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SPRING 1993

Volume XXXI Number 2

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The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the editors or the Kent State University Trumbull Campus.

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Submissions: ICON considers submissions of unpublished short stories, poems, essays, and black-and-white art. We read manuscripts and evaluate artwork from September 1 to March 1 each year. The deadline for the Fall issue is October 15 and the deadline for Spring is March 1. All manuscripts and art should be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

Direct all correspondence to ICON, c/o Dr. Robert Brown, Faculty Advisor, English Department, Kent State University Trumbull Campus, 4314 Mahoning Avenue NW, Warren, OH 44483.

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HART CRANE AWARD Co-Winner

J. S. BRANTLEY

TALKING OUT THE FIRE

When my sister was four, hot coffee spilled
over her soft inner thighs. My grandma swept her up,
ran across the backyard, beneath the Chinaberry tree,
through her Irises, thick as paint, and she stomped them down,
pushed them aside, broke them, as if she hadn’t tended them
all spring, and she ran with my sister across the yard
to Miss Evie’s, a healer with long, red nails,
and in a secret closet, away from all eyes save my sister’s,
Miss Evie talked out the fire, left no red marks,
no blisters, no scars, left nothing
except the coffee stains on my sister’s shorts.

I remembered all this today, twenty years later,
and it came to me when I grabbed a hot pan from the stove,
searing my palm. I bent over the kitchen sink,
icy in my fist, and I cried, not so much from pain,
but from something like loneliness,
for something like things lost.
I talked and babbled but still it blistered,
red and white and angry. I can’t talk out the heat,
can’t whisper to the fire in words it can hear,
and I want to run across a yard half the size of a country
to my grandmother’s arms, soft and white as flour,
crossed with tiny wrinkles, smelling of Sweet Betsy.
She’d know where to take me so I could be healed
and whole and young again, she’d know where to take me,
how to hold me so I could forget the burning
between me grabbing the pan today and her running
through her white and purple Irises, walking back
amidst that melange of color with my sister’s face
buried against her sweaty, sweet neck, laying
my sister in a starched white feather bed,
turning on the window fan, mopping up the coffee,
finally looking at me to say quietly,
Let’s have some ice milk in the fancy glasses.

But today I only have ice, melting against my palm,
and no words to talk out the fire which has burned away my life
until today too quickly, and if I could put it out,
talk it out, I would give to my grandmother this picture
of herself twenty years ago, up to her knees in bruised flowers.

HART CRANE AWARD Co-Winner

LAURIE MACDIARMID

MEXICO HAS TWO COASTLINES & SOMEWHERE, RAIN TEASES
THE FARMLAND

She:
Of course, it’s easy to make the most of yourself—
full stomach, resin fire snapping at the chimney,
brandy Presidente blossomed in crystal.
You’ve got everything you want under your thumb
and so what are the poor to you?
—except hands to cook meals,
to wash your dirty clothes,
or to raise a house brick by brick?

He:
My dear, come closer.
Let me touch your ear with
this I have to say:

She:
They’ve small relation to you—
a furious God cursed them full of
closted blood, weighed them down,
made them slow. There’s no
comparison. Or so you say.

He:
Ah, but darling—it’s in your heart already,
that beast you try to see in me.
You drink this wine, querida, as if it were
a carefree water, & your melting thighs
blend into mine, disappear into the fire
that snakes beneath these two pale palms.

She:
At sunset, your neighbors shoot by
in Cadillacs, down your smooth,
wide roads, past fountains & grassy glorietas
—just speed and ease—
’til they’re swallowed up by plate-glass houses
strung with wire, & trellised balconies
& iron gates, & dogs & sharpened walls
that keep field after field of mown &
moulded splendor in.
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moulded splendor in.

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He:
Muneca: say what you wish.
You seep into my skin.
Your heated mind forgets their many names—
the screen fades & runs blank,
the world recedes
& settles down into
these arms & legs, this touch, our sounds.

She:
Delicious how you sit, poolside,
& watch the mozo rake your garden
free of leaves.

He:
Listen: cars rush by.
Tires brush our streets in waves, bringing dusk.
Lights flick on.

She: & meanwhile, 'cross town, empty water trucks
grind down the mountains
a raincloud bears down to miss
a yellow farm, casting only
shadows across the lines of tough maguey
that slice that shriveled land into parcels
smaller than your lawn.

He: & nearby, a man & woman stretch out together—
he gives her this same warmth,
rising & falling over her,
soft as tides,
& her breath in turn dampens his neck
with tender, sea-salt squalls.

She:
Dusty workers wander in from the highway,
loosened from an old bus,
thinking of nothing but crisp blue fifty peso bills
& pulque—

He:
Night folds down & still it goes on.
Not far, their children play at bowling,
concentrate on each motion—
one holds the shiny ball aloft, pauses,
then winds it out—snap!—straight,
one foot shot rigid to the side, the rest of him
curved into the release.

She: —how they’d like to set their throats on fire,
how the machete sails through air
& whistles into the maguey’s heart—

He:
One brother claps & then the other, & the other,
their noise swelling into the alley &
filtering out into the sweep of tires,
earth swallowing the stretching sound.
They count the pins & write it out—
figures, sharp as their mother’s milky teeth,
the nip of her tongue in their father’s ear.

She: —the cactus bleeds white, & raw—

He:
My dear, we are that brittle.
Your fingernails, bleached as kisses,
roused flecks of blood from the skin’s parchment.

She: —delicate fuses
shattered over brick-red clay—

He:
& though you pass on,
these opal nails will grow if possible
more beautiful,
nourished by death’s rich soil.
He:

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NIGHTMARES

The door to Jimmy’s closet slips out of the darkness as Lizzy watches, intent. It looms over her like a stern adult, anxious to punish. She takes two steps back, giving the door room to swing. It solidifies, adds flakes of peeling white paint, the marring of tiny fingerprints, and some scribble in orange crayon. The round brass knob shakes, gently at first, then hard, rattling the entire door. She hears Jimmy crying and wants to let him out. But she can’t.

The hanging stops. A little boy, two years old, steps out, ghost-like. His lips are parched to bleeding, his pupils dilated, unfocused. His face is purple. Corn flakes stick in his hair, the reek of sour milk and urine fuming forth. He holds out thin, pallid arms, helplessly. A purple, starfish-like bruise sucks at his left bicep. “Lizzy . . .?”

No, that isn’t Jimmy. It can’t be, because . . . She screams the door away. Her eyes open, leaving her in the faint gray light of her bedroom. The street light makes its usual eerie shadows against her window. She starts to breath deeply, slowly, conscious of her earlier rapid gasps. Did she really scream? Dad might come if she did. But it wasn’t her fault. It was a dream. What could she do?

Lizzy flips the pillow, one side damp with sweat. She tries to sleep again. Her mother’s crying and her father’s silence keep her up. And that nightmare keeps coming back.

It is breakfast on Saturday. Dad sits beside Lizzy in his blue robe, reading the paper. Jimmy is in his high chair. Mom gets the cereal and milk. Lizzy is ordered to get bowls and spoons. Breakfast is quiet, as required. She eats quickly, anxious to go outside. Mom tries to force-feed Jimmy, who holds his mouth tight against the press of the spoon.

“Whirr. Look, it’s an airplane.” She moves the spoon in circles. “Open up the hangar.”

“Can’t you make him eat without playing games?” Dad flips to the Metro section without looking up.

She tries quieter coaxes, adding more sugar, eating some herself in demonstration. With an excited shriek, Jimmy pushes the bowl off his tray. It shatters on the tile floor. Cold milk splatters against his father’s bare leg. The paper folds in half before landing firmly on the table.

“God damn it!”

“Now, Harold, settle down. He didn’t mean it.” Her brows crease in concern.

Lizzy pushes her chair back, but she can’t leave the table until she is excused. It would only make her father more irate if she disappeared now. And she has to do the dishes. Her father picks up his half-finished bowl of cereal and dumps it over Jimmy’s head. Milk streams over his face and into his shirt. He sits surprised for a moment, then starts to wail. “He’s got to learn to eat when he’s told to,” Dad bellows to Mom’s pleading stare. Father yanks the child from the chair and spanks him. The screaming intensifies. He tries to force Jimmy back in his chair. Jimmy pushes off with both feet, launching himself loose. He strikes
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Lizzy trembles as her father pulls Jimmy from the floor. He doesn’t struggle, his face violet from screaming. He sucks in short, wheezing breaths. Father carries Jimmy into the boy’s room. Lizzy watches him lock the door of the closet, her brother inside.

“You’ll eat what you’re given when you’re given it. We’ll see if you’re hungry tonight. You just sit in here and think about it.” Seeing Lizzy, he adds, “And don’t you go letting him out or turning on the light, or it’ll be worse for both of you.” He goes back to the kitchen, pours a new bowl of cereal, and resumes reading.

Lizzy listens to the quiet whimpering behind the door. “Don’t worry,” she whispers. “It’ll be all right. Just don’t get him angry again, that’s all.” She leaves to do the dishes. Cleaning up, she notices blood on the floor by her father’s feet. She hurries outside to play.

The rest is a hurried blur. Dinner time. Her parents rush out of the house, Jimmy’s limp body in his father’s arms. They are going to the hospital. She should lock the door and wait. Her mother wakes her up. Jimmy is dead. He hurt his head and died. It’s not her father’s fault. She wipes her tears on Lizzy’s blanket and leaves.

Then the dreams started. Elizabeth thinks of Jimmy, spilled cereal, her mother’s face. She screams, waits for silence, screams again. But she can’t wake up. She is already awake.
TRESPASSING

I steal into your room, into your arms
Under the veil of conspicuous deceit,
Checking my conscience at the door
The shadow of guilt is at the heels of my feet.
I press my eager mouth to your lips,
Branded by the red stain of her lipstick
And try to pretend that I am oblivious
To the lingering perfume that cloaks you still.
I run my fingers through your hair,
Tousled by paths her hands have tread,
Sighing against your ear that reverberates
With the echo of things she said.
I look deep into the mirror of your eyes
And am faced by her reflection staring back,
Shivering as my skin is grazed
By the steely cold of your silver wedding band.
I'm a trespasser on private property
For she has staked all of you as her claim,
And I try to secure even the smallest piece as mine,
Aware that my efforts are in vain.

LIFELESS

Music no longer has a melody
Poetry is void of rhyme
Flowers are wilted and faded
Rainbows are black and white.
Spring's warm breeze is gone
Winter's chill has come to stay
The sun has set, never to rise again
As a long night replaces the day.
The wind is quiet and still
The rivers have ceased to flow
Every star in the sky has fallen
And they lie covering the grass like snow.
Laughter is a faint, distant echo
Happiness a memory from days long past
My grief stricken heart barely recalls
When it saw the glimmer of hope last.
You stole the life right out of me
And with it you took my soul
The world all but died for me
As I stood and watched you go.
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As I stood and watched you go.
TONI DE BONNEVAL

THE POET

The young woman student who introduced the poet was stunning. She had extraordinarily long legs and wore black stockings, Cuban heels and a flowered mini skirt of some light material that did not hug her figure but rather swirled in a style reminiscent of the older south. It was a style that enhanced her femininity rather than gender and no one could fault the shortness of the skirt.

The student’s hair was dark and blunt cut and turned under slightly to frame a perfect heart shaped face. Her eyes were dark, large, and wide set with a fringe of lashes that required no mascara. Her makeup was, in fact, minimal—a mere tinge of blush high under high cheekbones and a dash of lipstick, probably applied as she darted out the door, for the student would always be busy as those with blessed with an agile brain, delightful personality and compelling good looks are destined to be.

None of the student’s attributes were lost on the poet, who doffed a non-existent hat to her masterful introduction. “You are entirely too kind,” he said shuffling to the stage—for he was quite old. The student, who was president of the University honor society as well as the poetry society, which had sponsored tonight’s event, yielded the podium.

In truth, of course, the introduction had not been “too kind.” That would have been difficult, for the poet’s credentials were monumental. His octogenarian shoulders lightly bore the memory of Nobel, Pulitzer, Laureate and half dozen other more parochial beribboned laverieres, which he now kept looped over a picture of his late wife on the hall table of his tiny apartment. In the lapel of his rumpled tweed he wore a small rosette. Even he could not remember now what it specifically stood for. Some battle—presumably a victory—in typhus-laden trench or cellar of a bombed church? or perhaps it was a drop of blood torn by the barbed wire of the concentration camp from skin now as cross hatched as the leather bindings of some of his earliest volumes. (Significantly, the poet never read from those volumes, which he hated, and always read his works from paper backs with bright glossy covers.)

On this particular night the poet read a wide selection of poems, many from his most recent book, although there was a scattering from earlier books.

In general the audience was young—it was after all a University crowd—although there was a good portion of professors as well as a handful from the town. But this was not surprising, for the man had an enormous reputation. And the fact was they all loved him, for the poet was one of the few who managed to be both accessible and profound, philosophical and playful, bawdy and reverent.

In spite of his age, the poet had retained the barrel chest of his youth, and the deep sonorous voice that boomed through it set loose from his page ripe images of war and lust of rage and triumph that battered, buffeted and teased the old blind-eyed marble busts that lined the hall and brought thunderous applause.

Not all his work, however, stormed the volcanic heights. There were quieter lyrics too: the peaches sweet with warm September, the nuptial flight of hummingbirds, the old man leaning on his cane at twilight.

That night the audience called him back several times as if he were a rock star. But the poet did not mind. He clutched his fists over his head in vigorous self approval and approval of their adulation. The audience roared.

After the reading, the poet, the student who had introduced him, and the Dean of the College crowded into the back seat of the limousine that would take them to a reception. The student sat next to the poet.

“That was very beautiful,” she said, turning to him. Her heart-shaped face, intermittently illuminated by the glow of the sodium lights along the campus drive, was solemn. She wanted so desperately to tell the poet how moving she found his reading, how profoundly his images had stirred her, but overwhelmed by her reverence and awe of his talent, her own words failed her, and she turned toward the window, disappointed by her failure.

The poet was sorry she turned away. Her thigh pressed against his in the crowded seat, firm and warm. He smelled the freshness of her hair, and rested his eyes on the swirl of her short skirt which left her knees exposed, innocent and vulnerable like a child’s. The poet lifted his hand. His still thick fingers, which had felt the cold ridges of a grenade, the silk of a woman’s breast and the warm air of cattle snuffling for hay—hesitated in the gold light above the black stocking then sank to his lap.

“Thank you,” the poet said to the student. And he too turned away to the window.
THE POET

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RANDY CALDWELL

NAM

Dark silent jungle,
Crouched by a tree with a smoke
Just the M16 and me
A heartbeat later
The sky is on fire,
Bullets snarl past,
Death is everywhere
Screams of horror outline the distance,
The Vietnamese are here.
Shoot in every direction,
Fog like walls of lead
Heavy and hiding the dead
21 months of hell.
The devil lurks in shadows
And collects our souls,
Some are scared, some are dead,
But together they gave it their all.

COLOR . . . NIGGER

What color is nigger?
Is it black, blue, or white
Like me and you?
Maybe it’s red as an Indian,
Or as slant as the Japanese.
I think it’s all white like me
Black like you.
It’s what’s inside and how
We treat others that determine
Our true colors.
So maybe it’s the hypocrites
And bigots that should feel
Upset with this call,
Maybe it’s time that they become
The minority, and take the social fall.

CORINNE A. GIRSH

DEMOLITION SQUAD

The master carpenter-
the proof lies in the walls you build around yourself.
They keep you safe from all who get too close
Here’s the twist—
I’m an expert land developer;
I move in, demolish ancient buildings
and remodel walls with doors of caring
that open and shut at will . . .

CAPTIVATION

You come to my mind unbidden
Wishful fantasies of being a part
I analyze, read into, every spoken exchange
But don’t you too?
Abide by the rules you say—
Hard to do with none established
What lies ahead?
I’d like to audition for the part
What part?
The one you need me to play.
RANDY CALDWELL

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We treat others that determine
Our true colors.
So maybe it's the hypocrites
And bigots that should feel
Upset with this call,
Maybe it's time that they become
The minority, and take the social fall.
PIPE DREAMS

In the sidewalk a crack
slowly expands—creeping, grasping
with its demon claws,
pulling down victims who fall prey.
Entrapping the innocent,
stripping unborn fetuses of vitality—
no conscience exists.
Reeking of evil,
It devulges the mind—
mutilating the spectrum of life.
Lurking in dark corners,
It craves the blood of weak mortals;
Mocking their gullibility as they enter
pernicious abyss.
Whispering softly,
It will continue to lure souls
with distorted phantasms,
until Death interrupts—
claiming the shattered pieces of Its undeniable victory.

FINAL REFLECTION

A gentle breeze flutters—
calming, affecting my soul.
Above me angels sing sweet songs in Heaven,
bathing the skies with soft, soothing sounds.
My body is rhapsody in motion.
The reality of death is beckoning with its angelic hands,
whispering my name softly.
In winter’s pale light, dusk is ever approaching on a Saturday’s eve.
I will die before sunset—
comforted by the thought another night will not be endured.
The dark embracing arms will release me;
Another side of life is calling.

Death will be kind to me.
Pain and sickness is to akin to Hell.
PIE DREAMS

In the sidewalk a
crack
slowly expands—creeping, grasping
with its demon claws,
pulling down victims
who fall prey.
Enraging the innocent,
stripping unborn fetuses of vitality—
no conscience exists.
Reeking of evil,
It devours the mind—
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Lurking in dark corners,
It craves the blood
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GRETCHEN PHILLIPS

WINDOW SHOPPING

A man and a woman were window shopping along the crowded streets of San Francisco. The smog-filled air suffocated their lungs. The sun's oppressive heat beat down upon their heads, giving them a tired, woozy feeling. On every corner, stood a hooker, making her daily rounds. Small children scampered around the adults, dashing in and out of stores filled with candy, ice cream and toys. Every few minutes, a drunk or homeless person stopped the couple, asking for change or cigarettes. These people were dirty, with torn clothes and no shoes. Most of them pushed around shopping carts filled with old tin cans, half-eaten sandwiches, rotten fruit, and scraps of clothing. The traffic-lined streets sounded with loud, honking horns, ambulance wails, gun shots and police sirens. Cross walks that were lit with signs saying "walk" or "stop" were seldom obeyed by the hurrying pedestrians. Brownstone buildings were compact and tightly strung together in the city. Pizza shops, from every Italian name ever known, were scattered down every street. Construction sites caused a lot of backed-up traffic in the city. The men worked on sewer lines or fixed potholes in the deteriorating streets. Sometimes a beautiful woman would walk by, and whistles or cat calls would ring out loud and long. Wrought-iron benches were cemented into the sidewalk for a person's resting pleasure. An old man, in a blue leisure suit, sat and watched the people around him.

The woman clutched her bags tightly, while pushing through a sea of nameless faces; her husband followed reluctantly. A few feet in front of them, stood a small shop with a window full of jade jewelry. Combs, rings, bracelets and earrings made up the beautiful arrangement. She stood admiring the gorgeous, handcrafted jewelry, pointing her finger to the glass every time she saw a piece more beautiful than the last.

"Look at that gorgeous barrette, Mike," she said.

"It's terrific," he replied.

"Wouldn't it look nice in my hair? I'm going in to see how much it costs." The woman was right. Her long, raven-black hair would look spectacular in the jade and pearl barrette. Mike stood outside the shop, waiting patiently for his wife to return.

They walked along the overstuffed streets, hand in hand. Silence had overcome them. The woman was fuming inside, thinking terrible, nasty thoughts about her husband. The barrette had meant the world to her. He had stubbornly refused her wishes to buy it.

"It wasn't that much," she said, breaking the silence.

"$250.00 is a bit extreme for a damn barrette, Chris," Mike said, raising his voice.

"You don't think it was worth that kind of money, but I do," she said. "The beautiful craftsmanship alone was worth more than the store was asking." Mike stopped, turning his head towards her until their eyes met. He looked at her carefully, observing the hopeful look that danced in her eyes.

"Chris, I don't want to argue about a materialistic object. I can't afford it and that's the end of the discussion," he said.

Sullenly, the wife began walking in the direction of their small, uptown, apartment building. The discussion was over. The barrette would be gone.

A week had gone past since the day she had seen her beloved barrette. She went every day to the shop to see if it still sat in the window. Tonight was her and Mike's anniversary. She imagined how beautiful the barrette would have looked in her hair. The style of the jade and the shine of the pearls would have been fancy enough to wear to the ritzy La Chez restaurant that Mike was taking her too.

"Our reservations are at 8:00 p.m.," Mike reminded her.

"I'm trying to hurry! My hair isn't styling the way I want it to. If I had a barrette to fix it with, I would have been ready hours ago," she said.

"Don't fret about your hair. I like it all down. Let it flow across your shoulders tonight," he said.

La Chez was quaint and elegant. Waiters passed, carrying large trays of fancy finger sandwiches and bottles of expensive wine. People watched in amazement as the waiters rushed around to each table. They never spilled a single drop of wine or dropped a tray. Their waiter had been quite friendly. She liked him. His poise and grace made the evening flow smoothly. He was tall, with curly hair. His uniform fit nicely and his smile brightened the room. Mike ordered a prime rib for himself. She ordered a dinner-sized, shrimp cocktail.

"I like this place. It's very comfortable," she said.

"I figured you would, Chris," Mike said. "I'm sorry about the fight over the barrette. I know how much you wanted it."

"Well it doesn't make a difference now. I was foolish to act so infantile and greedy," she said. "All I ever need is your love, Mike."

The waiter carried a large tray, teaming with two wonderful odors of their dinners. He sat the tray behind them on a wooden stand. He smiled.

"One prime rib for you, sir," he said, as he set the plate before Mike. Turning around, he picked up a smaller plate and set it in front of Chris.

"And one jade, pearl-inlaid barrette for you, madame."
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FAREWELL

Cigars
and sordid work days
that left you asleep
in your chair
with arms folded tight,
so tight, as if
trying to secure more time.
Monitoring post-surgery snoring
for assurance
of a living soul;
struggling through
the occasional inebriation
that deafened your ears
from realistic words,
and those damn
country 8-tracks—
but I loved you.
I used to sit on your lap.
I was the perversial
‘Daddy’s little girl.’
If only you could see
how much of you
was installed in me,
but you made only one
high-school performance,
missed my sweet 16th,
and I drank alone on the 21st.
You never shared the pride
from all the successful tries,
and you are blind to how
I can construct my words.
You missed my graduation,
and you will not attend my wedding;
you have left me to walk the aisle
alone.
You once had a little girl,
but Daddy,
you have missed
how she has grown
to a woman,
bitter to the bone,
yet she loves you,

has loved you despite it all.
Forgiving what she wrongly
made your fault
to ease the pain
from kneeling
in front of the grave
anticipating that silly grin
to warm her heart,
instead, wiping away
the stolen love from her eyes.
I have loved you,
and still I do—
I only wish that
I would have
told you
good-bye
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I only wish that
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good-bye
A rose, colored bright,
Framed against a snow window--
Petals crushed in white.
— Mary Ann Lowry

Treacherous spinning
intoxicated spider
suffocating web.
— Rhonda Cope

Large powerfull thrusts
Passionate deceitful lust
Love; imprisonment
— Randy Caldwell

fast rides, games of chance,
spinning the wheel of fortune.
a street fair—or life . . .
— Gigi Danko

A snowy mountain
sits watching the stark valley
as the lark sings on.
— Kristen Evans

The book unopened
fell to the old wooden floor,
like a dying soul.
— Shannon Knight

Black clouds dominate--
Thunder heard from a distance.
Branches bend in fury.
— Gretchen Phillips

Quiver - quickening
Of the pulse; blood races through
The veins constricted.
— Tim Jilg

Winter cardinal
a wink of scarlet in snow
flits from tree to tree.
— Robert Brown

Thriving tobacco
Plant reaching toward the sun,
A black, shrunken lung.
— Jenn Farley

Laughing isn’t good
Like when your bladder is full
Now who is laughing?
— Mariah Bianco
TRUMBULL COUNTY HAIKU

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GREY CONSCIOUSNESS

Big, fluffy grey matter above my mind
clogging my senses.
It controls me, like a puppet.
An overwhelming force that darkens my world.
It follows me.
I run quickly but its existence remains.
It tells me that today will be dreadful
and many tomorrows full of agony and suffering.

It laughs mockingly at my frown, hysterically
at my salty waters.
Cloud in my thinking.
Confusion tugs at my conscience
tears it to shreds with its bolt of force.
Gasping for air the smog engulfs me,
choke me.

Remaining grey, it never turns black.
It's all a game I am forced to play.

SOUL VIBRATIONS

When I hear his voice it slowly slinks,
seeping into my body like a smoke stream
shivering throughout my sensitive soul.
I excruciatingly exhale and try to ignore it but I can't fight the buzz.
I can't forget what he once was.
PAM ASTOLFI

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RHONDA COPE

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PETER HUGGINS

THE LOVERS OF CARTAGENA

The lovers of Cartagena sleep
On stone beds in the walls of San Pedro Claver. They like the feel

Of hard stone against their skin.
They do not pay attention to priests’
Or nuns’ complaints, for the Inquisition

Has lost its hold on believers while belief
Loiters in the back streets
Behind hotels, drinks in cafes,

And argues with artists and intellectuals.
The lovers lie on their stone beds,
But in the glittering harbor

Under the golden moon Sir Francis Drake
Holds the city for queenly ransom.
Down the Bocagrande peninsula,

Through the lobbies of hotels,
Beneath the private vistas
Of balconyed condominiums,

Drake’s troops advance on the city.
The lovers sigh, rise again
From their beds, and take their positions

At the fort. This time they repel Drake.
In the arboreal night the jaguar
Cries, the jungle retreats,

The lovers return to their beds.
By morning the lovers seek
The wonders of Donna Castile—

The comfort of hot coffee, the magic
Of grilled chicken fajitas—and they are,
For the first time in years, completely happy.

ELAINE ARVAN

DARK AND PURE HOUR

Tonight,
When breathing’s heaving starts
Low in my intestines,
I kneel to drink
From the lightning rivers of my nerves.

Wee hours
Purge black into white,
A vigil night

Heavy on my nakedness
Like a burdened lover.

Purest rhythmed blackness
Urges sleep like a mother,
Lets you tumble deep through vacuums
Where the eyes close,
The lips stay open.

This hour,
Strangely liveable,
Lets thoughts run swift through richness,
Touch soft ground and spin
Cartwheels.

It’s peaceful here
With soundless frolicking,
These preparations for morning,
Made carefully in dreams.
PETER HUGGINS

THE LOVERS OF CARTAGENA

The lovers of Cartagena sleep
On stone beds in the walls of San Pedro Claver. They like the feel

Of hard stone against their skin.
They do not pay attention to priests’
Or nuns’ complaints, for the Inquisition

Has lost its hold on believers while belief
Loiters in the back streets
Behind hotels, drinks in cafes,

And argues with artists and intellectuals.
The lovers lie on their stone beds,
But in the glittering harbor

Under the golden moon Sir Francis Drake
Holds the city for queenly ransom.
Down the Bocagrande peninsula,

Through the lobbies of hotels,
Beneath the private vistas
Of balconied condominiums,

Drake’s troops advance on the city.
The lovers sigh, rise again
From their beds, and take their positions

At the fort. This time they repel Drake.
In the arboreal night the jaguar
Cries, the jungle retreats,

The lovers return to their beds.
By morning the lovers seek
The wonders of Donna Castile—

The comfort of hot coffee, the magic
Of grilled chicken fajitas—and they are,
For the first time in years, completely happy.

ELAINE ARVAN

DARK AND PURE HOUR

Tonight,
When breathing’s heaving starts
Low in my intestines,
I kneel to drink
From the lightning rivers of my nerves.

Wee hours
Purge black into white,
A vigil night

Heavy on my nakedness
Like a burdened lover.

Purest rhythmed blackness
Urges sleep like a mother,
Lets you tumble deep through vacuums
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A NIGHT FROM HELL

In October, 1984, my boyfriend, Billy Heinecke, from Baltimore, Maryland, and I broke up. We dated for a year or so and it was hard on me when we broke up and he moved back to Baltimore. My friends were worried about me, as I was real depressed. Mary and Chris decided to take me out to the local bar, Riverside, to cheer me up. This is how my night from Hell started.

Riverside, located in Walshfield, Ohio, is a very large bar. It has three parts—a deli, a restaurant and bar, and a nightclub. The nightclub is where we were going. It had a disc-jockey, a lighted dance floor, a bar downstairs, and pool tables and pinball machines up. We were dancing and having a really good time. The beer tasted good and the bar was not very crowded. An old boyfriend, Kevin Smith, came in. It was really good to see him. We were all having such fun. I decided that I was hot and needed some fresh air, so I stepped outside. Kevin followed.

The next thing I knew, I was being dragged across the grass to a building behind the bar that had been gutted by fire a couple of months before. Kevin proceeded to knock me out and tie my hands behind my back with a leather boot lace. When I awoke, I was being raped by this ex-boyfriend. I started screaming, and the more I screamed, the more pleasure Kevin got. He kept knocking me out by closing off my air passages with his hands or fingers. He tried to strangle me. He tried sticking his penis in my mouth, and I bit it as hard as I could. He then bit my breast and punched me in the face to get me to shut up. I just kept thinking, when will this end; when will Chris or Mary come to my rescue? He ripped my earrings out of my ears and kept punching me over and over. My stomach hurt so bad from being beaten.

After approximately two hours of being sexually and physically abused, I heard someone calling my name. That was what I needed to give me an extra boost of energy. I broke my leather bonds and pushed him off. His head hit the wall, dented it, and he was out cold. I grabbed my pants and made a mad dash for safety. Mary, who had been looking for me, was waiting outside. She walked me to the pay phone in front of the bar and made me call the police. I called once and when they asked my name, I hung up. I was hysterical, crying and carrying on, so Mary called for me. They said that they would have a police car there in just a few minutes. Within ten minutes, a police car pulled in. The officer talked to Mary and I until his backup arrived. This policeman had a dog with him. I explained what had taken place to this officer. They took the dog around the building and dragged Kevin out kicking and screaming.

The officer took me to the hospital where they could do a Rape Test. They took samples, pictures, and asked a lot of embarrassing questions. They asked if there was any chance that I was pregnant, and I said yes. They told me the test results would be in about a week. I was too nervous to call, so I made Chris call for me. I was pregnant with Billy’s baby. I did not know what to do!

I made an appointment to see my gynecologist, Dr. M. M. Al-Madani. Dr. Al-Madani told me that I was six weeks pregnant and the baby was alive. He also told me that since I got beat up so bad, that there was a chance that the baby was hurt, deformed, or would be retarded. He recommended that I have an abortion. This was the hardest decision for me to make in this state of mind. I called Billy to let him know, but he was the typical male. He said that he really did not care what I did, that we were through. I told my mother and all I could do was cry. I did not really have a choice. I decided to have an abortion.

By the time I made this decision, I was fourteen weeks pregnant and had to go to the clinic that was doing the abortion, The Akron Women’s Clinic, on Friday night for laminaria insertion. The procedure was done on Saturday morning. I was put to sleep and when I awoke, I just felt empty. This was one of the worst days of my life; a day I will never forget.

I found out that Kevin was charged with assault, rape, and gross sexual imposition. I had to testify in front of the Grand Jury twice. I did not hear anything for a couple weeks, so I called the Prosecutor’s Office. Because I had dated Kevin before and slept with him, the charges were reduced to assault and he got out of jail. I feel very strongly about this subject as it is a constant thorn in my side. I also feel that I got the shaft. The Prosecutor that was prosecuting the case is now a judge in Geauga County. I feel that he does not deserve such a high position.

This happened nine years ago and I think of it often. My feelings toward men are horrible and I feel that I really do not need one in my life. I have had other relationships, but they do not seem to last. I feel that this is partly my fault because of feelings of being violated by a man. I never want a man to have that kind of control over my life again. Some guys say that I am a Bitch—it is probably true. I have some real problems that one day I hope to get worked out so I can have a normal long lasting relationship with a man.
KRISTEN EVANS

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DIANE MOOMEY

APARTHEID

i did not understand, he said:
   he did not hate his blacks,
   he loved them.
i saw that he also loved
   his dogs and his horses.
   he built them little sheds
   to live in, let them
work for him.
   but of course, he did not let them
marry his sister.

CAREFULLY

carefully,
   they carried the sleeping tiger
   into the house, hoping
   to train it for
   life in the circus.
when it awakened, of course,
   the tiger had
other ideas.

JAMES HRUSOVSKY

MY CONCESSION TO YOUTH

I’ve lost
   the majesty of twist and turn
   the scandal of long hair
   of riding a bike with no hands.

My lips aren’t cherry candy stained—
   they are tender upon her spine,
   each vertebrae I devour like a cube of sugar.

UNFINISHED

I have a fear of stout-hearted whim and want of a
rapacious stare: I cave in too easily when desire’s there.

   She is the arch
   I am the base
   her foundation
   She gives me grace

Her naked back is blue-veined, white marble;
my caressing hand forms the ripples of
her spine. My monument to moment. A
quiet sigh; the powder-blue, cotton sheet
drapes her unfinished thigh.
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**SUNDAY**

"Hang on Joey," Stu quietly begs the limp form cradled in his lap. Their intertwined shadow casts a thick L-shape on the dust covered pier planks as the setting sun plays on the dancing ash and dust floating lazily on the cruel December breeze—floating, drifting, falling. Everything is blanketed in gray. At high tide, the only sound is that of the cold sea lapping hungrily at the pier supports with its salty tongue. The waves sing a lonely song, and the dull blue ocean with its deep voice continues its aria. "Please hang on."

How long has it been? Stu wonders. A week, a month, or has it only been a few days? The last plane flew over, he thinks, two days ago, and that was after the radio, which had broadcasted three or four days of unwarranted reassurance, had cut out. It must have happened about a week ago, Stu figures.

Trying unsuccessfully to brush the dust off of Joey’s face, Stu’s hand smudges the finely sculpted features. He is careful not to touch the newly blossomed sores which have appeared on the young man’s cheeks. Joey’s eyes are closed; his breathing is labored. Looking down at the handsome boyish face nestled in his arms, Stu attempts to recall the soft green-blue that used to peer from those dark, hollow sockets. "Your eyes, Joey," he says, jumping a little at the sound of his own voice. "They could see things I never knew were there." Stu breathes a deep sigh as the memories wash ashore. "Remember when we used to sit here like this and watch the ernes diving for fish? You would talk for hours about ‘the grace of the ernie’ and ‘its skill as a fisherman’. Everything was for a purpose. Everything was beautiful to your eyes." Stu laughs softly as not to disturb the resting form in his arms. He closes his eyes and, for a moment, can visualize the slow wingbeats of the white-tailed sea eagle as it leisurely hovers above the water. "Ah, but your eyes," Stu whispers, opening his own and looking down at the young man. "What do they see now Joey? What do they see now?"

Stu sits against the pier railing, holds the young man gently, and reluctantly waits for the inevitable turning of the tide at slack water. He looks back along the docks. The plundered boats, with their cabin windows in fragments and their shredded sails tattering in the thick, salty breeze, bounce blamelessly on the icy waves. One, a small shrimp, its ruined deck half in and half out of the water, still smoulders. Small wafts of smoke from its planks mingle with the gray dust that showers the silent coast, carpeting the docks, the piers, the beach. And the ernes, scattered along the beach among the scavenger gulls, lie motionless, waiting to be buried in the ash.

The beach-front houses and bungalows stand like lonely and silent sentinels. Their once impressive facades now appear drab. No festive voices sing from their gaping windows; instead, bitter drafts play soft, sullen tunes on their jagged remains. Stu knows that, except for their whispered songs, they will remain silent for a long time. He turns his gaze from the ruins; it hurts him too much to recall their glory. The ocean is the one last untainted remnant not destroyed by the crazed and frightened mobs. He looks out upon it thoughtfully.

... The great voice of the sea, with its eternal "Nevermore!" Isn’t that how it went?" Joey remains silent. "I think so," Stu quietly answers himself. "Who was that? Was it Dickens, or was that Uncle Oscar? Damn! I can’t even remember that. Lord knows you told me often enough. I think it was Dickens. Wasn’t it, Joey?" But Joey still does not answer. The only reply Stu receives is from the ocean, and its voice seems to actually sing out ‘nevermore’. "Just hang on Joey. For me, hang on."

Like countless times before, Stu reaches out to affectionately smooth Joey’s hair but stops his hand from stirring the blond locks. He realizes that he can never do that again. Something that he has done for years without a thought had been brought to an unpleasant end. A vivid picture from earlier that day returns to Stu - an image of a handful of hair. He surrenders his hand to the image and rests it on Joey’s thinning thigh. A wisp of a breeze blows from the water. Its salty breath stirs tiny whirls in the dust and ruffles the feathers on the quiet birds. The sun continues its descent. Its brilliance dances on the dull waves forming thousands of tiny indigo serpents in the water, but the dun-colored beach refuses to catch the sun’s bright beams.

Stu starts as Joey lets out a soft, weak cough. A fine thread of blood trickles from the corners of the gaunt lips, and the cradled figure breathes wetly. "Oh Christ, Joey," Stu says colorlessly. He gently wipes at the stream, mixing it with the ash on Joey’s face and leaving a dark, maroon stain on the young man’s lower jaw. Stu’s roughly hewn features soften, and his eyes begin to water as he lets out a deep, unsteady breath. The tears are cleansing tears, clearing glittering, wet paths through the smudged dust. "Let go Joey," Stu whispers. "It’s okay. Let go . . ."

Fallout paints the evening horizon magnificent shades of royal purple. Stu looks out across the ocean at the bruised sunset and waits patiently for the now ebbing tide to retreat.

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SIMON PERCHIK

332

As if from some hourglass this beach
slipped past last night, the wind
returning empty, its sand
laying motionless among the hours, one
more joyous than another, one more caring
one flying between these gulls
and even you are lonely

walk between the first snowfall—the air
must sense the sea it once was
—at the slightest calm
will change into clouds, into your sleep
—for hours into the slow dark
the way some movie will begin again
and the actors lean over to kiss
almost falling from the screen—one hour

always whiter than another, one weaker
one on fire and you let the sand
flow over your fingers
as if once there were 12
or 24 or someone you love
falling like water to measure the Earth
the silence and into your lips the hours.

MARY ANN LOWRY

CREATIVITY

The swan ogles
the fruit-borne tree
with finally focused eyes,
hungry.
and begins his never-known-before rise
into weightless flight,
when, suddenly, a mechanical dog,
collared by a civilized leash,
appears and erupts
with a hesitant bark.
The gold-rimmed day turns dark,
and the fruits become
hollow waxened figures
that melt in the hand
not in the mind.

GROWING POEM

At 2:00 o’clock in the morning
A couplet howled its way to me.

Now I’m crooning to it lullabies
Vainly trying to soothe its cries,

Hoping, with luck and lots of effort,
To bring it up to be a sonnet.
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A PLAYER TO BE NAMED LATER

Cold piercing steel
With razors edge
Crafted with pride
In the land of the free
Slow weapon of death
To those not yet born
Six deep in their graves
The unwanted are stored

DIMENSION III

Insomnia is the loneliest pain -
Descend from night tower,
Vision twisted -
The dark vineyard:
‘I’ fragments languish
In grey obscurity -

The empty road through
Sunflowers bent, dying -
A locked station -
In ghost village silence
One waits moments black -

Eerie dawn -
The monotonous green ceiling
Registers faint shadows -
Sound of train departing -
A white whistle evaporates
Sadly -
JAMES KOVAC

A PLAYER TO BE NAMED LATER

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ARTHUR J. SCOTT

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Sadly -
BOWLING

They bought the ore its evolutions too
Burning it to God my body on fire
Twas not employed how can I claim
Each day this horror of Mylanta's game

I must own the factory by now
You see absurd, I say real
Each man who goes to work
My name, image on his mind

DOGS IN WARREN

No one had ever shot a dog before. Ralph lay on the sidewalk panting. The Courthouse was across the street, justice only a dodge between cars away.

Ralph raised his head to lick the bullet. Where was the bullet? In his stomach? Locked in his Purina ribs? Ralph lowered his head onto the sidewalk. Except for the dull headache it gave him, it comforted him.

The crowd began to walk the sidewalks. Ralph was lodged under Roberta's window eyeing the color of the store. Soon he would be rescued. Moronically he would die the death of convicted sin to awake in some dream far from corporate headquarters. His family would try to find him and fail.

Nature began to affect him. He was invisible. These corporate managers and lawyers could not see him. He was asleep, resting, cute. The mouse from the YMCA splashed chlorine through his nostrils.

Police cars raced up Mahoning Avenue. Unmarked cars silently obeyed North Park Avenue's speed limit, stopping at the light a few yards from Ralph. Blue light blinded Ralph for a moment, exploding into Roberta's. The street changed. Unmarked cars hesitated for a moment and drove on. Tires sprained and ached in the holes in the road, shock work breaking teeth.

Ralph lay in smiles. He was a hero. Shot down in political and business restitution. Sounds of cars, wind blowing. Dog tags accusing him. Why market Street? Why? His eyes could look around Howard's down at the corner reaching for Action Ambulance several blocks away past open field or cat bathrooms.

Roberta opened the door finding Ralph. She let out a frightened sound and quickly ordered her assistants and Diane to call.

Ralph seemed to live happily ever after. The twenty-two bullet had been too clean, too legal. Surgeons had him on his feet in six weeks and now Howard's still has someone to look at and admire.

The fountain at Courtyard Square sputtered in agony. The bathrooms were criminally sunlight.
They bought the ore its evolutions too
Burning it to God my body on fire
Twas not employed how can I claim
Each day this horror of Mylanta's game

I must own the factory by now
You see absurd, I say real
Each man who goes to work
My name, image on his mind

No one had ever shot a dog before. Ralph lay on the sidewalk panting. The Courthouse was across the street, justice only a dodge between cars away. Ralph raised his head to lick the bullet. Where was the bullet? In his stomach? Locked in his Purina ribs? Ralph lowered his head onto the sidewalk. Except for the dull headache it gave him, it comforted him.

The crowd began to walk the sidewalks. Ralph was lodged under Roberta's window eyeing the color of the store. Soon he would be rescued. Moronically he would die the death of convicted sin to awake in some dream far from corporate headquarters. His family would try to find him and fail.

Nature began to affect him. He was invisible. These corporate managers and lawyers could not see him. He was asleep, resting, cute. The mouse from the YMCA splashed chlorine through his nostrils.

Police cars raced up Mahoning Avenue. Unmarked cars silently obeyed North Park Avenue's speed limit, stopping at the light a few yards from Ralph. Blue light blinded Ralph for a moment, exploding into Roberta's. The street changed. Unmarked cars hesitated for a moment and drove on. Tires sprained and ached in the holes in the road, shock work breaking teeth.

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JERRY DIDAY

THIS YEAR THE EARTH TOOK OVER

This year the earth took over,
Crunching, breezing past,
Lurching, straining, reaching out
Beyond human limits, human confines,

Tearing out of slim earth
with arching roots and bulbs,
Gasing in sunlight upon sunlight,
reflecting back darkest green and shade.

Tons of foliage crowd street and alley-way,
Shooting up to the stratosphere,
testing limits of space and consumption.

Helpless . . .
Human watch,
Engulfed by mounds of foodstuffs,
Pushed aside by burgeoning bush and tree,
Undercut by unnamed growth,

and pick
some ozone depleted space
in the corner of a room
to say "I am."

RANDY KLINE

THE DEATH OF HARRY BONDS

Was no big ordeal
He died driving drunk behind the wheel
Hit a mighty Oak with a solid smack, drove the steering column straight through his back

Pain he had no time to feel
Remorse he had none, for drinking was manly
Drunkenness fun

His family cried great tears of grief
for M.A.D.D. mothers his death a relief
for the only other loss was a poor oak tree instead of a family, or you, or me

And today, wearing his Sunday best
they laid young Harry to his last rest
In a hole in the ground they put the Box
Sealed the lid and locked all the locks
No more would he drive careless and bad
No longer would someone call him Dad
It's the same old song. Don't drink and drive
You might not make it, or worse, you could survive
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BRENDA VILERS

In Memory of Surya Srivastava, 1993

OUR UNSPOKEN DEDICATION

The kindest eyes
reflecting the skies
The softest smile,
the warmest face, we cannot replace.
Moving on through the seasons
changes in life so full of reasons.

They seem now like a desert mirage,
or some kind of dull collage,
But the feelings and memories always will last,
as we admire now . . .
    embracing the past.

The love never leaves
for it runs much too deep
Hidden in a mountain
like a fresh spring.
We have climbed so high to seek and
to find life’s treasure.
Knowing you, sharing with you, and
dreaming with you . . .
It’s been our pleasure!
    We thank you.

THOMAS PINTI

REVELATION

. . . and with book in hand I sat in solemn silence.
a threatening storm hovered above this grassland
upon which I sat - impetuously waiting,
thunderous booms bellowed from the sky, as the
black clouds loomed above, moving with a predatory
slowness.

my gaze turned upwards, which fueled an exhilarating
anticipation that coursed through my veins
rendering me speechless.
I sat motionless to the dark forces crafting its
plan, while the haunting, nebulous sky seemed to
form sinister eyes that peered down on my helpless
soul, overwhelming in its menacing presence. I
contemplated the forcefulness of the impending
downpour, beating me down
down
down.
but wait - triumphantly breaking through the blackness,
a beam of light pierced its barrier. the penetration
appeared to exert itself with determined persistence,
splitting the omnipotent overcast, and distorting
the sinister eyes into a more abstract and natural
formation. the imposing brightness dispersed the
ominous clouds, creating simply a serene ambience.
the warmth intimately embraced me, as if I was the
reason for its breakthrough. at once, my eyes lowered
as I revealed the initial page. I sensed that I was
about to embark on an euphoric journey.

every day brings forth a new Genesis.
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