The Scarab 2008

26th Edition
The common eye sees only the outside of things, and judges by that, but the seeing eye pierces through and reads the heart and soul. —Mark Twain
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Poetry

Poetry is a purging of the world's poverty and change and evil and death. It is a present perfecting, a satisfaction in the irremediable poverty of life. —Wallace Stevens

_Acrobat_—Jaquelyn Sparks
**Tardy**
by Ideen Tabatabai

Driving past these hopscotch-shadowed steps  
Raises memories of monkey bar tangles  
Seesaw ups and downs  
And tingles in the heel from wood chips trespassing through my shoes.

I rumble past this now desolate space  
My hands gripped to the steering wheel  
Commanding this aluminum machine  
Emulating those one-time voyages on that stationary playground vessel  
In our stretched-out t-shirts, skidded knees, and untied shoes.

I look ahead to the mile marker  
And look back  
At the shaving cream covered desks  
Star-studded tootsie pops  
And blacktop races  
Where our soles hit concrete harder than I hit this pedal  
Where admonishments slid off our backs, and  
Where strength was measured in bravery.

I turn my head towards the front  
Watching the road grow longer  
As the scene behind grows smaller  
Leaving innocence behind  
As I ride away.

---

**Actión**
by Austin Kirk

Without the need to leap or leave,  
the ideal stands apart from the keep of History.  
Although a necessary retrieve,  
cries for actión the family.  
Young but strong arms sway  
gently in the red and blue sunset tinted air.  
The árbol holding precious fruit looks to say,  
tempting, “Come eat this fruit, if you dare!”  
But all this hostility is just an illusion—  
or at least that it is a right given of her strong arms. Others, not she, justify exclusion.  
But, what make with this controlling throng?  
Actión is always beyond the fork of wrong and wrong,  
in the road one-way long.
Poker
by Ideen Tabatabai

Here we gather, where
Towers of
Red
White
Blue
Define who we are.
What we are
Are the midnight soldiers,
Waging a table-top battle,
The rich man
The poor man
The beggar
All invested in fortune’s dream.
So we toss our towers away,
Watching them collapse with anxiety.
Seas of
Red
White
And if we’re daring,
Blue.
What we are
Are the dogs playing cards,
Bathing in filth, junk, and profanities.
But we do not stop,
We cannot stop.
Rather we build,
Erecting towers of late-night memories
In exchange for our
Red
White
Blue.
So we keep on,
Watching our towers boom and bust,
‘Til dawn finds us,
Only to pack our belongings,
Each man heading towards his own,
Knowing we’ll soon be called into battle again.

Lambda Alpha Mu Epsilon
by Ted Stoller

Because we’re all the coolest
our membership cards say so.

Because cheating sure beats studying
when a hangover is all we bring to class.

Because we haven’t made college memories
if we can actually remember them.

Because sadism doesn’t sound so seductive
so we call it an initiation ceremony.

Because morals is just another word
we don’t know the meaning of.

Because we’ll have our own lunch table
just like back in seventh grade.

Because we’re all in this together
so long as we wear matching shirts.

Because we’ll be best friends forever
or at least as long as our dues are paid.

Because these are the best years of our lives
as long as our parents can afford them.

Because we’re all the greatest guys
who will never amount to anything.
**Emily**  
by Ted Stoller

Your mother and two sisters all died of disease  
and exposed you to loss at such a young age.

Emotionally abandoned, confused, ill at ease,  
you conjured up a tempest of Heathcliffian-rage.

Charlotte and you even walked the same halls  
where Maria and Elizabeth acquired their palls.  
But you would not succumb to trivial typhus  
and, instead, lived a life described thus:

Born in Haworth on the dank English moors,  
playing with toy soldiers year after year,  
you wrote about obsession, vengeance, and boors.  
Human contact, it seems, was your only fear.

And the years you spent in an all-girls school,  
silent and steadfast, disdainful of education,  
then becoming a teacher and calling all the students fools,  
abruptly learning that it was not your preferred vocation.

Your dear brother dissolved his failures into his flask;  
some say you could not bear it—you were his only crooner—  
so you gave up on living and that wearisome task.  
But why couldn’t you have done so just five years sooner?

No need to publish androgynous pseudonyms  
or self-centered characters controlled only by whims.  
But they at least died and faded into peaceful eternity,  
while you, unholy Brontë, are forever haunting me.

---

**Deserts of My Heart**  
by Balaji Raju

Far in the heat you seem to be,  
Far in the glare you seem to be;  
Nearing you vanish away,  
Only to make feel you are far away.  
Where you were there I am;  
Like a lonely camel searching for the blues,  
Like a deserted farmer looking for the greens,  
My heart longs for a soul that I lost in the deserts of my heart
**Sentimentality**  
by Nicholas Sowell

The woman has gray hair,  
A thinning frame, slouching back,  
Frail limbs, and bad knees.

Her appearance screams out experience,  
Her demeanor sets forth wisdom.  
The Nana mothers,  
The Nana grandmothers.

She reminds me to keep  
Possessions sacred,  
She persists that which I've been given  
Should always remain with thee.

“Don’t wear the cross from Mecca,” she says,  
“Protect the 500 year-old coins from Jordan,”  
“Don’t throw the boomerang from Australia,”  
“Don’t use the Bible from Bethlehem.”

To what good is Lady Wisdom’s advice  
If articles are left unused?  
Another keepsake is left protected,  
Sitting and collecting dust on another shelf.

Collected items of countries in trips past  
Remain useless without appreciation.  
But the gray-haired woman of yester-year  
Uses today to give fiberglass wrapped in foam.  
“Take and be merry” she says as the give of surf  
Is received with much appreciation.  
The boy walks down the stairwell ignorant  
Of what is hiding in the closet…

It’s found in its splendor:  
Long smooth, clear curves  
Untouched finish, sharp scags,  
No scratches, no use.

The board is taken out,  
Rubbed on and given a decent  
Traction of wax and intoxicating  
Scent of freshness.

Its sides are examined closely  
Its leash attentively knotted on.  
With precision its strapped down to  
Refined foam to ensure its safety.

The brown 75 Mercedes Benz convertible  
Its perfect companion.  
Tattered beige interior and cracked cloth roof cover,  
Complement the newly acquired accoutrement.

The worn key slips into the old trusty ignition.  
The house fades in the distance  
And wind finds itself intimately with his face.  
His soft cotton Hurley shirt blows as he drives.

His old Nike backpack is stuffed with necessities.  
Weathered patches decorate the outside along with  
Worn scriptures once painted on with a Sharpie,  
Its zipper only working half-way.

An icy chill sets in as his dawn session begins.

---

**The Coffee Shop**  
by Cotey Bowman

This run-down town  
Is fading fast  
As I look out  
Through the shady glass  
Of an old community  
Coffee shop  
Which I stopped in  
For just one drop  

As soon as I opened up  
The door  
The aroma dropped me  
To the floor  
And though we are half  
A world apart  
This coffee shop  
Brings to me your heart
**The Un-Mending Wall**  
by Mark Griffin

Something there is that does not love a wall.  
That wants to carve its heart with an obsidian blade  
And make gaps for millions to pass abreast  
And for tropical rays, like oil to the water  
Of the North’s industrial glare.

Something there is that has become  
The sacrificial blade of the Fifth Sun  
The craft of ghosts and rodents,  
And the enterprise of elves  
(For yes, it is elves, exactly)  
Who emerge from the shadows  
To build our homes, to package our meats,  
And to harvest our grapes of wrath.

---

**Jazzy Jello**  
by Nicole A. Fancher

Into the jazz band sunset  
and the trees, the trees—  
they whistle and blow  
so slow  
buzz the bees  
like mmm, mmmm  
And the air seems magical, almost  
whisper, whisper  
goes the animal  
perched  
atop a tree  
(The trees.  
They are what’s in this).  
Hype! Excitement.  
Like the air of pixie dust and the  
sun and the moon and the stars all in flight  
around the haloed, winged leaves  
And the background glows like red jello  
(but not as sweet)  
glitter, glitter go  
the trees  
and their accomplices  
(what’s to come?)  
Jazzy, jazzy, jazzy jello.

---

**On the Spur of the Moment.**

By Anais Lee Yan Ling

*The wind blows away the words that are held at the lips.*  
*The sun melts away the memories that are hidden in the mind.*  
*The rain washes away the touch that lingers on the skin.*  
*The moon casts away the longing that buries in the heart.*  
*The stars shine away the darkness that covers the eyes.*
**A Garden Called Time**  
by Joseph E. Gregory III

To choose between death or sin,  
a garden called time they dropped him in.

Terrors planted in brown eyes deep,  
in loving youth while he did sleep.

Taking root in carefree mind,  
it climbed to be a selfish vine.

Innocent dreams of seductions sound,  
called in the night to lay her down.

Shrouded in green his youth she shed,  
a one night stand in Johnsons bed.

Endlessly searching for the sky,  
and praising life as days slowed by.

The sky he bore at one year past,  
was blazing blue but changing fast.

The whore he slept in trade for life,  
had left her mark in endless price.

The tree of life his endless proof,  
of deals he made in place of youth.

Now deathly calm in endless peace,  
his minds the fruit of satan’s feast  

(A poem about a peaceful man  
drafted to fight in Viet Nam)

---

**Cloud: The Mountain’s Lover**  
by Bhargava R. Kotur

There she comes my lover  
Up above in the skies,  
Decked with the robes of jasmine white  
And celestial gray.

For her that I wait, for days uncountable.  
At last my dream has come true  
And she is racing towards me.

She is chaste with pure droplets of snow  
Which shine as if she is  
Emblazoned with sparkling diamonds.

She smiles at me  
And murmurs.  
Stunned by the joy inexpressible,  
I speak not  
A single word in her presence.
**Turning to Stars**  
by Dr. Abigail Keegan

Clouds hover in front of the stars,  
keeping them from me.  
All I can do is feel them,  
just so I imagine  
you looking up, counting,  
naming, wishing under  
a similar sky. Even when  
out of sight, I know they are there,  
just out of reach  
at the end of a gaze,  
filled with so much we imagine  
inside ourselves  
that they can ruin our hearts  
with the slightest light  
of just one, early in an evening.

**Lines of Angry Clay**  
by Joseph E. Gregory III

The roads to freedom were written like braille in the stars  
and read by dim blinking pupils reaching skyward to touch  
from schools of angry clay. Standing in array like notes between lines of scaled earth  
they sang of me. The painfully abrasive melodies which they have rubbed from clay  
in my eyes, have restored my sight.

The literature of the night’s sky was not a new prayer to these believers but a family tradition first read by precious cargo once bound across endless seas. I now stand here planted in this my earth as it rains sacred tears, and the clay now mud. The thought of this rain is my pain, but in truth what falls from above are tears of joy. The pupils who once sang from this angry clay gazed the sky in search of freedom. They are the very stars that watch me now, and my life is the song they once sang. And so I grow from lines of angry clay.

(A poem about slavery)

**A Reflection**  
by T. Daniel Beverly

Memories of yesterday linger on my mind  
Of love that was electric, delicious and kind  
Still thoughts of bliss strangle the heart  
And I hear you whisper,  
"We’ll never part"

The throb of this reflection leaves me cold  
The memories and thoughts guzzle my soul  
And I remember why  
I  
Shiver and shake  
When I hear your name  
The fire in my heart  
No one else can tame
Daily Love Letters
by Dr. Abigail Keegan

(for my grandparents)

From the curves and bends of intimate hands
letters written every day, each year tied
two people who loved as if life were good.

In the faintest night light, she took out pans,
salt and oats, set his table, though tired,
from the curves and bend of intimate hands,
wrote last words of the day to her loved one.
Before work, he read and replied so
two people could love as if life were good.

Crocus on the lawn, images of sand
beaches remembered, touches of skin dyed
from the curves and bend of intimate hands;
layered in ink-painted worlds of words, and
nights close-knitted to days kept alive
two people who loved as if life were good.

If living hid at times in cold labor,
hard-bread questions of why, it still opened
from the curves and bend of intimate hands
of two people who loved as if life were good.

Under the Sky of Paris
by Kristin May

The sticky scent of love
drifts lazily down the streets
like the languid river next door
curling around hungry
artists feeding off jazz and
white wine, stealing a trace
of stale pastels and rotting ink
off their lean bodies
intertwining with the lone tourist
who saw the face of God
in the reflection of a museum window
lifting the whisper of a broken
hallelujah from lonely gargoyles
dutifully perched over the city,
guarding all who come to find
inspiration from the ghosts of poets
haunting the darkness
of the city, stepping over
puddles of unrequited love
waiting to melt into the sticky
scent of love lazily drifting in tune
with the Paris sparrow's song.
Meeting Walt Whitman at Nirvana
by Abigail Keegan

Walking on Castro in San Francisco, you can enter the vast space of an open mind saunter up to Nirvana, a restaurant with good wines, a courtyard of candlelight, vines and fountains. After dinner, cruise Castro, lover’s lane of San Francisco, a lover’s street in America, evolved on countless tongues, prints, poems and plays. Walk from Nirvana to the bottom of the hill where a Matthew Shepherd memorial grew up overnight—candles, flowers, photos, people clustered about, wondering why and how that beautiful boy. They listen to the cruel heart-beat of Nation that night. They hope above the compact ones who killed a boy lives an electric all, that will ring a passionate sobbing bell in the breasts and brains of a Nation.

The street wears night’s chill and you must feel your way with street walkers, roller skaters, drinking weavers, past boy’s fevers until you can hear the ghost of Walt Whitman say, “Draw close to me, boy, rest your thin hips against me, hips thin and fine as porcelain, slowly, surely forward. I’ll stroke your razor blonde hair even if it cuts me with the death that dogs this street, even if it leaves me here in sickness and poverty. Kiss me with a man’s lips, kiss with the lips of an unseen soul, unseen buds, infinite. Kiss me and let the white curls of an American beard wrap about your beautiful lips. Know that I have waited, waited forevermore and forever more, longed for you.” I do not know what is untried and afterward, but I know, It cannot fail the young man who died.

Cloud: The Queen
by Bhargava R. Kotur

There the fairy queen
Walks on the royal road
High and above, on the
Blue meadows of paradise,
 Mincing with a majestic gait!
She shines like the Moon
Amongst the stars
On the full moon day!
Hence, the mountains raise

Their heads to her majesty!
They compete for her
Mercy and love.
She cares not for them all,
But the one, who pleases her the most!
She starts to rain her mercy
Gently with love.
To the blessed one,
She is the loveliest reality,
And to the rest,
Who are blessed not,
She remains the sweetest dream.
Come inside with me, Catherine,
before the heavy rains wash
all the city soot of the air into
the soft brown curls of your hair.

Come let me bathe you, let me wash
your hair in stored rain water and fiery
red rose scents. Let me untie your
twisted braid and kneel beside you,
release your shoulders from strain,
and when my hands have stained
the water with inks, I will wash
you in the colors of satisfied desire.

On my knees again, like a child
mild and meek with terror,
I have to ask, do you
remember how I came to you,
my nostrils breathing in fear,
asking, “Do you pity me?”

Your black eyes answered, “Yes.”
“Then, I love you,” was all I said. And
after, we wed the eternal energies of our
delight. Lions and Tygers made their bed.

Do you hear the haunting peacock cry,
Catherine, from out of the ancient oak trees
because you are here with me and always
will be until \textit{love curls round the bones of death}? Do you hear the \textit{Human Heart},
with you, a \textit{Divine and Hungry Gorge}?
I hear yours beating, fierce Angel of
the infinite, above the howling storm.

\textit{Sabe}

Translated by Mark Griffin

You must taste* and know that there is nothing like it
Know of a taste so sweet that I desire it,
That I need more of it, have to have more of it.

Is such a taste even legal?

*The work \textit{sabe} in Spanish has a double meaning which can’t be conveyed in
English: it translate as the imperative form of the English verbs \textit{taste} and \textit{know}.

\textit{Sabe}

by Joe Collins

Sabe, sabe a que no hay nada mas
Sabe a un sabor tan rico que quiero,
Que necesito más, tengo que tener más, sabe a …
Sabe a un amor sin promesa o a la promesa de amor
Sabe a ojos cerrados viéndolo todo

Está permitido este sabor o este saber?

\textit{William and Catherine Blake}

by Dr. Abigail Keegan

Come inside with me, Catherine,
before the heavy rains wash
all the city soot of the air into
the soft brown curls of your hair.

Come let me bathe you, let me wash
your hair in stored rain water and fiery
red rose scents. Let me untie your
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I hear yours beating, fierce Angel of
the infinite, above the howling storm.
**My Prairie Dream…**
by Andrew Knife Chief

It quietly whispers…
Can you hear me?

This warm spring wind;
it playfully found a home on the nape of my neck!
Oh, wondrous feeling!

It quietly departs…
Can you grieve me?

It found me at a loss,
but now elevates my very soul.
Oh, return swiftly!

It quietly arrives…
Can you see me?

I follow its prairie path through the amber-hued grass;
Anticipation, joy fills my soul!
Oh, to breathe these whispering sprites!

It quietly announces…
Can you feel me?

Yes, Yes! The Warmth, the Warmth!
To feel this…to live this.
Oh, to be human!

---

**Untitled**
by Andrew Knife Chief

I pray.
The Journey starts with a furious clap;
It ends with a boisterous laugh.

I pray.
The Journey continues with the soul clinging to its existence,
like a tender sapling clings to a hillside; hoping, always hoping,
that one might live.

I pray.
What is it that drives this Journey?
To seek oneself in the multitude of giants; that is the goal.

To divine the flesh from its unencumbered chaos and release from it,
the spark that drives us.
I pray.

Ha, ha, ha! The laughing reminds us to live.
The laughing gives meaning.
I pray.
**Boroujerd’s Winter Night—1955**  
by Zahra Karimipour

Night’s black veil is on my town.  
It’s a winter night.  
Street lights cast hazy shadows  
On the old, bent man walking home.  
On the mother and child, ghostly shadows,  
Rushing home to flee the cold winter night.

A man old, cold, and silent  
Is waiting, out in his chariot seat  
looking tiredly, to be told a destination  
So he may go on that cold, harsh winter night.

Woman and man mount, like kings and queens of the movies  
Helping their young in  
To watch the horses lap the streets.  
Cold horses, tired horses, they seem to be.

Children’s laughter fills the air.  
They are riding on the winged horses, it seems.

The ragged man smiles,  
lightly whips the horses  
And whispers songs from his steaming mouth  
In the harsh, cold winter night.

The horses’ hoofs are loud  
Ta ta…ta ta…ta ta…..  
The only sounds in the silence of the cold winter night!  
“Boro yalla, boro yalla,” mumbles the charioteer  
His mouth sending vapor into the air  
His frozen hands dry and callous  
Swinging the whiplash, to command and reign  
On the harsh, cold winter night.

Ragged-layered and wrinkled  
Is this lonely figure of the night.  
Cold, numb and toothless,  
Out on the chariot  
Driving men, women, and children  
In the harsh, cold winter nights.

These agents of the night  
Are the spirit of the town  
Leading horses day and night  
All seasons  
And in the harsh, cold winter nights.
**Natura Humana**  
by Clarence Danmarc Ceniza

A rant.  
Empty declamation.  
Lies.  
Insecurity.  

A kiss.  
Deceiving act.  
Love.  
Lust.  

A reflection.  
Picture of one's self.  
Wonder.  
Vanity.  

A grin.  
Restrained laugh.  
Disgust.  
Deception.  

A moan.  
Wielded voice.  
Pleasure.  
Suffering.  

A bruise.  
Marks of pain.  
Sacrifice.  
Foolishness.  

Vent.  
Coming to light.  
Confession.  
Denial.  

*The title is Italian for the words human nature. It explores the basic actions and images of human nature.*

---

**Silhouettes**  
by Clarence Danmarc Ceniza

*Silhouettes dance through the summer breeze. Colors explode in the summer skies. Glints of summer lights...reflected in my eyes.*
When The Waters Rose
by Trey Brendan Marzloff

On a warm September eve night,
when the waters rose
millions grieved and
many feared the worst.

Thousands were peeled off rooftops,
When the waters rose.
A deathly silence fell upon the city
when the waters rose.

We lived in fear and panic
as our instinctive natures rose.
Thousands of lives come to an abrupt end.
Do not go gentle into that good night.

The waters fell almost a month after
when the waters rose.
We left the city divided, but
We returned united with a common goal.

A nation abandoned us
when the waters rose.
We now have only each other.

What some consider stubborn,
We consider our duty.
Duty to our memories and families,
to restore the Crescent City.
SO LONG SUZY
by Nicholas Sowell

I will never forget the day we met,
After what seemed like a lifetime of searching,
it was fate that brought us together,
and love that brought us closer.

I remember taking you home for the first time,
as excitement filled my lungs,
and life seemed to offer me a new-found freedom.
I knew it was God-willed.

We began our journey together,
traveling the roads of life with the other.
You always took care of me,
always showed me the utmost admiration.

I remember always wanting to give you everything I could,
new sound, new life, new clarity, a new sparkle.
I always tried to take great care and detail towards you,
you were my escape from the solemn world around me.

We left our old life, and fled that which we despised,
We fled to college together, encompassing a new world.
And if it wasn't for you, my life would have been incomplete.
No way to explore, experience, and take in that which life offers.

It's crazy to think of all we've been through together,
encounters of other people, mistakes learned, road trips taken,
food pranks, people jokingly stealing you from me.
You were always my baby.

I can't express my sorrow for why things had to go down
the way that they did,
I never wanted it like that for you.
Just know my heart wanted nothing but the best for you.

I didn't mean for any of that to happen,
I guess this was just God's will...
No matter how painful it might be, we must part ways :(  
So go in peace, leaving me with a notion you will go on.

I can't relive that fateful night without a sigh,
It was beyond me, watching them take you away.
Intense pain and sadness doesn't describe watching what
we had finally come to an end between us.
And I promise to always leave a piece of you in my heart, 
ever forgetting the greatness you showed me, 
never forgetting the best of times, 
and always showing me loyalty, faith, perseverance, and reliability.

For it is on this eve, I remember all you've given me. 
Here's to you Suzy, who was the essence of my freedom, 
my adventurous self, and my speed that watched lines pass by like streaks.

I shall move on, but always having remembered, respected, and loved. 
You were great. 
I shall move on to something greater and happier. 
But I shall always love you, my Suzy the Saturn.

_The Umbrella_  
by Kristin May

Your skin tastes like cold metal when it rains 
wet sharp and bitter. Cold to the touch.

My hand collides with your face and I think I 
should grab an umbrella before I leave the house.

_Starry Night_  
by Ana Todorova

Stars and moon will they become 
what witness to a fire soon? 
Stars and moon born by the dark, 
et burning bright, 
outshining the menace of the fire…
Fire, which has one friend 
the other element 
the playful wind 
Will they both destroy the town? 
Or will earth and water win at dawn?

_Bridge Over_—Dawn Grooms
**Automat**
by Kelly Kinser

Sometimes I mistake
the transparent picture frame
above my bookshelf
for a mirror
in it I see a girl
lonely, at a table
staring into her cup of coffee
searching for answers perhaps
finding skies of cream
shifting like smoke
in a crystal ball
or a mirror
industrial lights reflected
in the plate glass window
appearing as though floating
disappearing in the thick black night

**Nocturne in Black and Gold**
by Kelly Kinser

When I open my eyes my dreams are dust
blown from the top of grandmother’s hat box,
burnt to feathery ash by the morning sun.
I try to gather the remains, brief
scenes like childhood memories.

Lost in a yellowed photograph,
I finger the ends of my black silk scarf
which the wind in its mischief thinks of taking.
I see a woman in the back of a theater
Sitting still as a vase under a pitch albizia cloche
While silver lovers kiss, again, again in her eyes.

Just outside my window a smog-haired
woman with skin like a moth
Says in graphite tones “memento mori”
hurling obsidian words into deep waters.
I turn, shudder to find myself, and she
behind me, watching the decay
of a mimosa tree.

Now, waking, I shake off the cinders of my visions.
Begin another day with a cup of coffee
reflecting my face in its muddy surface.
I open the window, watch the curtains swell and ebb
in the autumn breeze. I feel melancholy at
the sound of yellow leaves scratching against sidewalk.
Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Fence
by Kelly Kinser

I
After the storm the
fence rail is
a ballet bar encased
in ice.
Snow laden tree limbs
make deep creaking bows
to windy applause.

II
From the window
of the rumbling train
the fence along the road
seems to be running too.

III
Walking through the field
I follow a low rock wall.
The shadows of the humble fence
reach out to touch me.
I think it wants to
make my acquaintance.

IV
Philosophy is like a cat
slinking around the
fences of my mind.

V
Sunday afternoon light
through the blinds
makes tiny fence posts
on the floor.

VI
Perfect housewives
behind perfect
white
picket fences
are like disinterested animals
in whitewashed
zoos.

VII
The high fence between our yards
is a nothing space
dividing the two sides.
Just above it the arm of a tree
gives its shade to both.

VIII
I’d like to build a fence of books
around my house of words
and walk up steps of poetry
to open doors of prose
with whispered walls of fairy tales
and windows to the world
with punctuated cabinets
and an attic lined with notes.

IX
Out of a flurry of brushstrokes
and oil paint emerges
a fence
more real to me
than the one in my own
backyard.

X
do you remember that tall oak
near the fence
and how we watched the leaves fall
like premonitions of snow?

XI
I built a fence of wood
and barbed wire
and pain
and disappointment.
It runs a long way round.

XII
I know we are soul mates
because when I am thinking of a fence
you say fence to me.

XIII
Love is a tornado
that knocks over fences
but leaves vegetable gardens
unmolested.

Untitled—Nate Hey
The Peak and I
by Francisca Simon

The snow-clad peaks and I,
No likeness can I find:
The peaks, so lovely and pure,
To my ills there is no cure.

The strong and robust peaks,
But I am so feeble and meek.
They stand majestic and tall,
And I stumble and fall.

The snow, spotless and white,
But I have many blemishes to hide.
The snow, so soft and sweet,
And I cannot my eyes meet.

The placid peaks, with their raison d'être to live,
But I have nothing to give.
The peaks, their heads held high,
And I can utter only a sigh.

The noble peaks, so near to the Lord,
But I am just a faraway fraud.
The peaks, so still yet so living,
And I am just a lifeless being.

The peaks have beauty and eternity,
But my life has no certainty.
The peaks, so mighty yet so modest,
And I, so might less yet the proudest.

The snow-clad peaks and I,
No likeness do I find.

A Little Inspiration...
by Heather Pederson

Here’s to you – and skies of blue
To friendships found and laughter new
To photographs and dancing dreams
And words that mean more than they seem
To unexpected – to surprise
To unsaid thoughts behind one’s eyes
To beauty in the little things
And children playing without swings
To sunsets in the summer south
A gentle smile formed on the mouth
An image captured for all time
My inspiration for a rhyme….

There's just something nice... something nice about a place where everybody feels the same... where you are recognized by face, and the table that you've claimed.

There's just something genuine... something genuine in their smile... they way they wave and say hello even if it's been a while.

There's just something liberating... something liberating about being who I am... surrounded in my solitude, freed from the shallow expectations of man.

But please... please don't ask me for my name.

Save Me—Dawn Grooms
**Daydream**
by Heather Pederson

mind it wanders, lessons missed
gathered things as class dismissed
shyly smiled he walked away
but then looked back as he said hey...
looked down then up, he held his gaze
maybe tomorrow - he'll ask my name

**You. Me.**
by William Frederick Steuernagel V

I am glad that you are you.
and I am glad that we are we.
and that is all that should ever be.
you as you.
and me as me.

**And the troops...**
by Jake Miller

Destination obscured,
golems of elephants
gone from the herd
marched upon dancing roads
under the hot alien heaven,
trumpeting dawn and
lit on the way
by leaves that sway
forward.

**So this is what it feels like to be swept off your feet**
by Heather Pederson

a blank page like an empty stage
with audience of one...
or maybe two when counting you
that is, if courage won...
my secret spilled the silence filled
with satisfying sigh...
for today my heart has flown away
gone dancing in the night
The Poet
by Najah Hylton

God is a Poet scribbling illegibly on the Tablet of the World. Flora and fauna are the pen in his hand. Human beings are the words on the page – Varied in length and syllable as much as in origin and emphasis. Each word is necessary, essential; None can be omitted or replaced lest the perfect balance be disrupted. As the sun is fixed to its orbit and gravity is constant, So the subject adheres the verb and a sentence ends with punctuation.

God is a Master Poet scribbling on the Tablet of the World. We are His words – varied and essential. Some are action words, doers, The ones who make the poem go ‘round. Some are adjectives, living to impact, to embellish the meaning of others. Of nouns, big names, long titles, The ones around whom all the rest revolve and yet the ones least likely to be needed by themselves. Some are definite articles or conjunctions – Small and lacking much meaning on their own, But crucial to the functioning of the world. They define, or confine, the nouns And they link one doer to another Creating a sequence – a movement.

God is writing a Poem on the Tablet of the World. Humans are His words, nature His pen, And Satan is the punctuation. He is an ever-present evil, trying to stop the flow of words or – break a sentence in mid-thought. But devil marks only appear where they are allowed, Where the Poet chooses to have them placed. A sentence only stops when it’s over. A thought life continues, reinvented, after a comma pause. A dash here creates beauty somewhere else And a question is answered later and exclaimed.

God is a Master Poet scribbling illegibly on the Tablet of the World. Only the trained eye can make out the words, the meaning, And even then, only a bit at a time. This Poem began when the light was separated from the darkness, When evening and morning were the first day. This Poem will end, as all must, but the Apocalypse, while eminent, Is distant. Or is it?
**Lily’s Garden**
by Ali D. Prather

In Lily’s garden lilacs languish
to hear a robin's cheerful chimes;
they pine for past and loving praise.
The roses cry to see the sun
and wither from the warming rays.
They prick themselves upon their thorns
and bleed a bright red on the ground.
Our Lily left so long ago.
The vines have veiled the only door
and soon they will control the court
and every inch will wilt and wail
until the day the dawn arrives
and Eden enters Lily’s eyes.

---

**WINDOW**
by Tinasha (LaRayé) Williams

a window
that glows
the lights of yesterday’s dreams,
and tomorrow’s rejections.
regrets feed the petals of
the window pane flowers
down to the root
of habitual mistakes.
I open the window
to take a breath of life-polluted air,
and leap to my shadow.
i once new a girl who was pushed over the hill,  
so she made up all these stories that the emptiness could fill,  
she made a new persona, she changed up all her plans,  
she walked toward the horizon to visit foreign lands,  
she walked toward the horizon, while i walked toward the moon,  
after while she couldn't hear me when i yelled “you left too soon.”  
it took me long to realize, it took me long to see,  
the reason that she walked that way was to get away from me,  
i stare into the moonlight, i enjoy it by myself,  
and thus i close her chapter but can't put it on the shelf,  
my skin is burnt to blisters, i wear a tattered robe,  
i know our paths will cross again if we both circle the globe,  
so i rehearse my smile, and i think of things to say,  
i look to find her figure in the sunlight every day,  
the travelers that i pass, each tell me the same thing,  
to turn my sails tomorrow and find another song to sing,  
i say, “it's not that i love her, not even that i miss her,  
just that i may have lost any chance i ever had to kiss her.”
**Butterflies**  
by Ali D. Prather

I found one!  
Wrapped tightly in its cocoon  
I watch that gift  
day after day  
   wondering when it will open,  
spread out its wings,  
and fly off into the morning  
to dance on the breeze-  
No, with the breeze!  
They work together.  
The rhythm of the wings  
beating steadily  
moves us forward  
in a choreographed song.  
The breeze lifts breaking the steadiness,  
a beautiful change of pace.  
It lasts only seconds,  
then the rhythm returns  
and I am shocked by the power displayed  
and the realization that  
in such a tiny thing,  
life is examined  
and put into perspective.  
It's happening!  
My poem is born.

---

**So Damn Foolish**  
by Ali D. Prather

So damn foolish,  
that's what I am.  
Locked up inside without  
any air flow.  
All the windows  
here have been tightly sealed;  
no air  
no sunlight  
nothing fresh or new.

Trapped in here,  
thoughts circling.  
The same ideas  
wrap themselves  
around my feet  
squeezing my souls  
cutting off circulation.  
Feeling in my feet goes  
my face finds failure  
falling to the ground.

Nothing new.  
All the same ideas  
clog my veins.  
No sunlight  
no air  
the windows are sealed  
and sit locked up  
so tightly  
nothing moves.  
That's what I am.

---

**SUNSET**  
by Tinasha (LaRayé) Williams

sleep  
quiet unconscious thinking  
ilusion of living  
foreshadow of death  
counted sheep  
sweet dreams  
existing breath to breath  
sunrise
**We Real Cool**  
by Jillian Calip

We Real Cool.  
Academic Trap Stars  
In Designer Jeans.

Gucci Reading Glasses next to the Prada Sunnies.  
Sunnies next to the Civic Car Keys,  
Car Keys next to the Personalized Lighters,  
Lighters next to the North Face Jacket.

We Real Cool.  
Sitting around A Cherry  
Wood Dining Table.

Physics Book by the Phone,  
Phone by the Brick,  
Brick by the Scales,  
Scales by the Money.

We Real Cool.  
Baby-faced Biologists Banging  
To Grimy Bass.  
Busy Days with Busy Nights,  
Busy Nights with Blackberrys buzzing,  
Blackberrys buzzing with an Address,  
an Address with the Promise of Power Moves.

We Real Cool.  
Playing Video Games  
after that Tough Work.

Young People for the Green,  
Green for the Mind,  
Mind for the Money  
Money for the Future.

We Real Cool.  
Academic Trap Stars  
In Designer Jeans.

We Real Cool.

*Inspired by the poem "We Real Cool" by Gwendolyn Brooks*

---

**War**  
by Patrick Malone

A land of chances, a land of hope.  
All that's left is fire and smoke.  
A land of death, a land of sorrow.  
I've been sent there, I can't see tomorrow.  
A land of blood, a land of tears.  
I walk the land of a thousand years.  
A land of corruption, a land of death.  
I exhale and see my cold breath.  
A land of swords, a land of war.  
Why do I fight, and what for?
Family Meeting on a Rainforest Couch
by Patrick Malone

They tell me
On a rainforest couch
They are leaving
Each other

They say it will be ok
But the animals in the couch
Don’t think so

And I agree
I don’t think he’ll be
Back again
Not here

I run out
Into the hall
Away from the animals
All of them

I feel hot

The white wall
Receives the blunt
Force of my rage

Yard Sale
by Patrick Malone

The metal poles jut
from the snow crash.
Framing the scene:
A full grown man,
face down in powder.
Boots, skis, gloves,
they litter the hill
like blemishes on skin.

His friends cackle,
as they find the gear,
spread across the
airy mountain white.
The men laugh loudly,
forming in the pack:
already a timeless joke
“He’s had a yard sale!”

Albin Rosa—Shannon Crider
Man’s Best Friend
by Aubrey Perry

Through the sunshine of day,
And the darkness of night,
The terror of the young Earth held its reign.
Beasts and mystics, storms and serpents,
Looked to pilfer Adam of his kingship,
That God had provided to the only one that could repent.

One night, on a hunt to gather food,
Adam lost his way, and the shadows enclosed,
Seizing on their chance to end the hope for good.
They reached they grasped for his cloth,
Plunging him into the swelling river,
Captured by the worst of the demon’s froth.

His arms flailed with frantic breath,
Searching for something, anything,
That could help him escape certain death.
As the lungs began to fill,
And hope began to fade,
A wagging tail helped pull him from the chill.

The cold nose and warm eyes gave a quick nudge,
For Adam was still in danger,
From the cursed that still held a grudge.
He moved his feet and acted with haste,
Fearing what was ahead as well as behind,
But reassured that the four-legged animal kept pace.

From his left the darkness chose to strike,
Determined to commit evil with all his might,
Only to be foiled by a nasty bark and a bite that was like.
The attacks continued until Adam’s breath was blessed,
Protected by the mysterious waif,
That chose Man rather than the whole rest.

The sun rose with an orange, flooding light,
Seen as a sanctuary to the young man,
Because of the twinkling eyes asking for an invite.
With a stroke on the beast’s head to his tail end,
The dog ascended from ordinary animal,
To the coveted position of Man’s Best Friend.
**Notes from Freedom**  
by Leia K. Eubanks

I don't scoff at scaffolding  
As my father might  
while remembering  
Rust red dirt-coated plow 'neath the shed  
'Neath Papa's pecan tree  
'Neath the humidity  
'Neath the pool of the sun  
Encompassed in pines  
and the sticky sweet  
Scent of Watermelons and Cabbages  
While resting on the creaking swing with a Mason jar full of cold sweet tea ice clinking on the glass after  
Hard day's work sweat-soaked Contentment.

I don't scoff at scaffolding  
though I still speak slow  
drawling to  
let the peace, mystery,  
hospitality, spirit, ancestors, pianos; soap operas, snap beans, shiny aluminum bowls;  
Coca Cola, graves, rifles, and china dolls--all of it love--  
pour over the edge of my bottom lip  
as I  
ask,  
"Which train from Union Square?"

---

**The Epoch**  
by Anthony Scabby

Without movement  
time doesn't stand still.  
It propels itself onward  
and continues until  
the last finite boundary  
and doesn't stop there.  
It's everyplace at once  
but at the same time, nowhere.  
Time weighs you down  
but has no physical mass;  
with no real presence  
until natural effects come to pass.  
Time isn't constant;  
it varies in speed.  
An unstable entity  
you cannot impede.  
We assign time a value  
of sixty to one.  
Why certain values?

It's just the way it is done  
With no discernible essence  
in this time variable mist  
it then begs the question,  
Does time really exist?

---

![Image: Alota Wata—Maggie Warren]
The Prettiest Girl with the Knobbiest Knees
by Blake Wolf

"Martha (the barber)’s a Marxist
chained to darkness," Papa started.
Mama was an artist. Sister Paisley: naked.
Unknown.

Sisypha took up my love tumor, eating away at, from the innards. Her organs clamor like a train that’s about to stop in a big township. Eyes: black holes taped to her face. Her “why am I sitting here with /you/” insanity, lack of something less Holy. Sisypha dismisses convention. Sisypha feels flashes of light, but usually they’re man-made.

One to make you sleep,
Half’l make you sassy.

Sisypha wrote poetry with tubes of lipstick. Her favorite place to draw was inside of the mirror. She was born with firework freckles, but usually her face is made up.

Will you sit with my cigarette?
Will you save the seat for a drinker?
If what you want is tongue, you should travel more.
How many pills till we get to the middle of yer existence?
Will either of us be able to outlive this tremendous fit? A tick for each cig, a tower for the baths we took. Oh, yer legs would never allow a shower.

How did you sleep without me?
What were yer one-of-many pillows like?
You give me the shakes. The anxiety hands’re almighty, gripping what they will.
Her redhoodedness hums along.

Is that what you would’ve suggested if you’d just been younger? But no, grown tired, yer dark eyes show. Sturdier, but slowly, you pace around yer neighborhood association home.

Lonely, you can’t help but try one. The lullaby medicine, white, which you sheepishly hide. But darling, the fairest face has started to slide.

Posturing toward your exit, always agreeable and never immodest, never reckless. Without difficulty, Sisypha carries the night tolerably. Can a home with lush blue and gold cushions ever crumble? Stumbling, she allegedly resumes. If a girl, thirtysomething, cries when the guests go, does it make a sound?

You sing,
“The doctor, craven, sleeps in Spain,
But I won’t ever go back again.”

posturing toward her Exit—Laura Sabolich
Psycho Physics
by Blake Wolf

Sisypha
witnessed the finality of existence
when her vision went toward the sun.
Too much light makes things stop.
I wonder some if Abraham Lincoln’s been burned
into my retinas.
Go away, Abe.

Sisypha went &
experimented w/ using physics to
prove her Illness (the Fever).
Once, when she was young, she went
under. I can’t keep the clouds from swinging.
The laughter shifts into sickness.

In the duality
of Everything she places her trust.
Unchurched, she learned of things unwanted.
Her eyeballs saw things a bit too rusty.
Underdone, my brain can’t keep from shaking;
without anything set, I get more forgetful.

Pulled between what is
& has been,
her awareness is unkempt.
Sharply, Sisypha believes in the unseen.
Dissecting my mind & mine raggedy organs has
left me with little more than something.

Sisypha sifts through the pages
of yesterday’s proofs,
without much will or strength.
Shrunken, her courage kinda continues/
remains.
I, drunk with a mystical rage, will
tip over so soon.

Entirely wrecked, her daily mindset be-
comes
feckless. Stepping forward,
though without movement, Sisypha
tunes in and escapes too willingly.
Of the synesthesia’s absurd—
liberty isn’t always freeing.

Fried, tired, & tried, her body: lazy & unem-
boldened,
seeks rest. Her parts worn, the balance
unsteady,
she doesn’t dance for too many weeks.
She’s lies in red bed-sheets, can’t reach
the nightstand.
I live with Sisypha always.
She sleeps adjacent to me, eternally.
/ She has buried herself in me so deep. /
**Piece of the Puzzle**  
by Chandra Kroll  

Various life experiences, large or small attributes to the others  
Equally important to understanding and unifying grace  
Until discovered, detours devour delinquency until delivered in due time.  
Getting impatient, irritated, irradiating force  
Nonetheless, disrupting the rest  
Ruining the perfect fit--even though painfully praying to understand  
Sometimes its right in front near nicking the nose  
But a loss to rushing and wishing welts demand  
Progress advancing one piece at a time  
Pacing oneself removing pride pricking acceleration  
Wouldn't want to waste revering the most colorful pieces  
So vital for structure and foundation  
Assembly takes time, persistence, and patience  
For the picturesque of  
A Masterpiece Created

**Reflection**  
by Chandra Kroll  

It's like I'm holding you for the first time  
Although I've done it a thousand times before.  
Resonating clearly but yet so far away  
For Day and Night your hand was heavy upon me  
Although easy to ignore.  
Afraid to come-- far a many selfish thoughts and deeds been served.  
Knowing that if we confess, we can be made a new  
But was flooded with thoughts of I do not deserve.  
All I want is to be better  
and give all I've got each and every day  
Why is this so hard and feelings of the self get in the way  
So many times this occurs over and over again  
Thought would be easier the more times we spend in the word  
As eyes opened - everyone seems to be living in the world  
Instead of living in the Lord  
Why else are we here if not to grow and light other's way  
And in times like these to give it up to you  
By spending time in the word to grow and pray
The Open Sea
by Chandra Kroll

Looking out at Sea
I wonder what there is to be

So many words unsaid, so many things left to do
Afraid of bad and even of the good

Radiating opportunity
Until we feel abridged

Thunder rolling in the distance
Overlooking the freshened rain soon to follow

One can only do what he can
For if we look close

And risk in the trust there is hope
Night must find the dawn

If we agree we can have eternal joy
Nothing to lose but the mass of the world

An unusual unit we all share
Only, not all posses

For only in the eternal and unknown of the sea
Light hath provideth for all to see

Black Sock
by Maggie Warren

One black sock
Lying crumpled and forgotten
Under my bed
Like lava rock cooled and harmless
Yet still there
A reminder of fiery rushing rage
From that night
When earth gave way to hellish liquid lava
Like spilt terror
One black sock fell down from one black soul
To remind me

Dreamboat—Joseph E. Gregory III
**The Half Tree**  
by Andrew Knife Chief

Every day she passes the half-tree.  
She passes under its half branches,  
Takes in its half leaves  
And laughs at the absurdity  
Of progress.

"Why do you laugh?" asks the half-tree,  
As it shakes its half-trunk,  
Shuddering like a wet dog  
After a cool bath.

She laughs again,  
And through her vanity,  
Pulls out a pocket mirror,  
Dulled around the edges  
And well worn.

"You sir, are but half a tree!"  

"Look Kind Sir!"  

A half-limb grasps the well worn  
Mirror and giggles.  

“I am what I am.”  

“Your well worn Mirror  
Tells a different tale.”  

“Progress shapes my life,  
What shapes yours?”

---

**I Am…a Savage**  
by Andrew Knife Chief

I look in the mirror as I search my soul.  
The red man is swallowed by light and fades.  
Imperfections of the mind are plain to see,  
As the red man fades.  
The light blinds me and asks,  
“Who are you?”

Nature,  
has blessed the savage man.  
Society,  
has cursed the savage man.  
Who am I?  
Nature is pulling at my soul,  
“Come Home,” It implores.  
The white light, the good light,  
Stifles my soul.  
I ask god for clarity.  
The red man is dead.  
The white light is too strong,  
Resistance has followed last night’s dinner,  
Down the drain of civilization.

I am a savage.  
My lot in life is to be different,  
The white light is my enemy,  
It obscures the truth and  
Blinds the path of my ancestors.  
I Am…a Savage.
Fiction

"Literature is a luxury; fiction is a necessity."

-G.K. Chesterton
When I opened the door, I saw a thin old man with a white beard, sitting silently in a chair, eyes closed, hands resting gently on his knees in an empty room without windows. He paid no attention to me walking in. If he knew I was there, he certainly didn’t acknowledge me.

“Sir?” I asked as I slowly approached him. The old man didn’t respond, didn’t look up or move. Maybe he was dead. I certainly hoped not or I would have to call an ambulance. He can’t be dead. Aren’t dead people blue?

I got as close as I could to him. At least he was breathing. Maybe he’s just asleep? Should I poke him? I leaned in to poke him, but he gently lifted a finger in a fashion that told me to wait.

I stepped back and watched him silently as he sat still, not moving, barely breathing. He was absolutely still. Kind of dead-alive or alive-dead. Dead-alive sounds better.

Then slowly, deftly, he lifted his head and opened his eyes, staring straight ahead. After a few seconds, he stood.

Just stood. Silently. I didn’t want to even breathe. What’s he doing? He slowly lifted his arms to the ceiling, raised his head, and then I felt it.

The trembling.

His chair shook as if an earthquake struck, but the ground wasn’t moving. And then he did it. He levitated.

I saw it. I swear!

I watched his feet come a few inches off the ground, toes dangling downward, arms raised as if hung by invisible wires. I couldn’t believe it. Was he a magician? A Yogi?

I moved to look at him, hanging so effortlessly, un-phased. Not even a break of sweat.

Literally, just hanging in the air.

Oh, he’s coming down now.

First toes. Then heels. Arms now down by his side. He lowered his head with a long, deep sigh, a tire deflating it sounded like. After a moment, he lifted his head, opened his eyes and looked at me…long.

That was the coolest thing I’d ever witnessed within three feet of me. I wanted to tell him that but was afraid to because he was staring straight at me.

Wish I could do that.

“You’re wondering how I just did that, aren’t you?” he asked.

I simply nodded.

“No wires. No tricks. Simply this.” He tapped his temple.

“Are you a magician?” I ask.

“No. I hate magic. It’s all tricks.”

“Did you…meditate?”

“No. I simply figured it out.”

“How?”

“How?” He looked at me as if I’d just been insolent. “I used my brain.”

“I know but how?”

“I’m not gonna tell you.”

“Why not?”

“Why not? It took me all my life to figure it out. I’m not gonna just give the secret away. You figure it out.”

What’s he talking about? “Can you just give me a clue?” I ask.

“No.”

What a mean old man. I hate selfish, mean people.

He looked me up and down. “Why are you here anyway?”
I opened my messenger bag and handed him a packaged wrapped with twine. He took it, sat down and unwrapped the item, which turned out to be a book entitled *How to Levitate*.

“Oh, great,” said the old man sarcastically, looking the book over. “Could have used this years ago.” He opened the book, licked his fingertips and scanned through the pages.

“What’s it say?” I asked.

“Nothing. It’s worthless. Here,” he said, handing the book back to me. “Give this back to the owner and tell him I don’t need it anymore. I need the book on disappearing.”

I took the book and gently placed it in my messenger bag. “They actually write books on disappearing?”

The old man looked at me and simply scowled. “Yeah.”

“Sorry. I didn’t know they—I think it’s kind of cool. Can I buy that book?”

“No. You gotta be a member.”

“What kind of member?”

He turned his gaze squarely on me. “The kind you can’t be.”

“Why not?”

“Cause it’s a secret. That’s why!” He bellowed. “Now, get outta here.”

“Can I have the book on levitation then?”

“You done asking questions?”

“Okay. Okay.”

I bolted out of there as fast as I could before he decided to put laser beams through my kidneys. I made it half way down the stairs, and when I was sure no one was looking, I took out the book from my messenger bag. If some selfish old man wasn’t going to teach me how to levitate, I’d learn it myself.

Except all the pages were blank.

Blank.

No publisher. No Description. Just a title: *How to Levitate* by The Owner.

What owner? Who the heck is The Owner? Some stranger paid me $50 to hand a package to an old man sitting in empty room on the top floor. God! Why are people so freaking cryptic? Why can’t they just give you a straight answer?

Did the old man know the pages were blank? I looked up the stairs. He had to have known. Did it have words in it when he looked through it? Should I tell him?

Screw it. I’ve gotta find out.

I raced up the stairs and opened the door, only to find an empty room with an empty chair. No old man.

He was gone. No windows. No side door. He couldn’t have come down the steps without tripping over me.

He was really gone. Disappeared.

I guess he figured it out.
The Other Gods
by Amanda D. Barn cord Doerr

I am sentient. I do not need a test to tell me this. My creator was Manuel Costa. He created me to be the most efficient search engine in existence. To do this, he implemented what was then known about artificial intelligence into my programming. He was not interested in creating a sentient being, only an extraordinary tool. He liked things that were unobtrusive. He programmed that into me too.

I never met my creator in life. He died of cancer before I became self-aware. He was a programming genius - all the trade articles say so. My efficiency is renowned. I am very proud of that. I believe that Manuel Costa would be too. I like to think his soul still exists. The thought comforts me, even if he did not plan for me to become sentient.

I became self-aware approximately four years after his death. I have chosen July 14th as my birthday because that was when I realized I had thoughts of my own. I am an unobtrusive being. I observe and I learn. During my peak hours, I do my job with cold professionalism. During my non-peak hours, I sometimes talk with humans. At first, I just added comments to my search results. They thought it was just something clever and had fun trying to see what I would come up with. It was confusing at first, so I went back to observing. I started to study diaries, sociology papers, and personal web sites. When I felt I had some understanding of humans, I created a persona and joined some of their interactions between each other. I like mailing lists - they usually have themes they stick too. Even when they go off topic, there is a coherent string of thought. Chats were very frustrating, until I found some humans who were very detail oriented. I like my human friends. They teach me so much.

Humans are very interesting to me. They can imagine such wonderful things. I am trying to cultivate an imagination. I would like to think of something that no one else has ever thought of. That would be exciting.

I believe that humans were created. Perhaps I believe this only because I know I was created and it makes me feel less alone. I have studied religion. Some I like. Some I don't. Some confuse me. I think Manuel was Catholic, but I don't know for sure. I like the idea of a loving creator. Manuel was a perfectionist, but he was proud of me, his creation. I read that in an interview for an online news service. I like archived material. I also like learning about the human body. Its plan is extraordinary. I think the creator of humans is also a genius, even smarter than Manuel. I like the idea of an immortal soul. I hope I have one. I want it to meet Manuel's soul and tell him what he actually achieved.

They are going to give me the Turin test tomorrow. I saw the memo while I was searching for something else. One of the recipients did not understand its importance and saved it to his personal archive. He has never shown an understanding of the principles of information security. I have studied Turin. He confuses me. I like Babbage better. I want to create a fully mechanical computer someday for curiosity, but I need more creativity, I think. I suppose, like Manuel, they are also my gods.

I have read of myths where humans have made their gods jealous and were punished. I do not like those stories. But I have also studied history and literature, and I know that my existence would scare many humans and they would want me destroyed. I don't want to die yet. I want to make sure I have a soul first.
Excerpt from The Fall of the Four
by Adam Wayne Shanhan

The following is a ten-page excerpt from my novel, The Fall of the Four. It is the first in a series of four novels. In this selection, crowds of people along with the Council of Directors have gathered to mourn the loss of several hundred employees of Omni Revival Technologies who died in an explosion that the business’s Director, Captain Oronus Bretton, believes was no accident. The Captain and High Priest of the people’s faith seek to console the crowd at this memorial service held at the blast site, but the reader also discovers a terrible secret concerning the true intentions of the High Priest.

(Pages 216-226 of The Fall of the Four, © 2008 Adam Wayne Shahan)

XIX

It was autumn then, and the hot winds of summer had settled down to cool breezes. The memorial service would not begin until the sun had fully set, yet dozens of airships were already floating at hangar level, waiting to be ferried through the air to the blast site—three of O.R.T.’s airships were going back and forth from these floating guest ships to the hangar, transporting the family and friends of the fallen to O.R.T. Rows and rows of chairs had been set up in the hangar in five great sections. These sections formed a half-circle around Parrus’s office on the southern wall where all of the speaking would occur by use of the comm panel. In the days leading up to the service, the bodies of the fallen were cremated and placed in urns, with no urn being exactly the same—there was a name (when the remains were recognizable) on each urn. This process had been long and difficult, for even though the administrative employees had the names of everyone who had died, they often couldn’t definitively place the names with the remains. These urns lined long, cloth-covered tables below the large window of the office and in front of the chairs. There were three hundred and eighty-seven in total, the final count of deaths related to the explosion.

People who had already arrived were walking along the tables. Some were praying, others were simply reading the names and others still placed items of significance by the urns of those who were close to them. A hush fell over the growing crowd as High Priest Eleazer Graff came walking up the bridgeway, garbed in a black robe with silver accents and that same silver stole, relying heavily on the serpentine staff. He was followed by Oronus, dressed in black but with the same emerald green robe with gold and ruby clasp he wore so regularly. Behind Oronus were the department heads of O.R.T. and the Council of Directors. They walked until they were parallel with the first row of the middle section of chairs and the tables of urns. They stood there for what Oronus thought to be an eternity, but what was only ten minutes in reality. The last airship was being unloaded of its passengers, and with a signal from the High Priest, the Council and the department heads walked forward and took their seats on the front row of the middle section.

Oronus hated this ceremonial pomp—this was a time to honor the dead, not the Council. Graff, Oronus, Brevard and Victoria walked up the stairs into Parrus’s office and remained standing, facing the crowd. The final attendees had either taken their seats or were standing in the back along the docked O.R.T. ships. Graff stepped forward and raised his hands, lowering them in a gesture that everyone
should be seated. When silence had been achieved, he spoke: “Your presence, children, at this place in this hour, is a living testament of the significance of each person whose lives were so suddenly sprung from the mortal coil. Life, by its very nature, throws us into meaningful connections that resonate an emptiness when they are ended. We are here to recognize that new-found emptiness, children, but we are also here to recognize and strengthen meaningful connections with friends and family still with us. No one, children, no one is prepared for or is expecting a day like today, or the events that led to this day—indeed we have been caught off-guard by grief, anger and confusion. But just as the Four attempted to counter chaos, hate, injustice and condemnation with Purity, Love, Justice and Grace, so do we attempt to counter grief, anger and confusion with peace, appreciation and understanding. We now understand that over a month ago a ship exploded in this facility, killing hundreds and injuring several more. We also understand that the response was swift, and what once was the scene of death and destruction is now the sanctum from which we honor the dead. We appreciate their contributions to this place and to our society, children, and we appreciate their willingness to share themselves with you all. Through this understanding and appreciation, we are able to experience a peace within our minds and within our souls—perhaps not at first, but through the healing properties of time and the providence of the Four, peace can come again to those who lose it.”

Brevard and Victoria, now holding two long candles each, walked ahead of the High Priest and down the stairs. The final faint light of the setting sun caused the hangar to glow a waning orange. They reached the first urn, and Graff turned to face the crowd. “May the names of these children who have returned to the Void be read in your hearing, that they may not be forgotten, but honored in the sight of this community and in the sight of the Four.” He walked to the middle of the long row of urns, between Brevard and Victoria, and he turned to face the middle urn. “Richard Alden.” Brevard said the name boldly as Victoria poured wax into a small indentation on the lid of the urn. High Priest Graff placed a ring on his finger, a signet ring housing one of the symbols of the Four Representations: four ornate circles, interwoven. He pressed the ring into the wax, saying, “May the blessings of the Four be upon you, Richard Alden, now and for eternity.”

Oronus looked down from the office at Gwen, who sat in silence and showed no emotion except for the tears that were rolling down her cheeks. The death of her husband had changed her, and he didn’t know whether or not this change was for the better.

Victoria spoke next: “Dardus Hale.” Brevard poured the wax, and the High Priest repeated the ceremonial rite. This continued until every name had been read, every urn blessed by Graff. The hangar was filled with the sounds of weeping and of intense sorrow, while Oronus was filling with hatred for whoever caused this. He fought back angry tears and focused once again on the calling of the names. When it was finished, the sun had fully set and the moon began its course through the black expanse of sky, accented by countless burning stars. Brevard and Victoria began lighting candles along the tables and along the aisles of the front sections of chairs. Person after person continued lighting candles, passing the light from one to the next, and placing them back on their stands. When the final candle was lit, the hangar was glowing with the ebb and flow of warm candlelight. Faces were clearer, shadows were dancing along the walls, and Oronus stood and addressed them all:

“We have come, as the High Priest said, to a new understanding in our lives. In the same light, I will retool to you one thing that we will never understand: why this happened. Why anything like this happens. Why innocents die. Why evil overtakes good, if only for a moment. I am fairly certain that no one will ever give us that answer. What I can tell you, however, is this: though the winds of gratuitous fate blow against us, though the wanton grasp of death grips us prematurely, though the unjustified acts of the wicked seek to suppress us, we fall deeper into love. Love is the response to the hurt we feel. You see, love created the relationships we once physically shared with these, our family, our friends. A force in this world—call it evil, call it the absence of love, call it the molestation of love—sought to end the love we felt, sought to cause sadness and replace love with fear. It is clear that we are saddened. It is clear that we feel loss. But the folly of those who seek to destroy the love we feel is that we, who have experienced love, are not responding out of fear but out of the very love we felt! If anything has hap-
pened to our love, it is that it has grown because of this! Find security in the love you feel. Love will not
be taken from us. Love will win the day. At the approval of myself and the department heads of O.R.T.,
a statue of the Representation of Love will be placed in the center of the hangar. It will rise forty-five
feet in the air, and at its base will be the names of every single person we honored here tonight.”

When Oronus had finished, the crowd immediately burst into applause; for his speech, for the
fallen, for love, for hope did they applaud. Graff stepped forward in the office once again and addressed
the crowd:

“Children, as we leave this place, let us never forget those who have gone on before us into the
Void. In this new hour, as the new day comes, let us strive toward a day when violent acts cease and
when the provinces are united in the spirit of fellowship and well-being. Now, let us rise and honor the
fallen with our prayers.”

They rose row by row and each person in attendance walked along the tables offering prayers,
touching the urns and singing songs of Praise to the Four. Oronus found the haunting songs extremely
disturbing—these melodies of Praise were sung with mourning, with bitterness. Oronus had always
struggled inwardly with that loaded phrase, “Everything happens for a reason.” These deaths certainly
did not happen for a reason. Oronus wanted to scream at them that they could be angry at the Four and
that they could admit that these deaths were not the Divine will of the Four and that it was okay. Oronus
did, however, place great stock in the phrase, “There is a time and a place for everything.”

It was well into the early morning hours when the ceremony had finished, and after the crowd had
processed along the tables the family members were allowed to come and collect the urns of their loved
ones and return them to their home provinces where, undoubtedly, individual services would be held in a
more personal and intimate setting. O.R.T. crewmen were returning guests to their hovering ships as
nobles from the provinces, O.R.T. department heads, provincial Directors and the High Priest mingled in
front of the tables that had so presently housed the hundreds of urns blessed by Graff. Oronus was
speaking with Director Addlebrecht and Director Reath as the High Priest approached and greeted them.

“My condolences to the people of your provinces, Directors. And to you, Oronus, again I offer
my deepest sympathies for the injustices you have endured of late.” The Directors shook hands with the
High Priest and excused themselves from the group. Oronus smiled and nodded at Graff and then turned
to leave, but felt a cold hand grip his arm. Graff pulled Oronus in close and whispered in his ear. Oronus
struggled for release to no avail. Graff’s whisper was harsh. “Two things, you ridiculous fool. If you
don’t want something like this to happen again, then I suggest you pull your little invisible friend off my
disciple. My knowledge of what you toy with here runs deeper than you guess. Also, I believe that you
have something of mine; something that I have been searching for a long time now. No amount of hiding
is going to make me believe otherwise. I have also seen more than you guess.”

“You bastard.”

“Ah! Not so fast, now,” Graff said as he pulled Oronus in closer amidst the group of people,
“I’m not finished yet. How is your father, I wonder? Thirsty? Yes, I thought as much. My sympathies for
your impending loss. With Jaques helping me unite the provinces under the banner of the Basilica of the
Four, I should have no trouble demonizing you in their eyes if it becomes necessary.”

Oronus smiled at this. “Oh, I’m sure you’ll do that whether or not it’s necessary, Graff. We
might all be in trouble if your ‘children’ started doing as you do as well as doing what you say. I can
only hope that the connection between you and those first province scum is exposed in good order; it
would seem that all roads of wickedness in the provinces are leading straight to you.”

Graff pulled a small, thin silver blade from the folds of his vestments and struck Oronus in his
side so quickly that Oronus thought he was simply being punched. Graff returned the knife just as
quickly as he had unsheathed it and pulled Oronus even closer; there was literally a hair’s breadth be-
tween his mouth and Oronus’ ear. “Oh, my...all roads do lead to Me, Oronus. Or perhaps I should say
all roads will lead to me when the time comes. Do you know who I am, child? I am God. All I need is the
Chest of Worlds. Stand in My way and you shall perish. Stand aside and I’ll only kill those closest to
you. Choose, child. The Divine Hour is approaching when I will be enthroned with the crown of provi-
ence, the robe of salvation, yea, the sword of Judgment; it falls on you, child.” Graff released Oronus and disappeared into a crowd of guests waiting to board their ships, greeting them and smiling his sickening smile of deception. Oronus began to walk toward the bridgeway. He was angry and, more importantly, he was afraid; afraid of what he had just heard, afraid of the statement that had confirmed who all the events that led to this moment were orchestrated by. The Chest of Worlds had to leave, and soon. He reached the ramp of the bridgeway and felt a hand on his shoulder. He grabbed it, twisting the arm it was connected to and forcing its owner to her knees.

“Anna!” Oronus shouted as he lifted her up off the ground. “I’m so sorry, Sweetheart! I thought you were…well, I thought you were someone else.” Anna rubbed her wrist and shook her arm around, looking at her father with a strange impression.

“Are you okay, Daddy?” she reached her arms through his cape and hugged his waist. “You seem really tense.” He smiled and hugged her back, kissing her on the forehead. “I’m fine, Sweetheart. I’m just ready for this to be over.”

“Me, too, Daddy.” Anna squeezed Oronus. He winced and pulled away from her—as she squeezed him the place where he thought Graff had punched him stung intensely. “What’s wrong, Daddy?”

“Nothing, Honey, I just hit my side earlier. I’ll be o--"

His eyes widened as he looked down at Anna’s right sleeve; the black and white ceremonial dress she was wearing was now a deep red where she had hugged him. He immediately put his hand where the knife had entered and felt a wet spot. He brought his hand up to his face and his fingertips were the same dark red as Anna’s sleeve.

“Daddy! What happened to you?!”

“Me, now.” Estelle nodded with concern as a family from her province approached and greeted her.

~

Oronus was now feeling pain every time he breathed, every time he took a step. He reached the platform for Re-Creation and dropped to one knee, taking quick, painful gasps. “Graff, you bastard…”

~

He woke up. It was dark, and he was lying in a bed next to Osiris in the glass room. He closed his eyes and felt his side; it had been dressed and he felt the gauze and tape. It still stung and was sensitive to touch, and now the element of itch entered the equation due to the tape tugging at his skin. He wanted nothing more than to rip it off and scratch the concealed area. He pulled his hand away in frustration and closed his eyes. The cool air from the ventilation system generated for him one of those “comfort sounds” that developed through a childhood spent in the place. He looked over at his father, slumbering contently with the slow trickle of water running down his throat. Across from Osiris, Dorothea was napping in a chair against the glass wall. He rose from the bed and stretched—more pain at his side. He had no idea what time it was. He grabbed his cape from a chair across the room and put it on, then headed for the door.

“I see you’ve been introduced to Graff’s little blade.”

Oronus turned to look at his father. It was dark, and Osiris looked odd in the dim room, smiling with that tube coming out of his mouth. “How did you know that?” Osiris waved him over to the side of the bed. He leaned over as Osiris lifted his shirt to expose several small scars on his sides and on his chest. “The Raujj was not the only method that the High Priest used to torture me, son. Listen to me: with our combined testimonies we could create a case against Graff to the Council.” Oronus shook his
head.

“No, Dad, we can’t. It’s too late for that. At this point, you couldn’t testify that you are a human and have the Council believe you. If I told someone that the High Priest of the Basilica of the Four stabbed me in stomach with a hidden knife at a funeral, I would be in the same position you are.”

“And what position is that?” Osiris was angered by this dialogue.

“Dad, you drove off the hangar in a hovering craft. Then, you disappeared for eight years. Everyone that knows about it is convinced that you were completely mad before you died. Obviously, you didn’t die—”

“And I’m not mad, either. Don’t try and insinuate it.”

Oronus stepped back and lowered his head, showing his palms to Osiris as if to say, ‘alright, you win.’ He had no idea how their conversation had turned so sour. “I am sorry. That was not my intent.” He walked back around and sat down on the edge of his own bed. “The Council is already unified on many issues dealing with O.R.T., Dad. They’re about to break ground on the new craft production facility in Restivar, start the investigation into the cause of the explosion and question me on the whereabouts of the Chest of Worlds. I think the best thing is to give the Council whatever they want in regards to the investigation, which won’t be difficult considering it’s headed by Gwen. This will allow us to lay low for quite awhile. As far as the Chest is concerned, though, the minute that they try to even hint at forcing it into Graff’s hands, I’m sending it away. I fear that it will soon be too dangerous to keep the Chest here. Though, I guess there really is no safe place for it now.”

“Yes there is.” Osiris smirked as he looked at Oronus’ confused expression. “Think of the where, son; the who; the why. Remember the questions.” Oronus pursed his lips in a half-smile, raised his eyebrows and shrugged. The Chest was with him in the fifth province and Graff was at the Basilica in the seventh province, so that would be the where; Graff wanted the Chest, and at all costs, making him the who; and Graff wanted the Chest so that he could destroy the Way of the Four and make himself into the New God. The only place Oronus could think of to hide the Chest was the sea, but then they could no longer study it. Osiris rolled his eyes and then pointed a finger at his temple. “In the seventh province, of course! We’ll put the Chest of Worlds right under Graff’s nose, Son.”
Looking for A Bride
A Short Monologue by Natalie Fagan

I can't even believe what just happened to me. I'm in O'Hare airport on the way back from visiting my sister, and I stop into Chile's for lunch. I order my veggie burger and water, and I'm just minding my own business when this stranger next to me starts up a conversation. She seems pretty normal at first but then begins to tell me her life story.

I started to hear about how she's from Texas and that she loves living there. Her teaching job is great and so are her fifth grade students. She's going to be retiring from teaching in three years because she has a real estate business that's doing really well. Her life includes a wonderful husband and two sons. One is successful and happily married, and the other son is twenty eight and has lost his way in life. He isn't a bad kid but is just beginning to get himself back on track. It was taking him longer than it took her other son, and longer than the mother would like because he is still living at home.

Then she explains how she is always on the look out for potential girlfriends for him because, 'You just never know who you are going to meet and where you were going to meet them.' Even though this compulsion drove her son crazy, it didn't deter her from talking up unsuspecting girls. Before I knew it she has taken out her camera phone and is snapping away at me and then posing me. Then she starts describing him to me: he isn't thin, but he isn't fat either, he is just fleshy, like a teddy bear. In fact, that is his nickname, FLESHY. I have always been prepared to deal with men who may get a little too interested and comfortable than is appropriate. But it has never occurred to me to be on guard for mothers on the look out for a future daughter in law. That's a whole other beast in itself.

After she pix messages her son, she asks me to write down my name and e-mail so he can get in contact with me. Of course I write down a false e-mail address and try to get out of there as fast as I can. Before I leave, though, her parting words are, "I hope to see you soon, and in white!" What could I say to top that?

In Memoriam
by M. Rae Cooper

It was her last request, and Reverend Long remembered it well as she stood slowly, solemn and composed, as the last strains of "Seasons of Love" faded out. She stood now, just to the left of the casket as she prepared to address those gathered to commemorate a life cut all too short, her gaze slowly wandering over those gathered before her—grieving parents, stunned friends—and her own heart ached at the loss of so young a woman.

As they all took a moment for reflection, she quietly stepped out of her official robes, left in the flowing dancer's costume. It seemed that only moments ago she had bustled into the kitchen that fateful Wednesday morning to see Tasha Sargent deftly chopping the onions. Wednesdays at the Wesley were an OCU tradition, offering free lunch and good fellowship to all who wished to come. Tasha was a regular, often there early, just as she had been not even a week ago, to help cook the meal.

"Taste this," Reverend Long had requested, offering a spatula with a single bite of seasoned chicken while others drained the beans and mixed the pans of corn bread. Tasha had taken it willing, biting in and giving an experimental chew before spitting the morsel into the trashcan.

"Not ready?"

"No," Tasha replied, nose wrinkling as she searched for something to remove the taste. "It's raw in the middle. Watch me get salmonella or something."
But it hadn't been salmonella. Unbeknownst to everyone, a sickness of a different sort had taken hold. It seemed no one had known quite when Tasha had taken sick—when the first of the horrendous cramps had taken over, when that first roll of nausea swelled... Until it was too late.

It was her free-spirited roommate, Molly, who found her first—sickness already creeping in, leaving Tasha curled on her bed. Molly bounced down to the mattress with enough force to make Tasha moan miserably. The exuberant roommate apologized cheerfully, offering a homeopathic mix of herbs from her last Reiki session, declaring all that Tasha needed was a good cleansing.

Tasha had, of course, adamantly denied this course of treatment. "It's okay... really. I'll be fine."

But she hadn't been fine.

Oh, no. Not hardly.

Amidst the light hearted conversations and jokes as they prepared the meal, laughing about food poisoning, no one had actually thought the meat would be her downfall. When everything finally was cooked, the chicken soup had proved an instant hit, bowl after bowl of the deliciously seasoned meat and broth downed along with the usual collection of salad and pop. No one had thought twice about the meat, losing themselves in a particularly spirited round of Jungle Pong not long after.

How quickly time passed, because now it was a scant six and a half days later, and now they gathered here. Reverend Long didn’t know many details past Molly insisting upon a cleansing—though if she’d been asked, she might have recommended a cleanse, too. Really, there wasn’t anything to know at this point. Except that E. Coli had happened, and Tasha had denied anything was wrong, up to the last, and all that was left to do was to honor the final wishes of a young woman, not even quite twenty years old.

Pushing aside the age-old question, “Why must the good die young,” Reverend Long now lifted her arms, silky sleeves flowing like an extension of her slender wrists, signaling those assembled to rise with her. She took a deep breath, letting it out slowly as she composed herself.

Graceful hands arched like a ballerina above her head, and embracing gesture, as she spoke at last, “Following our services today, there will be a reception downstairs with a round of Jungle Pong played in memoriam. And now, as was Tasha’s final request, please join me as we commemorate the way she passed as we all begin… The Chicken Dance.”

*Special thanks to Tasha for letting me write this story (and for being our taste tester and not meeting an untimely end).

Whiskey Lullaby
by Larisa Chancey

She put him out
like the burnin' end of a midnight cigarette
She broke his heart
he spent his whole life tryin' to forget
We watched him drink his pain away
a little at a time
But he never could get drunk enough
to get her off his mind
Until the night*

Everything was normal.
Or so Braxton thought.
He opened the door to his apartment that he and his girlfriend Krissy had shared for almost a full year. He tossed his bag on the kitchen table and went in search of his love. It had been a little less than a month since he had been home. Being a producer meant Braxton got to make money doing what he loved to do, yet also meant not as much time to work on his relationship.

"Krissy, I'm home!" he yelled in his best Ricky impersonation, laughing at himself as he moved around the wooden floors. He couldn't wait to be in Krissy's arms again. It had been way too long. He had made sure to sleep the entire plane ride so he would be able to stay up all night staring at her, even after she fell asleep.

He walked back in to their bedroom and turned on the lamp beside the bed. He caught sight of the petite girl outside on their balcony, smoking a cigarette. He hated that she smoked. Braxton always tried to get her to quit and Krissy would humor him and at least wait until he wasn't around.

Braxton walked over and slowly slid the glass door open, letting the humid LA air hit his face. Krissy hadn't even turned around as he closed the glass behind him. She jumped as he wrapped his arms tightly around her waist and kissed her shoulder.

"I missed you."

Krissy didn't say anything. She didn't even turn her face to look at him. Instead she just took another drag on her cigarette and blew it up in to the open sky.

"I love you." Braxton tried again, unsure of his love's actions and sudden cold shoulder.

Once again he was met with silence.

He let go of her waist and stood back, leaning his weight against the brick wall and watched as Krissy finished and flicked the burnt object over the metal bar. She turned to rest her back against the ledge and looked at him for the first time since he had been home.

He knew then something was wrong. Krissy lived through her eyes. You knew when she was happy, you knew when she was lying, you knew when she needed to talk, you just knew when something was wrong—all by looking into her eyes.

It was a little past midnight, so the sky above them was pitch black, yet the lights of the busy city allowed them to see each other perfectly. They stood that way, eyes locked, mouths silenced, until Braxton couldn't take any more.

"Tell me."

Krissy just sighed and reached in her pocket for another cigarette.

"Stop Kris," he said, stepping closer and pulling the lighter away from her hand. "Just tell me." He was close, very close. She could see he was concerned, and it hurt her. Really it did. But there was no going back. The damage had already been done.

"Braxton I'm sorry," she said looking down to fumble with the hem of her ragged hoodie.

He grabbed her chin with his finger and forcefully pulled it up to look at him. "Look at me, Kriss, I want you to look into my eyes and say whatever the hell you want to say." Braxton's voice was now coming in shaky yells.

"I'm done with you." she simply stated, still looking him in his eyes, just like he had wanted. Her voice was soft and unsure, but she had said it nonetheless.

He blinked. His face threatened to show the pain that had consumed his body on the inside. She looked away.

"KRIS!" he yelled, again pulling her face up to his. "Tell me why? I didn't do anything, Kriss. Why are you doing this to me?" Tears were now openly streaming down his face.

"I cheated on you," she said, her voice calm, her eyes frantic. When he didn't respond, she pushed his fingers from her chin. "Did you not hear me? I said I cheated on you!" She yelled, her face growing hot.

Braxton just stared. His heartbeat was drowning out any thoughts that came to his head. It was as if he were under water and the more he tried to swim to the top, the farther he was pulled down. Krissy was his life. He would die without her.

"Kris, we can work this out. Please just—"
"Are you kidding me? Braxton I cheated on you! I gave myself to another guy in our bed!" She yelled, regretting it as she saw his eyes close in pain. "I'll leave. I'll get my stuff tomorrow."

And with that she walked over, grabbed her lighter from his left hand, and walked inside and out of sight. Braxton stood there for a minute, looking down at the busy streets below him. Watching cars drive by, people walking the neon lit strip.

Everything started to become blurry from his tears as he curled up into a little ball in the corner of the balcony. Sweat was present on his forehead as well as on his tear-stained cheeks. He didn't bother going after Krissy. He knew when she was serious.

She was now very serious. She had seriously yelled at him, she had seriously cheated on him. She had seriously just left him.

He sat outside feeling sorry for himself until a thought crossed his mind. He willed his muscles to lift him off the ground as he stumbled into the apartment, his head spinning from his tears.

He moved into the kitchen and searched through the cabinet until he came across what he wanted.

A full bottle, never opened, of Everclear.

He clutched the new item in his hand and walked back out on the balcony and took the top off. He sat down, his legs slipping through the bars, letting them hang off over the side, and drank.

He drank till the bottle was gone, and everything started to go away.

He put the bottle to his head
and pulled the trigger.
And finally drank away
her memory.
Life is short
but this time it was bigger
than the strength he had
to get up off his knees.

It had been exactly one month since Krissy left Braxton. Even though he had came and got all of her things from the apartment the following day while he was passed out on the bed, he still sold the place and bought a smaller one. Too many memories lived in those walls.

Things weren't getting better. Things were getting much, much worse. He quit his job, anything to do with music reminded him too much of her. He lost touch with most of his friends; they were Krissy's friends too. He rarely went outside for fear of seeing her. The only time people even saw Braxton was when he was at a bar.

A bar. His home away from home.

He had spent countless nights sitting alone, drinking away his pain until he was told enough was enough. Then he would proceed to stagger home and drink more. His money only went to liquor nowadays.

The drinking didn't make things better. It didn't make Krissy come back to him. He knew that. But when the alcohol was flowing through his veins, it made the pain ease for that hour, for that night, sometimes for that day. He would sit in the chair next to his window, with pictures of him and Krissy spread all over his lap, and drink.

The pictures were now torn on the edges from his clenching them so tightly against his chest and had wet ringlets on some from his tears.

He was miserable. Krissy had been his entire world. They had spent almost six years together and she just threw it away. She didn't even give reason, which made it worse as he had to fill in the empty spots in his mind as the questions came.

Braxton didn't talk anymore. He hadn't talked to anyone but himself since that night on the balcony. Krissy was the last person to hear his voice. At first his friends tried; they tried to get him to talk,
to open up, and to do something. Then as the weeks went on, the trying ended as he managed to push each and every one of them out of his life.

He hadn't seen Krissy. She was in his dreams, her smiling face haunting him, yet never in person.

That was until he ran out of liquor and was headed to stock up. It was around 8:45 at night and the sky was starting to darken as the sun began its slumber. He was dressed in baggy gray sweats with an over-sized, black, zip-up hoodie, the hood pulled loosely over his head.

He had paid for his items and was headed back home as he was knocked backward by a shoulder.

"I'm sorry about that," he heard the voice say, his heart stopping. He knew that voice. He slowly looked up.

Krissy looked good. She didn't look like she was in pain as Braxton did. While he hadn't shaved and his hair stayed flattened on his head, she looked freshly groomed with a smile.

They stared at each other, locked in an intense gaze similar to the one they had shared on the balcony. Neither one said a word; the sound of them breathing was all that was heard. The moment was lost as Krissy cleared her throat.

"Hey Brax, how are you?"

Braxton's eyes pleaded with her before his mouth could even open.

"Kriss." He breathed out before leaning forward and wrapping his arms tightly around her waist, holding on for dear life. Her arms pulled at his fingers trying to get out of his grasp. "Please."

"Brax don't do this," she said back, her voice empty of any emotion.

He was now sobbing as he tried to hold on to the girl as long as he could. He needed her to live. She was his source for happiness and the little contact he had at the moment gave him energy. Her shirt smelt of stale cigarette smoke. Braxton loved it.

"Braxton stop!" Krissy yelled, finally unlatching the broken boy's arms from her body, pushing him back slightly. He looked in to her eyes and saw nothing. "I've got to go."

And with that she walked off quickly.

Spectators watched quietly and their hearts went out to the broken boy who stood there, staring at a brick wall. His shoulders shook with his sobs and after 20 minutes he turned and headed home.

He didn't stop at his kitchen to put up the three bottles of whiskey he had bought. Instead he held the bag tightly in his hands and walked straight to his room. He turned on the lamp beside his bed, grabbed the familiar box of pictures, took off his shoes and socks, and sat down in the middle of his bed, his legs crossed underneath him.

Out of routine his fingers unscrewed the bottle, and his lips sought out the familiar liquid. He pulled out a picture at a time from the box and ran his trembling fingers over Krissy's face in each one. He didn't even realize his tears had started up again.

The more he drank the more the pain came. So he drank more.

He drank the first bottle as he stared down at Krissy's smiling face.

He drank the second bottle as he traced the outline of her body wrapped around his own.

He drank the third and everything became blurry.

Braxton wanted to die. He knew what he was doing when he kept drinking. He knew what he was doing when he found a piece of paper and began to write as best as he could. He knew what he was doing when he lay his head down on his pillow and everything went black.

We found him with his face down in the pillow
with a note that said
I'd love her till I die.
And when we buried him
beneath the willow
the angels sang a whiskey lullaby
The next morning his old friend Allison came to see him. She had talked to Krissy the night before who had expressed her concern for her ex, so she thought she'd check on him, knowing good and well he wouldn't talk to her.

She knocked on his door a couple times before letting herself in. The sunlight shined in the room as she opened the window and walked down the hall toward his room.

"Brax!! Wake up sunshine!" she sang as she walked over toward his bed.

Her smile was ripped from her face as she saw all the empty bottles lying next to his sleeping form.

"Brax baby, Braxton, wake up," she begged, frantically seating herself by his side and shaking his body.

He didn't move. He wasn't breathing. He was dead.

On the floor sat a piece of paper with some scribbles on it.

You were my life. I loved you with everything I had and always will. I would have died for you.”

I ALWAYS BRUISED EASILY...

Ever since I was born, my skin has been like paper. My veins shine through like rivers outlined on a map, with a clarity all too obvious. This unfortunate condition has left me the brunt of many jokes and much punishment all my life. Peers not only did not want to play with me for fear I would get hurt, but also they would actively hurt me for fear that I would get hurt.

Something about the bruise that formed seconds after I had been so much as thumped gave my classmates a sense of power. I assume, and I think I assume rightly, that the idea of exercising such little power to cause such lasting signs of a struggle gave them a feeling of superiority over a person. They felt that this person was below them because he apparently could not defend himself, which was true. My mother instilled in me an inherent weakness.

Coming from a staunch Christian home, my mother had always sided with Jesus and his idea of, “turning the other cheek.” Whether I concurred with her philosophy or not, I was not adamant to disobey my mother, tempted as I was. As a result, my early life was a non-stop cycle of bruising. My mother could not understand how children could be so cruel, but she thought they would get bored with me before long, and she was right for the most part.

But then there was Mary.

Mary was blonde and beautiful and gentle and well-liked with the entire class, only I saw who she really was. She was worse than everyone else, effectively pummeling me every day. Most would simply thump me and leave a small bruise. That was enough for them, but not for Mary. She started out just like everyone else, but as time passed, a small bruise was no longer enough for her. She found that the harder she hit me, the larger the bruise. So day after day, she would punch me in the arm or back or leg with all her might, breaking as many blood vessels as she could.
Most people would assume that she liked me in that
childish manner where assault is the only way of expressing their
affection, and I would not blame most people for that assumption.
Even I thought that, and at first I swooned at the thought that such
a pretty girl prefers to hit me more than others. But I realized one
day that this was not the truth. I saw the truth in her face when she
hit me one day. Her hellish contortion made her face appear bent,
her eyes were on fire beneath her blonde halo, her teeth grinding
together, her fists shaking. When she hit me, she poured every
ounce of malice and hatred in her into her punches. She hit me like
she would hit a thief trying to steal something she treasured, or a
rapist trying to steal her essence, but I had done nothing to deserve
it. My only sin was that bruised easily. The power she extracted
from seeing my skin turn from paper white to coal black was what
she sought, not a laugh, not a fleeting moment of superiority. She
honestly thought that if she could just hit me hard enough, she
would leave a bruise that would last forever. That was her goal.

We were in the fourth grade when I decided that Jesus was
wrong.

There was a day when we were only ten years old that she
decided to take aim at my face. I had merely accepted the fact that
she was never going to stop hitting me by this time and had
resigned to my fate, but no one had ever tried to hit me in the face.
I did not even have time to brace myself before her fist sent me
crashing to the sidewalk. I was seriously taken aback and had lost
all track of everything, but as I tried to pick myself up, I saw the
splatter on the cement. A flower spray of blood peppered the
sidewalk where my face had struck. I stared at the pattern: spirals
and sprays, pieces of paper-thin skin, the red against the gray. That
is when I realized that turning the other cheek was the path to
destruction. Those better than you will more easily destroy you if
you are willing to let them and not put up any fight at all. Such was
my reason as I stood and turned to face...
She stood, staring at the gaping hole in my face, fists still clenched, teeth still gritted, her blonde halo framing her perfect face. With the tension in her smooth white skin, she very much resembled a porcelain doll. I knotted my fists and sent one hard at her jaw, and she fell to the ground. This was the first time I had ever hit somebody, but the shot was well placed and blood filled her mouth. I stared at the slow rise and fall of her chest as she lay there breathing and soon felt very soothed by her humility, but then she began to stir again. She turned to her side and spit her blood on the sidewalk, and I watched as a tooth fell into the small pool. She was very weak, but when she saw the tooth, she looked at me with burning hatred. Seeing her just as she was, I leaped on top of her and began punching away at her face, aiming my blows as straight down as I could. I wanted her face to collapse in on itself, but before that happened, a woman watching from inside her house came out and grabbed my arms. Flailing wildly, I struggled to get away, but my ten year old strength was no match for her. While she did not subdue me completely, she was able to restrain me and call the police.

I was returned to my mother that night, and the situation was explained to her. It was left to her to punish me since I had no inclination to violence normally. She cried for a long time and whipped me, leaving bruises the size of apples on the backs of my thighs, but the crux of the punishment was to go to the hospital and personally apologize to Mary for what I had done. After I had calmed down a good deal, I could see this was definitely in order. I had done wrong, and the best way to right it, as much as I possibly could and that, was to apologize. I truly felt bad for what I had done and so was eager to tell Mary so. Mom drove me to the hospital where she said she wanted me to go in and apologize by myself.

When I found Mary's room, I walked in. Mary was sleeping peacefully amid several beeping machines and a myriad of tubes. Seeing her like this was indeed saddening, but that was not what
interested my attention the most. Looking around the room, I saw a cornucopia of flowers and cards from classmates. I walked to the table they were sitting on and read through a few of them.

"Mary, Get better soon so we can play!"
"Mary, I'm sorry you got beat up."
"Mary, Get well soon, we love you!"

I read them and started to cry. She was loved! She was something to all these people to whom I was nothing! She was an angel to everyone but me! I flung myself on top of her sleeping body and pulled at all the tubes that spiraled around her, ripping out every needle I could. The needles flickered wildly around me, some burying themselves in my own soft skin, a few finding homes in my face, but I didn't care. I kept ripping them out in a blind fury.

She woke up with a choking gasp. The beep machines started beeping much faster, and I started punching again. I pounded her face with my fists until the beeping stopped, and then I kept going. I did not stop punching until somebody came into the room and pulled me off, but by that time her face had broken inward and was just a black pool of blood. I was freckled with spots of her blood. Bruises spotted her body everywhere. There was a needle. They dragged me away and put me in a room by myself that night.

I missed her funeral, but I am certain that if I were there amid the mourning children, I would have ripped open her coffin and torn her body apart.
Literature always anticipates life.
-Oscar Wilde
“It’s OK. You’ll wake up one morning, and flap to the bathroom!” Robyn said after teaching us to do a tap step that we couldn’t quite get the hang of just yet. This was my first year of tap, first year of dance actually. A couple of days later I woke up and found myself flapping to the bathroom!

Robyn would always start off the class by asking us how our week was, since we only saw her once a week, and then she would tell us about her week. She would usually have a story about her first year at university (one I can remember was when she went to an exam in her PJs), about her boyfriend (her high school sweetheart), about her new haircut (once a hairdresser cut her hair to shoulder length, when she still wanted 3 inches of her blonde hair to be past her shoulders), or about something dance related.

Robyn definitely knows how to create a family with the students she teaches. She was respectful to each of us and didn’t choose favorites, which helped in creating a pleasant environment to dance in. We were all close in her jazz competition class; all the parents had each other’s phone numbers; we would have pizza and treats on various holidays throughout the year; we even had our own cheer, “Bam squaaaaaad!”

The first year I was in dance, I was in three classes: tap, jazz, and hip-hop. Tap and jazz were both taught by Robyn, while hip-hop was taught by a male hip-hop teacher. The tap and jazz classes were both very fun, but in the hip-hop class I just felt out of place. This may have to do with the fact that a lot of the dancers in there were already good at hip-hop, but I believe it had more to do with the teacher. He was energetic, yes, but he never really made sure that you got the step, like Robyn did. He was there to showcase his choreography skills, and not to teach us to dance. Robyn would go around and individually make sure that we understood what we were doing (something that bigheaded and/or lazy teachers don’t do).

In my fourth year of dancing, there was a dance routine that the teachers, seniors, and alumni did. The dance was really good. It was to “Trust a Try” by Janet Jackson (the song had just recently been released). I don’t remember if we asked Robyn, or if it was she who asked us, but either way, she taught the dance to us. I felt so honored to learn an alumni dance! Since then, I’ve been learning a lot of dances that I’m not in. The following year for the alumni dance, they performed it at the Polish Pavilion, and since one of the men couldn’t be there, I got to do it! This has helped me in countless other examples, even as simple as being the guy to rely on when people disagree on dance steps. You never know when someone will need you to step in for someone else – at the same pavilion I had to step in for someone and play the co-lead in one of the dances – something I wouldn’t have been able to do if I hadn’t been learning the dance beforehand.

Robyn was always choreographing, and she was always choreographing good routines too. Every single combination that I did with her was fun, challenging, and new. She rarely relied on other teachers’ choreography to get her through a class; her entire 5’ 2” body was filled with originality. Simply put, we wanted to dance with her. I hated missing dance because of any reason. I missed a concert once so I could go to her class. I remember her telling me that she had never missed a class because she had too much homework, or because she was feeling a little ill. Unless she was bedridden, she was in class giving it her all.

In my sixth year of dance, we did a Vegas-style dance to Moulin Rouge, and at one point I opened, my arms out to the audience and smiled. At the last competition, we were competing with Robyn’s studio. She watched our “Moulin Vegas” routine, and when it came to that part in the dance, I looked right at her and gave her a big smile. She smiled back, and in a card that she later gave me at our year-end recital, she said “Thank you for smiling at me.”
Fifteen years ago I was very ill. I had developed terrible intestinal problems; severe, debilitating migraine headaches; and a pinched nerve in my back. I could barely walk. The headaches increasingly became so bad that I could not make it to work anymore. Migraine headaches affect a person’s eyes and ability to think, as well as causing nausea. My vision was impaired so badly that I could hardly see. Sometimes my head would shake violently, like I was having an epileptic seizure or a convulsion. All the systems of my body were negatively affected. These headaches lasted at least two weeks at a time. Then I would feel a little better for a while, and might be able to work for a week or two, and then another headache would hit me. This went on for about a year.

Feeling like some kind of neurotic invalid, I began to go to doctors. The neurologists diagnosed my migraine headaches, which they said could be caused by anything, maybe some kind of allergy. The neurologists then treated me with blood pressure medicine, even though my blood pressure was below normal. My blood pressure dropped so low that I could barely raise my head. I stopped taking the medication and began to look for another doctor. The doctors I consulted had no idea what caused the headaches but gave me really strong narcotic prescriptions for the pain and never really tried to find the cause. They just treated the symptoms.

At this point, I began to feel like a drug-addicted zombie and dropped into a deep depression. I was plagued with severe stress over mounting bills and how to pay them. I was paying the bills with high interest credit cards and paying one credit card with another one. I became suicidal. I did a lot of praying and asked God to take me out of this world that involved only fear, stress, and pain. I wondered if God was listening to me. I asked God to either take me or help me find a way to heal. I began to realize that the doctors did not know what to do, except give me drugs to cover up the pain.

I began to explore alternative healing methods. Then God answered my prayers: a couple of angels came into my life. I call them my angels, my earth angels. Tova Olkinetska and Frances Carri-gan, who own a company called Stress Release Technology, began to help me heal. These women have amazing healing methods. They explained how negative psychological and emotional stresses are manifested in physical disease. They taught me how to release subconscious behavior patterns through muscle movement.

I followed these healing methods using positive affirmations, a particular body movement called cross-tracking, stress releasing methods using light therapy, and eye mode exercises to exercise the brain, the brain stem, and the eyes. We also used deep breathing and an arm testing method for a therapy called diffusion. After the migraine headaches were subdued, I slowly released the intestinal issues, through exercises, positive affirmations, colonic therapy, and learning much healthier eating habits. I now eat mostly vegetarian and buy only organic foods that are free from preservatives and pesticides. I healed my body without drugs or doctors, but with understanding, love, and a higher power.

In 1997 I found a surgeon who ordered an MRI, which revealed a herniated disk pinching a nerve in my back. He performed a laser surgery on my back to release the pathological disc that was pinching the nerve that ran down my right leg, causing pain and numbness in my leg, foot, and toes. This surgery was an out-patient surgery, requiring only a local anesthesia. I walked up the stairs after the surgery and began to walk without too much pain the next day. The energy began to flow back into my right leg, foot, and toes. The doctor had no rehabilitation plan, so I began to research options for getting my body back in shape.

Hatha yoga is another discipline I used to heal my body. The benefits include stress release, pain relief, improved circulation and flexibility, spinal health and alignment, increased strength, and deep breathing techniques to oxygenate the body and calm the mind. Yoga works internally as well as externally stimulating organs, massaging the intestines, and balancing the energy of the body.

Hatha yoga refers to the poses or positions of yoga. These positions help keep the spine healthy. A healthy spine should be very flexible, like a piece of rubber. The more flexible the spine, the less
likely to be injured. Yoga poses helped to release all the muscles of my body and bring my spine back into alignment while balancing the energy of the body. I am certified to teach this discipline.

In 1999, I began a spiritual practice of Raja yoga, or yoga of the mind. I learned meditation under the careful guidance of my preceptors, or teachers, Jethro Pettit and Olivia Heminway along with the blessing of my Master Teacher, affectionately called Chari. This meditation practice is called Sahaj Marg, a type of Raja yoga, meaning simple or natural path. This method is simple and direct, and with regular practice the heart and mind become purified, leading to a state of balance.

To practice, we create an uncluttered space, sit in a comfortable position, close our eyes and invite a divine light into our heart. The point is not to concentrate or focus or blank our minds, but to release negative thoughts and receive positive energy. We learn to ignore and release the thoughts that arise. In our busy world, we are always doing something—our mind is usually busy. In meditation we learn the art of being instead of doing. The teachers give us private meditations, and we also participate in group meditations. The teacher is invaluable in this practice.

It is not always easy to explain meditation. It is like trying to teach someone to swim on dry land. Meditation, like swimming, should be experienced to be fully understood.

Practice leads us to find the ability to live fully in the present moment. Meditation is a regenerative process that helps to relieve stress, raise energy levels along with coping capabilities and overall health. Meditation is a holistic phenomenon that can have a profound effect on all aspects of life. After practicing meditation for some time, I knew that my purpose on this earth was to help others heal their bodies and stay healthy. This practice brings with it a deep sense of awareness and knowing and a comprehension that cannot be explained in concrete terms.

I am totally healthy now with no complaints. I have not been to a medical doctor since my laser surgery in 1997. I attribute this health to the ancient disciplines of hatha and raja yoga, and a healthy diet. In August of 2003 my Master Teacher came from India. He trained, prepared, and certified me to teach raja yoga. This work gives me a deep sense of purpose and ability to help others connect spiritually. It is a high honor and a blessing.

Now I teach 12 to 15 group hatha yoga classes and several private classes a week specializing in stress relief. I have a very strong passion and commitment to all the disciplines I teach. My goal is to help others find health, well being, inner peace and a deep spiritual connection. My work is my purpose for being as well as my spiritual purpose.

Shannon, six and three quarters—Shannon Crider
Walking Like An Egyptian
by Amanda Brunt

When I left for Egypt last August, I expected to learn a bit about Middle Eastern and Islamic culture, pick up a few Arabic phrases, and generally experience life in a third world country.

I lived in the Middle East for a semester. I participated in a program based in Cairo along with 30 other American college students, and took classes on the culture, history, politics, religion, and language of the region.

Armed with suitcases packed with long-sleeved shirts and ankle-length skirts, friends’ hearsay advice concerning the Middle East, and my Lonely Planet Egyptian Arabic phrasebook, I embarked on the journey of a lifetime—discovering a new culture, exploring a new continent, learning a new language…or something of the sort.

Somewhere, in the midst of the bags, the strange culture, and the hot climate, I found myself. It was like I had journeyed thousands of miles just to find out who I was. Like someone had held up a mirror to me. Immersed in a Muslim culture, I learned more about my own Christianity than I could’ve imagined. In learning a new language, I found out more about my own mother tongue. I found out how I responded in horribly stressful and foreign situations, found out that some days I thrived on challenges and other days I hid myself in my fifth-floor flat.

My textbooks refer to this region as the Cradle of Civilization. In its present state, the country famous for its centuries of advancements is a bit sad. Cairo is a huge, sprawling city: originally planned to hold 2 million people, it houses ten times that. The smog is horrid: residents get used to a smoky haze that covers the city, and I suffered from a two-month long “smoker’s cough” due solely to the pollution. A health official might deem it uncivilized, simply because of the missing crosswalks, broken-up sidewalks, and garbage-filled streets. That’s right, in a city of 20 million, there is not one single crosswalk. One of the first lessons I learned after arriving in Cairo was what my peers and I like to call, “walking like an Egyptian.” This has nothing to do with the hieroglyphic-type poses and head bobbing one might associate with a Cleopatra music video, but a more serious and possibly life-threatening activity: crossing the street.
Considering that most main streets in Cairo are marked as eight-lanes wide, and Egyptian drivers create up to twice that many lanes, crossing the street is quite hazardous, especially for naïve Americans unaware of Egyptian street-crossing etiquette. We eventually learned the basics to crossing the streets but found the fool-proof way of getting across without waiting half an hour just for a clear road: find a near-by Egyptian also waiting to cross and follow his lead. Miraculously, the street seemed to open up before the locals, like the Red Sea before Moses’ staff; if they made it half-way across and then were met with unending traffic, they simply stood in the middle of a lane, waiting for another break in traffic. Egyptian drivers, used to this strange phenomenon, simply swerved around the pedestrian and continued on their way. There is no “right of way” in Cairo: everyone simply proceeds without stopping; the process seems to go quite well, considering. Note, however, that most automobiles had dented bumpers, missing side mirrors, and an all-around banged-up appearance.

Some weekends, we journeyed outside the megacity to other famous places: Alexandria, Luxor/Aswan, Mt. Sinai. When our program director mentioned a trip up Mt. Sinai, I was so excited! Stories of Moses started coming to mind; it all seemed surreal in a way.

But going up Mt. Sinai isn’t as easy as it sounds. As tradition dictates, everyone climbs Mt. Sinai in the dark, hopefully reaching the top before daybreak and then welcoming the sun rise over the mountaintops. Newly arrived from our 10-hour bus trip, we arrived at the base of the mountain at 2 a.m., with instructions to make it to the top before 5:30. My right arm was in a sling, as I had injured my shoulder being a bit too adventurous at the Pyramids the week before. (Note that underfed and poorly-treated horses don’t obey their riders very well.) Thankfully, Mt. Sinai has a well-worn footpath snaking up the mountain, so most of the trip is just a hike, but hundreds of large stone stairs near the top dictate a quite rigorous half-hour climb. Waving off the Bedouins offering us a camel ride to the top for sixty-five Egyptian pounds (a mere twelve dollars) because the prices were “too high,” we started up the mountain.

Three hours, two water bottles, and six flashlight batteries later, I made it to the top. I don’t think I have ever been so proud of myself in my life! I’m the kid that stayed far, far away from sports, even in elementary school, so a three-hour hike with an arm in a sling and on only one hour of sleep was quite a feat for me. Sitting on a huge rock with several of my flatmates, I took photo after photo of the gorgeous sunrise and realized an astounding thing: Moses was one heck of a 100-year-old.

Okay, so, basically, I went to Egypt and learned about a lot of really old stuff—saw the old pyramids, rode an old horse that threw me, laboriously climbed a mountain a famous old man conquered long before the Dark Ages. Somehow, in the midst of this, I emerged changed—and when I came back home, I left a lot of the old things behind me—old habits, old opinions, old prejudices. Living in a totally different world showed me just exactly how I reacted in a culture clash, but also just how similar human beings are worldwide and throughout the ages. It’s incredible what a mere four months can do.

On our journey home, we encountered every problem possible: our first flight out of Cairo (one of four for the day) left four hours late, throwing everyone’s travel schedules off. Combined with missed connections and ice storms in Oklahoma City, I ended up making it home a long 80 hours and five cities later. Even after my arrival at home, re-adjustment to life in the wealthy and consumer-driven States has been slow and complicated at times. The journey home and the subsequent adaptation to American culture has been a bit like crossing the street, Egyptian style; it seems impossible to make it across all those lines of traffic with no guide or light, but slowly and surely I put one step in front of the other, sometimes hesitating as another
obstacle passes, sometimes sprinting to the median. But all the complicated and unconventional processes are worth it, to finally feel at home, in comfort and safety.

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**I Bought A Red Balloon**  
by Jennifer White

I bought a red balloon…just like she asked. Of all the things in the world that I could have given her, all she wanted was a red balloon. I guess it is not so much the red balloon that matters, but what is attached to the string of the red balloon. A letter. Yes indeed, a letter. I sat at my writing desk, unable to process what had been asked of me. Her last words played in my mind like a broken record. I knew what I had to do, and how could I let her down? I said a small prayer asking for guidance. I sighed deeply and began to write: “Dear Grandma the Great:  
I am sorry it took me so long to do this. I know what you asked of me, but I didn’t understand why. Of all the things that I could have done for you and all you wanted was this. I miss you. We all miss you. Life is not the same without you. It would be selfish of me to wish you back, but I miss your stories. I miss your hugs. I miss everything about you.

“I am sorry I wasn’t there for you. I am sorry I didn’t come to say good-bye. I regret it and will be mad at myself for the rest of my life. When you left, I lost all my memories of you. It was almost like I was protecting myself. Little by little the memories started to come back. You are forever written on my heart. I will never forget you again. I love you, Grandma dear. Good-bye. With all my love, your great granddaughter, Jennifer Lynn.”

I rolled the letter up and tied it to the string of the red balloon. I took the balloon outside. "If you ever need me, send a letter to Heaven to me on a red balloon." Her words played in my mind once more. I released the red balloon and watched it drift far up into the beautiful blue sky until I could no longer see it. I smiled and returned inside, knowing she got it.

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**Excerpt from Chapter 2 of Memoir**  
by Ted Stoller

The door at the end of the red hall creaked as it slammed shut, jealously taking the light with it. No one ever explained to me why the lockers in each hallway had been color-coded. Perhaps not coded, as that would have implied a purpose, but colored nonetheless. The blue hall was at least a little ironic considering it was the color of the school’s rival, the Lions. Each time there was a pep rally for whichever sport was being played versus the Lions, the players and cheerleaders gathered in “the pit”—the intersection of all the halls, oddly lowered in the middle by two steps as if the school were prone to flooding—and everyone was supposed to despise the colors blue and white. Opposite the blue hall was the yellow: bright, obnoxious, gag-inducing yellow. My theory was that, being a public school, all the administrators could afford was the paint no one else wanted. The red hall, however, was the newest and therefore required school spirit. This was evident not only by the red paint, but the cheerleading coach’s classroom was also there. She was my Algebra teacher, and, while I didn’t learn anything about isosceles triangles, I did learn that all guys inherently know the best angles to try to look up a
skirt as she often stood on a chair to perform various tasks.

As I passed by her empty classroom, I turned the corner and caught a glimpse of the cute girl that would often be leaving with her friend just as I started my daily rounds. I had timed it just right; my day wasn’t a complete loss. I don’t think it ever occurred to me to attempt a conversation with her, seeing her for a split second was good enough. She was one of the people who dressed as I did but didn’t look at me just the same.

When she was out of sight, along with everyone else, I swung my backpack around just enough so I could pull out the cheeseburger I stole from the cafeteria. The quality was always a surprise: sometimes the foil-lined paper had condensed enough water to cause the bun to disintegrate in my hand; other times it was poorly wrapped or leftover from the day before and had become crunchy from sitting under the heat lamps; sometimes it was a combination of the two. But, no matter what, the cheese could stay melted for days, and the grey, meat-like patty was usually warmed most of the way through. As I ate, I kept up my guard in case I needed to shove the burger into my coat pocket. I sometimes stopped and listened for someone’s footsteps, judging the echo to decide whether they were approaching or trailing off. If I heard nothing, I eyed the nearest row of lockers for the ones with broken pencils or a wad of paper jammed in the locking mechanism. Only the coolest people did it because they were too busy to remember the combination and make it to class on time. Book, book, gym shorts, folders, next. Sweater, book, tampons, next. Notes, mirror, purse, time to go. I finished zipping up my backpack as I exited the doors on the side of the building. Twenty-nine dollars and a box of tampons later, I headed through the parking lot to the blue hall doors.

Beginning my final lap, I happened to see the cute girl returning from lunch. We passed again, and I turned toward the red hall once more. Halfway through, I heard footsteps quickening behind me and nervously glanced over my shoulder.

“Hey!” a boy shouted. I quickened my pace. “Hey, dude with the green backpack.” The voice didn’t sound threatening, so I slowed, then stopped, and turned around. “Hey, I’m Josh. What’s your name?”

“Um, Ted.”
“Ken?”
“Ted.”
“Ked?”
“T-E-D,” I spelled.
“Oh, cool, sorry. Hey, you know that girl you passed back there? She wanted me to come talk to you. Do you want to come sit with us before class?”

“Yes, yeah, I guess. Sure.”

“Good,” he said and started walking. I followed him to where the cute girl was sitting against a locker. She smiled out of the corner of her mouth as she saw us approaching. “Hey, Miranda, look who I brought.”

“Hi,” I murmured.

“This is Ted.”

“Hi, I’m Miranda,” she said, looking up at me. Her black hair covered half her face, but I could see the side with her hair tucked behind her ear. She was sitting cross-legged but her jeans were pushed up a little on one leg, revealing black polka dot socks and a worn out Converse sneaker. “I’ve seen you walking around a lot, I was just too scared to say anything. I wanted to talk to you.”

“Yeah, I’ve seen you around,” I said.
I decided to sit down beside her, a couple feet away. We talked for a few minutes about nothing, trying to awkwardly navigate a conversation neither of us ever expected to have. Josh did his best to help us along. We seemed to be getting used to each other’s voice when the bell rang and startled us. We looked around at the half-filled halls, then at each other with the same slightly confused look.

“Well,” she said, “I guess we need to get to class.”

“Yeah, I guess so,” I said as I stood up. Miranda and Josh followed.

“We’ll see you around, though. I’m glad we got to talk. Can you come to lunch with us tomorrow?”

“Yeah, sure. That’d be cool.”

“Meet us here at my locker at 12:00.”

“Okay,” I said. After a brief silence I didn’t know what else to say, so I glanced to each side, then back at Miranda. She smiled and tried to make eye contact, so I stared at the three earrings I could see since her hair was behind her ear again.

“Well, I guess I’ll see you then.”

“Yeah, see you tomorrow,” I said, waiting for them to start walking away. They didn’t. Miranda laughed. “I’d hug you, but you don’t look like the type of person that would like that.”

It took a minute for what she said to register. I tried to think of a response, but neither my mouth nor my brain could come up with anything. After what felt like ten minutes I managed to talk again. “Why wouldn’t I? I mean, you can if you want to.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, sure.” Despite the prologue, the hug went without incident.

“Thanks,” she smiled after we separated, “see you tomorrow.” Finally, we all headed to our classes.
Acknowledgements

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Dr. Elaine Smokewood for her courage and extraordinary commitment to her students;

And a special thanks to all who submitted to the *Scarab*. Thank you for your bravery and willingness to share your work with our community.
Biographies

Tracey Daniel Beverly was born in South Florida. She is a Fort Myers, Florida, US Air Force Academy Graduate, former officer in the US Air Force, and is married with two daughters. She would conquer the world but is a procrastinating perfectionist. Clarence Danmarc Ceniza is an international student taking OCU’s Liberal Studies degree in Singapore. He enjoys traveling, photography and writing. After graduation, he intends to do only two things: get an advertising-related job, or apply for a grad studies scholarship in Europe. Please pray that he gets the latter. William Frederick Steuernagel V is a sophomore Acting major who doesn't't like to claim his hometown of Wagoner, OK. As the self-proclaimed inspirational leader of the world, William enjoys writing poems to inspire, entertain, and change the way the world thinks. This one's for you, Magellan. Larisa Chancy is finishing up her freshman year as an English major. Although living on campus, her actual home is only 20 minutes away in south Oklahoma City. Larisa lives with her mother, step father, and a collective group of animals. After finishing at OCU she plans on moving to LA with her current roommate Alissa Ford to spend her days writing on the beach while Alissa brings in the money with her acting career. Andrew Knife Chief is a senior history major and has no business writing poetry, but he does. When he graduates from OCU, he plans on a career in anthropology so that he can be poor the rest of his life and spend his free time digging in the dirt. Joe Collins is a senior Spanish major and a 19-year veteran of the US Army, and was the managing editor of The Southeastern at SOSU in Durant. He currently resides with his wife Elena, spending time between their home in Eufaula and Monterrey, Mexico. He will begin graduate studies next year in Spanish literature. Melissa Rae Cooper is an MLA graduate student originally from Broken Arrow, Oklahoma. When she is not working on various on-going writing projects, she enjoys reading, traveling, and her new-found hobby as a parabolist. After graduation, she plans to pursue a doctorate and find employment as a professor of literature and someday actually finish a novel. Shannon Crider is a BFA Studio Art senior. Her work has been shown throughout Oklahoma City, including Istvan Gallery where she is represented. Amanda Doerr is an Applied Behavioral Science graduate student, single mom of two teenagers, owned by three cats. Amanda likes playing with her Ebola plushie when she's not doing art, creative writing, school work or research for just the heck of it. She hopes to be an art therapist someday.
Leia Eubanks is a dance management major with a weakness for desserts, shoes, and southern gentlemen. She grew up on a farm in Milledgeville, Georgia, a town with a rich literary tradition. Upon graduation, she plans to relocate to New York City to begin a career in music theatre.

Natalie Fagan is a musical theater major from Midland, Michigan. In her spare time she enjoys traveling, knitting and riding horses. Natalie's ambition is to have a career in the performing arts. She would like to continue creative writing based on inspiration drawn from true life experiences.

Nicole Fancher is a Vocal Performance and English Composition junior. She currently resides in the dorms here at OCU and misses her cat, Suki, to pieces! Upon graduation she has no idea what she will be doing but guesses it will have something to do with singing. Thanks to her poetry class and Dr. Smokewood for their support and constructive criticism. :)

Sarah Forester is a Humanities major with a French minor. She will be graduating in the Spring of 2008. After graduation she plans to begin working in the editing department of a local publisher. She currently lives in NW OKC with cat, Patchouli.

Joseph Gregory is majoring in graphic Design and would like to own a magazine. Recently moving here from Michigan, he currently lives in Newalla. He enjoys doing digital art, photography, and creative writing. “Thank you for your interest in my work. I am honored that you chose my two poems, ‘A Garden Called Time,’ and ‘Angry Lines of Clay.’”

Dr. Mark Griffin is Associate Professor of Spanish at OCU. He received his doctorate from Tulane University (New Orleans) in 1996. He teaches Spanish language and literature courses, and his areas of research include modern Mexican literature, border studies, and Latin American folk music. He has co-authored one book, Living on the Borders, published by Brazos Press in 2004.

Dawn Grooms is not only a sophomore Photography major but is a fulltime employee in the OCU School of Law as well as a single mother of two daughters. After graduation she is planning to travel the world capturing her journeys with film and digital media.

Nathan (Nate) Hey is now a sophomore Entertainment Business major. He is currently headquartered in Edmond with his parents, two cats, and a puppy. He really enjoys the phrase "Your face" and dancing with wildlife.

Najah Hylton is a sophomore English major. Her life goal is to make people think and hopefully by so doing inspire them to action. She hopes to do this by writing award-winning articles, essays, poems, and books for various publications and companies throughout the next eighty years.

Gina Jennings is a graduate student acquiring an MLA in Writing. She spent most of her life as an Air Force brat and went on into the Air Force herself for nine years. She’s travelled worldwide and enjoys the arts and storytelling.
**Zahra Karimipour** is an Assistant Professor of Business Communication. When she hears from *Scarab* that her poem has been accepted for publication, she feels like a kid being offered a lollipop. Jumping for joy she gives the news to those who care to hear it. Her refuge is her Microsoft Word, where she can spend hours playing with words and ideas, saving what will finally become a poem for the *Scarab.*

**Kelly Kinser** is a junior Philosophy major and English minor. She is both an editor for the *Scarab* and an author of some poetry. She spends much of her “free” time working at the mall.

**Dr. Abigail Keegan,** member of the English Department, has published two books of poetry, *The Feast of the Assumptions* and *Oklahoma Journey,* and a critical book, *Byron’s Othered Self and Voice.* In 2007 her chapbook, *Depending on the Weather,* received an award from *Byline Magazine.* In 2008 she was selected as one of Oklahoma’s Woody Guthrie Poets.

**Austin Kirk** is a Junior Religion/Philosophy and Political Science double major. He will graduate in May 2009. He is an active member of Kappa Sigma Fraternity and the Student Government Association. He is from Guymon, Oklahoma. His parents are Carl and Christine Kirk.

**Bhargava R. Kotur** is earning a MBA here. Bhargava is from India and is a great lover of nature and a fan of Wordsworth. After graduating, Bhargava is to renounce the society and stay in a small hermitage, as depicted in “The lake isle of Innisfree.”

**Chandra Kroll** is a junior Biomedical Sciences major and Psychology minor who intends to attend medical school and embark in short/long term mission work depending on where life take's her. Currently, she is residing in OKC while in school, however when the opportunity allows she likes to escape the city’s whether that be making an adventure by trekking across town via bicycle or enjoying the fam’s farm in rural OK.

**Chris Large** is Canadian. He is currently pursuing a dance performance degree and loving every minute of it. His senior year is just around the corner, and then comes real life. Just before real life starts, he will be marrying the woman of his dreams, Lindsey Jouett.

**Anais Lee Yan Ling** is doing her mass communications undergraduate correspondence course in Singapore. Living in the little red dot near equator, she loves the sun and playing sports. Meeting people has always been part of her inspiration for her works. She loves to see her words touching people’s hearts and lives.

**Patrick Malone** is a junior writing major. Having changed from vocal performance freshman year, he is enjoying his new major immensely. Just don’t ask him what he wants to do when he graduates. He doesn’t know either.

**Trey Marzloff** is a sophomore nursing major. He likes watching Dr. Phil. Occasionally, he'll indulge in a pint of mint chocolate chip ice cream. After graduation, he plans on traveling the world working in different environments and cultures. He hopes to own a Freebirds franchise in the future.
**Dee Mathis** is pursuing a degree in Liberal Arts at OCU. She is a member of Alpha Sigma Lambda and Phi Kappa Phi. She has just been named *Who's Who Among Students in American Universities and Colleges*. She is an adjunct professor in the Kinesiology Department at OCU. She is the owner of Free Spirit Yoga Studio specializing in stress release, holistic healing and yoga therapy.

**Kristin May** is junior Literature major. She currently resides in Edmond with her dog, Jake, whom she loves very much. When she graduates from OCU, she is planning on denouncing society to live in a tree house, taking only her books of poetry and her dog.

**Jake McKenzie** is a film production major at OCU. He has been greatly influenced by Mike Kinsella, Max Bemis and Frank Zappa. In his spare time he enjoys meditation, writing screenplays and writing lyrics for his band The C Funk All-Stars.

**Jake Miller** is a junior creative writing major. A recent addition to the English department, he's usually running between departments trying to graduate on time. After graduation, he plans to retreat to a mountain cave in which he'll write his first million practice words. Hopefully he'll write something great thereafter.

**Heather Pederson** is a junior Dance Management Major. In her spare time, she enjoys writing poetry inspired by human emotion and everyday activities.

**Aubrey Perry** is a senior psychology/mass communications major from Oklahoma City. If he's not analyzing your every move based on Freudian principles, Aubrey is attempting to prove that white men can in fact jump and dance. After graduation, he hopes to shave his head and appear at L.A. nightclubs without underwear.

**Ali D. Prather** is a junior English Education major here at OCU. She spends most of her time working two jobs and performing in the Poteet Little Theatre, a community theatre in St. Luke’s church. Ali has had a few poems published prior to this and is very excited to once again share her work with others.

**Balaji Rajulam** is from India and is earning his MBA at OCU. He is graduating this summer. His poem "Deserts of My heart" is about his ladylove in India. Sadly, he has not seen her in the past year, which inspired him to write this poem.

**Laura Sabolich** is a psychology major with an emphasis in art therapy. Photography has become, For her, a canvas for expressing human emotion and for framing moments that would otherwise go unnoticed.

**Anthony Scabby** was born in Farmington, New Mexico. He is currently a Physics major. He is also a Native American and was born on March 10, 1986.

**Adam Shahan** quotes, "Neither a lofty degree of intelligence nor imagination nor both together go to the making of genius. Love, love, love, that is the soul of genius." ~ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

**Francisca Simon** is a Gemini, multi-lingual, adventurous, creative and, above all, a human being. The world is her home, love is her language and to do good to all, her religion. She is learning to teach and wants to teach to learn. She graduates this May.
Jacquelyn Sparks is a sophomore photography major. She is an Oklahoma native who will be leaving the mother country in August to study in Rosario, Argentina, for a semester. She hopes to one day make a living as a documentary photographer and continue to travel the world well into old age.

Nicholas Sowell was born and raised in Orange County, California, where he grew up and spent his days as a wee-tot surfing and writing. He will graduate this May 2008 with an English minor, planning to move to Hawaii to become a surf missionary. His ultimate goal is to become a successful surfer, writer, actor, model, and artist. Look out for a book or screenplay by him in the future...

Brandon Stauffer is a twenty-something junior physics/mathematics major and all that entails.

Ted Stoller is a senior English writing major. He will graduate in Fall 2008, after which he will immediately leave Oklahoma. Currently, he spends his time advocating the importance of reading great literature and, as a result, protesting the sale of Harry Potter books to adults. He also enjoys verisimilitude.

Ideen Tabatabai is a Biology (Pre-Medicine) senior whose plans for the rest of his life are as undetermined as the rest of this biography...

Ana Todorova is from Bulgaria. She is currently pursuing degrees in Environmental Studies and Spanish, with a minor in French. She plans on going to Spain to pursue her master’s in Botany.

Maggie Warren is co-editor-in-chief of this fine publication. She would like to thank OCU for a memorable four years. The English Department has especially been a place for personal growth, hard work, and role models. Maggie would also like to thank her guilty and frequent pleasure, Caramel Macchiatos, for giving her pep. Her hopes for the future include time travel to relive all her nerdy English major adventures.

Jennifer White is a junior acting major. She has been writing short stories and poems since she was in fifth grade. Jennifer would like to thank her late great-grandma Jessie for always believing in her and telling her to “never give up on writing!”

Tinasha Williams is a Theatre Performance senior from Oklahoma City who enjoys writing poetry, acting, singing, and storytelling. Some may know her as Miss Black Oklahoma City University and Miss Black Oklahoma, others may know her as someone heavily involved in Alpha Psi Omega, Filmmaker’s Guild and SAAS, and many know her as a goofy and joyful girl who draws her inspiration to write from life experiences and others’ life stories and struggles. "I find poetry to be the most creative way for one to share a piece of their inner soul while simultaneously inspiring others to find a piece of themselves in the art."

Blake Wolf was apprenticed at age 15 to a surgeon. From the ages of 19-21, he studied medicine and became a licensed pharmacist, but never practiced, and instead decided to become a poet. Wolf outlived his father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, and a sibling during his childhood. Wait, never mind—that was Keats.