

Wiregrass

2012 LITERARY AND ARTS JOURNAL



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East Georgia College, University System of Georgia, Swainsboro, Georgia 30401
www.ega.edu



Kimberly Page

Featuring the writing and artwork of East Georgia College's
students, staff & faculty

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Cover photo by Kimberly Page

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Faithful One

I hear the dog bellowing across the way,
Always guarding day to day.
No fear has he of what lies in the darkness
As he faithfully watches this humble fortress,
Waiting for what lurks behind the bush that he might see
that dog beyond the old willow tree;
But yonder waits his time to pass.
His head becomes like weighted glass,
Too heavy to look up and see the light
Of an angel dressed all in white,
And when he closes his eyes forevermore,
He'll walk with her through heaven's door,
And although he will be gone,
In our memories, he'll live on,
The friend we cherished for so long.

— *Julie Morgan*

Geometry and Rhythm

Geometry was my first love—shapes
and theorems, sharp edges and angles,
proof that God's universe is orderly:

the arc of a fifteen-foot jumper, the trailing
line of a sinking fastball, the aching curve
of well-filled Levi's in the hallway.

Then the guitar brought me rhythm:
three years later, Jack Sharp defined it:
"the ebb and flow of music through time."

Suddenly, the jump shot began with
the jump, the sinking fastball began in
the wind up, and those Levi's came alive.

— *Alan Brasher*

Extraterrestrial

In the first phase, he didn't see the moon.
Now he sees a circle in the sky:
No harvest there, no Halloween,
No moon in June, no face.

Every face he draws is a death mask:
Straight line for mouths,
Square blocks for bodies,
Mushroom houses.
His stacks of ancient magazines
Have all the faces blackened.

Every moon a new moon,
Every face a blank face,
Every house an empty house,
Because nobody's home.

— *Donna Hooley*

Marks the Spot

My little college typewriter
Back in 1973
Worked just fine, but that it had
A single missing key.

I'd leave a space
To write it in—
I still do to this day
When hurrying to get it down
While I still know what to say.

Thus I learned to write
Of making love
Instead of having se ;
In letters I called my dog 'King'
Although his name was Re .

A habit now to watch each word,
Aware of just what's in it;
I never need some extra time,
But I might just need a minute.

— *Donna Hooley*



Kimberly Page

God's Country

Driving home with the window down
Sends the evening air through the sleeve of a shirt.
Change the radio station
While switching gravel for dirt.
Evening sun shining through the trees,
As the back road continues to wind.
Glance back at the trail of dust
Like pain from the past, it lingers behind.

Reaching the place where worries aren't found,
Pull down by the pond and put it in park.
Drop the tailgate.
Sit for a spell as the world turns dark.
A chorus of frogs and crickets sing their song
Then the coyote lets out its cry.
Look up to see what city folks don't,
A vast and bright country sky.

Pondering all the aspects of life
And realizing how lucky I must be.
What others take for granted,
I am fortunate enough to see.
Out of darkness, Skipper walks up to me,
And I gladly scratch behind her ear.
How sweet it is to live in God's country
With all things I hold dear!

— *Richard Patrick*



Melissa Frank



Jennifer Wickstrom

A Bird in the Treetop

I walk along, listening to the sound of my feet hitting the freshly rained on ground, the slight squishes of water coming up around my shoes. As I walk past a tree, the sound of my steps is interrupted by the sound of a bird singing. I stop and look up, and sure enough, there sits a small, gray bird right in the top of the tree, singing loudly, scarcely stopping even to take a breath.

A question then comes to mind. What is that bird singing about? It must be something amazing for it to want to sing about it all day long with hardly a break at all.

Only when someone walks by and looks at me strangely do I realize that I've been standing there looking straight up into the top of the tree with mouth gaping. Even with people walking past, staring, I cannot help but watch that little bird. It's captivating how it sings, its voice changing slightly every now and then. It goes from a whistle to a warble then to a rattling noise. It goes through other noises I cannot even describe.

It is soon joined by another bird who joins into its song. The second bird flies away after a minute or so, but the first one continues singing.

In the middle of its song, it cocks its little head and looks down at me. If it is at all possible for a bird to smile, I know that this one did. The bird then takes to the sky, and I walk on, but in the distance I can still hear its sweet little voice chirping out its never ending song.

— Savannah Parker

Conflict and Resolve

There is a place to which I go,
Where cares are freed, and peace does show,
A place where I can contemplate,
All the secrets we long to know.

Thoughts such as destiny and fate,
Parts of life we appreciate.
All of these things swim deep inside,
While salty winds accelerate.

Pain in my heart I must confide,
As foam swirls from the rushing tide.
Love she received was true and grand,
But another caused our divide.

Throughout life, darkness will expand.
Pressing on is in high demand.
Leaving this place, I take command,
Burying my fear in the sand.

— *Richard Patrick*

My Airman

Oh that horrible day that I have long feared,
When over my cries duty did call,
For I know that he must leave,
Climb on that metal bird and fly away,
Put his life on the line for everyone.
His job I know is honorable,
But the fears never leave my mind,
So, I watch as the bird soars and steals
The only thing good I have in my life,
And if that bird returns
With one less precious soul,
I shall, in my grief, slip away,
For with my airman went my heart.

— *Kelsey McElwain*



Katt Thompson

Panegyric for Things That Do Not Cost \$19.95

During this brief pause for station identification,
Let us forswear the things that cost \$19.95.
A pox on the Chia Pet,
The magic hair turban,
The vegetable slicer that slices and dices.
Cast out the space-saving Wonder Hanger.
An anathema on the glue-on light for closet and hall.
A ban on Miracle Chamois,
On nose hair trimmers,
On clippers of myriad kind.
Nix the Flavor Saver wrappers, boxes and bags.
Veto the commemorative glow-in-the-dark Elvis apotheosis,
A bull against bull served up by hucksters, pitchmen, and shills.

But let us honor the gifts without price,
The gift of friendship, the gift of love,
The turning of the seasons,
The gift of a summer day,
The first emergence of spring.

Let us praise the bounty of harvest,
The first stirrings of a newborn babe,
The joy of discovery,
The lessons of failure,
The sweet taste of success.

Honor all and spend without limit.
A soul cannot be had for a double sawbuck.
Do not place that crisp Andrew Jackson in the till.
Glory in the things that cannot be purchased.
Sing to the richness of life.

— *Kenneth Homer*

Business Poetry 101

Young entrepreneurs enrolled in Business Poetry 101
Feign interest as the teacher scans a line,
Each upbeat or downbeat a bull or a bear.
But the teacher has found something fungible in the work.

Most will not profit from the class
And see it as a loss.
The principal work--
Something about wind rippling waves of grain,
About the long green
About the folding green
About the wind touching us all like some invisible hand,
Touches not a one.
The sheaves of wheat are green; their papers mostly red,
And all dream of laissez faire.

The poet speaks of moral hazard,
But how to enter a soul into the ledger,
And how will benefits accrue?

— *Kenneth Homer*



Jessica McVay

Come Closer

The black hole
At the center of everything
Is sullenly quiescent—
It's swallowed
What didn't spin away
To a safe social distance
From this indiscreet pariah.

The classic quiet loner:
Keeps to himself,
Bothers nobody—
Such a nice young
Celestial phenomenon—
Who would have credited
What ravenous appetites
Lurked in his black heart?

— *Donna Hooley*



Sarah Williams

[in] Disorder: A Found Poem

Constantly Risking Absurdity [...]
This is Just to Say:
When I Have Fears—I'm Nobody!
Who are you?
The Flea[?], The Raven[?], The Eagle [?]
Jabberwocky [?], Daddy [?]
The Secret Sits.

I wandered lonely as a cloud When I was One-and-Twenty.
Meeting at Night In a Station of the Metro,
Acquainted with the Night [and] Parting At Morning.
The Sick Rose Sailing to Byzantium, [to] The Lake Isle of Innisfree, [to]
A Supermarket in California [on] The Road Not Taken.
Persephone, Falling.

Yet Do I Marvel (When I Have Fears) —
Starry Night, Pied Beauty, Kubla Kahn, A Poison Tree.
Fern Hill, Fog, Volcanoes be in Sicily.

Much Madness is divinest Sense [thus]
This is Just to Say:
When I Have Fears—If We Must Die
(Apparently with no surprise)
[Those] Wild Nights, Those Winter Sundays [...]
Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night.
Delight in Disorder, Constantly Risking Absurdity.

— *Dana Nevil*

Ellis

There was a proud and puzzled student
Once.
Studied English.
Perplexed, at his average papers,
I replied, "Talk about Death".
But he had never seen a great man die.

— *Derek Dyal*

Fatherless Girl

I was sitting on the fuzzy brown carpet in the den of my mother's house, watching my half-sister and half-brother play with their father on the day after Christmas in 2000. They were laughing so hard my sister's dimples were sinking into her face. Their father was a hard working man with his own business, working with hands so big his fingers looked like Roger Wood sausages. He stood six-foot eight, weighed three hundred pounds, his neck thicker than a tire. I watched as he bounced my little brother around on his leg and play fought with my little sister who kept running up to him and wrestling his hand.

I must have looked depressed because he asked, "Sweetie, what is wrong?" I just looked up at him in a daze. At that moment, I thought to myself, "Why don't I have a father?"

My brother and sister always seemed to get more than me. Birthdays, Christmas, Easter, and even Valentine's Day, they had double the presents. It never bothered me until Christmas of 2000. The new Black Barbie came out, and she had an electric poodle that did cool tricks, but the poodle was sold separately. I remember my sister and I were excited Christmas morning when we opened up the new Black Barbie Doll. We knew Mother would not be able to buy both of us the Barbie and poodle. As we were playing with our gifts, there was a loud knock on the door. It was my stepfather. He had presents wrapped in colorful, striped wrapping paper, with big gold bows. His kids almost knocked him down. I sat back, watching as they snatched the presents. Wrapping paper flew everywhere. In my sister's hands was another Black Barbie and the electric poodle. I walked over to her and touched the poodle and asked if I could hold it, but she snatched it away from me.

"My daddy bought this for me," she said. "When you get a daddy, maybe he will buy you one."

My mother slapped her. Everyone was quiet for a second, and I remember looking up to my stepfather as my mother yelled at his daughter. He looked a little scared and confused. He lowered his dark brown eyes. "When you get a daddy," my sister had said. It kept playing back in my mind.

Weeks later, my mother and I were in the grocery store, in the cereal aisle, and I asked her, "Mama when am I going to have a daddy?" My question must have caught her off guard because she dropped the box of Fruit Loops on the floor. Instead of answering my question, she told me to pick out any cereal I wanted. The entire time we were shopping, she acted as if I had not asked my question. On our way home, she had this scrunched up look on her face, and when she finally spoke, she said, "You do have a father."

I was excited as my mother described him as a man with musical dreams. He was tall with smooth, dark skin that looked blue in the night. He had dreads that hung to the center of his back, a slanted smile, and long, pointed fingers that he used every night to play his saxophone. She told me how much in love she was with my father, but because of his deep love for music, the relationship did not work out.

She said, "Honey, that saxophone was his woman, family, and life. I just couldn't come between him and that saxophone, but lordy I tried." She told me how he could never turn down a gig; no matter where it was or what else was going on in his life--he was going. The day she found out she was pregnant with me, she wanted to have a romantic dinner and tell him. Instead, she got home from work to find most of his items gone and a pink, scented note on their bed.

Darling, I got the gig to play in Chicago! I had to leave today to make it on time for the first performance. Sorry for missing dinner, but I promise, baby-- I will make it up to you; Love, Honey!

She wiped a tear away and told me to get the groceries out the car. That night she called me into her room. On her bed was a light blue hat box. I sat on the bed next to her, and when she opened the box, I could smell cinnamon and old paper. First, she pulled out some old photos of my father playing his saxophone in bars, clubs, and concerts. He looked just like she had described him. I could tell he loved his saxophone; he looked as if he were in another world: eyebrows raised, eyes closed, and cheeks sucked in.

One picture stood out from the rest. In it, my mother was wearing a red sapphire-sparkled, sleeveless dress and red, shiny pumps to match. My father stood behind her, his hands wrapped around her waist, wearing a white tux, red silk shirt, white hat with a red feather, and some sapphire cufflinks. Those two had to have been the life of the party. They looked so good. The cuff links he wore were also in the box, but there was little sparkle left in them. One of the royal blue handkerchiefs he cleaned his saxophone with was there too. I picked it up and studied the stains. At the bottom of the box was the pink note he had left for her. We sat for a while in silence. Finally, I asked her, "Mom, where is my dad?"

My mother had wanted to wait until I was older to tell me about my father, and how on the day he had written that pink note about the gig in Chicago, he died in a car accident. She had wanted me to be older, but she saw that it helped me, made me feel like a tremendous weight had been lifted off my shoulders. Nothing was missing any more. I had a father with dark skin that looked blue in the night and long dreads down his back-- a saxophone player with a dream.

— Alisha Waller

The Critical Thinking Short Story Contest *was created to honor the creative use of written language, recognizing that creativity in all its many forms is an important part of critical thinking. "Guilt" by Daniel E. Holloway was awarded first prize for the creative use of foreshadowing and symbolism. "The Warrior" by April Kruppenbach earned second place for its use of concrete detail and description.*

Guilt — *Daniel E. Holloway*

A bitter cold wind blew down Mount Omdöme and beat the village at the base with its icy wings. In turn, the villagers had bundled up in thick fur coats in an attempt to ward off the frosty air. On a day when most folk would be at home warming up to a fire, they had gathered in the town square. Lord Geoffrey MacGregor stood atop the stone platform set in the middle of the gathering. He wore a coat much finer and thicker than those gathered beneath him; a few villagers joked that his coat was much wider than theirs too, but not to his face, never to his face. None of those jokers were smiling now. They were all quite solemn, for they knew why they had been called there.

Lord Geoffrey began to speak, but even as he did, the wind from the mountain picked up and nearly knocked him over. He gathered himself in the most dignified manner possible and tried again. "Dear citizens, I have called you here today to judge the crimes of Jacob Brass, who is accused of raping and murdering a young lady in the inn last night."

A young man in the crowd opened his mouth to speak but was quickly silenced by an older man standing next to him.

Lord Geoffrey continued, "Now, as is our tradition, we shall bring forth the accused to be judged."

At that time, a pair of heavy oak cellar doors opened behind the platform, and from the opening emerged Jacob Brass being guided by two of the town's guards. They brought him up the platform and pushed him roughly to his knees. His face was covered in a mixture of fresh and crusted blood where the many cuts on his face had been reopened as new ones were added. Clumps of his thick black hair were missing in bald and bloody patches. His shirt had been torn off, revealing a muscular body that was now covered in cuts and bruises like the red raw marks of a whip. He shivered in the cold and looked pleadingly at the crowd through swollen slits.

As the morning grew on, Fredrick Tahl, a well-known drunk, was called forth as the witness. "I saw it with my own eyes," he claimed. "If you saw it, why didn't you stop it?" Jacob said. Fredrick just scowled, and the guard standing next to Jacob shoved his head into the stone platform. Suddenly, a young woman came running into the square. Jessica MacGregor, Lord Geoffrey's daughter, had appeared wearing her nightgown.

"Father, stop this at once. What you are doing is wrong..." Lady Jessica did not have a chance to finish her sentence because she was grabbed by a guard. Jacob stood up. "Jess! Jess!

Let go of her you..." The guard, seeing to Jacob, hit him with the hilt of his sword, knocking him out.

Lord Geoffrey made no attempt to hide his frustration with the situation. "You have heard the witness, now make your decision! Is this man guilty or not?! Hold up your hands where they can be seen clearly if you believe him to be innocent." Not a soul dared to move. No one wanted to meet the same fate as Jacob. "Very well then. Jacob Brass, as the lord of this village, I name your punishment to be banishment to the Icelands." A very satisfied smile spread across Lord Geoffrey's face.

Jacob was placed in a wagon and driven out of town. The large Clydesdale horse pulled him through a tunnel in the mountain that came out in the Icelands. An expanse of untouched white for as far as the eye could see, the wasteland was a place of nothing. The guard kicked Jacob out the back of the wagon into the snow and left him there. Jacob shivered, and he knew. It would not take long for him to die, but he had many hours yet to go. Jacob looked down at the freshly fallen snow and watched as a drop of his blood fell and stained the pure white below.

The Warrior — *April Kruppenbach*

Smoke, fire, and ash surrounded me as I rose from the ground. Burns littered my face and hands; black soot covered my once placid, blue kimono. I couldn't breathe from the ash that stung my throat and burned my eyes. Everything was gone; everything around me was burning to the ground.

The day had started normal enough; or as normal as a village threatened by war could be. The battle between our side of the valley and those of the Kuro Ten had raged for years. Now the final attack had proven effective. The warning call of the old brass bell had rung through the evening air, spreading its cry to every ear. Warriors, both men and women, had spilled from their homes with weapons in hand. I had stared down at my sword, my father's sword that had seen its share of bloodshed and death. My father was gone, taken by the hand of one samurai in particular: the Kumori Akuma or Shadow Demon. No one ever learned his true name; he was a samurai who relished in the blood of his opponents and lived in darkness. He was the murderer of my father, and would taste the revenge on my blade.

Many liked to believe that a woman could not defend herself, that they were meant to cook and clean and live in the shadows of their husbands. Many of us had proven them wrong: I being the highest of respect in my dojo, a fighter trained by my father and known across Japan as a wild spirit. When my father had lost his life, I witnessed it, had seen the Kumori Akuma run him through. My cries had not gone unheard as the assassin turned his head to me, eyes hidden by locks of night itself. No words had been spoken; no move to attack me had been made. The Kumori Akuma had simply nodded to me and walked away in the middle of a battle, never seen by my village again. My mother could not take the pain, and no matter what the doctors tried, a powerful sickness had taken her away. I was left alone in the world, to live, to defend, to prepare for what was thrown to me.

There had been many this time, all trained warriors that shot arrows alight with fire and swung swords of tarnished steel. Enemies had fallen from my blade and others, all of us caught in a beautiful and deadly dance for survival and honor. Battle cries and dying screams had filled the air with the smoke of burning homes, but now everything was quiet except for the roar of fire. I had finally made it to my knees, every muscle screaming in agony. I did not cry out, did not let my voice join the roar of fire. Homes and buildings hardly stood; only their blackened skeletons loomed and groaned with no strength left to stand. There was death, death I dared not look around for. Not a soul stood or breathed, and they never would again, their faces twisted into frozen pain and fear. Bile rose into my throat, but I forced the burn back down, refusing to show weakness. No one would see it, but I was taught to never bend, never break down.

My thoughts were numb yet spun around, bouncing against my already pounding skull. What would happen now? I was the last of my village, a proven warrior that fought and more or less won. I had survived; I had been tested against the blades and hands that had wielded them. A small smile pulled at my cracked and bleeding lips, a bitter smile that held truth and venom. There was nothing for me here; I'd have to leave and start anew. Such a thought should have sounded wonderful; it should have given me a sense of strength to stand and continue on. But the only emotion I felt was sadness as tears fell from my blue grey eyes. So this was how it felt to break; this was how it felt to suddenly be so low and be so alone. It was an awful feeling, terrible and dangerous, but I couldn't stop it.

Reality has a funny way of pulling tricks on you, something I noticed time and time again. This time reality had pulled a very harsh trick, and it started with a single sound: footsteps. The sound of well-crafted sandals on crunching gravel made my heart skip a beat. Someone was alive; someone was on their feet and walking in my direction. Sheer relief and glee raced through my body as I looked up to try and locate the person. The steps were set with purpose and strength; they were not the steps of an injured or scared person. I narrowed my eyes through the smoke as the outline of a figure came into my view. I raised a shaky hand and almost called out to him but realized in an instant the truth. Reality crashed like the still burning buildings around me; the sound was deafening. Walking towards me was a man dressed in black, hair as dark as the night, with a specially built sword in his right hand, its sheath under his left. The Kumori Akuma.

I was not sure what emotion I felt first: anger, surprise, or fear, but I knew I was in danger. My own sword was nowhere to be seen. I was hurt, and I was alone. To add onto my grasp of defeat, I closed my eyes and bowed my head. It was a sign that I could do no more and would do no more. I listened to the crunch of gravel until the steps stopped before me, and then felt the cool touch of metal on my cheek. His sword was touching me; the sword that had slain so many slid from my cheek to under my chin and lifted. I looked up at him with every ounce of hatred I could muster from my exhausted frame; he merely smiled. "My, aren't we the little survivor." I swallowed the urge to hiss as he laughed. "Leave me. If I am to die here then let me die in peace." His smile faltered. "You're just going to kneel here and perish; is that it?" My eyes narrowed as they searched for his. "If it means not having to be in your presence, then I'll take death with open arms."

The silence was a bit odd between us after those words left me. He brought his sword away from me and placed it back in its sheath, then knelt before me. I looked questioningly at him. What was he doing? "You don't want to die here do you? You have so much ahead of you." I turned to look away, but gentle fingers brought my focus back. Dark bangs shifted with the wind, exposing the bluest eyes I had ever seen. They were beautiful and cold and held so much secret. "Come with me. Join me in my journey as a wanderer and see for yourself who you are and will be." For a moment I was mesmerized, but one thing broke his spell: "You killed my father; I don't want anything to do with you." The cold in his eyes melted like ice. "I knew your father, Miyako. Your father and mine were friends, warriors at one time. When my father was killed, yours looked after me in secret, even after everything that I had done." A look of sadness flooded his face. "It was his last request for me to do what I did. I refused, but honor to an old friend over ran my guilt."

To that, he stood, framed by the thick smoke and highlighted by the flames. "The least I can do is take care of his daughter." The young man placed a hand on the hilt of his sword and the other out to me. "Allow me to try and fix what has been wronged." I just stared at him; confused and angry. He knew me, my family both past and present. Why had my father asked this man to kill him? What had been so wrong with his life that he had wanted it to end? I knew asking would get me nothing right now, but perhaps in time I would learn. I sighed and stood, my knees shaking so hard it took every ounce of strength to not fall. I pushed his hand away and moved to stand in ahead of him. "If we're going, let's go. I don't want to be here anymore than I need to now." The young man said nothing, just started walking out of the village with me at his heels.

We passed the remains of what once were homes and the people that had once called it home. Though they were hard to see through the blanket of fog and smoke, the stars seemed to mock me. How dare they shine through the darkness; how dare they seem to feel no pain. My focus was so strong I nearly ran into the man leading me. He looked at me for a moment before pulling a necklace from his throat. The large charm hanging from it was a mark, a mark of a warrior. The charm was only given to the ones who had proven themselves above the rest; a rare mark since most soldiers were driven to dark intentions. The necklace was placed around my neck without a word, just a simple smile and nod. I looked from the charm to him in wonder, but let it go.

Our footsteps matched step for step as we finally made it to the entrance of the village and started away. I wanted to stop and look back one more time, but words halted me. "Do not look back. That is your past now; your future is in front of you. Leave the past now." As a warrior, I knew he was right, but as a young woman who had lost everything, I wanted to defy those words and look back. Instead, I stared at his back; a question I had wanted to know for years was burning my lips. "What is your name? I know what people call you, but what is your true name?" Without stopping, he looked over his shoulder.

"My name is Aku." Aku. It felt as though I held a powerful weapon in my hands by knowing the name of the Shadow Demon, something I would use to my advantage later on. With my head held high, I followed Aku away from my home, my past, and into an unknown future. One thing was for sure: things were going to be interesting from here on out.

Tornado

Soundless chill of voices blown,
Ghosts of lives and towns we've known,
Funnel dips the tortured sky,
Barking dogs go flying by,
Beaten ground of twisted path,
Victims breathe tornados wrath.

Go ahead....scream
I've seen the eyes in pictures of
The men who fly as hawk not dove
In tears that spill the chill of death,
So sick we scream! But save your breath.
The children smile and laugh out loud,
But soon blue sky bursts thundercloud.
They learn of ways to twist and turn.
Their little hearts catch fire and burn.
I hope someday to find a way.
Communicate the prayers we pray

— Erik Wruck

Life

Life is like a roller coaster:
Fast, Fast, Fast, like a spinning storm,
Slow, Slow, Slow like growing rose.
Turns left, Turns right.
Life is exciting
Like a wedding day.
The birth of a newborn
Life could be like a Tsunami:
In a divorce,
The death of a spouse,
Death of a child.
Life is a roller coaster,
Rolling fast through every mile
We all must ride.
It is calling our name;
Are you ready to ride?

— Julie Bird

Peace Of Mind

“Picture a cool breeze flowing through your hair, lifting you up, a breeze that pushes into your mind & soul. Looking into the eyes of one you can see. Yet what per say is seeing? Visual imagery that each of us perceives in existence, or rather a deeper form of sight?

I see you, and you see me, we are as happy as we should be. Motions aside, feelings quite numb, actions & voice seem very dumb. Sitting alone all through the night, looking for stars, yet none are in sight... Flutters of thoughts race through your mind, the dark quiet night closing a blind. The solitude's unrest but where must you go? To find you a love & embrace what they know. Violently pacing, your thoughts on the floor will be the unrest & the fear at the door. Shall it be opened or shall it stay closed? Once addressed, realized, and confronted, to deal with the fear of such love that's unwanted... Now will you stay or get up and go through the door? Coming to terms with your fears once more... Being alone can seem like such a great bother, yet alone you will find... Peace of mind.”

— Jessica McVay

Unraveling With Time

I tied my shoes twice over
in hopes it wouldn't fail.
The knot I made held strong a while,
but then it became frail.
The inner lining's wearing out,
unraveling with time.
Woven fibers turn to string,
and nothing's left to bind.

It interests me the way the sole
can bear to stand so much:
walked upon, then thrown away
and all without a crutch.
No one ever lends a hand
Or cares to know its pain.
Some are left upon the porch
To weather in the rain.

I, myself, am like the shoe:
Lost and all alone.
I feel its pain forever more,
For I don't have a home.
I tied my shoes twice over,
Then tightly walked along,
Remembering undue pressure placed
upon a sole is wrong.

— *Ethan Womack*

Oblivious

I feel lost with my heart threatened,
scared to open up my emotion.
Am I lost in a world with no friend to confide in,
no one beside my tomb, no one within to breathe?
My very soul looks and wonders out into the wilderness,
bound like Israel crept with pain.
Where is my Goliath? Is it so hard to defeat my giant?
Am I less of a man? Do I question humanity?
Do I believe in love and life?
Does peace and happiness exist?
Is God really my creator?
Is life really worth living?
Is the world becoming more and more violent each day?
I am lost in a world of agony ending in pain,
no positive outcome just death and no dreams
for the dark and the leery.
Am I amongst thieves, liars, deceitful sinners?
Can you really take a knife and slit the throat of another?
Can you really hate those who treat you horribly?
Can you be so ungrateful that you don't realize those who suffer more than you?
Can you really dwell in the depths of the dark and wicked?
Why am I so lost, so alone, afraid to be a man or a woman,
afraid to be more than what society labels me to be?
The sky is so dark I cannot see;
the clouds are so thick I lose my breath;
I fall when I try to stand up;
the heat is so hot my skin melts;
What is this place lost in my mind?
Where does this pain originate?
This dark and lonely world from within your imagination,
You begin to see.. You begin to feel beyond all possibility..
You begin to be or you just live just because:
Oblivious...

— *Alexander Rich*



Kimberly Page

The Tenth Annual Emily Pestana-Mason Memorial Poetry Contest

This is the tenth year of the poetry contest to honor the memory of Dr. Emily Pestana-Mason, poet and former English professor at East Georgia College. The judge for this year's competition is Professor Emma Bolden of the Department of Writing and Linguistics at Georgia Southern University. She is the author of three chapbooks of poetry: *How To Recognize A Lady*, *The Mariner's Wife*, and *The Sad Epistles*. In addition, her work has appeared in various literary journals, among them *Prairie Schooner*, *The Indiana Review*, *Feminist Studies*, and *The Greensboro Review*.

Prof. Bolden has chosen "**The Three Children**" by Derek Dyal as this year's FIRST PRIZE poem, noting that its "*inventive language allows readers into the terror of the scene and guides them towards a hopeful resolution.*"

For SECOND PLACE, the judge has named Aimee Bookhardt's "**Beyond Wonderland**" for its "*fierce and refreshing honesty.*"

In THIRD PLACE is "**Rain**" by Alexander Rich with its "*beautiful images*" and "*series of metaphors for the peace we all hope to find.*"

The Three Children

Three little children
With dirty faces
Lay in a bed.
The mattress was an adventure,
Expansive, comfortable, and closed.

Dashes of spearmint amounted in the atmosphere,
Lightened by the faint scent of old ink,
And the storm of white oxford cloth.
The Father was home,
Stalingrad.

The mother was finally beaten.
She and Him gave Big words to each other.
Her torn blouse tortured by glass,
Reflected the salted brow of her knuckled-eye.
We could all finally get some sleep.

We didn't want to be Big.
Then, twas I
Finally, Big.
Praised with Big love
And sunshine.

— *Derek Dyal*

Beyond Wonderland

Slip inside the workings of my brain,
Glide through the tunnels and feel the rush of blood
pushing you further along.
Don't look now, but there goes the white wall of
innocence crumbling around.
Hold tight, cling tight, don't get crushed.
Sink through, feel the burn of my throat,
Raw and scratched, pain only starting.
Fall into my lungs, filled with smoke, suffocating.
Hold your breath and stumble upon a quiet heart.
Gentle now, beating softly.
Caress the mangled pump and feel the liquid pour,
Sliding between your fingers, staining your arms.
Red as a poisoned apple, you're marked.
Lost inside a flurry of butterflies,
Sweep you up and take you down.
Suddenly the atmosphere changes and you're lost.
Attacked at every side, nowhere left to go.
Lights off, where are you.
Standing still,
Stop.
Whispers latch to your ears and your feet follow,
Hands tingling, you feel the warmth growing.
Hidden beneath broken pieces of life,
You find what you've been searching for.
Careful now, careful.
Pain wracks your body and you hit the ground.
Your eyes search for something, anything.
Blinded by a white light pure as heaven,
Pain leaving your body...
Rescued by the angel hidden within your dreams.

—Amieé Bookhardt

THIRD PLACE POEM

Rain

Love rain coming down on me like – Jill Scott
It always pours when it rains like the – Cliché
Storms ride your back like hives
Some say the devil beats his wife when it rains
I always thought it was God crying for a lost and
 sinful world
like my dad always says
I look through the sky for a sign
rain falls on my face
my favorite type of rain is when it's misty outside
fogging the inside of a glass
cool air cutting through a blistering heat
And in my childlike mind I want to go outside and
 play
rain rain go away come again some other day
no real worries just rain..
drip drop... rain... sshh... rain

—*Alexander Rich*

Contemporary Obscenity . . . but for a Good Cause

[SOCRATES and PHILLIP are walking down a street, looking ahead and smiling while getting into their discussion. Children and people are in the background.]

PHILLIP: So Socrates, what subjects are you going to attack in today's lecture?

SOCRATES: The individual, society, and religion. I want your opinions on all.

PHILLIP: Whoa now – be prepared, and be gentle.

SOCRATES: Let's begin. Society, and to a greater extent the entire world, is dependent on a widely held belief – for example, in most cases it is religion – and this serves as the mainframe for its existence; but this is also its Achilles Heel, as most are blind or ignorant to their belief's flaws, leading to hypocrisy or greater dangers.

PHILLIP: You start off with your usual blatant, ballsy honesty. I get it though, what you said earlier. By 'blind,' you meant society is prone to Culpable Ignorance.

SOCRATES: Precisely. Religion is simply a generalized collection of enticing opinions, opinions that a society agrees to uphold given the fact its people view a concept or problem likewise. I could argue that there are no individuals, since all within it are the same. Take this Christian society for example: it professes that its members should be benevolent, giving, accepting, and tolerant of others' mistakes.

PHILLIP: I can't stand that you oversimplify religious concepts, but basically what you're saying is that you believe that religion stems from beliefs, and society is founded on maintaining that religion. That's how things work in your mind, correct?

SOCRATES: Contemporarily speaking.

PHILLIP: And so you would argue that, nowadays, people are what their society believes?

SOCRATES: Indeed. Wouldn't you agree?

PHILLIP: No.

SOCRATES: Why not?

PHILLIP: Because you're wrong.

SOCRATES: Am I?

PHILLIP: Yes!

SOCRATES: How so?

PHILLIP: Well, here's my way of seeing things: belief systems and their problems are inevitable and necessary for society to function, but not everyone in a society is the same. I know that there are also anomalies, like you and me, who are oppositely opinionated.

SOCRATES: Ah, we are anomalies you say? Yet still you advocate religion's necessity in a society.

PHILLIP: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: Thank you for your opinion; now we shall put this theory of yours to the test?

[SOCRATES and PHILLIP come to the corner of a street with no crosswalk lights and stare at BEGGAR VARNs as he tries to help people push their buggies to their cars and hands out lunches to the homeless.]

SOCRATES: Observe the man over there, the one you see performing acts of altruism every day.

PHILLIP: You mean the saggy, half-bald one, always sweating his poor ass off and surrounded by gnats?

SOCRATES: Yes, that unfortunate fellow.

PHILLIP: Yeah, I know who you're talking about. That's Varns. Beggar Varns. The guy's always trying to help me with bags or offering to help push my buggy. Though I don't know why; I've seen people blatantly ignore, threaten, and beat him cause he creeps 'em out; he sometimes gets chased even!

SOCRATES: Which all suggest marvelous traits on society's and religion's behalf?

PHILLIP: Hey, I said be gentle. Careful not to start bashing my or anyone else's religion now; I don't want to hear it.

SOCRATES: And yet, despite any ill will paid his way, his giving spirit has been unyielding for the past eight years I've seen him doing his service.

[VARNs tries to help an old woman push her buggy to her car, but she refuses him.]

PHILLIP: Every day?

SOCRATES: Every day.

PHILLIP: Wow, he's been at it for that long? Pretty impressive track record, I don't know if I

could be that nice; he's tolerant.

[Three kids run up to VARNs from behind. One gets down on his hands and knees behind him, the other two pull his pants down around his ankles, then push him over.]

SOCRATES: Oh yes, a scornful pity indeed. He still submits himself for the beneficial use of others, every opportunity he has. But there is a reason.

PHILLIP: Which is?

SOCRATES: When he was a young man, he was crushed when diagnosed as HIV Positive. The woman who was his partner at the time decided she could not share such a burden, leaving Varns on his own. In a fit of rage and sexual degradation, he violated the young woman before assaulting her and her new partner.

PHILLIP: Heavy.

[SOCRATES glares at VARNs]

SOCRATES: When he was released from incarceration, he couldn't find employment, was removed from even his own family, and forced to leave town by those seeking natural justice. These past years, selfless servitude is the means by which he seeks to redeem himself.

[SOCRATES turns to PHILLIP.]

SOCRATES: Now we test your theory, dear Phillip. Firstly, does religion adequately apply to this scenario, given that the followers clearly act contrary to its virtues?

PHILLIP: Maybe.

SOCRATES: Elaborate.

[PHILLIP looks in VARNs' direction.]

PHILLIP: Varns is just trying to repent in his own way for what he has done, wanting people to forgive him by endearing and providing servitude. If he turned to a church, then he would be taken sincerely, and he might have a good chance at seriously turning his life around.

[SOCRATES stares at PHILLIP.]

SOCRATES: "Anomaly" you call yourself. Laughable – your solution is the same as the rest of society. I may not be as religious as you are, but you'd be hard-pressed to find someone as accepting as I. Forced reformation is not the key, as evidence has proved. Despite common appeals, religion is not an omnipotent cure-all, regardless of the deity's claim.

PHILLIP: Look! Just because it doesn't work in all cases doesn't mean that it won't work in this one; Varns could be saved.

SOCRATES: Indeed he could be, but it should be by mankind, not divine doctrine.

PHILLIP: Whatever, Soc.

SOCRATES: Your position on society's need for religion is unmoved, I presume?

PHILLIP: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: It's settled. Next, I once said "The unexamined life is not worth living," and so my question to you is this: how will these tragic elements affect Varn's life?

PHILLIP: If Varns is doing this for his peace of mind, then when the time comes for reflection, he'll find that his solitary lifestyle will slowly eat away at his being. In my mind's eye, he loves and acts in an epitome of modeling ways, though this thought will only comfort him for so long, as those who oppose him are the ones who are most in need of taking heed from his actions.

SOCRATES: Hmm . . .

PHILLIP: Your go, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Of the so-called good people in society, many still look down their noses at Varns. In my opinion, Varn's acts are much nobler in nature. Not in hopes to be taken as a sign of approval from the rest of society, but instead for his own peace of mind so that he may live with himself contentedly the rest of his existence.

[PHILLIP looks at SOCRATES.]

SOCRATES: My final inquiry is - to society and himself - what truth are Varn's actions offering? Is he right for taking a personal, albeit selfish approach to his situation?

PHILLIP: It's hard to say in this situation. You might just have to give me a rain check.

SOCRATES: There will be no other. To be a contender in this argument, you must earnestly and vehemently take up one side or risk concluding that the grounds for your beliefs are unstable via not defending your purpose.

PHILLIP: What do you want me to say then?

SOCRATES: Merely an honest answer to what I inquired. I want your opinion, Phillip, and nothing more.

[PHILLIP looks towards VARNIS, then to the people, then at the sky.]

PHILLIP: I think the truth is much harsher. By shining example, he vainly loves in the way that the rest of this religious society should love, the way that they profess but fail to, and the shameful part is that they won't know that such pure and utter devotion is real – and closer than they might think – because they've become too hypercritical, hypocritical, and shunned its source.

SOCRATES: Very well spoken, and do I detect trace amounts of depression and jaded tones in your views?

PHILLIP: I think you're rubbin' off on me, Soc.

SOCRATES: Contemporary obscenity . . . but for a good cause.

— *Abran Cruz*



Kimberly Page



Happy Feet Curtis Clemmons

Eyes on the Road

A careless curve that lies in wait
And misty eve help set the bait
By day the ride is nice enough:
Tall pines poke through the granite bluff,
But laughter plays as nighttime falls,
This stretch of road where Satan calls.
Far and below shines city light,
Though none up here 'Sept moonlit night.
Slowly crawls the upward climb,
But down around and brakes will grind,
And now! A screech winds out of control.
The gates of hell await the toll.
A family of five with baby up front
Are easy prey for the Prince's stunt.
Over the edge in screaming faces,
No bones to save for graveyard places.
Again the curve is scraped in black,
As is the devil's game intact

— Erik Wruck

A Little Warning

A little warning to those who are young,
Memories are like writings on the beach:
Fail to protect them, and in the morn,
They'll wash away,
For memories are the precious gems of the mind.
Those who protect and treasure them are truly rich
indeed.

— Matthew Hobbs

Why?

Why do I torture myself so?

Is it for the thrill?

The Rush?

Or dare I say,

For Love?

Is it to have you in my embrace,

to smell our sin?

I toss and turn at night, wake up shivering,
wishing

that you were there to warm me again.

I find my thoughts drifting to you,

Only to be greeted with stares when I

Chuckle at the memories we've made.

I find myself longing for the fantasy in which

You are mine and mine alone.

Do I want you because I know,

In the long run, that I can't have you?

OR

Do I want you because you're

Gone?

Or is it to watch you walk away, get into your car,

And leave me in emptiness?

Or even to watch you vanish into the crowd

And be consumed by the desire to give chase

And tackle you to the ground?

I once thought you were nothing, then

We met and our minds exploded

And we connected.

Why do I torture myself so?

Is it for the thrill?

The rush?

NO.

It's because when I am with you,

The pain doesn't hurt.

— *Matthew Hobbs*



Isolation Jennifer Wickstrom

Beautiful Wreckage

Surrounded by broken beams,
And shattered dreams
Of what might have been...

Haunted by memories of the past,
Things she thought would last,
Unable to escape the prison of time.

Imprisoned by what was once beautiful,
The pain is no longer immutable.
All that remains is beautiful wreckage.

— *Chelsea Flora*

Isolation

My older brother, Roy, was always trying to prove himself to my father, but my father never seemed to notice. He would always tell Roy the only thing he wanted from him was to take over the family business once he retired. Even though my father always said that, Roy was always trying to prove to him how much more he could do. I guess that's why he enlisted in the military: to prove he was much more than what a small town and a third generation, family-owned hardware store had to offer. My father never made it a secret that he wanted Roy to take over the family business once he got out of college. Maybe that's why he left first chance he got and why he continued to leave. He would deploy every time he got the chance, and would never stay long enough to make any long-term plans. If my father noticed, he never said a word. He'd just say that once Roy was finished serving his country he'd have enough discipline and backbone to run the shop. Little did we know that Roy wouldn't be coming home.

I'll never forget the day we got that awful visit. The two military officers in their uniforms, the calm and formal way they announced Roy's death. The way my mom cried, how my father was unwilling to believe that Roy was gone. Most of all, I'll never forget how I sat there in stunned silence as everything fell apart. In an instant my mother went from complete grief to uncontrollable rage. Her words were sharp and unyielding as she tore into my father with her hurtful yet undeniably truthful words.

"You're the reason he's dead, Shawn! This is your fault!" She yelled at my father. "If you hadn't been pushing the shop on him he'd still be here! Now my baby boy is gone and all we have left to show for it is that stupid shop!" My mother's grief had resurfaced and replaced her anger as she began to sob and left the room.

I glanced over at my father. He had never looked so broken. His face was streaked with tears and his arms were wrapped around himself. It was almost as if he was trying to comfort himself. I somehow managed to walk over to him on wobbly legs. I remember as I wrapped my arms around him, how he trembled and weakly said, "It's my fault Roy is gone. It's my fault. If I hadn't been so stupid he wouldn't have kept going back to fight overseas. It's all my fault!" I can't remember how long we stood there, just holding each other crying, and trying to find comfort in each other. I don't remember going to bed or falling asleep. What I do remember is my mom coming into my room and saying that my father was gone. Panic gripped me as I hurried to get out of bed. We both knew that if he wasn't in the house, the only other place he would be was the shop.

When we finally reached the shop, it was engulfed in flames. The heat from the fire was so strong I could feel it standing thirty yards away from the building. My mom was yelling for someone to call the fire department. I stood from a distance watching my father. He was standing in the parking lot looking at the flames, a bottle of whiskey in his hand, and a blank look on his face. I walked over to him and he looked down at me.

“Look, baby girl.” He said softly, pointing to the burning inferno in front of us. “Do you think Roy can see the flames from Heaven?” Tears filled my eyes, and I slowly nodded. He pulled me into his arms and we stood there listening to the crackling wood, roaring fire, busting glass, and the sound of a siren as it got closer. In the midst of all the chaos, I had lost track of time, and before I knew it, it was a new day.

My father and I spent the next few days trying to salvage what was left of the shop while my mother made arrangements for Roy’s funeral. My mother and father never spoke of what happened that night, but my parents have always had a way of understanding each other’s pain. Deep in my heart I know they still love each other and one day they’ll discuss what was left unsaid. Until then, we’ll continue to fill the void in our lives.

One cloudy day, while cleaning through the rubble of the shop, I stopped to take a break. The only remotely safe place to sit was the busted out window of the shop. I brushed the broken pieces of glass away from the windowsill and sat. I thought of Roy and all the memories we had together. I thought of the things I wouldn’t be able to do with him, and I began to cry. Then I felt something warm touch my face; it was the sun. Then I realized that even though Roy was gone, he wouldn’t be forgotten. If there was anything that I had learned from Roy, it was that no matter how much darkness overshadows our lives, there is a light that is always ready to break through.

— *Alma Rosa Castro*



Jennifer Wickstrom



Crystal Jarrell



On the Road Johnny Coleman



Shadows Johnny Coleman

Happy Birthday Rhymes

Beyond the red horizon's glow
Your birthday star is there I know,
And as it beams across the sky,
We'll smile and say, "I know that guy!"

'Tis been a year since in the stars
The angels said their *au revoirs*,
And thus became at heavens gate,
The pages in your book of fate.

The morning woke and rubbed its eye
To part the clouds and light the sky,
But still you sleep, and dream you do
Of birthday wishes all come true!

Across the deep and dark of space,
Where stars alight by heavens grace,
With palm to palm, I send a prayer
To birthday babies everywhere!

Beneath the rainbow's arc and glow,
Drip drops a wish for you, although
To make it yours, you'll need to know
A birthday rhyme from long ago!

— *Erik Wruck*

A Head is not a Hat Rack

A head is not a hat rack
A storage room for cast off bits
An empty filing cabinet
A bauble
An ornament
A knob
A lumpish orb
An imperfect globe
A pendulum that swings
And sways to passersby
A head is not ballast
To trim a listing ship
A perch for birds
A place to hang a body
A dusty curio in a dark closet
A counterweight
A paperweight
A cannonball
A bowling ball
A finial for the body that grows beneath
Or just a place to grow hair
Think!

— *Kenneth Homer*

Young and Destitute

We hear our mother's voice in front, short and sporadic.
She yells, but it's hard to hear over the roaring traffic.
Traveling unguided, her choices and emotions are both erratic.
Us four kids with a single mother and no home; life seems pathetic.

Walking in the day, the sun stings the back of my neck.
Behind me, my baby sister is a wailing wreck.
The second one is exhausted from our continuous trek.
My younger brother's hoarse from trying to catch his breath.

My shoulders are red with pain from the bags we're carrying.
Mom says, "Stop dragging them, or they'll keep on tearing."
It's everything we own, except the clothes and shoes we are wearing.
Under her breath, she keeps crying and swearing.

The ground is rough and still beneath my feet.
People point or stare as we make our way down the streets.
Wheezing, I want to stop and have a seat,
Take a break from all our walking and this heat.

Our mother pleads for anyone to give us a place to stay.
Going to bridges she knows she's burned, but she has to try anyway.
"Garages and shelters are all we can get," I hear my brother say.
Sleeping among strangers doesn't put my worries at bay.

The promise of another day should bring bliss, but instead
Another day just means more for us to dread,
Wondering whether or not we'll continue to be fed
Or ever have a stable home to lay our heads.

Such pride and gratitude will make me feel bold
While recounting for you to lo and behold
This dramatic story, if it is ever told,
For right now, I am only eight years old.

— *Abran Cruz*



Tina Hendrix

The Example

"Mickey! Your dumb ass little brother's got your BB gun again!"

"What? Again?"

David is yelling from his driveway. Mickey, pedaling his bicycle through David's side yard, taking the shortcut home, now loops around to the sidewalk, rides up to where David stands.

"Yeah," David laughs. "The great safari hunter is shooting at everything that moves—woodpeckers, toads, grasshoppers!"

Mickey stands astride his bike and straightens a plastic hand grip on his handlebars. Sweating, he pushes his glasses up on his nose. "He thinks he's gonna shoot a squirrel or a rabbit and then skin it and cook it for supper....This time, I think I'll tell Mom."

"Why don't you just beat his butt?" David punches the air with his fists. "You haven't beat his butt in a couple weeks, have you?"

"I ought to."

"Or—I've got it!" David laughs again. "Beat his butt and tell your Mom!"

"Yeah," says Mickey. "Where is he?"

"I saw him over in the Carters' back yard."

Joey stretches on the ground behind a tree with his elbows in the grass, his head raised up, his right eye looking through the sights on the barrel of the BB rifle. Two mourning doves are pecking in the dirt near a clump of wild flowers about forty feet away.

Sallie, standing behind him, asks, "Why do you want to shoot them?"

"Ssshhh! You'll scare 'em away."

"I think I will."

"You better not!" But then he turns to gaze at her, her long red hair, her feet about a foot apart, elbows out, fists on her hips.

"Oh, all right! This time," he says. He stands, facing her, puffing up his chest and squaring his shoulders, the gun in his right hand. "But you don't understand. I'm a hunter. I coulda had doves for supper."

They both turn towards Mickey as he rides up and jumps off his bike.
“Let’s go,” he says to Joey. “And gimme my gun.”

They start down the block, Mickey walking his bike and resting the gun across the seat and the handlebars. Halfway home Joey says, “You didn’t have to take the gun in front of Sallie.”

“And you weren’t supposed to take it and go shooting woodpeckers and grasshoppers!”

“I didn’t shoot any woodpeckers!”

“You tried to, didn’t you?”

“I did shoot one grasshopper, one of those gigantic tobacco-spitters!”

“You’re not supposed to be shooting my gun. You’ll get your own next year.”

“Well, you never use it.”

Mickey and Joey kick off their shoes in the garage and place them neatly beside the door to the kitchen.

Joey looks at his reflection in the glass panes on the door. He spits on his fingers and tries to smooth down the wild hairs of his cowlick. “If you tell Mom, I’ll tell her about those dirty words you wrote on the sidewalk.”

“She won’t believe you,” says Mickey. He brushes the dirt off his pants. “Besides, I’ll tell her about the last three times you snuck out with my gun and the time you slugged that little kid in the face at the troop meeting.”

Their mother opens the door and stands with the light of the kitchen behind her. She looks at Joey. “You’re filthy! Come on in and get washed up. I just started making supper.”

She backs up, and Joey hurries past her, then Mickey.

“Joey! Are you wearing your new scout shirt?”

He freezes. “Yes, ma’am.”

“Now you’ve got grass stains on the elbows. You know I was planning to sew those patches on your uniforms before the next meeting. Why’d you wear it when I told you not to?”

Joey looks at the floor. “I don’t know.”

Mickey smirks, "He was trying to look cool."

She studies Mickey, holding the BB gun. "Joey wasn't shooting your gun again, was he?"

Mickey pauses. "No, ma'am."

"Joey," she says, "take off that shirt and give it to me. I'll have to see if I can get those stains out. Now go upstairs and get ready for supper."

Both boys start out of the room.

"Mickey! Wait a minute."

He stops and turns. "Yes...?"

"You know I depend on you to set an example for your brother, especially when your father's out of town."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And since you're bigger and older, I count on you to look out for him and help him. But lying to protect him is not really helping him."

"Oh, I—"

"Just listen! As I was pulling into the driveway, I saw your friend David in the street, and I asked him if he'd seen you. He told me that Joey had your BB gun and you'd gone after him."

"He said that?"

"Yes, he told me he was worried that Joey might hurt himself. He's always so nice and polite. But what I'm trying to say is...I expect you to set a good example, and part of that is telling the truth—just like David sets a good example for you because he's older and more mature."

"Yes, ma'am."

Mickey's upstairs in his and Joey's bedroom. He looks out the window and sees something happening in the vacant lot behind their house. Joey, holding the BB gun, is standing there with Sallie, and David is walking towards them. Mickey runs outside.

As Mickey approaches, Joey keeps looking from him to Sallie to David to something on the ground at his feet. Sallie is glaring at him, her arms crossed on her chest. David stands a foot

taller than both of them. In the dirt is a cardinal, thrashing about and flapping one of its wings. The other hangs loosely at its side.

"I didn't think I'd actually hit it," says Joey, looking at his brother.

"Then why'd you shoot it?" asks Mickey.

"I don't know....Maybe it'll get better."

David grabs the gun. "It's not going to get better!" he scoffs.

"I could take care of it," says Joey.

"You little dumb ass!" says David. "It's a wild animal. A bird with a broken wing can't survive!" He pumps the gun. "The best thing to do now is put it out of its misery."

"But I could feed it—me and Mickey could feed it!"

David shoots the bird point-blank, and it jerks on the ground.

"I can't watch!" Sallie cries and stomps off.

"Gimme back that gun!" shouts Joey.

David pumps it and fires it three, four more times until the cardinal lies still. He hands the gun off to Mickey and says to Joey, "Eat that for supper!"

"Why'd you do that?" yells Joey.

"Because I had to. Somebody had to, but it's your fault. You killed it. Only difference is it woulda died slow. It woulda starved to death."

"Come on, Mickey," David says. "Let's go to my house and leave the great hunter with his trophy."

Mickey starts to follow, then stops.

"Well, come on....All right, then don't."

David walks off.

Mickey and Joey kneel in the dirt and, using sticks, they dig a hole, push the cardinal in, and cover it up. Then, standing, Mickey says, "Let's go home. Here. You carry the gun."

— *Mark Dallas*

Beauty

What is beauty?

Is it the joy and splendor of a morning sunrise

Or the radiant sky as the sun sets?

Is it the gentleness of flowing waterfall

Or the geysers bursting forth in Yellowstone?

Is it Mt. Everest

Or a country hillside?

Is it the vastness of the Grand Canyon

Or the simplicity of a river valley?

Is it the enormous Redwood tree in California

Or the strength and majesty of an old oak tree in Georgia?

Is it the rhythm of the rain

Or the quietness of a winter night?

Is it the roaring of the ocean waves

Or the peacefulness of a flowing river?

Is it the magnificence of the night stars

Or the glow of city lights from afar?

I say it is the joy and splendor of a morning sunrise.

When I see a sunrise, I know that God has awakened me to a new day.

I look upon its beauty and cannot help but think there has to be a creator.

I am in awe at every sunrise.

— *Sabrina Allen*

Is Peace Alive

To you, I ask, is peace alive?
With talks of change yet still the same.
We shall, as one, make peace thrive!

But foolish wars still fought to strive
For only power hungry fame.
To you, I ask, is peace alive?

All I ask is a gracious vibe
That may, in turn, end all the blame.
We shall, as one, make peace come thrive!

Angry mothers in torment gibe,
Insults begging to end this game.
To you, I ask, is peace alive?

It seems though hate is still alive
With all the crime that seems untamed.
We shall, as one, make peace come thrive!

But still there's people who connive,
And feel no sense of guilty shame!
To you, I ask, is peace alive?
We shall, as one, make peace thrive!

— *Shakina Clay*



Melissa Frank

When Duty's Done: A Soldier's Song

I'm sitting here, and I'm watching a setting sun,
Wondering how you're doing, how your day's begun.
I do it every day . . . 'cause you're so far away.
I can't forget the day I told you, "Good-bye!"
I can't forget the tears I saw in your eyes.
So as I'm waiting for the night to come,
I'll clean my gun.

I climbed aboard a plane going so far away.
Ever since I left you, baby, I ain't been the same.
Well, this war gets tougher every day,
So they call me away . . .
And the thought of you keeps me going on
While I clean my gun.

Every day I'm over here seems like a year.
Things are so much different
When I'm over here.
I wish that you could see
I'm so glad we live
In the land of the free!
And the night patrol has just begun
As I clean my gun.

So, baby, dream about me.
Don't you worry none.
Have faith in our love.
Know that you're the one.

And I'll come home when my duty's done
And put down my gun.
Yes, I'll be home when my duty's done
And put down my gun.

— *Johnny Coleman*

If I Could Describe My Life

If I could describe my life, I'd be Cinderella.
Can't go nowhere because I'm taking care of others.
I have to do for others before I do for myself.
When I do finish the work for others, my own is taken from me.
I see Prince Charming, only I have no glass slipper to leave behind.

If I could describe my life, I'd be Snow White.
I have all these haters, and the biggest hater puts me in a deep sleep.
There are little men all around me; only Prince Charming can awake me.
He wakes me only for the haters to take him from me.

If I could describe my life, I'd be Pocahontas.
The curiosity brings me to a man of whom my family disapproves.
He teaches me of the new world or of things I don't know.
Constantly being told to stay away, but my heart still longs for him.

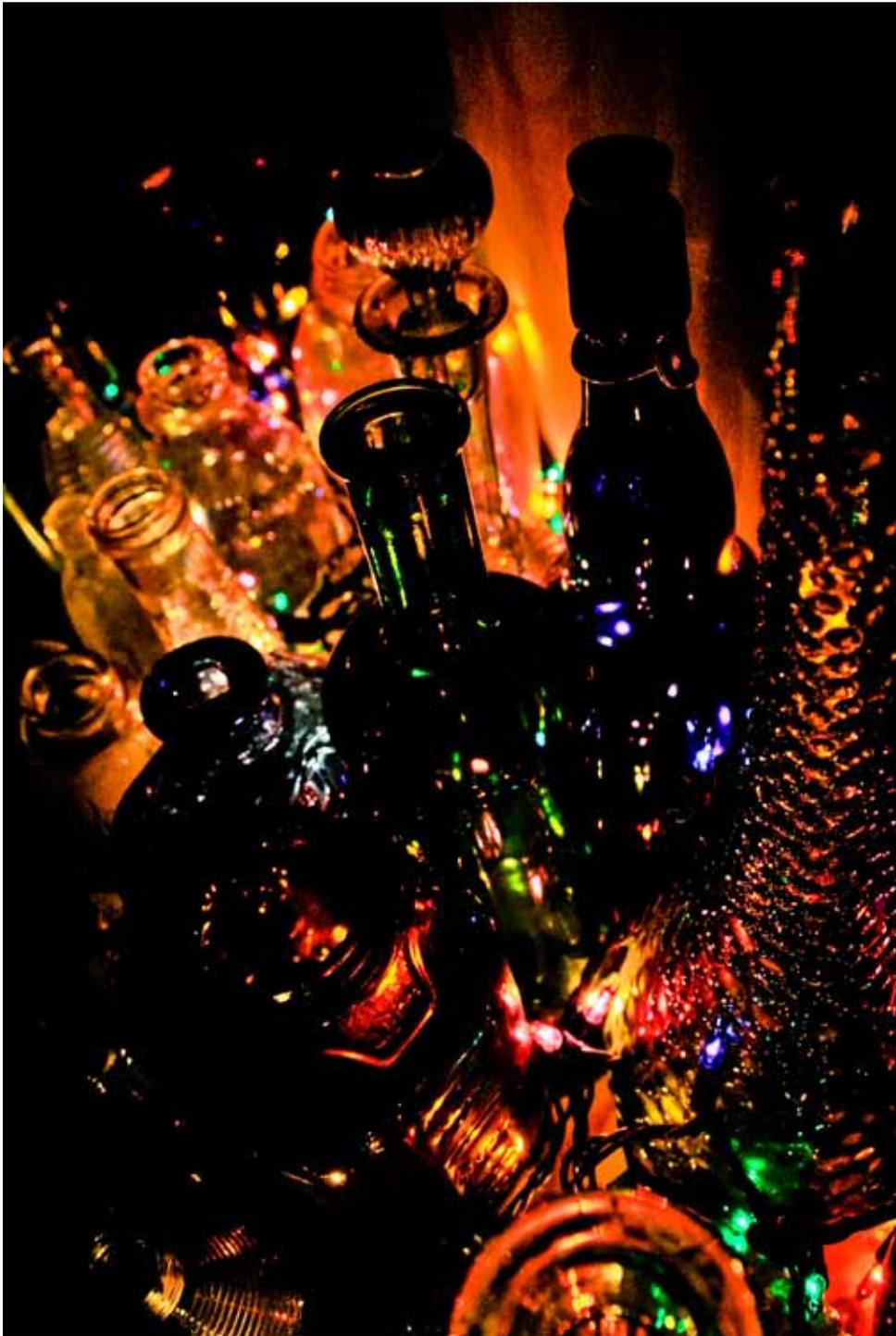
If I could describe my life, I'd be Princess Fiona.
My parents lock me away in this tower.
They leave me all alone.
I'm guarded by not one dragon, but two.
I know Prince Charming will eventually get past the dragons,
But I can only wait for him to take me away.

If I could describe my life, I'd be in a fairy tale.
My mother and father are far away, still holding love's true form from me.
As I fight, he fights to be in love with me.

— *Chelsea L. Doyle-Parker*



Melissa Frank



Tina Hendrix

Drunken Idiots

A swarm of drunken idiots
Takes over the land of peace and quiet
Like a dictators coming into power
And acting like children,
pretending to be monkeys.
Sober and annoyed by all of this,
We cater to their every whim,
Even if it is watching a video
With a demented weirdo
On the Internet,
Thinking that is funny,
But it is really not.
Drunken idiots being corralled
Out from the land of peace and quiet,
Just the way the sober like it.

— *June Noble*



Mr. Bones Curtis Clemmons



Spinner L.Christine Connors



Kimberly Page

Snake

Long brown hair, peachy pearl lips
You couldn't help but stare.
Dimples when she smiled,
Drove everyone wild,
Personality to fool,
Attitude to charm,
Wild, self-centered,
Motivated and eager,
Negative, Attractive,
Toxic and Dramatic.
By the looks of it you
would think she cared,
But make no mistake:
She's a
snake.

— *Jessica Williams*



Desmal Purcell

Children in the Night

The cold October wind blows down the long dirt road, causing the trees to sing an eerie song in the moonlight. I am sitting in my red Ford Focus, in the driveway of the small two bedroom brick home I share with my beautiful girlfriend, Rebekah. I am alone with my thoughts for the love of my life, a shining star twinkling brightly in my eye. I am so nervous that I am feeling sick to my stomach, and fidgeting nervously like a teenage girl moments before losing her virginity. In my hands is a diamond ring – the result of scrimping and saving for two months like an extreme couponer and a symbol of the undying love I have in my heart and soul for Rebekah. I am going to ask her to honor me with her hand in marriage, to wear a ring that will mark her as my partner in life. Rebekah is extremely sensitive about punctuality, and I can just imagine her wringing her hands while pacing the floor of our living room like a wicked witch plotting evil. I feel the courage building up inside of me, and I know the moment has come for me to enter our home and propose to my love.

Taking a deep breath and reaching for the door handle, I spot two children standing near the tree line of my property. Both seem to be on the smaller side, although one is slightly bigger. I would estimate their ages to be around ten or so. I cannot tell what gender they are, but based on clothing, I assume they are boys. The children are dressed alike – dark hoodies, jeans, and sneakers. (Since I do not know their names, I will refer to them as Big and Little.) As soon as I spot Big and Little – who are both standing at attention and deathly still – I feel a wave of intense uneasiness wash over me. I live miles down a long dirt road, and the nearest neighbor is about two miles away. What are these two kids doing here? It is so late at night, and probably past their bed time. Where are their parents?

Big and Little begin walking towards me, each step in tandem with the other. There is a sense of unnaturalness in their movements, like children who are playing at being adults. With each step they take, I can feel my sense of uneasiness rise. The bright moonlight illuminates the pale skin of their faces from the nose down. Their eyes are obscured from view. When the children stop a few feet from my car, Big is half a step ahead of Little, seemingly positioning himself as the leader of this strange pair. I can feel an overwhelming sense of terror that sends ice-cold chills down my spine. Why are these two children bringing up these spine-tingles? I am a grown man, and they are just two little kids. What could they possibly do to me? I reach for the door, but I can't seem to bring myself to actually open it. Instead, I roll the window down about two inches.

"Excuse me, sir," Big says in a small, childish voice after a moment of silence. "My friend and I are lost. Could you please take us home?" Little nods his head eagerly in agreement. It is then that I notice something that I wish I would have noticed earlier. Their eyes are completely black; there is no pupil or iris. No white of the eyes. They are black from one corner of the eye to the other, giving them the appearance of onyx reflecting in the moonlight. I can feel every nerve in my body go numb. I cannot breathe.

After several moments of paralyzing fear and panic, I find my voice. "I'm sorry, but I can't! I need to go inside. My girlfriend is waiting for me, and I'm already very late." Little's mouth slightly twitches, seemingly in frustration at my polite refusal to take them home. Big's face remains impassive.

"Please, sir. You have to take us home. We are lost and don't know where to go!" Big has the voice of an angel, "All you have to do is let us in your car." I reply with a quick, "No," and I have to swallow back my fear as a wave of anger travels over the faces of the children.

"Let us in the car, sir!" Big demands in a voice of authority that has me reaching for the door before I can realize what I am doing. I snatch my hand back and sit deathly still. My gut tells me I may not make it out of this encounter with my life.

"We promise we won't hurt you," Little speaks up for the first time. "All you have to do is open the door. Everything will be okay." Little has a deeper voice that sounds more like the voice of a sixteen year old boy who has just begun the transition to manhood. I know that if I open my car door, my life will be over – although I can't say how I know this. Call it a gut feeling, or intuition, or even extra sensory perception. If I let them in, I will die.

"YOU HAVE TO LET US IN," both children all but yell. "Please, sir! You must open your door," Big finishes with ill disguised anger, giving him the appearance of a pot nearing its boiling point. I yell "NO" at the top of my lungs. The children step forward and begin pounding on the window with their small fists – at first a slow constant rhythm that begins building into a frenzied banging. The rapid beating of my heart matches the banging of the children's fists perfectly, causing my heart to feel like it is going to burst out of my chest. I am going to die. I will never get to see my beloved Rebekah again. I have to survive! I lean forward and hug the steering wheel while closing my eyes as tight as I can. I attempt to steel my nerves enough to open the door and fight the children off. I am shaking, my body shivering in a fear like none I had ever felt before.

"LEAVE ME ALONE...LEAVE ME ALONE...LEAVE ME ALONE...LEAVE ME ALONE....." I yell over and over. Every second that passes I feel panic taking over my body. Just as quickly as the pounding started, all goes quiet. I sit in the front seat of my car, hugging the steering wheel with my eyes closed for what feels like hours but is actually only a few minutes. The roar of my blood pumping is deafening to my ears, making the deathly silence all the more prominent. I slowly open my eyes and look around the outside of the car and yard. The children have disappeared, and I am left scratching my head at the events I have just survived. I open my door and step out of the car. After seeing that the coast is clear, I quickly approach the front door of my house. When I step up on the front porch, I am shocked to see the door is slightly ajar. Leaving the door open and letting our the 'bought air' is not something that Rebekah would normally do. I take a deep breath, step up to the door and push it open.

“Rebekah,” I yell as I cross the threshold. I see Rebekah lying on the living room floor near the hallway. I rush across the room and drop to her side to check on her. Her body is lifeless and growing colder by the moment – a look of absolute terror frozen onto her once beautiful face. My heart is screaming in pain, and my mind is in anguish at the thought that I will never see Rebekah’s beautiful smile again. I will never hear her melodic voice, or get to hold the children we were planning on having and had already named. How do I live without her?

Although I am drowning in sorrow, a horrible thought crosses my mind. *I am now free to pursue my dreams without the encumbrance of a wife or a family.* Waves of guilt wash over me for my shallow and selfish thoughts. How could I be so self-centered as to see a positive outcome to the death of Rebekah?

I hear the sounds of soft footsteps approaching behind me from the direction of the doorway...

--Robert Warf



Crystal Jarrell

Zoë's Last Summer with "Pop"

Zoë lived in Timberon, New Mexico. During the summers she would go to Hobbs, New Mexico, and visit her Grandma and Grandpa. Zoë would stay at her Grandmas' house because Grandma and Grandpa were divorced. Grandpa had his own house across town, and because he never cooked, he came over for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Every night before he left, he would hug and kiss Zoë on the cheek; this was their special thing. After the kitchen was cleaned up, Zoë and Grandma would watch T.V. before it was time for bed. Grandma would go to sleep in her room, and Zoë would sleep on the couch in the den.

After breakfast was cleaned up, it was time for work. Zoë's Grandma and Grandpa owned rental property all over town, and one of them was in desperate need of repair. The three of them loaded into Grandpa's blue, single cab, Dodge pickup and headed to the trailer park.

"What do we have to do today?" Zoë asked Grandpa.

"We have to paint the walls, clean the kitchen, and repair a few holes in the walls," Grandpa replied.

They pulled up at the trailer that needed the repairs, unloaded the tools and headed in to start working. After completing the work, Grandma, Zoë, and Grandpa headed back to Grandma's for lunch. After the three ate lunch, it was their time to chill. Zoë really enjoyed visiting her grandparents for the summer.

About four hours later, after watching some T.V, reading stories, and coloring pictures with Grandpa, Zoë helped Grandma prepare and cook dinner. She was making Zoë's favorite-- lasagna. They ate and cleaned up the kitchen and washed the dishes and as Grandpa got ready to leave, Zoë said, "Pop, can I come stay with you tonight?"

"That is not up to me; you need to ask your Grandma."

"You sure can, honey," Grandma replied sweetly with a kiss to Zoë's cheek.

Zoë hugged Grandma goodbye and grabbed her bag. She was used to just staying at Grandma's house and seeing Grandpa when he came by during the day, but this time it was different because she was older this year.

When they got to Grandpa's house, Zoë hurried in and put her things in the extra bedroom.

"Grandpa, can we have cookies and milk while you read a story before bed?" Zoë asked as he came through the door.

"Yes, we sure can, Tinker," Grandpa replied, "soon as you get your pajamas on."

Zoë ran into the other room, put on her PJs and got in the bed. Grandpa came in with cookies and milk and Zoë's favorite story — *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. After eating her share of cookies and drinking her milk, Zoë snuggled up to Grandpa as he read. Soon she was asleep, and Grandpa got up without waking her and went to his room.

The next morning when Zoë woke up, she could tell something was wrong. Grandpa was an early riser, but he was not up yet. Zoë got up quietly and peeked into his room. It looked like he was still sleeping.

"Maybe he was just really tired last night," Zoë thought to herself. She went back to her bed. "I'll hear him when he gets up." She drifted back to sleep.

Meanwhile, Grandma was getting worried. Grandpa was usually at her house by that time. With Zoë being in town and having stayed the night with him, Grandma thought maybe he was just running late. She had gotten up earlier than usual and made breakfast so it would be ready when they arrived. After another hour passed, Grandma called Grandpa's cell phone, but it went straight to voice mail. She got in her white Mercury and drove to Grandpa's house. When she pulled into the driveway she pushed the button to open his garage door. When it raised, she saw his truck was still there.

Grandma tried the front door of the house. It was locked. She knocked and called out, "Zoë, are you guys home?"

Zoë heard Grandma's voice and woke up. She went and opened the door. "Grandpa is still in bed," she said.

"Are you sure?" said Grandma. "He does not usually sleep in this late; it is almost noon."

Grandma rushed to Grandpa's room, and saw him laying there. He looked like he was sleeping, but she got the same uneasy feeling Zoë had earlier, and when she touched Grandpa, he was ice cold.

"OH MY GOD!!!" She yelled for Zoë to find Grandpa's cell phone and call 911.

Zoë got the phone and dialed 911 and gave it to Grandma. Zoë did not know what was going on, but she could feel that there was something terribly wrong. Later, when Grandma explained that Grandpa was gone, Zoë started crying and ran into Grandpa's room.

"Wake-up Pop...Wake-up please," Zoë cried, standing by the bed. The paramedics and coroner soon arrived. Grandma and Zoë gathered up Zoë's things then slowly and quietly drove back to Grandma's house. Zoë curled up on the couch with the little red Teddy Bear her Grandpa had given her.

She could not believe what had happened to the man she thought would always be there for her. Grandma came into the house and started making the necessary phone calls.

--Chelsea Flora



Kimberly Page

The Man Who Dreamed in Color

It must have been a beautiful day. Henry could feel the warmth of the sun caressing his face and filling him with its energy. The rich new smell of the spring filled his nostrils and invigorated his lungs. He could hear birds singing playfully, and he imagined squirrels running up and down the trees and across the grass. Occasionally Henry could hear the feet of a jogger passing. Somewhere nearby, water was trickling. Most folks complained about that old dilapidated fountain being an eyesore. Henry only heard the gentle, deliberate sound that the water still made, and to him, the fountain was just as new as the day it was first erected.

From a good distance away came the sound of children, perhaps playing tag, flying kites, maybe even sailing toy boats on the pond. This fresh sound told Henry that it was not too long after three o'clock. Henry's friend Robert would be arriving soon, as he did every day at this time. Soon came the sound of slow footsteps on the sidewalk.

"Henry," the man grunted as he sat down on the bench.

"Hello, Robert," Henry replied, "How are you?"

"Just fine thanks," replied Robert, but his tone always suggested otherwise.

"This is lovely weather, isn't it?"

"If you say so, but in my opinion it's too hot in the daytime and too cold at night this time of year."

"Robert, you're one of a kind, old friend."

"Why is that?" Robert paused and seemed to be shuffling in his pockets.

"Because I've never met anyone else who would complain about the springtime." Henry listened and heard the sound of a match strike.

There was a pause as Robert inhaled. "How long have you been sitting here?"

The smell of cigar smoke met Henry's nose. He liked the smell, but he knew those cheap cigars Robert smoked smelled better than they tasted. "Same as always. My niece dropped me off this morning. I like it here. It beats being cooped up in the house all day."

Robert's weight shifted. He slumped on the bench. "I would get bored sitting here all day. What time is she coming to pick you up?"

"Around six, when she gets off work."

"Well, I won't be able to stay very late today. I have plans with my old lady. We're supposed to have dinner or see a movie or something."

"That sounds nice," Henry said. "Don't let me keep you. I'll be fine."

"I worry about you sitting here all day. You know there are some punk kids running around."

"Oh, I'll be fine, Bob. No one's going to mess with me."

"Well, I can give you a ride home if you like."

"No, I'll wait for Mary."

"Alright. I'm not going to twist your arm."

"I'll be fine." Henry wrinkled his forehead a little.

Robert didn't reply. They were both silent for a long time, in which Henry just seemed to face straight ahead, sitting happily, swaying a little sometimes as if a song was in his head, while Robert shuffled around and tapped his foot and took hard draws on his cigar. After a while, the sound of someone jogging came by again.

"Damn streakers," Robert said. "You'd think they'd get arrested. What kind of world do we live in?"

"Oh, they don't bother me," Henry replied, smiling slightly.

Robert didn't say anything. For awhile after the only sounds were the chatter of birds, the far off sounds of the children playing, and the fountain. Robert shifted restlessly. "Well, Henry, I better get going. Don't need to be late, you know."

"Very nice. Have a good evening," Henry smiled.

"Doubtful," Henry's friend replied.

They exchanged their usual short good-byes and Robert's footsteps faded away on the sidewalk.

It was not long before Henry could no longer hear the children playing or feel the direct sunlight on his skin. It was still warm, but the sun was beginning to sink. Mary would be along soon. Henry dozed to the lullaby of the fountain.

A cool breeze brushed Henry, causing him to rouse suddenly. He did not know how long he had been asleep. He could tell by the drop in the temperature that the sun was almost completely set now. Mary was late. "That girl works so hard," Henry said to himself. He imagined the sun setting in front of him. Soon it was very cool. He felt for his cardigan and pulled it over his shoulders.

Mary was never this late. Henry took off his sunglasses. He knew it was dark by now. He twiddled his thumbs as he thought of the stars and the moon.

Suddenly there came a rustling from behind.

"Who's there?" He called out, listening carefully. "Mary?"

Rapid and peculiar footsteps approached. As Henry nervously reached down for his cane, his hand met something cold and tiny spurts of air.

Henry smiled with relief. "Hey there, little fella," he said, patting the dog on the head and scratching behind its ears. He knew this friendly stray. "I got something for you, buddy."

Henry reached in to his cardigan and pulled out a sandwich wrapped in plastic. This furry canine often came and sat with Henry, who was always happy to share his sandwiches. Many times the dog had tried to follow Mary and Henry when they walked home together. He recalled hearing his niece trying to shoo away the animal. The dog thanked Henry with loud, joyful smacks as he gobbled up the meal.

As Henry was petting the animal and its wagging tail brushed against him, he had an idea. He grabbed his cane and stood up. He listened as eager footsteps and excited panting trailed off briefly. He heard a bark, and then with a smile of satisfaction, he followed the sound of hard little toenails clicking on the sidewalk. Whenever he stopped, the dog would bark, and Henry would start again.

After they had been walking awhile, moving along carefully, Henry stopped. He listened. He could no longer hear the dog's panting or his footsteps. He waited, but the dog did not bark. Henry's heart began to beat faster. Slowly he stretched out his arms to feel his surroundings. Was he home? He felt the building next to him. It was a coarse brick wall. No. Their house was wooden. Henry leaned against the wall. He rubbed his face. The dog had probably gotten distracted and ran off after a cat or something. He hesitated and shuffled his feet, then took a deep breath.

Suddenly, he heard a bark. The dog was excited about something. It sounded like it was around a corner. Henry felt his way towards the sound, guiding himself with his left hand on the wall. As he rounded the corner the stray dog's joyful barks were joined by a familiar female voice.

“Shoo! Shoo! Get away!”

“Mary!” Henry called.

“Henry!” His niece shouted. “My goodness! What are you doing out here on the street? Why aren’t you at the park? How did you get way out here?” Her voice was soft and sweet even when she was shocked or worried.

“It got late. I was worried about you. Besides,” he paused, “I think my little friend here knows the way home.”

“You mean you followed that dog all the way here from the park? Oh, you’re insane, Uncle Henry! This takes the cake!” She laughed. She hugged Henry. “You’re lucky something didn’t happen to you! You could’ve been—”

“Come, Mary, everything is fine. Let’s go home now, alright?”

“Alright,” Mary sighed.

They stood still for a moment, and then, with her arm in his, they walked home together in happy silence. Henry listened. He thought he could still hear the sound of the dog somewhere behind them.

Henry had eaten dinner and had his bath. As he lay in his bed, he could hear Mary running water in the bathtub. The sound of the water lulled him. He heard splashing as Mary was wrestling the dog into the tub, followed by some playful barks. He turned over on his side and pulled his soft wool blankets over him and soon he was asleep.

— *Zach Cowart*



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