Spring 1992

ICON Spring 1992

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ICON is the student-run student-operated literary magazine of Kent State University Trumbull Campus. ICON is published twice yearly: at the end of Fall and Spring semesters.

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

Subscriptions: ICON is available free of charge to Kent State University Trumbull Campus students, staff, and faculty. Those off campus may purchase individual copies of ICON (back issues $2.00), current issue $3.00 or subscribe to ICON ($6.00/year).

Submissions: ICON considers submissions of unpublished short stories, poems, essays, and black-and-white art.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.

ICON wishes to congratulate Susan Thurston Hamerski on winning the Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Award. Ms. Zell Draz has graciously made this award possible through the Helen Hurlbert Foundation. The contest is coordinated through the efforts of Professor Gary Ciuba.

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Assistant Editors: Michelle Gilmour Denise Evinsky

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Cover Art: Stephanie Young

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HART CRANE MEMORIAL POETRY AWARD

SUSAN THURSTON HAMERSKI

SOMETIMES, WHEN TWO STRANGERS PASS WHILE CLIMBING THE STAIRS

Such looks make the soul blush
and you know without speaking
without ever seeing each other
again that it might have been
another time another place
it really doesn’t matter but
it stops something. The thinking
about the thousands marching in Cape
Town, the diatribes in the Rose Garden,
the thinking about the crossing in the
road and the child dressed in red
corduroy standing next to the
sign that says no parking after
six p.m. and the thinking
about the meat that thaws in
the sink at home and suddenly in
those eyes you are sinking
as if in water, tethered to
the life of that someone’s breath
near recognition a gasp full enough to
bring to the surface
at that moment
a fantasy you might be arrested to print.
That leaves on the ivy turn close to
crimson; the thought catches in your
chest, because the vine is lovely and
a reminder that yes, yes, another
season is passing, and someday
eyes will not meet yours like that
and never shall tears be seen
from them and you will never
hear the voice kept secret by those lips.
But the ivy is there to touch, and you
reach through the window to snap
off a leaf and across town
the child crosses the street
and will come home, must come home
to dinner and warmth and will never
know about the eyes of the parents
and how close they all came to something else.

JAMES HRUSOVSKY

DEPRESSION IN FREE VERSE

Your rose petal knife blade twists
Sweetly for you, scars never to be seen . . .
Pain especially for me, wounds
Cured by your salty, frigid breeze.

What were the words,
What were the words
I forgot to say?

The sirens of the ocean-blue
Call, scream hysterically; they know
The words, say the words I forgot.

How was it, how was
It supposed to be? I’ve lost my place. How was I supposed to feel now?
Will you show me?
Show me how it was, a bow
For the crowd gathered to see.
It’s over, the show
Is over, is this how it should be?

Make it more, I want
To feel more than yesterday. I
Want to feel the words you say.
There must be, must be something
You can do for me.
I’ve lost the words, lost the feeling again.

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HART CRANE MEMORIAL POETRY AWARD

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Such looks make the soul blush and you know without speaking without ever seeing each other again that it might have been another time, another place it really doesn’t matter but it stops something. The thinking about the thousands marching in Cape Town, the diatribes in the Rose Garden, the thinking about the crossing in the road and the child dressed in red corduroy standing next to the sign that says no parking after six p.m. and the thinking about the meat that thaws in the sink at home and suddenly in those eyes you are sinking as if in water, tethered to the life of that someone’s breath near recognition a gasp full enough to bring to the surface at that moment a fantasy you might be arrested to print. That leaves on the ivy turn close to crimson; the thought catches in your chest, because the vine is lovely and a reminder that yes, yes, another season is passing, and someday eyes will not meet yours like that and never shall tears be seen from them and you will never hear the voice kept secret by those lips. But the ivy is there to touch, and you reach through the window to snap off a leaf and across town the child crosses the street and will come home, must come home to dinner and warmth and will never know about the eyes of the parents and how close they all came to something else.

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THE BETRAYAL

With wild eyes
she looks at him.
Like a caged doe
she tries to bolt.
Excited, he pursues.
Caught, she struggles
strains to escape.
Too late.
The knife descends
plunging and plunging
over and over again
slicing into soft tissue.
Blood gushes
now unrestrained.
With glazed eyes
she stares at him unseeing
like the day she said,
"I do."

SHATTERED ILLUSIONS

The small hand reaches, stretches,
striving to touch the
glittering, sparkling vase
gleaming in the sun.
Finally, contact.
Small fingers grab, pull,
slip, lose their grip.
Falling, it smashes into
thousands of icy shards
raining down on,
tearing into,
soft pink flesh.
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RANDOM THOUGHTS REGARDING MY DEATH & DISPOSAL

What will not do
is having my ashes
scattered at sea,
having my black-yellow corpse
picked apart by vultures,
being made into compost,
being thrown onto a funeral pyre.
I'd really like to drown,
floating & bobbing,
bloated & white, a gourd
with feet & hands
to scare washerwomen in
Bangladesh. Being stuffed
by a qualified taxidermist
would be nice too. Me-
modeling the very latest
fashion at Nordstrom
amidst jubilant cries of
"And she looks so life-like!"

If I'm placed in a coffin,
please, let it be neon-colored
so that the funeral directors
don't accidentally bump into me
& cause me to fall out & roll
across the floor. (I'd hate
having lint on my tongue &
eyeballs for the wake.)
Better yet, a coffin with
one huge eye painted
in the middle which seems
able to see in all directions
all at once like that
Mona Lisa woman. Or
freeze me & save me
for Halloween; prop me up
between 2 jack-o-lanterns
on your front porch.

Are there still head hunters?
How nice it would be
if someone were to
wear my shrunken head
around his neck along with
the usual hyena teeth &
the shards of sea shells.
Either that, or jab
a spear through my head
making a lollipop-scepter
to be taken along on some
diplomatic peace mission.

If you cremate me,
bring me home
in a porcelain urn
etched with phoenixes,
demons, & angels.
Build me a simple,
tasteful altar next to
your spice rack, &
worship me as your
kitchen goddess. Oh!
don't deny me
my moment's glory!
If I am to die,
let me be rolled
across the lawn
on a gurney towards
an awaiting ambulance.
For a moment--
the total object of
the hushed whispers of
nosey housewives
in floral dusters or
soiled terry-cloth robes,
the total object of
children's ooohs
& aaahs.

UNDENIABLE TRAGEDY

Tragedy
within itself;
slipping in suddenly
like a wave crashing the shore
to wash away castles of sand.
Being afraid of it is
as natural as breathing,
and believing it will pass you
is only human.
Then, like a piercing bullet,
reality hits home.
The fantasy of being
indispensable
is diminished and
Death
is undeniable.
RANDOM THOUGHTS REGARDING MY DEATH & DISPOSAL

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DENISE EVINSKY

UNDENIABLE TRAGEDY

Tragedy
within itself;
slipping in suddenly
like a wave crashing the shore
to wash away castles of sand.
Being afraid of it is
as natural as breathing,
and believing it will pass you
is only human.
Then, like a piercing bullet,
Reality hits home.
The fantasy of being
indispensable
is diminished and
Death
is undeniable.
BRUSSEL SPROUTS

He sat alone, gazing at the candy apple red truck before him. It was his pride and joy. It was also his security, for he clung to it like a bear does to honey. Suddenly, his thoughts were interrupted by the church bells. They sang out their usual six o'clock tune. He knew what that meant, and the sweat began to fall from him like tears of a saddened clown. For a moment he contemplated escape by running, but instead he realized he had better face up to it.

Before he could comprehend what was happening, he stood straight up, and began his journey, the whole time praying that it wouldn't be his last. He reached the door, and looked back at his truck once more for strength. With a sigh, he quickly flung open the screen door as it squawked in disagreement.

Next, he was walking from room to room with extreme caution and dignity. Tonight was his night. He would set things straight. Finally, and not a moment too soon, he reached his destiny. He looked around carefully. Then he saw the chair. It was inviting him closer with a smirk showing only deception. He sat down, and there in front of him lay a horrible sight. He wanted to turn back, but he knew it was too late. He looked for a weapon—anything sharp. Unfortunately, all he found was a spoon. Things got even worse, for at that instant he glanced up to see her. She was a monster gaping at him with fiery eyes. He waited. It was her move, and he was ready to face any consequences. She came closer, and he grabbed on to the chair clinging to the hope that she might retreat. Not a chance, she meant business.

"William Martin," the monster spoke with a trembling voice, "eat your brussel sprouts."

He stared into those fiery eyes, and knew exactly how to handle this. He sat perfectly straight and spoke directly at her, "No, I won't."

"All right then, we'll see. I'm through playing games with you."

Wait! What went wrong? Usually after his refusal she'd simply take his plate, and let him go. The monster had turned passionately insane!

He waited for her return, and then sunk back with horror in his chair as she reentered the room. He sat there motionless, for in her hand she held his candy apple red truck! How dare she!

"William, I know what this means to you; therefore I know you'll eat those brussel sprouts if you ever expect to see your truck again."

He was torn between standing his ground and losing his only sense of security. He looked down into the bowl in front of him. Those awful cabbages were smiling at him with victory. Feeling weak and ashamed that he couldn't stand up to her, he grasped the spoon with both hands and let one of the cabbages slide onto it willingly. He glanced at that ugly, treacherous monster one more time before forcing his arm up to his mouth, and shoving that little devil in. After gagging almost to the point of death, he swallowed it. There, it was done. With a sense of accomplishment, the monster set the truck down on the table in front of him, and as she turned to leave, her laughter rang in his ears like a piercing scream from a frightened girl.

Feverishly, he jumped up and ran toward an exit hugging his truck tightly. When he reached the porch, he sat once again gazing at his beautiful truck. He wondered if it had been worth it, and quickly agreed it was. Then something began to bother him as he pondered one more thought: what would happen at bedtime?
DENISE EVINSKY

BRUSSEL SPROUTS

He sat alone, gazing at the candy apple red truck before him. It was his pride and joy. It was also his security, for he clung to it like a bear does to honey. Suddenly, his thoughts were interrupted by the church bells. They sang out their usual six o’clock tune. He knew what that meant, and the sweat began to fall from him like tears of a saddened clown. For a moment he contemplated escape by running, but instead he realized he had better face up to it.

Before he could comprehend what was happening, he stood straight up, and began his journey, the whole time praying that it wouldn’t be his last. He reached the door, and looked back at his truck once more for strength. With a sigh, he quickly flung open the screen door as it squawked in disagreement.

Next, he was walking from room to room with extreme caution and dignity. Tonight was his night. He would set things straight. Finally, and not a moment too soon, he reached his destiny. He looked around carefully. Then he saw the chair. It was inviting him closer with a smirk showing only deception. He sat down, and there in front of him lay a horrible sight. He wanted to turn back, but he knew it was too late. He looked for a weapon—anything sharp. Unfortunately, all he found was a spoon. Things got even worse, for at that instant he glanced up to see her. She was a monster gaping at him with fiery eyes. He waited. It was her move, and he was ready to face any consequences. She came closer, and he grabbed on to the chair clinging to the hope that she might retreat. Not a chance, she meant business.

"William Martin," the monster spoke with a trembling voice, "eat your brussel sprouts."

He stared into those fiery eyes, and knew exactly how to handle this. He sat perfectly straight and spoke directly at her, "No, I won’t."

"All right then, we’ll see. I’m through playing games with you."

Wait! What went wrong? Usually after his refusal she’d simply take his plate, and let him go. The monster had turned passionately insane!

He waited for her return, and then sunk back with horror in his chair as she reentered the room. He sat there motionless, for in her hand she held his candy apple red truck! How dare she!

"William, I know what this means to you; therefore I know you’ll eat those brussel sprouts if you ever expect to see your truck again."

He was torn between standing his ground and losing his only sense of security. He looked down into the bowl in front of him. Those awful cabbages were smiling at him with victory. Feeling weak and ashamed that he couldn’t stand up to her, he grasped the spoon with both hands and let one of the cabbages slide onto it willingly. He glanced at that ugly, treacherous monster one more time before forcing his arm up to his mouth, and shoving that little devil in. After gagging almost to the point of death, he swallowed it. There, it was done. With a sense of accomplishment, the monster set the truck down on the table in front of him, and as she turned to leave, her laughter rang in his ears like a piercing scream from a frightened girl.

Feverishly, he jumped up and ran toward an exit hugging his truck tightly. When he reached the porch, he sat once again gazing at his beautiful truck. He wondered if it had been worth it, and quickly agreed it was. Then something began to bother him as he pondered one more thought: what would happen at bedtime?
THE ASSIGNMENT

With hot impatience, I force these hurried words.
Such angst I feel! The lead friction audibly
Grates the rough paper surface,
Scratching out barely legible words and phrases
Melting one into the other, the words race
Through my mind, pursued and threatened,
I can barely capture them as they flee from me.
I am praying this fire-brand in my hand
Will give birth to understanding, insight,
Or maybe amusement, at the very least
Something tolerable to read.
If I accomplish, at some point, to make you,
The reader, sense any of my emotions,
I can lie my tormented self down,
With a peaceful softening of my mad rush.

SING TO ME DADDY

I asked for your help
i wanted you to show me
you were too busy
you were too tired
so i did my best
what i could do
all of me
all that i had.

Now you're here
and you criticize
You have time for that.
An hour almost.
Your help before
would have taken less
of your precious, precious time.

Does it make you feel important
to put me down this way?
Do you feel stronger or better?
Is it how you're going to stay?

i'd do so much to please you,
But nothing is ever right.
And when i try to tell you,
we end up in a fight.

Please, help when i need it.
Please, teach me if i'm wrong.
i'd try to always listen,
Your approval would be a song.
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THE DEVIL TRAP

"...and then she told a story about a boy who had the devil's heart in his hand and could kill him..."
—Gladys Swan, *Gate of Ivory, Gate of Horn*

A boy and a priest were walking in the forest, looking for blackberries which they could sell in town for money to have the church door repaired. The boy was only a lad of seven, but the priest had let him come because he believed in the power of innocence against the darkness of the forest. As they picked their steps across a ragged field of briars, the sounds of a creature in agony came to them from the pine forest at the edge of the briar field.

They paused, listened. A moan of deep pain drifted across the summer air. In the silence that followed, a bird shivered, whistled. A fly sawed. The moan came forth again.

The boy said, "Something is hurt."

"It is not a good thing," said the priest. "I can feel it. Come, let's go away from here." But he saw the pure empathy on the boy's drooping lips, in his large light eyes, and was ashamed. What if he were mistaken? What if he were urging an innocent child to turn away from his own natural goodness, his own natural urge to give aid to a fellow creature in pain?

"Well, we can look then," said the priest. "Only look."

They changed direction, stepping through the brambles toward the pine wood. The air beneath the tall pines was dim, still. A thick carpet of brown needles cushioned their steps. When they had gone a little way into the wood, the moan again caught their ears.

"Over there," said the priest and led the boy around a thick cluster of dying saplings.

The moan grew louder, nearer. They turned past the last wall of the trees and stood before a very tall man hanging by his feet from a supple young pine. He writhed there and moaned and black blood dripped slowly from his mouth into a puddle on the earth beneath his head. At the center of the puddle lay a black, sleek, wet thing, pulsing and twitching.

"My God," said the priest. "My God, I've heard of this."

The hanging man looked at the boy, opened his lips. "Help me," he croaked. The man was naked and patched all over with black hairs. His eyes were black and gleamed with his agony.

The priest stepped forward cautiously to peer at the puddle of blood. "He's lost his heart. It is the devil, lad, and his heart is fallen out of his mouth. It is a devil trap. I've heard of this!"

"What can we do?" asked the boy, staring, transfixed, into the gleaming pain of the hanging creature's eyes.

"This is a great good fortune for all the world," said the priest. He pointed to the boy. "You must take his heart in your hand and squeeze the life from it. Then we all at last shall be free of him and his evils. Free at last!"

The boy looked into the eyes and did not move.

"Do it now, boy, quickly," said the priest. "Only an innocent can touch that black heart. If I put just one finger to it, my arm will be burnt to ash. Do it. Take it. Now!"

The boy knelt beside the puddle, reached in and took the heart in his palm. It was cold as snow, but twitched and writhed there like some legless, faceless animal.

"No," the devil whispered. "Please, boy. Mercy on me. I am old, sick. I have lived longer than the world, and I am sad as only a very old man can be. I have never known such pain as this I experience now, this pain of death. It has taught me. I will change. Only put the heart back in my mouth. I will become good again, as I was those days before I turned against the Lord. I will kneel before him. I will beg his forgiveness. I will serve my Lord again."

"Do not listen to him," growled the priest. "He lies. Squeeze it. Kill him. Do it at once!"

The boy's fingers curled round the heart. He began to squeeze it in his fist. A tear rolled off the devil's eye, hung on his eyebrow, dripped to the earth. The boy squeezed harder. The devil groaned, twitched, wept. "Please, boy," he whispered. "I do not want to die. I will change."

"Do not listen," said the priest.

"Think of your poor mother," the devil said. The boy paused.

"Do not listen," said the priest. "He lies. He is all falsehood."

"Think boy, if there were no mercy left in this world and your poor mother's heart was in the hand of a merciless child. Will you kill mercy, too?"

"He lies! You will not kill mercy! You will only kill evil!"

The boy looked from the priest to the weeping, pleading creature hanging in the tree. The devil sighed, the gleaming pain of his eyes began to film over to dullness. He said with great sadness, "The priest is right. What do I deserve? I have spent half an eternity fueling the evil in the hearts of others, turning man against man, nation against nation, inspiring the vilest acts to make others as miserable as I myself have been. Why, then, should you show me mercy?" The dying eyes looked up into the boy's face, the priest's face. "Forgive me," he pleaded, "so that, if God has more mercy than this child, I might at least rest in peace when I am dead. Your gift from the Lord is the power to forgive those who repent. I repent, Father. Forgive me."

The boy looked to the priest. The priest only stood there, mouth open, staring. The boy stepped forward. The devil's tongue lolled out of his mouth. The boy reached forward with the black heart. The tongue shot forth like a viper's, curled round the heart, snapped it back into the mouth.

Boy and priest stood, mesmerized, watching the devil swallow his heart. The process was long, strenuous. Perspiration shone on the devil's face. When at last the heart was in place again, the devil's body writhed, began to double up. He
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bent like a folded knife, his face gazing upon the stout rope round his ankles which attached him to the tree. He reached to the rope with his fingers, snapped it like string, dropped to his haunches on the earth, and crouched there for a moment, gazing upon boy and priest with red eyes.

Then he rose to his feet and seized the priest by the throat, watched the man’s agony as he squeezed life from him. The priest’s eyes and tongue bulged, his face turned blue, the slightest of sounds creaked from his throat. Then his body went limp. The devil flung the lifeless husk from him and turned upon the boy.

The boy looked up into the face of the terrible creature. Slowly, a grin spread across the devil’s face. He winked. Then spun and ran off, crashing through the forest.
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THEATRE AS THERAPY

Cathedral of darkness
Echoes deafening silence,
Seats like mushrooms rise
shrouded and forsaken

Ghost light in the wings
gives off an eerie radiance
to amplify the click clack
of feet on the abandoned stage

Standing center in an empty space
The feeling of isolation is suffocating
Entombed like a pharaoh, a dog, a moth under glass
Deep breaths bring on the trance-like calm.
Half Hour

Hot glaring lights make it tropical
Mirrors of distorted faces, pushing toward the light
Grotesque masks of grease paint and dread
The dressing room is a habitat of horror
Fifteen Minutes

Costumes constrict, cut and claw like wild things
Smells of dust and dirt and forgotten actors’ sweat
Drive the words to escape
like sand through a child’s fingers
Doubts gnaw at you like a disease
Places

Heart beats like a drum in my ears
A sea of unused faces peer through the darkness
We suffer for this exquisite anguish,
this Theatre of Apprehension,
like public masturbation
The Curtain Rises

VICTORIA & AGNES CECILIA

Two tiny teetering creatures,
not quite steady on their feet
they hold hands as they walk
and whisper giggled secrets behind
small cupped hands.

Eyes dancing with mystic and joyous mischief,
small heads bowed together, as in prayer
they communicate in a language we cannot
comprehend, and steal sly glances
at those who would not understand their communion.

Like gnomes, fairies, sprites, some mythical, magical
beings, they don’t seem to belong
to this world or to us
as they scampur, their gaits unsteady
a study in strange and frightening beauty,
the past and the future frolic
in a bitter yet poignant picture
of where we have been
and where we are going.
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X
RAY

The doctor's office displays
Mounted butterflies, in rainbow colors and more
On the wall. She waits with a lump
In her breast, her heart beating under it,
Sits among the butterflies
Until they call her.

She trembles, bare in bright light.
The girl in white with cool hands
Pushes her against metal plates.
Touches a switch. Machines move
Close, closer, press
"Don't breathe, don't breathe"
To flat and aching again and again.
Fingers spread a cotton sheet
Over her chilled body.

The doctor mounts a new display:
Gray wedges, streaked
White on black, opaquely lit.
"There it is."
His pen stabs into the spot
Above her heart.

Color flares
Flesh
smear mustard-
Open gash of
Crimson-red
seeps
Zig-zag black
Bruise blue,
with a late
Pale
In
Tubes
Into flat
pink
brown with iodine
marbled yellow fat
incarnadine
cross-stitches
next, purple
light green
orange
thin
runs
violet veins.

"But it's not cancer."

She shivers, sighs, and dismounts.

ABORTED FROM LIFE

I die on infant soiled sheets
I die on crawling days, on walking days
I die and cross my legs and my skin

Death licks the sweat off of my crucifix
My dead self struts and frolics like a zombie queer on Mars
There will be no men crowning me with horns,
Devil he cometh and taketh my good linen away

Flick of light in goes the groin of life
Out comes nails
Out comes snail shrieks
Out comes dead bubbles
Out it comes

The Apocalypse is NOW not the immaculate virgin ZEN
How will I die? Hmmmmmmmm
I will die lying in a perfectly erected rye field choking madly
on my own drab semen
MARY LOU MELVILLE

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Spring 1992, ICON
THE GOAT AND THE BRAVE LITTLE GIRL

Standing solemn and stately,
like a guard at the gate of Buckingham Palace,
a goat blocks the entrance of a metal dome
set in the corner of the Geauga County Fairgrounds.

The late morning, September sun strikes
the silver in his well-groomed fur
and spreads simulated glitter over the flexed,
smooth muscles that wait for their cue
to perform the last movement of his final symphony.

Behind him a little girl sits starched and still,
on top of what looks like a royal-blue harpsichord on wheels.
The bottoms of her feet brush the floorboard
where the keys would be
and her fingers grip the black leather batons that droop
over the backs of her hands, and reach
like tentacles to grasp a silver ring
on either side of the face of her goat.

The judge sips his water, swallows, sets down the glass
and with a tired hand he motions to the little girl
without looking her way. And with the controlled,
calculated movement of an expert conductor
her hands glide up--
--pause--
and when they drop, the limp batons
tap the sides of her goat, saying,
"It's time.
It's time for the overture to begin."

A right front hoof and a right rear hoof
sink into the nutmeg powder of the once mighty elm,
with a synchronized stride.
Then, two more follow
putting into motion a symphonic poem,
as their journey around the perimeter of the arena begins.

A melody from the harmony of the orchestra below,
gliding through figure eights without missing a beat,
diffused with oxygen and rose to the bleachers where we sat.
Not even Tchaikovsky, in his poignant "Swan Lake" finale,
could dislodge the passions that the soundless music
plucked from the hearts of those who watched,
before the final curtain fell
on the goat and the brave little girl.
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LINDA KALEDA
UPRIGHT

I was watching the Raiders’ game when the upright vacuum let itself out of the closet to change the channel, its cord tightly wound and headlight off.
I wondered if it had the right. It cleaned away my crumbs, my lint—it said—made me presentable. I figured I was lucky to have it, a state-of-the-art 6.5 amp upright vacuum cleaner, with attachments.
I put the football game back on without saying a word. The vacuum stood there in the living room. A few minutes later, it glided back into the closet; but it didn’t close the door behind. It just stood in there, and I couldn’t tell if it was looking out at me or the television.

MY LITTLE CABBAGE

Carlette cringed as Walter’s gargantuan fist engulfed and strangled the head of cabbage.

"Don’t buy cabbage again." Walter towered over her, his other hand poised to slap her as though she were a gnat.

Carlette picked up a sharp paring knife. Glancing at Walter, she chose a potato. She knew not to back talk him.

He struck her anyway. Carlette’s tiny frame crashed against the refrigerator. Looking up, she gauged every inch of Walter’s seven-foot bulk before she released her grip on the paring knife and shifted to raise her thighs off the crushed cabbage. She stared thoughtfully at the ravaged green head on the floor by her twisted leg.

That day Carlette started her new diet. For breakfast she devoured fried eggs, bacon, ham, and pancakes. While Walter was at work, she snacked on nougat-filled chocolates, potato chips, peanuts, and Sweet Creme doughnuts. She ate double lunches of burgers and fries. Mid-afternoon she visited the corner soda fountain for hot-fudge sundaes.

Mostly, Walter didn’t notice. During breakfast, he vanished behind the newspaper. At dinner, dim light from the television concealed mounds of potatoes and gravy, hot buttered rolls, and cream-topped cakes.

***

"Haven’t you gained weight?" growled Walter, supine in the darkened bedroom. "Do something about it."

"Right away, mom petit chou," agreed Carlette.

Lowering her three-hundred pound frame over his face and chest, she sat until he ceased to struggle.
FRANK TOTA

UPRIGHT

I was watching the Raiders’ game when the upright vacuum let itself out of the closet to change the channel, its cord tightly wound and headlight off.

I wondered if it had the right. It cleaned away my crumbs, my lint—it said—made me presentable. I figured I was lucky to have it, a state-of-the-art 6.5 amp upright vacuum cleaner, with attachments.

I put the football game back on without saying a word. The vacuum stood there in the living room. A few minutes later, it glided back into the closet; but it didn’t close the door behind. It just stood in there, and I couldn’t tell if it was looking out at me or the television.

DEBORA HORNING

MY LITTLE CABBAGE

Carlette cringed as Walter’s gargantuan fist engulfed and strangled the head of cabbage.

‘‘Don’t buy cabbage again.’’ Walter towered over her, his other hand poised to slap her as though she were a gnat.

Carlette picked up a sharp paring knife. Glancing at Walter, she chose a potato. She knew not to back talk him.

He struck her anyway. Carlette’s tiny frame crashed against the refrigerator. Looking up, she gauged every inch of Walter’s seven-foot bulk before she released her grip on the paring knife and shifted to raise her thighs off the crushed cabbage. She stared thoughtfully at the ravaged green head on the floor by her twisted leg.

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TRUMBULL COUNTY HAIKU

Lurking in the night
Darkness hides what is the truth
Heart races with fear.
— Jill Hunt

A winter morning
the snow encrusted trees grasp
at the sun for warmth.
— Rodney Williams

Shards of glass gleam in
the sun. A boy’s red cap twists
beneath a car tire.
— Michelle Gilmour

Oak’s bare limbs waver,
straining to hold up gray skies;
ants zig-zag in fear.
— Rochelle Austin

Red, hot candle wax
drips slowly down the long stem—
weeping of the wick.
— Gretchen Phillips

Two cardinals thrash
the hedge, a rush of crimson:
black cat sharpens claws.
— Robert Brown

An old prostitute:
Wax lips on a dead body;
cloth in plastic hand.
— Linda Kaleda

I slap you across
the face with facts, still you close
your eyes and kiss me.
— Pamela Cathcart

Blisters on his hands.
He won’t get up for nothing.
I hate Nintendo.
— Pamela Roddy

She blinks a sad eye,
a stream of water rolls down
into a deep pond.
— Denise Evinsky
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a stream of water rolls down
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— Denise Evinsky
KARL ELDER

DANNY AND ME

Our moms let us off before the matinee in Sandwich. And Danny, the dumb shit, has got on these faded red pants with shrunken pockets. I’m walking behind him in the dime store, and I look up and there flashing and bulging out of his front right pocket is an imitation chrome handle of a genuine squirtgun. I panic. A clerk sees it too. First off, I make like I never met the son of a bitch, browsing, until I realize I’ve been dawdling in the lingerie. I listen in. The wimp is crying; he can’t answer the manager’s questions. Though the tongue-thrashing Danny’s receiving has me sweating, I charge in as if another side of myself has assumed the controls:

“Let him be,” I said, “he didn’t do nothin’!”

The man was momentarily taken back. He must have thought Danny was alone. Damn, I thought, I could have slipped out of here.

The proprietor turned his wrath on me: “Oh? Well, where’d he get that toy so cleverly concealed there?”

The lie come effortlessly: “The drugstore over in Somonauk.”

“How about if I call over there right now?”

“Go right ahead!” I was amazed. It was like I’d been studying the lines for years.

The man balked. He turned and looked at the blubbering figure of Danny. Then, he swiftly grabbed him by the arm and yanked the squirtgun from his pocket with the other hand, turning to me, all in the same motion. “Know how I know this is ours?” he said.

I stood my ground.

“See this price mark?” he bluffed, holding the barrel in my face and pointing. “It’s like a fingerprint. Every store has its own spot.”

“Bullshit,” I answered, reached deep into my front pocket, and pulled out an identical squirtgun, “I bought this here two weeks ago.” I pointed to the price stamped on the butt of the handle. I lied, of course. I’d stolen it two weeks before.

“You’re a little liar. You took it from the rack not more than five minutes ago.”

“Oh yeah?” I aimed the thing at Danny’s downcast head, pulled the trigger and got him in the ear. “Then where’d I get the fucking water?”

We were both looking at Danny, whose sniffing had ceased. In the space of a couple of seconds he donned a mask of bewilderment, flared his nostrils, sniffed at his shoulder, barely lifted his eyelids, and seemed to stare at my squirtgun. Another kind of expression invaded his features—not of surprise, but that of a small child who is being tickled, is tired of the game, and wants his tormentor to stop. “You goddamned bastard!” he cried, looking directly in my eyes, involuntarily sucking air between every syllable, “it’s piss!”

I’d almost forgotten. A couple of bullies stuck bubblegum in my hair during the cartoon the week before, and I wasn’t about to let it happen again—at least not without a fight—so before we left home, I loaded my pistol with the only bullets at my disposal—urine.

The manager slowly turned his head and looked down at the barrel of my weapon, pointed at his mouth. It was as if he desperately needed to translate his disgust into words, but dared not for fear the gun might go off in my fist. He began to raise his hands, but stopped himself, seemingly recognizing the pointlessness of doing so. He took a careful step backward and found himself trapped by the counter.

“All right,” I calmly said, “hand it over, very slowly.”

As if caught in slow motion, the hand with the reposessed squirtgun rose, and the arm extended.

“Take it, Danny,” I half giggled.

Nothing moved in the periphery of my sight.

“Fucker,” I yelled, “take it an’ get the hell outa here before I turn this thing on you.”

Danny grabbed it and suddenly we were out the door, running, not once glancing over our shoulders. Something like the dull edge of a knife was cutting into my groin, but I couldn’t think what it could be. We made a right angle into an alley. I stood behind a pile of boxes, catching my breath. Danny was crouched behind a barrel on the opposite wall, heaving for air and staring at the plastic in his hand. He started to cry again. He placed the squirtgun under his heel and stomped it until it shone like bits of a broken bottle. I shoved my hand down into my crotch between my underwear and pants and retrieved an unassembled, motorized model racing car sealed with clear plastic onto a sheet of cardboard. Tossing it in one of the open-mouth boxes, I had the queer sensation of rising from my knees, having taken communion for the first time. Again, I looked across at Danny’s pathetic and pouting form, and once more, for the fuck of it, I leveled the barrel and let him have it.
KARL ELDER

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"How about if I call over there right now?"
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"I'm just a bit of an expert on that."

The man balked. He turned and looked at the blubbery figure of Danny. Then, he swiftly grabbed him by the arm and yanked the squirtgun from his pocket with the other hand, turning to me, all in the same motion. "Why are you glad the he's ours?"

"I stood my ground."

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ONCE HERE, FOREVER GONE

Throughout my childhood and adolescence I have been fortunate enough to be surrounding by a warm, loving family and many special friends. I guess it's a sad truth that as we grow up we often take these people for granted and give little thought to the place we call home. As we mature, however, so do our values and priorities, as well as our perception of home. Of course, I can not speak for everyone, and some individuals may never have felt this way at all. My opinion is based on my own personal experiences and feelings, and the changes I have witnessed in my attitude towards home as I've become a young adult. I expect my feelings will change yet again after I move out and live in a place of my own—they will probably be even more different if and when I ever raise children in that house. I can only remember what home meant to me as a young child, and that memory is very special in my mind.

The earliest recollection I have of my home is, fittingly enough, the first time I ever stepped foot in it. It was a muggy summer day in August, and I remember running from my dad's truck to the house, hoping to find relief from the suffocating heat. As I walked through the door I was not greeted by the cool air I had anticipated, but by the overwhelming smell of fresh paint and sawdust. I gazed up in wonder at the towering cathedral ceiling which, to a five year old, appeared to be almost sky high. Having little patience for my family, who were still making their way to the house, I began to explore on my own and took off down the hall. Excitedly I darted in and out of the different bedrooms, searching for the one I could claim as my own. When I came upon the room with a crystal chandelier, huge closet, and adjoining bath, I rushed out to my parents and younger sister and triumphantly declared that the master bedroom would be mine. Needless to say, my prediction did not come true and I reluctantly conceded to take my second choice, the room directly across the hall from what wound up to be my mother and father's bedroom. What I remember most about that day, however, is not anything I saw, or smelled, or touched. It is the exhilarating sense of unfamiliarity I felt that was both exciting and intimidating at the same time. For me, a curious and restless kindergartener, the new house presented me with endless discoveries just waiting to be made. Then, as the weeks and months passed, so did my fascination and enthusiasm for my new home. I, just like the rest of my family, began to settle into our new life in the new house, and before long I never gave a second thought to where I lived.

Today, the feelings I associate with my home are quite different from those I felt that first day. As a matter of fact, they are the complete opposite. The newness has been replaced by a comfortable security and all of the endless discoveries have been made. The rooms are now worn and filled with dozens of memories, everything from cold Christmas mornings to nervously preparing for first days of school. My home has seen the arrival of a new baby sister, first loves, and my high school graduation. In short, my home now has a history to it—that history is my life.

Nothing in this world is perfect and the place where I grew up is certainly no exception. Although I have countless memories of good times and laughter in my home, I also have a very sad memory of a day that I know I will never forget. It was four years ago in September, and I was doing my homework in my room, music blaring. Somehow above the noise I heard the phone ring and I, being the typical teenager I was, turned my stereo down so I could hear my mom yell if the call was for me. I listened for a while and, hearing nothing, cranked the music up again and returned to my studies. Not a minute later my mom came in and told me that my grandfather had just died of a heart attack. Naturally, my whole family was very upset and everyone was crying—except me. I think I was just in shock, but for some reason or another, I couldn't cry. I remember sitting in my room, alone, listening to people coming and going, the phone ringing again and again, and various muffled voices. Eventually my initial numbness faded and I felt very angry. At the time he died, my grandfather was living next door to me. For most of his life though, he lived in Florida and I was just getting to know him again when he passed away. His house was becoming home to me as I began to spend more and more of my time there. Then suddenly he was gone, and with him he took a very special place I was just beginning to feel safe and comfortable in. The abruptness of it all made me realize just how precious a family is, how fragile it is, and, more specifically, the delicate balance between a house and a home. Without my grandfather there watching baseball games, playing cards, and telling jokes, his house was empty, both figuratively and literally.

When the time comes for me to leave my home I will be very sad to leave so much behind. Granted, I will always carry the memory of the house I grew up in with me in my heart, but it will never again be the same. Sometime within the next few years I'll probably find a place that I will turn into a home of my very own where memories will be created and special times will be shared. Soon after that my current home will become my parents' house, a place I can go to when I need to feel safe and nurtured again—a place I can visit when I want to visit the past.
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JENNIFER PATCHIN

STEEL TRAP
(September 30, 1955)

The rumbling roar of an engine
The urgent squeal of brakes
The fatal crunch of impact--
Metal twisting, contorted out of shape.

Now nothing but stillness
Not even a stirring breeze
Silence blankets the gray landscape
And the torn man trapped in his crumpled machine.

Fragments of glass litter smooth pavement
Fresh blood stains the wheel, the leather, his hair
In the distance tardy sirens wail--
Death has beaten them there.

AUDREY TAYLOR

THERE IS A TIME TO DIE

I shall die at a time that has been appointed,
The day will be God anointed.
I shall die at a time that will be called Someday,
On what day exactly I can not say.

It will be a glorious day I know it for sure,
There will be rejoicing in Heaven when it does occur.
I know it will happen, yet no fear grips my heart,
There will come a day, in which I must depart.

My loved ones behind may cry if they will,
There's no bringing back,
Just hold on to memories and be still.

There's one thing in life I know is no lie,
There is a time to be born,
And there is a time to die.
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There’s one thing in life I know is no lie,
There is a time to be born,
And there is a time to die.
They stand despite us.  
Rippling arms,  
Ripping holes in the sky.  
Proud and defiant,  
Their ancient roots sink  
Into the marrow of Earth.  
Their toes suckled sweetly by the soil.  
Like the Indians,  
They are uprooted and hunted.  
Killed and moved westward.  
Until there is no more west.  
Huddling together on green reservations,  
Picnic spots, scenic views,  
Quaint and controlled.  
Mere hollow logs echoing dimly  
Their mighty, peaceful past.  
Before the white man.  
And now the landscape,  
A blur of brick and blood,  
Steel and flesh,  
Concrete and crushed leaves.  
The continent, a monument  
Of stone walls  
And iron lives  
Of black tarmac  
And Genocide.  
A treeless tributary,  
Flowing red.  
The new trail of tears.
TREES

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A treeless tributary,
Flowing red.
The new trail of tears.
REALITY

fake flowers never die;

Missy says
good horses
go in the
barn
they start
talking.
Well I
saw
cool
moss
in those
woods, and
I told
Missy
to put her
feet on it.
Missy just
laughed,
and that's
when I found
out
about
simplicity
in its
rarest form.

Now, show me an absolute, and I'll
show you my heart.

IT IS BECAUSE OF YOU

It is because of you
That my anger rises within me.
I can feel it beginning to boil.
It rises to its pinnacle
And hovers there,
Waiting to explode.
I wait for minutes to pass—
The minutes turn to hours,
The hours turn to an eternity.
I have never felt as angered
As I feel now.
I am not ashamed to admit
That I am frightened;
Frightened of it boiling over,
Frightened as to what I might do to someone,
Frightened as to what I might do to myself.
And it is because of you—
You are the one that makes my anger rise.
You are the only to blame;
Not my parents,
Not my friends,
Not my adolescence.
It is you that mocks my stupidity.
It is because of you
That I do not eat,
Do not sleep.
Because of you I am emaciated,
Have no pride left.
Because of you my mind has been destroyed.
Because of you my body houses an empty soul.
Because of the money ran out
And I am sleeping on the sidewalk.
I will tell you now
And only once—
It is because of you
That I hate myself
And I see no reason to go on living.
To end you, I must also end myself.
And so I will.
AMY MATHENY

REALITY

fake flowers never die;

Missy says
when horses
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barn
they start
talking.
Well I
saw
cool
moss
in those
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Missy just
laughed,
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in its
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SUSAN SAYERS

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It rises to its pinnacle
And hovers there,
Waiting to explode.
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The minutes turn to hours,
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As I feel now.
I am not ashamed to admit
That I am frightened;
Frightened of it boiling over,
Frightened as to what I might do to someone,
Frightened as to what I might do to myself.
And it is because of you—
You are the one that makes my anger rise.
You are the only to blame;
Not my parents,
Not my friends,
Not my adolescence.
It is you that mocks my stupidity.
It is because of you
That I do not eat,
Do not sleep.
Because of you I am emaciated,
Have no pride left.
Because of you my mind has been destroyed.
Because of you my body houses an empty soul.
Because of the money ran out
And I am sleeping on the sidewalk.
I will tell you now
And only once—
It is because of you
That I hate myself
And I see no reason to go on living.
To end you, I must also end myself.
And so I will.
KATHLEEN WOODYARD

TERRIBLE OLD ST. NICHOLAS

Coldness seeps through the quiet house as the young girl slowly, noiselessly slides out of the warm crowded bed. It is early in the morning and there is much work to be done before her younger brothers and sisters will be up. Quickly she pulls on the warm woolen stockings and hurries down the dark narrow stairway, carefully missing the squeaking steps. The old potbellied stove in the middle of the living room must be fueled before the day can truly begin. "Be careful Valeria," she silently tells herself. "Don't make any noise, don't drop any bark." Soon warmth seeps into the small shabby room and the grinning face of the old stove starts to lighten up the middle of the quiet room, leaving the corners dark and sinister. She almost panics as her eyes fleetingly travel the corner where the tree is. She can just barely see the large shape that looms there. "Stop it, it's only a tree and trees can't hurt you." She runs shivering from the haunting room to light the oil lamps in the cold kitchen, soon electricity will come to their neighborhood, but for now the weak smelly light of the lamp is all she has to work by.

In the back of the old kitchen is a small unlit room with a tarnished mirror and a chipped white enamel bowl half filled with frigid water where she gingerly washes her face. She needs to hurry and warm water before the family comes down. Already she can hear the old creaky bed complain as its occupants move, starting to wake up. Shivering, she brushes her long straight hair, hating the dark length of it. At school her friends were getting theirs bobbed. "But I could never do that, Grandfather would never allow it."

Taking the old scoured pot down from it's perch on the wall, Valeria pumps water from the sink into it and hurries to put it on the glowing stove. Fear starts tingling up her spine as her eyes again stray to the room where the tree sits, but soft voices upstairs release her from her gloomy thoughts of what the day will bring.

It's Christmas Eve 1926, and the city of Evansville, Indiana, is starting to come awake. In the dark drizzly morning people, huddled in warm somber clothing, emerge from their soot laden homes to catch the early trolley to work. The cold drizzle will keep the sun from shining today and will make the air heavy with odors and smoke from the factories crowding the dirty Ohio River that runs through the middle of town. There aren't so many automobiles chugging along the soiled narrow streets that you can't hear the tinkling of the milk wagons as the horses wind their way through the congested back alleys.

At the Schneider home already chaos reigns. Valeria (my mother) brings in the clanking, almost freezing bottles of milk. Her mother briskly sets the last bowl of steaming oatmeal in front of the youngest of her five children. Soon school will be starting and she will have to hurry to catch the old trolley to the massive dark old building in the middle of town. Already the metallic bells of the many churches are loudly proclaiming the hour. "School is only a half day today." She tells herself, "I will have to hurry home to help mom fix dinner before Grand-

father arrives.'" The tough old roast was already simmering on the back of the stove, it would have to cook slowly the rest of the day in order for it to be ready to eat at tonight's dinner.

At school, Valeria's friends were excitedly talking about what they hoped St. Nicholas would bring. New shoes, a blouse seen in the downtown department store, or maybe, if there was any money left over, a few new bright ribbons for their hair. Silently Valeria watches her friends, "How can they be so excited, don't they remember what else St. Nicholas brings?" Throughout the long morning the stern Sisters, dressed in habitual black, keep strict discipline over the room filled with excited young girls. Most have stars of hope and wishes dancing in their colorful eyes, put there by the joyous memories of last Christmas. A few of the girls, like Valeria, sit quietly with trembling hands and despair showing in their dark fearful eyes. Desperately, they fruitlessly hope the morning will stretch endlessly into the future, postponing the inevitable coming of St. Nicholas. Hopes and wishes are just that . . . hopes and wishes. The morning closes with children full of anticipation streaming from the dark building into the unnoticed drizzle of the day, brightened by the dreams of tomorrow.

Valeria would have liked to stay, to laugh with her friends for a little while. To put off the dark cloak of fear that she reluctantly wears, but she knows her mother is waiting for her, needs her to help with the last duties of the day. The house now gives a false sense of warmth, of security, as she washes and cuts the old potatoes and bright orange carrots for the company dinner. Lost in thought, Valeria automatically arranges the vegetables around the simmering aromatic roast as her mother watches her with pity, knowing the thoughts of dread that are racing through her eldest child's head.

The large dining room table is set with a cherished old yellow lace covering, the chipped special dishes are carefully arranged, waiting for the hungry people who now crowd the small house. In the kitchen, comfortably warmed by the stove and body heat of those sitting around the table, children silence their muffled voices, because Grandfather is now speaking. Even though they barely understand a word of the German he is using they know that to make any noise while the old patriarch is talking, will be rewarded with a stinging slap across the face. The children silently eye the crisp rosy apples glowing from the basket that grandma had magically produced as a gift for her grandchildren.

Time is quickly moving closer to the arrival of St. Nicholas. Minutes seem like hours and as the hour passes, it feels like seconds have gone by. Quietly, Valeria removes the used dishes from the cluttered table, and dawdles over the washing, trying to push the speeding clock backwards. At least she has something to keep her busy, the younger children are huddled on the floor of the living room staring half in awe, half in apprehension, at the sparsely lit tree dominating the corner of the dreary room.

Soon.

Soon the bell would ring and He will come through the clouded doorway. Soon the ancient imperial Grandfather will recount all the real and imagined wrongs of the last year. Valeria knows He will not forget the time her dress was a slight inch too short, the time while playing her hair had escaped from its bonds and
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had shamelessly hung freely down her back. Grandfather, regretfully, never forgot anything.

Soon.
The dishes are done, put carefully away until the next holiday. Nothing is left to do but wait, quietly.

Soon.

Hard steps are heard crossing the sodden dark porch. Terror stirs in little hearts as each child quickly presents themselves as perfect little boys and girls, hoping, desperately hoping that somehow Grandfather will forget they are there. Valeria, as the eldest has the dismal privilege of opening the front door, her chest thumps as she reluctantly walks to the looming door, hoping against hope that He is not there. That somehow someone else will be on the other side, that anyone else has come to visit.

The thin red suit with sparse dirty white fur covers an enormous body. His face is covered with coarse long white hair, covered almost completely, except for the cold watery blue eyes that stare into Valeria’s scared wide dark ones. He holds a brown dirty old burlap sack slightly bulging with the offering of a stingy Santa. The contents do not stir any curiosity, for now she sees the freshly stripped birch twig that is held in his strong hand along with the miserly bag. How she wishes she could slam the door in his cold face, how she longs to turn and run away to a safe place, a non-existent place where she could never be found.

Hesitantly her mother welcomes him into the deadly quiet room, while the now smiling Grandfather starts his recitation of evil. Every child, from the youngest to the eldest must now take their turns standing before the frightful demon dressed in red. Who in turn drills the mind of each with his piercing eyes as Grandfather relentlessly recounts the sins of the year. They crowd to their suffering, stiff faced mother for comfort after they have received their swift punishment from the stinging birch. Valeria stares with hopelessness at the switch as Grandfather now tells, with pleasure, of her indiscretions. He forgets nothing, somehow it seems as if he knows even of her secret failures. The thin twig swishes through the air swiftly, surely, to leave rising welts that will be felt for long sorrowful days.

Valeria watches as the now smiling benevolent St. Nichoals passes out the fragrant oranges that were hidden in his burlap bag to the forgiving younger children. “How,” she bitterly wonders, “How can they smile at him so sunnily, how can they forgive him so easily?” Another memory to store away, another mark against the world that carelessly hurts the innocent.

Half a century later my white haired mother shacks with bitter laughter as she recalls this story from her childhood. I wonder how much of her bitterness was caused by this tyrannical old man with his ignorant old-world traditions.

As a child on Christmas Eve, I would sometimes look at the door to our front room and expect old St. Nicholas to appear. He would be carrying his meager bag of offerings and in his bony hand a long dark switch... waiting.
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SEASONS

Spring came.
Wasp nests sprouted from the eaves.
Haiku burst the buds
of my magnolia tree.

Summer came,
green and wild.
In the heat and blaze of fifteen hour days,
my poems caught fire and burned.

Autumn came.
Grasses flattened underfoot.
Dying words began their random fall.
The Hudson rafted them away.

Winter came.
Birches snapped beneath their icy glaze.
My poems shivered, held their breath.
The only safe harbor was sleep.

RAPE OF THE QUIVERING RAINBOW

Midget down from his waist in water
Black as his world of laughing giants,
Suffering in an alizarin shirt.

Wave-tips have grown broken fingernails
Gouging the way into his stomach,
Sun slices eyes with razor prisms.

If one perceptive enough she sees
What is going on in buff seaweed
As spectrum of suffering shimmers.

Learning to defend against the cost
Of color flaunting from shade to shade
Racks the spiritual dwarf with white.

The opposite of prism is lens
Collecting pinpoints of universe,
To splay or focus the difference.
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BLACK MAGIC JEANNE

Cold black coffee and a Camel butt
trying not to think about last night
Can't find a way to fill this empty space
it never had a name before
This isn't just a game anymore

I only want you girl
Not the person who's hopes have been
dashed with lies
Not the one whose feelings are hardened
by fear
I love you baby deep inside where words can't reach
And rumors die before they get there

An endless treasure hunt
looking for the key to the paradox box
And I can't seem to work
the childproof cap
on my soul pain prescription

I hate this misdirection
I hate the questions. Who. Why. Where?
But I love you girl, deep inside
where cold stares lose their edge
and lies don't have a listener

JOGGER ACE

The co-pilot thrusts his head out the window. His ears are pinned back, tongue flapping bits of perspiration to the morning breeze. His eyes are squinted but ever watchful. I slam my cup of extra thick black coffee to the console and blurt,
"I have visual contact . . . approximately 100 yards . . . a decent sized grouping . . . maybe five or six." Bogey drools his approval.
"Estimated time to target . . . 30 seconds." I slow the ship to test the equipment:
"Air horns . . . primed"
"Loud speaker . . . SET"
"All systems are 'GO'"
I punch in the cassette tape. The mood ripens as the theme from the movie Jaws drones its melodic dirge throughout the cockpit.
I can see them more clearly now. A bunch of the worst kind, Fashion Bugs. They are wearing those obnoxious color coordinated jogging suits. Each and every one of them is sporting a ridiculous "personality statement" headband. Then I see the most irritating thing of all: headsets.
"Headsets! for chrissakes, this mission is gonna be a pleasure."
Giggling, I switch to the Subliminal Walkman Jamming Unit, its message permeates the airwaves and penetrates the subconscious mind.
"JOGGING CAUSES CANCER...
RUNNERS ARE COM- SIMP PSEUDO MACHO FAGGOTS
. . . HITLER WAS A HEALTH NUT . . . " etc.
"Good, it's working Bogey. Look at their heads starting to bob."
I fine tune the crosshairs on my super halogen spotlight; the power booster is glowing hot; the outside speakers are on.
"All set," I snigger "switch on."
The sound of charging Doberman feet slamming asphalt splits the dawn. Bogey takes the cue and begins barking wildly. Nervous heads and bodies twist and turn.
"NOW!"
A lazer-like beam of light finds its mark and blinds the frenzied joggers. Closing fast now I ease around the disoriented pack.
"BOMBS AWAY," I scream with glee. Dual toggle switches simultaneously snap; releasing a fluorocarbon propelled cloud of cigarette smoke and 3,000 ball-bearings. Reeboks and Footjoy's go airborne as I punch the accelerator.
"I hope you get shin-splints," my bullhorn taunts, followed by insane laughter.
The pain and confusion reflected in my over-sized rear-views delights me. As I symbolically stuff a Zinger into my mouth and stab a Camel to my lips, Bogey whines.
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HOMEWRECKER

I am a spy in your house
of love. A stain on your sheets.
Snarled in your hair, tattooed
on your arms and legs. I am
a scent, trapped in your sense.
A sound so quiet, you turn your
head to listen. It’s me that
hesitates before hanging up.

Parked in front of your house,
across the street, at the corner.
In a trenchcoat and sunglasses;
an uncommonly common disguise.
I am the lump in your throat
that won’t be swallowed, tremor
in your hands. Every suspicious
look you’ve ever given, received.

—Jeff Botzenhart

Phantoms
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GOOD MORNING? I HATE YOU!

I woke this morning, and I did feel,
Feelings of hate, as to make my head reel.

No good reason for acting this way,
Just feel like some hating today.

Upon rising, hate the phone for ringing,
The dog for barking, the bird for singing.

Wind up burning breakfast, too,
Busy, thinking of hate things to do.

Looking in mirrors!
Anyone would say, "Call a nurse!"

So . . . get in my car and drive!
Red lights, speed zones, finally arrive!

At work put my best Frown on!
Let everyone know what I'm doing.

Give all I meet that stony glare,
After all, I want them to be aware.

That today is my hate day,
They'd better stay out of my way!

Wait! Who's coming up the aisle?
Curses! He's loaded with smiles!

MINUTES INTO CENTURIES

The book of autumn has
too many characters in it.

The subplots are more
interesting than Death's
monologue: will red turn
into pink while we sleep?

will the bluebird remain
an inextinguishable flame?

What is love and what isn't it?
The priest who buries me

must be naked under his robe.
Authors hide secrets in plain

sight, in shadows of their words.
Forests are crowded with

gods weaving their own crowns
out of what green remains.
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WALLS

It was 3:30 a.m. on a Thursday. I had just arrived home from work. There was a message on my answering machine to call my grandmother. When I did she informed me that my grandfather had just died in the nursing home where he had just spent the last three years of his life.

Only the day before that unexpected call I had hung up a picture of my grandfather on the wall. It showed him standing proudly with my brother and the spoils from opening day of hunting season in 1987.

After my grandmother’s call, that day came back to me vividly. I remember that the sun had just risen, but it was still so cold that the snow crunched beneath our feet.

The three of us walked across that snow beneath leafless trees looking for bedding areas of deer and checking for places where the bark had been stripped away. I could see my grandfather’s keen awareness of the woods around us as he pointed out the signs.

I came upon a maple and perched myself on a sturdy limb while my grandfather and brother strolled through the woods trying to kick up something.

After two hours with no results my brother and I switched places. To my surprise, less than fifteen minutes later I heard a shot echo through the woods, followed by my brother yelling my name. By the time I got back to them, my grandfather and brother were already standing over a freshly gutted eight point buck. I saw a smile on my grandfather’s face that clearly reflected the pride he felt at having witnessed my brother drop a deer with one shot. That smile and that moment in time are something I will always remember.

In contrast, seeing this same strong solid man who loved the outdoors confined to a nursing home seemed like such a cruel paradox.

When he was first admitted I used to visit him frequently. He seemed to enjoy the company, but unfortunately he didn’t know who I was. On nice days I took him out the courtyard and talked to him. Usually he just stared blankly at the trees, as if trying to remember something. As his health deteriorated he lost his sight; and then even the trees were gone.

Eventually my father moved him to another nursing home so that he could be closer to where my uncle lived. Unfortunately that meant that I saw less of my grandfather. Sometimes my father would bring him home so we could spend time together. By this point, however, he had to be tied to his chair to keep from falling. But even without his sight he would turn his head towards the window as if he was still trying to see something beyond the glass. It seems as if the strong die most slowly.

Finally when my grandmother’s call reached me I felt a sense of sad relief. For now he was no longer confined to a chair with ropes, or confined within the walls of his blindness and loss of memory, or confined by the walls of a home for the dying. And I find, as I think back on him, I sincerely hope that once again he’s out there in the woods someplace, following a fresh track across fresh snow.
WALLS

It was 3:30 a.m. on a Thursday. I had just arrived home from work. There was a message on my answering machine to call my grandmother. When I did she informed me that my grandfather had just died in the nursing home where he had just spent the last three years of his life.

Only the day before that unexpected call I had hung up a picture of my grandfather on the wall. It showed him standing proudly with my brother and the spoils from opening day of hunting season in 1987.

After my grandmother’s call, that day came back to me vividly. I remember that the sun had just risen, but it was still so cold that the snow crunched beneath our feet.

The three of us walked across that snow beneath leafless trees looking for bedding areas of deer and checking for places where the bark had been stripped away. I could see my grandfather’s keen awareness of the woods around us as he pointed out the signs.

I came upon a maple and perched myself on a sturdy limb while my grandfather and brother strolled through the woods trying to kick up something.

After two hours with no results my brother and I switched places. To my surprise, less than fifteen minutes later I heard a shot echo through the woods, followed by my brother yelling my name. By the time I got back to them, my grandfather and brother were already standing over a freshly gutted eight point buck. I saw a smile on my grandfather’s face that clearly reflected the pride he felt at having witnessed my brother drop a deer with one shot. That smile and that moment in time are something I will always remember.

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