

Promethia

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Promethia

2008-2009

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From the Editors...

One of the things I like most about the written word is how it changes over time. From word order to the annual adding of words to the dictionary, print is constantly changing.

One of the things I like most about Promethia is no two works are alike. Similar? Yes. Identical? Absolutely not. Whether your poetry is not poetry to me or my short story is too long for you is irrelevant. All of it seems to work together to make a something as special and unique as Promethia.

Of course, the photography is also a nice touch.

Enjoy your findings.

— Amber Earls

According to O. Henry, “A story with a moral appended is like the bill of a mosquito. It bores you, and then injects a stinging drop to irritate your conscience.” The literary forms, as art, should not read like devotional readings, Sunday School lessons, or sermons. Rather, any lesson should develop naturally from the story or poem’s delving into the nature of humanity, nature, and reality. Art should illuminate not instruct. Such is the goal of Promethia, and such is the case of the following offerings. May they entertain, amuse, and illuminate their readers.

— B. J. Thome

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A Father-Child Communion

Joann Furlow Allen

A nap is a shallow pool of slumber. As I struggled to the surface of consciousness, my senses seemed to awaken one at a time. My eyes weren't ready to open yet, so I burrowed deeper into the crushed velveteen of the sofa. My slick polyester pants and shirt, so popular in 1978, seemed to catch a little on the nap of the sofa fabric before sliding into position. Beneath my cheek was a worn, corduroy pillow, handmade by someone into a quilted design -- very ugly, very sixties, yet very soft and comforting. I could feel the warmth of the late afternoon sun as it streamed in from the picture window, so ubiquitously found in all tract housing built in Oklahoma during the post WWII housing boom. My parents had moved there nine months before my birth and had never left. "You were a house-warming gift," Mom liked to say.

This was one of my last trips home, meaning I would go there again, but it would not be "home" much longer. I was finishing a Master's degree at a university one hundred miles away from my small hometown. I was soon to be married. My trips home had grown fewer as my life had become busier, and were to grow fewer still after the marriage. At that moment, however, I was again the little girl who had grown up in that little house on Roosevelt Street. I felt safe and contented.

Although my eyes remained closed, I could sense that the sun which blanketed my body was mercifully blocked from my face by the heavy drapes -- drawn open but gathered in just the right spot at that time of day to prolong my stupor. As I languished, still not seeing, I heard a familiar, yet unexpected sound from behind my head. A deep, masculine voice cleared itself politely. Without stirring or turning to look, I knew it was my father. Even when he was clearing his throat, Dad's voice seemed soft and southern. He never lost the Louisiana (Luziana as he called it) accent and speech patterns: shrimp never had an "h," and school would forever be "skool." It was a gentle, soothing voice, and I rarely heard him raise it. A mere flicker of disapproval or disappointment would cross his face, and I would be instantly contrite. My mother never had that power over me; only Daddy did.

How long had he been sitting there watching me sleep? How like him to refrain from turning on the T.V. set so as not to awaken me. How unlike him to just sit, however, since he had always been a man of action.

I had been born late to him: in his forty-ninth year, in the seventh year of his marginally successful second marriage. His first marriage had ended miserably and left him totally estranged from his former wife, and sadly, partially estranged from his son, Bruce, my only sibling, twenty-three years older than I. No one had thought to bring Bruce and me together much, but sometime between my teen and young adult years, my brother and I had surprised everyone by making an effort to be each other's family. I think Dad was pleased that his two "only" children had sought a kinship with each other. Having divorced Bruce's mother when Bruce was twelve, Dad had long since given up on a real father-son relationship. There had been too many mistakes made, too much bitterness. I had come to accept that even though Bruce and I had been fathered by the same man, we had not had the same father. I was Dad's clean slate.

I had always been Daddy's baby girl. Never a diaper changer, Daddy had held my infant self on a pillow, afraid to touch my delicate pink skin with his work-roughened hands. Later, he would suffer through piano and dance recitals, waiting for his few moments of glory when he could show off his pride and joy.

He had away been a worker, an outdoor person, a "man's man." He had come to the Oklahoma

oil fields straight from the Louisiana farm where he had been raised. His only 'college' had been tonsorial college, so that he could start his working life as a barber in his uncle's shop in the boom town. He quickly switched to the oil industry, working his way up, over the course of 30 years, to Plant Engineer. He was a fisherman and a quail hunter. Our best times together had been spent traipsing through the woods, bird dog leading the way. He knew better than to shoot any living thing in my presence, but "hunting" was our excuse for quality time together. Aluminum cans and my shoulder (from the kick of the sixteen-gauge shotgun) were the only casualties.

In town, he was known for his golf game. "Golfer Shoots Age -- 67!" read the sports headlines one day. He had a case full of trophies and the respect of many of his protégés, some of whom went on to play on the pro circuit. "My daddy's a scratch golfer" I used to brag, not having any idea of what that meant. In 1978, at age seventy-two, he could still astound much-younger golfers with his level of skill and fitness. To the often-asked question "why did you never turn pro?" He would reply, "That would take the fun out of it." I always thought that the money would have been nice. He always smelled like a box of Tinkleles.

I still hadn't let him know that I was awake; I assumed he was squeezing the rubber ball he always kept near "his" chair. He said it helped his golf grip, but he used it mostly to facilitate the bone-crushing handshake that had served as greeting—and warning—to all of my would-be suitors in high school. My future husband had passed the test.

Dad and I were both in uncharacteristic positions that day. I wasn't a napper, he wasn't a sitter. He was quiet but athletic. He liked to stay busy -- if not at work or in sports, it was "puttering" around the house. "Daddy could fix anything," I would later remind my not-so-handy husband. I had never been a sleeper. I would normally begrudge myself the few hours I took away from doing ten things at once. Both of us were claustrophobic. We were the ones who stood together on top of the storm cellar and watched the tornado pass nearby and destroy a neighboring town. As true claustrophobes, we much preferred taking our chances with the tornado, rather than huddling underground in the crowded shelter with my anxious mother and assorted hysterical neighbors. With Daddy's arm around me, I had felt safe—even in the raging fury of the storm.

My next sense to awaken was that of smell. A sweetly familiar aroma made me turn, finally, toward my father. He had not been just sitting there. He had not been squeezing his rubber ball. He had been peeling and slicing pears: pears he had grown himself in the backyard; pears that had greeted me every year in the fall with their soft yellow flesh; pears that would, in the hands of a skillful cook, turn into pear honey. It had been a ritual every fall for Dad to sit in the yard and peel and slice his ripe pears. Neighbor children and I would dance around him begging for a slice. Nothing ever tasted quite as sweet. Dad would pretend to be cross that we were eating all of his hard work. The blue eyes would twinkle, however, and the crooked smile would betray his pleasure. He always had a dry wit and subtle sense of humor. I am like him. We are not rowdy people.

"Don't tell me my lazy girl has decided to wake up!" he teased. As I finally looked at him, I saw the tanned face -- still handsome at seventy-two ("Quite the lady's man in his day!") I had heard this more than once. His blue eyes seem to look through me to all that we had been to each other. I would see those eyes years later in the face of my newborn son. It was those eyes, the crooked smile and the tan that I would miss when, three years later, I would stand with Bruce and look into the casket at what was no longer my father. Bruce and I would be there for each other, but our thoughts and memories would be very different. Bruce would produce the trusty old putter and lay it next to the body.

Fully surfaced and awake now, I still spoke not a word. I just opened my mouth comically wide. Daddy leaned forward and slipped in a slice of pear. It tasted like honeysuckle nectar. I knew then that no matter what, I would never stand alone against the storms of life. I had ingested my father's spirit.

Writer's Seminar

Andrea Brundage

A flock of chickens,
They strut in
Feathers gleaming and combs swaying,
To crow over their latest success,
A bug of infinite proportions.

They tell each other where they found it,
How they cracked it,
The consumption and delight.
Or perhaps their work is longer,
A worm to be pried out of the earth,
Stretched and tugged
Until it comes to them.

In admiring each other's work
They exalt their own.
Others' actions are a reflection
On the puddle of their egos.
But perhaps their eyes are too small for sight
Or brains for comprehension.
They leave as they came.



photo by Kristin P. Threadgill

New Jesus

Kara Fredenburg

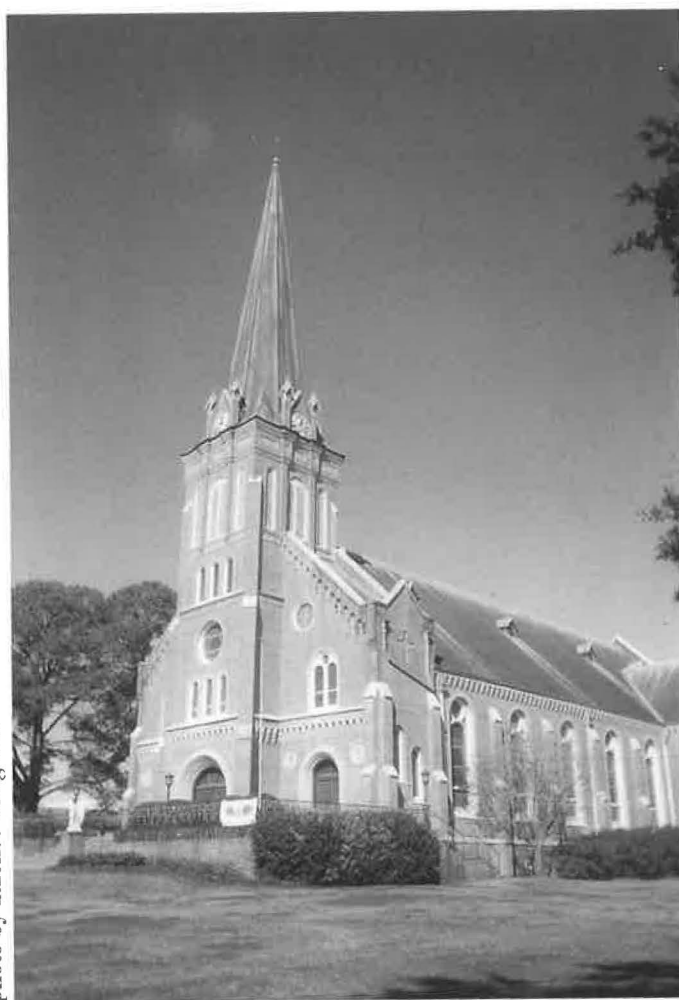
These days, Jesus wears
A cheap blue suit
And has a southern accent.

New Jesus has taken sensitivity classes
And has gone to the dentist.
His teeth are gleaming white
Like little carved gravestones.
The only thing shinier is his hair,
All backlit by those fires of healing evangelism

He stretches out his arms
And pulls in the audience
Like a net of goggle-eyed fish
And all he asks is a tiny donation
To keep him in rolls royces
And blue suits.

If only the first Jesus
Had been this good to watch
Maybe they would even have let Him live.

photo by Rachel Vaughan



The Fireflies

Bryce Merkl

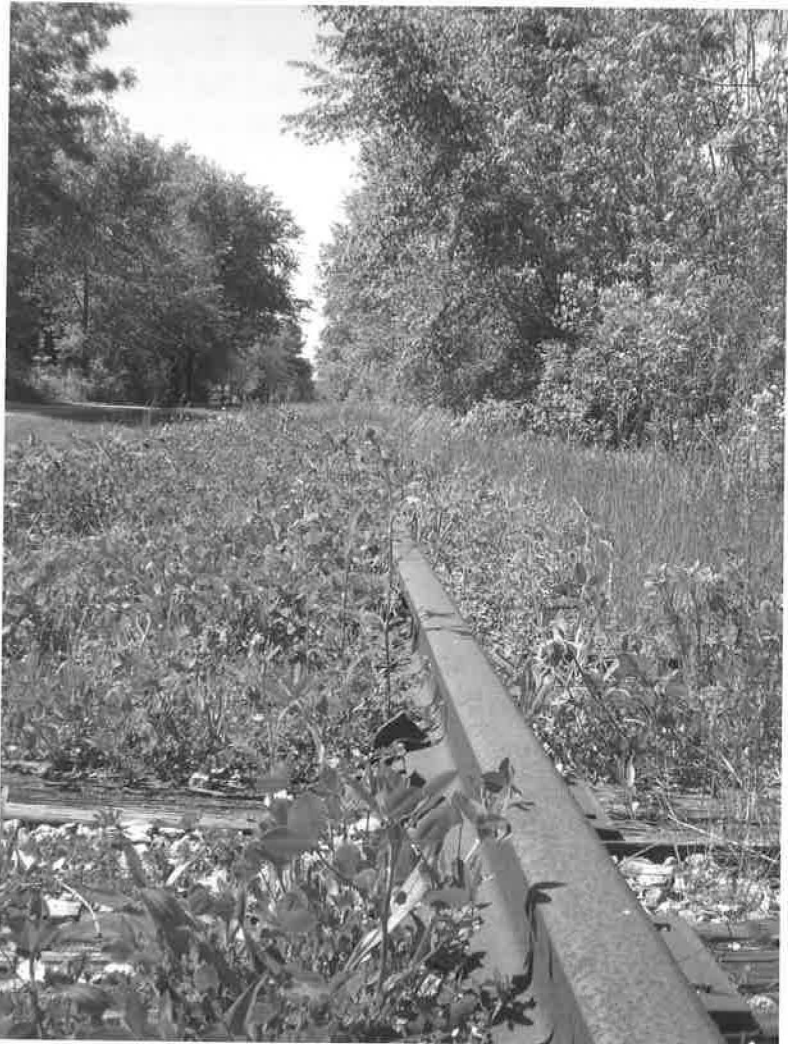
In darkest folds of Even's shade
I pause, the flickers catch my eye—
Their golden twinkles flash—then fade.

Like faeries dancing in the sky
Or sprites in playful reverie
Such are the flares I secret spy.

A pygmy spark on wing I see,
Then all is dark—a wink of light
Among a boundless shadow sea.

And so will be my passing flight
Out from this sullen mortal glade—
A fleeting glint in Timeless Night.

photo by Lisa Sobilo



The Do-It-Yourself Job

Donna Kelley

Tiffany Kellogg untied her embroidered half-apron and braced herself for the explosion. She might as well get on with it, she thought. She shuffled into the living room of her mobile home. Each piece of furniture posed near the next with a narrow aisle of low-pile carpet between them. Examination revealed no grease spots on the pastel slacks beneath the apron. Tiffany settled into the armchair under her prized Tiffany lampshade. Somehow, she identified with this fragile object because it shared her name. Every strand of Tiffany's medium brown hair lay in its designated position. Nevertheless, she tried to rearrange it to perfection. "I have some news for you, honey. Maybe you should take this sitting down. I gave my boss two weeks' notice."

"You what?" Shane shot to his feet, a pulse quivering in his reddening neck. The nearest armchair protested with an oof! as Shane plopped into it. "Cut the dramatics, Tiff," Shane said, in his no-nonsense style.

The magazine rack yielded the daily newspaper to Tiffany, who busily riffled through the pages. Regardless of her age, Tiffany had maintained her bubbly personality. She had learned the value of motivation after having wasted the first twenty-five years of her life. "Being counterperson of a deli is nothing but a rat race. I'm the only employee in the thirties age range."

"Tell me blow-by-blow about your plan of contingency." Absently, Shane picked at a network of white paint spatters on his navy work pants. Loose pickings peppered the carpet.

Orderliness epitomized Tiffany's ideal, but Shane cluttered as fast as she straightened. The usually soft-spoken voice rose a notch to mimic self-assurance. "Selling food isn't my idea of a mind-challenger. I want to be self-employed and do something creative."

"And just what do you intend to create?" Creativeness came nowhere near Shane's inclinations. Give him good old routine. Gruffness betrayed Shane's disadvantage of being caught off guard by upheaval in his own household.

"I'll start by operating a typing service. Meanwhile, I'll take a home-study course to learn a creative skill in compatibility with my aptitudes. I'll need a desk so I can set up a home-based office." A particular newspaper advertisement attracted Tiffany's eye. "Here is a sale on the desk of my dreams – seven drawers!" Gingerly, she passed the paper to Shane.

"Who will supply the two kinds of bread throughout this party?" Creaks from the armchair amplified in the quiet as Shane leaned forward for Tiffany's answer. Calloused hands turned palms upward to indicate what should be obvious. "We'll need wheat bread as well as paper 'bread' while these high-fallutin' plans take place."

Leave it to Shane to think of every angle. "This job means everything to me."

Moments of awkwardness lapsed before Shane answered himself. "I guess we can get along on one salary for a while. Half the price of the desk will be my Christmas present to you, but this scheme had better be solid."

On the second afternoon of the one-week sale, only one desk remained. Either the store had ordered only a handful for the sale, or else the desk bore Tiffany's name.

"You've brought me here for nothing! We don't have the room for this animal. Our furniture is already wall-to-wall." Heads turned toward Shane's raised voice.

Rather than cause a scene, Tiffany shepherded Shane to the car for a continuation of the

discussion. "I thought I'd convert the spare room into an office. Why not give the furniture to one of our relatives since we never have overnight guests?"

"It sounds like a lot of juggling ahead for me."

Count on Shane to balk at the mention of moving furniture. "Some husbands have to juggle furniture in much larger rooms." Teasing seemed to Tiffany a desperate strategy.

"Don't knock our dollhouse, Tiff. It keeps our hair dry."

Thanks to a clerk's assistance, the packaged desk now lay sandwiched between the two back doors of the car. On home ground, Shane nominated Tiffany as clerk. Hardly could they wrench the box from the car, much less wrangle it to the house. Take a few steps. Set the box down. Refill the lungs. Repeat the process. "Who but you would expect a woman to hold the storm door open while handling her end of the load?"

Shane growled under his breath. "At 110 pounds, this desk bypasses the category of feather-weight." Finally, Shane hoisted the carton of concrete and forged through the doorway. Numb hands released the package sooner than expected. "Let's try not to destroy the carton in case we have to return the contents."

No amount of effort on Shane's part would release the tightly-wedged leaden slabs from the carton. "Knife!" the paper surgeon ordered. "I have never used such a dull knife in my life!" Patience evaded Shane in the least undertaking.

"I have to save a sharp knife or two for cooking," Tiffany said. "This is the one I keep for these odd jobs." Eventually, all of the heavy wooden pieces made the living room resemble a junkyard. "I just hope no one comes until this case is dismissed."

Two sealed plastic bags revealed scores of tiny screws and alien parts. Actually, the bottle of glue represented the only identifiable item. Everything else had to be matched with illustrations.

"Pliers," the carpenter ordered.

The multi-folded instruction booklet fluttered from Tiffany's hand like an accordion. "Pliers aren't even mentioned in the directions."

"I need them to attach the proper screwdriver blade to the versatile handle."

Sometimes Shane explained things to Tiffany as if she were a toddler. "I didn't know we'd need tools to fix our tools."

Apprenticeship to her husband presented Tiffany with a challenge in itself. In similar projects, Shane had always appointed Tiffany to read the directions. Then she had to place the parts together and supply Shane with the exact screw. He acted as laborer; she acted as supervisor-assistant-gofer.

One drawer lay close to completion when Tiffany discovered that they had forgotten to put glue in the V-grooves. She feared that the glue had already adhered for a lifetime, but it readily separated. All seven drawers blocked the front door when a distinct knock drew their attention. "I just knew this would happen." Tiffany groaned in embarrassment.

Shane handed drawer after drawer down the assembly line for Tiffany to relocate. The neighbor asked permission to use the phone because she had locked herself out of her house. No sooner had the couple resumed work when the telephone rang. They could pick up a repaired appliance the next day. Fifteen minutes later, the phone rang again. This time, a relative felt like talking to Shane because his wife had taken a business trip. Of all the nights for callers of every description to accost them so heartily! Tiffany mused.

"Can you believe the hardness of this wood?" Shane displayed raw hands after turning a screwdriver into such solidity. Yet he rejected a proffered rubber grip disc and gloves. Thwack!

Folded newspaper met his bony knee. Eyes glinted. Lips pursed. Fingers drummed on the coffee table. Here sat a man who acted out his thoughts before verbalizing them.

"This desk is bellowing, 'Regard my empty drawers. Regard my bare top. Regard my cavernous knee-hole without a desk chair.'" Shane's voice had shifted into a monotone when he began his symbolic statement. "I can't let you go through with this escapade. I see a small fortune snowballing before my eyes...stationery, computer, desk chair, office accessories. You'll end up as a freelancer, sure—a freelance purchaser!" Monotones had transformed into musical scales.

"Honey, calm down. I won't stock the office all at once. My kitchen stool can serve as a desk chair for a while."

For a moment, Shane withdrew his bristles. Then he frowned at the left side of the desk. "The base trim refuses to meet the floor."

"I'll put up with that as long as the drawers fit." Tiffany conceded that either the manufacturer or the novices had made a major mistake. For some reason, the pre-drilled holes failed to line up as they should. They would have to disassemble vast portions of the desk.

"Tomorrow, I'll have to borrow a drill to make holes where we need them," Shane said, with an expression of distaste.

"Could the company have mislabeled certain panels with the wrong letter?" Tiffany asked.

"As I see it, we have two alternatives. We can beat the drawers apart and repack the lot, or we can leave the drawers assembled separately for a decrease in tonnage of the carton."

"I'm afraid to get another desk. The whole shipment might have defects." A forlorn Tiffany slouched on the floor.

"A desk of that type will cost far more if we buy it pre-assembled and have it delivered. I'm ready to call it a night." Shane lumbered off to bed.

Tiffany expected little sleep with such a feeling of disillusionment. Not only had they wasted much time, but the desired item would not belong to Tiffany now or ever. Am I not supposed to have this desk? Tiffany mentally interrogated herself. For two years, I've harbored a dream of owning a six-drawer desk. Then day of days, a flier arrived with a seven-drawer desk on sale. Thoughts pelted Tiffany like hail on a car roof -- entrepreneur, self-employed, freelancer. It sounded good by any handle. Maybe, despite all indications to the contrary, Shane did have a measure of faith in her potential.

With fresh determination, Tiffany decided to comb the directions for some sign of a mistake in assembly. According to the diagram, didn't the hardware show from underneath the desk, rather than from inside as she and Shane had placed it? That bit of adjustment should allow all base trims to drop a couple of inches, Tiffany calculated. Pre-drilled holes should then match.

"Honey, we don't have to take the desk back!" Tiffany said, with a squeal.

Shane demanded an explanation. "I hope you're right. You'll have to show me in the morning."

Confident of her discovery, Tiffany slept comfortably. The next morning found her adjustments working out. Base trims now met the floor. The fit of the drawers presented the final test. "Voila! They fit as smoothly as leotards." Three-quarters of the way through the project, Tiffany discovered that they should have added the back rail before fastening the back panels.

"You can't mean it! I've had these screws in and out of this inflexible wood three times." Today, Shane lost his cool at an early hour.

"I've never professed to have carpentry skills," Tiffany said, with meekness.

"Sometimes future generations reaped the fruits of the pioneers' labors, and not the pioneers

themselves.” Shane typically pressed the damper pedal.

The rest of the desk sailed together and stood ready for transport to the designated room. “Don’t tell me this desk won’t turn the corner of the doorway! Twenty-four hours of tedious work gone to waste.” An irate Shane kept his pot perpetually on simmer.

“So near and yet so far!” Tiffany wailed her lament.

Inching along, Shane and Tiffany maneuvered the desk through the narrow passage. A wifely touch of furniture polish made it sparkle.

Imagine the fun I’ll have in loading all of those drawers!” Tiffany drifted off to another planet. “I’m now a full-fledged entrepreneur with every office supply at my fingertips.”

“Would you go through it all again?” Shane held an imaginary microphone up to Tiffany’s mouth.

“Yes, but take note, furniture manufacturers. Stop boasting, ‘It’s easy!’ about your step-by-step instructions. I demand that you eat your words.”

Off the air, Shane confided in Tiffany. “This desk constituted a do-it-yourself project for a do-it-yourself type of career. After the way you handled this crisis, I’ll consider you as my investment in the future.”

“You can do better than that.” Tiffany dismantled the nearby lamp and carefully held the shade on her head. “Consider me as your Tiffany lampshade – quality and craftsmanship.”

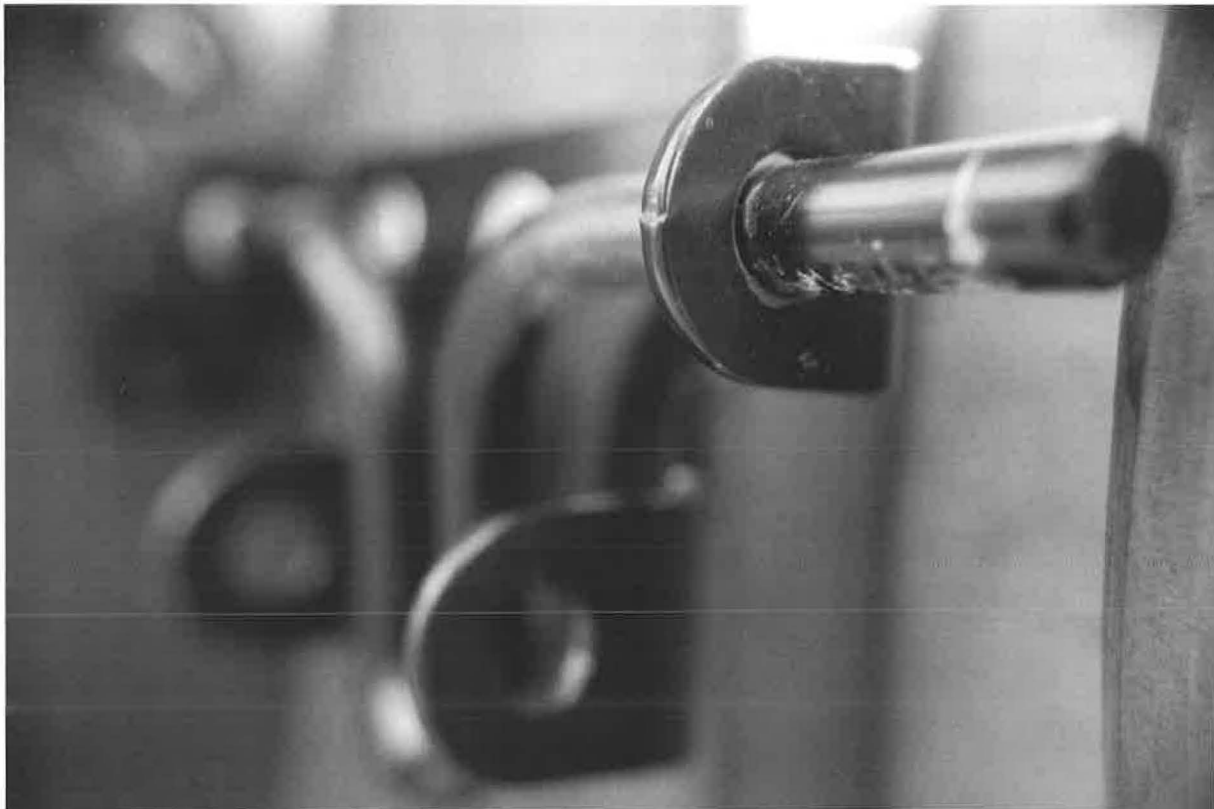


photo by Kristin P. Threadgill

Ornithology

Rachel Whitlock

I am a starving baby bird, devoid of cheap attention,
so please spoon-feed me with your hot-sauce words and cotton candy phrases.
I'll take what I can get.

You've glued this nest together with impractical implications,
and conceived my ell-oh-vee-ee from your jackknife gazes.
I am a starving baby bird, devoid of cheap attention.

I can perch on this bridge and pretend I do not have this particular expectation,
and wait to be filed away in one of your many mental briefcases.
I'll take what I can get.

Your hands caress piebald keys for affirmation,
and I am held and shushed and stroked and healed of all imagined diseases.
I am a starving baby bird, devoid of cheap attention.

I cry with cinder-block tears and you have a celebration.
You slash at me with a verbal katana, and my heart still blazes.
I'll take what I can get.

You've profited and I've grown thinner from this odd cohabitation,
but I will stay, content with being undervalued for emotional purchases.
I am a starving baby bird, devoid of cheap attention,
so I'll take what I can get.



photo by Kristin P. Threadgill

Silent Prayer

Elizabeth Staab

Lord, You know I love You.
My tongue is stiff and heavy,
Like men's boots in deep snow.
Iced with self-thought,
My words asphyxiate.
I lie silent, sensing You so close,
Closer than my breath, my thoughts.
You see the words I cannot shape,
The soul that sighs to sound Your praise.
Lord, You know.

photo by Amber C. Earls



Monday Morning

Sarah Bratschun

Eyelids slide slowly open
Blink away the dark
Whirring air pushes
Through the air-recycling fan
Closing away the dark
To bask beneath blankets
Just a moment longer

Alarm buzzes, chirping,
“Wake up! Good morning!”
Mornings are good
Like an attacking pit bull

Push away constricting covers
Suddenly suffocating sleep
Feet sink in the shag rug
Toes grasping for warmth
Padding feet toward the window
A little tug
Gloomy light infiltrating
Solemn sleepy solitude

The world is cold
Dripping with water
Soaked in late winter’s bath
Of heavenly descent

It’s Monday morning.
And it’s raining.

photo by Amber C. Earls



The Sapphire

Bryce Merkl

The mountain air was crisp, cool, and refreshing. The grandeur of nature made all of my problems seem minuscule and helped me put things in perspective. As I sat upon the mountainside, I pondered what the next day would bring for me. Currently, the circumstances looked grim.

My name is Elgrim. I am a jeweler. In the past, my business was successful and stable. I had all that I wanted, needed, and thought that I needed. My trade took me to faraway regions and remote realms. I sold gems to kings and queens. I had fame, power, and fortune.

But then I came upon some bad luck, if that is what you would call it. Bandits on the road stole some of my best gems from me. Counterfeiters in the market stole more pieces of my jewelry. To top it off, nobles had found a new fad to follow in the style of their crowns. Pearls became the new fashion among the rich, and my mountainous location caused my business to plummet.

The sun was about to rise, and only one star still shone in the sky. It was the Morning Star. I gazed up at it. If only I could possess a jewel that bright. I would give everything for a gemstone such as that, I vowed.

The sun ascended over the mountains, its morning rays illuminating the snow-capped peaks all around me. It was time to leave. My wife, Breliia, was preparing breakfast as I approached the small cottage at the base of the mountains. We ate some day-old bread and some thin milk. It was very little, but we didn't have much.

"I will go down into town again today, Breliia, and see what I can buy or sell," I said at the breakfast table.

"I wish you the best of luck today," she replied. Little did either of us know it would have nothing to do with luck.

I finished the last of my breakfast and grabbed a small loaf to take with me for the day. I snatched my ebony staff from the wall and wrapped my black cloak across my shoulders. I also took a small money sack and my pouch of jewels and tied both to my belt.

"I'll return by evening," I said to Breliia as I stepped over the threshold.

"Wait one moment," she replied. She went into a back room of the cottage and returned with a leather pouch. She placed the small sack into my rough hand. "When we had an abundance of wealth, I stowed away this small amount of money just in case we should strike upon hard times. Those times are now upon us. It is the very last of our money, but you may need it today in the market."

"But Breliia—"

"Just take it, Elgrim," she interrupted.

I began my long journey toward the town of Ohalla. It was an important trading center for the mountain regions, as many royals passed through the town on their way to the capital.

After walking for over an hour, I took inventory of my belongings. Between the two sacks of money I had almost one hundred rynes, about a week's worth of meager wages. Among the jewels and various articles that I had with me, the most valuable were three diamonds of considerable size, a small amethyst, a finely cut emerald, and a ruby. I also had a small knife with me, just in case anyone's hands got a little too greedy.

I walked on until I came to Ohalla. The market had already opened and was teeming with life. I found my usual spot on a busy street corner and laid out my goods for sale, the rest of the morning passing without much event. A few customers seemed interested, but none of them decided to make a purchase.

At the noon hour, I ate my small loaf of bread, and just as I finished, someone caught my eye. He was tall and dressed in fine white linen. He traveled with two others, another man and a woman, who were similarly dressed. The emblem upon his white tunic gave away his status. He was a Xi pilgrim headed for the holy mountain of Artica. Xi pilgrims were often very wealthy, as only a few could afford to make such a long and perilous journey. I prepared to make my pitch as he and his companions drew closer.

"Hello, fine sir," I said to him as he passed by. "Would you like to purchase some precious gems today?"

The man's peaceful eyes looked over toward me. He and his companions turned toward my stand of goods.

"These are very fine jewels you have here sir," the pilgrim said as he picked up an amulet.

"They are the best articles in town," I replied proudly, "and the best priced at that."

"Unfortunately, my friend," answered the pilgrim, "I have no need for jewelry on my long journey, and it would only be an unnecessary burden on the perilous road. Besides, all of my money has gone into the cost of pilgrimage."

My heart sank.

"But I still have something to offer—I will not leave you without hope," he said. "I hear that a certain prince is coming through Ohalla today."

"His majesty, Prince Erik?" I asked.

"No, not Prince Erik," the pilgrim answered. "A prince of another realm. A higher and more powerful realm than this country, and a much richer realm as well."

"When will this prince be coming?" I asked hurriedly, "What is his name? Which way will he be passing through?" I was extremely anxious—this was just the opportunity I needed.

"The prince will be coming this afternoon, I believe," said the pilgrim. "His name you will know soon enough, and his purpose for coming here is to sell a particular jewel he wants to get off his hands."

The words utterly stunned me. Whenever nobles wanted to rid themselves of jewels, which was rare indeed, they never expected a good price for them. I would often resell a noble's old jewelry and make a handsome profit. I didn't know what to say.

"I shall see you another day perhaps, kind jeweler," said the Xi pilgrim, turning to leave.

I mumbled something in reply, too stunned to think. A few seconds later, I put together a plan in order to ensure that I would catch the prince's attention. I moved my stand onto the main street of town, a prime location for spotting the prince's entourage. I then polished all of my jewels so they would look their finest. Never did such jewels sparkle and shine! Surely, if these precious gems did not catch the prince's eye, then nothing would.

But the afternoon passed and no prince came. Not even a hint of noble blood had passed through the streets of Ohalla that day.

As the sun sank in the sky, the market vendors began packing up their wares and heading home for the evening. I knew that I too should call it a day, but something kept me there, something I can't quite explain.

With the last light of the sun, I slowly began packing up my belongings. In the distance, I

heard someone approaching on horseback. I stepped off to the side of the road to let the rider pass. As the horseman drew closer he seemed to slow. I turned to see who it was.

It was a young man upon a white horse. His hair was dark brown, as were his eyes. His skin was olive, and his voice was rich and peaceful. He was tall and bore a great dark blue cloak upon his broad shoulders. He wore plain riding boots, and he bore no jewelry or fine articles. The young man dismounted.

"Are you Elgrim, the legendary jeweler of Ohalla?" he asked.

"I am he," I answered, "though I am far from legendary, not even well-known."

"I am a prince, Elgrim," he said, "and in my realm much is known about your exceptional skills and the magnificent jewels that you sell. Now, I want to get rid of a fine gem of mine."

The prince reached deep inside his cloak and retrieved a leather sack. He opened it and pulled out a large sapphire the size of a human palm. The beauty of the deep blue jewel struck me.

It was intricately cut and reflected the last rays of the sun in all directions, illuminating a wide area around both the prince and me. The jewel's outward appearance was not its only asset. Having been in the jewel trade for many years, I could see that this sapphire also had a deep inner fire that burned within. It had a glow that never faded, and a light that never dimmed. It was not a fake. It was genuine, authentic, and real.

"How much are you asking for this sapphire, sire?" I asked.

"Three thousand, one hundred twenty rynes," the prince replied.

That is all? I thought to myself. 3,120 rynes was a large sum of money, but a jewel that size and of such excellent quality could easily sell for over one million rynes. No—this sapphire is priceless.

"That is all, my lord?" I asked.

"Just three thousand, one hundred and twenty rynes, that is all," replied the prince, "but certainly no less."

This is too good to be true, I thought. This must be some sort of cruel joke. That Xi pilgrim must have been lying. This man can't be a prince. He doesn't even look like a prince! A true prince would know the value of such an exceptional jewel!

I looked at the sapphire again. It was real—I was sure of that. Moments ticked away like hours. I couldn't decide whether I could trust this man. The sapphire was genuine, but was the prince? How did I know whether he was just trying to trick me?

Just then I remembered what I had seen that morning on the mountainside. The Morning Star. I had vowed that I would give everything to possess a jewel such as that. If any jewel shined as bright as the Morning Star, it was this sapphire.

That was it. I had made my decision. I was going to buy the sapphire. The prince didn't seem to mind that I was taking so long to make my decision.

"I will purchase the sapphire, my lord," I said. I reached for my moneybag. That was when I remembered I had barely one hundred rynes to my name.

"I find myself short on rynes this evening, sire," I said. "Would you be willing to make an exchange of some of my fair gems for your exceptional sapphire?"

"Yes, Elgrim," replied the prince, "I am willing to barter."

I reached for my cloth bag of jewels. I drew out the three diamonds that I possessed.

"These three diamonds could sell for one thousand rynes to any noble in the realm," I said, handing the gems to the prince.

"Fair enough," said the prince, "that leaves 2,120 rynes remaining."

The price was still startling, but I reminded myself that the sapphire was worth more than I could ever own. It was a good thing the prince had given me such a low price. I drew out the emerald, the amethyst, and the ruby.

"This emerald could sell for 400 rynes," I said, "this amethyst for around 300, and this ruby for about 500 rynes."

It was with great reluctance that I handed these jewels to the prince. They were some of my finest gems. Their polished forms sparkled in the light of nearby torches, but when I held them up next to the sapphire, they seemed dull and quaint, almost counterfeit. The sacrifice was worth it. I gave the three jewels to the prince.

"Good," said the prince with a smile, "only 920 rynes remain."

Surely, I can find 920 rynes worth of jewelry in here, I thought as I dug through the bag of jewelry. I pulled out every last article of jewelry in the bag and assessed its worth. I spared nothing. When I was finished, the total value of every brooch, amulet, crystal, and piece of gold added up to 800 rynes.

I took a deep breath. It wasn't enough. I didn't have enough money to buy the sapphire. I knew it was futile, but I surrendered the entire bag of jewelry to the prince anyway.

"All of this jewelry is worth nearly 800 rynes," I said, "but that is all that I have. I am afraid I cannot purchase your fine sapphire, my lord."

The prince smiled, eyes peaceful. He didn't seem the least bit troubled that I had wasted his time.

"Surely Elgrim," he said, "with only one hundred twenty rynes remaining, it is useless to give up now. Do you have no additional rynes on you at all?"

Of course, the money! I drew the two money pouches out from under my black cloak. I counted each coin, making sure not to miss one. 100 rynes exactly.

"Well done, Elgrim," the prince said, "that leaves only—"

"Twenty rynes," I finished.

Where could I get twenty rynes? I thought. Surely I can find them somewhere, anywhere! I looked at the sapphire again. It is such a priceless jewel! I would give anything to own a gem so beautiful. What could I give the prince so that I might have this jewel? The knife!

"Why, my prince, I also have this exquisite knife here!" I said. "If you would be willing to take it, it would cover the rest of the cost. I would say it is definitely worth at least twenty rynes."

I had lied. I had bought the knife a long time ago for twelve rynes. Now, with wear, it was worth more like ten. I tried to smile to cover up the lie, but the prince's eyes looked straight into my own, and I felt ashamed. He was not angry, just disappointed.

"Elgrim," the prince said solemnly, "this knife is not worth twenty rynes is it?"

"No, my lord, it is not," I said, ashamed. "It is worth only ten. I am very sorry, my lord, please forgive me. I just so greatly desire to purchase that sapphire."

"Fair enough," he said. "That leaves ten rynes."

I looked the prince in the eye. He was no longer disappointed.

Oh what else do I have that I can give? I thought. I paced back and forth. Nothing was coming to mind. I leaned on my staff, exhausted.

The staff. I looked at the carved rod of ebony. I had taken it on many journeys, and it had gone with me everywhere. It held more sentimental value to me that it was actually worth.

"This staff of ebony, sire," I said, "it is worth three rynes, please take it."

"Only seven rynes remain," said the prince, taking the staff. "I hope you are able to find

them.”

I had to think only for a moment and I knew where those seven rynes could come from. My black cloak. I didn’t want to give it up. I had a long journey home that night, and it would be cold. Besides, what would Brelia think if she heard that I had given up my entire trade, the last of our money, and a few personal and sentimental items to return with only the clothes on my back and a sapphire?

“I am sorry, my lord,” I said, disappointed, “but I am unable to purchase your fine sapphire today. Maybe another day.”

“Whatever you please, Elgrim,” said the prince as he handed me back all of my things.

I gave the sapphire back to the prince. It sparkled and shone in the light of nearby torches. The prince mounted his white horse and prepared to leave.

Such beauty, such worth, I thought. A priceless gem. My thoughts turned back to what had transpired that morning. The Morning Star. I would give everything for a gemstone such as that.

“Wait!” I stammered. “I will purchase the sapphire!”

The prince didn’t look surprised. He dismounted. I handed him all of the jewels and jewelry, the money, the knife, the staff, and my black cloak, all without as much as a second thought.

“The cloak is worth seven rynes,” I said. “That should cover all the costs.”

“Three thousand, one hundred twenty rynes,” said the prince. He handed me the sapphire.

“Thank you, my lord,” I said as the prince mounted once more. He began to slowly ride off without a word.

“Wait!” I cried. The prince stopped. I ran up to him. “You do know, sire, that this sapphire is worth far more than 3,120 rynes, do you not? In fact, my lord, it is priceless!”

The prince looked down upon me from his horse. His gentle eyes told me that he knew the priceless value of the sapphire. His deep brown eyes looked into my own.

“Consider it a gift.”

*So ends the story of the Sapphire.
Some call me wise—others, a fool.
But I have no regrets,
for I gave it all for the most valuable of treasures.*

An Elegy for Bryan

Keith Gogan

My friend Bryan Sanchez died
In a car accident last week
Rubber ten inches wide
Could do nothing but glide
On the cold black glass of winter
Sending him in his sweet chariot of steel
Sliding into an afterlife
We've only heard about

I remember seeing him fishing
Up at a high lake surrounded by the
Serpentine snow banks of June
Plucking trout out of the water
The way people pull cans out of grocery carts
At the checkout
At the supermarket

He loved to fish
To outsmart the wise ones of the waters
Holding them up for a snapshot
And later frying them in the waning sunlight
Just before the stars turned on
Over the peaks
Announcing the fading of the light
But only one kind of light
To be replaced
By another kind
Beyond the sun
Of each day

photo by Nick Harness



The Jawbone of an Elk

Andrea Brundage

The eating wore its teeth away
in the destructive act of living,
until holes developed in holes
and mountains were crowned with valleys.

The front teeth were the first to go,
like sentinels of fate
leaving behind honey-combed holes –
proof of their existence.

The other teeth would follow,
a mountain ridge in single file,
bound by what tore them apart.

photo by Amber C. Earls



Satellite Café Digression

Joshua Rio-Ross

The café music trickles down these waterfall walls of flint and affluence
And we never fail to notice that we ignore
Just how destitute the glass house of society truly is-
But I digress, and I digress again,
And I digress into an ever folding realm of napkin brilliance,
Into an ever folding world of burnt coffee and philosophy
Turned objective mathematics,
Objective mathematics turned back to the physics from which it came,
And I digress into the turning wheels within wheels
Which require that we use torque to turn our cars to where we might go
To change the world we pollute as we go to clean it,
At which I digress, once again, to the subject from which I began
Without digression: destitution.
But I digress,
The frantic, underprivileged college student twirls his pencil
(With torque)
Pondering some nonexistent, or yet to be existent, truth,
And wisps the pencil back to pen and back to feather and back to bird
All by spinning what is counterclockwise
And realizing, perhaps by digression, perhaps by progression,
Perhaps by both in concurrence or in succession,
That there is nothing new under the sun.
This not because there is no innovation,
But, contrarily, there is no time for the sun
To take notice of, to digress into
The difference of what is and what was and what is to come.

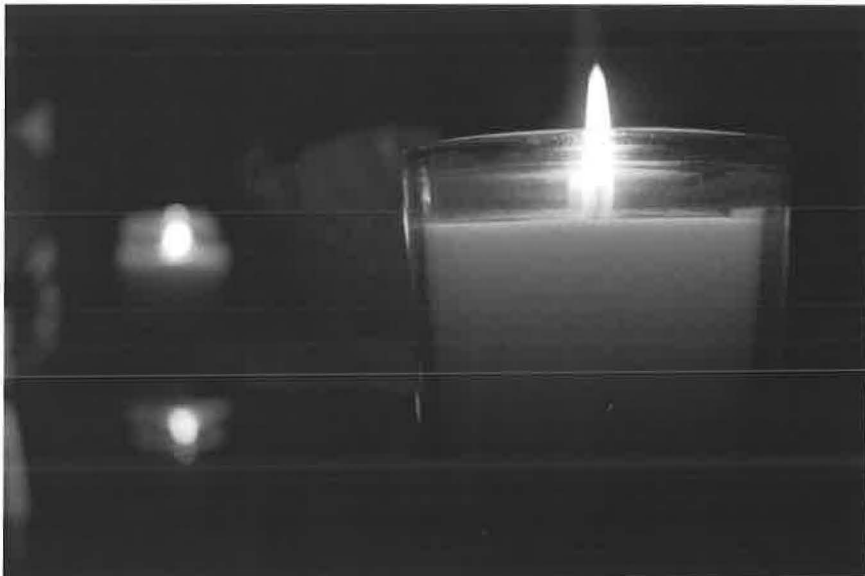


photo by Kristin P. Threadgill

Tree

Amber C. Earls

I sit
I wait
I stand strong
But you still pass me by
Something in me jumps when I see you so I'll
Make my bark a little straighter
Stretch my branches a little further
Make my leaves not lose their pigmentation and show off a little gloss
But you still pass me by and so I...cry

I cry and you see my tears but
You don't see my tears
My tears are internal
They run on the inside
These tears won't touch the ground
So my trunk will become crooked
My bark will begin to peel and my
Leaves will detach and decay and I will...cry.

I will wait and detain and be pained by my loneliness and...cry

I wait and I wait until you come along and
That something in me will jump so I'll
Strain to straighten my trunk and I'll
Wince while I revitalize my bark and
Tell my leaves to hang on a little longer

And I think that you'll
Climb me or
Hug me or
Sit under me to read a good book
But you take out a knife and carve S loves J or
J loves K or K loves LMNOP
And you walk away
Thinking you've achieved so much
And you tell them that you did it today
And I...cry

And you see my tears but you
Don't see my tears
You call it sap I call it blood
You call it natural I call it pain
You call it nothing I call it death and so I...cry.

Why not just destroy you?
I am bigger than you
You have to look up to see my greatness
I have to look down to see your lowness
So why not just destroy you?

Because it would mean making someone else be hurt or pained or...cry

I stand strong

Or so you think.

photo by Amber C. Earls



The River

Kara Fredenburg

Onscreen, four characters, larger than life, interact in what appears to be a neighborhood coffee shop. One, an attractive young man, principled but conflicted, is clearly the hero of the story. Seated near him, and gabbling good-naturedly over his latte, is another man, the hero's best friend, who will pull him through all his troubles with good advice and well-timed quips. At the next table a lovely young woman—who, early on, has expressed her great distaste for our hero—sits conversing with a companion, a brooding young man whose crinkled brow and pursed lips reveal him already as the impending villain. Within the next hour and a half, the young woman, in spite of her reservations, will realize the truth about her companion, giving her heart at long last to the deserving hero.

Such is fiction. Encountering characters in a story, no matter how complex the plot, is a bit like pulling a dusty old box of Christmas ornaments from the attic. All of the expected items are there: the paint-peeling clay horse, the slightly threadbare tinsel strand, a jagged glass ball that didn't quite survive storage and, of course, the beloved, gleaming star. Colorful and varied as the assortment may be, it will soon arrange itself on the tree in a pleasing and familiar way.

Life, though, is not like fiction. Rather than relating as a limited and relatively transparent array of players, real people pass in and out of each other's lives in infinite and unpredictable ways. Strangers can become friends; friends can become strangers; loves can form and grow but then be stillborn. Reality lacks the tight purposefulness of a story, the friendly predictability that warns us what role each person will perform. True relationships are less like the mingling of a few familiar objects and more like the inconstant mixing of a thousand tiny pebbles in a river, swirled together in an eddy of circumstance only, perhaps, to be swept apart by the greater flow of time.

It is this inconstancy that makes our relationships such a terrible risk. We have no scripted guarantee that our interactions will end in a meaningful way. Our trust can be betrayed, our passion and effort, wasted. We must entrust ourselves to others without fully knowing the outcome, without fully seeing their hearts and intentions, exposing ourselves to great pain, loss, and humiliation.

And yet relationships still draw us. In spite of the risk, we allow our common interests to bring us together, hoping that our investment will pay off with a lasting bond. There is a thrill in not knowing, of delving past the merely superficial and, wonderfully, shockingly, discovering in another personality a kindred spirit. The same inconstancy that blights our loves with danger grants beauty and value and color to them.

We move, unthinkingly, through the cast of characters that will compose our lives. Who can say which of those faces we pass will soon become names, and which names will still be on our lips when our own faces are lined with age? We are swept together by the forces of life, passing, colliding, uniting, with no certainty that all our pains and triumphs will have any resolution in the end. It is this uncertainty that makes our lives so much richer, so much better and so much worse, than fiction.

From Airplanes

Yoana Sampayo

Craving
To hopscotch clouds
To sink in free whip cream
To spy on the earth, like God
Holding a snow globe up to his nose
To watch the microorganisms vibrating
From one patch of cement to another
To know none suspect my eyes watching
To say, "I am only one of them."

photo by Amber C. Earls



Artificial

Kristin P. Threadgill

Every flower wilts
Unless it is artificial
Is the same to be assumed of friendship?
A structure that blossomed from a seed
Flourishing into the highest beauty
Soon fades and withers into infamy
Known for what it once was
A distant memory--so bittersweet
That faded into death
A plastic flower cannot die
Just as an artificial friendship
It cannot fade
It is fake and surface
Not seeded within the heart
It can only appear as is
Fake
Never changing
Never to fade
Never to feel



photo by Danielle Grant

Worth Fighting For

Curmira Bill

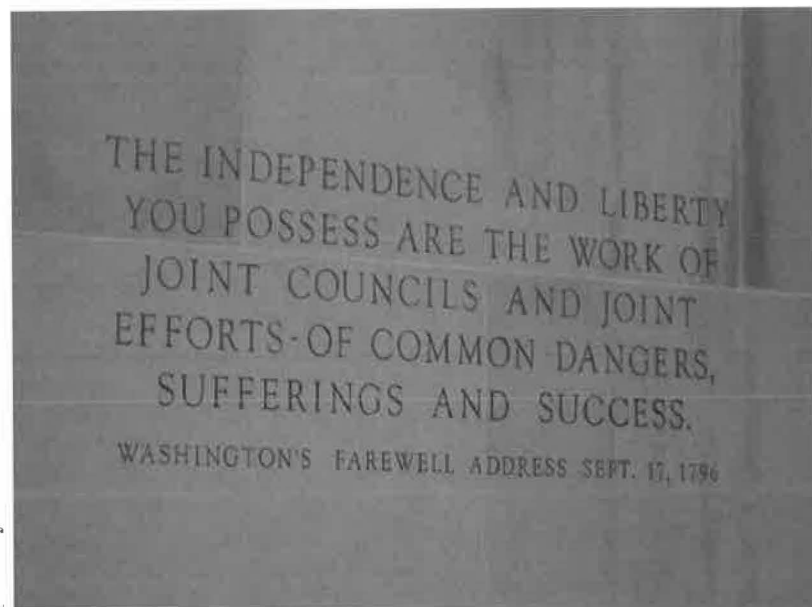
Putting my fists up
With my pistol ready
My heart pounding fiercely
My mind set,
I was sure I could see it

Someone shouted charge
And I went
They went
We went
Like an already fired cannon ball
Unable to stop ourselves

Somewhere in the mob
A punch was launched
A bullet was fired
A dagger was forced into something

By the end of it all
When the smoke cleared
Before the blood dried
All I could see were the people
Around me massacred
Not at all what it was
That we had fought for
Or what they had died for

photo by Amber C. Earls



The Paradox

B. J. Thome

Walter Van Der Horn grimaced as pain shot through his limbs. He had come to expect these fits from the genetic disease that had plagued his family for generations. He slowly counted to thirty, the normal amount of time before the pain would subside. As usual, the sharp piercing abated into a dull ache. As he leaned his head against the wheelchair's headrest, he heard the door open smoothly behind him.

"Sir?" came the tentative voice of his assistant.

"Come in," Van Der Horn answered. He heard the click of dress shoes on the tile floor as the assistant moved from the door. A few seconds later, he appeared on the edge of Van Der Horn's vision. Concentrating on his right hand, he manipulated the controls for his wheelchair just enough to bring the assistant into full view. "Any progress?"

"Actually, we have had a large amount of progress in the past few days, Sir. Although the preliminary tests were nothing short of failures, a few revisions of our theories have proven quite successful in the computer models. The team is preparing a practical test as we speak."

Van Der Horn gripped the arm of his wheelchair feebly as another wave of pain ripped through his body. Once it subsided, he asked, "When will the results for the test be in?"

"We hope to have the probe sent out tonight, but we'll wait until tomorrow evening to make the call in case the probe has some unforeseen impact on the timeline."

"Excellent. Alert me when it is time for the operation. I want to be there."

"Yes, Sir."

"Is there anything else?"

"No, Sir."

"Then leave me be." The assistant nodded in deference before complying with Van Der Horn's request. Waiting until he heard the door close behind the assistant, he directed his wheelchair toward the group of pictures on his desk. With an effort, he reached up and grabbed one of a handsome, thirty-something man with a small boy who was holding up a small fish. A tear slipped down Walter's cheek. "I know what you went through, Dad. I'm going through it too." He coughed as sobs started to interfere with his breathing. The coughing stopped as another wave of pain hit. Once it had subsided, he put the picture back on the desk. "If everything goes right, Dad, you won't have had to suffer. And neither will I."

The next day, the assistant entered Van Der Horn's office. "Sir, we're ready to begin."

Van Der Horn opened his eyes. "Understood." He pressed a button on his wheelchair. "Laboratory 3." Immediately, the chair began to move toward the door. When it was within a few feet, the doors opened automatically. Once in the hall, the wheelchair altered its course and began to head for Laboratory 3. After about ten minutes, Van Der Horn entered a room filled with computers and technicians.

When the mission director saw Van Der Horn enter, he stood. "Sir, I am honored that you were able to join us. Please, sit by me." As soon as the words came out, the director winced. "Sorry, Sir, I didn't mean to—"

"Just don't make the same mistake again, Mr.—"

“Dr. Holeman, Sir. I have a degree in theoretical physics.”

“Mr. Holeman, do not interrupt me.” Van Der Horn frowned, making eye contact with the mission director. The room grew silent, as all eyes turned toward the confrontation. After a few moments, the director backed down.

“I apologize, Sir.” Holeman lowered his eyes. “I was out of line.”

“See that it doesn’t happen again.” Van Der Horn paused, still staring at the director. Finally, he turned his attention toward the rest of the room. Immediately, the technicians returned to their work, the noise of information updates filling the room. Van Der Horn addressed the director without looking at him, “What is the current status of the project?”

“The probe has made successful transit of the wormhole,” Holeman replied. “Visual telemetry has confirmed that the wormhole is connected to the thirteenth century, the time chosen for the operation.” The director paused, noticing Van Der Horn grimace in pain. Half a minute later, his tense muscles relaxed, and the director continued his speech. “The operative is in the disembarkation room, prepared to intercept and eliminate the target.”

“Excellent. When we will know the results?”

“As long as the wormhole remains open, a temporal bubble will block the control room from being affected by any changes in the timeline. Once we shut down the wormhole, any alterations will be seen instantly. However, the bubble only extends a limited distance from the wormhole. We have probes positioned on the edge of the bubble, in order to record the changes and report on any unforeseen anomalies in the timeline. If things don’t work out properly, we can create a second wormhole and attempt to correct the problem.”

“And if the desired outcome is achieved?”

“Then the operative will eliminate the target, preventing him from producing offspring. Consequently, you, your father, and your entire lineage for the past several centuries will simply cease to exist.”

Van Der Horn gave a small sigh of relief. “‘Cease to exist.’ To surrender to the warm embrace of oblivion,” he mumbled. He closed his eyes and nearly smiled.

“Um... Sir?” the director asked tentatively. Van Der Horn opened his eyes. The director continued, “Sir, I do have a few concerns. I’m afraid that this experiment may have disastrous consequences. According to what laymen refer to as the ‘Grandfather Paradox,’ any attempt to—”

“Mr. Holeman, I am not interested in laymen’s terms or anything associated with them. I want results.” He slammed his fist on the arm of his wheelchair as hard as he could, which was, in his weakened condition, not very hard. “Not theories. Not objections. Not second opinions. I want results. Do you hear me? Re—”

Van Der Horn’s voice broke off in mid-sentence as a wave of pain rushed over him. Due to his currently agitated state, the pain was far more severe and longer-lasting than normal. As the throbbing increased, nausea overwhelmed him. His most recent meal returned to his mouth, and he vomited repeatedly. Having long ago lost control over his abdomen, he was unable to lean forward, causing the vomit to coat the front of his shirt and form a puddle in his lap.

Once the heaves stopped, several nurses hurried to Van Der Horn. They removed the vomit into a small bag and used a specialized tool to remove the stains from his clothes. Within moments, the only sign that anything unpleasant had happened to Van Der Horn was the light shimmer of sweat on his forehead.

When the nurses left, one of the lead technicians approached the mission director. “Sir, it’s time. If we don’t send the operative now, we might miss our chance.”

After glancing at Van Der Horn who nodded in approval, the director replied, "Begin transport."

The main screen at the front of the room blinked on, painting a view of a small room located near the control center. It was a simple white room, bare of any furnishings or décor. At first glance it seemed to be empty. However, on the far wall, as shown by its border with the floor, was distorted into the shape of a whirlpool. As the director and Van Der Horn watched, a single figure clothed in black entered the room, walked straight toward the distortion, and disappeared.

Van Der Horn watched the screen for a few moments before turning to the director. "Have we achieved our objectives?"

The director glanced at the technician in charge of analyzing the experiment's results. "We're sending out the probes now," the technician replied. "We should receive telemetry from outside the bubble in just a few. . ." The technician's voice trailed off as he glanced at the console readings of one of his underlings. "What? No! How can that be?" He turned to the director. "Sir, we have a problem."

The director ran from his place at the back of the room to join the technician at the console. "Don't tell me..." he mumbled, shoving the technician aside and furiously typing on the keyboard. As he typed, his eyes grew wide, and his mouth frowned. "That's what I was afraid of." He turned to Van Der Horn. "We've got a problem. We need to initiate a second wormhole and undo what we just did."

"Why?" Van Der Horn demanded, frustrated that his plan were apparently not proceeding as planned.

"The Grandfather Paradox."

"Explain."

"The Grandfather Paradox describes a temporal phenomenon. The name comes from the popular example of a person going back in time to murder his grandfather before his father is born. Since the grandfather dies before having the father, the person is never born. Since he is never born, he can't go back in time to kill his grandfather. Thus, his grandfather lives, and his father is born and so is the person. Then the person goes back in time to kill his grandfather. It's an endless loop that can't be resolved. Only one of two options can happen. First, the cycle could end up looping for eternity, going from each scenario to the next and then back. As a result, the timeline never advances farther than the point at which the person goes back in time."

"And the other option?"

The director paused. "The loop could play havoc with entropy, causing the universe to..." He took a deep breath. "Resulting in the total annihilation of the universe." He turned back to his console. "Unfortunately, I think what we have here is a case of the second option. You sent the doctors back in time, stopping your great-great-great-etc.-grandfather from marrying your great-great-great-etc.-grandmother. As a result, your ancestors haven't been born and neither have you. And since you haven't been born you can't send the men back in time."

"Then why am I still here if I was never born?"

"Because of the temporal bubble I mentioned earlier. It protects the surrounding area from alterations in the timeline. Once the wormhole shuts down, however, the temporal bubble will collapse, and everything formerly in the bubble will change to match the new timeline."

The director turned to face Van Der Horn. "We need to correct this problem before we run out of energy to maintain the wormhole. Once it collapses, we all cease to exist."

"We all cease to exist," Van Der Horn mumbled.

The director moved to another technician. "Get the second wormhole generator online. We need to go back and stop the operative." He turned to another technician and started to give him direc-

tions.

“Shut down the wormhole!” Van Der Horn commanded, causing everyone to stop in his tracks.

“Sir?” the director said. “What do you mean? If we shut down the wormhole—”

“Then my objective will be complete,” Van Der Horn interrupted.

“But, respectfully, Sir, if you do that,” the director replied, gesturing to the array of technicians, “none of us will exist. The universe won’t exist. You might as well be a mur—”

“Do you think I really care about any of that?” Van Der Horn snapped. “My goal is and always has been to end my life. And not only my life but my very existence.” He held out his withering hands. “Do you see these? Once they were strong and able. Now they’re decrepit handicaps. I don’t want to go through any more of this suffering. I can’t endure it any longer. And I don’t want to have ever gone through it. And if the annihilation of my existence has a few nasty side effects on everyone else, then so be it! Do you think your existence has any claim on the extent of my suffering?”

The director was silent.

“Now shut down that wormhole!”

The director stood still. “I—I won’t do it.”

“You coward!” Van Der Horn screamed, another wave of pain beginning to emerge and adding to his fury. “Out of my way.” He directed his wheelchair towards the wormhole control console, nearly running over anyone who didn’t immediately jump out of the way.

He reached his hands painfully toward the keyboard. With great effort, he began to type the order into the computer. The current wave of pain increased exponentially, bringing nausea with it. Van Der Horn turned his head as far as he could to the side as he vomited, plastering his shoulder with foul stomach acid. Finally, he completed inputting the order. He held his finger over the “enter” key. He closed his eyes and the pain, temporarily dulled by his vomiting, returned in full force. “No more pain!” he yelled, bringing his finger down onto the key.

Nothing happened. After all, there was nothing to happen. And there never had been.

I Walked in the Rain Today

Amber Earls

Hi Listener. Guess what?

I walked in the rain today.
And for the first time in a long time,
I felt incredibly lost
But incredibly free.
So I opened my mouth,
And caught crystal diamonds on my tongue.

Also,
I called out to God
And I told Him
That I felt like disaster.
I told Him
That I needed a hug
And I told Him
That I wanted that moment to last forever.

I'm reading Stargirl for Young Adult Lit.
You know the one.
Do you remember that part
Where Stargirl dances in the rain?
I think I did that today.
My boots are soaked
But they're beginning to dry underneath the Philadelphia poster in my Dorm.

And my Fro is completely back.
Totally.
Not straight anywhere.
After all
We all know what happens when I get my hair wet.
(It shrinks. Go figure.)
I'll keep my fro too
Until I ask Jen for her Blo-dryer and give her the 5 bucks I owe her for doing my hair for Home-coming.

I didn't do well on my Humanities exam.
Because I didn't study hard enough
Or long enough.

And I'll leave that one alone because I already feel terrible.

I'm writing poetry again
And it feels wonderful
And I told God about it
While I ran copies for Mr. Reiger's class.
And I think He's happy for me too.

And I thought about this
While I walked in the rain today
And sloshed through the puddles
And let raindrops kiss the shades
That were taking a nap on my head
And I think
I want God
To give me another day
Just like this one
When I'm too old to like Rock Music
(If that's possible)
And Spongebob has replaced classic shows like EEK! the Cat and Salute Your Shorts.
(Too Late.)
And I forget how to laugh at silly things because I will be too busy with babies and running my Multi-Million Dollar Corporation.
And I'll be in my forties
Too embarrassed to
Take a walk in the rain
Without a silly thing as an umbrella
And cry out to God
And thank Him
For giving me such a wonderful day.



photo by Jordan McCown

Time

Elizabeth Staab

Early-morning pennies,
gold-pink and shining as the birdsong sky,
plunking into gutters,
fall from weary hands.

On the crowd-stopped sidewalk,
a mint-bright dime
buys a mint-bright smile,
a pack of gossip.

Day's last purchase,
crumpled bills and mud-tone coins,
cleared from restless pockets,
are tossed away in sleep.

photo by Lisa Sobilo



Worship Concert?

Kristin P. Threadgill

Thousands of eyes face the stage awaiting the star line up
The parade begins as the kick drum launch vibrates and echoes
Storming through the auditorium like an unforgiving aftershock
Always on repeat, a heart of worship is again the theme of the show
Come on! Time to stand, conform and raise hands at all the right pre-chorus
Hyped emotions seduce the crowd, as if to say come worship with me
A small, yet coveted sneak peek beneath the seduction reveals the truth
Come one, come all, come worship me! A legend in my own mind
Sheep flock and goats chant in compliance, it is what it is as always
An ego stroke to the hollow heart that conducts in spirit and deception
Where it is the actual directive of song and purity is dismissed for idolatry
Still, all sing a song sung a million times in vain and buy a t-shirt on the way out
The commercialism of Christ takes center stage and exits stage left



photo by Kristin P. Threadgill

The Scientific Method

Rachel Whitlock

I'd been at Jackson High School for 3 years when I finally won the schedule lottery: a class with THE Malcolm Cunningham.

Malcolm Cunningham was the most gorgeous specimen of adolescent boy that I had ever laid eyes on. His curly dark hair, brown eyes, and the subtle hint of muscles underneath his Ramones t-shirt and worn-in jeans all worked together, along with his mysterious yet confident "I do what I want" aura, to form the image of my ideal boyfriend. And now I would have a 45 minute block of time to just...look at him. Sure, I planned on working up the courage to talk to him eventually, but for the time-being I would focus on gathering as much information about him as possible in our 12th grade English class.

"Good MORNING class, how IS everyone??" my new English teacher shouted with a big grin. I could smell the idealism coming off of her like those freshman boys who doused themselves with enough Axe body spray to suffocate an asthmatic.

"I think it's very important to enjoy literature in this class, even though you might go into a very different field after high school. Tell me, who are your favorite writers, authors, poets?" She pointed in my direction, so I muttered something about Dorothy Parker, and looked towards Malcolm for a response. He cleared his throat, tossed his bangs away from those dreamy eyes and said "Dude, I really like e.e. cummings. He just like, completely disregarded all those crappy grammar rules and got away with it." Was it possible that Malcolm was smart as well as gorgeous? Oh, I hoped so.

Four weeks later, I got back my first test, with 94% scrawled at the top in red ink. I smiled. This class was going better than expected. I heard a discontented grunt from the back corner where Malcolm sat, then saw him move to cover the grade at the top of the page with his hand as others looked his direction. A 78%. Wow. His traditional well-placed barbs at the "establishment" were obviously out of place on a test covering Shakespearean sonnets. No matter, my heart would still beat wildly at the squeak of his black high-top Converse.

Nothing that Malcolm Cunningham did escaped my gaze. The way his left-handed notes resulted in blue smudges on his arm...his tendency to click his favorite pen rapidly at the first sign of boredom...his complete disregard for when class began...all of these minute details went into my mental dossier. I would yet figure out my subject.

My chance at eloquent first words finally came, midway through October. He had forgotten his copy of *the Odyssey*, and Ms. Renning had the brilliant idea to read aloud from the climactic revealing of Odysseus to Telemachus. This was, coincidentally, the same day I had been brave enough to take advantage of her oft-repeated "sit where you are comfortable!" policy, and placed my carefully-dressed self in the chair beside Malcolm.

He shifted nervously in his seat at the prospect of reading aloud from a book he had forgotten to bring, but I was fully prepared. With a gentle motion I put my copy of the book in front of him, with the passage highlighted in pink. I heard gratitude in the way he cleared his throat, I swear. Oh, and how I melted at his voice. As smooth and clear as a mountain stream...

When class was over that day, I gathered up my things quickly and turned to face Malcolm, expecting a verbal thanks from those kissable lips that would hopefully lead to a discussion of the

homecoming dance coming up. Instead, he snapped his binder shut with an echoed veracity, and turned to face me with burning in his eyes.

“I don’t need your help. I was FINE on my own.”

The previous voice that could have recorded audiobooks for a living was replaced by one that could easily be envisioned using unkind words towards his mother. I was aghast at this development. He swung his heavy backpack onto his arm with a thud and all but stomped out of the classroom. Not knowing what else to say, I yelled after him with a desperate voice.

“What did I do?”

I heard nothing in return but the echo of his angry footsteps across the hallway.

photo by Amber C. Earls



One Morning

Kristin P. Threadgill

One morning, I woke up, and my future was within in grasp
I questioned the validity of this promise, so longed for, so sought for
Could this be it at last, and if so what merit do I hold to deserve such an offer
One morning, I woke up, and the sun went down
One morning, I woke up and darkness was the sole resounding sound
All that remained was the tri-moonlight, far above yet beside me
Never leaving, never forsaking, earnestly wanting me to reach
One morning, I woke up
The stars though dim shown patterns of my past, both pleasant and painful
The moonlight illuminated my heart and revealed to me my dreams
Reminding me of my designated paths and directed steps
Reacquainting my soul with promises that were and are to be
One morning, I woke up, to a whisper in my ear
Fear not, it said, fear not, for this is your year
Make haste and listen there's a story longing to be written
One morning, I woke up and a new dawn had been set
One morning, I woke up



photo by Lisa Sobilo

In the Depths

Blake Booth

Roaring, there is no sound,
The ground upon which I stand is void
Lost in the blackest tears,
Liquid flames burn without light
Their scorching fingers molest my body
In deepest fears
Mind seeks to place what is
But there's no understanding what is not familiar,
Terror like a spear pierces my immortal with misery
What I was, is that which holds me now
Its heavy chains bind me down,
To what, I do not know
Only that I lack the ability to move
In this solitary state
Death ever abiding, ceasing never, lingers
By my feet
The slow, cold breath falls upon my skin,
Desolation here

Wonderland

B. J. Thome

Gray light glimmers through
trees' prismic fangs; sparkles
dance on silent seas
while
wind carves waves in frozen froth.

We scatter sand to turn sea to slush.
Wrapped in cold-wards, we waddle.
We curse the cold
and
for spring we sigh.

Shadowless light glimmers
in heated house; figures
dance on large small-screens
while
gravity carves waves in bulbous blubber.

Fresh Bread

Amanda Showler

August was always the most miserable time for bread making. The three bedroom ranch house swelled with heat from the ovens, and even the walls were sweaty with Georgian humidity. Today, salvation came on the wind and stirred the thick haze of heat that made the whole world sleepy. She heard it whistle through the wide open window behind the dining table and stepped away from her cloud of flour and yeast.

The screen door creaked as she swung it open and stepped out onto the porch into the moving air. Wisps of grey hair shifted from their place against her wet brow and danced around her ears. She wiped her hands first on her apron, and then over her face to remove the layer of flour and sweat that had settled into the little wrinkles around her eyes and mouth. The cotton shirt that clung limp to her body came to life as the wind blew through it to cool her. She drew in a long, fresh breath and closed her eyes. Relief.

On the shaded east side of the porch, Dixie, the family's English Shepherd, lay sprawled, tongue out, lungs heaving in her sleep as the black and white fur rose and fell. Even the weather-worn rocking chairs creaked ever so slightly with the wind.

A few minute's break won't hurt, she thought. She retreated to Papa's rocking chair, the one on the east side, and relaxed in the shade. Her bare foot stroked the fur on Dixie's side and in a moment's time she was lost in memory.

When Dixie was a puppy, the boys would take her out to the yard and throw sticks and things for her to chase. She would yip and yip as she ran after tennis balls and old shoes, corn husks or even rocks. Then when she and the boys got older, she started chasing them like sheep, always nipping at their heels to get them to run faster. They would laugh and haw, trying not to get caught, provoking her to chase again if ever she got bored. She could almost hear their laughter again, and the faint rustle of bare feet and suspender clamps as they raced through the grass. Now Dixie was here alone, sleeping on the porch, a remnant of days gone by.

June took a deep breath to release the tightness that had grown in her chest as the happy little film played back in her mind. The ache, she knew, was too much for a single breath to heal. She shook the image from her mind and looked about.

The blazing afternoon sun was still inviting enough to bring a smile to her face. The horses in the pasture to the west swished their tails and shook their manes and plodded around one another to find the freshest grasses. Finches huddled on the old stump Papa had hollowed out to fill with feed and they quarreled now over bits of seed and grain. The wind lifted dust from the drive, putting an orange haze over the front yard. Overhead there were no clouds, only a bird here or there, singing to the sun. She heard the barn door behind the house groan on its rusty hinge. The leaves on the oaks in the front yard chattered to one another in a peaceful rhythm.

As she turned her eyes from the lush green that marked the east border of the ranch's property, she spotted a dark, oblong figure growing in the distance. Amid the distorting waves of heat, it was hard to tell at first, but she was almost sure it was a person coming up the drive. June stood, brushed the hair out of her face and strained her eyes forward to make out a gangly male, hands jammed in his jean pockets, head down against the stirring cloud of dust around him. He came slowly, but not care-

lessly.

Whatever could possess a person to come calling on such a miserable day? she wondered. Though she could not see his face, she was sure this poor creature needed some kind of help. He walked all tight to himself, as if he were cold or afraid. Since he couldn't possibly be cold, she reasoned, he must be frightened by something. James was no where near the house today but out in the far pasture feeding cattle. Whatever this young man wanted, she would have to handle this on her own.

Unsure of herself, she backed into the doorjamb slowly and placed her right hand on the double-barreled shotgun that always stood post by the door. The man never once looked up and that bothered her. She lifted the shotgun, letting her left arm cradle it loosely, as if it belonged there. She didn't want to use it or anything. Just make a statement.

As the man drew closer, she noticed a familiarity in his gait. Something turned in her stomach that told her she'd seen this man before.

"Hullo there," she called out.

The creature lifted its head, a copper face glowing between a dark mop of hair and the dingy, long-sleeved Henley it wore. The face was twisted with sorrow and tight with fear. The look reminded her of the nights when her son was a little boy and woke up with terrible visions of monsters or of falling...

Like two bolts of lightening through a dead tree, shock and relief struck her chest as she realized the man coming towards her was her son.

"Hullo, mama," she heard him say, more like whimper, as he approached the stairs.

Blood rushed to June's ears at the sound and her legs felt weak beneath her. To steady herself, she breathed his name, "Andrew." She faltered down the porch stairs, bending slightly to let the shotgun fall to the painted wood. She nearly fell into the man's arms, but held herself by the stair railing, her heart unsure of the hundred emotions she felt all at once. They stood there for a long moment, eyes absorbing a foreign vision.

The calloused hands of the man slid out of their pockets and he stepped forward to throw boyish arms around her.

"Mama," he called her, his voice wet and broken from crying.

"Oh, my Andrew," she cried as her arms filled with the full-grown muscle and bone of her son. She rested her head on the sweaty chest of the young man she last saw as the boy Dixie chased around the yard. Suddenly the visions of bare feet and suspender clasps didn't seem so far away anymore.

Andrew buried his face in his mother's collar and muttered, "Mama, I'm so sorry. I never meant to... [sniffle]. I'm so, so sorry."

"Shhh. Baby, don't worry about all that. You're home." June pulled back to look at those bright blue eyes. They were just as full of life as she remembered them, even if they were a little sad. She cupped his wet face in her hands and said, "I love you, son."

He took her hands, kissed the palms gently and said, "I love you too."

Dixie's bark broke the dreamlike moment as she rose and wagged her old tail at the familiar figure on the stairs.

"Hey, 'ol buddy," Andrew said to her, enveloping her in his long arms.

June smiled at her boy and picked up the shotgun.

"Come on inside the house. I'll send the hand out to get your father and I'll pour you a glass of tea. Do you want some bread?"

photo by Kristin P. Threadgill



Waldo

Jordan McCown

Act I, Scene I

The scene is a media room in a middle class home. A beat-up couch, obviously left over from the guys' days of bachelor-hood, is pushed up against the wall, and a cluttered coffee table sits in front of it. In the middle of a cleared space sits a white, flimsy cardboard box, the kind that mall stores give out as gift boxes. There is a door on the left side of the stage, the only entrance to the room, and a window on the right side. The whole room is messy, with stacks of boxes labeled "Rec Room" and "T's Books" in one corner and a couple of guitar cases and part of a drum set in the other.

*Two guys, **Tristan** and **Bryce**, are sitting on the couch. From their ages, we can judge that they graduated from college a year or two ago. They are staring at an invisible TV sitting in the audience. The two of them are intensely concentrated—both are holding video game controllers.*

Tristan: (grimaces and starts mashing buttons wildly. He leans into Bryce, then begins punching him in the leg repeatedly, grunting) Uh! Yeah! Get him!

Bryce: (begins to panic. Suddenly, he throws down the controller) Dude, why?! Why is it that every time you start to lose, you start cheating like... like... like Jonathan Rhys Meyers in *Match Point*!

Tristan: ...like who?

Bryce: (realizing that what he has said is impossibly not funny, but trying to play it off anyway) *Match Point*? You know, directed by Woody Allen? Starring Scarlett Johansson? ...The guy cheats on his girlfriend? ...The movie was huge in 2006.

Tristan: What are you, Wikipedia? Nobody has ever heard of that.

Bryce: Whatever, I just watched it... (mumbling slightly) it seemed like a good metaphor...

Tristan: Oh, speaking of metaphor, look! Look at this! (picks up the box on the coffee table. He opens it and holds up a striped red and white sweater)

Bryce: (slowly, in awe of the thing he is beholding) What... is that?

Tristan: This, my friend, was Erica's Valentine's Day present to me.

Bryce: (laughter beginning to creep into his voice) That... is the most ridiculous thing I have ever seen! (now laughing entirely) Does she not realize how goofy you would look if you wore that? (suddenly horrified) She doesn't expect you to wear that, does she?

Tristan: What do you mean? Of course she expects me to wear it! It's a Valentine's Day present, am I supposed to just act like I never got it?

Bryce: No, you don't have to ignore it! Frame it, post a picture on Facebook, just don't wear it! You can't wear that!

Tristan: I'm going to, man, and it is going to be ok.

Bryce: No! This woman has you brainwashed! You guys have been dating two years, and she has you licking yogurt off the kitchen floor for her! You can't do everything she wants you to! You are losing your self, your soul is crying out to you—"Save me! Save me! I am becoming a woman!"

Tristan: Man, it's all about commitment. I have to say "I will wear this sweater, even though it will make everybody I have ever known lose their respect for me. I will wear this sweater, because I love my woman, and I am committed to making her happy."

Bryce: I am pretty sure that if you took all the first letters of all those words, and put them together, it would spell the word "whipped."

Tristan: And this is why you are still single! Look, it's like... (searching) if you go bear hunting... and halfway through the hunt, you find a bear... and... you decide you don't want to kill it, and you walk away... and then it decides to kill you. See, that's it. If you had stayed committed, if you had killed that bear... then you would still be alive...

Bryce: ...

They both burst out laughing

Tristan: Seriously, though, I am going to wear that shirt.

Bryce: Ok, well tonight's your big chance. (Tristan looks slightly confused.) Remember? Tonight? Movies, at ten, me, you, and the lady.

Tristan: Oh yeah, *Seven Pounds*, I hear this one is going to be really uplifting!

Bryce: (glancing at his phone) Mmmyes. And we need to get going. Come on, I want to stop by 7-Eleven on the way over there so I can sneak some Sour Patch Kids into the theater. I'm not paying thirteen bucks for one of those tiny boxes!

They both get up and head out the door; Tristan pulls the sweater on over his head. They are still talking as they leave

Tristan: Excellent idea! Do you think I could hide a slurpee under this sweater? ...

Lights down

End of Scene I

Scene 2

It is one year later. The room remains, for the most part, unchanged—there are a few new boxes, here and there, labeled “Erica’s Stuff.” It is clear that this room has remained the haven of “guy talk” in the midst of the home that Tristan and Erica now share. One thing, however, stands out as particularly out of place—a large, blue book sits on the coffee table, with a picture of a laughing baby on the cover.

We find the two guys sitting on the couch, once again staring at the TV in the audience. Tristan is holding a video game controller and is in the middle of playing a game while Bryce looks on. Tristan is finishing telling Bryce a story.

Tristan: ...and so she left me this book here (nudges it with his foot) to look some up and help me choose a couple.

Bryce: (picks up the book) Dude... (starts to flip through it) Dude, how weird is this? This is the kind of thing we used to talk about back in elementary school...

Tristan: I know, right? And now here we are...

Bryce: Here you are. I’m still swingin’ singl-y, brother, and livin’ the life. You are the one having a kid.

Tristan: Holy crap, man! Ho-lee crap! Sometimes, it’s hard for me to believe I’m even really married!

Bryce: I know, and to someone so HOT! I mean, every time I see your wife... wakkawakka, SCHWING!

Tristan: Dude, that wasn’t even funny when Erica and I were just dating. Now that we’re actually married, I am contractually obligated to beat the living williejangles out of you if you do that again.

Bryce: Hey, all I’m saying is, if you guys ever consider—

Tristan bellows and throws down his controller, tackling Bryce. They grapple for several seconds, laughing, and Tristan comes out on top with Bryce in a headlock, punching him in the ribs repeatedly as he flails.

Bryce: (shouting, laughing) Ok! Ok! Let me go, you big baby! Hey, you’re wrinkling the book! YOU’RE WRINKLING THE BOOK!

Tristan releases him, and slowly sits back down on the couch and picks up his controller again, giving Bryce the stinkeye. Bryce picks up the book in a mock huff, smoothing out the pages.
Silence for a few moments.

Bryce: ...but seriously, she is beautiful...

Tristan: (looks at Bryce for a moment, ready for another fight, but sees that he is sincere) ...Yeah, man, she is... It's unbelievable how this all worked out...
I mean, you remember that first time I asked her out? Everyone was practically lining up to talk to her, she was so incredible... and here I was, little Tristan Waldo, practically hyperventilating as I handed her that rose and asked her to the SpringFling...

Bryce: (now actually looking through the book, mutters without glancing up) You were definitely a pimp god...
(suddenly) So what are you thinking of, then? For the name?

Tristan: Well... if it was a boy, I was kind of thinking of doing something different, you know... like... Garth?

Bryce: Garth? As in, Wayne's World? Are you kidding me? That's pretty much the worst name ever!

Tristan: No, not as in Wayne's World, as in, like, Garth Brooks or something! That man is a country sex god! I like the name, ok! It has a good manly ring to it.

Bryce: It kind of sounds like Darth Vader...

Tristan: Right! Darth Vader! Who's cooler or manlier than the big Darth himself?

Bryce: Well, have you brought it up with Erica yet?

Tristan: Yeah... she hated it, too. I don't understand you guys.

Bryce: (flipping through book) Look, Tristan. The name you give your child will stick with them for the rest of their life. Do you want your kid to go around known as... (flips a page)... "Garden Keeper?"

Tristan: What?

Bryce: Yeah, that's what it says right here. "Garth" is an old English name for "Garden Keeper." You might as well as name your son "Jeeves" or "Hired Hand" or something.

Tristan: Oh... well that's not optimal...

Bryce: Here, look at this one (hold out book, Tristan cranes his neck to see).

Tristan: Montgomery? "From The Hill of the Powerful Man?" What the heck does that mean?

Bryce: I don't know, but it's manly, isn't it? Manly is what you're looking for. And it has a good movie-star ring to it. Like (lowers his voice) "Montgomery, rock god, sex idol, and now, like you've never seen him before, starring in "Explosion-Gun III: What is it This Time?"

Tristan: That, or Montgomery Burns, that old guy from The Simpsons. I don't want kids to rub their hands and say "Yessss, Smithers" every time they look at my son.

Bryce: Well, whatever you do, don't make him a "Jr."

Tristan: And why not? My dad was a Jr. What's wrong with being a Jr.?

Bryce: Well, for one thing, I think it would be hard to live your whole life in your dad's shadow like that, and... I mean, he'll already have a strike against him because of that dumb last name, and on top of that... (quickly) Tristan is kind of a girl's name...

Tristan: What?! I don't have a girl's name!

Bryce: Didn't your mom tell me that she came home one day and caught you playing with dolls and having a tea party?

Tristan: Look, I was doing that with my neighbor, ok? Who happened to be a girl. Her name was Shawnee. It was all part of my master plan of mack...

Bryce: Riiiiight... and that's why YOU were wearing the dress!

Tristan: She wanted to see what—(Bryce is laughing)—oh, forget it. Why can't you just admit that you're jealous of my spectacular name?

Bryce: Are you kidding me? Your name means... (looks through book) "Tumult." Why would I want to be named "A Big Confusing Mess?"

Tristan: (grabbing book from Bryce's hands) Let me see that... it says here your name means "Speckled!" Ha! Speckled!

Bryce: It's better than Messy!

Tristan: Ok, Speckles! You sound like you're from "My Little Pony" or something!

Both laugh

Tristan: But seriously, though... I am so excited, man...

Bryce: You're going to be a DAD, man! You can teach your son, train him up in the ways of dudeli-hood!

Tristan: I can finally play catch with him, coach his soccer team, watch "Enter the Dragon" with him, teach him how to treat a woman...

Bryce: Hey, can I be his godfather?

Tristan: ...dude... of course!

Bryce: Right on! Are you serious! I'm going to be a godfather!

(the phone rings, Tristan reaches over to answer it)

Tristan: Hey, this is Tristan! Yeah... (looks suddenly worried) Wait, what? What?! (jumps up, grabs his coat off the couch, starts wrestling it on while still holding the phone to his ear). I'll... I'll be right there... (throws the phone down without hanging up. Starts heading out the door).

Bryce: Hey! (Tristan turns slightly) ...What is it?

Tristan: It's the hospital... Erica's been in an accident...

Bryce: WHAT?! (leaps up, follows Tristan out the door)

Lights down

End of Scene 2

Scene 3

The lights are dimmer, but not so much that you would consciously notice it in the audience. Rather, your eyes focus on the lone figure sitting on the couch.

It is Tristan, and his head is in his hands. He looks bad—he hasn't shaved, his eyes are red, his cheeks are tear-streaked. His wife and baby have just died.

He is alone. After maybe half a minute, there is a knock at the door. He makes no move to answer it.

Bryce: (through door) Hey, Tristan, man I know you are in there. Open up. Please.

Look... this note out here... Look... Tristan... Tristan... (his voice breaks) ...Tristan... Everybody out here is asking "Where's Tristan Waldo? Where's Waldo?" What can I tell them? They just want to come see you. What should I tell them? ... Tristan... I know it's not easy... Tristan, you can't do this, ok? Don't do this. Just... just take the year off or some thing. Take some time off.

As Bryce talks, Tristan awakens, as if from a reverie. He sits up suddenly and begins digging around the couch.

Bryce: Go travel, or something...

Look, I'm not going to say that it isn't the end of the world, because it... it is... But... it is... ...Tristan? Tristan, you can't stay alone in there forever. You need people. Just go out, please, mingle, get in some crowds. See new things. (crying now) Tristan, please...

Bryce falls silent. Tristan stops—he has found what he is looking for. From behind the couch he pulls out the sweater that Erica gave him a year before. He looks at it, and his face becomes soft. It is as if lines that he didn't realize were there melt away, leaving him tender. He holds it up to his face, inhales deeply, then slowly slips the sweater up over his head. He adjusts it, then goes over to some of the boxes and reaches behind them. He pulls out a walking stick and a backpack, along with a red stocking cap. He goes over and opens the door, surprising Bryce, who has been leaning against the wall beside the door with his head in his arms. It is clear that Bryce has not been sleeping, either. He jumps up, but Tristan silences him.

Tristan: (hoarse, halting) I am going. Away. For a while.

Tristan pushes past Bryce.

Lights down

End of Scene 3

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