything I see is a snapshot. Looking at me from the bike path, maybe thirty feet away, is a woman, motionless, as if merely the cardboard cutout of a woman. Directly ahead are four men (early twenties) fishing in the canal. My hands, imitating my feet which are one with the pedals, refuse to release the handlebars . . .

There are moments when a person suddenly remembers, in detail, an experience months, even years in the past and sees clearly its purpose. There are flashes when in a few short seconds the brain sorts massive amounts of information—in fact, entire journal entries in full color—and recreates an entire episode in an instant (or the time it takes to fall eight feet!); simply put, a flashback.

. . . I was riding to Howard's house . . . it is an eight mile ride from my house to his. The sky to the north is a disturbing blend of grey and black, as if a half burned mound of charcoal suddenly saturated. At such distance, threat is hidden in a facade of beauty; I put on a lightweight hooded pull-over and start down the road. I make it about four miles when it begins to rain—RAINING?! NO! The gods are seriously dropping bucket-size rain drops and the wind is relentless! But this is Bakersfield: the rain will stop in a few short minutes—well, that is the hope that keeps me pedaling. In reality, the storm is growing stronger each minute. The streets are hectic with commuters who seem not to have a minute to spare and DEMAND every inch of the road—and a few inches of my narrow bike lane. Mountain hiking seems so much safer than trekking across Bakersfield. Within minutes I am SOAKED. The wind keeps blowing my oversized hood completely over my dripping face. When I get on Hageman the traffic is thick with SUVs and 4X4s that do not fit in their lanes. School is letting out and I am minutes from reaching Centennial High School. Water has filled the gutter so that there is only a sliver of bike lane that is not six inches deep. The giant, speeding, metal and fiberglass beetles insist I stay on my own path! So I push through the water. My front tire is channeling incredible amounts of water, with an efficiency to impress even the Michelin Man, right

into my shoes. I cannot see through the rain drops (can I really call them "drops?!") pounding my face. I get to the high school and now the bike lane is ten inches below the surface of the water. Suddenly my front tire looses the water displacement battle and I begin to hydroplane. My handle bars are turning sideways, and as I fight to keep the bike going straight, I imagine myself fatting and sliding out into the fifty mile-per-hour traffic that is whizzing by two inches away from my left arm (in a school zone!), but somehow I maintain control. I reach Coffee and Hageman—yet another red light I must sit through as people stare at me, safely entertained from behind glass, like I'm some tweaker trying desperately to find my next fix. As I sit there, my right calf, which is in the up position waiting to push off, begins to cramp; I can't give in to the cramp as the light will at any second change to green. The light turns green and I push through. There is no longer any visible sign that a bike lane ever existed, so I decide to use the sidewalk that is finally available. I cross an intersection and turn into a ten foot long, eight inch deep puddle and head for the sidewalk entrance. Just as I hit the sidewalk, all concentration on the telephone pole and the light post that I must maneuver between two feet ahead, the wind blows my hood completely over my face—I think, as time nearly stops, "no S#&!%ing way." My left hand reaches for my hood while my right attempts to steer the bike across the slick sidewalk and through the space my brain remembers the poles to be—the gods may have been laughing, but they did not want me to be injured—YET! Remarkably, I avoid the poles and head down the sidewalk. Six blocks later, I turn, finally, onto Howard's street. I see his house. I plan my route: I will turn up his neighbor's driveway and cut across the yard, then find cover at his front door—Ok . . . that makes sense in my head. But NO, the gods are not yet done with me! I turn up the driveway and shoot across Howard's front yard using his concrete walkway—his very much 'S' shaped walkway that is hidden under three inches of standing, muddy water. My front tire drops into his flower bed. I fly over the handlebars thinking, as time slows to a crawl, "I should have worn a helmet!" I hit his sidewalk, hands outstretched like a game winning slide in the World Series, and slide, a three foot wave of water surging from each side of my body, all the way to his front door. My bike chain breaks, one of the front sprockets bend, and my handlebars become a deformity. I jump up, ignoring the *blood and the pain in my knee and hip, only thinking about Howard's neighbors possibly*

rolling in laughter and already imagining how they will tell all their friends. I limp to the door like a cat that just fell—"I MEANT to do that." I walk in, and Howard gives me a towel. I put the towel over my head and turn around to see it INSTANTLY STOP RAINING—COMPLETELY! Howard says it had not been raining five minutes prior to my arrival. It was following me . . .

"I should have worn a helmet." Is that what I was thinking? Should have . . . Time is speeding up! Everything is moving again. The fishermen stare. The cardboard cut-out comes to life—the woman looks stunned. Not thirty seconds ago I hit the straightaway, stood, and thought, "FASTER!" As I hit the bank, I knew something bad was about to happen. My back tire dug into the bank—I have *heard* about this thing called "rebound." Is that, that tiny little, over-pressurized Fox Shock, what just launched my back tire, pedals, and feet over my head? There is a short pause, before the fall, when things just stop, for an instant, the upward motion. Then! My face plummets towards the earth! I hear an enormous explosion! I feel—or do I hear?!—a snap in my shoulder. I roll onto my back and try desperately to breath but my body seems determined only to empty my lungs and I lay there uncontrollably making noises that remind me of the seals at Marine World. The lady on the bike path, now full of life, keeps yelling, "Are you okay?" I try saying no but for some reason cannot create words. Why will she not come closer?! A cyclist suddenly appears as I remove my broken helmet. I think, "I am glad I wore a helmet."

Two months—shoulder surgery, titanium plate, five screws—later I still laugh at the thought of that cyclist telling me, "I can give you my phone number and take your bike home for you." I remember thinking, "Are you S#&!%ing joking?! My two week old, full XTR Santa Cruz Blur?!" Out loud, T say, sincerely, "No, thank you very much. I can take it home." However, the humor is gone when I remember how, before my rainstorm accident at Howard's house a year earlier, I refused to wear a bike helmet. Had I not been wearing a helmet the day I broke my clavicle, who knows what the outcome would have been. I cringe when people tell me similar stories but with riders who were not wearing their helmets, stories with endings that involve wheelchairs. I am astonished at the life-changing power of one seemingly insignificant question: Should I wear a bike helmet?

GLIDING LOW

Kevin Anthony Chidgey

The woman awakened to see Elmo pulling on his clothes, and she thought how he looked like a grasshopper or a praying mantis. His limbs were long and thin, and the joints seemed accentuated. She saw on the little table next to her bed silver coins and a small gold nugget. The nugget she knew would have been picked by Elmo's long fingers from the bottom of his pan somewhere on the upper Kern River or one of its tributaries. She would tuck it away with the rest and be glad for Elmo's generosity. She was no longer young and knew she must horde what she could unless she wanted to mop and do laundry when she grew old.

When Elmo came to town, he came early to see her before anyone else. He paid for the whole night, and he stayed the whole night. No one else ever did that. Others did what they did and were on their way. Good riddance! But Elmo was slow and gentle and then liked to cuddle. He said he had never had a woman of his own.

She had mentioned Elmo to her friend Sally. Sally laughed and said, "Sarah, any man who wants more from a whore than to use her for his animal needs is stupid and foolish, the most pathetic kind of man.

But Sarah knew he wasn't stupid, and she didn't see anything pathetic about him either. Foolish? Maybe so, but it was a kind of foolishness he enjoyed. He lived mostly in the mountains and slept on the ground and panned for gold decades after the rush had gone. He lived life exactly as he chose. In a growing little valley town like Bakersfield where the future was cattle and farming, he was a relic, and, if people laughed at him, it was always a good-natured laugh. They seemed to know that men like him would soon be gone.

He saw her studying him and said, " Are you coming to breakfast with me?"

"I'll be down," she answered.

That was something else about Elmo. No one else ever went out in public with her. But he would take her for breakfast and care less what anyone thought. The whole of Bakersfield might be staring at him and he would just grin back. Once he paid for the whole night and then asked her to put on her best dress. Ok I can do whatever he wants, she thought. He's nice and pays extra. But she still didn't quite understand until he offered his arm and took her out to a theater. When they came back, he wasn't physical with

her except to curl around her and inhale the scent of her hair. He didn't use tobacco, and his breath was clean, and he smelled like soap. She couldn't remember a nicer evening, an evening like real ladies had.

Across the campfire from his friend, Guy Clement, Elmo once confided that he thought he loved Sarah.

"You can't love a whore," Guy Clement said as he drew on his Virginia cigar. "Even if you could, she couldn't love you back."

"Why not?"

"She's a whore. Whores can't love anybody."

"You ever love anybody?"

"You know I did," Guy Clement answered.

"But you're a killer Guy. Lots of people might say a killer can't really love anybody."

"You were there Elmo. You know I had to kill those men."

"Maybe Sarah had to be a whore."

Guy Clement chewed on his Virginia cigar. "That's why nobody likes you Elmo."

"Why?"

"Because you're always telling people they think wrong."

"Only when they do. Besides, if you don't like what I have to say, don't talk to me."

"Ok, I'll just talk to all these other folks." And Guy Clement turned and stretched his arms to the silent solitude of the southern Sierra darkness.

Three months later, Guy Clement lay bleeding on a boardwalk in a windy desert town after a deputy shot him for stealing a horse even though he had never stolen a horse in his life.

He looked up and said, "Elmo, I never had a brother, but I guess I love you like a brother. And Elmo, I think Sarah probably loves you too. She'd be stupid not to. You're the kindest man I've ever known. Even if you did kill those six men up on the river that time." He gave a feeble nod toward the notches cut into the wooden handle of Elmo's old percussion revolver.

"I didn't kill six men up on the river," Elmo said. "I shot one of them in the leg and another one through the ribs, but they both lived. The other four ran off. They were all drunk on bad whiskey. Rumor grew that I killed them all, and I just played along."

"Then why'd you cut the notches?"

"I guess to scare people off."

Guy Clement tried to laugh, but blood came out of his mouth.

"Well it sure worked Elmo. People are scared to death of you."

Guy's shaking hand fumbled into his shirt pocked, and he handed Elmo his last Virginia cigar, and then he died.

Now Elmo sat in the restaurant at the best table in front of the window and waited for Sarah to come to breakfast. He thought about Guy Clement, and his eyes watered, and he didn't care who saw. He remembered what Guy said about Sarah. She probably loved him too. Dying men spoke the truth.

"Elmo! I've been waiting for you to come to town. Looky here!"

Abraham, the restaurant owner, held up a little paperback book. The cover said in bold letters: Blood On The River. And in smaller print it said: The True Story of Elmo Granger and the Kern River Shootout. There was a small drawing of a handsome mustached man holding a revolver next to his smiling face. It didn't look anything like Elmo.

"I'll be damned," Elmo said. "Can I see that?"

"It's yours," Abraham said. "Be my pleasure to make you a present of it. Will Saddle be having breakfast with you?"

"Her name is Sarah," Elmo said.

"Yes sir. I mean Miss Sarah."

"She'll be coming."

Elmo opened the book and began to read, running his finger along beneath the lines of print and saying the words to himself. He had always been thankful that his mother made him learn to read. Sarah had once admitted to him that she could hardly read at all, and he promised to teach her someday.

A loud slap on the table interrupted his reading, and he glared up at a red-haired young man leaning over him.

"Go find someplace else to read, old man. We're gonna have breakfast here."

"Go away," Elmo said.

"Get him, Josh!"

"Throw him through the window!"

Two friends behind the red-head urged him on. Elmo stood up and pivoted behind his chair, gripping its back with his bony hands. When Josh

moved on him, Elmo broke the chair over the younger man, and the man's legs buckled , and blood leaked out from the side of his head where the scalp flapped open. His two friends spread out and looked serious. One pulled out a bone-handled knife, and the other came up with a small break-action revolver.

So I'm going to die this way, Elmo thought. He turned to try for the door, but there was Sarah with his canvas bag. She took out the huge old revolver with the notches cut into the handle and thrust it into his hand.

"Elmo's gonna shoot you now," Abraham hollered. "Elmo Granger's gonna shoot you dead."

The two men heard the name Elmo Granger, and they saw the huge old revolver, and they ran out the back door.

Elmo watched them go and looked at the little book on the table and thought how silly it was that his life had just been saved by an old lie. The revolver wouldn't have helped him at all since there was no powder behind the menacing balls in its cylinders. He hadn't loaded it in ages.

He turned to Sarah and said, "I don't feel much like breakfast anymore.

"I can't say blood makes me hungry either."

Elmo put the revolver and the little book into the canvas bag and took Sarah by the arm and led her out of the restaurant and down the street without looking back.

"Where are we going?"

"To rent a wagon. I'm going to take you somewhere quiet so we can read this little book some nice man wrote about me."

Back in the restaurant, someone pulled Josh to his feet and helped him off to the doctor.

The town marshal bustled in and demanded to know who did this, and, when he heard who it was, immediately declared that it must have been self defense.

"I'm sure as hell not going after Elmo Granger for defending himself."

Abraham ordered his boy to mop up the blood, but he knew it would leave a stain on the wooden floor. Well worth it, he thought, for the story that could be told and retold. "That's the very blood," he would be able to say.

Elmo guided the wagon west along the river. Several miles out of town, he turned southward into the sagebrush. There were a few cottonwoods here

and there and occasionally the decaying monolith of an ancient tree that had spent its life long before white men had come to this country, perhaps even before the Spanish had come.

"There's nothing out here," Sarah said.

"Only peace and quiet," Elmo said. "I've been out here before when I just wanted to think or do a little reading.

"Look!" Sarah pointed to a long-eared jackrabbit that ran at their approach.

"Be on the lookout for runner birds too," Elmo said. "There's lots of them out here."

"What are they?"

"Funny looking, scraggly, long legs, long tails. They run instead of fly."

"Yes, I've seen them. What's the point of a bird that doesn't fly? Seems like they kind of got cheated."

Elmo shrugged. "They wouldn't be the only ones."

Just then a pair broke from the brush and scurried ahead of them as fast as a man could run. As they watched, the birds beat their wings and took to the air.

"They can fly!" Sarah exclaimed.

"Just not much."

The birds gained only a few feet and then leveled out, gliding gracefully just above the sage.

"I guess that's all we get," Elmo said.

"Maybe that's all we need," Sarah said. "Maybe that's all we need."

An Orphan's Journey Home

Rosa Rascon-Brown

I never asked my father about his youth; I knew better than to ask him about an era he tried to forget. But now his lungs are weak. For a while we thought he would not see another sunrise, because his voice was weak and his breathing was shallow. I need to know, and he needs to remember his youth, so I asked, and I did not take no for an answer. I asked him while his voice was strong, he said, "there is no need to talk about unhappy things." I told him that all that he was in his youth made him the man he is now. He agreed.

His memories uncovered a man much different than the tough, strict father I knew. The man, who grew up with the railroads, is now mellow in his later years, with a slow and unsteady pace, and a voice always one sigh away from a tear. I didn't ask about his childhood; I already know about him losing his mother at the age of 4, and his father at the age of 11. I know about how he and his six siblings had to be separated because not one family could take care of all of the kids together. His twin, light skin, green-eyed brother was taken by a rich family while my dark skin, brown-eyed father had to live with an ill-hearted aunt in a town far away from all his siblings. It is a sad story I have to write about someday, but for now I want to write about the young Juan De Dios (my father's name, John of God) who wore out the border roads in search of better memories in the land of milk and honey: the United States.

In 1947, at the tender age of 15 years old and tired of being mistreated by his own aunt, my father packed a small knapsack and headed north. He traveled with his 18 year old brother from Mexicali, Mexico to Yuma, Arizona and then into Phoenix in the same state. He said he, two other men he never met before, and his older brother walked all night in the desert guided by the faraway lights of distant towns. In Phoenix, he jumped on a moving train that didn't know his name. The hope the train gave him started to dissipate when he noticed that his older brother didn't jump on time and missed the train. He almost jumped out of the train, but his brother urged him to go on and told him he would catch up with him later; but, nobody knew where the train was going. My father said goodbye to his brother not knowing if he would ever see him again. His eyes were fixed on the distance, until his brother became a small dot in the horizon.

"We traveled in the darkness of a cargo compartment for three straight

days. The final destination was not important as long as the train took us far away from this land," my father added. They finally landed in Chicago, Illinois, and wondered around looking for a job. I asked him how he survived without food. He said, "Good Samaritans. Mexican like us, knew what we were going through, and gave us food. They were good people." Once in Chicago, he found a job and worked long hours in the fields. A few months later his worn out shoes took him to California, then into Oregon, and back into California, always planting and picking somebody else's crop. He picked the best fruits for healthy eaters while he was content with a bite of cold tortillas and beans. He lived in old, crowded, and worn out shacks that looked like boxes, provided by the landowners, along with many other workers while the landowners enjoyed their well kept big ranches. I asked him if the landowners treated him well. He paused and replied hesitantly with a sigh, "yeah," as if he tried to convince himself that they did.

He crossed the Golden Gate Bridge both ways; back and forth he walked hoping to find a better job. He was offered a job maintaining the railroads. He was glad to get a job that paid better than the job at the fields; unfortunately, just a day short of payday, after working for a month, the immigration department found him and took him to Monterrey, Mexico. I often wonder if this was a coincidence, or if the person who hired him called the INS to take advantage of him. He said, "they (the immigration officers) take you as far away from your homeland as they can," perhaps, to make the journey back to their loved ones a bit more difficult, thus discouraging their crossings back into the US.

He gave the U. S. a second chance, when he traveled, the same way he did before: in a cold and dark cargo compartment of a train that took him all the way to Iowa. There, he worked in a smoldering plant that made automobile parts and fences (I think this is the place where his lungs started to deteriorate). I asked him how people treated him in Iowa, he again said, "they were fine, but you couldn't mix with them (Whites); Mexicans lived in the poor part of town, and Whites lived in another; you knew who you were and where you belonged."

It was in Iowa that my father met Matilde, his first wife, a half Native American, half Mexican lady who was a few years older than my father. He said, "then my children: John, Robert, and Antonia were born." I see the pride in his eyes when he talks about them. He loved those children then,

and he loves those children now. He finally had a family; he was a husband and he was a dad. He wasn't just an orphan, anymore. Life finally decided to smile at him. But his smile was short lived. Just as he started to see meaning in his life, my father, once again, was taken away from his family, this time, by the immigration department. It didn't matter that he had a family; they ripped him away from those whom he loved and loved him. "They knock on my door, asked if I was Juan Rascon; I said I was. So they handcuffed me in front of my crying wife and children, as if I was some kind of a criminal," my father said as his eyes stared in place, hiding his sadness in a half smile. If he had rights, they ignored them; nobody bothered to tell him. He was taken to the State Penitentiary in Omaha, Nebraska. He was forced to live among criminals because there weren't enough "illegal immigrants" to take back to Mexico in one trip. He lived three months in the penitentiary, because it was not convenient yet to take him back to a country that was not his home anymore. He remembers how he was put in solitary confinement, because one of the criminals named Donald disliked my father, so he fought him every time he set eyes on him. Donald always lost, but he always fought, which kept sending my father to solitary confinement. I don't know what happened to Donald while my father was in solitary confinement.

Three months later, my father and 31 more "illegal immigrants" began their journey back to Mexico. Once in Mexico, my father then went looking for his sister in Obregon, Sonora, contacted his wife in Iowa, and a few weeks later he was reunited with his family. He also found his older brother whom he had not seen since they got separated when he was fifteen. It was a brief happy time. My father worked as a bracero while Matilde worked as a bar tender, both in Yuma, a border town in the United States. They worked in the U. S., but lived in Sonora, Mexico. So every day, after work, they went home in Mexico. For a while, Matilde tried to adapt to the ways of a foreign country, but that strange land never became her home. The stress finally took a toll on her and some time after her arrival, she took her three children and left an empty home for my father. She denied him a chance to say goodbye.

She never looked back, and after trying to track her down, my father gave up looking especially when someone told him she got married again. Without any legal documents, tired of crossing the border that kept rejecting him, my father never went back to the United States. His voice cracks as he

remembers his children who didn't call him dad. My interview was abruptly interrupted when my father said, "I think you have enough information to elaborate; let's pick it up some other time." I know the memories he tried so hard to bury had begun to crack the ground, and they began to hurt him. I couldn't insist for I also had to swallow my tears as I walked away, but I needed to know.

Instead of Milk and Honey, my father had a bitter taste in his mouth, but he did not inherit a bitter heart. He met my mother some years later and moved to Ensenada, Mexico where I was born. Throughout my childhood, I saw my father show kindness to all those around him, especially those in need. He brought homeless, juvenile delinquents to our house. They called him "dad." He even brought to our home the aunt who mistreated him as a child. She stayed with us for several months, while my father found a doctor for her daughter who was ill with Tuberculosis. He was a beacon of light to many of our relatives who needed a hand. At least once a year, we hosted someone who needed my father's help. He never said no, and he never took any money from them.

Even though he lacked an education, he held political offices in Ensenada in an attempt to offer the youth ways to keep them out of trouble. He raised money to obtain several of the baseball and softball fields that are still in use. He worked hard all of his life to provide for his family, and he promised himself never to have an empty wallet, for the lack of money is what gave him so much disgrace. To this day, he has kept that promise. Even though he is sick, he still manages to work, driving his taxi cab around Ensenada, taking the opportunity to practice his almost accent-less English with the American tourists in town, treating them with respect and kindness, even though their past generations fail to do the same for him.

Now, I am in the United States trying to achieve what my father never achieved but always insisted we worked for: an education. One day I decided to look for my father's three children. I went online and searched for their names on the World Wide Web. There I found them as if they had been waiting for someone to search for them. I looked at their names on the computer screen and felt like I was staring at a ghost, but the ghost was alive. After Matilde left Texas, she went back to Iowa. The three children never moved away, as if they were hoping our dad would look for them in that place. John, his oldest son, served as a Marine in the Vietnam War and

is now a prison guard. Bob was too young to serve in Vietnam, but he still works in the military. He is in charge of a department that makes weapons. Antonia (Toni) has worked for over 20 years in a factory making wrappers for McDonald's, and is a state champion bowler. Matilde already died, and there is no way to corroborate the not so accurate stories she told their kids about our dad. But that is not important anymore. I called John, he pondered about the idea of meeting with a man he thought was already dead, and he tried to bury. He called the other two, and they were eager to see their father one more time. Nine years ago, forty years after he saw them last, my father finally saw his missing children again. It was an emotional reunion; but there are too many scars that still need healing, and I doubt true healing will ever take place. I hope I can replace some of my father's painful memories for pleasant ones. I cannot erase his past, but I can help rebuild whatever time he has left with moments of pride. His weak voice will become strong in me, in the land of milk and honey that failed to discover what a great man visited this land once.

HEDORA*

Rynae Alexander

I lived in Los Angeles for nearly twelve years. My reasons for moving there are complicated, but primary was that I associated LA with fun and opportunity: my stepfather always drove us down to watch the Dodgers or Angels; whenever I visited my dad, we invariably went to see some movies; and several times I made trips to Disneyland and Knott's Berry farm, I also saw Sting and Bob Goldthwait there. The problem with the city is that mostly all you remember is the driving. LA's attraction—like the sugar that cobra plants use to entice insects toward doom—is the opportunity for entertainment; but you'd be better off living outside the city, driving in from, say, Riverside or Bakersfield to do something memorable.

The first thing you notice upon entering Los Anus—what confirms that you're there—is the smog: Bakersfield might have the worse air, but LA has a notorious gray-beige haze swirling the air like a malevolent plague of Chinese cockroaches—confusing your vision, corrupting the sky, infesting your lungs, and staining anything not moving. If oxygen contracted cancer, it would be smog; sometimes I wonder if it has given *me* some disease, ready to explode in my lungs or burn through my veins like a biochemical time bomb. Strangely, the smog is only noticeable during daylight: either the sun's rays naturally bring out this dull air-cancer's color via lit-up particulates, or the infestation consciously attempts to counteract the sun's presence, diffusing the one positive, natural, and regenerative presence in a soul-sucking daily travail

Distance becomes blurred: when you're in traffic, oppressed by that beige blanket, you have no sense of how far you have to travel or precisely where you're at— this, in a city known for being flat and wide. Millions of hapless denizens thus slog daily through the streets or freeways, crawling or lurching along the blacktop veins toward some vague destination, like a train of cows in a slaughterhouse labyrinth; or, on rainy days, like pockets of phlegm stiffly and steadily being hocked up and spat. And at night, the worst is the 405 over the hill into Santa Monica: white headlights snaking down the hill, red taillights crawling up—like the torches of a hundred ascetics moving *up*hill, where they are sacrificed to an elusive god, their boiling blood oozing back downhill like sanguine lava.

Drivers come to rationalize the misery: acolytes in the cult of *dinero*, they agree to two- or three-hour drives each way because, "Hey—it *pays*;

it's a great opportunity; I have to pay off my new house in Saugus; if I suffer some overtime on the weekend, I'll maybe someday take my family to a movie." Etcetera. I predict that eventually—with home-sized SUVs already roaming—Angelenos will just invest in mini-RVs and live on the freeway when not working 'Driving' will become the norm; permanent stops the aberration.

* In the early 1970s, the Japanese film corporation Toho made a film titled **Gojira tai Hedora**, which literally translates to The Whale-gorilla battles Pollution,' but was released in America simply as **Godzilla vs. the Smog Monster**. LA to me is Hedora [heh-doe-/ra], the embodiment of Pollution to the extreme that it becomes a living, breathing, menacing Smog Monster

Comic Book Shop

Anonymous

On a quiet Sunday afternoon, while the sun beats down on the city, a comic bookstore is open. The store sits in the business district among so many stiff, stuffy, and upright corporate offices. The parking lot is calm. No one is around, rightly so considering it is a Sunday. One would not know a comic bookstore sat among the dull offices except that a blue-and-red "light-up" Marvel comics sign stands in the window along with a sign of the same colors proclaiming the store is open. Other than that, the store looks as bland and dreary as the rest of the business district. As one approaches the glass door that is the portal to a world of superheroes and villains, one sees the store hours stated plainly in black Sharpie on a black and-white sign. Once inside one finds oneself in a comfortable hole-in-the wall surrounded by the greatest heroes of all time: Superman, Batman, Spiderman, Wonder Woman, Storm of the X-Men, and others. One also, recognizes some of the most formidable of villains: Lex Luther, The Joker, Green Goblin, Cheetah, and The Brotherhood. After acknowledging the greatness that lines the walls of the store in the form of soft, slick-covered books with brilliant illustrations standing upright on clear plastic shelves, one realizes that the comic bookstore is, in fact, not a store at all, but a shop. Stores are a bit larger and more spacious; shops are smaller and more intimate. At a store one encounters a clerk at the cash register; in a shop one encounters the proprietor in that same place. This is where one finds HIM. He is not exactly at the register, but sitting in the type of chair one might find in those neighboring corporate offices, at a computer that sits behind a faux wood counter.

The head of the bald proprietor has a matte shine to it; there is a shadow of hair, a contrast of rough, spiky edges to the clean, smooth, glossy center coming from his forehead and working back. He is not entirely bald but has opted to shave the remainder rather than wear a clownish cut with a bald center and long haired edges. His attire is simple and more than casual; it is comfortable. He wears tennis shoes and basketball shorts with a Superman t-shirt; the Superman t-shirt is more than fitting. Large, round prescription glasses magnify cool, grey eyes surrounded by eyelashes with thick eyebrows hovering above. Eyelashes, eyebrows, goatee, and the silhouette of a beard due to a day without a shave are all the same dusty brown. His looks are as one who is not as close to forty as thirty-nine, nor close to thirty-five as thirty-six. He does not have the youth of thirty-six, nor does he have the sense of aging that thirty-nine brings about. He is thirty-seven or thirty-eight. While he sits one sees in him all the usual char-

acteristics of a comic book reader. The potent smell of loneliness arises in the room and one can taste his social ineptitude. He is a shy boy still reading his first comic, awkward and silly, holding on to the hero he is not but can experience through such grand stories. The only sound in the room is dust swirling wildly but still somehow calmly in the air. He is unaware of the world around him, where babies cry and coo and parents soothe with soft kisses and safe arms.

Beep, beep, a patron enters the front door; the proprietor recognizes the man and prepares an order of books for him. The patron was a man: surely patrons of comic book stores are generally teenagers, or children, who come with dumbfounded parents unable to understand their child's fascination. While the proprietor prepares the books, the two chat with familiarity. The proprietor is suddenly different. They do not talk superheroes or villains; they do not talk Star Wars or Star Trek; they talk about their families. They talk about classes; the patron is a professor and the proprietor a substitute teacher. They talk about babies and mutual friends. Beep, beep, the patron exits, and another patron enters; this patron is also a man. The door beeps, and patrons enter and exit; books are picked up. With every patron the proprietor talks about nothing in relation to comics. They have lives, these patrons; the proprietor has a life, too! They talk about mainstream phenomena and interests such as Television and movies of all kinds. They talk music. They have wives! Beep! Beep! BEEP! The door beeps, in come patrons, out go patrons, the dust whizzing in the air is outdone by the sound of "Hey, Coops!" "Hello!" "How are you?" "Good to see you!" "How's the wife?" "And the children?" The patrons are more than patrons; they are friends. The proprietor smiles at them with familiarity, and they all smile back.

When the day is over and the proprietor is alone in the store again, he returns to sitting. There one leaves him, sitting in the type of chair that one might find in many of those neighboring corporate offices, at a computer that sits behind a faux wood counter. He is no longer the usual comic book reader. Redolent fragrance of fellowship fills the room, and one can taste his affability. He is as a shy boy reading his first comic; he sits, nostalgic over a silly and awkward childhood pastime. The sounds in the room are of jollity and sociability. He is aware of the world, where babies cry and coo and parents soothe with soft kisses and safe arms.

Station

Michael Green

A gas station sat alone on a rural stretch of highway, empty but for a single car that sat hooked to one of the pumps. Inside the car was a young man sitting on the passenger side in the front eating chips while gas poured into the car. The man stared through the windshield past the dried dirt and remains of flying insects at the convenience mart in front of him. Its lights shone out into the darkness and blended with the moonlight while the sound of the man's crunching and the gas's running and the crickets' chirping blurred together into nothing.

The driver's door flew open and another man leaned into the car, pointing a gun at the man inside.

"Get out," the second man shouted, jabbing at the air between him and the first man with his gun.

The first man turned his head and looked at the second man. "What?" he asked with his mouth full.

"Get out of the car," the second man shouted again, jabbing the air with his gun a second time.

"No," the first man said.

The second man didn't shout again. Instead he just looked at the first man, unable to believe what he'd heard. "Get out," he said after a few seconds. But this time he wasn't angry, just confused.

"I'm not getting out," the first man said, putting a chip into his mouth.

"I'm stealing this car," the second man explained, exasperated.

"I know."

"Then," he jabbed the air again, "get out."

The first man shook his head. "Get lost."

The second man stared blankly. His mouth and eyes hung open. Then he reared back out of the car and laid his arm on its roof, looking around at the empty desert. He ran his hand through his hair and bit his lip, too confused to know what to do. After a while an idea seemed to come to him and he ducked back into the car, pointing his gun and the first man again.

"Get out of the car," he shouted fiercely, "or I'll shoot you."

"I'm not movin'," the man told him.

"I'm serious," the second man said, his voice filled with frustration, "I'll kill you."

The first man sighed and jerked the handle, popping his door open. He

climbed out muttering curses to himself and slammed the door. The second man jumped inside and pulled his door shut. Then he pushed down all the door locks and reached to start the car. The keys were missing. He looked on the dashboard and around him in the car. He checked the sun visor and under the seat but he found no keys. He groaned and hit his skull against the headrest.

He turned his head and saw the first man standing outside, eating his chips and looking in. The first man picked up his gun and pointed it at the man. "Give me the keys," he shouted.

The first man looked at him questioningly.

"The keys," the second man shouted, "give me the keys."

The first man touched his ear and shook his head. "I can't hear you," he said, his voice dull and soft.

The second man reached over and rolled down the window between them. Then he held out the gun and shouted at the man. "Give me the god damned keys!"

"I don't have them," the first man told the second man.

The second man lowered his gun and looked at the lights of the mini mart. Then he raised his gun again and looked back at the first man. "Where are they?"

"My brother has them," the first man said.

"Where's he?"

"Inside," the first man said, "using the bathroom." He ate another chip. "He has constipation," he said. He ate another chip and looked at the mini mart. Then he looked back down at the second man. "He might be a while."

The second man hit his head against the steering wheel.

"Just hot wire it," the first man said.

"What?" the second man asked. He swiveled his head on the steering wheel so he could see the first man.

"Hot wire the car," the first man said.

The second man pulled his head back and looked at the steering wheel.

"Don't tell me you can't hot wire a car," the first man said. "Open the door."

"What?"

The first man reached through the window and unlocked the door. He pulled it open and climbed inside. "Hold this," he said, handing the bag of chips to the second man. The second man took the chips, looking at them in confusion.

Station

The first man bent down and reached under the steering wheel. He pulled at some wires for a while and then there was a spark and the engine rumbled to life. He reared back up and took his chips, pulling his door shut and settling into his seat.

The second man began to drive but then stopped. He looked over at the first man, who was again eating his chips.

"Get out," he told the man.

The man looked over at him, chewing his chips. "What?"

The second man grabbed his gun and pointed it at the man. "Get the hell out," he shouted.

"I got out once, that's it."

"Are you insane? I'm stealing this car."

"No you're not, you're just pushing me around." The second man blinked several times. "Well," the first man said, "are you going or not?"

The second man set his gun on the dashboard and began to drive. He pulled out of the gas station, leaving the hose lying on the ground, and sped off down the highway. He drove for several minutes without saying anything, sweating the whole time and breathing heavily through his mouth until his throat was dry and sore. The first man didn't speak either, but continued to eat his chips. Then, after about ten minutes, he tilted his bag towards the second man.

"Chips?" he asked.

"No," the second man said. "Is there anything to drink in this car?"

"No."

The second man nodded and swallowed a few times, trying to keep his mouth closed and breathe through his nose. "Where did you learn to hot wire a car?" he asked after another minute.

"Gym," the first man said.

"Oh." The second man swallowed again. "Is this your car?"

"No."

"Who's is it?"

"My brother's."

"Why'd you hot wire it for me?"

"You couldn't do it yourself."

"But it's your brother's car."

"I was in the boy scouts," the first man said with a small shrug.

The man thought for a while. "That doesn't explain why you helped me steal your brother's car."

"Does it matter?"

The second man looked at him, then back at the road. There was nothing in sight, and he couldn't remember seeing a sign.

"So where are you going?" the first man asked.

"I don't know?"

"Then why'd you steal a car?"

"I needed it."

"Why?"

"So I could go faster."

The first man nodded. "But you don't know where you're going."

"Look. I'm the one with the gun," the second man shouted, "so I'll ask the questions! Is that clear?"

"But you're gun isn't loaded," the first man said.

The second man grabbed his gun and pointed at his passenger. "Of course it's loaded."

"It's a revolver," the first man said, "I can see the chambers when you point it at me. They're empty."

The second man was breathing heavily through his mouth again.

"Are you going to watch the road?" the first man asked.

The second man looked back at the road and continued driving. "Are you sure there's nothing in here to drink?"

"Yes." The first man reached under his jacket and pulled out a gun. The second man saw and fell against the door, holding his hands in the air.

"Don't shoot me, please don't shoot me," he screamed.

"We're going to go off the road," the first man said.

The second man grabbed the steering wheel and the car jerked back into line.

"Please, don't shoot..."

"I'm not gonna shoot you," the first man said. He turned the gun around and held it out to the second man handle first. "Take it."

The second man's eyes flicked back and forth from the gun to the road. Then he reached up and took it.

"It's an automatic," the first man said, "uses a clip. That way people don't know whether or not it's loaded."

The second man looked at the gun and then laid it on the dashboard. "Thanks."

"No problem," the first man said, eating another chip.
"I have to drink something or I'm going to die."
"You can live for days off your own urine," the first man said.
"That's disgusting. I can't drink my own urine."
"There's another gas station up here a few miles."
"Does it have a mini mart?"
"Yeah."
The second man nodded. "How far?"
"About half an hour."

The car pulled into the gas station and the second man set the parking brake. "I'll be right back," he said.

"Whatever," the first man told him, crumpling his empty chip bag and tossing it out of the window. "Get me more chips."

"Okay." The second man walked into the mini mart, which was just as empty as the gas station. He grabbed a bottle of soda out of the refrigerator and opened it, drinking all of it in a few long sips. Then he leaned against the window and sighed in relief.

He grabbed a little basket and filled it with sodas and chips, and then walked to the counter. There was no one there so he dinged the little bell. But still no one came.

"Hello," he shouted. No one answered. He leaned forward to see if there was a door into a back room. There wasn't one, but he saw a body lying on the floor behind the counter. It was a young man in a uniform with his name, Carl, on a little tag under the words ZippiMart. His head had been split open and the floor was covered in blood and brains.

The second man fell away from the counter, dropping his basket onto the floor. He lay there panting. His face was white and sweat rolled into his eyes and stung him. Then he jumped up and reached over the counter to grab the phone. He picked up the receiver but there was no dial tone. He reached for the phone and saw the cord had been cut. He dropped the receiver and ran outside again. He stood there by the door thinking what to do. Then he leaned over one of the little potted palm trees by the entrance and threw up.

The second man pulled open the door and dropped into the driver's seat, shaking badly and wiping his face.

Station

"Did you get my chips?" the first man asked him.

"The attendant's been murdered."

"Really?"

"Yes. The phone's broken. Do you have a phone?"

"Why?"

"We have to call the police."

"But you're a car thief."

"That doesn't matter, we have to call the police!"

The first man looked back at the mini mart. "I don't have a phone."

"Where's the nearest place with a phone?"

The first man thought a moment. "I guess the gas station."

"Where's that?"

The first man pointed in the direction they had come from. "About forty minutes."

"The place we just came from?" the second man asked.

The first man nodded.

"Isn't there anyplace closer? What's that way?" He pointed in the opposite direction.

"A town in about two hours."

The second man hit his head against the steering wheel. "Damn," he breathed. He started the car and pulled out of the gas station. "I wonder who did it," he said. "Do you think someone robbed the place? Or they killed him for some other reason?"

"Does it matter?" the first man asked.

"No. I guess not."

The car pulled into the gas station, running over the hose it had left lying on the ground over an hour ago. The second man got out of the car and ran inside. "Hello," he called, "I need some help. Someone's been murdered." He saw the phone and picked it up. There was a dial tone and he called 911. He turned around and looked across the room as the operator picked up the phone. On the floor at the other end of the store he saw something that caught his attention. He dropped the receiver and ran across the mini mart. Blood was running out from under a door and forming a puddle on the floor. He looked at the door, which had a little male stick figure on it and a sign hanging over it that said Restrooms.

"Oh God," the second man said, "his brother." He turned around and saw a third man standing behind him. He started to speak but the third man lifted a hatchet and swung it down. The second man screamed and the hatchet struck his neck, knocking him to the floor.

The third man opened the car door and fell into the driver's seat. He set a bloody hatchet on the dashboard by the two guns and set a six pack of beer between the seats.

"Did you get my chips?" the first man asked.

The third man handed him a bag of chips, which he opened and began eating. The third man pulled a beer can out of its plastic ring and opened it. "Where were you?" he asked.

"I was sitting here all the time," the first man said.

The third man reached under the steering wheel and fiddled with the wires until it started. Then he backed up onto the highway and sped off into the dark.

"Who was that guy?" he asked.

The first man shrugged and crunched a chip in his mouth. "Does it matter?"

The Pig Lamp

Michael Green

When the news ended, Florence, as she did every night, took her pills and checked that all the doors and windows in her apartment were locked, and turned off all the lights and brushed her teeth. Once she had finished these tasks she turned off the light in her small, crisp bathroom, heavy with the smell of farts and Lysol, and walked into her little square bedroom. Her bedroom, like the rest of her apartment, was small and drab and brown with shelves of knick-knacks and photographs and other pieces of garbage she treasured; the collected mementos of seven decades of dull, meaningless life. She took off her slippers and her robe and climbed into bed very cautiously. She was wearing a thick nightgown and, even though it was seventy degrees in the room, pulled her quilt up over herself with the excitement of someone escaping a deep and unrelenting chill.

She slept propped up on pillows, almost sitting. She set her heavy, coke bottle glasses with the large pink plastic frames and the thin gold chain on the nightstand beside her bed, where there was a bottle of aspirin, a glass of water, a small wind up alarm clock that couldn't be seen in the dark, and a large green ceramic pig lamp. The pig had a big, wickedly delighted expression on his swine-like face and large black marbles embedded into his glossy, putrefied flesh. His front hooves were clapping in excitement, and before she took a final sip of her water and said goodnight to herself once again, Florence shook her head in distaste at the hideous lamp. It was much too ugly for her sweet little gingerbread house of an abode. She wriggled, as much as a woman of her advanced age could wriggle, back into her mass of pillows and cleared her throat. Then she lifted her two thin, frail hands out in front of her and clapped clearly and loudly twice in the air. The pig lamp turned off and the room became dark. Florence settled her head back and folded her hands over her stomach and prepared to fall asleep.

Half an hour passed. Florence fell asleep. She dreamed of the things she had done that she had enjoyed in the past. Things she had forgotten and would forget again once she awoke. Her dreams were happy ones. They came to a stop, never again to be remembered, when she woke up suddenly and found the lights on in her room.

Florence sneezed and looked around the room in surprise, startled to find herself suddenly awake and in the light. She assumed it must have been morning again and that the night was over, but her little alarm clock had not

gone off, as it usually did, announcing that the time had come once more for her to get out of bed and eat bran cereal and decide what to do for the rest of the day with its dull, urgently unenthusiastic ring. Outside the small window that looked out from her bedroom she could see the electric light darkness of night. The lamp beside her bed was turned on, the orange light glowing out from over the head of her green pig.

She yawned and resettled herself into the heap of pillows behind her and adjusted her quilt once again so that it was perfectly laid out over her. She lifted her hands and clapped twice in the air. The pig lamp went out and she closed her eyes in the darkness, sighing as she prepared to fall back asleep.

She was almost asleep again, half out of consciousness, when she heard a sound that brought her awake again. She blinked and sat up. The lamp beside her bed was back on and her room was light once more. Certain she had turned it off, she looked around the room in confusion. She checked her clock and saw that not forty minutes had passed since she first went to bed. Finally, uncertain what was wrong but feeling tired and wanting to go to sleep, she clapped to turn the lamp off once more and tried to go back to sleep.

This time, lying in the darkness, her eyes closed, trying to sleep, Florence suddenly heard a sharp, flat smack in the room. Her eyes popped open just as a second, identical sound followed. At once the lamp beside her bed turned on and illuminated the room. Florence sat up quickly in bed, feeling her heart tremble weakly within her chest. She pulled the coverers back and stood up, feeling heavy as her legs came awake again. She put her feet into her slippers and walked to her bedroom door, opening it and looking out into her apartment. It was dark in the other rooms, and quiet. She looked into the darkness, and then looked back into her room. She looked at the window, where she saw only the lights of the city, and at the pig lamp, who stared at the wall, and the photographs and tiny dolls and statues on her shelves who all ignored her as usual. She reached out in fear and turned on the hall light, which illuminated most of the apartment. Then she walked about quickly into every room, hitting every switch she could find. She flooded the place with light. She looked in every room and every closet and every cupboard and in the refrigerator and the stove and the microwave her

daughter had bought her and she didn't know how to use. She found nothing but light and darkness everywhere she went.

Her home was empty.

When she returned to her room, having again checked every lock and turned off every light, she had calmed down. She searched her bathroom once more and, almost unwillingly, as though doing so could somehow bring her fears to life, locked her bedroom door. She took off her slippers. She got into bed. She clapped. The room went dark. She pulled her quilt up to her chin and sat in the blackness, her eyes open, waiting. She waited a long time before she heard it again in the darkness.

clap clap

The lights went on. Florence clapped and they turned off.

clap clap

They were on again. She got out of bed and picked up the phone. She called the police.

"There's someone in my house," she whispered to the woman at the end of the line.

The policeman was young and looked very tired and, honestly, uninterested. Florence had the feeling he didn't care if there was anyone in her house or even if they murdered her. He and his partner searched the house with big black flashlights.

"Your door and windows were all locked?" the officer asked, looking in a closet.

"Yes," Florence said, holding her robe tightly around her.

"Are there any other doors other than the front door?" he asked, looking in her bathroom.

"No."

"Does anyone else other than you have a key to the apartment?" he asked, opening her window and looking outside.

"Well... no. No one else. Just me."

"Cat out here."

"What?"

"Cat out here," he repeated. "On the fire escape. It's a black cat. Is it yours?"

"No. I don't have a cat. I'm allergic to them."

The Pig Lamp

The officer leaned back into the house and looked at his partner. They were both young men in their early twenties with short hair cuts under crisp black caps. They exchanged some shrugs and looked around the room, hoping the burglar would suddenly hop out and wave to them.

"You say you heard someone clapping at you?"

"Yes. They turned my lights on. See?" She clapped in the air and the room went dark. Then she clapped again immediately and the room lit up again. The officer's younger partner had put his hand on his gun in the holster at his waist, and the officer gave him a disappointed look and shook his head slowly.

"What probably happened," the officer said, putting his flashlight back on his belt, "is the cat outside was making noise and you heard it."

"But it turned on my light."

"It's possible that's due to some kind of faulty electronics. I'd suggest you unplug your clapper."

"But it was a person clapping."

"Well . .. it's possible there was someone outside your window clapping. Or maybe someone on the floor above you was making noise that turned the light on."

"Check under the bed," Florence demanded suddenly, pointing to her bed.

"Excuse me, ma'am?"

"Check for the burglar. Under my bed." She folded her arms defiantly. The officer sighed and nodded to his partner. The man stared back at him stupidly. He pointed to the bed.

"Check," he said.

His partner nodded and pulled his flashlight out. He got on his knees and pulled up the quilt. Then he turned on the flashlight, fell to his elbow, and moved the beam back and forth underneath the bed. After an inspection that lasted just a bit longer than it should have, he stood up again, returning his flashlight to his belt. "Negative," he declared very seriously.

The officer looked at him, his hands on his hips, and lowered his head, shaking it slightly. "Ma'am," he said, lifting his head again, "I'm pretty certain that there's nobody in this apartment except the three of us. I don't think anyone was earlier, either. Worst case scenario, I'd say someone was outside harassing you, trying to scare you. Probably it was a neighbor or an

animal making noise that set off your clapper."

"Well," Florence said, not at all convinced, "turn it off."

"Excuse me, ma'am?"

"If you think the clapper is broken, turn it off." The two men looked at each other. "I can't do it. I can't move the night table, it's too heavy."

The officer licked his lips and nodded. "Okay, ma'am. I'll turn off your clapper for you. I'm sure we don't have anything more important to do."

When the officer got off his knees and pushed the end table back to the wall he looked up at the big pig lamp, smiling down at him. He reached up and flicked the lamp off and on with the switch above its head. Then he came to his feet and put his cap back on.

"That's an interesting lamp you have there, ma'am," he commented, straightening his belt.

"It was my husband's. He bought it at a yard sale."

"I see."

"It's terribly ugly. He had no taste."

The officer nodded, looking at the lamp as though he was transfixed by it.

"I've wanted to throw it out," she said, "but it reminds me of Walter."

The officer looked at her again, hooking his thumbs in his belt. "Well ma'am, we'll be going now. Let us know if anyone else bothers you."

"You can be certain I will. And hopefully they'll send someone more competent next time." The officer smiled. "I hope he doesn't come back for your sake, because it will be on your conscience if I'm murdered."

The officer nodded. "Good night, ma'am."

Florence turned and stood in her living room after the police men had left.

"What rude and insolent young men," she said aloud, not caring if they could hear her out in the hall. "No respect for their elders. None at all." She walked back to her room, turning off all the lights and feeling decidedly safer even though she had no confidence in the rude young officer and his stupid partner. She took off her robe and got back into bed. Then she clapped in the air and waited with a puzzled expression as nothing happened.

"Oh," she said suddenly, slapping her thighs, "how silly." She reached over and turned off the pig lamp by hand, plunging herself into darkness. "I would forget my head if it weren't fastened onto my neck," she muttered,

lying back against her pillows and closing her eyes. She fell asleep.

clap clap

Florence sat up suddenly and found herself in a lit bedroom. The green pig lamp was on again. She trembled in bed, looking at the green pig and his big, black eyes. She swallowed and reached out to it. She turned the switch and the light went off. She sat back and waited. She waited for a long time. She began to get sleepy.

clap clap

She jumped fully awake and whimpered to herself as the lamp came on once more. The black eyes were staring at her. She pushed the covers aside and came to her feet, forgetting to put on her slippers. She tried to reach back behind the end table but her arm wouldn't fit. Then she tried to pull it out from the wall but it was too heavy. She stood there staring at the pig for a moment, biting her lip. She went out into her kitchen, opening a drawer and pulling out a heavy steak knife. Then she shuffled back into the bedroom and stood beside the end table. She struck the cord of the lamp with the knife. She pinned it against the table and sawed at it with the knife. Finally she cut through the cord and the light went out. She gasped and dropped the knife behind the table. Then she laughed at herself nervously in the dark. She felt her way back to her bed and sat down on it.

"Tomorrow," she whispered, "I'm throwing that pig away."

clap clap

The lights came on and Florence shrieked, grasping the quilt she sat on in her fists and leaping off the bed. The pig was looking at her. She heard something behind her and turned around. Outside her window she saw a small black cat looking in at her with large, green eyes. It opened its mouth and she saw its white teeth and pink tongue, but no sound reached into her room through the window. It scratched again at the window sill. Florence ran to the window and hit the glass with her fingers, trying to scare the cat away. It hissed at her angrily and she shouted at it.

"Get out of here," she yelled. "Go away. I hate cats. Bother someone else."

The cat hissed again and jumped onto the fire escape. It stalked around there beneath her window, looking up at her occasionally and opening her mouth. Florence turned around and saw the pig lamp smiling at her. She saw that the rest of her apartment beyond her bedroom was still dark. Her

eyes fixed on the darkness. And then they fixed on the pig. And then she heard a hiss and she turned and looked and fixed her gaze on the angry black cat outside her window looking into her with deep green and yellow eyes. She heard something behind her, like something being dragged across a hard surface, and she turned around but she saw nothing. Then the cat tapped at her window and she turned back to it and again heard the sound of something being dragged across wood or concrete. She spun back and saw nothing, only the pig at the edge of the end table watching her and the darkness beyond her. The pig looked at her and she stared back into its dark, lifeless eyes.

clap clap

The pig lamp turned off and Florence was suddenly plunged into darkness. For a moment the dark was purely silent as it was purely black. Then it was pierced violently by the twisted screams of a dying woman.

Poems

A Thought of Three
--For Her, She, and not Me--

An effect to detect and know self
An essence leaves nothing else,
Such it be, the notion of perfection
Grace taken form as destination.
Yet I speak to the world and the wind it contains,
The very circles allow all dainty to maintain,
Which is the cipher preferred by our deity
This reflection strives in a lack of divinity,
A contradiction of truth that fabricates
Is the work of God that never precipitates,
We try as men to understand to cope and feel
Emotions lead us to fall on a broken seal,
We rise in vain in attempted efforts to achieve
Then our dreams manifest to falsified needs,
A broken pattern leaves us in the past
Opens forgotten regret healed by mass
Broken by an Angel to be healed by the same force
Called a marriage placed upon a perfect divorce,
The least heals the weak and pacifies the rest
An Intelligence blest made ready for the best
The warmth, hope, and need for understanding
These hundredth or so years of maintaining
A labyrinth of solitude perplexed in virtue
Annihilated by the want of that very virtue
I speak of blind love in the presence of the mind
Wishing for this pure true love embedded in time.

A Displacement

I speak of love
An effect I cannot feel
I talk of an Angel,
Fore she is motivation behind my pen,
Yet she is misplaced love,
Forever with me
I then move to the stars,
Spoken words of an anomaly,
A female who put thought in my pen
Destiny cannot allow us to cipher the universe
Fore her understanding of the world is her own-
His to see and mine to maintain as she follows
The next chapter is humanity,
By her lips words began to speak
I was told not to conform,
Fore my thought were solely my thoughts
Now I write my words for me
Even though the powers still comfort me
They elude me by taunting me
A daily life of only self is mine-
An Angel is my heart,
An Anomaly is my mind,
Humanity is my existence,
Now I pray for my spirit to be just
Fore if she breaks me,
I will forever be broken,
Less I have my Heart or Mind
Humanity is left optional,
Its properties cannot contain my spirit.

Understanding

We know not the concept of reality
Subjected experience is a perspective formality
We take the totality of religion as classification
Deductive morals that are then a partition
We divide faith by geographical identities
Leaving deity with skewed properties
We look to god but god is intangible
Still we cannot fathom god as imaginable
We follow order, comprise self in mathematics
Jurisdiction of life is given schematics
We read the blueprint of a prior architect
Knowledge overflows and lives are wrecked
We learn to know, is to deny mortality
Numerically to reach infinity is not a tautology
We enter the minds sociological imagination
Only to see he thinks while he is all action
We cannot define a sociological construction of reality
Fore man is peaceful with mindful misanthropy
We place ourselves on the individual level
Living in chaos trying to see not the Devil
We void infinity and reach a finite end
Logically to follow mathematics would end
We accept the imperfection of mans failure
To be correct is to have a disposition of failure
We feel the composition of our want of God
What then has the power to contradict God

Obvious

Catching glimpses of light in mirrors unseen,
Glimmers in the night of these things I might mean
Shrouded in the dark, to be kept from the light,
Hidden in the veil of these things that I write.

Settings of silver bearing apples of gold,
Reading through volumes of stories untold.
Caught in the mystery of a hazy tomb,
Concealed in the waters of its curious womb

Information Inundation

Double Helix Hyperdrive
Biotech Psuedolife
A System Crash, a Virus Scan
A URL in Uzbekistan

Text Message Tornado
Tear Gas in Waco
Telescopic Optics
Rely on Robotics

Instant Message a Blogger
From Halo to Frogger
Google, MySpace, UTube when I can
Something like the movie: The Lawnmower Man.

Replace

Envelope, consume, overwhelm, immerse,
Chapter by chapter, verse by verse.
Control, confine, restrict, contain,
The warring desires behind all this pain.
Teach, instruct, lead, define.
Don't ever leave me, but leave me refined.
Bum Chisel, cutaway, scrape.
Make me, mold me, give me my shape.

Untitled

What thing shall I write, what thing most adored?
The power and might of my God and my Lord
If I dare to speak, my own lips could fail
This truth that I seek, to share and to tell
Does my pen hold the key, my hand know the way,
to unveil the light, turn night into day?
Can this paper hold, these pages contain
riches untold, glories unnamed?
What vessel am I, What scribe could record,
The Holy Most High, my God and my Lord?

But then I realize, It's already done
Words have been written about God's only Son.
Some in the Bible, noble guide, ever true.
Some found in nature, God's conspicuous clue
And the last are found, with such upward pull,
Written on men's hearts, engraved in their souls

Precedent

You brought me through the dark,
Why should I fear the shadow?
You've already won the war,
Why should I fear the battle?
The bear and the lion fell,
What threat is a giant?
What will bar the gates of hell,
When God's child stands there reliant?

You saved me from the fire,
What fear have I of the flame?
Rescued me from desire,
To make my will and yours the same.
You taught me how to trust, what thing shall move me today?
When I've built my house upon the rock,
And in your hand I stay.

Music

The Orchestra plays a march for the king.
A young boy plucks on a guitars string.
The south sways to the swing of the blues,
Dancing in Memphis in our blue suede shoes.
Goodbye Buck Owens, the Bakersfield Sound.
Swing your partner round and round.
Tejano in Texas, oye oye!
Swing your dreads in Jamaica, dancehall reggae.
Marley, Hendrix, Elvis, Cobain.
Sing me a love song, I'm feeling your pain.
A marching band in a half time show.
They love David HasselHoff in Tokyo.
In Europe they rave to electronica.
Ozzy paved the way for Metallica.
Slap a funky bass, someone please do the twist.
Rising on the charts, play the latest hit.
The wedding bells chime, hands lifted in praise.
Who wrote the theme to the show Happy Days.
African tribal, a banjos sweet twang,
The savage beast, that only music can tame.

Tie the world together,
Unite its many parts,
Change this world forever,
Unite its many hearts.

Thoughts of Her

Thoughts of her race through my head. Every word she ever said. I shiver and shake lying in my bed. Beads of sweat drip down my forehead. Why didn't I abide by the rules she set? It is so clear now that she left. I took so much from them when I placed that bet. Now it is there love I no longer get. It is God that has restored my hope. Now he is the one who gives me strength with which I cope.

Tonight

It is tonight that I pray to God for my freedom. I ask God to make me kind and always be forgiving. That is the only way I want to continue living. Through his spirit I will always be kind and giving. It is this behavior that she could not find in me. My soul was blind to deceit and envy. It is now that my heart is suffering and my mind is empty, so I ran to God and began to see things more simply.

Anteros

i long to tell you
i long
i long for something and i am unsure if you
can see what that is.
Each time i enclose you in my embrace
i feel your warmth, your taste
i hear your breath your lace-like lips that grace my face for a moment or two.
i can lose myself in your heartbeat
the rhythm intoxicates my senses
overrides the thoughts in my mind
the pains i feel from your words
or the lack thereof
your heartbeat
makes me sane again
as i lay in your arms or you in mine
my gemini
i wish the world away
along with all those that take you from me
i place my conscience aside
and reside in you.
Forever still would NOT be long enough...
Do you know how MUCH i want you...
when you're here but not
when your there and i am unsure if you still exist?
Do you know how much i miss you...
when your here but not...
when your there and you want to be?
When you dream? When you are there?
When you are roaming the world of disillusion?
i still wonder what it means to love me...
my sweet lover, tell me please what it means
to love me?

She is My Everything

She was my home when I was dependent,
She was my voice when I could not speak,
My map when I started to lose my way,
My light when things got dark,
My sight when I couldn't see.
My hope when I had none.
My memory when I started to forget,
My faith when I felt like not believing.
When you were out at your parties,
She was taking care of me.
She may not be as perfect as you see yourself,
She may not have everything you have,
She may not have your bookish wisdom,
Or your life.
But I can't see a reason why she would give up what she has
And no matter how hard you try,
You can not add up to what half of what she is.
And even though you can't see it,
She's the best thing that ever happened to me.
She is my everything,
no matter how hard you try.

My Sky, My moon. My sun.

What do you think about
When you lie away from me?
Dispersed across a land kissed with drought
Do your eyes wonder
Upon my satin sky
As you try to slay the fears you ponder?
Alone, used, bruised, worthless, than discarded
Hiding fears you dare not speak,
Leaving you envious of the departed.
Do you look to my moon
For the guidance you can't see
Hoping you can be with me soon?
Does my sun
Provide you with a bright insight
To the things you have seen and done?
And yet,
I see you fading,
Your courage vanishing into darkness.
Hold strong my friend
For I will lend you
My sky, my moon, my sun,
To bring you home again.

"Snakes in my Garden"

You are the worst kind of snakes,
Biting only when my eyes are turned.
You lurk behind every accomplishment,
Poisoning each and every one until sucked dead.
Your very presence leaks your Venom,
Meant to infect every action I begin to take.
Every bad step leaves me flinching,
Waiting for your fangs to seep in my heels.
Your every word envenoms my living.
Every moment of mirth left lifeless.
You two target my delight,
Sending my life swirling down the river of Styx.
Your Poison is deadly,
Your venom travels quickly,
Leaving me paralyzed and alone.
As your toxin invades my body,
My thread of life loosens.
For your bane has now become my blood.
I will no longer fear,
Those snakes in my garden,
Because now I walk with a rake.

Imagination

I travel to a place made from pure imagination
A place where children laugh and gawk.
Where everyone can be as foolish as they wish,
And no one seems to notice.
A place where the sky seems bluer.
The water clearer,
And the sun a lot brighter.
A place that can transform the worse feelings,
Into bliss,
This place allows you to,
Ride a spaceship,
Race amongst the stars.
Anything imaginable.
It allows you to attend a wondrous tea party,
Pleasantly huge as in our dreams.
Visit the many countries of the world,
In just a brief boat ride,
Party with a bunch of mischievous ghosts,
Take sail along the great Caribbean,
And encounter the pirates that claim those waters.
Enjoy the adventure of an African safari,
Ride upon one of King Arthur's decorated horses,
Or jump into your favorite childhood tale.
The possibilities are endless,
For there is no limit to your imagination.
Visit the land of tomorrow
Or dance with princesses in a land of fantasy.
Wonder into a town where everything is tooney
If adventure is what your heart desires,
There is a place just for you.
If you like to explore,
There is a frontier waiting for you,
Or venture into the comfort of New Orleans.
A single man's imagination permanently etched in history,
Leading the way for those who dare to think,
That their imagination can accomplish great things.

Memory.

At a corner cafe in some faraway place,
an ancient sits, drinking her poison of choice.
The air is heavy with sweet perfume,
The sound of cars passing by. She slowly tunes it all out.
her mind is blank until a voice interrupts her thoughts,
Shattering her reverie.
"Hey Sylvia," blasts a voice not unlike a car horn,
She slowly turns, looks toward the source.
A young woman smiles blankly at her, she seems unfamiliar
Suddenly she is brought to a memory, a friend long gone.
A person she had loved, feelings rush back to her like an ocean
Driving towards shore.
Ah, what splendid days they be,
the picnics by the lake,
learning how to fish,
shopping on 5th avenue,
sharing secrets of some long forgotten importance,
midnight whisperings of (now unimportant) information,
and of course the Saturday evening picture shows.
Then she was gone.
All became quite and still and boring,
Life seemed to stop.
The days had passed quickly
Time only became a word.
She had waited patiently for her friend to return,
But she never came,
Until now.
The ancient slowly felt something happen to her
Something that hadn't happened in years.
Her jaw began to move,
the corners of her mouth, creeped up
Her teeth began to show, slowly,
but very surely a smile formed.
The source began to move,
She crept towards her.towards her,

Memory. *(continued)*

The ancient braced herself,
feeling nervous, after all she had aged.
The source came closer, closer
WHOOSH!
Was all she heard
as the young women slowly whipped past her
To a table opposite her.
The ancient could feel tears welling up
A voice screaming
I'm here don't you know me?
Can't you see me?
At a corner cafe in some faraway place,
An ancient sits drowning in her poison of choice.

My Mistress.

My mistress's hair is like rust,
but I wish she had more of a bust.

Beautiful Face.

Beautiful Face
Deep sadness in eyes,
Will pay for crimes.

Ode To Beer.

Oh you give me pleasure,
Throw me back to good ole times.
You smell sweet like new cut grass,
Taste real good too.
After a few my thoughts,
Are clouded
Cannot think clearly,
Start to utter stupid and unintelligable things.
Cannot understand me.
Try to walk,
Ow! Stubbed my toe,
Fall Down
Stare up at pretty wood ceiling.
Am hungry but cannot eat,
I need sleep,
Damn!
My head hurts too much,
Try to take a shower
Doesn't help.
Take a chaser,
No relief there, either.
Had fun last night with you.
Ready for another two.
On my way, no stopping now.
Have another round.

One summers' night

For the first time in many a year.
West I turned.
Touched this impassioned soul by chilled wind.
And, took in the waning gray sunset over storm churned ocean.
In the final moments, moonless, under blackened clouded sky.

For the first time in many a year.
East I turned.
Clutched tight the native blanket black and white.
And, waited for the sunrise within fog hidden mountains.
In the final moments, later, the dark relinguished to morning light.

For the first time in many a year.
I turned into days' first hint.
Blessed the little warmth upon my face.
And, took in the full days' break.
In the final moments I found within my person.

For the first time in many a year.
My soul did turn.
Held tight the blanket and the memories.
And, discovered deep within this heart.
In those moments, I found, once lost, this impassioned soul.

Fear - more or less

Hampered this moment; and, also a life time.
Ultimate pressure to always just begin.
And, if at once possibly started.
The fear of failure. And recognized.

The Meaning of Life

Forever young.
Of a time once years ago invincible.
When I was about to go out into the world and change it.
Reality came to me on an impressionable day.
Came to me, yes, on one day.
Forever after changed, and challenged.
To, now, have reached an age.
I look back and say.
I have had a great life, a most wonderous life.
I have no complaints.
I can want nor wish for anything more.

Of mid-night memories and her

Once again and never more
Those nights I lay awake
To know her past miseries
Those nights I lay awake
And captured the images other sleep
Oh, her gentle breathes on mid-nights deep
So soft, so at peace
How safe she felt

How painful the memory
Loving her and letting go
Once again and never more...
Again these nights, these memories

After Midnight

The penalty's pain of every moment
When every moment is but memory
You no longer mine
Your penalty within every moment
And a memory can mean so much
You no longer mine
These past midnight hour's moments

When in the still night's refrain
Every minute's passage I ponder memories
Every minute's seconds ever pain
And a memory can mean so much
You no longer mine

This heart captured by every memory
When in the still night's refrain
You taught me love's presence full moments
You taught love's absence full pain
And a memory can mean so much
Yet remaining all mine
These memories
Will 'er endure?

Alas, more or less

You know how it is,
they always promise to write
and they never do.

So to contravene this action I decided
this time I will write first.
And throw my chances with the wind.
But, like the leaf once dispatched by
chanced flight, there will come a time
my brief journey into destiny
will make contact with the ground.

There to wilt, oh misshapened age,
disregarded to finality and then small fragments,
once so proud, rendered thus but dust under yon foot.
And long forgotten my glory days.

I give back to life what life has taken.

Her Promise
Epilogue to Lori

Once and forever her covenant,
now, then, passion ensnares my soul,
till came one day's finality; she, never more.
We lived many moments shared pleasures, and knew,
some, their entire life, experience never a second,
what for us was but satiated desires.
Each moment's day, in-flavored memory,
there is in this investment, denied her,
the day she left, and the years come and gone,
though long parted, of once and forever, and frozen memories.
She, like me, grown older now, leathery and wrinkled.
She suffers painful aged disfigurement and discovered,
that which comes to me, and others, comes to her.
Each night's promise, the hours hers. She alone.
Her mirror envisioned ever less desirable, withered,
she'll see those changes and between the two of us,
I alone possess-thus treasure.
Parting images, and too many the memorable moments,
she remaining always, as young, as fresh, as alive, oh beautiful,
graced of liquid passions, loved, never changing, once and forever.

Little Ant

There was once this little ant
who saw this vision,
who, when she walked by,
was so tall he was all but overwhelmed
by her sheer beauty.
But once she walked by
he realized the total truth
of his situation.
For he knew he would probably
never ever see her again and besides
there would never ever be
any kind of chance
she would ever recognize him
among all the other ants of the world.
So, alas, he did
what he knew he had to do,
he wished her well and felt
jealous of the person lucky enough
to ever catch her attention.

Ageless Knowledge

Comes now, perhaps the moment once spent
less wisely, once adventured, passed,
where I should have gone.

To realize, at this late date, all is not
as it should be, the taste of what could
have been, grows but bitter.

From the runes the blood of worms display,
knowledge now that knows full well, all
knowledge is but an illusion.
Less only what little - one would know.

Put Out the Light

Leave hence this space
the address home,
and too message machine
who does serve thee well
in absence.
Thee a dark creature comes hither night....villian,villian,
villian of devil due,
ones comes who dous speak
with the blood of worms.
I share not the blood
of wife to paper,
else she betray more men...
thus said, "put out the light".

"One more and this last"
give justice to the heart,
yours in delight.

"Have you prayed this night"
Come, "put out the light".

Come Hither, Smile for Me

Wounded body, wounded soul
Each day's hurts
Never ending More yesterday
More today
More waits tomorrow

Grown weary, deaf, and blind
If this be earth what h***
What keeps me wake wakes me
Never ending and agony
There within, something calls for me
In this arena no winner
Death smiles at us all
I search for thee
Come hither, smile for me

The day the human spirit takes flight
What the sky will look my last day of life.

CRUSHER

I don't remember my first asthma attack,
only that on many nights, as I lay
in bed feeling an invisible fat
bully sit on my chest while cramming
cotton balls into my lungs, my mom set up
a vaporizer to help clear the air
and my lungs. But once, during the daytime,
your crush came. I asked Mom for help, but she
just told me to go lie down while she
continued watering the yard. And I
started upstairs, five years old, struggling
at each step, your phantom hand ramming down
my throat and tearing at my lungs as another
clawed at my back, making my muscles ache.
In tears, head throbbing, and only halfway
up the twisting staircase, I said, "God, help
me. Help me breathe." But I still couldn't. I
said, "God, on the next step, let me die."
And the same with each step. No death, but no
breath. For the rest of the day I lay in
my room, crushed and twisted and crying
and confused. Five years old and I knew:
there was no god; Mom didn't care; and why
was Daddy never around? I was weak
and sick. And at age ten, as I stared at
my infant half-sister (healthy focus
of all Daddy's attention) you revealed:
she would get everything, and I would
be forgotten. She'd be a Something, me
a Nothing. I told her this, even as
you seized my breath. And now she's a Doctor
with money, even as I serve out another
sentence of unemployment, my breath shorter.
At five, and ten, and fifteen and more I
knew I was nothing and would be no more.
Now at forty, it's time I fully embraced
the meaning of your Nothingness, giving
up my place in Life to another who
might be able to breathe. This you've taught me.

SLAUGHTERHOUSE GAMBOL

The gray-beige haze infects LA
like swirling hungry plagues
of vicious roaches. Distance, days,
and goals get rendered vague.

Cancerous air corrupts skin, drains
souls; each breath sees lives aged,
until gloom sparks the dying brain's
dirty timebomb, 'Road Rage.'

Zombied locals list through grids clogged
with steel caskets, fates locked.
On rainy days they slip and slog—
phlegmy knots slowly hocked
and spat

Urged by crumbling rouge memories
of promised cheer and gains,
they grate and grind in towering
steel tombs till brightness wanes.

Bludgeoned minds reeling, they stagger
rancid gray labyrinths,
grimed spirits dragging corpses home—
hearts frayed; lungs rough; eyes scraped;
throats gashed.

Each Friday croaking "Nevermore,"
come Monday's golden lure
of laugh-filled nights and high rewards,
again they plod this dirge.

BLUE MAN GROUPIE

Hey, mom; just got back from Manny's hotel.
He's pretty, urn, pasted, but you'd—with all
the stuff he has to do, like this one part ..
he can be pretty worked out after a
show. Just getting, like, removing the blue
can be a chore. But there was this one part—
this was in the show—tonight's show—you've seen
it, right? Maybe not this troupe, but, like, some
other troupe? I wasn't sure if you'd, or...
Anyway, so.. .when the guy breaks off, when
his guy breaks off to do the sexydance?
So, Manny did that tonight, and then he
also did that in Portland. And when he
did that dance in Portland, he actually—
and I couldn't quite tell from my angle,
because the stage was so high and I was
like second row—he actually jumps
into the splits, which you don't see being
done very often. No. And I was, like...
and like I said, the stage was really high
and I was second row, so I was like—
afterwards I was like, "Did you really
do the splits?" And he was like, "Yeah." And I'm
like, "Are you really that flexible?" And
he goes— Y'know, he's really, tough... I mean
athletic. I mean they're all athletic,
cuz it's an athlete's show. Then I was, he's
like, "Oh I'm flexible that way but I'm
not flexible, like, doing sideways splits."
And then as he's telling me that he starts
coming down into a sideways split, and
I'm like, "You're so *Blue*" And then I asked him,
"Is that one of those tests they put you guys
through? Like, 'Catch a ping-pong in your mouth—okay

BLUE MAN GROUPIE *(continued)*

you're in'?" And then he said this, like, cute thing...
He's just... I think he's just adorable.
Have you ever seen him without his make-up?
He's really good looking, and he has a
really nice voice. And he actually
sings. I was really a little surprised
by his voice. It wasn't what I was first
expecting. Um... I actually have...
well, we're on the phone or else I'd play it—
I mean it would be great if I could be
playing it through my MP3 player—
but he actually sings and performs,
and he came in on his day off; and so
I have him on my MP3 player.
It'sof... He did... actually did this
show—it was really interesting. He
did this show at a, at a place back in
Vegas, and they actu—and they broadcast
through the Internet? And so—and they had
it on the archive—and so, I watched it.
And then, someone else I know got, did the,
recorded the audio. So I have
the audio of that show, and it's *ripe*.
Y'know what I found out he's got? He's got
like a complete Seattle Seahawks home
uniform. The dark ones. And when he puts
it on, when he's dressed like Matt Hasselbeck,
Manny looks the same as on stage. Really.
And he was, like, "Yeah, we've got a sweet deal
going with the Seahawks. Like subtle cross
promotion and everything." Maybe...
I don't know, maybe they might start doing
halftime shows up there. Like during all the
home games, and the playoffs. I would move up
for that. Seriously, I really would.

Fortinbras

The past is part of present here
And whispers scream profound
My heart is free of longing here
Here, loving limbs surround.

In arms that wrap around me strong
I breathe in quickened gasps
I wish his arms were twice as long
With seven hands to grasp-

To pull me close like swaddling cloth
Enrapt in rapture's light
Coccooning, safe, like moonlit moths
Conceding to the night.

Connected, still, in warm embrace
Our beating hearts compete,
Inside our veins our blood cells race
In circular defeat.

Sustained by gentle pitter pat
Of love that pumps and bleeds
Our two selves held so close so that
I hear him when he thinks.

We whisper words of fantasy
And share a tired dream-
To melt and form again as one,
As solid as the sea.

Animate Animus

I wish I knew something useful
Yet all I can do is leer.

I commit undetectable crimes
steal and return the thoughts of the world
Combine anti and matter together
'm stuffing my pipe with hysteria and hype
have secrets to disseminate.
'm breathing queerly on your hair—
You can feel the puffing of my cheeks.

She fosters lies in her locket
She's bleeding heart that can save yours
She's pricked and pronged, embrace her
She'll hum the tune, not sing the song.

I see her silver bullet,
Her heart beats ohs and ones
Afflictions in the mirror
Her eyes roam in the mirror.
She, blinks, she buzzes, she pops.

I see you I collect myself,
Chuckling like a champ.
I wonder like a wolverine
I solve you with a "snap!"

Marys

I.

I crouch on a stained oak bench
cocking back the manual wind
on a disposable camera trying to quiet
the sound of grinding teeth with the thick
of my inner thigh. I have amassed over
a thousand Marys. They are kept
stacked neatly in cedar boxes
at the comer of my formica desk. One
woman upon the same woman, resting.

II.

I watch a man pray double fisted
punching lightly between his lips
and the moment words fail
to be only ours. The twitch of his
gestures makes me think he speaks
for some living loss, some girl
not gone enough for her
scent to leave his sheets.
He should find some comfort
in that God has been known
to give a fella back his gal
with a touch on her that is as easy
to remove as fruit from the rind.

III.

I once found her laid out in a glass casement.
The humidity condensing at the soldered-on top
made her cry off the plaster forming nose
and upper lip. Her tears were a town
advertised miracle. And perhaps accidents
in design,
storms made within closed boxes,
are gifts from—

The Differences between two Kitchens

There are times when you stop my everyday
motions. I go to move a towel from the oak
counter to the ceramic sink and catch myself on
the sight of your hands rolling slow over dishes.

More often, I have to make excuses
for staring at where you are not.
I tell people I'm tired. They say, eat
more greens and get good sleep. I close

my eyes against the ordinary light
of ceiling lamps. A red glow pulls
through the gaps in me, just as sun
would work itself through the skin
of our kitchen curtains. You come in

from behind with an arm full of lemons
grown from the tree out back. I cut yellow
bodies into halves. You rub rinds between
fingers to touch us with the scent of citrus.
We were

not fighting then. It takes an effort to remember
the distances between us, a constant opening of
rooms to let you out of where I reside
without you.

First Loves

My first romance was with a crooked
china plate.
I took an interest in its yellow scars,
the texture
of perseverance. I made guilt a habit
for not taking
better care of fragile things. I'd cry
at the last
three bites of supper that revealed all
my fault
for breaking and all my love in fixing.
One evening,
after I'd finished my mashed potatoes,
mother, in
a quick movement, threw away the plate.
She
without apology readied herself to protect
what might
harm her child's crooked smile.

Tear Drop

A thought,
An act,
An image,
A slap.
Now I see it coming down my eye.
The salty, crystal clear, melted diamond
that cuts my flesh
and in my soul penetrates.
The pain that I gain
I keep it all inside
until I burst with my cry.
Now I've formed a river
that leads to your ocean
where I drown.

Long Lost

tears turn the pages of a love long lost
or maybe it wasn't there to begin with

trials and tributes wasted.
rare lust of sweat untasted.
my smile, you have erased it
and now i have a loss

my heart still cries from missing you
still kissing you in my dreams
my angers rise like torrent tides
my passions die in screams

at times i hit the lowest lows
so low i see no light
embarrassed slips and foolish trips
escaping just one fight

a friend my foe presumed of me
yet tears just occupy
all space between us canyons cold
still cant look in your eyes

those brazen blues so lost no sign
of love i thought i had
im here and queer cant shed a tear
for fear i will go mad

i hate the fact i love you
something i wish undone
my sight and sound silence surrounds
my tastes gone and im numb

how can you be so nonchalant
when smoke clouds fill my face
im selfish now yet still somehow

Long Lost *(continued)*

i think im a disgrace
my confidence is waning
my pride has lost its skin
my heart is constipating
all the images your in

and then my friend of friends i know
ive seen it long ago
your hands reciprocate nothing
and so its time you go.

your heart reciprocate nothing
and so its time i go.

To Kristyn:

Splendid happiness dominates most of our moments,
Then ruined by my belligerent outbursts resulting from my broken hopes.
Contentious atmosphere fills the air,
As some of my actions seem so untrue.
Yet nothing seems to break our future.
You understand my soul,
Hope for change fills my heart,
Your young love conquers all.

Sappho's Descendant

If I could transcend your words,
That flow like satin descending on skin,
Piercing into my empty places
And filling their pleading voids,
I would see behind the smokescreen;
Your mask with blue grey eyes,
That smile at me arbitrarily,
Melting me to the insignificance.
You think I deserve.

Language that congregates and dances
On ambiguous air
Thin as petals that brush the wind,
and dense as desert darkness,
so deep
it weighs on endless midnights.
I cling, wearing the albatross of your sentences
Around my half maiden,
Half sage heart,
I am Sappho, dry as yellow grass
You are her hero
Igniting me with breathless fires
you build in oblivion.

If only I could see you truly,
Aye, chance, free will.

Summer on the Streets of Oxford

A cacophony
of fading light
descending slowly
on symphonies
of voices
blending inharmonious
in their native languages
as they congregate
on Commarket

Smoking with tombstones,
sarcophagus conversations,
as laughter floats
though gated graveyards
shaded in abundant summer trees.

Intermittent, shadowy light
that bums beyond the time of slumber
follow my footsteps
through this ancient place
that I have never been,
yet have always known.
Take this alien through
the ubiquitous music
of this summer evening,
as she comes home
to your sequestered light.

At 47

An epiphany,
as years fade by,
Quartz blue lucidity,
as time convolutes,
and my tomorrows
are finite and murky.
Fires burn hotter
destroying all illusion,
just when I'm told
I'll become uncertain,
fear no longer
persuades me
to give away what belongs
rightfully to me.

Euphoric clarity,
bathe my sensations in this renaissance
on the breath of an emerging dawn
as the darkness
begins its descent.

A Simple Poem

Just a simple poem,
You're sure to understand—
To cure your aching boredom,
I swear it won't be bland.

There are no heavy metaphors,
But just one gentle fact—
Unlike my poems from before,
This will not be abstract.

Any child can read it,
And even comprehend—
This poem's not the culprit
Of oaths that will offend.

I do not use big words,
No need to look them up—
I know that sounds absurd,
But it's time that I grow up.

Didn't bother with the meter—
No rhythm in the lines—
Don't label me a cheater
For using feeble rhymes.

Who cares about the grammar,
I ain't know how two spell—
Forgive my nervous stammer
In this poem that I tell.

Put away the tissues—
This shouldn't make you weep.
This doesn't tackle issues—
This poem isn't deep.

A Simple Poem *(continued)*

It's not a woeful ballad,
Those poems make me sneer.
But this one's just as valid—
I want to make that clear.

This poem's not of love,
It's not about the war,
It's not of OJ's bloody glove,
Nor sheltering the poor.

It's just a humble tale,
this poem speaks the truth–
It's not about the Grail,
Nor capturing your youth.

Just a simple poem,
I'm sure you understand–
It cured your aching boredom,
Don't tell me it was bland.

Ode to Baseball Fans

They scramble through the gritty mud,
The sturdy and the frail,
To see the flood of rival blood
And watch their team prevail.

They gobble dogs while chugging beer
In seats of spattered gum—
They have no fear, they're drunk with cheer—
Their flasks are full of rum.

As innings drag, the fans will crave
More liquor down the throat—
They start the wave and misbehave
While gaudy beach balls float.

They'll ease the sting that booze will bring
At seventh-inning stretch—
When folks can sing the common ring,
And drunken ones can retch.

The game is through—the foes are slain,
The victors make a toast:
They feel no pain, they drink champagne,
They strut the walk and boast.

Fans draw their guns and shoot the sky
While smoking fat cigars—
They're on a high, their mouths are dry—
It's time to hit the bars.

Mt. Baldy

Upon the mount, the secrets lay,
The truths of fact and lore—
Where Cheyenne slay their deadly prey
Near Adam's apple core.

While outlaws scheme, they must hide out
In caves on Baldy Mountain—
Where Spaniards scout and do not doubt
The fabled youthful fountain.

When danger daunts, you must assail,
Just use the ole machete,
And on the trail you'll find the Grail—
See Big Foot and the Yeti.

When things get hot, banditos flee
To Baldy in the dark—
Where they are free to have high-tea
Inside of Noah's Ark.

Oh you can find Amelia's jet
That pummeled from the sky;
See Nixon sweat but never fret—
He does not need to lie.

There, Elvis sings and struts the walk
While flirting with your wife;
Lift up the rock—prepare for shock—
It's OJ's bloody knife.

Where General Grant and Robby Lee
Sit down to play some chess—
See Sonny ski into the tree,
Watch Barry Bonds confess.

Mt. Baldy *(continued)*

Heir Mozart and the local gnome
Will join in soft duets,
As Boy Scouts roam the rounded dome
While smoking cigarettes.

Sir Drake was shot and left to rot—
The story's yet been told;
Just find the plot—"X" marks the spot
Of Pirates' buried gold.

Upon the peak, the hunter sings
To boundless depths below;
See blackended stings of campfire rings
From midnights long ago.

Alas the mount, un-touched by time;
The wind recounts its tale;
Now hear the chime of Baldy's prime–
Its fallen angels wail.

Jessika

At the end of the bar–
The Infamous Jess–
The cleavage is far,
Has as a lot of finesse.

She'll send you a wink,
She'll offer a smile.
With too much to drink,
You won't care for a while.

Those luminous eyes,
A promise of thrill–
That promise soon dies
And you're stuck with the bill.

Dom of the Dead

There's fear in my soul,
There's dread in my eyes–
Fine mischief's his goal–
A good prank never dies:

He'll stick gum on my stool,
Steal change from my drawer,
He'll pee in my pool
And track mud on my floor.

Spills juice on my bed,
Pours milk on my fries,
Wipes snot on my head
And puts soap in my eyes.

My tires, he'll stab,
Then key up my car.
He'll run up a tab
And ditch me at the bar.

He'll flirt with my wife,
Make fun of my sister,
He'll threaten my life
With a bad titty-twister.

He'll steal all my tips,
Push me in a well–
Put tape on my lips,
To make sure I don't tell–

Shoots spitballs in class–
He's done it all year,
He'll siphon my gas
And then fill it with beer.

Dom of the Dead *(continued)*

To raise up the stakes,
He'll send gifts in the mail:
A box full of snakes,
And a poisonous snail.

When he is boozin,
He'll puke on the floor–
Fine rugs of his choozin–
Please show him the door.

No better to do,
Your patience, he'll tread.
He'll come after you,
For he's Dom of the Dead.

Sara

Been like this a while–
In darkness she cries.
Just look past her smile,
See the pain in her eyes.

To the outside she's brave,
But in-side she is torn.
n her own private cave,
She continues to mourn.

For absolution she longs,
For forgiveness to share–
To right all the wrongs
Of a loved one not there.

Today's a new dawn–
Too late to repent;
How can she move on
When she still smells her scent?

She offers a prayer–
Her Mother's still here–
She's stroking her hair,
She's quelling her fear.

For that it's too late–
But new life will begin,
And now she must wait
To be with her again.

She continues to live,
She's fallen in love,
She continues to give
As she's watched from above.

Sara *(continued)*

And through all of her pain,
There's this instinct to cope.
It will not be in vain,
For there's a shimmer of hope.

It's been there for a while,
In darkness it cries.
Just look into her smile,
See the love in her eyes.

Country Essence

Be sure to bring your dogs along and get
A tank of gas. Dress in comfy old clothes
And leave Bakersfield behind. Don't forget
To set your cruise control as limits impose.
Along the country highway scents and sights
Await. The reeking smell of scattered skunk,
The golden glow of sunlight on hills as night
Begins to fall, casting shadows amongst tree trunks.
A herd of cattle slowly chew their cud,
The scent of excrement lingers in the air,
An eighteen-wheeler splattered with mud
Makes traveling so slow difficult to bear.
Your journey ends on a bumpy dirt road
Where family meets in a yellow and white abode.

Goodwill?

Like bees around the mother hive,
Before the beaten doors,
A massive human swarm arrives
As workers pace the floor.

The eager eyes of shoppers seek
Amongst the bulging racks
Of old discarded junk, unique
Attire and cheap knickknacks.

The grimy carts are loaded down
With items they adore:
Outdated novels, old nightgowns,
A heap of home décor.

Impatient women dress in aisles
As lines for rooms are long.
The elders gasp and men just smile
As nude bodies draw a throng.

The wail of drowsy babies ends
The drawn out search as carts
Are rudely raced by those who intend
To be the first to depart.

Upon each item, greedy eyes
Are watching the bags fill.
The customers leave without goodbyes
Toting sacks marked "Goodwill."

Random Thoughts from Canine Minds

JEEZ, when are they ever gonna wake up?
Oh... oh... I think I see movement up there!
Man, I hope so cause I gotta go pee.
Not to mention that I'm starvin' to death
Since YOU hogged all the food last night and left
Me with nothin' but crumbs floating in our
Water dish. Gosh... I'm tired of bein'
Locked up–

Would you just shut your trap and go
Back to sleep! The longer we lie here,
the Longer we get to stay inside the house.
Why do you insist on going outdoors?
It's cold out there, not to mention boring.
Oh great! You've woke them up. Now we're going
To be thrown out while they go and do fun
Human things all day long. Are you happy?

Maybe she'll take us fur' a walk before
She–

Yeah right, didn't you notice that she's
Getting in the shower right now? You're such
An imbecile! How long have you been here?
You should know by now that we only get
Taken for a walk when she puts on that
Old sweat suit that she leaves by the laundry
Hamper. How I relish the days before
You ever came along...

What do you mean?

Well, before you, I went for walks almost
Daily. I would often accompany

Random Thoughts from Canine Minds *(continued)*

Her in the car as we traveled to the
Homes of family and friends. She thought that
I needed a "friend" and sure enough, you
Showed up.

I sure am glad that you wanted
A friend. Hey, guess what I just saw outside.

Who cares what you saw? I know I don't care.
There are some kinda flying things out there
That keep peckin at the ground, then they fly
Up to the trees and–

Flying things? They're birds!

Hey, she's turnin' on that loud noisemaker
Thingy that makes her hair go all over.

That is a blow dryer. It is only
A matter of minutes before we will
Be forced into the weed-riddled backyard
That reeks of Urine and ...

I love those smells!
Why are you shakin' and a tremblin' for?

I hate it out there. If I shake like this
She'll feel guilty and hopefully come home
Early. It has worked before so it's worth
A try.

Mmm...I can smell somethin' yummy.
She's got treats! Chicken strips, my favorite!

Random Thoughts from Canine Minds *(continued)*

Great, she's going to bribe us with those treats.
We will, once again, fall victim to the
Power of food as we watch the sliding
Glass door close, confined in this hellish yard.
Well... here are the words I have been dreading.

"Hank and Alfie, lets go outside. Mama loves you.
Be good boys."

See Alfie, you should
Have kept your trap shut. Thanks so VERY much.

It Saddens Me

It saddens me to see the disappearance of our cultural identity
To see it falling under, torn and dashed asunder, sacrificed to western gods and false reality
To see it given up and trampled down by one that is not and can never be our own
To see it repressed, suppressed, oppressed by those who don't know and are only known
To see it subjugated by what they want for us but what we do not want for ourselves
To see it torn down, pulled down, strewn around, taken from off its ebony shelves
To see it dejected, rejected by what is no better nor worse
To see the suit that was not made to suit us put on us, becoming our curse
It saddens me

It saddens me to see the world following those who believe they were made only to lead and never to heed another
To see them losing intentionally, subconsciously the very foundation beneath their members
To see the foundation shaken, removed, chaos and confusion ensuing
To see the stability, toppled, reproved, disorder and destruction brewing
To see a civilization be called uncivilized though civility reigned its civil structure
A new civilization without a history is born, civic duty becoming alien, a society on the verge of rupture

To see what is valued be made valueless though its value was invaluable
To see what is worthy be rendered worthless though its worth was irreplaceable
To see the recognizable go unrecognized though recognition was deserved
To see it wasted and wasting away no bits or pieces reserved
It saddens me

How Can They?

How can they not see it's a lie?
Convince themselves to believe a truth that does not exist.
Support the insupportable
Accept the unacceptable
Commend what would otherwise be uncommendable
in any other circumstance,
at any other time,
by any other name,
if perpetrated by any other people?

They know it's a lie
A lie that can be easily fed to the masses
when painted over with humanitarianism,
overshadowed with tactics of fear,
and accompanied with appeals to "us versus them"
and threats to our very existence.

How can they blindly digest this lie?
How can they defend it?
Bury their logic,
erase their ability to think,
forget their criticisms,
discard their tools of analysis and "minds of their own."

How can they remain inactive in the face of this lie?
Be bullied into silence and complacency
Be afraid to speak out against what they do not endorse
Just sit back and watch—
How can they?

We've seen this before
We've done this before
and each time looked back and decried it.
Can we not leam from our "mistakes"?
Is it impossible to leave behind this battle?
Instead we return to our folly
Repeat what has been repeated and condemned
Assume the place of those we have strained to remove
Recreate what has taken lives to abolish
—How can we?

A Poem that Rhymes

To make a poem that rhymes again
Whose rhythm is easily decipherable
The kind I used to write back then
When life was carefree and enjoyable

A poem whose meaning is not dense
But is pleasing nonetheless
Whose lines do not always make sense
But are written with care and finesse

A poem whose tone is not serious
But inspired by childlike creativity
That often attempts to be humorous
Yet still triumphs in its simplicity

Whose toil is clearly evident
In each carefully chosen rhyme
But now I struggle just to invent
For poems, I simply have no time

To Suffer

To Suffer
To live a life in perpetual pain
In agonizing defeat, disgust, detriment, despair,
depression, discrimination, disorder, disdain
In sorrow, in illness, in unending woe
To experience excruciating torture at the hand of a foe

And I, I stand aloof to it all
I turn my back to it all
Ignoring, disregarding, shunning it all
I distance myself, never glance over the wall
To continue my life, unmoved by it all
Because I have yet to suffer.

There is the fact that we're connected by our humanity
Our color, our race, though not our ethnicity
That, I fail to consider, I fail to see
I fail to acknowledge that it could very well have been me.
I stand apart from it all
I close my eyes to it all

Rejecting, erasing, denying it all
I isolate myself, never peer over the wall
To continue my life, unflinched by it all
Because I have yet to suffer.

I have been offered ways to act
To service my time and make an impact
But my affairs are much too important for that
Too important for the thousands dying, displaced, miserable and neglected
I stand away from it all
I shut my ears to it all
Excusing, refusing, forgetting it all
I separate myself, never look over the wall
To continue my life, unchanged by it all
Because I have yet to suffer.

A Human Being

I am a human being
Don't expect to hurt me without making me
Cry out from the sensation shaking me

Because I am a human being
I will smile at the object that pleasures me
To survive, I will take any measures, see...

... I am a human being
I react to your words that are mocking
Feel disgust at an image too shocking

Because I am a human being
I can love one with fervor and passion
I can laugh in a genuine fashion

I am a human being
I must dance to the music that's moving me
Be inspired by the melody soothing me

Because I am a human being
I'm endowed with much mental ability
I acquire language with facility

If there is misery I will sympathize
Tears will flow out when a loved one dies
Because I am a human being.

A Wartime Litany
Part II: The Fable

There once was a leader
He knew not a thing
He made his decisions
On merely a whim
He sent all the children
To fight for a cause
This was his decision
Made without a pause
He knew not his history
He knew not his past
He knew not he was not the first nor the last
To send all the children
To kill and be killed
They did not endorse it
But that's what he willed
The world began singing
With voices so low
Too low to be heard
By him who did not know
They sang without end
They sang low and long
They sang without ceasing
And this was their song:
Violence begets violence
War begets war
Please let us die and suffer no more

Hatred breeds hatred
Distrust yields distrust
Force is but an option
It is not a must
The leader he heard
He heard and ignored
Because the song was never shouted or roared

A Wartime Litany
Part II: The Fable *(continued)*

He heard all the stirrings
From people below
He heard but pretended
That he did not know

He spoke without reason
Acted without thought
Sent children to die
Though their deaths were for naught
The people they sang till they could sing no more
Violence begets violence
And war begets war

But still he continued
To act on impulse
To claim that the truth
That he spoke was not false
Though everyone knew
That his words were all lies
They too ran away
And covered their eyes
So as not to see
The despair he caused
So as not to see
The lives which were lost
And so all the savagery
Went on and on
From dawn until dusk
And from dusk until dawn
But deep in the silence
Away from his sight

The song carried on
But was sung in fright

A Wartime Litany
Part II: The Fable *(continued)*

The world kept its voices
All quiet and low
So not to awaken
Him who did not "know"
They sang without ever
Uncovering their eyes
That hatred yields hatred,
Lies engender lies
They sang the refrain
And they sang the encore
They sang till their hearts
Were bleeding and sore:
Violence begets violence
War begets war
Please let us die and suffer no more.

The Earth, No More

What remains is desolation.
Site of endless desecration.
Spirit dead, no words said on her behalf.
Defenseless, relentless pleas fall on deaf ears.
Forgetting her service, there are no shed tears.
Now as she forever sleeps, who weeps for the earth, no more?

All around is pure destruction
Echoing the earth's reduction
to nothing by those who pass unpunished.
All is lost. She bears the cost of her users
Silently, undone violently by her abusers.
To store her ashes, there's no um. Who yearns for the earth, no more?

Forever gone, the earth is finished,
Her role suddenly diminished.
Yet life goes on as if all is the same.
She dies alone, her death unknown to those who use it.
It's chilling, the willing participants in her death
whose actions evoke not the least scorn. Who mourns for the earth, no more?

Now the earth no more exists.
Only a memory persists.
No loved ones lay her peacefully to rest.
She lies in state, her loss too great to comprehend.
Never to awaken, her foundation shaken permanently.
Her grave reads merely, "Here she lies." Who cries for the earth, no more?

Marshmallows Floating on Water

I
Sometimes I wonder why the sky is grey,
its long, nebulous plane creeping up on day
like a cat quietly stalking its prey.

No light passes through this melancholy sheet,
trapping the cold but giving off a heat
that ignites a burning sense of defeat.

A depression settles overhead–
heavy, dark, the weight of lead
mixed with worries that are fed

by the sense which continuously numbs
the feeling. Then the rain comes,
bitter, and the brain succumbs

to this sullenness. It is fodder
to the season. And when it clears, its daughter
is above: marshmallows floating on water.

II
Marshmallows floating on water is its appearance:
the blue and white juxtaposed as this distasteful beverage
spread across the atmosphere. A liquid suspended,
defying gravity. Frozen, like a film on pause.

It is born of the grey yet so unlike:
a lightness of vapor, victorious, the rays dispersed
in open warmth, precipitating nothing but sweet motion
and comfort in this volatile stability.

Listening to the Other

Why do we still take what they say as a given
and question our own which was taken from us for replacement?
It is no rotten tooth requiring extraction for false implantation.
What is so worthy of imitation?

Why are we so brainwashed by their ignorance, their arrogance,
their "expertise" in inexperience,
on matters which do not concern them.
What greater knowledge do they hold?

I hate it when they say
we are falling behind.
Behind what?
That which does not fit,
like the infamous glove but without the acquittal?
Why do we listen?

I hate it when they say
we are not capable, not ready,
not stable, not secure,
not prepared, not there yet.
Then what are we? Not them?

Why do we listen?
I hate it when they say
their goal is to help
when they offer dependence
and ill-adjusted models
leaving us wounded, to climb a mountain with our legs tied.
Why do we listen?

I hate it when they say
we are not moving
and ours is not proven,

Listening to the Other *(continued)*

they label and define,
and assume a common mind.
Why do we listen?

And when they say
we own the place,
re-fulfilling the déjà vued prophecy
until we are not ourselves,
only a mere shadow
will we still listen?

Move On Vaughn

I kissed his tongue-in-cheek
with a flirty half-pout
and he came out to play

I moved pagan Heaven
and, too, divine Earth
to please him
not just for one night

He moved on from me
as suddenly
as an oily sheen
from a cool raindrop

His nerve endings satisfied
my nerve endings nailed
belied
by my own half-doubt

I heeded the welcoming warning sign:
Time to Go Home

"Shadow"

A shadow haunts me in my dreams
It calls my name in whispered screams
It comes to tear at my black heart
And pushes me to fall apart
It suffocates me when I'm sleeping
And waits for me to cease my breathing
It only torments me when I'm alone
With its freezing touch that turns me to stone
It forces out my bloody tears
And grows stronger with passing years
I know it only wants my soul
That's why it digs a deeper hole
And mocks my sorrow and my pain
With lightning, thunder, and the rain
A shadow taunts me in the night
And with my prayers fades the light
It gives me nightmares when I sleep
It never fades or becomes weak
And when I unseal my closed eyes
I see the shadow still alive

Death of the Dove

And thus beneath the winter frost
The sweet dove died away
But no one mourned for what was lost
And no one came to pray
The peaceful little body lies
Decaying in the snow
Its beauty taken from our eyes
As we are left with bone

Lake Lapis Lazuli

My mind can still feel those quiet winds graze
When we sailed Lake Lapis Lazuli,
In the fresh morning, during our last days.

The mellowing season lazily fades,
Our bright youth now gone, timidly aged, yet
My mind can still feel those quiet winds graze.

I recall this comfort drifted away
Like soothing waves from my beached day dreams
In the fresh morning, during our last days

When you said, True love is a ghost moonlighting
In our sleep,' and back then I agreed. But,
My mind can still feel those quiet winds graze.

While our ship sailed we'd invent childish dreams
(They froze in that time and never took seed)
In the fresh morning during our last days.

I'm now pining for that distant memory;
When we sailed Lake Lapis Lazuli
In the fresh mourning during our last days–
My mind can still feel those quiet winds graze.

Deprivation

The snakes are all around me,
in my fingers and
in my toes
engendering and dismembering my
prose.

The cucarachas in the
corner of my eyes scatter sand and
vanish days.

I've know this stranger with
each passing mourning,
warping and submission, wreathing inside.

"Let their eyes he darkened,
that they see not: and make
their loins continually shake" (Psalms 69:23).

God Damn these mornings

as mv hands begin to break.

Civility, sanity, then everything
and agree with what I make,

A freedom and blasphemy to consecrate such.

Miss Wanderings, the addict.

The life of cheap silvery rings
pursues servile pleasure.

Seeding small rubbery rings,
as parchment absorbs black coffee rings

that soften and seep,
silky as burned brown spoon stains,

A flash, and then gloss became dull.
The knell, a fading memory tarnished.

The Johari Construction

7:30 in the morning.
Jogging past this construction yard.
I run past the structure's loud contractions.
i reach the soccer fields and notice a row of trees.

Some are dying and will he removed, never known.
Others lay dormant waiting for a hopeful moment.
While the elite evergreen keep their inhumane green ever,
Their talents we could never have.

The trees settle in their small sect of sanctuary still;

The workers pound-in their reality of handwork;

The professors enlighten in their classroom of momentary hope:

The student realizes in a prison of psychological torment:

Some are dying and will be removed, never known.
Others lie dormant waiting for a hopeful moment.
While the elite evergreen keep their inhumane green ever,
Their talents we would never want.

Ephemeral Wisps

My fingers, like plastic chair-legs, salient among the scarred leather and creases that clinch these hands, rubberly wrapped around the idea of survival, until the pumping slows and speeds, and slows and flickers, and then darkness.

The aluminum
can flexes and enrages:
heart beats its charcoal.

The red coal turns black.
The can's heart beat, from sucking,
pumps pale, releases.

Sudden and yellow,
jaundice gently slowing
my internal beat,

Frenzied, I cringe and
regret. She calls wimpering
"HELP!" to my hopeless end.

Caustic Night

Realily he spit out his mouth:

poisons and fungus and the
splitting burn in nostril and skin.

The pen rests on my pillow.
The homeless man sleeps, flat and constricted on my rug--
his bags, organized and limited, a sign of some designed intention.
A gaping orifice still and snoring solid; I leave my room unnoticed in night.

"Finally," I say. I winced from stagnancy.
Gliding with every leaf around me; All wind freeing me this night.
"Never sleeping, not never unholy am I."

A small roundy, while striped night, scampering,
trapped along a wall parallel to my evil on skateboard wheels.
"We are intersecting- I am letting, so go!"
She stares at me and never the more,
only seeming to cry.

I studied every night,
Robert Lowell's "Skunk Hour," civilized.
I smell my hair now.

She stares at me
blankly, afraid, angry, and
naturally under the same vacuous moon,
surviving with that stink of hers.

Reality she evoked from nether regions.

Gorman

The top of the Ridge Rout,
Just a stop on the road to somewhere else.
Christo's hills

Winter's icy grip has finally loosened,
Leaving the hope of fragrance flaunting wildflowers,
Mardi Grasing the once winter pastureland.

Puffy fluffs liberated from "spittin' cottonwoods" float by
Pretending to be snow,
On their way to see the world.

Late sring.
The sring of high places,
Short and fleeting.

Cold breezes cast ripples of goose bumps in the grass sea.
While flowers surf the wind waves,
Undulating earth holds sway against erosion.

The perfumed breeze caresses.
Now gentle, now grabbing, toddler style, at your skirt,
Letting you know who's in charge.

Eagle cries pierce the wind's hiss and chatter,
Pinging the voyeur like sonar
And wafting sweet hay across the verdant scene.

This is the dewy, jasmine time
Before the hot dry kiss of summer,
lown from Hades itself.

Before the toasted landscape
Closes up for summer,
And only the horntoads are happy.

Prose based on Mark Rothko's "White, Yellow, Red on Yellow:"

The church is still - the people in it fidget, ruffle pages. Children's shoes tap dance the aisles waiting for release. The air conditioner makes that blowy sound. Someone coughs. The altar is red – the red of Charlton Heston's spoon dipped in the strawberry jam of redemption. Saving soylent green is people. Mrs. Rothko's boy spilled his carmine. The juice sluicing down away from the sandalwood candlelight and its smoky stains. Is this where art goes when it dies?

The butterfly

The bullertfly's magnificent colors
Each caged within its own black prison
Sequestered hues hushed and pure but separate
Stained glass with wings

The butterfly's fleeting flowery flits
I'll just have a drink and go
He keeps his visits brief
Careful to never over-stay his welcome

The vines, the jaded foliage verdant with envy
Ever swaying, never going anywhere
Earth rooted
Why can't we fly?

Mona Lisa

The gray sky is raining on the Louvre; the square surrounding the glass diamond entrance is a reflecing pond. Flotillas of tourists waddle into the brightly lit rhombus.

Let a smile be your umbrella on a rainy day.

Hall after hall, art flew by overpowering the senses. Era after era punctuated the hovering statues, the pigment stained canvas, the paint permeated pine.

Smiles don't take up shelf space.

Crown jewels glared back at gawkers under hot lights and glass. Look but don't touch. Knightly knick-knacks.

You are not fully dressed until you wear a smile.

Mummies stared vacuously at fossilized viwers paying thier last respects, daily. Oriental onyx ointment jars oozed antiquity.

A smile is forever.

Cavernous halls filled with enormous images. Sublime art. Visions that dwarfed you, engulfed you.

Beauty is power; smile is its sword.

You were on the raft, sea gulls and men crying, roiliing spray. Wet with salt-caked fear and agony. Overwhelming betrayal.

A smile is a special remedy for an injured mind and body.

The medusa haired drifters' sinews taught. Straining against the abyss's dank maw. Waves licking at raw feet. Biding their time.

Mona Lisa *(continued)*

Tears deepen a smile.

Biblical art. Art recounting glorious fates and feats. The canvases slay dragons, strokes of paint save mankind. Heroes. Demons. Ruddy cherub faces nod approval from on high.

Smile, God loves you.

A small painting hung tethered behind velvet ropes. Not very impressive among the huge panels. Each masterpiece filled with important ideas. Just a simple portrait.

Smile and the world smiles with you.

Onlookers chafe aganst the restraints. Looking at but perhaps not seeing the portraited person. Could that be Leonardo?

Some people wear their smile liek a disguise.

Did the Lion sfumato his form and merge it to another? Hermaphrodite? Or is this simply an eminent entrepreneur's spouse marking a quarter-century?

Your smile is your life force.

Androgynous features, modeled under a thinly veiled headpiece. Eyes that perhaps scrutinize and inspect or simply imply surveillance. The quaintly demure grin.

A smile is just a frown upside-down.

Alluring yet aloof lips, parted slightly to convey a past ideal of elegance. The Tuscan master's hands swept on that smirk and lifted the likeness out of obscurity.

Smile – it's the second best thing to do with your lips.

Mona Lisa *(continued)*

Peter Max and the admen crossbred op art and marketing fantasies to bring that smile to the masses. The faint greenback odor of exploitation follows the poplar portrait.

A smile makes the world go round.

Leonardo could never have comprehended what this little painting would become. But then again, why did he carry this picture with him for years?

A smile takes a moment, but the memory of it lasts forever.

A Simple Cup of Coffee

The best part of waking up. Morning
After morning you fill my favorite cup
With an alluring aroma: the maker
Comes to life alter the whirring grind of beans.
A small pleasure, an unpretentious drink,
A brief moment to enjoy my coffee.

You look comforting sitting on my coffee
Table. The way I begin each morning
With you customarily in hand, a drink
To energize and awaken, a two-cup
Minimum. Even the smell of your beans
Is enough to persuade me to make

A start to my day. But now your drinkers make
You more than just ordinary coffee.
A Google search for gourmet beans
Retrieves over four million sites. Morning's
Brew inflated beyond just what fills my cup.
Better than a regular or decaf drink.

Now you have become conceited, a drink
For connoisseurs. C'otfee shops, they make
Fancv names for the sizes of your cups,
Foo. Now, people can take a coffee
Quiz to discern their most pleasing start to morning
On Starbucks' website, revealing which beans

Best match their answers – calibrating beans
To the personality of the drinker.
If having a smooth or bold morning
Or a robust or fruity start makes
A difference, I don't know. You're just coffee,

A Simple Cup of Coffee *(continued)*

But you're again transmuting, by the cup
Instead of by climate. Before in cups.
Explorers and traders gathered your beans
And trees to bring to the New World. You. coffee.
Once lived simply in Africa – not as a drink –
Transplanted all over the world to make
Money, awakened to a strange sun's morning.

It you're made from gourmet beans or are a drink
Only, it pressed or brewed in a coffee maker.
A cup of you invariably starts my morning.

The Revelation

The long, straight lines of the buildings,
A drab two-story rise.
The Kelly green door exposes
An uninspiring inside.

The carpet color: soggy earth;
The tile: a dingy white.
Clo down the dim and narrow hall
By artificial light.

A red and white striped couch within
Sitting unexpectant
Was the place my youngest sister chose
To confide that she was pregnant.

This startling news disquieted me–
Combined delight and fear–
For the cares awaiting this young girl
Of only twenty years.

Homesteading

How long have you been traveling?
This makes
Eleven weeks from when we left our home
And three from when my husband died.
I'm sad
Your troubles seem so great. I've lost a friend
Or two myself along this long, hard path.
I've traveled down and back this path more times
than should be traveled. Now, I'm on my last
And final way. I'm settling myself down.
got some land, some cattle. Planning to see
What I ican make of it. Why don't you go back?
without a man around, things could get rough.

We've come too far to head back. My boys,
They need a better life. I hope to find
A chance for them to grown into the men
Their father wanted them to be.
How was
Your husband lost along your journey west?
If you don't mind me asking, ma'am?
The doctor said a warmer climate would
Help, the dryer air would relieve his symptoms:
Our options were exhausted here at home.
The symptoms of the tuberculosis
That he'd contracted after the war were
Only growing worse so we decided
To leave the familiar for the unknown.
We left our home in March to head out west,
My husband and I, our two small children.
Our home, Virginia, where our children grew
Their first few years, the place we'd known for all
Our lives, the place our family still lived.
We left for somewhere we'd only heard of

Homesteading *(continued)*

From others, who had made the trip before.
We had to sell almost all we owned
Because the covered wagon only held
A very few necessities. We sold
The table, chairs, and other furniture
To pay our trip across the plains. I kept
Grandmother's teapot to pass along to
My children, but everything else is gone.
For everyone, leaving home was hard, but we
Were trving to save his life. We bought the few
And needed things for the trip, packed up,
And met the people making journeys, too,
Across the plains. We only were a group
Of ten that left with faith of promise – new
And brighter life is what we're seeking here.
The way across was hard with John, that was
My husband's name, because he had to rest
Or else he'd cough – like he'd never stop.
But one day he did. Somewhere in Kansas.
And now, my boys have buried their father.
A small and wooden cross is all that marks
Him now.
How young are they, your children, now?
They're all but four and near eight, in March.
We'll make our way to Pueblo. Colorado
That's where we're headed and where we'll end,
It's what their father would have wanted so
It's what I'm going to do.
My boys, they need
The chance to grow to men, just like their father was.

Grandma Frieda's House

Those memories seem forgotten
But now I take them out
And remember the house on the hill
With its smell of pie drifting about.

With lemon trees to climb
And strawberries to pick
And the best spots for hide and seek–
But why did she get sick?

Her house was aplace forfun.
Weekends of tennis, volleyball,
Pool, dolls, and always plenty of sweets.
then our fun stopped. We hit a wall.

The house that had been a playground
Became a hospital.
the good is hard to remember
And the bad easy to recall.

I can't forget the hospital
Bed in the living room
Or her morphine induced laught
And watching her fading bloom.

She passed away, the house was sold.
I drove by years after–
Lemon trees, strawberries-all still there.
But I missed our laughter.

To My Period

I have to tell you, I cannot stand you!
Oh, but in my forties you will be gone.
I really hate all the little phrases
Used to try and make you cute or funny,
They do not work because you are neither.
"My Aunt Flo is in town," this is absurd!
When my aunt visits it's funa d when you
"Visit" I anticipate your departure.
Oh, and the slang – no doubt men invented.
Have you heard them: "on the rag," or "the red
River," or maybe "that time of the month"?

Because of you, once a month, faithfully
for seven days, I turn into someone else.
I know you're on the way when I break out,
And my breasts become sore.
I'm either crying over nothing, or
Getting angry because I can't find my keys.
Oh God, and the pain in my lower back.
Do you know, sometimes it makes me vomit?
And, lately you've been surprising me.
I don not like your surpirses. Why can't
You come the same day every month like you're
Supposed to?

So thanks, thanks a lot for making me
A crazy nauseated mess every month.
It's your fault I turn bitchy every month,
And your faut I can't wear white pants, you bastard!
You have a way of wanting to
Let everyone know you are "visiting,"
And you really needn't bother, I have
A feeling they already know. And you steal my fun!
You want an example? Trips are planned
around you and your schedule.

To My Period *(continued)*

Okay, I will admit there was
A time when I was happy and relieved
To see you, but that was only one time!
You know what else? You are quite disgusting.
The whole mess with tampons and pads is sickening.
I hate wearing pads.
It's like wearing a diaper and just as vile.
Well, I do appriciate that you stop
In water; it makes swimming more pleasant
And keeps the sharks away.
What I've been trying to say is:
Get it together! Be regular!
Just remember–
Someday liberation will be mine!

life under the sun

the sky was once blue
the clouds used to float towards the sun
voluminous clouds, full of life, they would float
i swear they would
and these colors never used to run
no, they were bright once
roses had a crimson hue
violaceous flowers wore their purple like royalty
hills were covered with their green attire
that was before
before they faded
now even the golden rays of the sun are tarnished
it's all faded
the once fertile soil now burdened by rot and decay
shades of black
shades of grey
however you want to see it
this negative cliche
it once was beautiful
swear

You + Me + Her Me = Love

They say in your eyes there burns a great fire,
The heat of which I dare not to aspire.
I've given you up; admitted defeat,
How could I have been so lost and weak?
Forfeiting my own for love of a friend,
I have plenty of time for my courage to mend.
Would going forward with faith in my personal wealth,
Have cost me so much of respect for myself?
I feel like a ditz, an utter fool,
When all of my life I've tried to be cool.
How could this be that I've given you up?
It's like pouring the water out of a cup.
A cup that was brimming and overflowing with life,
Instead of water I swallowed a knife.
It feels so wrong deep down inside,
Help me escape; I just want to hide.
Hide from the sun and the shimmering rain,
Why does this make me feel simple and plain?
It won't be long now till you're hand in hand,
And I'll want you so bad I'll cry tears in the sand.
I'll cry and I'll cry my fresh salty tears,
As I hear in my head laughter and jeers.
I didn't even try; this happens every time,
I hadn't even thought of you as mine.
My courage is broken; my image is shattered,
I hadn't realized how much you mattered.

Untitled

He's taller and stronger
Than me.
I hate hime
Not really.
I'm scared
I'm scarred
Can't breathe...
He's funny and cute
But not for me.
I hate him
Not really...
I'm cold and rude
Can't reach me
You love me
Not really.
I'm hiding
I' m dieing
Can't let go
You love me
I hate you
Not really.
Abuse
But not from me.
Abuse
But not for me.
Abuse
I feel the pain.
Abuse
I know the shame.
His muscles and brains
Too much for me
I hate him
Not really.
I'm scared and hiding
Can't find me
Aren't looking
I'm dieing
Can't breathe...
I'm scared and I want you
Won't tell me
You love me
Not really.
Don't touch me
Can't see me
Don't ask me
Can't make me
I feel the love
Not really.
I want the love
Not really.
You need the love
Can't feel me.
You want the love
I'm loosing.
See me
Watching you
There's hunger and longing
There's fear
Inside me
How did it reach me?
Don't help me
I'm dieing
Don't save me.
I want love
I hate love
I feel love
Not really.
I see you
Don't hate me.
I want you
Don't hurt me.
Can't feel you
Don't know you
Can't stand you
Beside me
Scared and alone
When I'm with you.

Untitled

I never thought
In all my life
That I'd be with you

I never thought
In all my life
That dreams could come true

I never thought
In all my life
And I never dreamed of you

Untitled

Rarely can you ever fathom
the reality of illusion.
You cannot even try to depict the
rare and beautiful picture it displays.
Already you have found that time
has no meaning to the soul.
Never can you restrain the soul from
taking the shape of that which it loves.
Can this really be the life god
has chosen for us?
Living on the earth with others
is not always easy.
All the time people dream of a place they can truly live.
Yet you say there is no place
in which we are not confined.
To you and I freedom has a different meaning
and a different price.

Ryan

THE BOY
Quiet yet expressive
Smiling and laughing
Sweetly
Ryan
THE MAN
Strong yet shy
Learning and writing
Confidently
Ryan
THE SOLDIER
Proud yet merciful
Fighting and living
Courageously
Ryan

Mirror

Mirror, mirror in your eyes
Reflecting everything that you despise.
Looking in those hollow pits
There's a soulless emptiness.
There is no being, just a shell
No thought to heaven or to hell.
You have no self; you reflect what you see
Please don't turn your eyes on me.
Taking the image; robbing all thought
This makes you exaclty what you're not.
There is not future; you have no past
Thought you wrere built and made to last.
You gather what's around you and take it for your own
You are a perfect porcelain doll, abandoned and alone.

The Boy With the Pen

There you sit with pen in hand,
Thinking so hard I don't understand,
How can you do it with your spirit so free?
When I think of you do you think of me?

You look so ddep inthought,
Looking for the words you've sought.
Your brow is wrinkled on your face,
My heart is beating aainst its case.

You write your story, poem, or play,
You drop your pen and there it lay,
I grasp it in my shaking hand,
I try to give it to you, but I can't stand.

I look at you with a teary eye,
I have to run; I'm going to cry,
I drop the pen on your desk,
I feel as if I've failed a test.

You don't seem to notice my anguish insie,
As I dart ou the door lookiing to hide,
Why do you follow me in my hectic state?
Ask how I'm feeling, and I'll tell you, "Irate."

You think that you've done something horribly wrong,
As I mentally quote the lines of a song,
To calm therush, to cool me down,
I play with my hair, so long and brown.

You look at me; I look at the floor,
I'm trying to hide what I can't ignore,
You lift my chin to look at my face,
My heart is racing at a fast growing pace.

The Boy With the Pen *(continued)*

You try to read the emotion in me,
I'm startiing to laugh; I think you won't see,
The heart griping pain and torrent inside.
Of the innocent love that I'm trying to hide.

You hold the door open as I walk past,
You're such a gentleman, so young and chaste,
We sit down you continue to write,
I know that I've given you a fright.

As the seconds and minutes tick by,
I'm terribly lost; I let out a sigh,
I'm thinking right now, "I don't feel too bright"
As I write you a note and fold it up tight.

I feel a light tap; you've seen what I've done,
I hand you the note before misgivings won,
You unfold the paper with a delicate care,
And read through the note as I wistfully stare.

What are you thinking? I can't even guess,
I really hope that you'll say, "yes"
Suddenly, you laugh at what the note said,
I can feel my cheeks grow incredibly red.

The question wasn't hard; what will your answer be?
I like you, do you like me?
So fold me a note marked yes or no,
Please tell me, I need to know.

One

In love
That is what I was
Feeling [it] (felt)(was) so much
When the truth did not speak loud enough
You could have treated me
Like a nobody
And still I did not see all the awful things done to me...

All I say was somebody that
Loved Me
But now I see that this love has faded
That this love is gone
To only leave me (with nothing) as one

The End

In the End
Will you ever know
And if you do
Will it show
Will I Ever Learn to Let You Go...
Does this mean our love will no longer grow
Or will this distance show
How much our love can grow
And from this will I learn
That no matter
How far or near
You will still be here
Near to my heart
And never be apart
For Love will
Protect You
Guide You
Until the Very End

They say...

I am just a girl that is what they all say
I do not know what love truly is
So (tell me) What is love?
It is when you can't stop thinking of him
(So) What is love?
Tell me because (I think) my heart just skipped a beat...
Just thinking of him
What you can see may be blind to me
What you migh think of as love, I may see differently

I am just a girl that is what they all say
I doo not know what love truly is
So (tell me) What is love?
Is it when you can't stop thinking of him
(So) What is love?
Tell me because (I think) my heart just skipped a beat...
Just thinking of him
(For)
So what is love? Can what I feel for you be love when
What they see may be blind to me
Because what you can see may be blind to me
What you might think of as love, I may see differently

OR
I am just a girl that is what they all say
I don not know what love truly is
So (tell me) what is love?
Is it when you can't stop thinking of him
What is love?
Tell me because (I think) my heart just skipped a beat
Just thinking of him...
So can what I feel for you be love when
what I feel may be blind to them...
When what I feel for you is ineistent
(They tell me what I feel is impossible)
Well...

They say... *(continued)*

I think that what they might think of as love
I may see differently
OR
I am jut a girl that is what they all say
I do not know what love truly is
So (tell me) what is love?
Is it when you can't stop thinking of him
What is love?
Tell me because (I think) my heart just skipped a beat
Just thinking of him...
So can what I feel for you be lovve when
What they see may be blind to me
When what I feel for you
To them is imaginary
No No No
This cannot be
I know I love you
And that is all that is true to me

I am just a girl that is what they all say
I do not know what love truly is
So (tell me) what is love?
Is it when you can't stop thinking of him
What is love?
Tell me because (I think) my heart just skipped a beat
Just thinking of him...
So can what I feel for you be love when
What they see may be blind to me
When what I feel for you
To them is imaginary
Well the truth is...
Nothing will change what I feel for you
Nothing will change the way I feel it should be
(I think that what they might think of as love
I may see differently)

Darkness Darkness

Darkness Darkness
Come on Light
Darkness Darkness
Don't give up the Fight

(Do not end the goodness in my life
Come in and let it shine
Do not dim the light shining to bright...
For if you give up the fight)

OR

Darkness Darkness Come on [in] Light
Darkness Darkness
Don't give up the Fight
Darkness Darkness
Come in and let t shine
Darkness Darkness do not dim the light (shining so bright)...
For if you do my soul will be no longer
Be able to survive

A Day OR A (The) Cycle

Sun escaping into the Night
Moon exposed no more Light
Suddenly Darkness covers the (blue) sky
Then stars expose their radiant sight
But no sooner will the sun glow the sky
And wak-up the dark sky night

Sun escaping into the Night
Moon exposed no more Light
Suddenly Darkenss covers the (blue) sky
Then stars expose their radiant sight
But no sooner will the sun glow the sky in luminous light

Sun escaping into the Night
Moon exposed no more Light
Suddenly Darkness covers the (blue) sky
Then stars expose there radiant sight
But no sooner will the dark sky glow
In the sun's luminous light

And leave only the light that would soon not let go or show

Sun escaping into the Night
Moon exposed no more Light
Suddenly Darkness covers the (blue) sky
Then stars expose there radiant sight
But no sooner will the dark sky glow/transform
Into the sun's luminous light

Questions Unanswered

So much on my mind...
At night I cannot sleep
Thinking about hat
has happened
in my life
What I have seen?
Who I have loved?
Who I have longed to love?
And what (or who) I will see?
Now I lay down to rest
Hopng that tomorrow
I will answer some of these
Questions
Replaying in my head

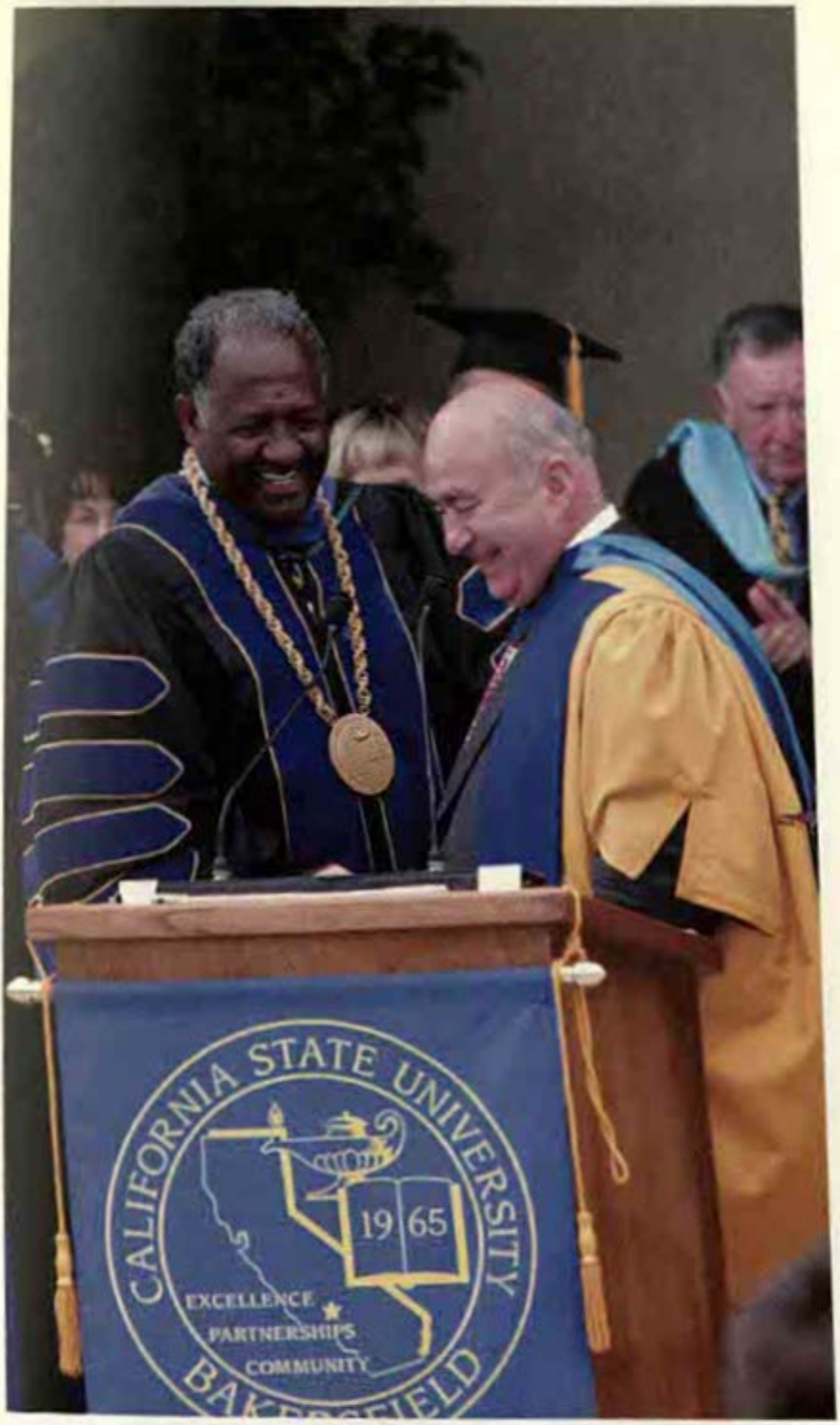
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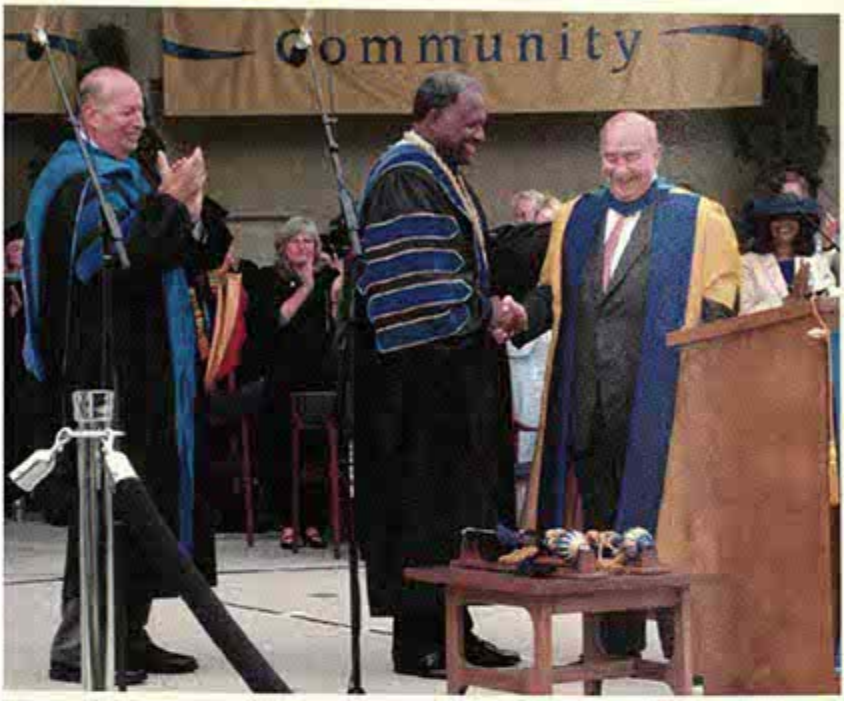
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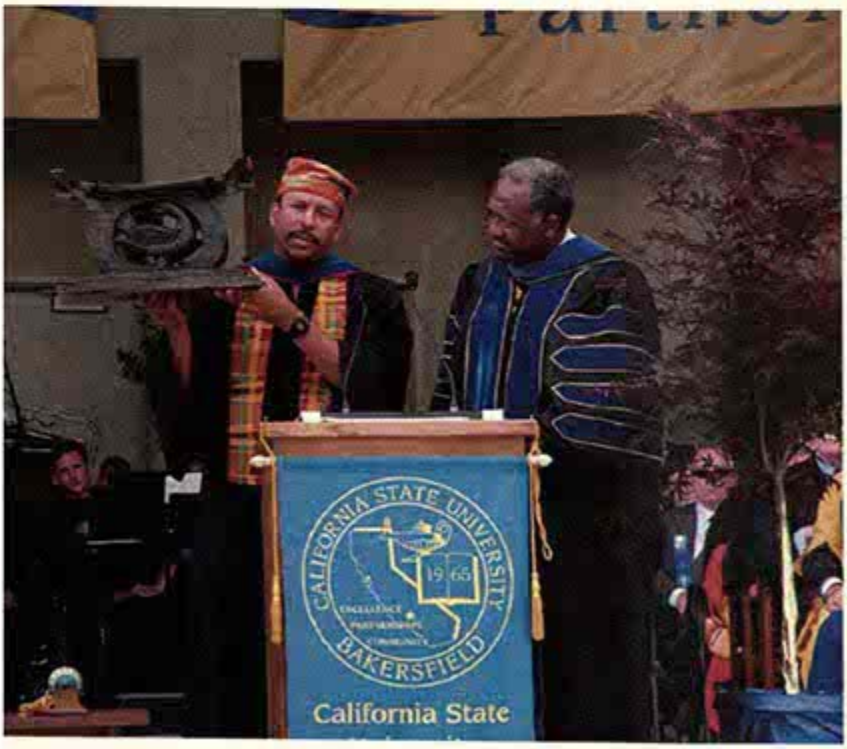
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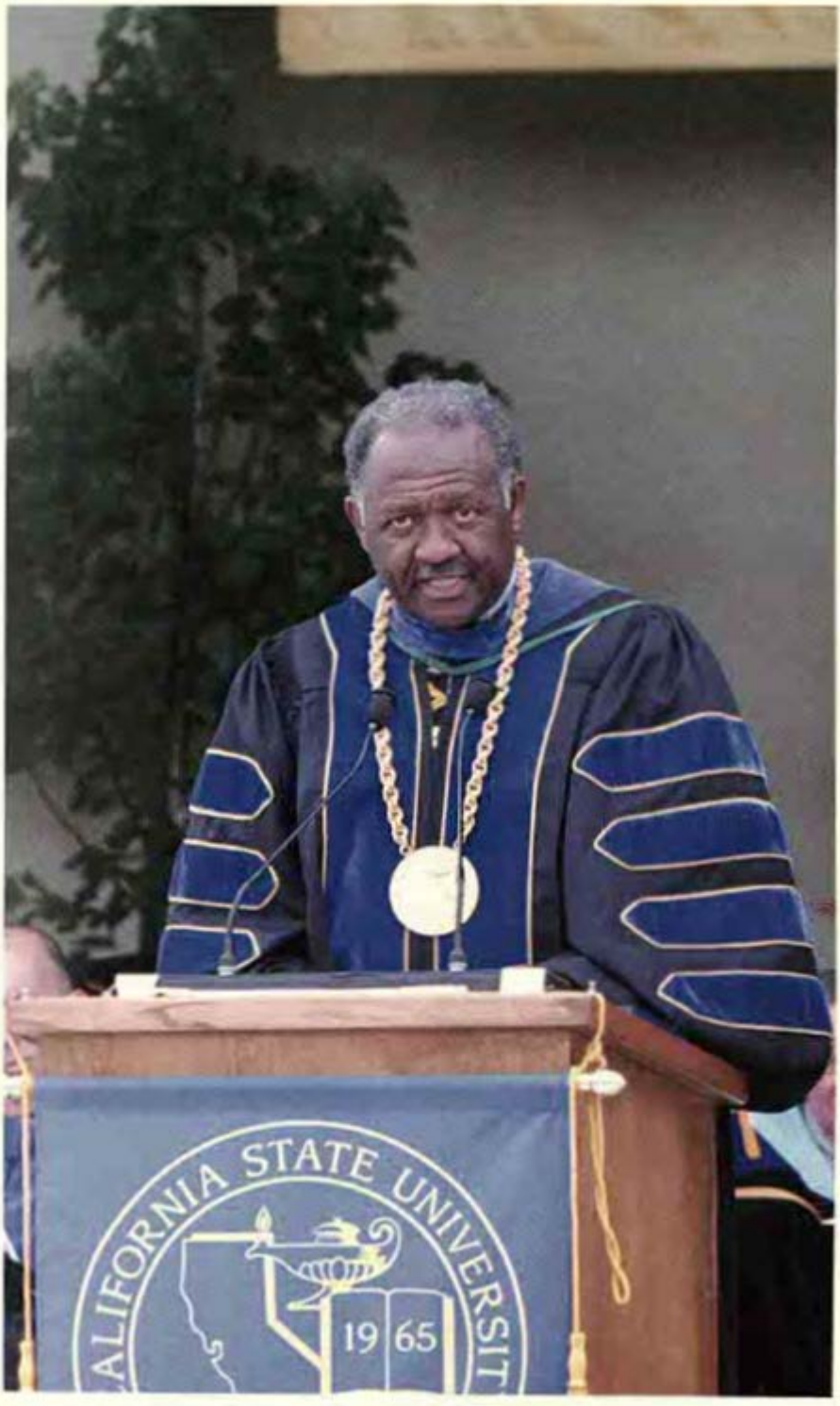
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