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Editor’s note:

When it was mentioned that I would be editing the Oakwood yet again, I heard several variations on the theme: Are you nuts? Didn’t you learn anything last year?

The truth is, I did learn something. Editing an annual literary and fine arts magazine for a large (by South Dakota standards) university is an awesome task. It begins with an almost euphoric feeling of anticipation: assistant editors are chosen, graphic designers and production staff are assembled, budget proposals are reviewed, posters calling for submissions are created (by Shannon Kettering this year) and the process of accepting entries is developed.

Then you wait.

As the deadline for submissions approaches, anxieties rise. Will we have enough entries to make up a quality magazine this year? Professors in the English and Art departments are hounded to push students to contribute stories, poems, and artwork. Oakwood staffers hassle their talented friends. The day arrives, and the office is flooded with last-minute submissions. The editor’s heart is filled with joy at the sight of the mountain of potential masterpieces.

Home for the holidays: the editor lugs along the stack of submissions, to be read and appraised over Grandma’s Christmas cookies. Hopefully the advisory committee is finding time during their yuletide break to do the same.

The New Year brings a flurry of activity and, as in 1997, a flurry of snowstorms that slow up work on the magazine. Meetings with the advisory committee are hastily scheduled between blizzards, and the editor makes the final decisions on the literature pieces. The finalists in the Witherington High School Writing Contest are chosen and congratulatory letters are mailed. The graphic design/production team has settled on a cover design, chosen paper and ink colors, and selected artwork to be published.

In the waning days of winter, the Oakwood staff gird up their collective loins and get down to the “real work.” Artwork is scanned or photographed. The selected literature, amounting to roughly 30,000 words, must be typed into a pagemaking program before the graphic designers can begin layout. After a desperately needed mini-seminar on QuarkXPress by Rodney Nowosielski, the editorial staff hit the keyboards. Several late nights later, the text is entered and proofread, and the production team can make negatives. Then it’s off the SDSU Print Lab, where Dennis Lundgren and his crew of remarkably patient experts print the pages. Everyone, including the editorial staff (who last year didn’t know a perfect binder from a hole in the ground), is press-ganged into assembly. The pages are collated, gathered, bound and trimmed.

The book is done! Back-slapping and goofy grins all around, as we admire the final product of seven months of work. Just in time for the Great Plains Writers Conference, the new Oakwood is unveiled. It still has to be advertised and sold, but the frantic period is over. And it all went by so quickly.

So why would any sane person choose to do this twice? There is a mind-boggling sense of satisfaction gained to see one’s name under the heading Editor on the front page of this wonderful magazine. The congratulations of professors and unstinting admiration of family and friends are splendid to receive. But even better is the knowledge that, thanks to the support of Student Association funding and efforts of everyone else listed on the front page, the Oakwood has survived for another year. In these times of money shortages and declining interest in liberal arts, SDSU’s magazine of creative literature and artistic expression shines as an example of this university’s determination to preserve a medium of expression for its talented students. By its very existence, I believe the Oakwood enriches the creative community of South Dakota. I fervently hope it may always be allowed to do so.

Lynn M. Yost
25 March 1997
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Honorable Mention:

Sox
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poetry
A Buckskinner's Prayer

The smell of a cedar fire,
    the whisper of the wind
in the cottonwoods.
The feel of a curly maple stock
    nestled against your cheek,
the taste of venison.
The sight of lodge fires
    through the early morning fog,
the knowledge that there is a place
without hate and prejudice.
These things haven't any price tags,
    they can't be bought nor sold nor taxed.
When my time comes to walk the Spirit Trail,
    I hope it leads to a place like this.
I don't need a mansion of gold or angel's wings,
    I'll be happy with a tipi
and a pair of buckskins.
Now I know there's all kinds of folks in Heaven,
    but God, you reckon you could set my camp
alongside of folks like these?

Ronald L. Bergman
Offerings to the various gods of humankind take many forms,
From the sacrifice of a fatted calf
to a couple of dollars shoved in an envelope,
From the smoke of incense
to the touch of an eagle feather.
The altars used take on many forms as well,
From golden chalices to wooden tables,
From a small fire to an entire mountain.

My humble offerings to the Creator are oftentimes observations of nature, of mankind, and of myself.
The altar that I use is the body which the Creator has given to me to use for awhile.
I hope that you may find solace in the smoke from this altar.

He that holds within his heart the light of truth,
Can tread fearlessly into the darkness of falsehood.

Some say that love has no thyme or reason,
and in some respects that’s true.
Though some folks take love lightly,
I for one, never do,
For I’ve been hurt in love before, more than I care to remember.
Those who take love lightly, don’t seem to be bothered by the pain.

The pain of learning that the love, you thought so true, was gone with as little trace as the sun upon the dew.
And so you look for a reason to vent your troubles on, but you find that love is but a reason within a reason.

The power of intension is indeed a powerful tool that can be used to heal or hurt, build or destroy.

I grew up hearing the words “Thou shalt not kill.” Though shalt not kill.........what?
Other humans? Animals? Plants?
If humans, then perhaps to be considered is the fact that some people are more like a sick and diseased animal, much like a rabied dog, than a human being.
But perhaps the statement refers not to who or what,
But to when and why.
For there are times when the taking of a life is unavoidable, Such as defense of country, defense of defenseless, and defense of self.

Ronald L. Bergman
Mosaic

Soggy leaves
cling to concrete –
pressed by footsteps
into mosaic patterns.

Kia Bielke

Quiet Observer

The empty lake’s mist swallowed
my boredom, as I sat on one side
of an opposing shore not seen

and watched sixty stars fall
and eavesdropped on loon families
crying their stories.

Kia Bielke
Kerri Risdal

*Man Made*

Linoleum Print

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Entertainment Tonight

The television is a wonderful thing.
There are television morals,
Talk show therapy, and
Sitcom situations.
Murder victims to survivors are 10 to 1.
Survivors to lawyers 5 to 1
Lawyers to cops are 1 to 20.
Cops to homicidal maniacs to jails are ...
  What jails?
Everything is:
  Live,
  Based on real life, or
  The news.
It brings families together–
  Just in time to watch a shuttle or a president’s head
  Explode.
Wildlife is FOX.
Kindergarten is ABC.
Extinction is PBS.

I need a VCR.

Rachel Bierman
No Man’s Land

A living thing,
A shifting valley amongst crawling, golden hills.
Animated by the lizard, the beetle, the wind.
The air melts, creates wavering disfigurations:
   Water appears and quickly evaporates,
   The image boils away,
   Out of reach, temporary.
Tangles of black thorns and branches:
   Scorch marks. Dragon’s domain.
   Vulcan’s Forge.
Sun, alone in the great, yellow blue sea-sky.
The moon, only, has company—
   Winking cousins of the harsh ruler of the day.
Sylvan, aquatic, human creatures shun this place,
Or,
It has shunned them;
   Protects its desolate beauty.

Rachel Bierman
The sway of soundless strides;
The Sahara stops to see...
Moving majestically, Magnificently; Maintaining meaningful movement.
Lament lost allies, friends, families, Elephant funerals for the fallen.
And move on, to new nyanzas
And West to warrant water; into the wind and Winter;
For Ivory, from valiant visages, vanquishes these virgin visions.

Rachel Bieman
Sheila Muth

*Broken House*

Photograph

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There is beauty in this world where I have never seen it before. I have found it in the smiles, seen it in the eyes, and heard it on the lips of people who come from all over the world. I may never lay eyes on all of God’s mountains, oceans, lakes, or hills, but I know these places are lovely. Anywhere such beautiful people could live, must be heavenly.

Kelly Bradbury
Could God Make Something Ugly?

When you look at someone, what do you see? What do you look for? What runs through your mind?

I demand to know, because I see how you treat him. Your eyes roll back and your lips separate in a way which turns a smile into a devilish sneer.

I demand that you tell me why you push him around and give others reason to laugh at him.

I want to know what goes on in the mind of people who look only at the surface...who can’t see beyond their prejudicial mind and find the beauty within.

If you truly believed there was a God, and you believed this God created both you and him, you wouldn’t treat him as you do. You wouldn’t, because you’d know he was your brother and God created him in the likeness of himself. You’d know that though he looks different on the outside, it doesn’t matter because God exists on the inside.

In the end, everyone gets hurt. When you insult him and make fun of him, he begins to hate himself. He spends the rest of his life trying to overcome this hatred.

In the end, you are hurt, because you have let one more of God’s beautiful creatures pass through your life without enriching him and making one more man a happy person.

In the end, God is hurt because the two creatures he created spend their lives hurting each other and picking up the pieces.

God created man. He made man in his own image. If you look at someone and see only ugliness then you have failed to see God in him.

I demand to know why you do this. I’m sure you have an answer...but, is it an answer you’d be willing to tell God?
FIRE

Dancing, whirling, burning;
Luring in everything around me.
All dance my dance and are scorched
    by the heat of my passion.
My life is a whirlwind;
    burning hot and fierce, spinning out of control.
Grasping at everything,
Only to have my dreams fall to ashes in my hands.

The helpless moths are drawn to me—
    deceived by my brightness,
    destroyed by my fire.
Tongues of flame leap from my fingertips
    igniting the passions of everyone.

My love does not warm the heart and
    embrace the soul—
It burns with a flame that cannot be quenched,
Scorching those unable to withstand my heat.

Amy Cissell
Stephanie Vander Wal

*Abandoned Acres*

Etching
MEDITATION

never together, never apart;
all are churned in one bowl
producing all that is, was, and will be.
each can destroy, none dare.

basic need, basic hatred
enmity beyond control
tolerable only because of necessity;
opposites drawn toward each other, unwillingly, unavoidably.

each asserts power, wanting to,
but yet not daring to dominate, for fear of destruction.
balance, ever delicate and shifting, must be preserved –
the universe must remain unbroken.

from whence does love come?
– from everything.
it is drawn from all of creation,
living and non-living give to me their power.

I am creation:
the elements, life death, love, hate;
all is in me.

Amy Cissell
Untitled

Devoid of color, shape, form-

A dusty day. Dry wind blowing
through the empty house that
Even the ghosts have long since fled.
Lying here, under the knife of the ancient surgeon
while the pulsating heart is bled.
The leeches suck with their fabled healing power-
Absorbing the good; the pure; the happy; and
leaving the decaying, filthy insides to rot.
Putrid and vile maggots are eating me inside out
Until the body is like the house: ancient, empty-
Even my soul has fled.
Nothing is left but the cold, lonely emptiness,
Shivering with detached fear and hate-
hate for what is left-hate for the soul-
Not strong enough to live
Not weak enough to die.

Amy Cissell
Ramble Thought

my life has been like a helpless little ship being cast side to side by a never changing sea. or as if i was a penny being passed from one person to the next. so tarnished by time you can’t tell it was a penny anymore. i have always been so passive, always agreeing with others and their thoughts and ways. never saying no. i go along trying to make others happy. sometimes it makes me happy, not all the time as i wish. my outside has changed so much, but the inside is the same, so succumb to itself never letting others know my true feelings or thoughts. externally the look is rough and ragged but the inside quite soft and vulnerable. only knowing short-term, hardly ever long-term. never knowing what to say or how. and when it is said it is never right. the words goes as far as the lips but by the time they get to the ear i know they are wrong. i convince myself, over and over, that i need no one, but i find desperately that i do. i can’t conform to anyone’s idea of what i am. i try hard but it never works out. my life is an interesting one, on lookers stop in and leave just the same. i think too much, perhaps i shouldn’t.

Jen Conners

FRANTIC LANGUAGE APPARATUS

death symphony
yet I felt smooth beneath language
music never whispers
after a bloody black day
frantic urge to use raw shadows
as part of my delirious chant
the wind is gone
still I scream madly
needing the will to live
I recall vision behind the worship

Rebecca Dinger
Betsy Gilbertson

*Del Sol*

Linoleum Print
A Whisper to Wolf

You who understand the darkness
By tilting my face to the light
Dance with me in the rain
Tell me the story again
Don’t leave out the part
Where they live happily ever after
You are the dream I awakened from as a child,
Stretching out my arms
Never Knowing why.
You are the voice in my head that lulled me to sleep
When the dark was strange
And the nights were long.
You are the hand I held so tightly
When I was lost in the forest
And couldn’t find my way out
Keeper of my secrets, lover of my dreams,
Fellow star-gazer.
It is for you that my lips sing the song my heart has always known
That wonderful melody where the words don’t rhyme
Yet the tune tumbles over rocks like water.
It is you I saw in my mirror one night
You whose arms I felt around me on the roof.
Your hand that forced mine to drop the knife.
Your spirit was with mine long before our hearts met
And somewhere long ago
I remember waking up with you beside me
Stroking my temples and kissing my forehead.
Every set of phantom arms that held me
Were yours.
Always you have walked beside me
Invisible, unreachable,
Touching when I needed you most.

Rebecca Dinger
I had to follow behind;  
It’s not proper for a  
Girl  
To aid in shouldering the burden.  
So I followed behind as they bore him along  
Clutching tightly,  
Carrying him past the hammock  
Where we used to argue  
Over whose turn it was to swing.  
And when I tipped him out to claim it  
He screamed and ran to tell his mother  
Who hushed him; I was “company”  
They bore him past the pond  
Where one of our forgotten cohorts had fallen in  
leaning too close  
And he’d pulled her out, shouting that  
She knew she couldn’t swim; what in God’s name  
Possessed her?  
This time it was I who ran to tell his mother; I had grown  
from “company” to “family”  
His mother sent her home and hugged him.  
I clutched my rose tighter as they  
Moved past the big old pine tree,  
Whose base and boughs had been our house  
And once he kissed me when we were playing war.  
It was his big dying scene,  
Clutching at phantom wounds, and pledging  
“Only you, forever and ever.”  
We were nine, I think, and I told him  
I’d never love another.  
Then we both jumped up giggling  
And ran inside for lemonade.
Into the house.
I followed behind him
As they carried him home.
And who bore him there?
His father, whose kind words were few and far between.
Two uncles and two cousins he’d seen once a year;
And a boy who had tolerated our games in childhood but
    deserted us upon adolescence.
And I
Who helped him hide stray kittens from his mother,
Who lied and said he had hit a patch of gravel when he
    broke his arm biking down Duck Pond Hill
Who provided him with laughter when his father’s silence
    switched to violence,
Who kissed him once at nine and once at eleven and once all
    night long when we were seventeen...
I followed behind
Bearing the heaviest rose in the world in my hands.

Rebecca Dinger
Sheila Muth

*Untitled*

*Watercolor Painting*
It was dark when I left,
And dark when I came back.
You were still there, leaning on the car,
Your arms crossed and your eyes hurt.
At first, you were ready to fight with me,
But you ended up fighting to get inside me.
I could see on your face,
You didn’t understand, couldn’t,
Because I couldn’t let you.

What made you stay until I got back?
It wasn’t for answers to questions
You didn’t even know yet.

You chased me until I sat,
And then you sat, too, next to me.
(Isn’t it odd how walls come down in the dark?)
I knew that there was no way to make you see.
Much less feel,
Yet I think you did.
Things I said to you, I never said before;
There were a few that I hadn’t even realized where there.
It was all dark, like empty night,
At least until the stars peeked through.
The more you nudged, the gentler your voice became,
The voice I’d rarely heard before that;
Once in a bookstore, once in a church parking lot.

They say a boy’s voice gets deeper as he becomes an adult.
I think a boy’s voice gets gentler as he becomes a man.
I know there’s more to who you are than you show,
And more to who you were than you’ve said.
It’s strange, though, how the night makes it okay
To be.
It was cold and chilly when you went home.
It was also still night, but
Somehow, when I finally turned off the porchlight,
It wasn’t dark.
Vitilation

I killed a guy 2000 years ago.
And I killed an honest guy, 130 years ago.
I killed both Kennedy’s. I killed the King.
Don’t mess with me. just fear me.
I will strike again.

Pilate did nothing.
Nor did Booth.
Oswald did nothing.
I did the deeds.
Civilization forever bleeds.

Be wary of me;
I dropped the bomb.
I took the youth from his mom.
I started the disease
There’s no avoiding me.
Who am I? You ask.
I wear my mask,
and I taint history,
like a vulture,
feeding on its prey.

Josh Hoffner
Yesterday/Today/Tomorrow

I ran once from my distant past
until I learned that I was my own
history
I used to dream of future times
then I discovered that my future
was in me

Sartre said.
(and I believe it true)
that we are not complete, nor through,
that is, until we are dead.
This rushing river, Time,
is marked with moving markers
we have made
blithely, blindly, we divide
this swiftly moving current which we ride
into ‘where we were’
(even though our memory is inaccurate)
‘where we are’
(which keeps on changing)
and where we think we’re going
(and that we’ll never know).

Surely some mere mortal
could devise a better
scheme
but only God may say, “I AM”
The rest can only
dream.

Richard A. Jensen
Fear

the
light
fluffy
snow
f
e
on my hand
like birds and cars
my hand wanders
away from it
ALL
the powerful few
wait and see
running
stumbling
rising
trying to get away
fly
fly
fly away
to be silent
and safe among
the trees.

Andy Jessen
One

One Hyena
laughs and growls.
it runs and preys.
Slinking,
sneaking.

One Group
knows and sees.
They pause and wait.
Thinking,
peeking.

One Force
laughs then pounces.
All together now.
Drinking,
eating.

One Question
asked and re-asked.
"Why?" the dead call.
Sinking,
sleeping.

Andy Jessen
Silence Spilled

Silence spilled over the lake.
As a young child sang nursery rhymes
And cried.
Low whaling of pain and anguish
Filled the child’s ears.
Mary had a little lamb...
But mommy had bruises
And daddy, full of liquor, cruises
To town for another drink.

Hours later the child appears
In a tear stained face,
Only to see her mother
Nursing a bleeding smile.
Little do they know, a mile
From home daddy lies in a ditch.

The call comes in,
Ringing with excitement.
The man on the other end says
Sorry mam, your husbands dead.
Mommy drops the receiver
And cries.
Relief at last,
Relief from the past.
Mommy says “daddy won’t hurt us anymore”.

Melissa S. Kulp
Richard Jensen

*Onward and Upward...*

Photograph
The Operation

In the gut-blackness of night I walk
Across the city’s arms and legs and torso, along the ridges of firm muscle, these hills all wet with snow-melt; through the trees, the tangle of body’s hair; across the skin of a living and breathing force composed of one hundred-thousand heartbeats.
Through the sleeping dark I walk, illuminated by lights both natural and created.
The pale moon imitates itself against the concentrated beams of streetlamps, the sons of the celestial sun, and I long for natural darkness.
Night rules supreme however, and still there are places where the city’s slumber can be intoned.
Where the shadows fall can make all the difference.

In the gut-blackness of night I walk, though not alone.
Freeman walks with me, a poet whom I celebrate and am pleased to keep company with.
Together, we are the vampire poets; metropoli-surgeons–maverick doctors of verse who prepare to operate upon our sleeping patient.
To the heart is where we must go; through the veins and capillaries, vessels small and large; these streets are the veins and these sidewalks the capillaries.
We probe with our senses the source of arteriole excitement:
The metrical systole and diastole of life; the rhythm, the music of the city.
To the heart we must go.
To the source.
To the center. This could save us and we know it; the city knows what we do not.
Along these roads is the stuff of life; the pedestrian and bicyclist; the policeman, the taxi-cab driver, the gas-station attendant; the motorcyclist and news reporter; the drug dealer, the bum, the drunk.
All of these are cells as we are cells in the city’s bloodstream, organs, and tissues.
Some are diseased and some well.
I am both diseased and well, and the city knows the cure.

We make our cut with delicate precision, making our way to the city’s heart along the street’s fine incision.
I light a cigarette and we take to the darkest road we can find.
The Seasons of Life

As a howling wind blows through changing leaves of trees,
I feel my body cringe when our summer world begins to freeze.

I reminisce about my childhood,
of memories so fond,
The times I thought would last,
were here and now are gone.

Life passes us by so quickly and changes as we go,
No sooner are we new spring blossoms, then freezing in the snow.

Tanya Larson

Friends

Just as the sky grew bright with dawn,
and a new day had begun;
the three of us came to a fork in the road,
facing the rising sun.

One took the path to the left;
one took the path to the right;
the other turned away from the sun
and strode back into the night.

James Lopez
Before Kindergarten

Hot Cream of Wheat,
the smell, warm and sweet,
makes me hungry now.
A layer of sugar, cooled and cracked,
sweetened each bite.
The spoon waited on the table.
I liked to push it shiny
through the sugar and feel it press
thick cereal to the side.

Later, a smile lifted tired eyes
and it was nap time.
I nestled into the pocket of love
shaped near my mother’s tummy
and fell asleep.

Steve Lovett

I Want To

I want to
make love to
you
in an up
stairs bedroom
where Autumn
sunlight is splashed
on a hard
wood floor.

Steve Lovett
Molly Engquist

*When I...*

Linoleum Print
Rainbow

He tossed a soft look across the table, 
over books scattered and stacked. 
She caught it and laid it down between 
the pages before her like a prom rose to save. 
Writing on notebook paper, fringed and messy, 
he wrote a wish and offered it to her.

“May I kiss you?” she read.

A flock of butter flies 
flitted between her toes 
and rose to tickle her thigh. 
She nodded politely.

They rolled forward and fell 
up and over 
the books below, 
the pages dimpled with words 
like a redwood deck spotted by rain.

A little girl stands barefoot, 
cool drops shivering her legs; 
holding her father’s hand, 
she hopes to see a rainbow.

Steve Lovett
Green-Eyed Monster

While you worked on your mirage
    I worked on my sanity
Unaffected is what I long to be
But the memories unlatch the rage

They seep in

And there I am
    Alone, unbridled, fulfilled
Questions never answered
    I hope you write about me

Late, springtime, lunar
    Crisp leaves underfoot
I long for your torment, angst
    Lonely, bridled, unfulfilled

Your eyes weren't green

Marcy Moss
Between Steel Things

Thank Heaven for that mean machine
That smashes boobs between steel things
Cold as ice, and hold your breath
Get that thing off my breast!

The pain it sears through my chest
I'll stand still, I'll try my best
Finally over, I can breath
At least for now, I can believe.

The wait is long, it seems forever
My breast still trying to recover
Won't they please relive my worry
At least till next year, oh please hurry.

The call it came, I shouldn't delay
But please be here, oh my, what a day
I can't believe, did they just say
Away it must go, it can not stay.

It's hard to believe
It's such a small thing
Could change my life
So momentously.

Away it went, glad to say
Never return, that's what I pray
Thank Heaven for that mean machine
That smashes boobs between steel things.

Lynda N. Miller
Jennifer Fordyce

*Indian II*

Etching
Escape from Knowledge

Bright ink splashed across the page
Quick to erase for the fear
It’s so strong. What if someone sees?
Would it be the end of the world?

Persuasive teachers eager to eat
And drink in the students’ their creativity
Isn’t it time yet? To speed far away
From this school, to anywhere but here.

Sara J. Olson
Forsaken

Going to see my queen.
   Good News!
   The battle is won!
But when I see you in your chamber,
I find
   it’s just begun.
In your arms
you hold another,
in a moment’s stolen bliss.

My trust
lie there
forsaken,
   by this other that you kiss.
Alas,
you’ve seen me standing.
A king gazing at what’s lost.

Empassioned eyes
   in guilt
assess,
   Their secret pleasure’s cost.
A monarch ought consider,
the price
   of love sincere.
A king can ill afford to find
his heart a mutineer.

A treason kiss
   on knightly lips,
pierces, a poison dart.
A secret lust,
my trust
has taken.
   A kingdom falls apart.

Tyler Omoth
The Farmer’s Lament

Look at them, eyeing at their pleasure
everything I’ve known- my life, my living,
precious memories for their sieving,
hunting for bargains at their leisure.

Heedless of my pain, outliving
the farm I was. Fate unforgiving.

Now all I had to know and treasure,
lies before them in dollar measure.

Tyler Omoth

Thoughts on a 3-2 Pitch

Oh God. This guy killed me last time.
I’ve got him this time though. Curve?
Are you nuts? He’d kill it! Fastball
up and in? Now you’re talkin’! Here’s
the high heater. Okay kid, you have to
remember your mechanics. Step back
Turn the foot. Now balance

Back straight, tuck the
shoulder in. Start
compressing and

Explode!

Duck.

Tyler Omoth
Betsy Gilbertson
Mountains
Linoleum Print
Making medicine

Mortar and pestle

can pulverize no

remorse to relief;

Sorry can’t Sorry

eough. I persist.

to insist that hurt

things don’t nice back, but

your mouth says I do

not need to Sorry

anymore.

Jason Ranek
A psalm for Jennifer’s tummy

I look at your nuggets,  
shaped by wheat and barley,  
at the edges and roughness  
that make you crunchy.  
What are human bodies  
that you nourish them,  
or the organism that you sustain?

Blessed are the bodies who have  
discovered Grape-nuts,  
bodies who have  
acquired the tiny nuggets!  
Eating them is more rewarding  
than Fruity Pebbles,  
their grain is more valuable  
than colored sugar.

Are Grape-nuts fortified  
with bright colors and sugar,  
or are they fortified  
with vitamins and minerals?  
Truly, vitamins are better  
than bright colors,  
nourishment than sweetness.

For Grape-nuts sustain  
the wise bodies until lunch,  
but the childish bodies go hungry  
30 minutes later with only  
Fruity Pebbles in their tummies.

“Grape-nuts, energy for life.”

Jennifer Larson
Pilgrim

The bone-splitting stakes of my
headlights crucify the country
road in white pale nakedness.

I stop, humble the beams before
the light of the moon.
I dance on the toes
of my shadow at a crossroads
and my boots resurrect the highway.

Steve Lovett
Emilie Hagney

*Leger in Black and White*

Inking
A Bath with Sean Connery

Wanting to escape I cry out
Calgon, Take me away—and I slip into silky
Water, frothy with bubbles

A cold beer and a hot cigarette join me
I light a mulberry candle
In the belly of a glass kitten

With the push of a button
The Three Tenors serenade their cara mia in my little bathroom;
Three resplendent men in elegant tuxes

As the waves of music roll over me
I lap the soft, silky water over my body
Luxuriating as the reincarnate Of Paul Rubens once again

My hands lazily stroke the curve
Of my hips and thigh
And fingers trace the outline
Of my lip, cheeks, nose and brow

I gently lay my face
Upon the perfumed satin—A wonderfully sensuous pillow

I finish my bath with Sean in a trance like state and
With reluctance I answer the door to inspiration Clad only in a towel

Cara L. Schott
Wal-Mart Discount City

I watch the Wal-Mart cashier as her forehead wrinkles in concentration
A stray curl lies plastered to her sweaty cheek
I fight back the urge to tuck it behind her ear--
Instead I smile.

She is a hidden flower in the jungle
Of colorful goods
Bright lights
Clacking registers

When she thinks no one is watching,
She props her leg up under the counter
And stifles a yawn.

Cara L. Schott
Scared of the Dark

The night takes hold,
the shadows sink down.
The night light is bold;
makes anyone frown.
   What was that?
(I heard it, I did it.)
   Did you see that?
In the shadows it slid...

I gather my courage,
count One...TWo... THREE-
rip up the covers
grasp the bed with a knee.
It’s gone now, I think.
I scared it away.
I’ll try now to sleep
and last ‘til the day.

Jennifer Stevens
Roberto

A head that holds something waits
for fingers
that know the trouble
of being smart
and stupid
all at once.

Fingers knowing
the artistry
and the majesty
of the velveteen tapestry
I called his skin
(in the dark).

All and all
and heading down
to nowhere fast-
almost far faster
than two hands,
one heart,
and one head
could resist.

My head knew why a fall
could be so dangerous-
his did not.

Sara Syverson
Vivien

What was it about him that moved me so?

Maybe it was the chocolate cake he fed me-
an all-I-could-eat buffet
of his sweetness for the taking.
Ah, he loved melting me down
with his lines of poetry
of kingdoms and lovers-
his lines and lines of
who the
hell
really
knew what?

Maybe it was the way he spoke, you know,
*hands alive under brown eyes.*

Or maybe it was the passion
and fear I felt every time he kissed me.

It was life-
a grand life-
’til I realized (and I did realize),
that he would
never
truly come to see me.

She had him before it began.

*Sara Syverson*
Woven

Weave me into the night,
I won’t tell.

All mysterious and glittering I would be.
Silent,
but roaring inside.

I would teach every night galaxy to sing
the music given
to the hearts of lovers
falling in love.

Lovers loving
and dancing in love,
oh yes, they would become the stars,
and I would become the shine in the black-
expanding like hours
and leaving this land
to the birds of morning.

Sara Syverson
et al.: Oakwood

Sheila Muth

*Orange Flower*

Acrylic Painting

52
Felicity in Black

This
is
my
white
heaven.

She calls—but I’m not getting up.

I am the
Goddess
of Stretch and Yawn.

Sun
on white cobblestone
make me feel
divine.

I am allowed to soak
up
every moment
of light.

I can think of nothing
better to do
in the world than
to stretch
myself
open
right

here.

Sara Syverson
Kool-Aid Moustaches

Knox-blocks
and Kool-Aid moustaches
fishing for bullheads
and throwing them back
tank tops
and bare feet
searching the barn
for hidden batches of kittens
riding bikes down a bumpy, gravel road
Lassie running ahead.
Summer on the farm;
a child’s simple paradise.

Laurie Troth
Sorting Memories

i can’t seem to figure it out

was it the couch that brought back the memories of the dog
or was it the other way around?

of course, it was the former-mans best friend (the couch)

i loved the dog too

she was so smart and playful
best of all, she had her nose in as much trouble as i did

but what of the that big brown couch?
so comfortable and inviting yet innocent
and inanimate?
but
the focus of so much attention:
love and aggression

my love for its comfort
the dog’s love (aggression) for it’s buttons

i suppose if you’re a dog it’s fun to bite off buttons

i’ve now figured it out
it’s the lack of buttons that brings back the memories
of mans best friend
and the dog
yes well
no, really

memories of the whole thing
childhood mine
not yours

Matt Vidal
Tabloid

A woman shoots her foot to rid it of a callus,
Princess Diana is moving from the palace.
A thousand-pound man lives in his bed,
Twenty astrologists tell what’s ahead.
Satan’s bones found in Washington state,
Bigfoot captured on videotape.
A woman impregnated by a UFO,
A guy who says he’s two hundred years old.
Elizabeth Taylor on divorce number seven,
A girl who claims she met Elvis in heaven.
Twelve top tips to improve your love life,
A story of a man who’s had sixteen wives.
I glance through the stories as though I don’t care-
Hold it! Check out this baby’s blue hair!
I only read the tabloids to pass the time,
Waiting my turn in the grocery store line.
What can it hurt? It’s a harmless addiction
And I always appreciate a fine work of fiction.

Laurie Troth
To unlock the door

The one who holds the key
will be the one who will see.
What that key looks like
is unclear uncertain.
It’s something you have to find
inside your soul
inside your mind.
It’s something that has to fit
into whatever it is you call peace.
And when that door is opened,
when you see whatever it is you see,
you will know.
And you will believe.

Jeremy Waltner

You, me and the moon

The moon’s thirsty eyes
fall upon my
outstretched arms.
And I am burned
by its cool, salty breath
on my bare skin.
Alone, I stand in the
middle of your presence
wondering how its possible
for anything to be
so beautiful.

Jeremy Waltner
Sincerely Confused

To me,

I think I know what direction I’m heading
Why have I switched majors so many times?

I think I know who I am.
Why do I ask so many questions about myself?

I think I love myself.
Why do I hate everything I do?

I think I know what love is.
Why do I hurt what I love?

I think I am the sucker of image. Everyone around me seems to know who they are, where they are going, and are so proud.
Am I wearing a mask, too?

I think I am normal, that everyone is like me.
Why do I sit here and judge myself by their facades?

Sincerely,
Confused

Rebecca Weisz
Population Statistic

Virginia, Egypt, California, England
The world, his home
Percussion, his passion
Whipcrack snare
Thwack, thwack
Hued bronze explosions
Ping, crash, splash
Octobans
Tlok, pop-pop
Hi-hat
tick, tic-tic
Intricate patterns, four-on-the-floor
Rock, reggae, jazz, fusion
Composer, arranger, performer
Legend, idol, rhythmatist
Steward Copeland

Louis George Whitehead
Echo

Sound of nothing
echoes from canyon walls,
back, forth, back again,
still,
substance escapes
and reality stays mercifully hidden.
Night is the most beautiful:
darkness is warmth
and silence is strength
at times like these,
when, alone, a little scared,
i stand at the edge,
saying nothing
and relishing its never ending echo,
humble, proud at the thought
of my little place
in all this,
in my ability to escape
into my insignificant role
in the nature of things.
i love this world.

Bill Wright
Faceless
Eight-thirty A.M.
Fluid lines of motion
   broken into blank stares,
   empty faces,
blending, merging,
   between towers of cold steel.
A million wristwatches,
   A million nervous glances.
An ongoing stream of motion,
   Motion without energy, without action, without intelligence
or direction.
Dormant motion.
Motion seeded in stagnancy.
Motion without hope.
Motion without life.

Steel and flesh become one
   as rush hour continues
blending into a mass of organs and wires,
   an instoppable cybernetic machine
   with no trace of will or conscience.
Love loses all meaning
   and suddenly, life is no more.

Bill Wright
Eye of the Storm: A Tribute to Domestic Violence

Jen Conners

Photograph

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Last Call

In the midst of fog,
in the thick of despair,
a lone figure
   wanders, lost,
ringing a bell,
echoing,
the loneliest of sounds,
and weeping tears of hope.

Bill Wright
Stream of Conscience

I flow between rocks and stones,
    bouncing off points of resistance,
    shying away from real struggle.
I am channeled.
Control is not mine,
    not really,
as I rush onward
    in a dizzying, spiraling series
    of twists and turns.
Every inch I move,
    a lifelong commitment:
    no turning back,
    no second guesses.
How I long for freedom,
    but the rocks turn me away
    and the stones are unimpressed with my power.
I flow over, beneath, around,
    but never through,
    and never by choice.
How I long to choose my own path,
    regardless of resistance,
    regardless of struggle.
How I long for freedom,
    but it's so hard to let go...

Bill Wright
Ancient Ritual

I walk through darkness
I wear your love as a shroud
Silence envelops me
Thoughts of you
Dance through my head
An ancient ritual
It brings my tears like rain
They cannot wash away
The memories
Of moonlight glinting off snow
Flashing against
The cerulean blue of your eyes
The bird’s-wing touch
Of your hand in mine
It was all a dream
I realize this and know
There was no love
Naked now
I walk still

Through the darkness

Alone

Marsha Yonker
prose
I'd Always Stop... 
by Kia Bielke

... by Grandma's house on my way home, after helping Dad with the barn chores. That's what I did every summer evening.

Grandma always had a big garden. She'd wear Grandpa's dirty seed cap and dull mustard-colored shirt to go weed and pick; they kept the mosquitoes from biting her skin. As the sun went down, she'd sit on the glider in front of the house, shelling peas and cutting yellow beans into the silver bowl on her lap.

Dad asked where she wanted the garden this year, so he could plant soybeans around the spot. Grandma used baling twine stretched between two sticks to guide the seeds into a row. I helped her plant sweet corn this summer. It was my first time. Usually my sister helped her, until she went away to college.

Like I said, I'd always stop by grandma's house. I remember Grandpa rocking in the KMart lawn chair, cats weaving around his ankles. I remember the stars popping out of the sky as the three of us sat and talked.

And I remember how Grandma made sure to leave the yard light on until I got home, although I could find my way even in the pitch black. I just followed the path the cats and dogs had dug into the grass. I remember praying that I would never forget the way the calm light peeked out of the houses while baby pigs squealed in the barns, oblivious to the silence. I'd lay belly up in the middle of the lawn and realize I was part of the earth. I'd imagine the gravity holding me to the ground while the earth was spinning through space. I'd wonder if Grandma ever did that when she was a kid, when they plowed the fields with two horses, Captain and Skip, and one-bottom plow.

Before I even woke up in the morning, Grandma would be out in her garden, weeding before the sun got too hot. Then, she'd return to the garden as the sun went down. And I'd stop again to talk as I made my way home from helping Dad with the barn chores.
Like a Ghost...  
by Jeffrey S. Gleason

October 31, 1987... a foggy, drizzly afternoon walk from the dirt road to my perch located in an oak grove known as "the funnel." The first fifteen minutes is always a period of few sights or sounds... a period of adjustment, normality so to speak, for the wildlife and myself. An hour into my vigil the squirrels appeared as did a large number of transient robins. The scene was mesmerizing although the sound was rather raucous... the beating of wings, rustling of leaves, the incessant calling of birds back-and-forth. The hammering of a red-headed woodpecker and the high pitched "wheep, wheeep" of wood ducks overhead are a welcome respite. My mind begins to wander... dreaming, wishing, almost feeling that "he" should appear. A trance-like state... Quickly though I'm back, but not quite reality... for time spent in the tree is never reality; thank god! A welcome visitor had appeared below, ghost-like as they oftentimes do. A large tan form with yellow and brown, aged worn headgear. The moment came and went as I watched him disappear down the draw and out of sight. I knew or thought I knew what the outcome would be. A hush had again fallen over the landscape. I followed and eventually found what I had so longed for while standing poised high above the oak leaf carpet. Almost impossible to believe the stick in my hand could fell such a creature, big as he was. I knelt beside the fallen giant, thanking and praying to whomever was listening... my ritual, a way of paying back what I had so gratefully received.
The long arduous journey was nearly over. He made his way swiftly and skillfully over the treacherous mountain pass. He had crossed deep ravines, scaled steep cliffs, and taken little notice of the freezing cold, all the while pressing on with strength and endurance born of a steadfast determination. The closeness to his destination fueled the fire of his energy, and he scrambled up a huge boulder in an effort to glimpse that which he sought.

Once on top, he squinted and scanned the jagged precipice against the cold, grey sky. A lone hawk screeched and soared above him as he searched for a sign. His heart leapt. There it was. Close to the top he could make out the shape of a stone wall on the edge of a cliff. He smiled as he scrambled down and renewed his efforts. It would not be long now.

It had been nearly two years since he had left his village in the far distant south. His difficult journey had been fraught with many dangers and perils, and more than once he had nearly lost his life. He had left his village with nothing but the clothes on his back and had crossed hundreds of miles of wilderness and rough terrain. Forced to use all the fighting skills he had learned, he had defended himself against numerous attacks by bandits and wild animals. He had learned how to live off the land and had hardened his body and trained his mind to ignore the elements.

At last he had reached the Tai Xiang mountains, and there, somewhere in the cloud-covered peaks, was an ancient monastery where he was to find a master who would take him through the final stages of his warrior training. His teacher had taught him all he could and told him that he would have to journey far in order to find the master who could help him complete his studies.

His heart quickened as he finally came upon a stone stairway that was cut into the side of the mountain. A mist curled about his body as he ascended the smooth, cold stair, and all was a heavy, dreaming, white silence as he came upon the entrance to the monastery.

As he strode through the archway into the monastery’s interior, his heart began to sink. It was empty. The crumbling stone walls brooded silently over the ancient floor which lay cracked
and exposed, staring into the sky. There was no roof, no buildings, nothing; except for an ancient well that lay in the middle of the floor. He walked over to the wall on the far side and peered through a crumbling section at the valley below. It lay shrouded in mist and stretched for miles until it disappeared into the distance. He wondered, for the first time, how far he had come. He glanced again at the empty space. Perhaps the master would meet him here, he thought, or perhaps he was watching him at that very moment. There was nothing to do but wait. He sat down on the edge of the well and waited. Hours passed. He quickly dismissed any thoughts that his teacher may have been mistaken, or that he had been wrong about the location of the monastery. He knew his teacher was a wise and virtuous man, and that there would have been no deceit. He didn't know what to do. The screech of a hawk echoed through the mountains, as the words of his teacher echoed through his mind: "When faced with a problem you cannot resolve, you must stop, and search within yourself for the answer."

A light snow began to fall. Time and snow passed silently about him as he sat on the edge of the well and thought. At last the sky began to darken, and he knew he would have to seek shelter for the night. As he got up to leave, he paused for a moment, and stared into the well. There at the very bottom, upon the still waters, he saw nothing but his own reflection.
The Father I Never Knew
by Anna C. Peters

Mark Peters is a man I know well. I've known him for my entire life; he is my father. The Mark Peters I know has delivered packages for Federal Express for as long as I can remember. He wakes up at 4:15 in the morning and goes on walks everyday after supper. Each night, he's in bed by eight o'clock, so that he has a chance to read. The man I know is a forty-nine year old husband and father of two children nearing adulthood.

There is another Mark Peters, a man who I barely know at all; I've only met him once or twice. The last time I saw him was when the Gulf War began—he was crying. He is a man with stories about the war in Vietnam. I've always wanted to know him better, but I've been afraid to ask him questions. Until now.

On Easter Sunday, 1969, Mark Peters, a twenty-two year-old with plastic frame glasses, left for Vietnam. Having overstayed his leave to spend more time with his fiancee, he was three days AWOL when he arrived at Oakland Army Base. Everyone he had trained with had already left for Vietnam and were eventually assigned to the 101st Airborne Division. As it turned out, my dad was lucky to have waited three days. The 101st Airborne had one of the war's highest fatality rates due to their location near the Demilitarized Zone and the North Vietnamese regular army. Their tow attempts at parachute assaults proved disastrous.

"With all of the parachutes getting stuck in trees, the Vietnamese considered the 101st to be easier than shooting fish in a barrel," my dad explained to me. "GIs used to say that only two things fell from the sky, bird shit and Airborne."

Mark was first sent to the 90th replacement unit at Bien Hoa, a suburb of Saigon. "Immediately after getting off the plane I noticed the intense heat. It had to be around 105 degrees," he told me. "Even the water, which was hung from trees in lister bags to keep cool, was hot. It was like drinking sweat."

One of his initial impressions of Saigon was that it looked like a big dump. During his first drive to the replacement unit, he looked out from the rear of the troop truck and saw what appeared to be trash heaps. He later found out that what he had seen were actually people's homes. The countryside had been devastated and people had relocated to the outskirts of the city. According to my father, "It was worse than any ghetto."
The first night he spent in Vietnam, there was a B-52 strike, dropping dozens of 500 pound "daisy cutters." Everyone woke up and took cover, except for my dad. "While I was in Vietnam I slept very well,' my dad explained. "I knew that if I slept like a baby, and was killed during the night, I would never know what happened."

I asked my father if there were any incidents that stood out in his mind, and he told me about an image in the Mekong Delta that he remembers "as clear as a photograph." His platoon was "on-line," walking about 30 feet apart from one another, across a rice paddy. They were searching for booby traps so a helicopter could land to pick them up. When a booby trap is triggered there is a distinct popping sound, and five seconds later the grenade explodes. While they crossed the field there was a "pop" and everyone immediately recognized the sound. The entire platoon turned their heads to see where the noise had come from. In the middle of the line there was one man who remained looking straight ahead, Robert Lee Woolwine. "I can still see everyone looking at the one guy," my dad said slowly. "He stood there totally helpless. Ironically he had returned to the field the day before, after recovering from previous grenade wounds."

My father was lucky; the only injury that he received was a scrape from a bullet. After having spent a few weeks in Vietnam, my father's platoon walked into an ambush. Six men, including my father, were pinned down in the open; there was nothing for them to hide behind. My father hid his face behind a radio, which he was designated to carry. He laid there shooting his gun, and listening to bullets fly towards him. "Finally I realized that if I didn't shoot, no one shot back," he explained, "so I stopped shooting." Of the six men pinned down, two were killed, two were injured, and my father was shot through his sleeve and the heel of his boot.

After four months on the field, my dad started to hear rumors that a unit was going to be pulled from Vietnam. "The rumors were incredible,' my dad laughed as he spoke. "I started a rumor one morning and it got back to me by the next night." It turned out that some of the rumors were true; The Ninth Infantry was the first unit pulled from Vietnam. Each night the names were called off of those to be reassigned to other units. The remainder were to remain in the Bravo Company and return to the "world." Out of the 90 members of the Bravo Company, my father's was the last name to be called. After four months and twenty days, he was to be reassigned to Hawaii as a military policeman and left "Nam" behind.

At first he was happy, but then he began to think about the people who were still fighting; guilty feelings began to build up. "After awhile I realized that those guilt feelings could only have been avoided by being killed in Vietnam."
It's been over twenty-five years since my dad's experience in Vietnam but his life and his attitudes are still affected by the war. He is distrustful of all types of organizations. "Organizations are anti-human," he told me, "the people who act as leaders tend to be the biggest fools of all." He also has a hard time trusting governments. According to him, "the world is run by people who shouldn't be given any power at all." He says that this should not be viewed as a hatred but as crystal clear reality.

However, he believes that people who haven't been through his or a similar experience have missed a lot. My dad says, "If everyone experienced war, the world would be a very different place." But then he laughs, "Actually I doubt that very much."
Cara L. Schott

*Untitled 02*

Photograph
Talk of Things to Come
by Laurie Troth

I wonder if she knew the day that Johnny died. I did, now that I look back on it. I remember walking up to smell of a fresh country breeze blowing in through the window and music drifting up from downstairs. I found John in the kitchen, drinking his morning coffee and listening to a George Strait song on the radio. I tried to convince him to take the day off—I wanted us to take a family picnic at Rose Hill, a nearby lake, for the day. But trying to get a farmer to take off a sunny day in August is like convincing the sun to rise in the west for a day. But trying to get a farmer to take off a sunny day in August is like convincing the sun to rise in the west for a day. Anyway, how could he have known that his wedding ring would get caught in the chain of that combine? He couldn't have known. But did I? Or more frightening, did Katie?

That day was like any other August morning. We lived on a farm close to my dad's farm in the heartland of South Dakota, and had been helping my dad with his farming. Our farmhouse was old, but the old-fashioned porch and wooden floors somehow added charm to the place. Our home was snuggled in the Wessington Hills, overlooking farms and small towns for miles around. We loved to sit on our front porch and watch the sun go down and the stars come out during the hot Midwestern summers. John and I loved our little piece of heaven. Someday we would take over the whole farm when Dad retired.

Maybe I should've known that our lives were too good to be true. I always told John that he didn't need to wear his wedding ring during work, that no other farmer did. But he insisted that he liked to wear it to remind everyone of our love. How could such a beautiful symbol of our love be the thing that took John away from me forever?

That fateful August morning three years ago, John had left early to help out one of our neighbors, harvesting his wheat. Many farmers would group together and take turns combining and driving the grain truck to the elevators for each other, to get the harvest finished quicker. Katie woke up as soon as John left. She was only one year old, but adored her dad. She wasn't her normal, happy little self that morning, though. She refused her bottle and cried all morning. I couldn't make her happy no matter what I did with her. I myself felt uneasy and irritable. Katie fussed and was restless for hours, and I was anxious for John to come home at noon. Maybe he could calm her down, I thought, as I
started some barbeque for dinner. About twelve-thirty, the strangest feeling came over me. I felt the most intense sense of dread ever in my life. I immediately worried about John because he said he'd be home around noon, but I learned long ago not to set my clock according to farmers. He very rarely came in for dinner exactly at noon, especially during harvest. But still...

Katie, who had been whimpering, began to scream violently. I ran into the living room to see what had happened, but just as suddenly as she began screaming, she stopped. She looked at me in the oddest way, then she lay down on her blanket and began sobbing her eyes out! This terrified me, a first time mother, and I didn't know what to do. But I didn't have long to think, because the phone was ringing.

I don't remember much else about that day.

I had always had a strong intuition. My dad said that Grandma had it too, be he never did. He told me that I inherited her stubbornness and her "strong build," too, but I think that was just a nice way for him to explain my being a bit overweight. At least I got my dad's lack of obsessing about appearances, so my weight never bothered me too much.

I wouldn't call my intuitions psychic or anything, but just gut feelings. Like the day I met John at the rodeo. I really didn't want to go that day but felt as though I had to. The minute I saw John in his cowboy boots and hat, and he smiled at me with those amazing dimples, I knew I would marry him. I didn't simply just want to marry him, I knew that I would. Mostly I had my feelings about happy things, like when my best friend Karen went into labor or when John was going to propose to me. I never saw any visions, or anything, I just could sense it. Sometimes I didn't even realize I sensed it until I looked back on it, like the day John died.

But lately I had been worried about Katie. Dad said that Grandma could always see not only the good but also the bad in the future, he even joked that was why he'd lived so long, because she was always watching out for him. Unfortunately she couldn't help my mother, who died of breast cancer when I was three. Grandma passed away ten years later. How I wished my grandmother was around now to give me advice. Katie's feelings were getting more frequent and more intense, and I suspected she even saw visions. She knew every present that I gave her for her fourth birthday in July.

"Mommy, when can I get my pony? I'm going to call him Snowflake because he's all white," Katie rambled on about her pretend horse while I frosted her homemade chocolate birthday cake that I made her.

"I'm sorry, Katie, but I can't afford to buy you a horse," I said.

"But Grampa did. He's gonna bring it over after supper. But I'll like my doll and my new 'jamas too, Mommy," she said.
How on earth she knew that I had bought her a new doll and pajamas for her birthday, I'll never know. Dad hadn't said anything about getting Katie a horse for her birthday, and I was worried about her being disappointed when she wouldn't get it.

After supper I was washing the dishes when our dog Sam began barking at something down the road. I looked outside down our long gravel driveway, expecting to see some deer or a 'coon wandering too close to the house. But I was surprised to see Dad driving up in his Ford pick-up with the horse trailer attached. Katie ran outside, banging the screen door, to greet him. I about fell over from shock as I watched him opening the trailer to reveal a pony inside. A pony as white as snow. Dad later swore to me that he never told Katie what she was getting for her birthday.

Katie showed other signs of her gift in harmless little ways, like telling me what I was going to make for supper or knowing where our cats hid their batches of kittens around the farm, but I wasn't prepared for it to take on a more serious effect.

I was weeding my potatoes in my garden when it first happened.

It was a typical South Dakota summer day. The temperature had surpassed one-hundred degrees and I could see dark gray thunderheads building up in the west. I was on my last row of potatoes when Katie ran up to me, with Sam close behind.

"Mommy, I'm worried about Friskie's kittens in the barn. Can we please take them in the house with us, please?" Katie begged me.

"No, honey, you know that I have allergies to the cat's fur. The barn is warm and dry and perfect for baby kittens," I said as I finished off the row. "Let's go inside and have some lemonade."

But mommy we have to move the kittens. Please mommy, I don't want them to be squished," Katie said as she started to cry.

"Katie, for Heaven's sake, the kittens will no be squished. Come on now, it's starting to sprinkle. We'd better get inside before we get soaked." I told her. The black, threatening clouds were moving towards our farm very quickly.

As we walked back to the house, I looked at my precious daughter. Her big, blue eyes and dimples made her look like an angel. Her thick, dark hair swung back and forth in her ponytail. Luckily she got her father's hair instead of my fine, dark blond hair. If only Johnny could see her now, he would be so proud of her. I swallowed the lump that came up in my throat. Although Johnny had died three years before, it was still so hard to face everyday without him.

Katie and I washed our hands and I turned on the old television to catch a weather update.

"-if you are in this area, take cover immediately. Go to a basement or cellar. Do not go outdoors or get in your car. I repeat, there is a tornado warning for eastern Hyde county and western
Richard Jensen
*Mondrian Dreams*
Linoleum Print
Hand county. Take every precaution necessary if you are in this path. The tornado is moving west at
about forty miles per hour. We'll keep you updated here on KSFY," Phil Shreck warned viewers.

I went outside to take a good look at the clouds, since Hyde county was just east of us. The
clouds were twisted into several shades of white, black and gray and the air hung thickly around me.
The usual sounds of birds, insects and tractors humming in the fields were all absent. Sam sensed my
worry and started to whine. The ringing of the telephone broke the silence and brought me back into
the house.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Pam. Are you and Katie okay? You'd better get down to the basement with that storm
coming."

"Hi, Dad. Yeah, we're fine. Do you think we should go downstairs right now?"

"I think so. I can see the twister from my house. Are you and Katie going to be all right, or
should I come over?"

"No, just stay home. You put Snowflake in the barn, didn't you?" We kept Snowflake at Dad's
place since he had a nicer barn and only lived one mile down the gravel road from us.

"Yep, he's safe and sound. You be careful, now," Dad said.

"Okay, we'll head downstairs right now. Goodbye."

Katie and I made it to our unfinished basement just in time. Katie always hated the dark base-
ment because we only used it for storage and protection from storms. I was as scared as she was, but
it helped me calm down to hold and comfort her while the wind screamed above us and the rain
hammered on the house.

Before long, we heard a roar that sounded like an oncoming train. It got louder and louder
until it sounded like it was going to suck us up out of the basement.

"Mommy, Mommy!" Katie screamed, "The kittens, Mommy! They're dying! They're being
squished by the barn!"

I briefly wondered why on earth she would worry about the kittens being killed instead of us,
but I was too terrified to dwell on the thought. It's times like this when I really needed John. I tried to
comfort myself and Katie by telling her he was watching over us from heaven.

Finally, the wind stopped and I couldn't hear the rain hitting the house anymore. We went
upstairs and slowly opened the basement door. Our house was a mess, with several windows broken.
I glanced through a hole where the kitchen window used to be and saw my petunias strewn across
the yard, along with branches and debris everywhere. It looked like every leaf was torn off the trees
and dumped in our yard.
Katie ran straight outside before I could stop her. She stopped dead in her tracks when she ran around back to the barn. Where the barn used to be, actually. There was nothing left but a pile of splintered lumber. Thank God we didn't keep any livestock in there anymore, I thought to myself. But poor Katie was standing in shock. I went to hug her but she suddenly ran to the barn and started digging through the mess. When I caught up to her, she had quit digging and was staring at a pile of white, bloody fur. It was Friskie. She was holding a kitten in her mouth. They were both dead, crushed by the weight of the barn.

Katie looked as though she wasn't even seeing the cats, but instead concentrating on something very intensely when she suddenly let out a scream. Shivers ran down my back, reminding me of memories of the last time I heard that scream. She stopped screaming and turned around, looking at me with terrified eyes.

"Oh no, Mommy, not Grampa, too! No, no, not Grampa!" Katie screamed into the still after-storm air as she fell down on the moist black dirt, sobbing.
The oversize digital clock clicked and an unusually large 10:20 brightly appeared atop the television.

All was quiet in the oversized trailer. All was quiet except for the broken fan that rattled as it struggled to stay going, and the clothes dryer clunking in the corner.

And right in the middle of all the noisy silence sat a woman in her brand new recliner with her shoes off and her crooked toes, unhappily reading her magazine. She was an elderly woman whose lips were pressed together so tight, they looked like they might break. She was short and overweight and her hair was unusually curly this particular morning. She looked anxious for something.

Not so far away but further than one may think was a garden. It was a beautiful garden that would inspire the world’s greatest gardener. Every fruit and vegetable imaginable was sprouting that bright Sunday morning, and right between the onions and peppers stood a man. As he bent over to pick his morning vegetables, his knees creaked and he groaned slightly. He was old—older than she—and he understood why his body didn’t work as well as it used to, but he didn’t like it. He was tall and thin and looked lost much of the time. His face was long and his skin fell further than it should, and his eyes were empty and sad.

He was choosy as he selected vegetables for morning’s brunch. They had to be just right, he knew, as his wife expected them to be as fresh as possible. And he, too, wouldn’t settle for anything less. After he had just the right amount of the ripest vegetables, he turned towards the west, the hot sun falling on his narrow shoulders, and saw through the screen door, his wife reading. He slowly started for the trailer, and then paused and thought. He turned around and looked into the glowing sun and squinted. With vegetables overflowing in his arms, he stepped over the cabbage, through the corn, and headed for a patch of tomatoes, like he was on a quest to conquer the sky. When he got to the tomatoes, he dropped his head and stared, and a heartwarming, jagged smile appeared on his withered face. The tomatoes were so ripe, their glow challenged the sun, so firm they were crying to be touched. His knees creaked louder than before as he stooped to pick his perfectly grown vegetable, while peppers and onions fell from his arms, landing in a pool of red. The smile in his eyes was definitive of his excitement, and he forgot about the peppers and onions scattered like rolled dice across his garden. Both he and his wife knew there was nothing better than a fresh, beautifully grown tomato. And below him were hundreds of them.

Just a short while before, he had longed to stay in the moist soil under the morning sun, exploring his garden. But now all he could think about was sharing a tomato with his wife. He gathered up the scattered peppers and onions and the one perfect tomato, and turned back toward the house.
Jennifer Fordyce
Indian III
Etching
As he aggressively made his way across the garden, he thought about how impatient his wife must be. But he knew he had something that would capture her silent forgiveness. He passed the clunking dryer on his way in, peered at his wife through the corner of his eye and went straight into the kitchen where he found a knife. He stared at the tomato firmly resting on a cutting board and focused all his energy into making a perfect, clean, cut straight down the middle.

Wham! The knife slammed against the cutting board and the tomato fell open, its juices flowing like the Red Sea. He took out of the cabinet two small plates and pulled two napkins from the top drawer. After he put the tomatoes on the plates, he took the salt shaker, straightened his posture, slightly tilted his head and lightly salted each. And as if he was presenting a queen with a crown, he handed his wife the tomato and took a seat in his recliner, the coffee table with the lamp on it and the remote control the only thing separating them. Together they ate those tomatoes and for a short, short while, they both experienced the pleasure of perfection, the happiness of unity. For an instant the trailer was filled with life and warmth. But as the theory of science must exist, so must the pendulum of time swing. Just as quickly as the feeling of perfection began, it ended, and all that was left on their plates was tomato juice and a few seeds. The man knew it was time to get to work.

He took her plate and placed it on top of his, putting them delicately in the sink. Then he took his position at the counter next to the refrigerator, took a knife out of the knife drawer and looked at his wife who had gone back to reading. A thought came to him as he stared at her, but before he could decipher it, it was gone. "Funny," he thought as he turned to the onions and peppers on the cutting board and very carefully started cutting. After he had one onion cut into four perfect pieces, his wife got out of her chair and joined him in the kitchen.

Her walk was syncopated and direct as if she gave a great deal of thought to every movement. She walked into the kitchen and right to the refrigerator where she took out a package of ham. After she got a cutting knife from the knife drawer, she took her position on the counter adjacent to his. She took a cutting board significantly bigger than his, set down the ham and knife, dialed the stove to "eight" and returned to her ham. Then she, too, started cutting.

Each was with their own thoughts as they worked together, yet separate, both staring at their cutting boards as the knives made cut after cut after cut. Cut, dice, straighten, turn, cut. And not too far away but further than one might think was the fan; turning, cooling, rattling. And further away yet was the dryer; drying, shaking, clunking. It was beautiful music as all four worked rhythm. Cut, rattle, cut, clunk.

Soon the man's eyes moved away from his dicing and he looked around the kitchen his wife had recently redecorated. His glossy eyes saw to the bottle of Jack Daniels on top of the refrigerator before moving to the clock on the wall. "Hm, 11 o'clock," he thought slowly. He then turned around-
barely making it—and saw the empty case of Old Milwaukee on the floor next to the wastepaper basket. He looked at his wife briefly, looked down at his onions and continued cutting. Cut, rattle, cut clunk. "I hope she goes to get some more beer," he thought to himself, and then convinced himself she probably would.

Just as he was thinking this, his wife finished cutting the ham into small pieces and walked back to the refrigerator. She took out four different kinds of cheese, each wrapped individually, and collectively placed in a large ziplock bag. The white cheese, which was so fresh it bounced, was cut first, then the yellow. Then she cut a lighter shade of yellow cheese, and then an off-white, almost a blue, cheese. She carefully rewrapped them all, resealed the ziplock bag, and returned to the refrigerator, right next to where her husband had started cutting peppers.

She took a carton of eggs and walked back to her station, looking straight ahead as she marched, humming "On Wisconsin" in her head. "How many eggs? Five?" she asked her husband.

He nodded and she broke the eggs into a large glass bowl and stirred. The whole trailer moved as she primed those eggs, her short, stocky body shaking. He was annoyed. "Jesus," he said to himself. He looked up, turned around slowly in place, looked about like he was lost or didn't know what to do next. The peppers and onions had been cut, so had the cheese and ham. Eggs had been broken and put in a bowl and the oven was glowing. He didn't know what to do next, so he took a seat at the kitchen table, slouching. He breathed hard and his skinny arms fell beside his body, nearly touching the floor. He watched his wife put the omelette in the oven and then he leaned forward. He put his elbows on his knees and his hands on his head and started the floor with wide eyes and a blank mind. The omelette was cooking. There was nothing left for him to do. So he waited, watching the clock tick, listening to the dryer clunk and the fan rattle, and stared out the window at his garden where he spotted a weed. He thought about going out to pick it, but decided to let it go. "Time moves so slow these days," the husband thought to himself. "Much too slow." He looked over at his wife who was sitting in her recliner reading with her feet up and her crooked toes with that intense stare glued to that magazine, and he thought about how much he loved her.

In the next twenty minutes that passed, traffic outside picked up, the sun moved higher in the sky, weeds grew a little bit taller, and the human race grew a little older. But most importantly—at least more importantly for a certain couple in an oversized trailer—an omelette finished cooking.

A timer didn't go off. A buzzer didn't sound. When it was done, the man simply knew it and his rise told his wife it was time. He cut the omelette into two equal pieces while his wife took out two plates and two forks. Then each took a piece of their creation and sat at the table. Still, they did not say a word or look at each other. They stared at their plates, fork in hand, and ate.

The oven was still glowing.
In the Mood  
by Lynn M. Yost

On the stereo, Glen Miller swung once again into "In the Mood." She blotted her lipstick on a tissue, reapplied it, and smiled at the result. Her dark hair was swept up and fastened with two tortoise-shell combs, a style appropriate to the sleek black dress she wore. She picked up a belled wine glass and swirled the contents, catching the candlelight in the ruddy darkness. It was a good burgundy, and she rolled it around in her mouth before swallowing. One red-lacquered nail tapped the rim of the glass, making it chime with the dulcet refinement Baccarat provided at $150 a pair.

She leaned in toward the mirror, adjusting her earrings, her hips swaying gently to the music. She finished off the glass, setting it down on the vanity next to the empty bottle. Her cheeks were slightly flushed with the wine, and her eyes, delicately made up, were bright. A pulse fluttered under the pale skin of her throat. She lit a long brown cigarette and inhaled deeply, head back, eyes closed. She let the perfumed smoke drift out through her nose, slowly, savoring it.

Skipping lightly on three-inch heels, she jived to the sax solo, swinging at the end of an invisible partner's reach. She saw herself in the full-length mirror by the front door and laughed gently. She straightened a stocking and gave her reflection one last look. As the trumpets ascended toward the finale, she leaned in and kissed herself, leaving a perfect red pout on the glass. She opened the door and danced out coatless into the night, not bothering to latch the door behind her. As a fine dust of snow blew across the threshold, Glen Miller's orchestra swung again into "In the Mood."

* * * * *

Two men walked in silence toward the house. A wedge of light cast itself out onto the snowy walk, as if straining to follow the dainty footprints that skipped away into the howling dark. The taller man paused, staring down at them. The wind razored through his coat, making it snap against his legs. The other man waited, not speaking; as he hunched his shoulders against the cold, his badge caught the light from the half-open door. Inside, a cheerful trumpet solo cocked off.

Without discussion, both men mounted the steps. The man with the badge pushed the door open with his fingertips, an oddly delicate move for such a big man. The other man stepped over the sill, leaving a print in the growing drift of snow in the entry. Indoors, the music seemed impossibly loud; he felt an urge to tap his foot to the jaunty rhythm.
Sheila Muth

*Bridge*

Photograph
"Like we said, there was no note," said the badged man.

"But you're sure. . .."

"Eighty tabs of Nembutal, if the bottles we round were full, which we think they were. Washed down with a nice Chateauneuf-du-Pape. People don't make that kind of mistake." He looked at his feet. "Sorry."

"Jesus." The tall man shoved a hand through his hair, his face twitching. "It's colder than hell out there, did she. . .." he shrugged helplessly.

"She just went to sleep. Probably didn't feel a thing." The man with the badge moved closer, his face gentle. "She was just lying there in the snow like she was taking a nap. No pain."

The tall man searched his face for deception; finding none, he shifted his gaze, shoulders slumped. The room gave no answers. On an ornate little table against the papered wall stood an empty bottle. A Waterford ashtray burgeoning with lipsticked cigarette ends reposed gently on a lace mat. The air still held traces of smoke, and a breath of perfume, warm and spicy.

Behind him, the full orchestra pounced into the last bars of "In the Mood." He turned an angry, interrogative face to the smug surroundings, eyes darting, and then stopped. He stood still, turned to stone by the incongruous sight of himself in the mirror, pale, dishevelled, windblown, with a perfect red kiss print imposed on his cheek.
I'm cracking up. I have forty days left and I'm going crazy.

Today I was on watch as roving security. I had the 8-12. I was walking around the ship and stopped off in the EW shop. Ron was the only one that was in there at the time. I sat down at the desk and was flipping through a racing magazine. My interest turned to the weapon that I had been fingering at my side and I took the gun from the holster and started playing with it. I pulled back the slide, cocked it and pulled the trigger. I cocked it again and put on the safety. I flipped the safety off and pulled the slide back and locked it into place. Ron wanted to see the gun and I told him "no." He kept on insisting and I told him I'd get in trouble if I gave up my gun to anyone as roving patrol. I still had it out and the slide was pulled back and locked in that position when he reached out and tried to grab it. I rose to my feet with the gun clasped in each of our grips and we began wrestling for it. I reached around my belt and pulled out a clip and told Ron I would lock and load on him. I wasn't seriously considering it. I said that because I thought that it might make him let go. It didn't. He kept holding onto the gun and trying to wrest it from me so I slid the clip in and released the slide. All of a sudden the gun was loaded and cocked with no safety on. Ron let go quick, as if he had just touched something that had scorched him.

"Do you trust me?" With smooth deliberate motions, I pushed the clip release button and slid the clip out of the butt and put it back in my belt. There was still one bullet left in the chamber. I looked at Ron and laughed. It was a low evil laugh that rumbled from the pit of my gut with psychotic hilarity. I looked intently at Ron and my face grew hot as I raised the gun. I brought the gun to rest against the side of my temple. The metal of the gun barrel felt cool against my hot forehead. Ron's eyes were open wide. I saw the look on his face as if he were seeing me for the first time and he did not know me.

He looked at me and with a nervous grin he said, "You're crazy. You would shoot yourself just like Kurt Cobain."

I stopped laughing and put my finger on the trigger and put ever the slightest pressure on it. "You can't compare me to anyone," I said, "especially not some terminally depressed metal-head thrasher punk."

"It's not even loaded."

"Yes, there is one round still chambered."
"You won't do it. You're not on drugs," he said.

I said, "You think you have to be on drugs to kill yourself?"

"Your brain has to be drugged or drunk or something. A person won't kill himself if he's normal," he replied.

Then I thought about what he would think if I applied just a little more pressure with my index finger. He would be astonished. He would go into shock. He would go insane from watching a normal person kill himself on a whim. What would everyone else think? They would be perplexed. Wondering why I would choose to do something like that when everything seemed to be going my way. I am the happiest person they know, they think they know me so well. I have a box full of travelers checks and a train ticket for my trip to Europe that I've been planning for nine months. I have tickets to the Save-mart 300 this Sunday. I get out of the Navy in forty days and I'm enrolled in college this fall. They would feel cheated, as if it were not fair, having to witness someone leaving the game on his own terms and not sticking around to see how fate might deal him a win or a loss. Such a private act of negation would attack their own tenuous sense of meaning in a fragile existence and would leave an echo of emptiness, a smear of nullity behind. It would be a kind of desertion that would leave them feeling cold and a little less protected against a vast and dark nothingness. It would force them to confront their own petty and painful and unfulfilled lives and it would leave them with a chilling uncertainty coursing through their souls. It would be like leaving a party too soon and leaving all the other guests painfully uncomfortable.

I realized that it would be nothing for me to do it. I thought about the bluntness of it. I could exist this instant and in the next I might not, depending only on a threadbare strand of sanity that tied me to this reality and which seemed to be unable to hold its own weight. I wondered what made crazy people snap. I wondered if I were crazy and had yet to. I could twitch and then it would be over. I would fall to a lifeless pile onto the deck and bleed in an ever widening pool of my own warm crimson blood. I realized that nothing was keeping me from doing any of it at that instant.

We both were there in the shop. I, standing with a gun at my temple, and Ron, sitting there in the chair. We looked at each other with tense stares, the nerves pulsing in my forefinger. I'm not sure how long we looked at each other. Each trying to read something from the other man's face. Neither sure what the other might do and yet neither giving away any clue that might betray his own thoughts. Finally, abruptly, I broke his gaze and pulled the gun down to my left hand. I grabbed the slide and pulled it back and ejected the bullet towards him.

"It was loaded," I told him in a taunting tone.
Sheila Muth

*Bird*

Photograph
I stooped and picked up the round and Ron said to me, "You're psycho. You're going to kill yourself someday."

I put the round back into clip and placed it back into my belt. My face was still hot and now a wave of faintness washed over me. I finished my watch in a numbed kind of trance. I walked about slowly and somewhere in the back of my mind was playing the tune of fade to black and everyone that I laid eyes on I saw in a different light for the rest of the day. I saw them through the eyes of someone who had the prerogative to decide for himself that he would stick around a while longer, just out of curiosity, to see what might happen next. I decided to see if maybe other great things might lay in store for me. Maybe new adventures, that might exhilarate me; new challenges, that perhaps would leave me content and fulfilled; new days, filled with happiness and wonder and madness and the glorious warmth and brightness of a deep drawn breath on a cool summer's morning; and perhaps even, if I were lucky enough to have the gods smile in favor upon me, new loves awaited me if only I would choose to wait for them.
Thank God there won't be any nut cases around tonight, Jane thought as she sat down in front of the mike. She took a swig of what must have been her third cup of coffee. Nothing was shaking her from her hangover-induced fog. Jane thought she had learned her lesson about drinking before noon during her college years, but her "Dusk to Dawn" radio show was fraying her nerves and she was back to dealing with her stress the easiest way she knew how.

When an all-night talk show was offered to her four years ago, Jane thought it would be cool: freedom to try her own ideas, a small but dedicated audience, and working hours that fit her insomniac lifestyle. Of course, that was before she got to know her new producer, Curt. His constant last-minute changes and show ideas that didn't work were bad enough, but his endless practical jokes at her expense were pushing Jane to her limits.

Jane gingerly slid her headphones on and felt something soapy on her ears. She yanked the headphones off and discovered that someone had put shaving cream on them. Someone who was laughing loudly in the production booth.

"Enjoy that, Janie?" Curt said over the studio speaker, barely drowning out the forced chuckles of his ass-kissing assistants.

"Sure did," Jane said. "It was just as funny as the other thousand times you did it."

"Don't be sarcastic," Curt said. "We want a happy mood tonight for 'People Off the Street'."

Jane grimaced. "I thought we were going to scrap that segment. I had plenty of stuff prepared for--"

"Well, we had a good one come up and say he really wants to go on the air with you," Curt said. "Trust me."

Jane bit her bottom lip to keep from screaming. She hated the "People Off the Street" segment the worst. Curt convinced his daddy the station owner that having passerbys be in-studio guests would be a great idea. So far the guests had consisted of drunk teenagers and weirdo street walkers. Who the hell else would be out in LaCrosse, Wisconsin during this time, thought Jane.

She looked at the clock; 15 seconds to air. Jane wiped the rest of the shaving cream off her headphones, put them on, and prepared for what she thought could be the worst "Dusk to Dawn" show ever.

Jane turned on the mike. "Top o' the evening to you, LaCrossanites," she said. "Time once again for the 'Dusk to Dawn' show on KWLF. It's eight in the p.m., the sun is just going down in the
hot summer sky, and the cool people around town are coming out for everyone's favorite segment—"People Off the Street.' We'll get to know some of the real people of LaCrosse right after we pay some bills."

Jane paused to roll her eyes, "-‘People Off the Street.' We'll get to know some of the real people of LaCrosse right after we pay some bills."

Jane turned on the commercial tape and leaned back in her chair. One of Curt's assistants handed her a piece of paper.

"Here's the info on the first guest," he said.

"Don't bother. I'll just wing it," Jane said.

The assistant looked at her in disbelief. "No sheet?! But Curt thinks you should read this."

Jane smiled sarcastically. "Exactly," she said. Curt was notorious for giving Jane the wrong info as a joke. She wasn't about to look stupid this time.

The assistant stomped out of the booth and came back with the guest: a small, balding man wearing a brown vest with a red shirt underneath that made Jane's head throb just looking at it. She loosened the rubber band that held her long blond hair in a ponytail and tucked in her gray T-shirt.

"Hi, I'm Jane. Your name is...?"

"Uh... Jack. Jack Barkley," he said as he sat town by the mike across from her.

"Okay, Jack. Just relax and have fun," she said, wishing she could follow her own advice.

The commercial was starting to wind up. As Jane reached toward the board to turn on the mikes, she caught a glimpse of Curt in the production booth. He was smiling slyly at her. She raised an eyebrow at him and turned on the mikes.

"Welcome back to 'Dusk to Dawn' on KWLF. I'm Jane Winger along with our Person Off the Street, Jack. Call in to talk to Jack at 1-800-854-KWLF. What brings you out on a hot night like this, Jack?"

Jack was sitting with his hands between his clenched legs. "Well, um, Jane, I'm here to... well, first of all I want to say that I'm a big fan of yours. And the reason I'm here is to... to warn everyone."

Jane raised her eyebrows. "Warn everyone?" she said. She looked at Curt. He was still smiling.

"Okay, I'll bite, Jack. What are you warning people of?"

"Well... the full moon, of course," he said.

"Afraid it's so full that it's going to burst, Jack?" she said, chuckling.

"Please... no jokes. I'm serious," Jack said. "Anyone outside tonight is in danger."

"Why's that?" Jane said.

"Because..." Jack paused and blew out hard. "Because I'm a werewolf."

Jane stared at Jack, glanced at the booth to see Curt and his assistants laughing wildly, then
CAT

Richard Jensen
Cat
Line Art
looked back at Jack. "You're a... werewolf," she said. "Yes," Jack said. "Well, not right now, of course, but when the moon comes out later tonight, yes, I'll turn into one." He pawed nervously at his leg with his hand.

Jane nodded with a pained smile, pursed her lips, and said, "We're going to commercial."

"Um, Jane, we just did some ads," an assistant said on the studio speaker. Jane turned the mikes off, threw her headphones against the board, and stormed back to the booth.

"You've got to be kidding me, Curt," she said as she threw open the door.

"Boy, the look on your face was priceless," Curt said, chuckling. An assistant ran to the board to put a commercial tape on the air.

"This is the lowest," Jane said, running her hand over her forehead. "Curt, I'm not going to put this poor guy's mental problems over the air."

"The hell you're not," Curt said. "Look at the phone board. It's lit up like a Christmas tree. Everyone wants to talk to this guy."

"Hey, Jane," said another assistant. "Tell him that if he's hungry, we've got some Alpo in the back."

The room erupted in laughter. Jane threw a dirty look at Curt, then went back into the studio.

Jane plopped back down in her chair. Her headache was at its worst. "Is that guy bothering you, Jane?" Jack asked.

"Yep," she said while angrily shuffling the commercial schedules.

Jack glared at Curt as Jane turned the mikes back on. "All right, we're back talking to Jack, who claims to be a... werewolf. Let's hear what some of you think," she said as she looked at the computer screen to get the first caller's name. "Kristin from LaCrosse, you're on."

An obviously drunk woman giggled and said, "Hi, Jack. I'm a cute vampire. Wanna get together?"

Jane disconnected the woman. "Next caller, please," she said, rubbing her forehead. "Tom from Waumandee, you're on."

"So, Jack, if you're part wolf, do you piss on fire hydrants, or do you use restrooms like other guys?" Tom was laughing hard while Jane disconnected him.

"Okay," Jane said. "Since none of you feel like asking good questions, I'll try." She watched Jack scratch behind his ear. Jane rubbed her face and said, "So how old were you when you first... became a werewolf?"

Jack smiled and leaned forward. "Well, I first want to thank you for sticking up for me like that," he said. "Hmmm... first time. I was about 25, two years ago. I remember because you were celebrating your birthday on the air and we're the same age."

"Is 25 the age that most werewolves first come out?" Jane said, scarcely believing that she was trying to take this seriously.

"Yes," Jack said. "It starts when you have reached one-third of your life span. I don't know why. My mystic wouldn't tell me."
why. My mystic wouldn't tell me."

"Mystic?" Jane said.

"Yes, I had a mystic consultant back in Cincinnati," Jack said. "He told me to move out here, so I could roam out in the woods. There would be less chance for me to hurt someone in a wooded area, he said."

"Uh-huh," Jane said, rubbing her eyes. "And what else did this mystic tell you?"

"He told me that the wolf spirit is one's own rage that is repressed for years," Jack said. "The lunar rays from the moon god release it in nature's most primal form, the wolf. The rage turns you into a hunter, looking for someone to vent all the repressed rage on."

Jane stared at him, shut off the mikes, and went over to him.

"I can't let this go on," she said. "You've got problems, Jack. I'm not going to exploit them on the air. Go get help."

Jack smiled at her. "You're so nice," he said. "You're even nicer than you sound on the radio." "Yeah, yeah," she said. "Just go. Show's over." Jack walked out, smiling at her as he went out the door.

Curt stormed out of the booth. "What the hell are you doing?"

Jane slowly turned around to glare at Curt, then walked out. She slammed the door behind her as she went out to drink her headache away.

Jane woke up the next afternoon face down in her living room, her head screaming like a banshee. Through the pain, she tried to piece together how she got home, how she ended up in the living room and what happened in general. It was her first blackout since her brother's wedding last year.

Jane struggled to sit up. She licked her dry, crusty lips and tasted blood. She wiped her mouth and came up with two fingerfuls of blood. Jane saw the couch leg near where her head was and thought, Must've cut my lip when I passed out. She tried to laugh at her clumsiness, but it made her stomach churn.

Jane stumbled to the bathroom, bumping into the walls like a pinball. She grabbed some aspirin and turned on the radio. KWLF was static, so she turned to KLAC, the all-news station. The monotone announcer helped smooth out her headache a little.

"... voted to abolish the Motor-Voter bill..." he said.

Jane swished two aspirin around in her mouth, trying to swallow. She kept thinking about how she was going to explain last night to the station's owners.

"... winner of the Miss Broiler Days pageant was..."

The aspirin finally went down and Jane grabbed the cotton balls and hydrogen peroxide to clean the cut. Nothing like the smell of peroxide to start your day, she thought.
"... this just in..."
She dipped some peroxide on a ball. The sour smell almost made her-
"... has been identified as Curt Irvin, a producer at KWLF. Irvin's body was found next to his car
at the KWLF studio this morning. The case is being called a homicide..."
The peroxide bottle had been on the floor for almost two minutes before Jane came out of her
shock.

Jane put the receiver down slowly. The sobbing secretary at KWLF gave her all the details: Curt
was found by the program director this morning. Because Jane had left, Curt sent everyone home and
stayed behind to put a feed from the network on the air. Since he was the last one to leave, there were
no witnesses around.
The details of how Curt was found made Jane shudder: He was lying in a pool of blood with his
throat ripped out. Police said there were fang marks on his neck.
Biting the neck. Just like a dog would do, Jane thought.
Or a wolf.
Jane shook her head. "You're letting your imagination go crazy," she said. "There's no such things
as werewolves, remember? Worry more about the police when they come to question--"
The shrill ring of the phone froze Jane. After three rings, she picked up.
"H-hello?" she said.
It was Jack. "You really shouldn't have your on-air name be your real name, too. All sorts of
maniacs can call you."
An eternity seemed to pass between Jane's heartbeats. "What are you doing calling me?" she
said. "I-I can't talk. Something terrible's--"
"I know," Jack said. "Believe me, I know. We need to talk."
Jane was puzzled. "Talk? What about? What do you want?"
"I'm offering to turn myself in," Jack said.
Jane closed her eyes and rubbed her forehead. "Please don't pull this crap on me now. It's not a
good--"
"The police will be coming to talk to you soon," Jack said. "They probably already know that you
left in a huff last night. You're going to be a suspect. I'm going to admit to it so you don't have to be has-
sled. But before I turn myself in, I have something for you at my house. It'll be a good source of proof of
my guilt for the police. I live at 888 Nicholson Avenue in Arcadia."
"I'm not coming to see you!" Jane said.
Jack sighed. "If you don't come, I'll leave the area and let you fend for yourself. Come and I'll turn myself in. I need you to be here. Come alone and please hurry. It's going to be dark soon." Then he hung up.

This isn't happening, Jane thought. Wake up, Jane. Dream's over. The bad man's gone away. C'mon, wake up! My God, I can't believe this...  

Jane sat down. He's right, though, she thought. I'll be a suspect and I have no alibi. God, I can't even remember last night! Maybe I should go to the police first...

She had been sitting for over an hour before she made up her mind: She was going to Arcadia. Jane had done time for a DUI four years ago and couldn't bear the thought of possibly living like that for the rest of her life. Even if she was cleared, the rumor would follow her forever. And Jack, as crazy as he seemed, would go to a sanitarium or something where he could get help. She grabbed her keys and went to her car.

She got in and started west toward Arcadia. She came to a stop light and started chuckling. My protector, the werewolf, she thought.

Then a chill ran down her spine. "Protecting their loved ones are what dogs do best," she said. She started dialling on her car phone as she drove toward the setting sun.

She pulled up to Jack's dark gray house, took a deep breath, and walked to the front door. The sky was turning to dusk. There's no such thing as werewolves, she kept thinking.

Jane walked right in. There was a familiar voice coming from the dark room straight ahead. Her voice. From one of her shows.

"Jack?" she said.

"Remember this show?" came Jack's voice from the darkness. "August twelfth of last year. You were interviewing that guy who thought he was one of the Dukes of Hazzard. The guy had a car that looked like the General Lee and got arrested when he tried to jump that creek and crashed into the pickup of a game warden. Total idiot. Did your bastard producer force you to interview him?"

"Why did you want me to come here?" Jane said.

"I have taped all of your shows," Jack said. "I wanted you to know that someone loves you and was looking out for you before I go to the police tomorrow morning. I'll say I'm an obsessed fan who was trying to protect you from that jerk. They're more likely to believe that than the fact that I'm a werewolf."

"Actually, they're coming to you. I called them from my car."

Jack gasped. "Why did you do that? If they come here when the moon comes out... I don't
know if I can protect you from all of them."
    "I can take care of myself, Jack."
    "Like hell you can," Jack said, his voice becoming deeper. "You could get hurt if you stay."
    "You won't go ballistic if I'm here to keep you calm. Now relax--"
    "No!" he growled. "I can't always control it. I'm losing it right now. How could you betray me like this?! I'll hurt you and all those cops and who knows where I'll stop. And their blood will be on your hands for bringing them here at night!"
    "Jack, calm down before you hurt yourself."
    "Get out of here! I'm losing it!"
    "No, you're not, Jack! You're not a--"

With a roar Jack leapt from the darkness. Jane moved right and hit Jack's back, the momentum sending him crashing into the door. He lay on the floor, whimpering. She turned on the light. Jack was still the same small, bald man, licking his bleeding shoulder as the police pulled up. Jane walked into the other room and shut the tape off, guided by the light coming through the window from the half moon.

    "All right! I'm going already!" Jane yelled as she peeled herself off the barstool that had been her home since 6 p.m. The bartender had made last call over half an hour ago and finally pulled the drink out of her hand.

    Jane stumbled out of the bar and looked up at the full moon. She chuckled as she scratched her neck. Jack's probably somewhere chasing his tail or licking himself right now, she thought.

    Nearly a month had passed since Jack was arrested. He wound up in a mental institution, being helped out with his werewolf fixation that he had had since he was young, according to an intern there that Jane knew. Apparently it wasn't the first time he acted like a werewolf to try to protect others.

    Jane, meanwhile, had moved to the sales department at KWLF. The thought of a night out was still foreign to her after four years of working from 6 p.m. to 5:30 a.m. on "Dusk to Dawn." But she was making the most of this evening.

    She looked up at the moon again. Last time I was this drunk and looking at a full moon was my brother's wedding last year, she thought. A wave of sadness came over her as she scratched behind her ear. Two classmates of hers were killed that night, and the last thing she said to them was, "Go to hell!" They had been riding her for staying in the bar all day and all night, so she told them off and left in a drunken rage. She had apparently passed out in her parent's backyard when she was woken up by her sobbing mother with the bad
news. How she managed to find her way home was still a mystery to her. It was the first blackout of her life.

Yeah, too bad about Vince and Jill, she thought. Not that I like them, but they didn't deserve to die like that, all torn up by some maniac.

Still I've never solved those murders, she thought.

Jane looked up at the moon again and saw two of them. Damn double vision, she thought. Must be the vodka.

A vicious headache hit her. God, I'm drunk, she thought.

She passed by a store and glanced at the window. She watched as the hair grew all over her face and the fangs digging into her lower lip. Jane looked at her hands and watched the claws emerge. Jane tried to scream but a howl came out instead.
witherington high school writing contest

Sponsored by SDSU English Club
THOUGHTS IN FRONT OF THE BLUE

Blue.
my eyes have found a comfy spot
somewhere between the yellow throw rug
the red and green blinking lights on the vcr
and the Blue tv screen
the movie is over now
everything is over now and
i can’t feel anything
everything is numb now
including the hand he is holding
i don’t even blink anymore
i just watch the vcr lights and
the Blue screen
our eyes don’t see any other colors
besides red, green and Blue
or so my biology professor tells me
hum
everything he says is like a buzz in the back of my head
hum
he is talking about god and forgiveness
why does he care so much about forgiveness
i just forget
is that the same as forgiveness
my comfy is getting blurry now
why are there tears swelling in my eyes
those tears stopped everything before
but there is no use for them now
he knows i’m not hearing a word he’s saying
he’s just talking because he’s afraid of the silence
i've never cried in front of him before tonight
everyone has seen me cry at least once
but he managed to know me three years before seeing me shed one tear
i've seen him cry
he tries to hide it though
sometimes we'll be driving around talking and
i'll see a tear roll down his cheek
then he'll casually brush it away
as if it had never happened
it hurts to blink my eyes
i wonder what time it is
i don't think i could move my eyes even if i wanted to
i'm so tired
sleeping helps me forget
he wants me to hold him
i know
he always buries his in my stomach when he wants to be held
it's so automatic now
stroke
stroke
stroke
his hair wasn't this short before
i liked it better when it was longer
it felt so good between my fingers
why can't he say i love you
he either tells me in one of the many foreign languages he knows
or he says i
then stops
then sighs heavily as if he had just tried to lift something much too heavy
i am the only one
who tells him he is loved
i know his parents never say i love you
that's just the way they are
i'm only one of five people that have ever hugged him
maybe that's why ...
i like this tv screen
every time i look at the Blue
i forget
Second Place Poetry
Katie Pederson
Freshman, Mitchell H.S.

Walls of Frost

People are like March grass.
From afar they appear soft and calm,
Nothing seems to move them.
Closer though, and you will find
Pikes and spears
Guard their fears,
Walls of frost censor their emotions.

People have two sides
Though they hide them well.
They show their armor,
Crude words and mean faces,
Shattered peace and divided races.

Harmony is hard to find these days
And when you do it's shunned.
Turmoil seems to be a fad,
Embraced by almost everyone.
It's funny that
Though we cannot agree
On boundary lines, treaties
Or even styles of dress
We all seem to agree
That we love to be in distress.

History is our teacher
And has told me this;
Fads grow tiresome
And drag us down.
Till we find the courage to drop them.
So I hope that’s all this is.
All the rage and confusion
Is just a style some are trying,
And soon will discard
To the place where
Bell-bottoms and paisley shirts reside.

Then peace can return
To the sphere we all call home.
Because this is a fad,
And nothing more.
That means joy with hope and laughter
eventually,
Will soften our frozen core.
Third Place Poetry
Jon C. Phillips
Senior, Britton H.S.

Happy Hunting

Twas Five a.m. opening morn and all through my abode
Three hunters prepared anxiously to hit the road,
Our coats were all zipped up to our necks real tight,
In hopes that the weather would let up by first light;
The rifles were nestled all snug in their cases,
While we slipped on our boots and did up the laces;
And I grabbed the orange vests and father the orange caps,
Each of our minds racing 'round our thoughts doing laps-
When out on the road there arose such a storm,
I shivered and shook just trying to keep warm.
Away through the windshield all I could see was the snow,
As the minutes went by the drifts continued to grow.
The morning made dark by the new-falling snow,
caused the worry inside us to gather and grow;
When what with my freezing ears should I hear
But a four wheel drive pick-up truck drawing near,
with the hubs lock in and shifted to four low,
I knew in a moment we were ready to go.
Slower than snails we pushed on our way,
Each one of us ready for a heck of a day:
There was Father, and brother, Billy Bob, and Joe Nixon.
Tom Hansen, Phil Engameyer, Donny and Dan Fritzen.
To the top of the drifts, to the top of the hill!
Now who ever said cold weather hunting is a thrill!
As the heater kicked in we started to sweat,
Billy shed his orange cap. saying, “Are we there yet?”
So with our rifles we jumped from our trucks
With our minds full of deer - especially big bucks.
and then in the blowing we started to trudge,
Through the thigh deep powder we could just barely budge.
As I crossed a fence line, and was turning around,
Out of the trees a small doe did abound,
She was covered with flakes from her hoof to her snout,
And in seeing her flight I let out a shout.
Not a shot was fired, our interest did lack,
For you see the dear doe was minus a rack.
Brother’s eyes how they twinkled! his brows how they rose!
His cheeks cherry red, I think they were froze;
His blue little lips were drawn up in a sneer,
His adrenaline pumping, prepared for more deer.
The stock of my gun I gripped while gritting my teeth.
My frosty breath encircled my head like a wreath.
Then out of the thick trees there leapt a great buck,
And when he stared at me with awe I was struck.
He was muscular and stout; a right brawny old deer,
And I laughed, when I saw him, it was mostly from fear.
A wink of his eye and twist of his head,
Soon gave me the notion that I’d make him dead.
He made not a sound, but started to herk,
And lifting his tail, then turned with a jerk,
But pulling the trigger did not do the trick,
the action was frozen all I heard was a click.
He sprang through the snow, and gave a short cry,
and away he flew quickly like a bird in the sky;
and I heard brother exclaim, ere the stag waved tootolou,
“I haven’t seen dang thing, how about you?”
Shades of White

When a snowstorm comes I can catch up
Sort the papers on my desk
Worry about the taxes
Clean my dusty home
Get rid of this to-do stuff.

When a snowstorm comes I nestle down
I always make a chocolate drink and sit in a big chair
I’d really love a fireplace, but it’s just not there.

When a snowstorm comes I get my toys
Skis and sleds and skates and boards
The friction the snow offers me
Will make a great velocity.

When a snowstorm comes I am squeezed in
I pace, I whine, I fret
I want to go to different places
With a different atmosphere
Different than here.

When a snowstorm comes I have to work
Infallibly. I shovel, salt.
Otherwise how could I get out?

When a snowstorm comes I watch
The snow, and the way the snow filters the land
I am sleepily wrapped together
for the day and another clear, cold night.

When a snowstorm comes I get tropical dreams
I eat canned pineapple
White makes me see green...
Honorable Mention Poetry
Aaron Svec
Junior, Brookings H.S.

Poetry.
Fur Meine geheime liebe.

Poetry isn’t like stale Pez.
It is what it is.
Not necessarily what it says.

The tacky, plastic,
Pez protector;
much like our own thought projector.

We open them up,
wide to share,
in exchange quite undebonair.

Any dolt can make
a sugar brick.
But for better there is a trick.

A lemon drop,
for you love.
Is so much more fitting thereof.

Sweet hard coating.
Center tart not bitter.
Purity of emotion (without twitter).

Where Pez just would fall apart.
Spreading shards
to shred a lover’s tender heart.

The sweet lemon will flow,
with all emotion that is mine.

Your reaping it full. I will not pine.
Informed ignorance is bliss.
Sometimes it’s better,
not knowing what you miss.

In final beloved.
Poetry is what we were.
Compared to it,
Love and life are a blur ...
new year’s day
-to bobby-

a few years back i had taken a piano job out at our town mall. our “mall” was only about a handful of stores and depressingly small, but i really didn’t have much of a choice where i could play. i was that all annoying piano girl who surrounds the k-mart shoppers with lengthy drawn-out melodies and songs of the season. i had taken the job becuz the cost of living was going up at a disturbing rate and i was having a hard time catching up. so i gave up my afternoons and half-saturdays, all for minimum wage, but it did give me a guaranteed chance to get out of the house (apparently my father had a bout of infidelity before i was born and my mother had decided now was the time to discuss the issue). and besides, the world of retail could be my gateway to a completely new experience.

i started working there during the daybreak of the christmas season. i put my beloved concerto sheet music (that damn chopin was a riot, wasn’t he?) away and dug around for a beat up christmas carol book i had preserved for just the occasion. armed with book in hand and a dorky christmas sweater on, i went to my first day on the payroll. After i had played my first 2 hour set, and this is probably for the reason that my longest duration of playing had only been 45 minutes, my hands and forearms were completely cramped. i soon got used to it and at special moments, i even actually almost enjoyed my job. my family would sometimes come by to hear me play and support my habit, and my mates came by regularly to mock me. i did stop wearing that wretched sweater after that first christmas season though. shrunk the blasted thing into a size intended for dogs. i had this job for about 5 years; until i graduated from high school and escaped from this fucking hell-hole of a town.

i recall that it was the beginning of my working girl experience that i first met david. my school class and everyone else had to have our pictures taken for parents and yearbooks and such so the school would bring in a cheap student photographer from the community college to capture us on film and provide the district with photo id of us if we ever were to be arrested. the school usually received exactly what they paid for. but this time we were promised decent pictures for some reason unknown, but a lot of us were betting that the money that was intended for further asbestos removal wasn’t being spent on that this year. david was our photographer, and he was actually a professional, with the right equipment and everything. he laughed and he joked and he put us in unorthodox positions and took his damn bloody time taking those pictures. i noticed that his hair stood up, that he talked in a monotone voice, wore a tommy hilfiger rowing shirt, and had a tendency to stare at me. i’m not that conceited as to assume he was staring when he was not and i tried to ignore it, and he was.

i knewiwhewasiknewhewasaiknewthatheknewandheknewthatiknewthatheknewiwhewas. the sick twist on my part
was that i enjoyed and took great pleasure in the constant sudden eye contact every time i glanced over at him. i don’t get that. i never get it. i’m ignored. i’m not butt-ugly, i’m not mesmerizing. i’m the way i am and it doesn’t seem to be good enough for the other boys. i liked being stared at. its complimentary on my part.

the oddest obscenity i’ve ever heard yelled out was that of one where the young man screamed “damn, those whores must be expensive!” to a few of my comrades (i left the engagement early). it’s insulting for the fact he called them whores, but complimentary in the way he was regarding them pretty. isn’t it ironic? don’t you think?

i didn’t allow myself to make a thought of david’s less-than-proper etiquette until the end of the school-day. i had forgotten to tell mother i would be going straight to work after school so i had to call her. i had to run and grab a phone pass from my american history instructor and then go to the school office to use the student phone. when i walked into the office i immediately noticed the room was overcast in a coat of calvin klein cologne of some sort. obsession or one or chipmunk or some other meaningful one work title graciously given to various pre-packaged aromas. the room also smelt of apathy; drenched in it more like it. i was ready to make my phone connection on the student reserved phone when i discovered that the photographer was using it, and like hi work, taking and generously spending his damn bloody time using it. After waiting approximately 6 and 1/2 minutes, i tapped him on the shoulder and made my case very clear that i had a dire need of the phone he was operating. “just a minute,” the conversationalist of 93’ answered. “gotta go, bye.” and then he just hung up. i, for one, was taken back by his sincere willingness to oblige to my request. i could only say thank-you and pick up the phone and gaze right back up at his smile. “anytime, pretty face.” he gave me one of those pointing gestures of endearment that a sleazy band manager always gives and walked away.

he hung up the phone for me at the blink of an eyelash and called me pretty face. at that precise moment, he officially etch-a-sketch himself into my mind.

all during the bitterly cold and heavy walk (damn 4 pound algebra book) to my place of employment, i thought about him and what he looked like and what he smelled like and his monotone voice; everything. i was a few seconds of immersion short of obsession. the problem i have with specimens of the male gender is that i just can’t let go. i become completely infatuated and listless. stalking. i can’t let go of anything or anyone. it’s the hardest thing for me to do. well only some of the time. no, i’m lying. i can let go of anything.

i checked in at the mall office, punched the clock, found the piano, adjusted my bench (the guy who plays for real is really quite immense), and started. it was only the monday after thanksgiving, but i played christmas pieces anyway. no one seemed to mind; no one should for the fact the whole mall was done up in christmas crap already anyway. it’s a bit ironic for me to be participating in this red and green fiasco since i am an atheist and hadn’t gone to church for the past 7 years. it’s all for the common purpose of cash though. it’s pretty funny.

i played for 46 minutes (ditched the sweater) and was soon found myself mocked by my christmas spirited peers. i kept playing with my back to the philistines, knowing none of them had the gall to backstab me as i would to them. no permanent scarring took place with this condescension, although they did give healthy tries at it. for the rest of the time until my break was reasonably uneventful and i was fitfully ignored for a good length of time, but later i soon felt and realized undoubtedly that there was a pair of eyes still upon me. burning into me. i ignored and finished my crap-head rendition of “here come the bells”. i thought the eyes were to soon gone on their way, but clapping came as i let go and
released the last note from actuality. "you play well for a pushy girl, pretty face." i thanked him even though i wanted to be a good angry post-feminist and claw his eyes out. this feeling was canceled out by my emotion of equal strength to throw myself upon him. i refused to turn around. "you do this often?" he very politely inquired, pretending to be interested.

"i will be doing this for awhile. i can't talk. i have to keep playing if you don't really mind, sir." i replied quite coldly for a little girl, which is quite cold. even for me.

"alright—i'll see you around." he walked off.

i make myself aware of my environment and all the souls occupying it at all times. i've acquired the knowledge that people have certain smells, and the scent they produce reflects who they are and what they're capable of. it's kind of like who you choose favorite beatle determines what personality traits you have. the same goes for your favorite friend of the sitcom friends, even. even though a lot of us would rather beat the life out of courtney cox though.

most men smell of awkwardness, boredom, and occasionally the bout lust will sprout up. but every once in awhile i come across old boys who smell like rape. david didn't smell like rape. rape smells like the kind of danger that you always welcome yourself too, no matter how many times you tell yourself no. david did not smell like that. david only had the persistent habit of staring. i was indeedly attracted, even though i knew it wasn't at all good for me and just plain didn't want to get into it, but i couldn't tell if it was the face or the dirty lust of it all. the virgin and whore within me were having a bout of violet violence. a fight to the finish. for once but not necessarily for all.

i came to the decision for the sixth time to rid my mind of him. the fact i've confronted his figure three times and he remembered me throughout my encounters with him was the fates acting out on malicious wishes for my fumbling sanity. no more. i was being very good at that until my first playing break.

i went outside for a smoke, even though it was really idiotic and stupid thing for me to do, considering it was out in the open and i was still a minor and the community was really tight about underage tobacco use, even though all the old-timers can barely talk becuze of all the evil substances they have stuffed under their lower lips. i don't mean that at all as vitriol to the elderly at all. i luv old people. i learn the most honest answers from them. they have nothing to lose. at least they act like it.

i discovered i had forgotten my lighter and was searching myself for a match book. i'm a pyromaniac and i usually have something of that flammable nature on me at all times. i was still searching for that book when an all too familiar monotone vociferation broke my solitude. "light?" a hand offered me. i took it and mumbled thanks, half-wishing it wasn't him and half-wishing he would never leave. i took a long drag and ignored his all-confident looks at me.

"so what's a pretty face like yours smoking for? its a bad habit."

i snapped like a twig. "would you just stop showing up in the same place that i'm at?! what the hell are you doing?! following me?! HuH! jesus christ."

"i'm sorry if i'm intruding your space, would you like me to leave?" he gave such a sincere unatrocious reply to volatile reactions and accusations that i immediately felt sorry for what i had said and felt. "no, please don't. i'm just kinda wound up. i just find it a bit odd that your suddenly everywhere i am."

"you too? i think destiny makes thing happen with good intentions. actually, to tell you the truth, i kind of like it.
it isn’t everyday that i meet up with a pretty face like yours.” every time he said pretty face in reference to me i felt my heart skip and my fear heighten. i was harmless enough. it’s just that there hasn’t been a guy outside my family ever called my pretty before. but it still scared me the way he would say it and look at me down at me longingly, as if he were hungry and i was covered in cake or waffles or something. maybe both.

my dentist smells like rape. he’s an overly-kind man with good sincere intention. it’s just that his voice tells me secretly that he was actually a very bad man. once when i was 5 i became lost in jc penneys. a nice bloke tried to help me find my parents but i was so uncooperative, for that was the week when my kindergarten class talked about strangers and how e were never to talk or take candy from them. i was about to bawl or go ballistic or both, and this nice joe tried to suggest to me places where my mommy was. he kept leading me to the wrong place and i was set in my mind he was going to kidnap me and that my ass was fucked. the only other man i knew who smells completely of rape was a friend of my family. i was his tennis ball-girl and he liked to talk to me even though he was all grown up and i was just a little kid. the fascination facial notability that he possessed was that he was the spittin’ image of john lennon. i was never sure of whether he would put salt or ice on my wounds. david smelt like interest, and that every-popular apathy, and cheap cologne, and my father smells of hard work and laundry. my ex-boyfriend reeked of tide detergent and his new girlfriend smells of dishonesty. my substitute challenge instructor who was a former 1st grade teacher, legendary only for her indisputable knack in warping wide-eyed and extremely intelligent and charmingly innocent 6 year olds into extremely messed up, suicidal and ritalin popping 7 year olds, simply smelled the way only a bitter old hag could smell. i smell of uncertainty paired with over assertiveness and the aim to please and satisfaction until i become unsatisfied. i also smell like grainy pictures on calendar paper when i want to.

David stood next to me, looking forward, strong and silent. i finished my cigarette and crushed the butt with the heel of my boot. i decided to have another one while i still had the time, and as i tapped another out of my pack he spoke again. “you think i could have one of those?” i silently handed him the pack and he thanked me with a smile. i caught the smiling face for a few seconds and became totally mesmerized. he wasn’t attractive by any “normal” standards, not at all. it was just that his eyes drew me in. they told me the things 9i wanted to hear, and now i wanted more, i wanted to grab his neck and embrace him with everything i had and smell him and crawl inside him, and i wanted the same from him. i controlled my desires, but i made no move to deny or change them. i dealt with them instead. i simply closed my eyes and played along.

i find it funny how 90% of the creepy boys you encounter are actually the nicest people you’ll ever meet. to create an equilibrium and counter the point, the most pretty boys are usually the biggest wanks who will always screw you over. david’s face was oddly comforting; apologetic eyes and an easy smile if not a smirk. his hair was cut in the classic / normal cut and was ordinarily messy. his shirt was wrinkled and askew and much to thin for that weather. he wore only an unzipped and dreadfully ugly windbreaker over it, but he didn’t seem cold at all. he would glance at me every once in awhile, giving me a friendly smile if we reached the point of eye contact. he was starting to make me feel at ease. he was simply making friends and seemed harmless enough, but i still felt uncomfortable twitch in the back of my head. why me? why was he wasting himself and his precious time to try and become friends with a minor teenage girl who didn’t have anything better to do with my time than play christmas songs for minimum wage. it wasn’t so much that he was older; i
don’t like kids my age and if i do socialize it’s usually with a much older crowd. it was just that it seemed he could be with someone a helluva lot better for him. one side of me wanted to know more and get closer and the other side begged me to stay away. virgin / whore. it wasn’t the danger of getting killed or kidnapped, it was the danger of getting hurt, of becoming obsessed and filling my time unwisely and often feeding my unhealthy infatuation with actions i would want to rather forget. to end up caring too much, more than the other, was my fear. i couldn’t do that and get hurt again. i’m not going down that road again. not ever.

my thoughts were interrupted again, quite startled this time, by his monotone voice that my sub-conscious had already refused to get rid of. he asked when i got off. i wanted to tell him and a date up, but i didn’t. he did it for me. “maybe afterwards, we can go out for a cup of coffee or something. if you like, of course.” i wasn’t completely sure of his sincerity. some people are very good liars, myself included. everything’s a lie and can’t be completely proven anyway.

“i get off around 7:15. they bring in a real professional pianist for the busy hours, if you want to call them that.”
“isn’t that insulting to you?”
“it takes the pressure off.” (my only regret is that sarcasm never goes well on print)
“i’ll meet you by the piano.” he smiled and left without a good-bye. i almost felt dirty. almost. i could get away with a friendly cup of coffee, i wasn’t expected to be home until 9. oddly, i still felt like i was doing something very, very, wrong and bad. in hindsight, i just wanted to get inside him more. that was it. i closed my eyes and played along.

and that i did. the hours and the times passed as they should, and it wasn’t long until i felt the eyes on my hair again. i gave “hark the herald angels sing” a nice little fancy-type closing and greeted my coffee companion without turning around. i professed that i had a few minutes left yet and jumped into “what child is this”. without forewarning me, he sat down on the bench, barely touching my right or left hip, i forget which one. the apologetic eyes stared at my hands, not enough to make me nervous, but still. enough. i wrapped it up, said hi to dan-the-real-piano-guy, and david took my arm as we were off.

“where are we going?” i receive an official stupid git award for asking this question after getting in the car.
“all the coffee houses are closed, so i thought i’d treat you to a nice dinner. you probably haven’t eaten yet, have you? you’re probably starved.”
“yeah, i am.” and this was true. i was really hungry to tell you the truth.
i should have asked where we were going to eat, but i didn’t. i didn’t even think about it until we slowed down in front of an apartment building.
“uh, david, i really don’t think,” i couldn’t finish becuze he cut me off before i could manage the words out of my mouth.

don’t worry about. cynthia luvs to cook for other people. and i already told her you were coming and it would break her heart if you rain-checked out on us. i told her about you and she’s absolutely ecstatic to meet you. she doesn’t get off work until late, but she fixes meals before she leaves and then i pop it in the oven or whatnot before she gets home.”

okay, this was a new revelation. not only did i feel like a complete fool, i also felt like a complete ass for thinking
this guy was into me. i always pull wanker behavior like that. i wanted to slap my self. hard.

“is cynthia your significant other?”

“my loving wife and soul-mate for the past 3 years. come on, she’s due home in about an hour and i have a lasagna to take out of the oven. her mother was italian and i swear she gave cyth her magic touch with food. this will make your knees buckle.” he got out of the car and ran around to open the door for me. he still remains to be one of the most impressive gentlemen i have ever encountered in my lifetime.

yes, the lasagna made my knees buckle. and the garlic bread. and the salad/salad dressing. i thought i saw god when i took a bite of her strawberries ‘n’ cream torte with alabaster lemon frosting. that meal remains as one of my favorite times. cythia was and is a smart, confident, chatty person who knows what’s up and carries on with things in an assertive manner becuze she knew that she was right without being arrogant about it. she and david divorced a few years later. i still have christmas card contact with her. i do believe that right now she’s co-habitating with a musician in boston. the best of luck to her. god knows she doesn’t need it.

conversation is a precious thing to me. i treasure good intellectual intercourse very much, and that night was chock full of it. they treated me like i was an adult and i behaved as an adult. they were a classik well-educated/college degree holding 30-something couple. i would get into what we talked about, but i think i’m losing your interest as it is.

much too soon, i had the urgent need to return to my nest. the clock struck 9 and i requested permission to proceed back to the pumpkin coach. i thanked them both emphatically for the evening and david promptly drove me home and saw me to the door, only touching me with his voice on the way there. at the door i wouldn’t have minded if he gave me a handshake or a hug or something of the sort. i wouldn’t have even gone ballistic if he had given me a brotherly peck on the forehead considering he had become that close to me in that period of time. but he did something kind of unexpected, for me at least. it probably seems perfectly alright in your perspective, and it was, i would even go as far to say it was a logical action, but at the time, in my point of view, it was a bit weird. my collar was crooked; i had worn a dirty button down oxford and the collar had gone askew in the process of the day. he looked me over, flashed his impeccable and irremistakable smile (closed mouth at first, open mouth as he left) and fixed my shirt like a mother would her son. he never said good-bye formally; he did that by holding up his hand as a boy-scout would, and smiled yet again (he had sublime teeth) and walked to his car, only to look back once. i went inside and immediately peeled off my clothes and crawled into a hot bath.

every day after that, he came by after work to listen to my last rendition of the christmas classik of the day, greet me by ‘pretty face” (his term of endearment for cyth was “mesmerizing”), sit next to me on the piano bench, and then take me to 666 lake st., apartment 29 for something good to eat and discussion of life philosophies and infinite corners of the entity. and once in awhile he would come by during my break to bum a smoke. he fixed my collar every time he took me home; i ran a lot of bath water that month. by the week before christmas, cyth, david, and i were a quite a set of matinence triplets. we caused a couple of ruckuses that i’m not going to get into becuze they were kind of silly, but fun nonetheless. they were real people.

i didn’t really think of a christmas gifts for them until david mentioned he had something for me when we were walking to his car on new year’s day (i still had to work). the christmas decor had long been down and all the valentines
day decor was up now. i refused but he insisted. “oh, come on.” it’s the least we can do. you’re the only person we can stand in this town for more than fifteen minutes, and you’ve been so good about spending your free time with a bunch of old geezers.” he insisted with his eyes too, so i accepted while hurriedly wondering and planning what i would plan to give them in return. cynth like art, and david was a nan goldin fanatic, and i did see the printed version of “sexual dependency” the last time i went to the hungry mind in st. paul....

he proclaimed that the gift was not here, but somewhere else, and i was to wear a blindfold for it was a great big surprise. “you’re going to luv it. i promise.”

“you’re not going to do something really bad, are you?” i only meant it as a joke and was making the statement between giggles and a huge smile.

“no, of course not. i would never hurt you.” i felt the car slow down and stop.

he raped me and then i went home.
Darkness, an all-too-familiar foe, invaded his sleep-hazed eyes and tried desperately to keep them a stranger to light. The luminous, florescent glow of his digital alarm clock seemed to be the source of the sirens that tore through his unconscious mind. The eerie sound still vibrating in his ears brought him to a fully conscious state, as he struggled with stiff arms to shut off the alarm clock.

Sleep still rested itself on his tired, weary face as his futile memory began to replay the dream that was so rudely interrupted. With the light turned on, he squinted his eyes to avoid the overwhelming blindness as he quickly gathered his thoughts together, as if trying to figure out what to do next.

The clock read 8:02 a.m. Yawning deeply, he began a step-by-step process: (1) Put feet on floor. (2) Remember how to walk and go and take a shower.

Tiny water droplets began to evaporate as soon as the thirsty cold air swallowed them up, leaving in their place mountainous ridges of goose bumps that adorned the bare flesh of his forearms.

A smeared, distorted figure stood before him in the steam-covered mirror. With his left hand he briskly cleared a spot so that he could view his face more clearly. Another yawn escaped his mouth as he said with a hint of comedic flare, “For good measure.” Laughing and crediting himself fore such a sharp tongue (especially this early in the morning), he made his way out of the bathroom and straight to the television for the morning’s weather report.

The TV stood along the west side of his bedroom wall, where if he was positioned just right while watching it, the sun would shine in his face; taunting him to move to a different location.

The big mirror on his dresser gave him a full view as he dressed quickly, listened to the weather report, and vaguely remembered the dream that he had last night. It was the same dream that haunted him many nights.

On top of the TV stood a picture of a girl dressed in a snow-print sweater. The expression on her face was one of joy and serenity. Scrawled in perfect handwriting at the bottom of the picture was, “Love always and forever, Mandy.”

“Why?” was all he could manage, looking at the picture. “If only I was able to do somethin,’ he said as he proceeded to mentally beat himself up. She was so beautiful, he knew that he didn’t deserve her. It pained him awful whenever he had the dream.

In the dream he is walking out into the street where the only light that is visible is that of the streetlight. Darkness suffocates as he proceeds into the clearing created by the light. Surrounding him is a growing pool of crim-
son as he kneels down and looks into the dying face of Mandy. She looks at him with lifeless eyes and speaks with a soothing tongue. “Why?” is all she says.

“Why?” He repeats the word again.

Turning his back on the picture now, he retrieves a little name tag that proudly reads BOB. Being careful not to stick himself with the pin, Bob pins the name tag on his shirt.

It has been little over a year since Mandy passed away. He was with her that cold November night. The memory of that night still plays and replays itself in his mind. He remembers her cuddling closer to him to keep the chills away. When she says to him, “Hey, I think we should go to the movies tonight,” she looks at him with big, pleading eyes.

“Come on, it will be fun. Besides, we haven’t been out in a long time.” He can still smell the perfume that he had her for her birthday. He can still remember how hard she tried to persuade him. Finally he gave in and they went.

“Hold on a second, I have to use the restroom. Why don’t you go and start up the car and get it warm,” he said. She gave him a big, cheerful smile and left.

The hollowed sound of gunfire shattered through the silence of the evening sky. The sound of tires screeching and metal crunching echoed up and down the street. The worst case scenario, in the wrong place at the wrong time, innocent bystander. His heart ripped to pieces as he rushed out into the street, the sound of tender snow crunching beneath his feet.

The only light present was that of an old streetlight, and the lifeless body of his wife lay in a dark pool of blood as she fought for her life.

“H-help.” The word surpassed his trembling lips as he tried frantically to gather enough strength to proceed further.

Mandy’s pale grief-stricken face stared into a vast void of nothing, as she spoke with her dying breath, “L-luv y-you.” Then there was silence.

Tears began to form as he quickly diverted his glance away from the mirror. His wedding band sparkled in the redundant light of the bedroom.

“We have a cold one in store for you today. So if you’re going out, remember to bundle up nice and warm,” said the voice on the TV. “Temperatures range from the low 20s for Buffalo, Brooklyn, and Manhattan. The rest of New York State should expect temperatures in the mid 30s.”

“Yeah, you look nice and warm,” he said as he quickly turned the TV off. Taking one last look in the mirror, he grabbed the Ernie Ball cap that hung beside the TV and placed it on his head. With the cap in place, he made one last overall check, smiled a phony smile, and bid himself good-bye.

AS he walked out into the freshness of the early morning air, the wind in its own subtle way greeted him with a biting tongue that froze his tear stained cheeks. “Low 20s, huh. Brooklyn, what a hole!” The friendly comment was returned by the wind as it began to do a number on his ears. The soft crunch of the snow made a rhythmic beat as he walked down 34th Street to the Broadway intersection.
He could feel the uncomfortable position of the name tag as it bored itself into his chest and began to rip out his chest hairs with every slightest movement. Adjusting his shirt through his big winter jacket was no easy task.

Broadway and 34th, pronounced the big green street sign. With a sigh he made his way down Broadway Ave. No rest for the working class, he thought. He worked at Broadway Records, a used CD and tape store. A friend of the family owned it and basically gave the position of manager and owner to Bob, as he was the only one who worked there. He didn't mind the long hours; it kept his mind busy. Besides, he loved to listen to music and sit around and fiddle with the guitars that they had on display.

This morning, like every morning, was slow. He had a couple people stop in and browse, but they didn't buy anything. So for the last three hours he sat around and watched the time go by.

The jingle from the front door slapped him in the face and stole his attention away, as he looked up to see a man in nice business attire and a long trench coat make his way up to the front of the store.

With a friendly gesture, the stranger produced his hand and said, "Hi, how are you today? My name is Ken Burton. I believe we spoke on the phone earlier this morning. I called about the guitar."

"Oh," said Bob as he returned the gesture, "Bob, Bob Bennett. Nice to meet you. Yeah, hold on a sec and I will be right back with your guitar. So do you play?"

"Me? No, it's for my son. His birthday is in a couple of days. I thought I would surprise him. He's wanted one for a long time now."

The jingle over the door interrupted again as a young man appeared and quickly disappeared into the back of the store.

"I would wrap it for you," Bob said, trying to be funny, "But I don't have any wrapping paper on hand."

A hearty chuckle came in reply of the little joke. "Thanks anyway," said the man.

"Will this be it for today?" Bob asked while he rang up the price. "That will be fifteen-fifty."

"Here you go," said the man in the business attire as he handed Bob a check.

"You have a nice day, sir," said Bob.

"Thank you, you too."

A slight chill crept in as the man quickly exited the store. Now the only other person besides Bob was the young man that had entered the store earlier. He was wearing an old green army jacket that had seen better years. His hair hung like greasy tendrils down the front of his face, which bore the scars of a relentless acne problem.

"Can I help you find something, sir?" Bob asked with a slightly uneasy tone. He could feel his face getting hot and flustered as he opened the top drawer and peered into it at the small .48 pistol. The gun mysteriously found its way there about the same time that Mandy died. For some reason Bob found himself not being able to trust anyone since Mandy's death. A gleam of fear adorned his eyes as the stranger approached at an alarming speed.

"Yes," said the stranger drunkenly. Stumbling forward, the stranger tried hard to maintain his balance. "Um, yes. Do you think I could get a cigg from ya?"

"A w-what?" Bob asked in a puzzled tone.

"A cigg, a smoke, you know, a cigarette," the stranger replied, gesturing with two fingers pressed gently to his
lips. “Do you think I could get a cigarette from you?”

“I’m sorry man, but I don’t smoke,” said Bob.

“Come on man, I really need a smoke. Come on, I know you have one, give it up,” said the stranger, getting angrier with every word spoken. “Oh, I see how you are, you’re just a punk. If that’s the way you’re going to be!” he said as his left hand ventured into the shabby depths of his jacket and retrieved a small handgun. “Why don’t you just give me some money and I will go and buy my own smokes.”

Fear tore through Bob’s body like an electric current. Without a coherent thought he threw open the top drawer and challenged the stranger with the same unfriendly gesture. Like kids playing Cowboys and Indians the two faced each other.

“What the—” said the stranger, as the deafening sound of gunfire rang out and shattered the silence of the little CD shop.

* * *

Part Two

“Hey Buddy, it’s time to get up,” said a distant voice. “Your time’s up. It’s time to go and join the real world.”

The metallic sound of the tumblers in the cell door lock echoed off the walls as a guard dressed in blue entered. He was holding a small clipboard. “you are Brian Anderson, correct?” No answer. He continued, “Let’s see, you are being released today, so hurry up and get showered, and I will send someone along with your clothes.”

“W-what time is it?” Brian managed to croak out.

“It’s eight o’clock. Now hurry up and let’s get going.”

His clothes were lying in a neat little pile on the bench that lined the lockers just outside of the shower room. “Wow, clean and everything,” Brian said giving the guard who was standing outside of the door a little smirk. “What’s for breakfast, Honey? Eggs and bacon. You know that’s my favorite.”

“Quit being a smartass and hurry up,” said the guard impatiently.

“Okay man, hold on for a second. Jeez man, let me get dressed at least, huh?”

Brian found joy in giving other people crap. He began to whistle as he buttoned up his shirt and donned his green jacket. “Hey man, it’s been five months already? I guess time really does fly.”

The shabby old work shirt that he had on hung loosely over his baggy jeans. The coat added a certain flair, as the stuffing hung out of the rips and tears that adorned the jacket’s exterior. Greasy hair hung down and covered the pitted surface of his face.
“Come along Buddy, I’ve just about had enough of you.”

Outside, reality’s walls came crashing, bringing with them a dreadful feeling of claustrophobia. The wind spoke, biting and thrashing against his face, as he pulled his jacket closer to him to secure the warmth. Although he had on a big winter jacket, he could feel tiny goose bumps align his arms.

He had been down for a week now, and he was starting to feel the strain. Normal people think that jail is the best thing for junkies. It allows them to straighten out their lives and find alternatives to being high. But in reality it is easier to get stuff in jail than it is out on the street.

The air, fresh and cold, stung his lungs as he inhaled deeply and then coughed it all back up again.

“Hey man, do you have a cigarette I can borrow?” he asked the nearest person on the street.

“What? No, get away from me, freak.” The hard comment was then followed by a sharp punch to the lower side of Brian’s cheek. “you’re just a punk anyway.

The street, what a place. Where someone would rather kill you than look at you. They will turn you hard and uncaring. Well, you just have to be in order to survive.

Brian rubbed the right side of his cheek, trying to get the numbness out of it. The stinging sensation where his face had been violated was still strongly present.

The place where the sun had so bravely managed to stick its head out was gone, leaving in its place a shadowy reminder of a day forgotten. Darkness prevailed victorious and began to spread its sickly disease, causing the old, dimming streetlights to light its path. The bleak coldness of the nightfall’s breath brought up a panic feeling of death.

The old but unavoidable questions began to surface. Where will I sleep? How long can I last? The scars on Brian’s forearms, or in junkie terminology “tire tracks,” began to itch and cry out in pain. His body needed to be soothed. “The pain!” Brian screamed out in agony. A junkie’s only worldly need. With their drugs they can be anybody they want, they can be anywhere they want to be. A junkie’s only friend. A quick escape from reality.

Now the pain was more present with every step he tread. The pain began to consume his mind. He had been walking for hours now and it was time; what he needed was some money.

“Excuse me, ma’am. Could you um, could you spare um, a few bucks so I can get something to eat?”

“Get away from me you little beggar.”

“Pleeeeeeasee, ma’am. I haven’t eaten in dayz.”

“NO!”

“Well forget you then! I don’t need your money. I’ve got my own money. I was just lying to you.” Just then he snapped and lunged for the frightened lady as she tried desperately to protect herself by flailing both arms in the air to avoid the attack.

He stood over the lifeless body of the young lady. Breathing hard, trying to keep his composure, Brian grabbed the purse that was in the tight grip of the lady’s hand and dumped out the contents on the ground. Although the streets were crowded with people, nobody noticed the commotion. That’s another thing about the streets. People are always
looking out for number one. Not caring about anyone else. He grabbed up the wallet and all of the loose change on the ground and stuffed them into his coat pocket. “What’s this?” he said as something shiny caught his eye. There, luminating in the wake of the old streetlight, was a small handgun. Quickly grabbing it up, he placed it in his inner coat pocket and took off down the street.

The frozen air consumed him and paralyzed him as he ventured further and further into the hollowed mouth of nightfall. He needed someplace warm where he could gather his thoughts and warm himself up. A sign over a door read “YES, WE ARE OPEN.” Brian looked up and read the sign on the awning. It read, “BROADWAY RECORDS. We buy and sell used CD's.”

Quickly avoiding the wind's hateful tongue, Brian pushed open the door and went inside.

“I would wrap it for you, but I don't have any wrapping paper on hand,” said the man behind the counter.

“Thanks anyway,” came the reply from the other man in the trench coat.

Brian decided it would be a good idea to wait till the other man left before he asked the man behind the counter if he could spare some money. He diverted his glance to the back of the store and made his way unnoticed to the aisle marked classical music. He began to thumb through the CDs, briefly looking at the titles on them.

The jingle over the door startled him as he looked up to see the man in the trench coat leaving the store. Brian had been out in the cold longer than he thought. He started to stagger as he made his way to the front counter.

“Can I help you find something, sir?” said the clerk in a friendly tone.

“Yes,” Brian said drunkenly, as he stumbled forward. “Um, yes. Do you think I can get a cigg from ya?”

“A w-what?” the clerk asked.

“A cigg, a smoke, you know a cigarette..” Brian gestured with two fingers up against his lips, and then he repeated, “Do you think I could get a cigarette from you?”

“I'm sorry man, but I don't smoke,” replied the clerk.

“Come on man, I really need a smoke. Come on, I know you have one, give it up,” Brian said, getting angrier with each word. “Oh, I see how you are, you're just a punk. If that's the way you're going to be!” Brian said, as he reached into his coat pocket and produced the small handgun that he had recently acquired. “Why don't you just give me some money and I will go and buy my own smokes.”

With lightning quick reflexes, the clerk threw open a drawer and came up quickly with a gun of his own.

“What the--” was all Brian could manage, when the clerk let the hammer fly and brought Brian down with the quickest of ease.

https://openprairie.sdstate.edu/oakwood/vol2/iss6/1
After the smoke cleared and Bob had some time to regain his thoughts, he peered over the counter at the lifeless body of the stranger. He just shook his head in disbelief. He had heard the same gunshot once before; apparently it was one too many times.

The bullet had entered the left side of the stranger’s neck. A river of blood poured out, creating a dark circular outline of the body. Bob went to check for any ID or some form of identification. The driver license read Jane Smith. On the stranger Bob found a twenty-dollar bill and two-fifty in change.

The police report said it was self-defense. But deep down, Bob felt that it was more along the lines of retaliation.

* * *

Just another day.
Dawn and the White Wolf

Introduction

As she rocked in the chair, the wind grew colder, and her face became lighter. She was growing older before my very eyes. The chair creaked as it went back and forth, back and forth.

She looked up at me with her cold blue eyes then she said softly, “Stay, young child, and I will tell you a story of love and one’s heart that wanders far to find thy love.”

“Yes, ma’am,” I said and sat down to listen to the story.

Chapter 1

One snowy night the wind roared, and the sky turned black. The biggest storm ever was coming.

Dawn, a fourteen year old, was the daughter of the Queen of Crystal Lake Valley. Her father had died many years ago of influenza. She had an older sister Cassie who was eighteen and as beautiful as Dawn but usually kept to herself.

“Mother, I’m upstairs,” Dawn replied.

“Come down here. Steve is here to see you.”

As Dawn walked down the stairs, the whole castle lit up from her beauty. Steve, a peasant, had asked Dawn to marry him, but her mother objected.

Cassie was in love with a young man named Andy who was the prince of Swan Lake City. Her mother thought Andy was sweet and kind and had no objections to Cassie marrying him.

Dawn was furious. She had no words to express her feelings to her mother. In her rage she ran away deep into the woods where no one could find her.

Chapter 2

“Dawn, come to breakfast,” her mother called the next morning.

No answer.

“Dawn Lillypad Ann, come down here now!”

No answer.

Her mother filled with rage as she climbed the stairs to find her. As she entered the bedroom, she immediately
saw a letter on the dresser. The letter read,

Dear Mother,

My beauty may be great, but my heart is even bigger. Since my heart is so big, my feelings are many. I love Steve. Because he is not a prince should not make any difference so you will never see me again.

Love,
Dawn

The queen ran down the stairs and summoned all her guards. “My daughter has run off. If you do not find her, you will regret it very much!” When Cassie heard about her sister, she fell into great despair. She loved her sister and would die without her. She then fell to her bed in great depression. Surely, she would die if Dawn did not return.

Chapter 3

Many year had passed, and Cassie had grown older but was still very ill. Without Dawn there was no hope for Cassie’s survival.

Deep in the forest inside an unnoticeable, little cottage lived Dawn. She no longer lived off the riches of her mother but the riches of the forest. She ate berries and fruit that she found. She never went out at night, for she could hear the wolves cry in the distance.

One morning she was awakened by a knock on the door. “Who could that be,” she wondered. “Maybe, they will go away.”

“Knock, knock, knock.”

When she finally opened the door, she saw Steve standing in the doorway.

“How did you find me?” Dawn asked surprisingly.

“I have searched for years for you and would not give up until I found you. Now my search can end,” Steve responded.

“How is my mother? Is she still alive?”

“She has stepped down from the throne.”


“Also, whoever finds you alive then shall marry you and become king,” said Steve.

“How is my sister?” asked Dawn.
“She is very ill and dying of despair without you,” Steve announced softly. “How long has she been like this?” Dawn asked with tears in her eyes. “She has been like this ever since you left almost four years ago,” said Steve. “Then we shall leave immediately, be married, and save my sister,” Dawn said as she hurriedly made preparations to leave.

As they left on their journey back to the castle, they did not notice that a storm was approaching fast.

Chapter 4

As they walked along, they could feel the winter storm approach, for the wind was blowing harder than either of them could bare.

They continued through the black forest but night fall soon approached and the night grew colder and darker. They decided to rest for the night in a big tree and would continue in the morning.

During the night as the young couple slept, a pack of wolves surrounded the tree. Dawn became frantic so Steve jumped down out of the tree to try to scare them away.

The wolves all charged at once and dragged Steve into the dark night. All Dawn could do is watch. As she huddled in the tree, sleep would not return. She just sat in the tree for the rest of the night thinking about the yellow eyes of the wolves.

When morning arrived, she sadly continued on her way, for she still had her sister’s life to save. She struggled through the wintery blizzard snow and huge drifts. She soon collapsed. Unknown to her the pack of wolves were following her the whole time. As she lay in the snow unable to move, the wolves gathered closer.

Chapter 5

As the snow covered her, Dawn could feel her life slip away. A white wolf, the leader of the pack of wolves, saw the young girl near death and began digging her out. He pulled her into a cave where it was very warm. Slowly her blood began to circulate and she awoke. Something was wrong! Everything was black. The experience has blinded her. She knew at once that she would never see again, but she knew she had to reach her sister. For Cassie’s life was still at stake.

As she went to leave, the white wolf pulled her back to the cave. At first Dawn was very frightened, but then she sensed no danger. She talked to the white wolf with gentle words and a soft touch.

When she went to leave again, the white wolf served as her guide.

They traveled for a few hours. Then Dawn could feel the cold of night approach. She lay under a tree but shivered badly from the cold night air. The wolf lay down beside her. With his warmth she slowly went to sleep.

Chapter 6
When Dawn awoke, she could feel the warm sun rays but could still see nothing. She decided to continue her journey to help Cassie. Somehow the wolf seemed to know the way and acted as Dawn’s guide.

Dawn held onto his tail as the wolf led the way. The wolf brought food to Dawn. He seemed to know what she liked and disliked.

They traveled on for days at a time hardly taking a break. Then one day Dawn ran smack into what seemed to be steel gates.

The gates were covered with locks of ivory, and Dawn could smell the wonderful fragrance of all the flowers. She could hear the birds chirping to a delightful tune. She knew at once she was home at last.

After Dawn found her way up the long pathway to the door, she slowly stepped up and knocked. She was still hanging onto the wolf’s tail. She knocked a second time.

“Knock, knock, knock.”

When a man opened the door, he asked, “Who are you? What are you doing here?”

Dawn had forgotten she was now 20 and not 14 years old. Her hair was now shoulder length. Her beauty had lessened while she was in the forest.

She at once answered, “I am Dawn Lillypad Ann once princess. Now I will be queen of Crystal Lake and the castle.”

The doorman was stunned. “You may enter, my grace.”

The white wolf led Dawn directly to Cassie’s room where she was ready to take her last breath.

When she looked up, she knew at once who was standing above her. Cassie stood up and hugged her sister. As the tears ran down her face, a tear dropped into Dawn’s eye and her sight returned. Her beauty also returned. She once again lit up the whole castle with her beauty and her joy.

Then she turned to the wolf who had saved her life and gave her the courage to continue on her journey. As she bent down to kiss his nose, an even more brilliant light filled the room. The white wolf rose into the air and was slowly turning. Slowly ever so slowly the wolf was turning into Steve who she thought was dead!

When he saw Dawn, they just stood and looked at each other.

Chapter 7

Soon after Cassie and Andy were married. Cassie became the queen of Swan Lake.

Dawn and Steven were also married, and Dawn became the queen and Steve became the king of Crystal Lake.

Epilogue

That was the story of Dawn and the white wolf. When I looked into the old woman’s eyes, she had tears running down her face. Then I remembered her name, Mrs. Ann....Well, you never know. Miracles can happen.
Honorable Mention Prose
Jessica Peterson
Freshman, Sioux Valley High School

Sox

An elderly man sits in a rocking chair with a small girl resting on his lap. The broken leather and old wood of the chair creak as the chair rocks back and forth. His weathered lips curve into a smile on his lined face. The tiny creases around his eyes start to deepen. This is a smile so genuine that anyone can see the sparkle in his green eyes.

The child lays her head against his broad chest as if he were fragile china on the verge of breaking. It is obvious that work has not aged his body. His is still tall and broad. Although his face is wrinkled from hard work and hair is gray from children, his face still glows with warmth that no fire could produce.

I am proud to say this man is my grandfather.
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Submissions

If you are currently a student at South Dakota State University (graduate or undergraduate), you are eligible to submit works for the 1998 edition of Oakwood.

When submitting please enclose a cover letter that includes the title of the work(s) you submitted, a current address and telephone number, your major(s), your year in school, and medium and measurement (for art work). Please do not place your name anywhere on your literary works. This will insure anonymity during the selection process.

All types of creative work can be submitted to Oakwood. For written works, we will accept fiction, non-fiction essays, and poetry. For artwork we will accept drawings, prints, black and white photography, cartoons, floor plans, and photographs of paintings and sculptures.

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