

MONTAGE

200?



A MACMURRAY
ART AND LITERARY
MAGAZINE

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WELCOME TO MONTAGE.

We're glad to be back after a long break. For those of you unfamiliar with this publication, *Montage* is MacMurray College's art and literary magazine, filled with artwork, poems, short stories, and prose written and selected by Mac students.

For me, one of the most confounding problems as editor-in-chief was assigning a year to this magazine. In these pages you'll find works from the fall of 2004 to the winter of 2006. And, simply to make things more confusing, it is now being published as 2007 begins.

So, we're leaving the year as 200?. No single year could properly represent the time, energy, and creativity that have gone into this magazine these past few years.

And, as to not make the future jealous of these past, we took a last minute time travel expedition to the autumn of 2009 to secure our final selections.

I want to thank you on behalf of everyone who was a part of putting this magazine together. Keep on writing. Keep on arting. We hope you enjoy *Montage* and that you gain something from these pages.

Erik Tylkowski,
editor-in-chief

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STILLNESS ALL AROUND

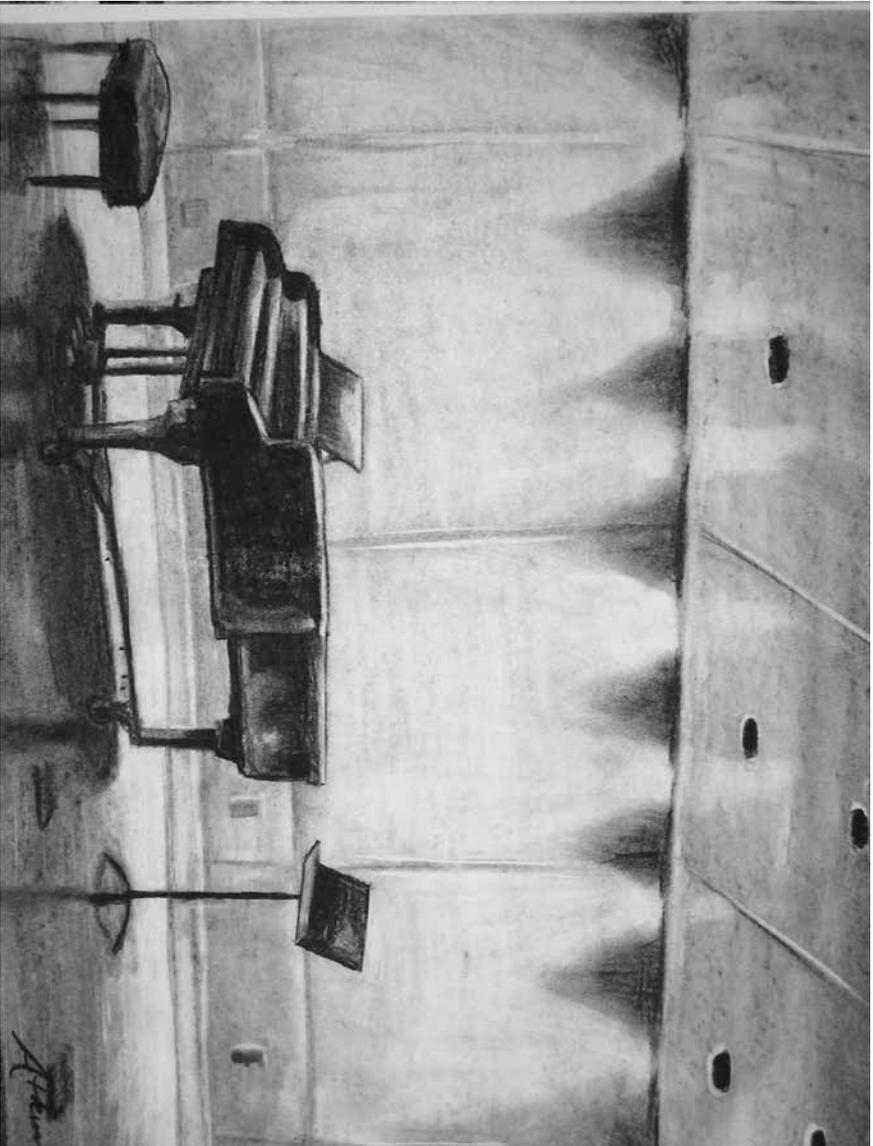
BY JACQUELINE LANDIN

High up in the canopy
The calmness is profound;
A cry that's aptly spoken,
Startled—stillness sounds.

YESTERDAY

By Eric Crouse

A little less insane than yesterday
We sit and lie around the house
Your winks and nudges make today
A little less insane than yesterday
We'll try again tomorrow-if we may
To rekindle the excitement we now douse
A little less insane than yesterday
We sit and lie around the house



“Solitude in A Mirror” by Brian Atkins

THE VOW

BY ABI WURDEMAN

The deep arch of Irene Henephen's penciled-on eyebrows suggested to Lacy that the five-inch slit in her scarlet knee-length skirt was far too scandalous for a Sunday morning service at Immanuel Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Lacy began to fidget, feeling the gaze of the seventy-six-year-old charter member burning into the fabric of her skirt from across the aisle. She pretended not to notice that she was being scrutinized as she curled and uncurled the corner of her bulletin between her thumb and middle finger.

She was beginning to feel rather foolish for having shown up dressed as she was. Most of the young members of Immanuel had either joined a hipper Lutheran church, grew disenchanted with Lutheranism and sought a different denomination, or disclaimed religion altogether. Much of what remained here were the older folks, firmly rooted in the old traditions of the church, who feverishly backed the senior pastor's decision to avoid change at all costs. As a result, the attire of the women of the congregation consisted largely of heavy wool sweaters, full-length flowered dresses with lace trim and puffed sleeves, and a broad array of orthopedic footwear. There were very few knee-length skirts (those that existed belonged to the middle-aged women who, like her mother, still had the legs for them), absolutely no five-inch slits, and the closest thing she could find to another hourglass figure in the sanctuary belonged to the fifteen-year-old acolyte who concealed hers with a robe. Her youth alone forced her to stand out, and in this parish, it would take a muumuu to conceal the differences.

Deloris Schaffer, a middle-aged single woman who had a habit of asking Lacy if she remembered the two weeks Deloris babysat her when she was eighteen months old and her parents were gone for a mission trip in China, slid into the pew in front of Lacy and her parents. Deloris caught hold of Lacy's gaze and stubbornly clung to it.

“Hey there!” she gushed. “So glad to see you back! How’s school?”

Lacy replied with an uncharacteristically warm smile. “It’s going great,” she said. “I really like it there.”

Deloris nodded enthusiastically. “Yeah, college is an experience. A lot of opportunities to witness. Have you gotten any Bible studies started down there?”

Lacy heard this question at least three times every Sunday she was back from school. She was never quite ready to tell these people who considered her a strong leader and a young woman of spiritual maturity that she had lost the sense of certainty for which she was once praised. She had converted no one since beginning school, nor had she made any serious attempts to. And she served as a guide to no one—rather she hungrily devoured the ideas and philosophies of other denominations, trying to make sense of her own. She could no longer explain how God’s benevolence was apparent in the story of Job. She was not entirely certain that she understood the line between the redeemed and the condemned. And some days she even felt doubtful that prayer would pull her towards the truth. But how could she explain to this woman beaming before her now that her faith had thinned and become so delicate? How could she admit to asking more questions than she answered? How could she confess to this woman that she felt remarkably out of place in this community of strict Lutheran truths?

As it happened, there was no opportunity to test these questions, because before Lacy could reply, the organ began to sound the first chords of the opening hymn. She recognized “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” immediately, and without so much as a glance at her bulletin she lifted the red hymnal out of its place on the back of the pew and flipped to Hymn 321. Her eyes were not committed to the print of the page, nor was she focused on the words. But she caught every note perfectly, and sang every syllable as she tugged at the hem of her skirt, trying to stretch it. And though her eyes never left the offensive slit in her skirt, never stopped measuring the area of her thigh that was exposed, her body followed the path of the raised wooden cross

and the feeble, balding pastor that processed with it towards the altar.

As the organist concluded the hymn with the final chord, drawn out rather dramatically, Lacy felt a gentle nudge in her ribs and heard her mother's voice whisper, "Is your underwear red? Maybe you could pull the skirt down over your tush and no one would know the difference."

Lacy raised her eyes from her skirt to roll them in her mother's general direction, then caught sight of Pastor Bradley, now standing at the baptismal font, an infant in his arms and his wife, daughter, and son-in-law gathered at his side.

Lacy leaned in toward her mother.

"I didn't know they had another one," she whispered.

"Oh yes," came the reply. "Just a couple weeks ago. It was very dramatic. For a while they didn't know if Lauren would make it."

Even now, Lauren looked a bit worn down, Lacy noted. The beaming mother look had yet to grace her, although Lauren did watch her father and the infant he cradled with a quiet smile, one of Mona Lisa proportions. Her voice was barely audible when paired with the booming, alert voice of her husband, as the couple vowed—with the help of God—to raise their child according to God's will and to encourage her spiritual growth.

The infant began to cry, and Lauren reached out to lightly stroke the child's curled pink fingers as Pastor Bradley swayed in an effort to calm her. Speaking over the baby's gasps and cries, he asked the congregation to vow to accept their own responsibility for encouraging and facilitating the child's spiritual growth within the Lutheran Church. And though her fingers never left the dimpled hand of her child, Lauren turned her gaze to the parishioners before her, as though awaiting an answer, as if twenty-nine years had not taught her that the congregation would inevitably respond, "Yes, with the help of God."

The hopeful gleam in Lauren's eye forced Lacy to hear herself take the vow for the first time: "Yes, with the help of God."

And as she watched the water trickle between Pastor

Bradley's fingers while he lifted small puddles to the infant's forehead, and heard his voice, baptizing her under the same Name under which countless others, Lacy included, had been baptized, she made the vow a few more times in prayer, just to be sure God knew she was serious this time.

She glanced across the aisle to discover the eyebrows of Irene Henephen, former Sunday school teacher, arched in disdain toward Lacy's skirt. And Lacy smiled. She may not always be fully committed to the doctrine of the Lutheran Church. She may forget Luther's explanation of the Ten Commandments. One day, she may even call herself a liberal. But she will always know what love is, what grace is, who God is. And she will always remember who taught her that first—with the help of God.

O, HOW I LONG TO HEAR

BY THOMAS PINKERTON

O, how I long to hear your voice, a sweet zephyr of sound
That, when soft, could shatter The Lord's firm countenance.
Softer,
When like silk against the mind's tympani,
The most blessed of threes is uttered.
Not father, nor son, nor ghost,
But instead a triad of unending beauty.
A phrase whispered in soon-hallowed halls
In secreted places – made paradise – if only because of the
company.

Let me hear those words again, those sweet murmurs
That made my heart alight on branches.
That made tears appear on our cheeks
Like the softest dew.
Let me appeal, as lovers oft

That Time halt its relentless advance.
That space between us fade to naught,
'Til our hearts, minds, souls, bodies again become as one,
As it did in the time promised us in our youths.

And like youth, let us don our innocence once again;
Let us bathe in the basking warmth
Of another's arms. Emotion melting, dissolving
The glacial cold between.

O, how I long to hear again those inflections of the sweetest song,
Rippling as the reflections of a lily-scented pond...
Disturbed by an Autumn rain.
As though my spirit were a crystal glass,
Singing one, long, forlorn note at the memory
Of a finger through my hair – a light touch 'pon my skin.

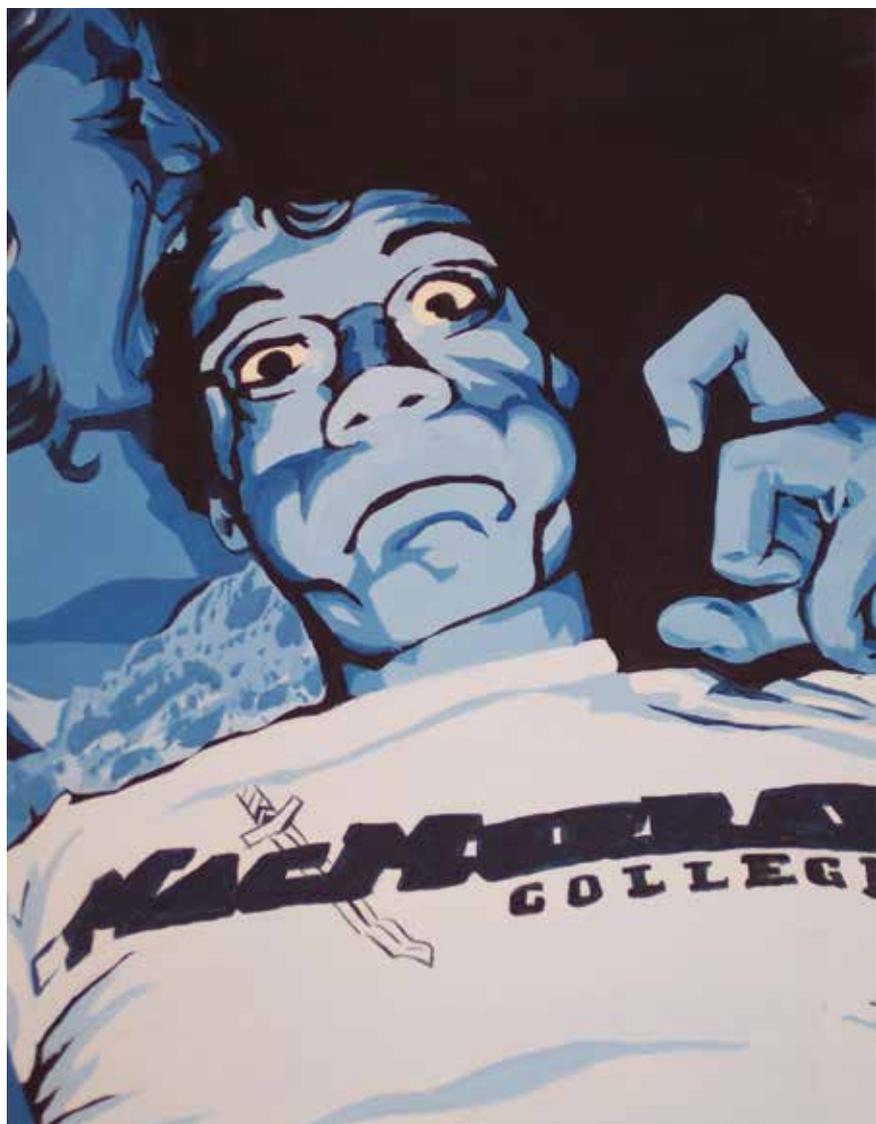
So cry, O lonesome heart, sob, O wanting soul.
Rebel against the loss of touch.
Rebel against the biting cold.
Let out unto the wind a prayer, a desperate plea, a howl.
Send into the char-black night, my pride –
A winking star, extinguished fully. Now humble. Now meek.

O, how I long to see again, such radiance
'Pon my brow, washing away the furrows there
In a bathing light, eclipsed by naught.
Entranced, enchanted, I reach out,
Longing again to feel down-soft flesh,
You. Embodiment of hope, no longer ethereal, now made
solid.

O, how I long to hear your voice,
Your breathing, harmonious, next to mine.
Hearing again a simple three-word phrase
That blessed me more than all things divine.



“Attack of the Killer Tomatoes” by Brian Atkins



"Massacre at Midnight" by Brian Atkins

UNTITLED

BY RICHARD SCHULTZ

I've written my dreams in the sand.
I blew them away in a single breath.
And laughed about the simplicity of it all.
I cloaked myself in starlight, ate a bit of light from the dippers.
And laughed for the realization of it all.
With cupped hands I drank from the well of clarification.
And laughed at the clarity and translucence of life.
I burned endless fields of memories.
And cried tears of joy as they turned to ash and disappeared.
With the heart of a titan I stormed the gates of hell.
I've overcome the desires of the grandest kind.
And laughed at the success of it all.
I've built walls for my world as high as the city will allow.
And laughed at the solidity of it all.
I picked a dozen daffodils from a field of flowers.
And laughed at the fragrance of newness.
I've buried my hope under the stones of Atlantis.
And cried tears of joy at the experience of it all.
I leapt from the highest rooftop on earth.
I spread my wings and still haven't found the ground.
And laughed about the view from on high.
I sat at the pearly gates of heaven while the choir sang a love song.
And laughed at the beauty of it all.
I swallowed the whole world in a grain of salt.
And laughed at the flavor of everything.
I shook the hourglass and found there to be much sand.
And cried tears of joy at the fullness of life to live.

CASUAL CONVERSATION

BY NIKKI VANT

"Is this seat taken?"

"No."

"Can I sit?"

"Yes."

"Thanks. It's pretty crowded in here."

"Mm-hmm."

"I'm Ben."

"Jillian."

"Nice to meet you."

"Likewise."

"What are you reading?"

"*The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath."

"Ah. Feminist prose, huh?"

"Pardon?"

"*The Bell Jar*. It's feminist prose, right?"

"Well—"

"My ex-girlfriend read stuff like that all the time. She was way into women's lib. She read Plath, Beauvoir, Morrison, Hillary Clinton... All that crap."

"Crap?"

"No. Not 'crap.' You know what I mean."

"I don't think I do, actually."

"I just, you know, don't read that stuff. So I don't understand it."

"I see."

"Yeah?"

"Yes. You haven't given it a chance, so you write it off."

"Is that all you read?"

"Is what all I read?"

"Feminist prose. Is that all you read?"

"No."

"What else?"

"Tolstoy, Austen, Wordsworth, Chaucer, just about anything, really. I'll read any author at least once."

"Are you a teacher?"

"No."

"Oh. You just seem...you know, like a teacher-type."

"Why's that?"

"Well, because you read all the time and you talk properly and stuff."

"How do you know I read all the time?"

"Well, you rattled off those authors..."

"I read, but not all the time. And I only mentioned four."

"So what do you do?"

"I'm a writer."

"Aha! That explains it!"

"Explains what?"

"That look you have."

"What look?"

"The teacher look. It's really a writer look. What do you write?"

"Novels, mostly. Although I have put together two collections of short stories."

"Cool. Anything I've read?"

"I don't know. Have you read *On the Edge*?"

"No."

"Then you probably haven't read anything I've written."

"*On the Edge*, huh? Maybe I'll check it out."

"Mmm."

"I've never met a published author before."

"Mmm."

"You know, I write poetry."

"Do you?"

"Yeah. I got some of it put in a magazine at my college. It was pretty cool. I still have a couple of copies. Think I could ever get published for real?"

"I don't know."

"Hey—do you think you could, you know, pass some of my stuff along to your publisher?"

"Probably not."

"Why not? Different genre?"

"No. I'm just not going to do that. I get requests for that a dozen times a day, and it's just not something I do. I don't know you, I don't know your work, and I refuse to once again embarrass myself by sending a stranger's work to my bosses simply because you wrote a poem in college. I learned the hard way that I can't always be a reference for up and coming writers."

"Whoa. Sorry. I was just asking. Didn't mean to hit a nerve."

"You didn't. I'm just trying to have breakfast, and you've come to my table, started talking to me as though we're old friends, and now you want me to get you published. It's just a little much to handle before lunch."

"You want me to leave?"

"You don't have to. I'm sorry I snapped at you."

"It's okay. It happens. Women are pretty emotional."

"Pardon?"

"It's okay. I had this ex-girlfriend who'd go off on me every time I left my underwear on the bathroom floor. She was way emotional."

"Perhaps you should have used the hamper."

"Yeah. Well, she didn't have to get so upset, you know?"

"How long were you together?"

"Three years."

"Mmm."

"Is that book good?"

"I think so, yes."

"Would I like it?"

"Probably not, but that shouldn't stop you from trying it."

"Maybe I will."

"Mmm."

"What else would you recommend?"

"I don't know. I don't know your reading tastes."

"I don't really read."

"Then why are you asking for my book recommendations?"

"Well, lots of my friends read, and my new girlfriend reads all the time, so I thought I'd see what's so great about it."

"Well, you should ask them what to read, then."

"I used to read a lot, but then I started dating, and I just don't anymore."

"I see."

"Are you married?"

"No."

"Boyfriend?"

"No."

"Girlfriend?"

"No."

"Do you date?"

"I don't really think that's any of your business."

"Sorry. Just curious."

"Mmm."

"Are you working on anything right now?"

"Pardon?"

“Writing? Are you writing anything right now?”

“Yes. A novel.”

“What’s it about?”

“The plot isn’t fully developed yet.”

“Oh. Hey—I know you probably get this a lot, but...where do you get your ideas?”

“You’re right. I do get that a lot.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes. I get my ideas from life. I’ve written short stories about brief moments in my day, and I’ve written novels about events in the lives of my friends. Anything around me is usable in my work.”

“Are you going to write about me?”

“Pardon?”

“Well, this is a moment in your day, isn’t it? Wouldn’t it make a good short story?”

“Perhaps.”

“That’d be awesome! If you do, will you call me and let me know so I can tell all my friends? Here’s my card.”

“If I did, you wouldn’t know it. I usually take a kernel of truth and spin a story around it.”

“That’s too bad.”

“Mmm.”

“I’d know, though, right?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I’d know if someone wrote about me. It’s me, you know? I’d know the person because I know myself.”

“Not necessarily.”

“I think I would.”

“Perhaps.”

“Maybe I should write about this.”

“Mmm.”

"I could be an author. I'll do just like you said: take a...what is it? A kernel of truth, and I'll turn it into a story."

"Mmm."

"I could be an author. It'd certainly be better than what I've got going now. I could write the next great American novel, even! How long did it take you to write your first novel?"

"Five years."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes."

"Wow. Why did it take so long?"

"Authors don't just sit down and write a finished novel. You write a draft. It gets edited and rewritten over and over until it becomes the final draft. And that's only your own revisions."

"Man. I didn't know so much was involved."

"Obviously."

"How long did it take Sylvia Plath to write *The Bell Jar*?"

"I have no idea."

"Maybe it depends on what you write. I mean, if I write a novel that's just for entertainment, maybe it won't take as long. Maybe it's the books that have social statements that take longer. What about your novels? Do they have social statements?"

"Indirectly, yes. But to the casual reader, it's about the story, not the statement."

"Ah. Symbolism."

"Not exactly."

"I was going to be an English lit. minor in college, but I hated a few of the professors, so I didn't do it."

"Mmm."

"So I stuck with business, and now I punch a clock. But if I write a book, I could quit and be a writer. I could start with this, even! Do you have a pen I could borrow?"

SAINT PETER, I ALWAYS EXPECTED LESS

BY ERIC CROUSE

Saint Peter, I always expected less,
more gray and cumulo-stratus
than bright sk[eyes] and vibrancy.
Obsidian non-Euclidian
replacing fluted marble
and marble flutes.
My afterlife after life
never had mileum aureum.

I always found my gold
on Earth: leaves falling
in autumn, last month's playmate's
lengthy locks, Crème brûlée
Life un-through being lived.
And yet I'm not livid.
No, that's untrue.
Muscles tense and veins bulge,
teeth clench and words sputter.

"It was your time" becomes
A hard [con]cept except
for blind Faith and her friends
following each other over cliff's edge.
I don'tcan'twon't wrap my fatty bacon
around the tender filet mignon.
It's the cooks job. My life
came out rare, not well-done.

INSOMNIA

BY JORDAN DANIELS

Into the darkness I descend
My mind, a cloud
Has yet to give
I float on this plateau
As I await the unknown

Willingly I do descend
To sleep, perchance
I do not know
As shadows envelope my being
One last voice cries out

As a knife through butter cuts
So is this voice
To my confused existence
Wherefore do I linger so
Upon the brink of continuation

This has become without my help
A journey constant
Never does it slow or stop
The cards, once on the table
Cannot be moved



Untitled by Matt Duncan

NOT A DAY GOES BY...

BY MELISSA DAVIS

Not a day goes by that I do not think of you, my friend. You are always with me in everything that I do. Though you would never take credit for it, you played a big role in where I am today. Your way was gentle as you softly planted the seeds of your friendship in my mind.

You so wanted to see me become the person that you knew was inside me. You patiently stood by me in my greatest hours of need never wavering for one moment. You saw me through the tears and bruises. Every time, you held my hand and took me in when I needed a place to stay when I thought I had left for the last time. You never judged me for the choices and mistakes that I made during our friendship.

You would only warmly smile at me and say, "When are you going to find your happiness?" followed by, "When is my old friend coming back to me?" Then you would gently remind me of that person that I was. You would ask me, "Do you remember the girl you once were?" Then you would tell me, "I remember you, you were so alive and fun. Your sense of humor always got me through those long days of school. The times that we shared were the best times that I remember from growing up with you. Please tell me when my friend will return."

The thing that bothers me the most is that you never did see your old friend return. You were killed in a car crash just as I started to become the friend you always knew I was. I never got the chance to tell you that I began college classes two weeks before you died. I never got the chance to tell you that I found the courage to leave and begin the journey to find my happiness. I never got the chance to thank you for being my friend.

Your friendship helped me leave behind my abusive marriage and brave the unknown in search of the happiness that you thought I so deserved. You are why I am a survivor of domestic violence. Without you I would be just another statistic. Therefore, not a day goes by that I do not think of you, my friend.

SUNDAY MORNING

BY NIKKI VANT

As the young acolytes
Fidget with white robes,
And there is the whisper of

Prayers
Plans for later
Questions about doctrine and dinner

While the people sit stiffly,
Seeming to pay attention,
There is the rise and fall of

Murmured responses
Meditative homily
Muted piano

The anticipation swells,
Exploding into conversation.
Footsteps on the thick carpet
Matching the tempo of the postlude.

CROCODILE TEARS

BY ABI WURDEMAN

"Man, am I glad to see you."

"I'm sorry? I'm afraid you have the wrong person. I don't believe we've met before."

"No, yeah, we haven't. I just mean, I'm glad to see someone else not cryin'. I always hate these things, I mean, I get uncomfortable 'cuz I always feel obligated to start the waterworks, you know. Like, I feel like, if I don't bust out weepin' it means I'm some kind of a jerk or I didn't care about the . . . you know . . . the guy. Or lady. I'm just glad I'm not the only one here with dry eyes is all. Name's Joey, by the way."

"Hi."

"And you are--?"

"Beth."

"Nice to meet you, Beth. Yeah, it's especially embarrassing when you shake the widow's hand, ya know, 'cuz it's like, you feel like you're supposed to say something all poetic about how he was just such a great guy and you're supposed to look all sad. It's not that I'm not sad, you know it's just, well . . . but I haven't seen her yet today, so I avoided that, I guess. I don't know where she is, maybe off cryin' somewhere. You seen her?"

"I'd prefer to be alone right now, if you don't mind."

"Is that why you're sittin' all the way back here? I thought maybe it's 'cuz it was darker. Didn't want anybody to see you not cryin', you know? That's how I found you. Lookin' for a dark spot."

"No, I was just looking for solitude. Now if you would please—"

"Whoa! Listen to that one! Now that's wailing! She must have been pretty close to him. Maybe that's the widow. You think? Man, we'd better steer clear of that one."

"She doesn't mean it."

"Huh?"

"The wailing is insincere. She's not quite that torn up

about him.”

“How can you tell?”

“Good heavens, anyone can tell.”

“Well, then, what’s she faking for?”

“Attention.”

“Attention?”

“Attention. She pulls something at every family function. At weddings, she dresses more ostentatiously than the bride, at anniversary parties she takes on full responsibility of horribly sentimental toasts and her own brand of entertainment—she has, after all deemed herself the next Barbra Streisand. And now, since she won’t very well die for the attention, she steals it by being the most tragically mournful.”

“Man, you won’t catch me hookin’ up with a chick like that. My wake is gonna be all about me. People will be cryin’ over me, not some broad who’s still alive and gets my money anyway.”

“She’s not his wife.”

“Huh?”

“She’s not his wife. She’s his sister.”

“Sister? Huh. She’s young.”

“He’s young.”

“He is? That young? How old?”

“Thirty-one.”

“Man, I figured he was at least sixty.”

“Sixty?”

“Yeah, sixty. I mean, not that he was like, ancient, or anything, but he had that gray hair, skin gettin’ all droopy and gettin’ those brown spots and stuff.”

“Daniel?”

“Daniel? Who’s talkin’ ‘bout Daniel? That’s Mr. Coopencamp up there.”

“It certainly is not! It’s Daniel Thomas.”

“Daniel . . . uh-uh!”

“Did you even look in the casket?”

“I just thought they had him fixed up real good.”

“No, believe me, they haven’t done him justice.”

"Where's Mr. Coopencamp? I thought he was supposed to be here. This is Berkley's Funeral Home, right?"

"It is."

"And this is the eighteenth, right?"

"It's the seventeenth."

"Oh."

"You're early."

"Yeah. Hey, can I ask you something?"

"What's that?"

"What happened to him? Like, what got him? It wasn't cancer was it? It's always cancer."

"Not cancer."

"That's good. So, what was it?"

"He drowned."

"He don't look like the type to drown."

"He isn't."

"What happened?"

"He was kayaking. He capsized."

"Man, those things are dangerous."

"No, they're not. He fell out of it, but the current was too strong and pushed him into a rock. It knocked him unconscious."

"Shoulda been wearing a lifejacket."

"He's a fantastic moron. I've told him several times since."

"Man, I'm glad I didn't run into his widow."

"Yes, you've mentioned that."

"Yeah, but I'm even more glad now, 'cuz I'd be all like, 'I'm sorry for your loss, Mrs. Coopencamp.' And that would be crazy embarrassing, you know?"

"I'd like to be alone now, please, if you don't mind."

"Yeah, I forgot. Sorry. I got all caught up—"

"Please."

"Yeah, sure, I'm going."

"I'd appreciate it."

"Beth?"

"Please!"

"What's your story? How come you're not cryin'?"

"Why are you still here?"

"Come on, why aren't you cryin'?"

"I want to be alone!"

"Tell me!"

"Because I'm done, okay? I'm not crying because I'm all dried out. And I can't sit here tonight and weep into my handkerchief and absorb everyone else's sympathy and then go home and expect to feel better. I don't want the fruit baskets or the flowers or anyone else's weeping and I certainly don't want to heal in anyone else's way or on anyone else's clock. Do you understand? After the funeral tomorrow, I'm supposed to go home and begin healing and I don't want to. I don't want to start over or look to the future, because I can't see anything bright there. Crying hasn't solved anything yet, it hasn't made me feel better, and I don't expect it will."

"I get it."

"You don't get it."

"No, I think I get it. You miss him. You're sad that he's dead."

"That is an outstanding simplification."

"And you don't wanna cry 'cuz you already did and it didn't make you feel any better about waking up by yourself this morning."

"It's so much more complex—"

"Sure, maybe, but it's not like you're the first person to be sad about someone dying."

"He wasn't just someone. If you'd known him I wouldn't have to tell you that."

"You don't have to tell me that anyway. If he was just someone he wouldn't be worth not cryin' over. Listen, I'm sorry about all that, 'I'm glad I don't hafta meet the widow' stuff."

"It's fine."

"Mrs. Thomas?"

"Yes?"

"I'm very sorry for your loss."

"Thank you."



"Beauty's Consciencousness" by Mindy Hay

DINNERTIME

BY NIKKI VANT

She can only see his
Wide back,
Strong shoulders,
Where he sits, hunched,
Leaning into the computer,
Trying to escape into it
After another day of tedious factory work,
The only movement the computer mouse,
The only sound its constant clicking.

Her mother halfheartedly defends him—
“He really loves you”—
But she doesn’t see beyond
The front door where the parents
Exchange pleasantries and children.

When Mom has gone,
Everything else remains:

The unwashed dishes,
The unvacuumed floor,
The uncooked meal.

He has made it her duty.
After all, she’s the daughter.

And while she stirs the stew,
Reading Great Expectations
by the light above the stove,

She can only see his back
Where he keeps his chair warm,
Silent save the constant clicking.

A THOUGHT OF A SOLDIER

BY TIFFANY PITMAN

The cannon booms loud a far off.

The dawn is not yet awake.

I hear the call to march.

In me I feel my heart quake,

For I am not made of stone or metal.

This flow I feel will surely let me meet my GOD.

For when the carnage begins, and the bullets
fly, I fear that it might come my time to fly.

It might happen that a ball hit my arm and I fall.

And if I don't go, I must draw my sword and
prepare for the brawl that will come when a
brother, or a friend, or a father will come and
make me fight with him.

And for sure one of us will draw our last breath,
and go on to the end, leaving this world for
other men's pride, greed, and sin.

By the end of this day, this ground, these
trees, this virgin sweet place will see blood,
grime, fear, and hate.

And by this means it will meet it's disgrace,
for no one and no thing will be or can be
spared from the awful thing that tries to tear
it's way through this land.

But the only way to defeat it is if
together we band.

But since I see not how that is to come
I stand here with my hand on my gun and
wait for the judgment to be made.

The cannon booms loud a far off.

BLINK

BY ERIC CROUSE

Blink.

Too Late.

Out of the corner

Of your eye

You saw it,

But then,

Like

A

Shooting

Star,

A

Supernova,

It vanishes.

rushing at shutter speed,

A perfect sunset

A gleaming gem

ninety-nine percent

covered

by sand.

Blink.

It's Gone.



"Sublimation" by Mindy Hay

PRIMAL INSTINCTS

BY JACQUELINE LANDIN

My ancestry is feared by humans. We're considered freaks, yet the majority views us as fantasy. My breed is known as lycanthropes, beings that can shift into one animal. And yet the specific bloodline of lycanthropes I fall into is commonly known as werewolves. We have the will to shift at any time, but when a full moon is present, our free will is snatched away. Being in my animal form is exhilarating. But when you can't control it, careless mistakes are made, and sometimes death ensues. During a full moon the pack and I stray to the woods nearby, trying to keep a good amount of distance between us and humans. We do not wish for bloodshed, but it's in our nature, and thus we are forever bound by it.

The waxing gibbous was already towering in the heavens. Two more days and I wouldn't be able to restrain the shift; it would overwhelm me the moment I had uncertainties of controlling the process. I had to make sure I'd be alone Saturday evening.

The night was still young, and I was teeming with liveliness; I knew I'd happen upon Phillip sooner or later, so until that dreadful encounter, I decided to have some amusement of my own. I slithered out of my attire and commenced the transformation. The blood within my veins began to boil as the beast inside me flourished. I underwent the excruciating pain as my bones extended and my skin stretched to fit over the newly designed body. And yet, it was enjoyable at the same time, knowing that I'd soon be free and able to run through the woods with no cares in the world. My human teeth drew out in long pointed canines, my muzzle swelled and flattened into place, and I could feel the prickling effect of fur as it sprouted and grew, fashioning my coat.

I still maintained many of my human features, but I was taller, shaggier, and more beast like. I had gone from a measly

five foot two to a height of six foot four. So it was somewhat of a change in altitude for me. I can stand on my own two feet as easily as a human may, but I was also built for speed which requires the use of all four limbs.

As a slight breeze rustled past my body, tickling my muzzle I was thrown into a sneezing fit. "You all right, Reg?" Thrusting my shaggy head to the right, I noticed Phillip traipsing up to me, tail held in the air. "Yeah, I'm fine." I replied.

"Do you want to run with me along the creek?" Even in wolf form, I could sense a sly smile across his smug face.

"Not tonight, Phillip," I answered, "I need my sleep. History test in the morning."

"Oh, alright. I'll take that as a rain-check," he scoffed.

"You do that."

I started back towards my house, ashamed I had lied, and yet relieved at the same time. My ears pricked up at the sound of Phillip gallivanting over brittle leaves.

"If you planned on sleeping, why the transformation?" he said striding beside me.

"Because I enjoy the change. Why the twenty questions?" I snapped in irritation. He hadn't uttered a sound, and before I knew it, I was alone again; the tranquility of the night engulfing me. Had I caused him heartache? I could only hope. Phillip's been after me since the day we were pups. I guess he has this idea engraved in his mind that I'm going to choose him as my mate when Winter Solstice rolls around. Well he's got another thing coming to him! I don't ever want to be tied down, restrained, and confined in a cage of conformity. I long for independence, solitary happiness. How dreadful to even think of the notion!

Chills flew across my body like tiny militia advancing to war. Shaking the thought from my mind, I altered my set course and began treading into the woods. I would have it from Phillip for sure, lying to him, abruptly changing my mind. But that was a risk I was willing to take. All the cares in the world fled from me as I immersed myself in the obscurity of my sanctuary. All will be well, I thought to myself.

The moon's opaque shaft of light pierced the forest canopy and landed here and there on the earthen soil. Whenever I passed through these rays, my coat would glow with a sort of intensity to that of an ending fire. My kind cannot hide from the moon; we're born followers. The moon is our life source, our mother.

The night holds endless possibilities when you know how to properly utilize to one's advantage. That's what I love about my bloodline; we're uncontrollable to everything but our mother.

Pondering the idea of my own strength, my past slams into me and nearly knocks me off my paws. My vision becomes distorted and my stability dwindles. With eyes rolling in their sockets, my mentality sinks into my previous experiences.

I'm of the age of six, my third shift, and it's my first time alone in the woods. I remember it as if it happened just yesterday. It being my third shift, I was a little rusty with the process, but I was beginning to handle it more professionally. Giddy with glee, I set out at a brisk pace; my short stubby legs having to more than double their speed to satisfy myself. The wind that night was no more than a light breeze, but the fragrances came from all around, colliding with my sensitive snout.

A thousand odors crashed into me at once, and my mind was overcome with bewilderment. I couldn't take them all at once; I had to single each one out at a time. So I closed my eyelids and concentrated on a peculiar scent that tickled my membranes. I quickly recognized the odor as that of a squirrel. Nice... I thought with a smirk. It was to be my first kill. To me, it was a very significant night, as I was to become one with the pack. My task was to go kill my prey, and return with the body mutilated.

I set out on all fours, quietly trailing the scent of my feeble victim. Coming to an abrupt halt, my muscles tensed as I viewed my kill unknowingly before me, cleansing itself with its tiny hands. Sweet mother moon. I licked my lips

and ran my tongue over my canines. Settling into my attack stance, I wiggled my rear and set my tail stiff. It's now or never Reg. That was the only thought left in my mind as I eyed my victim. With no warning, I was upon the squirrel, writhing in the dirt, my teeth biting at the flesh. With the first bite, my mouth was flooded with the sweet taste of blood. And at that pivotal moment, I knew what it was like to take a life. To kill. And I savored it. But I quickly found out that humans were off limits. One false move and the whole pack could be exposed. I didn't want to jeopardize myself or my family, so I set out to only kill for food; never to lay a hand, claw or tooth on a human.

As the memory subsided, my vision suddenly became clear, and I was conscious of my surroundings. I had never had a recollection like that before. What did it mean? What could it stand for? More importantly, what was going to happen?

An owl passed overhead, scarcely making a hum as the air passed over its impressively hefty wings. I could detect him only because he happened to pass through a shaft of light emitted from the moon.

"Out for a midnight stroll? I thought you had a History test to study for." What the hell?! I whirled around one-hundred and eighty degrees and found myself staring into the jet black eyes of Phillip.

"You lust for the kill...the excitement of it all. Why hold it back?" Phillip asked as he circled me, pacing aloft his airy paws. I cocked my head in his direction, and raised my furry eyebrows. He seemed so different under the pale moonlight; as if he were a divine spirit of some sort.

"How long have you been watching me?" I asked, perplexed beyond reason.

"Ever since you emerged into the woods," he snickered. That dirty rotten scoundrel! How dare he stalk me! It's a good thing I'm in my wolf form, because at that very moment, I was fuming with anger. If only I had it in me to be done with him...

"Don't take it so harshly, I just wanted to see what you were up to. And by my calculations, I was right," Phillip responded, calm and collected.

"Right about what?!" I snapped in fury.

"You had a memory, a recollection of your childhood. None that powerful should be ignored." I was skeptical, I must admit, but I wanted to listen to what he had to say.

"Go on," I responded.

"A memory like that doesn't come back for no reason. You can't just ignore it. It means something. It tells you about your future, so if I were you, I'd take heed to this," Phillip answered back.

"The only problem to that is I'm not a killer," I answered.

"Maybe you are... do you remember the sensation of taking another's life. Being in absolute control over a certain situation?" he paused, "It felt good, didn't it?"

"It doesn't matter, that was in the past, now leave me alone!"

I turned my back from him and loped deeper into the wilderness. I wanted to get away from him and his dense ranting. How daft could I be not to realize he was following me all this time?! Closing my eyes, the memory was forced back to me. Why must you keep tormenting me?! Once I opened my eyes yet again, I was forced to come to a halt as I realized Phillip was standing in front of me, his tail flicking back and forth, his eyes intent on destroying me and everything I have worked for.

"I thought I said to leave me alone."

"Unfortunately, that is something I cannot do. Please, follow me." He trailed off towards the northeast, slowly at first and looking back periodically to make sure I was following him. Then he began to pick up his pace. I had no choice but to follow him, otherwise he would be pestering me the rest of the night, and I'd never get a wink of sleep. So I trotted along not too far behind.

I was loping over dried leaves which cracked under

contact. As I ran after him, I was passing small mammals slumbering through the hours of darkness.

We finally stopped about a quarter mile in. And I was beginning to pick up the scent of humans. What is he planning? I pondered silently. As the scent became stronger, I knew something was not right. There were too many hormones in the air. And after a few seconds passed, I realized that we were headed towards two teenagers, a boy and girl. By the scent I was able to gather that they were a bit intimate with each other. Phillip stopped, and I was forced to stop as well. Before me lay the two teenagers, sprawled out on a blanket, fondling each other, their bodies entwined.

"Do you see those two?" Phillip asked, already knowing the answer.

"Yes..."

"Kill them." I must admit I was shocked at his command, but I half expected it. He wanted me to fall victim to my youthful emotions I had long ago masked.

Whispering hoarsely, I said, "No. No, I will not surrender! I'm not like that, and you know it!"

"Fine, then watch, and maybe you'll change your mind," Phillip retorted bitterly.

Before I could stop him, he had leapt towards his unknowing victims. I heard their piercing screams as he charged straight for them. In that exact moment, my memory took hold and held me captive. As Phillip sunk his teeth into the thigh of the young boy, I suddenly tasted blood in my mouth. I can't let him do this...this isn't right. I had to do something. I looked around and noticed the girl had tripped and sprained her ankle on an upturned tree root trying to flee. She held it in her puny grasp, with tears streaming down her face as she witnessed the attack on her lover.

That's it! I thought, finally making up my mind. I dashed towards Phillip, howling at the top of my lungs. He dropped the boy from his mouth and licked his bloody lips. I glanced over at the boy, collapsed on the earthen soil. He was still alive, but barely. Phillip had punctured the skin and he

was bleeding moderately. Despite his wound and the terror he withheld, he would certainly live.

“Why must you interfere? Why must you always be a killjoy?! You know you want this, so why deny your primal instincts?” Phillip yelled at me.

“Because I don’t believe in blood lust, that’s what separates me from you!” With that said, I lunged towards him. Jaws snapping, fury in my eyes, I went straight for his neck. As I did so, I noticed in Phillip’s eyes a look of alarm and fright. He immediately turned left, and I had to change my attack stance in order to keep him. What am I doing? I thought as I dove for him once more. This time, I caught him at his most vulnerable, the lower throat. With a twist of my head, I broke his jugular and immediately felt the hot steamy blood rush through my mouth. It was sweet as I lapped it up. His body fell to the ground, limp and motionless.

I glanced over at the two teenagers, now huddled together, sobbing. I walked over on my two limbs, towering above them massively. As I looked down in their eyes, I beheld the terror I had emitted. I am a beast! I stepped closer and they cringed away. It wasn’t worth explaining to them what I was, where I came from, and what had happened.

Turning away, I looked down upon Phillip’s immobile body.

“I guess you were right Phillip...I am a killer...”



TIME MARCHES ON

BY BENJAMIN COX

The quiet, gentle music echoed off the brown paneled walls of the three-room apartment. Stale smoke billowed up into the shadows of the streetlamp outside in the cool June evening, causing the air conditioning to be set at a buzzing sixty-eight degrees. She held her hands over her perking nipples from the air blowing onto her bare, mole-spotted chest, sweat slowly rolling down into her navel. Her red hair was thrown back and the red embers of the cigarette lit her jade green—a soft, seducing green of the trees—eyes and milky pale skin that was freckled at times, especially around the shoulders. The covers of the bed that was too bulky and too coarse—especially after love—lay wrapped around her orange painted toenails that seemed to glow in the pale light. The color clashed with her magenta fingernails that now held the habitual piece of tobacco in her right hand, which she tapped out on the nightstand's ashtray that Nick had put there for her. This physicality of her body was typical Laura—strange, sexual, and beautiful. She rubbed out the cigarette and rolled to her side away from the window unit and let it blow on her sweaty back, and in that moment she had a realization of her love for Nick.

A flash of light showed through the lace curtains on to the bare spot that she laid her arm on. The sweet sweat of June came and went quickly and was replaced by the coldness of the room and the futon that had become their bed. Nick's computer buzzed quietly on the other side of the apartment and began making its normal grinding noise as if it were working without being touched, a robot of sorts. The lights of a passing car shown through again, and everything had been just as she had dreamed of as a young girl.

She felt with sudden pulses inside of her where he had been, the instrument of their love that had made her a believer in sex again. "This," she thought, "is what sex should always

be like, mind-blowing and passionate. Passion from the way he throws his arms around me after we have finished, spooning in the moonlight for hours, kissing each other all over, telling each other without speaking that we love one another. This is how we should always be. Our love should be forever like this. We should always be 21—and forever should feel this good.”

Love seemed this way to her. After all the failed relationships: the boyfriend who was five years older than her that beat her simply because she burned the pork steak a little for dinner one night or didn't want to have sex because she had worked all day; or the boyfriend who had the tiniest penis known to man and didn't open doors, made her pay for her meals, and stalked her after she broke up with him; or finally, the three one-night stands that had given her gonorrhea, which she had to spend money to get fixed at the health clinic with antibiotics. Nick had become her center and ground to reality. He told her when she needed to calm down. He held her when she didn't. He gave her support when others wouldn't. Even his faults, she thought beautiful and less frightening than most. However, she hated it when he checked other girls out at parties and such and spoke his mind about how he thought they were hot out loud to her. It drove her nuts, but he had never shown any intention of following up. “I'm a connoisseur of beauty,” he would say, “and you're number one on the list.” She always liked how he saved face, and it always worked. She knew he would never change and never wanted him to, he was the inevitable, the eternity of which she dreamed of with her dolls as a girl playing house. He was it.

The shady three-room apartment rolled away from her—the movie posters on the wall, the huge stack of Playboys on the chest of drawers, the lack of space, the stale air of smelly work clothes and shoes, the tiny bathroom with a cabinet in the shower that you always hit your head on when you get in, the kitchen with the archaic refrigerator and stove, the front door that was hard to lock, and the hard frame of the futon that stuck in your ribs as you slept. In her mind,

she passed by all of this to a big, two-story Victorian house in the South, back to her home in Georgia, with the ocean nearby, a big back yard with kids playing in the yard, and Nick barbecuing in the back. She passed it all on to forty years of marriage and growing old together and watching their grandchildren take their dollar bills that they had given them. She passed on to the late nights where he would stroke her long, red hair and the middle of her back near her butt to put her to sleep.

She coughed a little from the cigarette and rolled to the edge of the bed. She reached down to the pile of clothes she had made conveniently. First, the lace bra that fastened in the front. She wore the "fronties" just to piss him off, because they were hard for him to take off, and usually required both hands. Next, the cotton panties and pants together went on and then finally her shirt and socks. She fluffed her hair and grabbed her keys on the nightstand. She could hear him singing "I've Got a Woman" in the shower. She chuckled when he hit a sour note. Quietly she opened the front door, and without a word left him. Her parents wanted her home before 2AM and it was one already, and he had to work at 6:30. "This is Love," she thought, as the door shut.

Her mother was waiting at the front door for her with her nightgown on.

"At Nick's again tonight?" she asked, condescension apparent.

"Yes. Is there something wrong?" she replied.

"Three late nights in a row, young lady. You need to stop spending so much time with him. What do you two do...wait; I really don't want to know what you two do. Just come in and go to bed."

Rather than argue this time, Laura just walked in the door and shook her head. Her mother, in her wire-rimmed glasses, daggers shooting out from behind them, had had this discussion several times within the last eight months. The long

hours, the thoughts of pre-marital relations, and a blue-collar boy in a relationship with her daughter didn't set well with her mother's high culture of Southern upbringing.

"She still thinks I'm going to meet the rich man of her dreams," she thought. "Well, I've already met the man of my dreams." She halted in front of her bedroom and could still sense her mother's eyes on her from down the hall, she fought the urge to say something and opened the door to her room and closed it quickly.

She could see her father lying there in the bedroom with the day's paper folded on his chest and his bifocals low on his nose reading the paper. He would lay there and say, "Over at Nick's again, eh?" Her mother would say yes and then go on a twenty minute rant about how he was the wrong boy for her, how she was breaking God's rules, and that her father should step in and halt Nick from seeing her ever again. Her father would quietly nod and continue reading the paper. Laura grabbed a blue bear that Nick had given her for Valentine's Day and fought off the urge to cry.

"I've already met the man of my dreams. He loves me," she said to herself. She inhaled two deep breaths and laid the bear back on the bed only to disrobe the clothes she had put back on fifteen minutes ago. She went down the hall to the bathroom and met her father in the light.

"Lu-Lu, your mother was upset again this evening with you. When are you going to learn to get in before midnight? I told you that if you did that, she would eventually come around. He's a good boy. I like him, but I'm not going to fight to the death with your mother over this. This is something you and her are going to have to work out. I can't go to bat for you all the time," he said, his eyes pleading.

"I'm 21, Dad. You shouldn't have to go to bat for me. I'm a grown woman. Things aren't like they were with you and Momma, and she's just gonna have to realize that," she managed, trying to fight the tears again.

"But you're still in our house and you still depend on us financially. Your mother won't be able to say anything to you

and neither will I once you finish school and move on your own, but as long as you're in college and living at home you have to play by the rules," he continued to explain.

"Can we just talk about this in the morning? I've got a headache and I don't want to fight anymore about this," she said, pushing her way past him into the bathroom. He shut the door for her with a look of sadness and then disappeared back to the shadows of his own bedroom.

"Why can't they just see that he loves me? Why isn't that good enough?" she thought, opening the medicine cabinet. A swallow of two giant tablets of Motrin and bathroom sink water, a rinse of mouthwash to get the taste of semen out of the back of her throat, and a wipe over her moist vagina and she was back to her bedroom in bed.

"I've already met the man of my dreams and he loves me back," she thought as she slept.

Smoldering frustration sat as a lump in Laura's throat at the breakfast table. Her milky pale skin was flushed red and the green of her eyes was jade and deep, suffused with anger, bright and hot. She was on the verge of saying to her mother, "Why didn't you say anything about the other boys I've dated and fucked? Only because I've been with this one longer and he doesn't make enough money is the reason."

Like an angel perched on a gravestone she sat, obedient to her traditional Southern Baptist upbringing. Her mother scolding and reminding her that God was watching her with every word, and that "You and that boy ought to get yourself to church and keep out of that sinning you indulge yourselves in late at night."

She took her fork and butter knife and mannerly cut a square out of the buttermilk waffle and took a bite, looking at the "This Is Mother's Kitchen" knickknack on the wall, as she tried to sound out her mother's demands. Her mother hadn't even touched her food, as it sat as a still-life painting neatly upon the table. Her father was in his usual suit and tie sipping a cup of coffee, sounding her mother out as well, reading the paper. Laura knew there was nothing he could do to save her.

He had only tried to prepare her the night before. He had been in her position a time or two and she knew he didn't envy her one bit. Her mother continued to berate her.

"Why do you give him money? The boy can get a better job than working down at the lumberyard for seven dollars and hour and pay for things himself. You need that money just as well as he does. You need to be more practical."

"Mother, could you please pass the maple syrup?"
Laura quietly asked.

"Sharon, I already talked with her last night," her father spoke out from behind the paper.

"I don't appreciate you staying out till 2AM, keeping me up worrying while you're letting that boy spoil your reputation. You've got people down at the church talking, saying you're living in sin, having sex with that boy before marriage. I'm the song leader at the church and they're going to vote me out next term because I heard one lady say that I can't even keep control over my own household let alone both of my daughters. If you keep staying with that boy, you're gonna end up like your sister!"

"Mother, could you please pass the maple syrup?"

"Sharon, for God's sake, don't drag Erin into this. Haven't we had enough of that discussion? It's all over with that anyway. The baby has got a good home."

"And I don't see why you can't spend time at home with your family. Harold, I just don't want that to happen again. She's the older child. She should have more sense. She's all wrapped up in this boy. She needs to get her priorities straight."

"Sharon, she's also still just a kid. He's a good guy. Things with Erin, those things happen. It was a mistake but don't hold them over your other daughter's head. I think you've done enough damage already."

"I don't appreciate you condescending me in front of the children when I try to correct them."

"Could you please pass the maple syrup?"

"She's not twelve years old anymore, Sharon."

“As long as she’s in this house, she will abide under our rules. This boy must abide under our rules even if he’s not sleeping under this roof. How did you meet this boy anyway? Tell me how you and him met. And don’t you lie.”

Laura had grown to a hot red under her face. The once, beautiful girl turned angry and fierce. She slammed her fork and knife against the porcelain plate. Her father’s paper instantly crumpled to his lap and her mother stopped shouting. Laura stood up and the oak dining chair slammed to the floor.

“Do you want to know, Mother? Do really want to know the truth as to how we met? Well, I’ll tell you and you’d better listen and listen good. We met at a keg party. You know the ones where they have alcohol and drugs? I met him there through a friend at the college. We got drunk and we fucked each other, mother. That’s right we had good sex all night long. He fucked me really good! He’s not the only one I’ve fucked before, but he’s the best one, god damnit! He’s going to keep fucking me, you know why? Because he loves me, and if you don’t like that than you, all the old women down at the hair salon, all the people down at the church, all the people down at the college, all the people in the town of Hillview, they can all go straight to fucking hell. Why? Because he loves me, mother! He loves me like daddy loves you and still loves you. He loves me like a man should love me. He’s not a boy. He’s Nick, he’s my lover, and my best friend, and if you don’t like it, then fuck you!”

Laura ran out the back door to her car, not noticing her mother’s jaw dropped to the floor and her father’s pale complexion. She didn’t want to wait to her mother then. She just wanted to feel his arms around her as she cried into his soft, muscular shoulder. Her car flew to the lumberyard and ran to him, as he dropped a bundle of two-by-fours to the ground. His dirty gloves wrapped around her white shirt and smeared on it.

He didn’t say a word as she just shook there in his arms. He could hear her sucking air through the tears. The salty tears tasted bitter as she tried to compose herself.

“What happened, sweetie?” he asked.

He pulled her back to see her tear-stained face.

“She doesn’t like me being with you.”

A look of puzzlement came across his face and he held her by her arms now.

“Who?” he gazed strongly into her eyes. She wiped the tears across her sleeve and looked deeply into his safe, brown eyes, “My mother, she doesn’t like you.”

“Why? What did I do to her?”

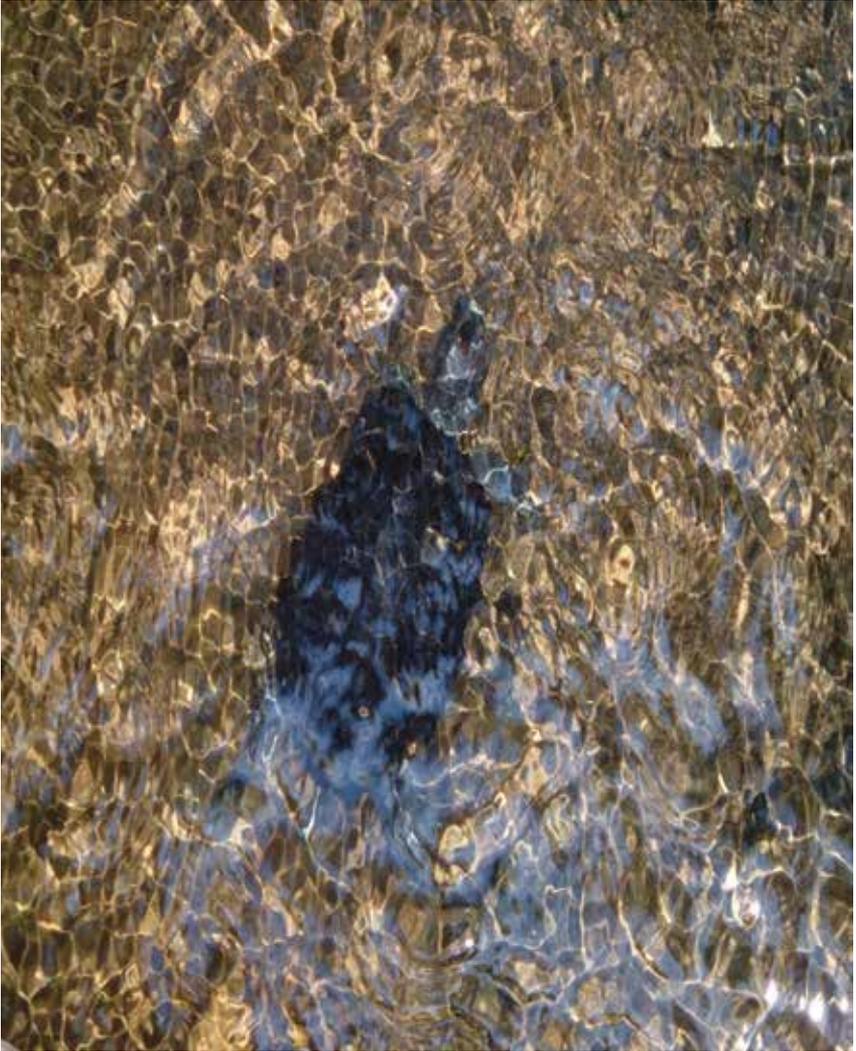
“She says you’re no good trailer-park trash. That we live in sin and that you’re gonna get me pregnant and run off and never come back. I told her, Nick. I told her everything.”

“Aw, honey. It’s okay, it’s okay. I could’ve told you she didn’t like me,” he smiled, and pulled her close.

He was standing on her front lawn, still dirty from work. He had a half-day’s time on the books to use for a personal day and drove down to her folk’s house to confront her mother for her. Laura was standing there with her arms wrapped around his right arm as he stood there and took her mother’s ravings for over two hours on the front porch in front of the neighborhood. Her father had come home from work for lunch to find the scene and was in the middle of the two factions. Laura’s mother had finally reached a point for his rebuttal.

“So what do you have to say for yourself?” she pointed.

“‘Provoke not thy children to anger,’ you should read that in your book, and ‘Thou shall not judge for the degree to which you judge another so shall that degree be measured unto thee.’ I love your daughter. I don’t know if you understand that. Some of the things we engage in are not condoned by your good book. I know. I’ve read it through several times. I know who God is. I know I don’t have money. I know you want your child to have a good life. I’ll try and provide that when the time comes. So do what your God did for you to me, and that’s give me a chance to at least prove



Untitled by Jason Palmby



"Limits" by Mindy Hay

my love. That's all I got to say, and if that isn't good enough for you, then I'd pray awful hard to learn patience as a virtue. Good-bye."

He turned and walked away. For the second time in the week, Laura thought her mother had finally taken a look in the mirror. Her father simply gave his wife the "I told you so" look and went in the house.

And again Laura had a flash of realization, a sustained thought of forever loving Nick. She saw it a little bit brighter than before. Nick's love had become more refined in the fire, a diamond, sharp, bright, and beautiful. She rubbed his long, dark hair as they drove in his old Ford truck to the outskirts of town, as he smiled telling her something about how he felt about finally telling her mother where to go. She never heard a word but simply smiled in the seat, one leg up, rubbing his hair as it flapped in the wind, the Stevie Ray Vaughan album blaring on the tape deck. She knew that she had a special spot in her heart for him and he would be forever a part of her.

I wish you could've met your mother. I guess its one of those things, life's little ways of playing tricks on all of us. God left you and me here. I'm here to raise you and you are here to do whatever you want. Your mother was the most beautiful woman, with her long red hair and deep green eyes. That's where you get your eyes from, you know. Yes, that's a picture of our wedding day. See her green eyes. I told you she was beautiful. Your grandma didn't like me much but your grandpa and me were buddies. Him and I used to go fishing together a lot after your mother and I got married. I wish you could've met him. He was a big, strong man. He could've told you some good stories, too.

Well, let's see. I think I can remember one. He grew up outside of Atlanta on a farm with a dirt floor. His daddy was a poor farmer and he and his four brothers used to sit in front of the radio and listen to the Grand Ole Opry. Your grandpa was a smart boy, though, and got himself a scholarship of

science and ended up going to college. He did some kind of development on a jet for the government, and made lots of money. In between there, he met your grandma at school he told me, high school I think. And, they ended up dating off and on for a while until your grandpa said, "I finally got my head out of my ass and married her."

Now, don't you go and talk like that. It's just a figure of speech, but don't say it or you'll get your mouth washed out with soap. Anyway, yeah, that was our wedding day. It was a warm Sunday afternoon in Memphis. We got married down by the riverfront. There's a park there right along the river and Beale Street. It was really warm and a barge kept going by while the preacher was trying to marry us. The humidity kept rising off the water and you could see it. I about passed out in my tuxedo. I surprised your mother. I picked her up and we both walked out in the water. She got mad at me later for ruining the three hundred dollar dress in that old muddy water.

Your mother was so happy about Memphis. She loved the music down there and Beale Street with all the old-fashioned cafes and shops. She said the town had a spirit about it that made her feel alive. The city reminded me a lot of her, free-spirited, eclectic, and beautiful with its faults and its perfections. We lived in a little house on the other side of town for a couple of years until I finally caught a break and got a record deal. Man, we had three cars stolen while we lived in that little three-room shack.

I knew something was wrong when your mom said she wanted to move back home. Something inside me told me that she knew something was wrong inside and didn't know what. I was on the road a lot those years. I had to, to keep us in a home and in food. I don't blame your grandma for not liking me because a musician's life is a hard one, especially the life of a musician's wife. Your mother was there through it all though. About a year after we moved home, you came along.

Yeah, your mommy died on your birthday. She'd be very proud of you. I told you she was beautiful. She's your angel looking down on you. She got to hold you for a little bit,

you know. See. There's the picture.

No, honey, you didn't kill mommy. It wasn't your fault. Don't cry. Mommy was sick and didn't know it. She just got tired and went to sleep, is all. Don't cry. Mommy loved you, oh so much. I love you. I love you so much. Yes, I love your mommy, too.

He walked in the white hallways carrying a basket of flowers. Through all of his dates on the road and his work and raising his boy, he never missed her birthday. She was alone in a corner staring out a window. A Jim Reeves record played on the stereo as several others sat around the couches and grunted and groaned as they normally did.

"Hi, Mr. Stevenson. How are you doing today?"

"Oh I'm tired, Judy. We just finished the last tour. I'm glad to finally get some time off. Eric wanted to come home, too. The little guy loves traveling but he loves coming back to this old one horse town for some reason. I tell him once you get in you never come out. He just laughs."

The two of them laugh together for a few minutes and exchange a few more pleasantries.

"How is she doing today?" he asks.

"She's doing okay. She was asking for her the other day. We told her she was at home and was busy. She's been quiet for most of the morning. How old is she today?"

"Eighty-four."

"She's still really strong for her age."

"Yeah, she's stubborn. Of course, she told me I was gonna live forever because the good die young."

They laugh again and he says good-bye and walks over to her.

"Hi, Sharon, how are you doing today?"

"Good," she manages, turning to him smiling.

"For me?" she stammers.

"Yeah, happy birthday."

"Where's little girl at?"

"She's at home busy."

"Oh. Tell her see me."

"I will. She told me to tell you happy birthday."

"You good boy. You good boy," she says, as she pats him on the back and kisses him on the cheek.

She had been confined to the home for almost six years now. The strokes had nearly killed her and losing her husband made living on her own impossible. He couldn't take her on the road with him and he felt guilty leaving her in a home. He made every effort to come see her. For some reason he pitied her, because during her daughter's life she had done everything to drive them apart, and now she was paying penance. Her other daughter never came to see her and had given up the rights to her care. She had gotten fed up with her years ago. Now, Sharon was just a sad old woman growing old, unable to talk and losing her memory. Nick smiled, patted her head, helped her to her room, asked the nurse if she needed anything, and left crying as he always did, because deep within her mothers dimming green eyes he could see his wife and his wife's dreams of them growing old together. He could see he was that man in those dreams.

He had always had it that way. He married my sister without a pot to piss in and his whole heart to give. He gave her everything and took it all away to save his child. I don't blame him. His life is his music. He truly lives the music. When "You're Gone Because of Me" hit the radio, I fell to the ground crying like a baby because I knew he wrote it for her.

I was there that night. He was pacing up and down the hall for eight hours while she sat in labor. The doctor came out and told him. Inoperable lung cancer had caused a blood clot. It wouldn't have been a problem if Lu hadn't been so damn tiny and unable to push the baby out. A C-section is what they needed to do to get the baby out. If they did that, she would die and the baby would live. If they didn't, they both would die.

My mother wouldn't let him sign the papers to do the section. She beat on him and hit him in the face. He cried as he signed it. Daddy had to carry Momma to another room. It was a mess. Up until then, my Bible thumping, Holy Roller of a mother had never cursed God or any human being a day in her life until she cursed him to hell. She called him a fucking heartless bastard to take her daughter away. Momma didn't even go in to see Lu. I never forgave her for that.

I'm glad you didn't see all of that. Your father was a good man. I know he didn't always show his love as good as he could've to you, but he did the best he could. Even though he liked to see a naked girl a time or two, he never cheated on your mother to my knowledge. He never married again. He said that she was it; you were it.

Did you know that your grandma didn't even come to the wedding in Memphis? Grandpa went by himself. I think that's why grandpa went first sometimes. Grandma drove him crazy. I feel to blame. I never came around after I had my child given up. I was younger but I was always a little bit more independent than your mother. She was kind of dependent on your father to protect her, and he did. Your mother was too kind hearted sometimes. I think the only spat that your mom and dad had was because of that. She gave part of his paycheck to this guy who lived in an apartment down the street who had six kids and said he couldn't feed them all that week. I heard your dad just got mad, went down to the strip club and got drunk, came home and slept on the couch and forgot it happened until a week later when they were short on a bill or something. Your dad used to tell that story so funny because your mom came down to the club after him and got up on stage and danced in front of him and he didn't even know it. Of course they both knew the owner. Man that was a good story he told. I miss him, too.

Your dad always tried to get me to come around and talk to grandma, and I probably should've. I guess I got some of her stubbornness in me, too. They both are gone now. I

think all the pain in your dad's life caught up to him and he just missed your mother. I know I do. I miss them both.

The dark haired, green-eyed boy stood in front of the old brick apartment building, sweating in the June sun. He double-checked the address on the slip of paper. It had been five years since his father had died and it had been almost fifteen since he had been back to Hillview. He drove by the old lumberyard outside of town and talked to some men out there who had worked out there for forty years. They said they remembered his father fondly and even his mother, a woman that he had only come to know vicariously through others and he yearned in his heart for her. She was that spot in his heart that his father always sought to fill with gifts and money. It was his father's lifelong goal that he knew he would never fulfill.

It seems that's all he knew of his father at times, the underdog of life. The old town looked the same to him, even through a twenty-five year old's eyes. The same old park square with the brick library, city hall, and post office casting their shadows on the one way street that was just off Highway 267, the one that ran from St. Louis to just outside Murrayville, then on to Springfield, from I-72 onto I-55 to Chicago and Peoria, depending on which lanes you take. He knew the roads. Eric knew them like a musician's son who had traveled them for years, watching his father play his life on six strings and twelve wood reeds held together by metal, a guitar & harmonica player of songs that he had lived.

Now, he was back here, where it had all started for his father, back to Apartment 3, on 210 N Main Street, Hillview, Illinois. A gray-haired, back bent old man answered the knock on his front door. The old man smiled.

"What can I do for you, son?"

"Hi, I know this sounds a little odd, but my dad used to live in this apartment about thirty years ago and I just wanted to take a look at it. I've got a picture of him and my mom in front here with his old Buick. See?" Eric handed the picture to

the old man.

The old man slid on a pair of black-rimmed, thick bifocals and gazed at the picture.

"Well, oh yeah. I guess he did live her. He looks awful familiar. What's your name son?"

"Eric Stevenson, sir."

"Oh yeah, you're that blues man's boy. Nick "Bluesboy" Stevenson. Yeah, he used to work down there at the lumberyard. Used to come in my store down on the Grange Block. Good boy. Got lucky and went down to Memphis and cut a hot record and next thing you know, he was donating money to the local high school. Good man. I was sorry to hear he passed. Tragic thing. You play any music?"

"Yeah, that was my pop. No, um, I take after my mom's side of the family, unfortunately. I just do production."

"Hehe, funny how those things skip a generation. Well, come on in. I don't think much has changed, except for maybe the ceiling tile. They had a leak up there and put in a new roof a couple years ago. Owner says he's gonna raise the rent. Probably heard your old man used to live here and wants to turn it into some kind of tourist attraction. Some of these bastards around here'll do anything to get people to stop in here. Ain't nothing here, I say, just a couple of gas stations, some farm land, a post office, the dollar store, and a couple taverns. Everything went to hell after the Grange Block burnt. Oh well. Que sera sera. Take your time."

Eric hadn't heard the old man after he let him in. He ran his hands along the wood panel and tried to imagine it as his dad would've had it, how his dad had told him he lived. Eric peered into the two other rooms. He wiped the sweat from his forehead. His suit had made him indelibly hot in the small, poorly cooled apartment. The air conditioner looked about thirty years old.

"Probably hasn't changed since dad was here," he said out loud, thinking to himself.

"Yeah, the damn landlord Wallis won't get his maintenance man down here to fix it. I betcha you're right,

damn thing probably is thirty years old," the old man said as he slapped the top of the unit with his hand.

Eric opened the door and stepped out onto the porch and looked across the street. He turned and thanked the old man for his time. He smiled and wondered why he had come to the old apartment. For the first time, within his soul, Eric felt the presence of his mother and father simultaneously together, happy and serene.

"There were a lot of good times spent in that old apartment. Some of the best and hardest days of my life. I guess you kinda grow akin to a place like that where you grow and learn," he heard his father speaking in his memory. The presence of his parents came back to him and faded again to the back of his mind. He stood for a few more minutes on the steps of the apartment, looking into the cracks of the sidewalks, the mortar of the bricks of the old buildings, in the tress that had stood for many years badly bent by the plains' wind. He stood and looked for his parents and tried to find them there. He wanted to see that small child running along side of them in bliss. He knew he had missed out on that Time and Love that he longed to find there.

He knew he would never come back here. The deep hole in his heart, the absence of his father and his stories, the lack of his mother's love that lived vicariously through others, his grandparents' influence, the graves of all that he had sought to find there had rendered him helpless and hurting, an exile in his birthplace, he had become a crucifix upon the stairs of the beginnings. He would rise from this hole and never return, except only in his mind.



"Potato in Repose" by Brian Atkins

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