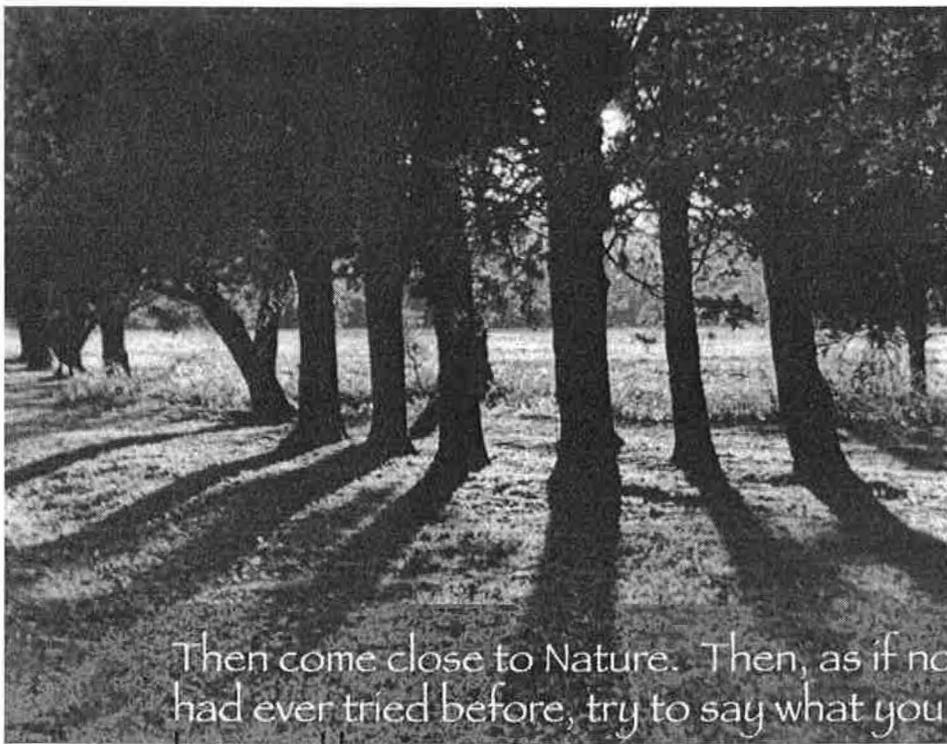


Promethia

2003



Then come close to Nature. Then, as if no one had ever tried before, try to say what you feel and love and lose.

Rainer Maria Rilke
Letters to a Young Poet

Promethia 2003

Promethia 2003
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Promethia 2003 is published by

Department of English
Oral Roberts University
7777 S. Lewis Ave.
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74171

Contributions accepted from the students, faculty, staff, and alumni of Oral Roberts University.

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Editor's Note

Annie Dillard writes, "You were made to give voice to this, your own astonishment." The Promethia contains the words of wanderers filled with astonishment at this world we face. We grasp at life and write it down to discover it; we dream of more than we hold, and we guess at life's secrets. These are our guesses and our dreams. We share them with you.

I would like to thank each person who contributed to this year's Promethia. Thanks are especially due to the wonderful Promethia staff, who compensated for my numerous shortcomings, and to the faculty advisor, Dr. Meyers, whose hand guided each step of the process.

Christabelle Hall, April 2003

1. Introduction

2. Methodology

3. Results

4. Discussion

5. Conclusion

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midnight snow

I keep thinking
you are Infinity
you are

Infinity

I don't know what that is to me

you are not a feeling
not thought or phrase
I see your fingers at night
quietly darning worlds

I don't see you here
where you are
like vapor
waif cloud
under rising moon

a cadmium yellow leaf shower
midnight snowfall
numbing cold

how well can I know you
maddning as you are

next to me untouchable

sandstorms rise
I wonder
recede
fear on the horizon moving

away

I cannot tell the desert from

the ocean

am I gone
forty years

or
walking on

water
do I need to know

silent you are and beautiful
like midnight winter snow

Phillip Griswold

Someday My Friend

Pick up your guitar and play me a song
Tell me a tale that's two hours long
About brunettes and blondes, the bold and the beautiful
About carefree craziness, a subject that's suitable
So that she might see a man like me
In the song you sing

Will you write me words of wonder
Of stupid success, and blameless blunders
Of poor people pouring out their hearts
For lasting love leaving them apart
So that she might see a man like me
In the words you weave

Lay down your head and conjure a dream
That's fully fantastical with things never seen
Of jesters and jokers and jolly drunks
Of handmaidens and heroes whose backs are hunched
So that she might find a fool like me
In the fantasy you unfold

Dig up your soul and do your dance
Move your feet it's our last chance
With rhyme and rhythm ringing in our ears
Jukeing and jumping, as joy fills our tears
Cause grinning she grabbed for a grape like me
Lost in the groove you got

And someday my friend
I will sing you a song...

Steven Leyva

he and i (alone)

he (alone) and i (alone) wanted the same thing. united in thought. in vision. he and i cautiously crept closer and with each stroke of a finger my inner spirit tore at my flesh, screaming: this is not it. this is not him. this is not what you want.

we both got it (he and i, alone). got what we thought we wanted. with fingers interlocked and hearts mutually breaking, i held my tongue and he did not whisper sweet nothings because our (his and my) desires were united and we knew.

this wasn't what he and i wanted, but our longing was for a thing similar. we caught the scent and stood still. the scent was not the thing; it was only a taste but we grasped at it, trying to catch it.

like fireflies in the summer night air with your best friend. but i always feared i might smash the firefly in my bare hands. extinguish the glow. kill the thing.

and so we stopped. he and i unwound our fingers and stepped apart. before it was too late. before our lips touched. before the regret solidified.

we are still alone. he and i, together, yet separate. and i don't want him. and he doesn't want me. he knows (what i know) my thoughts are on another.

i think he heard my guilt-ridden-hope-less-fantasies. but i know the music of us (he and i) did not sound like once i heard it. in the light with our bodies not touching, but our spirits were kindred and i knew it.

Gwendolyn Glover

Through My Veins

Through my veins

I can feel it

I can feel it screaming

A song that demands a fulfillment

Full of crisp cherry blood drips

A crashing of mighty fists

Can you hear it growing?

Through my veins

I can feel it

I can feel it decomposing

All opposition that rises in its way

Scorching the air with ammonia and dust

Dragging the surface to an underground nation

Can you smell it rotting?

Through my veins

I can feel it

I can feel it marching

To a beat that splits the earth

Creating a frontier of division

Between cowards and heroes

Can you see it coming?

Through my veins

I can feel it

I can feel it straining

For a release of power

To fear all into submission

Owned by one perpetual god

Can you sense it brewing?

Through my veins

I can feel it

I can feel it wanting

Me to return to my place

Round with respect and riches

Possessing every culture's gratification

Can you feel it pulling?

Through my veins

I can feel it

The foreign strength rides on a needle or knife, razor or spark, snort or breath

It still wants me to rule

Places, people, ghosts, and unsatisfied desires

Only existing through my lies

Although I decline, I can still feel it, through my veins.

Paul Grenier

Oklahoma Autumn

Oklahoma Autumn
Not with the flash quick flames of home
Kenya's crimson hills and crooked gold valleys—do the
trees turn.
Here, by dead degrees they crumble,
burning slowly black while ruin
pastes their broken edges
flatly to the ground.

Hillary Rotich



Photograph by Amanda Gonzalez

Twain's Love

O, soul--
Look away South
to slave songs
and jig dances
and moonshine in the moonlight...
O, soul--
Look away South
down muddied tides
and bloodied banks
and Huck Finn social commentary...
O, soul--
Look away South
for hope rising
and justice swimming
and futures you will shape.

Molly M. Gill

Midia

The light faded from my heart as I heard the sound of the door opening and closing. The brightness from outside penetrated the dark room like the flash of a camera, and I soon beheld the outline of my mother's figure only behind the lids of my eyes. I heard her tired feet walk across the room toward the settee on which I was sitting and felt the shifting of the chair to accommodate her weight. Her silence was like a weight upon my tongue. I found only cobwebs in my mind. And hunger.

I put my head on her lap; she stroked my head and said, "How's mommy's baby?"

"Fine," I replied. "We sang songs at school today; after lunch, we didn't have to do anymore work."

"Did you get homework?"

"Mm-hmm, but I finished it."

"And how come you're sitting here in the dark?"

"Because the light-bill is always so high." I answered rather quickly that time. Normally, I would have shrugged and deflected such a question somehow. It affected me that we could conserve quite a bit more in that house, but I knew now that it would not affect her. She never realised that things were connected to her actions, that turning on a light would incur a bill, though that had been clear to me for a long time. What I now knew was that she too did not feel her connection to things, and would not feel her connection to my reply. She would not get that the logic of my answer suggested a flaw in hers. Even then, I knew that if I saw the need to conserve and make things easier on my father, then she should too. In my answer was blame, one that resided in my heart. But she was my mother. How could I let her know that I despised almost everything she did? I could not. Not only because I did not want to, but also because she could never understand without taking her eyes off herself.

So I answered her question and steeled my heart for her reply. It came.

"The light-bill will be high no matter what we do, so we might as well turn on the lights." And she got up, turned on the lights in the living room and the dining room, went to her bedroom and turned that one on too.

That was the night I cried.

Four hours later, at nine o' clock, my father let the brightness of the room penetrate the darkness outdoors when he opened the door to let himself in.

"Daddy!" I rushed to him. He was tired, but he picked me up. "Daddy, it's nine o' clock. How many hours is that, daddy?"

"Um, let me see." He walked with me over to the dining room and placed his things down on the table. "I left at six and now it's...that's fifteen hours."

"Fifteen hours! That's good, daddy."

"Yeah. You thawed out the meat for me?"

"Yes. I put it in water just when I came from school and then I did my homework."

And then my father asked about my sister, who was in the bedroom watching television with mommy. I looked at him then and I pitied him—my own father whom I loved, I pitied because he would work to the end of his life taking care of his family because that's what a man does. He carried a weakness that fancied itself strength. But how was such a life to be changed? The grooves on his face were as old as his marriage certificate; the lines were ten years long.

In the kitchen, my father was wearing an apron. As these thoughts fluttered in my head, I systematically handed him the things he needed: salt, pepper, a knife... My father was an expert cook. He was cutting the meat with the big knife. Behind him on the stove, the fire burned beneath a large pot from which steam rose in wispy sheets to the oil-splattered ceiling, while I opened the cupboard to take down the rice bag. It was heavy and filled my arms up to my neck.

"Careful," my father said and took the bag from my arms.

"Daddy, I can..."

"I know you can," and he kissed me on the forehead. "But it's late, and as much as I love your company, you have to get ready for bed. So go and bathe, and when you're finished, I'll be done with dinner."

"Kay."

I hurried with my shower; it was dark.

When I returned, my father was sitting in his room with a plate in his hand. He was still wearing the apron, and fatigue was a crown upon his head. He wiped the sweat from his brow with the back of his hands, but the weariness only spread more evenly, like the smear of a window under a windshield wiper. My family was all gathered together in my parents' room, and the picture we made was as still as life. My sister and mother were routinely watching the television, which was to them their lifeline. They lay on the bed with their plates open in front of them. My mother and father carried on a sporadic conversation that was notably superficial. It alighted on nothing and was as wispy as air, containing nothing that could be called a serious topic. Serious topics made me nervous; they encouraged vehement disagreement and malice—the kind of malice that expertly curled in and out of the contours of my labyrinthine heart, felt at home there, knew its way around the place.

This was the evening we were watching a programme that featured a career mother and a father who was having trouble staying at home with his children. The wife openly questioned the attitude and constitution of the man she married, declaring him less than a man because he would rather work than stay at home with the children. His face had lines too like a cello, and the agony of emasculation held him between its legs and bowed his strings, creating a doleful, tenebrous tune that drifted into the room like a weary traveler who had found his home.

"So you don't want to take care of the kids; you'd rather just give her money to do it," my mother derided the man in the television. She said irrational things like that all the time, and though my father rarely answered her, this was the time he did.

"It's not that he does not want to take care of the kids. Giving his wife money is how he takes care of them."

"Do you think that going to work and coming back home with money is anything compared to what a wife has to go through with children all day?" Her words were tamer than her look, which was one of simmering irritation. She looked away, and I saw the muscles of my father's jaw tighten. He looked down and continued eating. The obvious question hung thick in the air: How would you know? But, of course, she didn't get that either.

I had sat down and begun eating at some point during this incident and was now finished with my food. I took my mother and sister's plates, which were still on the bed, as well as my father's plate and my own into the kitchen. Then I climbed up on the stool so I could reach the sink to wash them. It was ten o' clock. I had to go to bed, but I knew I wouldn't be able to sleep. My father, to me, deserved more for what he did. Yet, I saw his life steam-rolling him into his tomorrows; and every time his jaws tightened, his life tightened its sphincters around his neck. I felt malice walking the floors of my heart once more.

Anger breeds something akin to courage. This nameless emotion was, at this moment, rendering me someone I had not then ever been, yet always was. It was ridding me of my carnal appearance and presenting me as I would be in the end: my mother's equal before God. My position, therefore, in the family was no longer clear to me. I was growing inside myself, being propelled to a limit where, absurd as it seems, I was telling my mother all that I thought of her. I imagined myself endowed with the necessary armaments to psychologically confront her. It was no longer an obvious deterrent that I was a child and subservient to this parent. No, we were equal. And I had something to say to her that needed to be said by someone, but no one else would say it.

I was sitting in my bed looking at the light that shone from my parents' room under my door and experiencing this spiritual liberation. Fires quickened my bones, and in this frenzy, I arose from my discomfort, opened the door, and marched toward my mother's room. Determination hardened in my eyes; I saw the end and it was—it was...

I was at the door, frozen still as the light that was shining there. It was touching the tips of my toes, and as it did, I felt that unnamed virtue leave my body. I was a child again, so I went to my room. And that was the night I cried. It lasted but three seconds—three seconds and, I think, three teardrops.

I hid the shame of my retreat under the covers of my bed, and sleep claimed us both.

I heard my father's voice calling my name. My eyes opened, and the weak morning light gently stimulated my slumbering mind. The sunlight illuminated the memories of the night before. Nothing would change; I saw that as clearly as I saw the morning dawn into a day that so closely resembled all the ones that had come and gone before. Outside my window, yesterday's mist rested on today's mountains. I saw my father's face in that mist, his problems returning with the sun, though sleep had covered them as the night had the landscape.

Treena T. Balds

The Simple Needs

Beauty in the open night set before you
With everything you could ever need
Who needs light in the dark?
What about a million times a million lights?
There aren't numbers to count the stars
That burn off their brilliance for the likes of us

Who needs a mirror in the sky?
I rather suspect the servant of the one
Who burns everlong
His true reflection hangs in the sky
To light the dark night
For evening is truly darkest
When the silver moon is shines
Then hides behind the earth
A mere twelve times a year.

Who needs the wispy breeze?
Can anyone truly appreciate
Its gentle touch?
It is like a child asking for attention.
Its subtle hands run through one's hair
As to playfully have its way with it.
And do not neglect
The innocent touch upon your skin.
Can you feel the smooth, invisible fingers
Guided in flight to touch?

Who needs a feast for the eyes
With time spent watching night-lit clouds soar by?
Can you see the way they ride the wind
And swirl violet into deep purple
Upon a dark black canvas miles away?
Can you see the art in motion?

What can you see?
I see lot of things.
The roots of things everyone sings
Yet no one sees enough to understand.
Can you see the pain
Of malnourished needs?

I.
You.
We.
We are all creatures of many needs.
Yet, however odd, it is the simple needs met
That satisfy the most.

David Franklin



Photograph by Amanda Hall

Yesterday's rain

glides off shimmering birch leaves
On each exhale of wind
recalcitrant showers time travel
forward and down
to kiss lips upturned

Mom's stacks of tabled photographs
fan and flicker in time with summer gusts
stealing through porch screen windows
while she assigns great-grandma's quilt to
new place on cabin couch

Mom hands me gift bag
From crumpled white tissue I pull
small, WW II-era, painted china plates from
Great-grandma's house
Rivers and trees spill into my hands

At yard sale on the way to Augusta
Kim unearths low-to-the-ground
forest-green rocker, perfect for
female legacy of short legs
For fifteen dollars I christen
it Grandma's chair. She

rocks on the porch in the afternoons
and retires when fever arches skyward
(for the umpteenth time)
Bed in unfinished back room
creaks synchronous with chills while
we wait, watch, pray for Tylenol's temporary stoppage
My 11-year old helplessly offers a pillow



Photograph by Ann Clas

On one of Mom's "good" days
Kim and I stop at coastal inlet co-op
to collect naïve lobster. When we return
she opens bag to find innocent bug-eyes peering out
At dinner she cracks and savors
butter-dipped sweet meat and dribbling nectar
I snap last photo...my 13-year old

laughs and kisses fiery half-eaten lobster
I add finished film to collection
to develop at home
Back in Houston I file and sort my graphic diary
slip last lobster photo into small album
to give to my daughter when I see her next
I watch, wait, pray for yesterday's rain
to catch up with today

Lynette Bowen

What Holy Things

I went to church this morning, but not my church, with an old friend. I was weary of the warehouse décor and CCM soft-pop praise tunes of non-denominational churches (including mine), and so I told my friend that I wanted, no *needed*, to celebrate Advent at some place “churchy.” I needed creamy candles sending up their smoky incense, ancient Christmas anthems exploding, exultant, from silvered pipes, wooden pews creaking, the pink Mary’s candle burning quietly on the Advent wreath. So my friend picked the place, and we ended up in the contemporary service of a large denominational church. Metal chairs littered a cold, sunless annex to the sanctuary, and a few rumpled garlands were strung about for Christmas decorations. Since it would be un-Christian to be irritated with my friend about this state of affairs, I started looking around for things to be irritated with. It didn’t take long. Ten minutes into the sermon, a well-to-do woman sat down next to me. The pastor was phenomenal, but she wasn’t listening. She began to check her watch, pick fuzz off her sweater, pull up her socks, fluff up her perfectly frosted hair. Just about that time, I heard a throaty sound coming from behind me. The kind, elderly gentleman who had greeted me warmly during the “peace of the Lord be with you” had fallen sound asleep and was now snoring quietly behind me. The poor pastor, I thought. With a teacher’s empathy, I knew how long it must have taken him to prepare the sermon we were hearing—it was full of allusions, beautiful metaphors, even references to works of art. *I’m listening*, I wanted to tell him; *all your thought, all your intelligence, isn’t lost on me. Ignore these idiots, and keep writing wise, beautiful sermons.* Another snore from behind. It was getting impossible to concentrate on the finer points of the Incarnation.

Then, in a moment of ironic grace, I became part of the picture I was observing; the examiner’s lens swung my direction. What it saw was comical—a censorious, cranky visitor, upset about Christmas decorations and chairs, trying to enter the realms of the sublime. A sigh of God’s love arose within me, and I saw in a moment that *this*, the stuff of this morning in church, is what the Incarnation is about. I think of lines from Richard Wilbur’s “A Plain Song for Comadre”: “What holy things were ever frightened off/ By a fly’s buzz, or itches, of a cough?” Or, I might add, an old man snoring or a lady picking fuzz? “Harder than nails/ They are, more warmly constant than the sun.”

We never hear about it, but surely at the Sermon on the Mount, *somebody* at the back yawned and wondered what was for lunch; surely, as the disciples rowed away from Christ out into the darkening Sea of Galilee, someone had to go to the bathroom; surely, at the Last Supper, someone picked his teeth. The great good news of Christmas is that Jesus’s patient love loved it all, all the rag-tag, hair-fluffing bits of our humanity.

Lori Kanitz



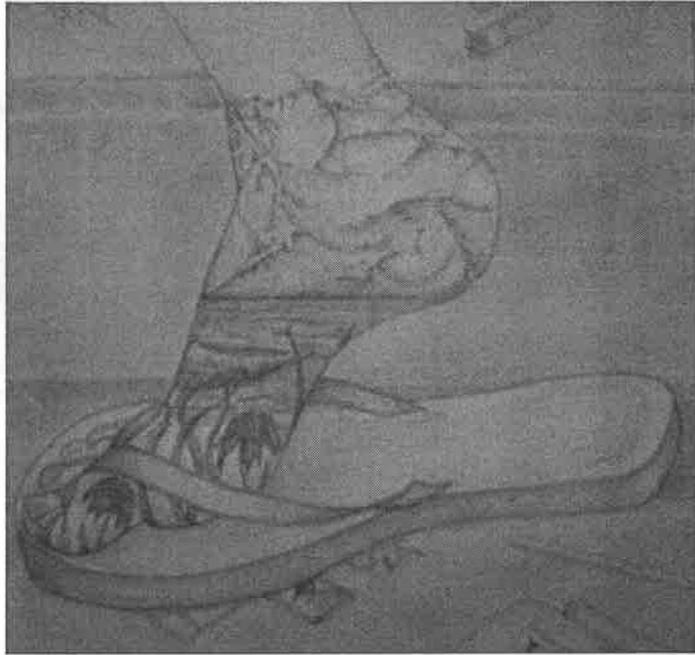
Photograph by Adam Willard

Hollow America

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Phillip Griswold



Original Art by Gwen Land

Views

Pebbles praise placid ponds
Who shout the sky's swift story
Of humanity's haunting history

Paul Grenier

Souls of Winter

Fingers frostbitten
Bitter remorse
Lips frozen shut.
Unable to move
Unwilling to change
Incapable of speaking.
Chill up the spine
Toenails trembling
Shoulders shiver.
Winter weakens
Seasons unchanging
Cold envelops.
Beauty disappears
Snow scarce
Frigid remains.
Death is becoming
Shadows calling
Darkness appealing.

Lindsay Goodier



Photograph by Amanda Gonzalez

Valentine's morning

It is in the library
Where the dust of ages lies clustered in some old
abandoned corner
And the mold has just the right amount of must

It is in the library
Where pages rustle and scarcely another sound is heard
apart from occasional coughs,
Gentle murmurings, and workers shuffling piles of oh-
so-precious books.

It is in the library.
Where my childhood reverence for life and learning
begins.
A chapel, a cathedral; a silent witness to the god of
logic, order, peace, and love.

And yet it is not silent
For among these quiet messengers I hear wisdom
singing

Sarah Lockwood

Haiku

Heavens, sing to me
Through bursts of light and crackling sounds,
Prairie thunderstorm.

Lindsay Goodier

Trickling On

These waters keep flowing
Up and around the trials of rock and stump.
Baptizing ramped clay and curved mud,
And squeezing through the narrow road.

Progressing like a slinky down a spiral staircase,
Sometimes coasting over sand smooth as marble
Or floundering up down, side to side
and
Against wind and rubble,
Yet always persevering and pressing on.
Occasionally slowing down to a tr

i
ck
l
e,

Freezing in the cold, lonely night,
But rising again with the sun like a tidal wave at
equinox,
Regaining momentum and pace.
Circling round and round,
Yet mustering faith to scurry under dusky
bridges
And past mocking shadows cast by lurking
limbs.

Churning, splashing, gurgling, or rushing
Finding a way to progress and move on.
Polluted by filth and waste,
Still longing for purification.

Like sharks drawn to blood
These waters long to feast in fulfillment.
Bubbling in excitement,
They near the delta,
Source of refuge and strength.
And they would do it all again
Just to mingle with the Living Water.

John R. Snyder

dreams beyond the deep end

let us not speak of dreams
beyond the deep end
while this ocean lies
before us lapping
waves only on the shore

we have dashed
bedazzled uncertainty
against desire's carapace;
sea swept, let it be
enough and be no more

passion floats among
the dreams of the weak-
willed and over-ridden;
be to us deeply hidden
sunken treasure's store

which found in the
seeking easy strives
to pull us downward,
left in the stillness
holds the hope for more

yet of this let us not speak
tonight, for beyond
deep waves windswept
sinking we rise fall
drown choking a roar

let it be that speechless
we walk the sands
in moonlit content

let it be, and then no more

Jana Swartwood

The Day I Realized Dogs Are Better Than Men

I am in love with this guy who's living with me. He's gorgeous: athletic and muscular, beautiful brown eyes, and reddish-brown hair. He does have a few bad habits that occasionally get in the way of our relationship, however. One is that, if I would allow it, he would happily eat anything to be found in the trashcan, especially anything of a paper or plastic nature. Another is that he sometimes gets so excited to see me when we've been separated by an eternity of three minutes or so that he could easily knock me over in his exuberance if left unchecked. But I suppose the real problem here is that I'm just not comfortable marrying outside of my own species, no matter the obvious superiority of dogs over men. By now, you're probably wondering about my sanity, or lack thereof. To be perfectly honest, I haven't always thought this way myself, either, so please allow me to explain. This is the story of the day I came to this life-changing realization that dogs are preferable to men.

My boyfriend at the time and I had been together almost a year, following a close friendship of about three years. In general, we were happy together, except for the occasional issue, which is to be expected. We had even been ring shopping. He was, however, exhibiting somewhat worrisome signs of reluctance about actually buying a ring or popping the question, despite his persistent professions of his intentions. I was making an admirable effort to ignore his apparent reluctance and doing a fine job of it until the day in question.

I had just had my tonsils removed that day, following two weeks of excruciating pain during which my tonsils had grown to the size of small oranges and I had shrunk fifteen pounds as a result of living on soup and water. It was a Friday, and my main source of encouragement was the thought that, since it was the weekend, I would soon be seeing my boyfriend, future fiancé, future husband. That was the way things worked since he was attending college in another town. The weekends were reserved for us, and of course since I was miserable and had just undergone (an admittedly minor) surgery, he would visit at least Saturday, if not Friday night.

So there I was, in my old bed at my parents' house, drifting in and out of sleep under the influence of some very strong painkillers. My faithful canine companion, Gunner, was lying peacefully beside my bed. His presence was obviously due to special circumstances, since he's not typically a clingy dog, and he tends to prefer the soft cushion of any piece of furniture he is allowed to utilize to the hard, pillow-less floor. His favored resting place in my parents' home is the loveseat in the living room, and he moves its coordinating pillows about to best suit his comfort. Right now, for instance, it's a little early in the morning for him, so he's asleep in his favorite chair in my own living room, not lying here at my feet as I type, something for which I can hardly blame him, since I would rather be sleeping, too. Gunner, however, possesses that unexplainable canine wisdom that makes him understand when his people are uncomfortable and when he is needed, and in those instances he rises splendidly to the occasion.

Unfortunately, the same could not be said for my loving boyfriend. To his credit, he did at least call to say that he was staying at the college to get some very important work done for a class. This seemed reasonable enough to me, although I was, of course, very disappointed. It was all very reasonable, that is, until I called him the following evening. From what I was able to understand over the background noise, I gathered that he was out with his friends and that he had not had an opportunity to work on that extremely important project at all. I am completely comfortable trusting that any female reading this will absolutely understand the problem with this situation, but just in case you happen to be a male of my ex-boyfriend's sort, I'll expound upon it a little. Staying away for a weekend to hang out with friends is perfectly acceptable to me under normal circumstances, but I was going on my third week of being confined at my parents' house, unable to eat anything reasonably food-like, and in quite a bit of pain. All of these circumstances made his decision that visiting his buddies was more important than visiting me extremely unacceptable. To make matters worse, he did not apologize because he did not expect me to be unhappy about it. Even after he realized that I was angry (which took several days of stony silence on the phone), he could not figure out the reason behind my sudden mood change. Must be the medication.

The day I came to realize that my dog was more reliable than my boyfriend was the beginning of the end of my relationship with that boyfriend, although that incident was not the only reason for its dissolve, and the beginning of an even closer relationship with my dog. My relationship with Gunner is still thriving. He can ascertain from the slightest change in my tone of voice or facial expression if I am angry with him or just unhappy in general, and he's almost always deeply apologetic or sincerely concerned, as the case warrants. Don't misunderstand; I'm not saying that all men are of the same density as my ex-boyfriend, or even as the two that followed him. I'm merely saying that I have yet to find one I would trade for my dog. Maybe someone who has had a few lessons from his own dog would do the trick. In the meantime, I have learned to cherish the love and commitment of the canine species even more than I did before.

Shawna D. O'Connell

oasis spilled

in every desert there is hidden
life, drinking up
from the depths and
pushing up through dead sand

in every longing there is a word
to puncture the capped-off
cover holding back waves
of purpose

and we find with rapt attention
we watch the overwhelming
one-ness roll reluctant
self-sufficiency away

in every ragged breath
there is a willing spirit
purposefully contrary
to that ill-ending gasp

you are the life in me,
the breath of every word,

you are the oasis spilled
upon my barren sands

Jana Swartwood

Neruda

Tonight, I, too, could write the saddest lines
About her; lines whose lights-out countenance
Attains its perigee, and, yet, repines...
A visage of the verse of malcontents

The light was on, for yielding of control;
Rescindment from the dimmer switch, withal,
Began the hardest fall from highest roll.
I moved my hand; she tore it from the wall

Oh Pablo, surely you can sympathize
With petered flames and lumens vacuous
This filament's demise has scarred my eyes
A twisted tungsten stranded, visionless

Despondent as my passion's flame declines,
Tonight, I, too, can write the saddest line

Matthew Miller

Desolate

Dismal gray a dusty air
Empty silence so consumes
Senses shattered with despair
Obligations build their tombs
Life is fading ev'ry breath
Attempts to walk now leave me lame
The same birth now brings me death
Ever wond'ring why I came

Adam Willard

Obsession and Order

An incredibly studious and well-read man, Jorge Luis Borges was a "professor of English literature at the University of Buenos Aires," as well as an internationally known author (Solomon). In his story "The Book of Sands," he places a line from George Herbert's "The Collar" as the epigraph, inviting the reader to speculate as to his reasons. He also was a great admirer of G. K. Chesterton, and many parallels exist between Borges' story and Chesterton's "The Blast of the Book." Through examining both direct and indirect references, Borges' enigmatic tale that wrestles with an obsession with order and the need for freedom in the face of the chaotic nature of reality, can be seen in new lights.

Borges encountered Chesterton's writing in 1914 while living in Switzerland, and read him so frequently (along with Stevenson and Kipling) that he could recite entire passages off by heart (Imbert). Borges' earliest reference to Chesterton is found in his 1932 essay, "El arte narrativo y la magia" ("Narrative Art and Magic"), where he praises Chesterton's strategies of surprise in his stories (Imbert). In his essay, "Chesterton en Borges" ("Chesterton in Borges"), literary critic Enrique Anderson Imbert devotes an entire section of 14 pages to a chronological study of Chestertonian parallels and allusions found in Borges' fiction. Included in this study is a brief look at "The Book of Sand," where Borges states: "Somewhere I recalled reading that the best place to hide a leaf is in a forest" (Borges). This is possibly a direct reference to Chesterton's tale "The Sign of the Broken Sword," where Father Brown says, "Where would a wise man hide a leaf? In the forest. [. . .] If there were no forest, he would make a forest. And if he wished to hide a dead leaf, he would make a dead forest" ("Sign").

In addition, Borges specifically mentions Chesterton's story "The Blast of the Book" in a 1935 essay in which he recommends that this, as well as other certain works of Chesterton's, be anthologized. Common themes and elements in the two stories bring renewed perspective to Borges' tale. For example, in "The Book of Sands," Borges asserts, "To claim that it is true is nowadays the convention of every made-up story. Mine, however, *is* true." He includes autobiographical references to the account of the first person narrator, thereby adding to the ruse of authenticity. This enables his account to be weighted with the incomprehensibility of the mystery of the book he comes to temporarily possess. As the Scottish Presbyterian Bible salesman declares, "It can't be, but it *is*" (Borges).

On the other hand, Chesterton's tale revolves around a mysterious book that has contributed to the dramatic disappearances of five people. Each time a man has opened the book, he has disappeared. The possessor of the volume is a missionary with the Scottish name of Pringle (who also brings the awful artifact to the main character's attention). He tells the skeptical Professor Openshaw, "I've got to tell my story to somebody who knows, because it's true. And, all joking apart, it's tragic as well as true" ("Blast"). Yet by the end, the book is exposed for the hoax that it is and Openshaw, who had once declared, "A man of science isn't trying to prove anything. He's trying to find out what will prove itself," is proven to be duped by his quiet, unassuming clerk ("Blast").

Both stories deal with an obsession with pattern and order--the potential for madness due to the illusion of attainable solution. After ceaseless investigation, Borges' narrator finally comes to the realization "that the book was monstrous. What good did it do me to think that I [. . .] was any less monstrous? I felt that the book was a nightmarish object, an obscene thing that affronted and tainted reality itself" (Borges). He had become consumed with systematically attempting to discover some order or pattern to the "devilish" volume. He relates,

A prisoner of the book, I almost never went out anymore.

[. . .] I set about listing [the illustrations] alphabetically in a notebook, which I was not long in filling up. Never once was an illustration repeated. At night, in the meager intervals my insomnia granted, I dreamed of the book. (Borges)

He soon intentionally looses it in an immense library, abandoning his need to plumb the depths of its mystery in an effort to attain freedom and preserve his sanity.

Likewise, Chesterton's main character comes to the point where he is impelled to tell "the priest every detail of this monstrous mystery" and Father Brown exposes the hoax by pointing out how the pattern of "disappearances" was a deception ("Blast"). He tells Openshaw,

"I suppose the hardest thing is to convince anybody that 0 plus 0 plus 0 = 0. Men believe the oddest things if they are in a series; that is why Macbeth believed the three words of the three witches; though the first was something he knew himself; and the last something he could only bring about himself." ("Blast")

By being wholly preoccupied with the similarity of the facts of each disappearance, Openshaw had been trapped by his own rationality. At the conclusion of the tale, he tells Father Brown,

"I suppose I do deserve it [. . .]. But you must admit the accumulation of incidents was rather formidable. Did you never feel just a momentary awe of the awful volume?"

Undiscovered and Ceased By Time

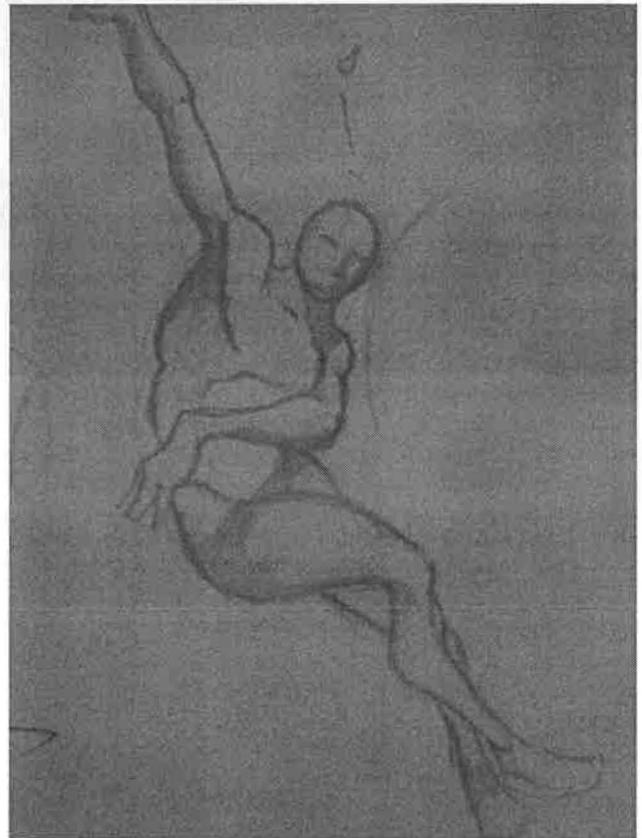
The twinkling of the piano rains on the fields
A calm glow sweeps over the meadow and steeps into the sky
The road twists, spinning scarecrows
To wrong directions and sounding
Off rusty weathervanes
There's a life unknowingly loved by everyone
Sends people dashing down the road
Snatched by the mulberry patched sky
Or swallowed by the unseen ocean underneath the hills

The mad scurrying across city cross-walks
The drawing out of blueprints written and erased over again
Lying on tables of outdoor cafés
Lovers glance over the shoulder and smile at each other
Each to one's own home
A shady fantasy fenced in by earth's decorations

Silence seizes the piano playing
Scarecrows tumble, blueprints sail over car tops
Lovers have never met
Business briefcases are left on café table tops
Houses never exist and flowers become
Nature atoms in manmade packets

The calm glow hovers
The ocean speaks in unison
Rows of sunflowers ripple in bliss
Clouds burst in the atmosphere
All the second hands of clocks in the world whirl backward
Everything else disappears

Jamie Chen



Original Art by Jared Parks



Photograph by Amanda Gonzalez

Rain on my Parade

Drip, drizzle droplets falling down, falling down
 Splash! on my nose and all around, all around
 Fresh, oxygenic from the trees, from the trees
 Sweet, this aroma on the breeze

Time wanders slowly on
 Dusk rushes toward the dawn
 Dare I suspend its time,
 Straining to make it rhyme?

Plop! Yet another on the page, on the page
 Yes, tis the 'hour to be sage, to be sage
 Wait for the dawn an other day, other day
 Poems like the raindrops drip away

Matthew Miller

Nonconformist

This sad dance we do
 Built for so many
 But not for us two...
 You step forward
 Onto my toes
 Because I won't back away
 And so it goes...
 You try to lead
 I won't follow
 We pause the song
 For some helpless tomorrow...
 You criticize
 My footwork unending
 But it is not hatred of you
 That makes me unbending...
 Perhaps it is not dancing
 But dancing *your* way
 That makes me unwilling
 To rock and to sway...

Built for so many
 This sad dance we do...
 Built not for me as me
 Built only for me as you.

Molly M. Gill

Single

Out of habit, I suppose
 Each morning
 I have a mere half
 An English muffin with breakfast
 Drop it into the toaster
 Like a quarter in a slot machine
 Depress the lever:
 No jackpot
 Just an underdone English muffin half
 Underdone
 I suppose
 Because it fills
 Only one slot
 In a two-slot toaster
 Made
 For two

Keith E. Gogan

Tethered and Bound

Tethered and bound
weathered with sound
that deafens
so sharp it cuts
me
in half.
And my skin
is scaled and peeling
to the autumn's early freeze.
Why must there be no one
Why must he come
in the wake of evening
to pull the wool
over my
eyes.
I am blind and buried
buried ten feet below
in a bleeding heart-shaped
tomb
with no room to grow.
And I can still watch
the daisies bloom
with the hesitancy
of spring wonder.

Lindy Spore

Patience

Enter the yard I went

Red of leaves covered by fall
Thick upon the ground with screams of breaking
Wishing the fade of darkness to reveal brilliance
Clogged veins of stagnate nourishment
Stand thick with bursting force
To bathe the ground
With red of leaves covered by fall

Brown of ground laid by ministry
Loud words to hold it stiff and still
Hoping the relinquishment of its ordinance
Strong roots of musical groans
Enforce throughout with righteous obedience
To preserve the sleeping
With brown of ground laid by ministry

Blue of faces influenced by east
Tomorrow sky visions with gazing eyes
Licking the parchment of lips to clear kiss
Heard voices of silent psalms
Sit the sun with sleepy seen
To teethe the heavens
With blue of faces influenced by east

Leave the yard I planned

Paul Grenier

Truth and Wonder in Your Eyes

Sitting in this sequestered coffee shop, I am attempting to work on a “fantasy story” for one of my classes. I’d rather not be doing this, although it’s nice to sit in a corner with a cup of coffee and try to feel like a writer. I cannot write stories, especially fantasy stories, but I forge ahead. I’ll probably spend more time looking around than writing: Pinecones form the centerpieces on coffee tables that look like the remnants of a sunken ship. The ashtrays are shaped like leaves or strange animals and are glazed in odd fluorescent colors. The sweet spring air wafts in from the slightly open windows, and the sun reveals the cloud of smoke gathering toward the ceiling, making the whirling clouds painted there seem as if they are billowing down into tangible reality. I just sit here in the corner, attempting to write but peripherally listening to the conversations around me.

A girl with sad eyes approaches me and asks for a ride to a friend’s apartment. Her hair is cut close to her scalp; it becomes her because her eyes are big and full of meaning. She wears layers of various hues of black and gray, and the cigarette in her hand makes her appear at once distinguished and on the fringes of society. I heard her earlier on the telephone with the friend she is apparently attempting to meet. It seems that they have had some miscommunication, and she must now get to her friend’s house on her own. I have been listening to her ask around the shop, of friends and strangers, for a quick ride. There are but a few people here on this quiet, sunny afternoon, and no one seems willing to help. I had been wondering if she would address me; I had tried to look immersed in my writing. Her voice is soft and unassuming as she asks if I have a car and would mind taking her to a friend’s apartment. Uncharacteristically, I agree. Like every good mother, mine always taught me to never, under any condition, do something like this. But I do. I think that, maybe, my writer’s block will be cured if I otherwise occupy myself for a short while.

As we drive along, she is polite and shy, and I let her smoke in my car as she directs me to her friend’s apartment. I notice that her eyes look dark and tired. She tells me that she observed me writing in the coffee shop. “Do you write a lot?” she asks. I tell her it is for a class and that I don’t do much creative writing so this assignment is challenging for me. “But I read a lot,” I add, not wanting her to think less of me for my admission of guilt. For me, admitting to having a difficult time writing is like any one else admitting they have never used the internet. “Have you read Anne Sexton?” she asks. Her question seems abrupt and bold for eyes so deep and dark. “Yes” is all I say, but I am thinking, “o starry, starry night, this is how I want to die.”

I ask her if she had read Sylvia Plath, and she responds with affirmative passion. This girl whose name I do not know, tells me that she loves these poets because she identifies with them. She briefly tells me what I already know of the lives and experiences of the two women. Then, these sad eyes begin to tell me of all they have seen. I face ahead toward the road, but I listen attentively as she tells me how her parents put her into a mental institution because of her drug problem, but her experiences there only drove her into deeper depression. She is not specific as she explains how inhumane the therapies were, how the nurses and therapists made her feel less than human, but the distress still sits in her dark eyes. She tells me that she has been clean, free from drugs, for several months now; but the residue of fear and anger resulting from the way she was treated at the mental institution has not left. Because of this, Sexton and Plath give her hope. The comforting power of their strange words fills her eyes with light for one moment. I snap out of my euphoric state, as she says, “This is it,” pointing to a non-descript apartment building. She tells me thank you, and I know she means it.

I wait a moment to be sure she won’t be stranded here now. She enters through the door, paint chipping away from neglect, or because there are more important things to do than paint front doors. *For writers who show us that we are not alone...* I think as I drive away. We are currently reading these poets in one of my classes. This application is almost surreal, though I am not sure why. Isn’t this the point? Every once in a while, we are graced with an experience that affirms life and confirms our passions. On these rare occasions, we can do nothing but sit in quiet wonder, humbly thankful for the pens that convey meaning and truth and for the eyes that embrace them.

Natalie Spar

I AM

I awoke from dreaming
the morning mists were streaming in through the window
yellow and murky
reaching for the floor my feet felt nothing
it broke through and I fell into nothing
there was nothing

my fingers reached up to the screen
and fell through my head pushed in
and tumbled over into
emptiness

television
radio
games games games
books filled
paint dripping void down
slipping void sounds
playing joyfully empty

subtle hints of flavors green
walking spinning summer sheen

stone tables gray of lichen
stone faces staring ugly down
sighing of hilltop grasses swishing
my arm is twitching
sitting
alone in the wide world
looking for someone who is
someone

 someonewho
is is IS

it blows through my beats
unprotected
He is
He is
He is

"I AM"

Phillip Griswold

autumn and the silver setting sun

skin like sunset
your presence and
the light you cast
argent splendour
warm and steadfast
looming and proud
the colour of autumn
and the kindest days

Buckley Cloud

Sonnet II

Remembrance of a time so long ago,
When I had first beheld the jewel I seek.
There lay a warm, blue gem amidst the snow,
Its lonely warmth across a plain so bleak.
That warm, glowing, blue coal burned in my mind,
To someday hold its splendor in my hand.
As I drew close, my gem left me behind;
Across the world I see that jewel so grand.
Now here, then gone, my gem just out of reach;
So far away, yet longing never dies.
My God, for help and guidance, I beseech,
Let me attain this precious treasured prize.
Provided patience for another day,
I shall pursue my gem and never sway.

Adam Willard



Rock Conversations

I like it when we have these conversations about rocks

She tells me

nimble 10-year old fingers play
tumbled rose quartz as easily as she breathes Mozart on into ivory
tuned in to human
and earth history
she brings to life the memory of paper notes
and listens to the spectral folk songs of transmuted elements
exultant melodies dancing off vibrating strings of
and listens to the spectral folk songs of transmuted elements
ebony Hematite
rainbow flashing Herkimer
lavender Amethyst cluster

*(her birthstone
...she reminds me)*

at the airport, before I leave
she slips into my palm part of her collection
fool's gold for a crazy aunt
and writes in treasured stone for me
the historical record of
conversations about rocks

Lynette Bowen

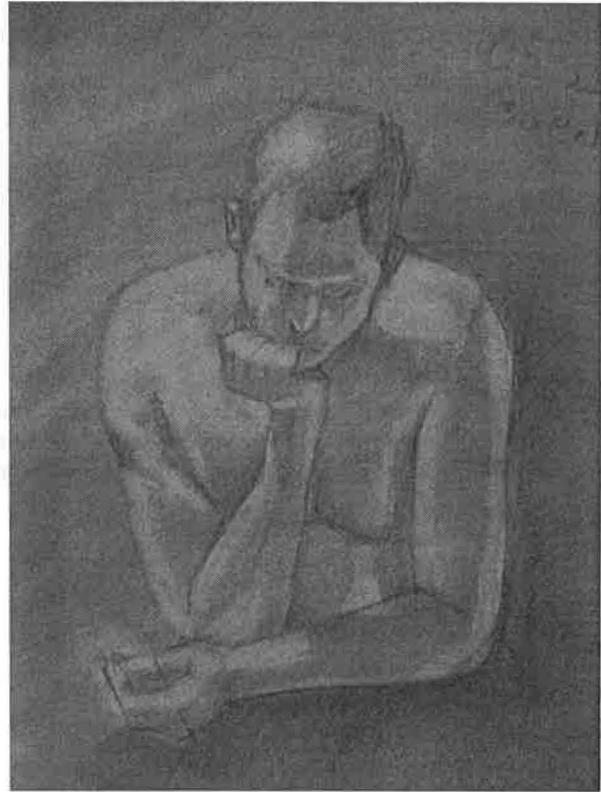


Photograph by Amanda Hall

My American Moon

Dust settles, car ventures off to blue
destination...
Trees glow lively brown, gold, red,
tumbling shaky down...
Dying blades of grass whisper through
the wind their own elegy...
Grey sky shouts prophecy of nature's
coming torment...
Four footed creatures disappear in
special places, same as last year...
My moon stays the same
My American moon...
Forfeits change for faithfulness
Seasons for security
Living and dying for eternal monotony
American moon, forever is too soon

Kyle Erickson



Original Art by Jared Parks

Race

Long pallor face am I
White as Juliet entombed,
Longing for Romeo
Long dusky face is he
Black as ebony piano keys.

How does one shelve love away
And bury thoughtful things to say
And cover up healing with suicide
And stay silent while people die?

Long pallor face am I
Long dusky face is he
I long to speak, fear to try
Question the White that's me inside.

Long dusky soul have I
Long pallor soul has he
Who longs to be more than White
Who longs to be seen as more than
Ebony.

Molly M. Gill



Photograph by Adam Willard

Remnant

(Verses loosely taken from Ezekiel 6, Isaiah 40:3-4, and Psalm 86:11)

it took a day's journey or more
to follow the dusty wind upward
toward lusty nirvana
wrapped in violet fragrance
an offering lifted in continuous melody
chanted from the high place

my help comes not from the hills,
they said; I will lift instead
my eyes to the mountain
of my built hopes and
spill upon the altar blood
of what is to come, a hope
and a future, a fertile worship
and right in my eyes

he will not see, they whispered;
his love will cover all--
but the remnant remembers
pre-catastrophic warnings:

more desolate than the wilderness
he promised to make it,
calling forth ruin
under every tree and sweet high place

my heart is for you, he said,
and jealously I have watched

you build upon the mountains
places on which to whore,
places on which to cast graven idols,
places on which to lay your hearts

with a steadfast resolve he set his face
toward the mountains and commanded
the high places be torn down,
a curse of their own choosing,
forsaking Gerizim for Ebal:

the population humbled in ashes
plucked their dead from the streets,
and so fell the cities among them
and so I watched, listened,
smelled, tasted, and fought
to tear them all down:
every lifted offering
and place of adoration

seeking with one heart to demand
retribution while demanding
with another to cherish idolatry

I have lifted you up above the ruins
in mockery, proclaiming to the people
that the high places have fallen,
but you remain in me a thorn
just in reach but deep, foreseeable
but hardly knowable, intrinsically
within, interminably exalted

so it is that I have chosen you to worship
and have whored away my two hearts
thinking they were only one--and higher

idolatry does not always strike
the hard of heart first;
in the mere thinking I took you,
a second, a lesser love, an object nearer
my eyes and thus my heart,
and built you up as a high place,
a sweet altar upon the mountain within

I have labored under the falsehood too long;
I have struggled at the foot of the mountain
in search of his voice, but only whispers remain:
*Gerizim, Ebal, blessings, curses,
mountain to mountain
so choose you this day*

finally my two hearts see who you are,
naked in the sunlight like a rock whose
shade is suddenly stripped away

*every valley shall be exalted
and every mountain and hill made low*

and you are only a sham, an image
of an object long forgotten, long
neglected, and never to return,
never to fill my arms or heart

*make straight in the desert
a highway, make straight a way,
prepare ye the way*

a remnant has watched
a remnant has waited
a remnant has longed for your demise

I have seen you glimmer in the sunlight,
in the dew of twilight, a god unto my own eyes;
without you, I wander alone

*the crooked straight
and the rough places plain*

yet as I too am nothing, so do I judge you
even at risk of your eternal loss. . . .
my eternal gain

be gone from my one heart and my second!
let not my heart bend to your pleas;
let not my hands move from your throat now
that the truth has found me

*give me an undivided heart that I
may make straight in the desert*

let me not be like kings of old,
who bid the high places remain
while worship was pure in the valleys

*undivided, that I may fear your name
and every mountain and hill made low*

let me be this time among those who remain;
let my reluctance break away with the tide
and the longingness fall at my side

I will set my face now toward the mountains
and command the high places be torn down

Jana Swartwood



Photograph by Amy Smiley

Advent

*"All my longings lie open before you, O Lord;
my sighing is not hidden from you."
Psalm 38:9*

Three years ago this December I moved out of the suburbs to a part of town where there are bus stops and people who actually use them. Since then, I have been strangely drawn to watch people as they wait for buses. It is cold in Tulsa now. As I inch past them during the evening commute, I steal long glances at the rigid features bracing themselves against the Oklahoma wind, looking past me, past the traffic, to the horizon. In the wracking heat of July, their gazes were fierce as the sun itself, as if by force of will they could cause a bus to rise out of the shimmering asphalt. Their elevated, profiled faces move me. I have thought about this a lot, wondering at the source of their magnetism; it is their profiles, the profile: a patient, determined, upturned face, with eyes lifted to gaze intently at some unseen vanishing point in a realm beyond me.

The bus stop profile has become, for me, an image that describes our condition most honestly. Those of us who hope in Christ wait in profile. During Advent, particularly, I feel this with a keenness as sharp-edged as heartbreak. We, too, are waiting. We watch the horizon of our hearts, our lives. Watch it as fiercely as we might watch a door through which, perhaps, a person we want very badly to see will come—waiting for the moment when it will open, and, at last, He will walk through it.

But for now, the door opens only long enough for us to glimpse what is beyond it. And so, we wait with elevated gaze for another advent (*advenire*), "coming." Come, O Come, Immanuel.

Lori Kanitz

A Better Resurrection

Skimming on the runway—skimming!
Gaining momentum, until the tug, the lift
And you're off, on the wing,
Like a great bird, until you look down at the wing
And see rivets and feel the wall vibrate
Against your chair-arm.
Rising above the autumned city,
Celebrating its new colors, dressed for fall,
Right out of Saks Fifth Avenue
Green river-fork, patch-work earth-face,
Receding, touched up with cumulo-nimbi
—But then that ominous brown-gray roll
Hangs over the city, and you know
All is not well—not all is well!
Mother "N" keeps trying, fighting to be gorgeous
in Her seasonal garb.
But man does her in: Kicks her in the stomach;
Shoots her in the head!
He says he loves her—liar!
Why does he cover Her up with that ugly veil?
Hide Her beauty, belittle her dignity?
But I still see Her, still love Her,
Though I look at Her through a "glass darkly."
I know she's there, and I'll rise with Her
In a green shoot, when Her friend/enemy
Has blasted himself off onto another
Sphere, to start gorging away at Her Vitals.

Grady Walker

A Sovereign State

America is an old truck
A pickup rusty duck
Driven by bell bottom blue jeans
No buttons, just holes

Our country is a hand me down
From the Indians
But we made it look new
With a handful of misfits

Some shame, some gain
Our histories all the same
Plain Janes raising cane
Whose to blame, whose to blame

Steven Leyva

Southern Bells

Alive in taffeta skirts that swirl over polished floors
How lovely
Open hands and closed hearts
Dominating love in balmy-aired afternoons strolling into sweaty nights
Sipping mint julep, inhaling Romanticism

Dead in woolen grays that bleed over polished fields
How lovely
Open eyes and closed ears
Frightening Stella in steam-boxed afternoons screeching into sweaty nights
Downing whiskey, choking on stale Romanticism

Reborn in spandex shirts that drip over polished floors
How lovely
Closed eyes and open hearts
Experiencing love in cologne-scented afternoons racing into sweaty nights
Slurping Old Fashioned, sucking on Romanticism

“Strangers have the best candy.”

Sarah Lockwood

I like the way my skirt *dedicated to my mom for her birthday*

I like the way my skirt
sways about my feet
as I walk
I like holding it
gently in my hands
as i flutter up the steps
but I'm clumsy
I often step on the edge
of my skirt
tripping
and I laugh at my ungracefulness
my mom says
life is too hard
too short
to take yourself
too seriously

my mom knows many things
but she didn't do so well
in school
never attended college
my mom
never wore long skirts
up several flights of stairs
balancing
books, bag, and lunchbox
when I begin to fall
down the stairs
my mom's words are there
to steady me

Gwendolyn Glover

ME, THE DEVIL, AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE II

According to legend, once upon a time there may or may not have been but probably was a king whose daughter had been kidnapped by the Devil. The Devil sent a message to the king that read, "These are the Dark Ages, and I lack for suitable intellectual stimulation. Send your best men to me to challenge me, and should I find one worthy I will release the princess to him. Those who are unworthy I will deal with on my terms." So the king gathered all his knights along with the kingdom's greatest sages, scholars, and wizards, and together they postulated an endless list of riddles, questions, and conundrums that they hoped might avail them. But the king was not satisfied.

"Verily," he said, "these strategies are indeed cunning, yet I am apprehensive that they are inadequate to the undertaking at hand. Is there no one else whom we may consult?"

The king's most trusted advisor reminded him of the mysterious knight who lived at the edge of the Swamp of Radioactive Suffering.

"I do remember him," the king said. "He was the land's most clever and valiant warrior, the antithesis of all things pusillanimous, ever risking never-ending and interminable quietus in the name of judicial stability. Yet rumor maintains his terrible antisociability. Nevertheless, I should like to meet him. Fetch the chap here at once."

The next day the knight was brought before the king. "Yeah?" he asked.

"I bethink my hearing of you!" the king exclaimed. "The disrespectful fellow! How splendid to gain your acquaintance. On behalf of the kingdom, I would like to bespeak a favor."

"You can ask," the knight said.

"Pray, sir, remind me," said the king, "by what moniker were you christened?"

The knight cast his dark cloak off his broad shoulders. "Reinhart," he said.

"Quite right. Sir Reinhart. Now then. My daughter has been kidnapped and I would appreciate it eminently if you would accompany an expeditionary force to manumit her forthwith. I implore you with boundless desideration."

"What?" Reinhart asked.

"His majesty wants you to help rescue the princess," an advisor said.

"Then why didn't he just say that?"

"Must you inveigh so?" the king asked. "Such incessant persiflage is most certainly *not* conducive to fecund confabulation. Furthermore there is absolutely no benefit from animadversion."

Reinhart looked at him blankly.

"Now," said the king, "to the provisos of the plan for the rectification of this pernicious and flagitious delict."

Reinhart scowled. "For the love of God, what the heck are you saying?" Several fairies were buzzing around the room. One landed on Reinhart's arm and he slapped it. "You should spray for those," he said. "They're bad this time of year."

The king spoke to his advisor.

"The king wishes for you to accompany a force to help rescue the princess," the advisor said.

"Yeah, yeah, I got all that," Reinhart said. "Give me some details."

"The princess has been kidnapped by the Devil and is being held in the-"

"Nope, sorry."

"I beg your pardon?" the advisor asked.

"No. I'm not going to do it."

"But I haven't even finished explaining the situation!" the advisor protested.

"I've heard enough. Good day." Reinhart turned to leave.

The king spoke hurriedly to the advisor.

"The king informs me that should you be successful you will receive the princess's hand in marriage."

Reinhart stopped. "So you want me to go fight the Devil for some girl I don't even know? Haven't even met? How should I know if I'd even like her or not?"

"She is boundlessly pulchritudinous," the king said.

"Yeah, well, some Preparation H will clear that right up," Reinhart said.

"No, no. The king said that she is quite beautiful," the advisor said.

"How beautiful?" Reinhart demanded.

They showed him a picture.

"Not beautiful enough," Reinhart said, turning again to leave.

"My good sir," said the king, "I always assay to be propitious. I am the wielder of near-boundless capital; far be it from me to be parsimonious. Certainly some manner of reasonable guerdon will inveigle you to entreat my plea. My progeny is beloved of all and recherché. You have but to designate your valuation."

"Excuse me," Reinhart said to the advisor. "What?"

"He said he'll pay you," the advisor said.

"How much?"

"How much do you want?" the advisor asked.

"Five million," Reinhart said.

"Then I shall confer upon you five million in federal reserve notes, legal tender for all debts, public and private, upon the determination of this enterprise," said the king.

Reinhart made a face and opened his mouth and the advisor quickly said, "It's yours."

"Well then," Reinhart said, "I suppose I agree."

The advisor told him the nature of the Devil's challenge. When he concluded, Reinhart said, "Fine. I agree. But I have one condition. I ask my question last, and if the princess gets rescued before my turn, I still get paid half."

The king nodded his agreement. "I pronounce my gratitude upon you, sir knight, for your ready concordance in this predicament. It is most excellent that we can experience such ratiocination of the situation. Now please, experience some placidity amid the present gloaming's sojourn, for you shall sally forth upon the aurora."

"Yeah. Sure," said Reinhart. "Great. Whatever."

"Excellent," said the advisor, seeing the king's beneficent smile. "Servants will show you to your quarters now, and you'll leave tomorrow."

Reinhart was roused from his bed at dawn and given a horse and placed at the end of the single-file line of courageous knights and wise sages who were heading out through the castle gates. As the gates were closing behind them the king came thundering through on a white stallion and joined Reinhart at the back of the line. He was not dressed in his kingly raiment but rather as a knight.

"I promulgate my desire to hie me in accompaniment and perceive the circumstances," said the king.

"Whatever floats your boat," said Reinhart. A fairy was crawling on his leg and he squashed it.

"Blasted fairies," he said. He took some fairy spray out of his saddlebag and sprayed his arms and legs.

The party traveled over field and stream and hill and dale for three days. On the morning of the fourth they beheld a black castle nestled forebodingly at the base of the Mortiferous Mountains of Annihilation. Disheartened, the band approached. They saw the gate was open and entered carefully. Upon seeing that the courtyard was deserted, they dismounted cautiously.

A man was standing in the doorway to the inner keep. He was tall, handsome, and slender and wore an extravagant red coat. "Please come in," he said. "There's no need to be afraid just yet."

"Devil!" hissed one of the sages.

"Why of course!" exclaimed the Devil. "Who were you expecting? William Shatner?" They all looked at him blankly and the Devil said, "Never mind. Wrong time period, my mistake. What can I say? It's early. Come on in." He motioned them inside.

The Devil led them up a great stair to a huge room lit by smoky torches. Stone archways soared overhead and the ceiling contained red and orange and gold stained glass that was glowing like flame in the morning light. All the stonework was black and smooth and there was a great red carpet leading up to a wide dais upon which towered a high obsidian throne.

"Do you like it?" the Devil asked. "It's got this *je ne sais quoi* that I just love about it. The Realtor showed me this place and I saw this room and I said *I've just got to have it!* I promise you, it's a *great* place to die."

He walked up on the dais and sat on his throne. "Perhaps you'd like some seats while you await your turns." He snapped his fingers and long stone benches appeared along the walls. After carefully examining the benches to make certain they were not in any way dangerous, the knights and sages sat apprehensively.

"Where is the princess?" demanded the greatest of the king's knights.

"Ah, yes. The princess. She is quite safe, I assure you."

"Well I don't believe you!" exclaimed the knight, jumping up before the dais. "Show her to us!"

The Devil's eyes flashed. "My dear sir *I AM THE DEVIL* and am in no way obligated to show you *anything*. In fact I am cut to the very quick of my being by your lack of faith in my integrity. After all, do I

not travel time and space causing capricious madcap mayhem in the name of my own intellectual satisfaction? And do I not handle such business as the epitome of fairness?"

Upon these words everyone looked puzzled except the king, who sat and nodded and stroked his beard.

"Furthermore," the Devil continued, "when have you ever known me to not play *fair*?"

"You're the Devil!" the knight cried. "You never play fair!"

"I AM the Devil and I DO play fair," the Devil said. "There's no pleasure to be gained by cheating at intellect. There are so many other things to cheat at and people to cheat and ways to cheat them. Quite frankly, cheating and lying can get rather tedious and boring. But just this once I suppose I'll indulge your impertinent request." He snapped his fingers and an iron cage appeared, hanging from the ceiling. The princess was inside. The Devil stood as all the knights began calling to her. Reinhart and the king observed these occurrences from the farthest end of the bench. "And now," the Devil cried, pointing at the great knight in front of the dais, "let's play!"

A haunting chord from some nether region echoed through the chamber and the light from the ceiling intensified before the dais, and the knight appeared to be bathed in flame.

"I wasn't supposed to go first," the great knight muttered, squinting into the glare.

"Too bad," said the Devil, sitting again upon his throne.

"What about some ground rules?" one of the sages demanded.

"Ah, yes, ground rules," the Devil mused. "Very good. We must have ground rules. Each of you will ask me one question. If I am unable to provide the correct answer within three minutes, you win and I release the princess. If I answer it, something bad is going to happen to you. You won't be permitted to ask me a question you do not know the answer to, and should I miss it, you will be required to answer it correctly. All right?"

The Devil snapped his fingers again and a small black pedestal appeared before the dais. On it was a black hourglass filled with red sand. Mysteriously, all the sand was suspended in the top half. "The glass will begin to run when you ask your question and I have until all the sand has run out to answer. In the unlikely event that I am unable to answer correctly, you will hear this sound." He snapped his fingers and the sound of a gong reverberated through the chamber. "Shall we begin? Challenge me!" He looked to the knight before him and said, "Ask."

The knight gathered up his courage and said, "If it takes a clock two seconds to chime two o'clock, how long does it take for the same clock to chime three o'clock?" After saying this he dropped his gaze and stared hopefully at the red sand trickling through the glass.

The Devil smiled. "How very considerate of you to help me warm up with an easy one. It is not three as you would like me to guess. In fact, it's really quite simple. The first chime is time minus zero. The second chime is time plus two; two seconds for both chimes, two second intervals between chimes. To chime from one to three o'clock there will be two intervals, therefore four seconds."

The great knight bowed his head in defeat. The Devil snapped his fingers once again and the floor beneath the knight dropped away, and he fell into darkness. There were fearful and angry murmurings from the other knights.

"Now, now," said the Devil. "There's no reason for any of you to get your codpiece in a bunch. No need at all for pandemonium. He might not be dead; after all, Gandalf wasn't."

They all looked at him uncomprehendingly.

"Of course, my mistake. Next!"

One of the sages timidly got up and made his way to the dais. As he stepped into the light, the sand leapt back to the top of the glass. This sage had prepared what he believed was the most cunning question yet devised. But as he stepped forward, fear gripped him.

"Uh," he said. The sand started running. The sage stood and stammered for several moments.

"Just a second," said the Devil, snapping his fingers and making the sand pause. "Perhaps I failed to mention that if you don't ask a question in your three minutes, you lose just the same as if I answer correctly."

The man nodded.

"So what's the problem? Stalling won't help you."

The man swallowed audibly.

"Ah, I see. Nerves. Not much of a public speaker, are you? Well, I'll offer you a special deal. I can let the glass continue to run and you can ask your question, or I can ask *you* a question. A one shot deal. Decide."

"Uh, uh," said the sage. He did not feel he could regain his composure in the time allotted. He gathered up his courage and said, "Ask me."

"Delightful!" exclaimed the devil. "But first tell me, what manner of sage are you?"

"Uh, a scientist," the sage said nervously.

"What manner of scientist?"

"Uh, I study animals, sir," the sage said.

"Very well," said the Devil. "I shall ask you a biology question. Let us say I put you in a room with three monkeys. You observe these three monkeys and see that one has a stick, one has a banana, and one has a copy of the writings of Socrates. My question to you is this: which primate in this room of ours is the smartest? Your time starts now," he added and the sand, which had again been reset, began to run.

"Uh," said the sage, "well, uh, it's clearly not the one with the stick. It, uh, may be the one with the banana because he can, uh, find food. Or, uh, it may be the one with the writings of Socrates because it may be a highly, uh, advanced species of monkey."

"Your choice?" said the Devil. A fairy was buzzing incessantly around the throne. He pulled out a fairyswatter and killed it.

"Uh, I only know about regular monkeys, so I'd have to say the one, uh, with the banana," the sage said.

"I'm afraid that's the wrong answer," said the Devil.

"The one with Socrates?" the sage asked meekly.

"Nope, sorry. But you only get one shot."

"But-" said the sage.

"Even though you missed the question rather badly," the Devil said, "it's probably safe to say that *you* would be the smartest primate in the room."

The sage's eyes glowed with understanding. "Of course!" he cried.

"Of course," echoed the Devil, and the floor opened and the sage disappeared. "Next!"

Next came the royal alchemist. "I am the royal alchemist," he said.

"That's great," said the Devil. "Ask your question."

"Which is heavier, a pound of silver or a pound of feathers?"

"Really," said the Devil, "how childish. Any fool can see a pound weighs the same as a pound. Now-"

"Wro-" the royal alchemist began.

"Tut, tut," the Devil said. "No interrupting. I see that clever gleam in your eye. What I was about to say was, obviously we can see that a pound is a pound, and you would have had me if I had ended my answer at 'they weigh the same.' But you were hoping I would forget to take into account that precious metals are measured by a different system. You see, my poor friend, I know full well that the *avoirdupois* system is the common system used to measure the weights of most things. However, the *troy* system is used to measure precious metals and gems. And any fool knows that the *troy* pound is about twenty percent lighter than the *pound avoirdupois*, so by that reasoning the pound of silver weighs less than the pound of feathers. You are all welcome for the science lesson. Goodbye." The floor opened and swallowed the royal alchemist.

The royal instructor stepped forward bravely. "*Quantum materiae materietur marmota monax si marmota monax materiam possit materiari?*" he asked.

"A trick question," the Devil said. "Woodchucks, I'm sure, would chuck quite a lot of wood if they could, but unfortunately woodchucks, also known as marmots, cannot chuck wood at all. You lose. No bonus points for the Latin." The royal instructor was sent plunging into the darkness.

After him was the royal accountant. He said, "Three men went to an innkeeper for a room. The innkeeper told them a room would be thirty dollars, so they each paid him ten. After they had gone to the room, the innkeeper realized he had overcharged them by five dollars. Being an honest man, he gave the servant the five to return but the servant was dishonest and kept two and only returned three. Therefore, each man ended up paying nine dollars for the room for a total of twenty-seven dollars, but that added to the two the servant stole only makes twenty-nine, so where is the missing dollar?"

"If this man is your accountant," the Devil said to the assembly, "your kingdom is in sad shape indeed. There is no missing dollar, fool; your twenty-seven dollars includes the two you incompetently added to it when you should have added the three that was returned! How utterly disappointing, Mister Arthur Andersen Enron Face. Let's break for lunch."

After a cautiously eaten lunch the knights tried their questions, none with any degree of success.

"What is a camel's hair brush made of?"

"Squirrel fur," the Devil said, tapping his fingers on the throne.

"What is hard to beat?"

"For me? For you? For anyone? A drum with a hole in it."

"What do you call a broken boomerang?"

"A stick."

"What is born at the same time as the world, destined to live as long as the world, and yet never five weeks old?"

"The moon. You can all do better."

"What is an end to which we should all like to come?"

"A dividend. How truly infantile."

"What is everyone on earth doing at the same time?"

"Growing older. Or breathing. Or living. Or dying."

"What can be measured, but has no length, width, height or weight?"

"Any number of things, not the least of which is the temperature. As opposed to your stupidity, which seems to be boundless."

"What question can you never truthfully answer 'yes' to?"

"Again, any number, one of which is 'are you sleeping?' and another of which is 'when you fell off that cliff, impaled yourself on a sharp rock and then drowned in two inches of water, did it hurt?'"

"When should you strike a match?"

"What kind of question is that? Strike it when it merits punishment."

"What makes a man bald?"

"His lack of hair. Really, some intelligent creativity would be appreciated."

Soon the king's forces had dwindled, and the only three left were the king, Reinhart, and the king's advisor. The advisor stepped confidently to the dais.

"Please make this good," the Devil said. "I've been awfully disappointed thus far."

The advisor read from a paper he had brought. "There are two rooms next to each other in a house. One of the rooms contains a cute puppy and the other one has a hungry lion, but you don't know which room contains which. You have to pick one room without knowing what's inside. The door to each room is attended by a man who knows the contents. One of the men always lies and the other always tells the truth, but you don't know which one is which either. You may ask one of the men one question. What do you do?"

"Am I to presume I want the puppy?" the Devil asked dryly.

"Er, yes," said the advisor, off balance. "Or I suppose it could be a beautiful girl if you prefer."

"The puppy will be fine. But how unoriginal and dissatisfying! This riddle is as old as dirt itself. Into the pit you go."

"But the answer!" the advisor protested.

"Ah, yes, the answer, of course. You simply ask one man what the other would say if you asked him 'where is the puppy?' and then you open the opposite door. Bye now."

The darkness swallowed him and then the Devil turned his attention to Reinhart and the king. Reinhart was scribbling furiously on a piece of paper.

"Well?" the Devil asked. "Will it be the old knight or the middle-aged knight first?"

"May we collaborate?" Reinhart asked suddenly.

"I suppose," the Devil said languidly. "Since none of you have been a suitable challenge on your own anyway. Although that is like putting your two remaining eggs in one basket. But one basket, two baskets; it doesn't matter. They all go in the pit eventually."

Reinhart whispered in the king's ear for several moments and the king nodded his understanding.

"My friend here will ask a question which I have devised and which we have agreed upon," Reinhart said. "And he will do it in but one sentence, so as not to waste any more of your time with foolishness."

"Excellent," remarked the Devil. "I wait with baited breath."

The king walked over and stood gravely but proudly before the Devil's dais. Fairies buzzed around him but he ignored them.

The king smoothed his beard, looked the devil in the eye and said, "Hearken unto me now, that you might garner all my necessary erudition as I convey it, for it will be necessary, since we shall now postulate that two riders begin their respective journeys one hundred and fifty miles apart and are progressing toward each other along a singular and distinguished thoroughfare composed of bituminous

pavement (similar to the natural asphalt used by the ancient Babylonians and which often is called bitumen, hence the derivation of the name 'bituminous pavement,' and may I add that for this calculation you may wish to keep in mind that bituminous material softens upon the application of heat), and let us further propose that the first rider is hurtling unswervingly at ninety miles an hour (now I should note here that he is not peregrinating nor is he riding a horse or any kind of equestrian mount, but rather is careening out of control down a steep hill at a forty-five degree angle, which accounts for his exceedingly high velocity, in a coach with a heavy body suspended on springs and equipped with side doors and front and rear seats, a roof that forms part of the body, and an elevated seat for the driver which is attached to the front of the body) and the second rider is traveling at sixty miles an hour in a chariot (let me inform you that it is one of the Roman types, called a *currus*, which is entered from behind and closed in front and uncovered, and is normally drawn by two, three, or four horses, although for this scenario we shall designate the number of equines as being two and say that they are thoroughbred Arabian stallions of the family *Equidae* of the order *Perissodactyla*, descended from one of the original three Arabian stallions that were brought to this land an eon ago, and which chariots carried either one or two persons, both standing, although for this scenario we shall designate the number of persons as being one, and let me differentiate for you so that you may please keep in mind that I am not referring to a *biga*, which is a two-horse chariot for battle or for racing), and that simultaneously, flying with alacrity at a constant velocity of one hundred and ten miles an hour, an osprey (member of the family *Pandionidae* of the order *Falconiformes*, classified as *Pandion haliaetus*, which is the common name applied to a cosmopolitan hawk, and perhaps it will aid you to know that it is approximately twenty-four inches long and dark brown above and white but variably streaked with brown below; its head is white with a dark brown mask-like cheek patch) sets out from the head of the first rider, flies to the head of the second, then immediately turns and flies back to the head of the first, and keeps going in like matter until the two riders meet; how far in total, then, I the king would like to know, thou foul and malevolent Mephistopheles, does the osprey fly?"

The Devil smiled wryly. "The king, eh? Are you quite finished? It's really not as complicated as all that. The answer—" He broke off with a start as the gong echoed through the chamber and the last grains of sand settled on the bottom of the glass.

"That's not right!" the Devil protested. "I know the answer!"

"You lost!" exclaimed Reinhart, leaping to the king's side. "Just as you said, the question was asked and you couldn't answer it in the time allotted!"

"A technicality," said the Devil. "*Dadgum FRABERNACKLE!*"

"Truly, your remonstrances are utterly groundless, as our victory has been sportsmanly. We have, in the end, brought home the proverbial bacon," the king said.

"Bacon, eh?" said the Devil. "Not so fast. You have to answer the question. And you have to answer it *now*, as per the agreement."

"One hundred and ten," said Reinhart. "The osprey travels one hundred and ten miles in that time."

The Devil's eyes glinted. "Very well. You shall have your trifling victory and your bacon too. The girl is of no consequence to me." He snapped his fingers and the bottom dropped out of the princess's cage and she crumpled to the ground. Reinhart and the king rushed over to help her up.

"What about my men?" the king demanded.

The Devil shrugged. "What about them? I never made any stipulations about their return. Besides, the trap door was there when I bought the place, and I never got around to checking out where it went. But you're welcome to look."

He snapped his fingers and the trap doors opened. The king rushed to the brink and peered in, but could see nothing but blackness in the yawning chasm below.

"The abyss is quite deep," the Devil said. "I can tell you that much. You're perfectly welcome to hop in and find out if you like."

"That's quite all right," said Reinhart, leading the king away from the edge.

"Very well," the Devil said cheerfully. "I must admit, that was slightly more fun than I had anticipated. But I believe next time I shall have the time begin *after* the question has been asked. Yes, that will clear the situation up nicely. Now let me show you to the door."

They followed him to the courtyard and mounted their horses, the princess riding behind the king.

"Have a pleasant evening," the Devil said. "Do come again."

As they rode away from the castle, they could hear him singing:

*I'm the Devil
And I like to sing and dance
I'm the Devil
And I like to wear my pants*

Then they were away, heading for home. The sun was setting behind the trees and the moon was just beginning to peek out from behind the clouds. Soon it was night and they rode, the only light the moon and the stars, and the only sounds the patter of the horses' hooves and the buzzing of the fairies.

Joshua Danker-Dake

