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Eastern Kentucky University, English Department

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AURORA



AURORA

1987

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So Much Righteous Anger

Lauren Willoughby

Over beers two years ago Trevor Abbott was very expressive on the subject of marriage, encouraging me to remain a bachelor for life. Sloshing dribbles of Coors in arcs over my carpet, he informed me, as if for the first time, of the values of freedom and the chains of responsibilities and obligations. Women were scheming cats. He moaned for quite a while, consequently soaking my carpet.

My carpet used to be beautiful, a creamy off-white. I had installed it a few months after moving from Wisconsin to Kentucky to enjoy the title of Mr. Abbott's next-door-neighbor. A titled neighbor is entitled to Abbott's friendship and confidences --especially if that neighbor has a satellite dish and a well-stocked bar.

He had come over to watch a Charles Bronson movie on my dish. The week before it had been Clint Eastwood and Sean Connery. Several nights a week my tuner strayed from C-Span to HBO for gut-ripping fistfights and bloody vengeance rendered at the hands of those "death-dealin' sons of bitches." I wondered what woman would be sacrificed tonight so that our hero would have a reason for the piles of corpses he left behind.

"It'll be on in 40 minutes," Trevor said, consulting his watch. "It's good. Have you seen it?" I nodded no. "You'll love it. I've seen it twice."

"That good, huh?"

"It's a great movie," Trevor said, studying my tuner box. "I'm gonna have to buy one of those things, but you can't get a decent one for under a thousand." He lowered his voice conspiratorially. "I hear you can get parts, put one together for under three hundred, and sell

the thing for over fifteen hundred.-- I sent off for the details. You interested?"

"No, thanks, I don't think I'd do very well at it."

"Damn, the future's in this satellite technology, you know that?"

"I suppose so."

"Hell, I know so," he said, pausing as he took a drink. "A man has to resort to his own devices. It's not his fault if a man can't find decent work in this economy -- and I'm not gonna dig ditches or pump gas."

"Weren't you going to set up a catalog mail-order business?" I asked, remembering his recent enthusiasm over hearing on "Hour Magazine" that cottage industries --particularly mail-order businesses --were booming. He had had Abbott Gift Co. printed on reams of paper and a few t-shirts. I had received a few of each, as generous souvenirs. "I thought you were going to the courthouse to file."

"It's a bunch of bullshit," he snorted. "They have all these forms, fees, regulations, taxes . . . they really don't want people like us to have any money. Everything runs for the rich, and we're under their thumb right where they want us."

Trevor wasn't my only talkative neighbor. Blue-haired, pinched-nose Mrs. Hatchet, who lived on my left, loved to gossip. Like Trevor, Trevor was one of her favorite topics for conversation. Before the mail-order enthusiasm, she told me, there had been attempts at attack dog training, swimming pool digging, water distilling, and countless other things she said would come to her later. The Abbotts' two dobermans were left over from the brief dog training experiment; he named them for characters in a gladiator movie. Mrs. Hatchet said that June, his wife, still suffered from a back injury she received falling into an open hole that was to become a pool. "I'm surprised she is still alive with all those

hair-brained schemes he gets her into," Mrs. Hatchet had said, her thin voice quivering with fury, then she sighed. "She won't listen to reason. He's the only man she's ever known. Poor, bullied thing doesn't know she doesn't have to put up with him."

Trevor was rambling on about being prepared for a drastic economic change, about trucks not transporting food on government orders, about rioting mobs trying to beat down your door for a can of corn, about the food he had stored away, about the guns he had bought to protect himself, and I was thinking about Mrs. Hatchet, when the doorbell rang.

Trevor jumped off the couch and ran toward the kitchen. "If it's June or the kids, you don't know where I am," he called over his shoulder.

It was the twins. "Hi, Mr. Hale, is Dad here?" Trina asked.

"No," I answered, blocking the doorway. "Is there something you would like me to tell him if he should happen to stop by?" Tanya lifted up on tiptoe and peered into the livingroom, where two beer cans sat on top of the coffee table. She smirked.

"I guess it's not really that important," Trina said, biting her lip. "It was just the wholesale people calling about Dad's mail-order business."

"I thought he gave up on that idea," I said.

"We don't know about it if he has," Trina said, rather stiffly for a 13-year-old. "I finished stamping some labels just today."

"Figures," Tanya muttered, shaking her head.

"Sorry to bother you, Mr. Hale," Trina said.

"Yes, hope we didn't inconvenience you,"

Tanya added, and eyed me seriously. "You can't be too young to get cirrhosis--it's one of the top killers, you know. Be careful with those beers." She winked at me and ran after her sister.

Trevor emerged from the kitchen with a fresh beer as I shut the door. "I never can get away," he said disgustedly. "They always have to know where I am."

"Why don't you tell them where you're going? June might be worried about you."

"A man needs a sense of freedom. 'Sides, it's good for her, keeps her on her toes."

"Well, she must know you're somewhere around here. Your car is parked in the driveway," I said.

"No, it isn't, I parked it way down the street," he laughed.

"Aren't you afraid, leaving June alone so much, that she might get interested in another man?" I asked, playing with my pull-tab.

"June? Hell, no," he said and sighed. "I'm afraid if I ever found a wife of mine with another man, I'd have to kill her."

I dropped my pull-tab, clattering, into the can.

"That reminds me," he said, digging into his pants pocket. "What do you think of this?" he asked proudly, handing me a small pistol. "It's a .22 and she's a powerful baby."

It felt like a warm and tingly thing in my hands, and I quickly gave it back to him. "It's nice," I said, feeling better when it was back in his pocket.

"Maybe we can set up some milk jugs and do some shooting sometimes," he said, and I nodded. He picked up his Coors, sank back into the cushions, and began talking about the rotten institution of marriage. I wished he wouldn't be so eloquent a speaker with a can of beer in his hands, as he gestured dramatically.

Does beer stain carpets? I hadn't thought so, but I decided to get a head start on the spots, whether or not it was rude to clean up after a guest while he ruins your carpet. As I was getting rags and cleaning solutions from the

kitchen, Trevor called out that he would never have married if he had had a choice.

"Didn't have any choice. She got herself knocked up -- what could I do? It wouldn't be honorable to leave her to raise my kid alone, and I wouldn't ever allow abortion." he said, banging on the armrest as I came out of the kitchen. "I did the honorable thing."

"Could you lift you foot?" I asked, and he set his booted foot heavily on the coffee table, I began to scrub at a spot.

"Say, what're you doing down there? Did I spill some beer?" Immediately contrite, he set his beer can in a coaster.

"It's okay."

"Isn't that one of those stain proof carpets?"

"No, afraid not."

"Well, hell, Sam, that's the only kind you should get," he said loudly. "When I buy carpet again, that's what I'm buying."

"You're absolutely right," I agreed. Agreeing with Trevor is the best policy after he has put down several beers.

"I know I'm right," he said with conviction. "Everybody ought to buy those stain-proof carpets, especially if they've got kids. Lord knows I know what a mess kids can make."

"Your girls don't make much of a mess, do they?" I asked, thinking that the twins seemed well-mannered, like their mother. I had two more spots to scrub until I had a complete collection of well-lathered beige spots.

"Well, you know kids... Aren't those spots coming up? Want me give you a hand?"

"No," I panted, on my hands and knees, working hard on converting the last and biggest spot, for consistency.

Trevor cleared his throat, and I knew his chin was set at that angle reserved for serious statements.

"Say, Sammy, uh, can I ask you a personal question?" he asked, deepening his voice until it was in danger of cracking.

"Why not," I said, sitting up to relieve my back and shamefully out-of-shape pecs.

"Are you, uh, are you one of those...one of those..." he faltered.

"One of those --what?" I asked, beginning to be more than mildly annoyed with him.

"One of those..."

"No, I am not one of 'those queer fellas' you're so fond of talking about," I answered, seriously questioning my notion of southern hospitality, about to revamp it. Two nights a week of Trevor's company was surely beyond neighborly obligation.

"Look, I didn't mean anything. And what were we supposed to think? I mean, you haven't got a wife or a girlfriend, far as we know. And you don't talk much about women," he blustered. "You got such pretty furniture and stuff --hell, what were we supposed to think?"

"We?" I was beginning to realize how curious a specimen I was to my neighbors, besides Mrs. Hatchet.

"Uh, the guys, the neighbors. But I knew right off you weren't. I mean, I can tell by looking at somebody --they just don't look right," he said, quinting at me. "But the guys, they wondered why a guy with your money wasn't snared already."

I laughed and Trevor joined in. "Tell your friends I almost got captured, but she changed her mind and set her traps for someone else." Suddenly I felt embarrassed.

Trevor clapped me on the shoulder. "Yeah, I know how it is. Women get you all tangled up and leave you to untie yourself."

"She was a very attractive woman, looked a lot like June, in fact."

"Think she's pretty? Hell, she is, isn't she? Wouldn't have married her if she wasn't."

He slurped more beer, a frown crossing his face.

"What is it draws you to a woman, Sam?"

"I don't--"

"See, there's this woman I met at Shane's Bar," he interrupted. "She's got the most beautiful green eyes you could ever find. She drives a black Corvette and has her own house." Trevor leaned back on the couch, lacing his fingers behind his neck. "She was tobacco queen of the county, and was homecoming queen at the high school twelve years ago, you know."

"No--"

"I keep forgetting you just moved here, buddy," he grinned and slapped my thigh. "Great place, isn't it? I love it, wouldn't live anywhere else. I can stand up for 'Yankee Doodle' and get all misty when they play 'Dixie.'" He paused, looking expectantly at me.

"Yeah, it's a great place," I said, clearing my throat. "Summers are certainly warmer."

"Down here you get better inspiration from writing that book?"

"Since I'm writing about the history of the tobacco industry, I think it would be more inspiring here than in Wisconsin," I answered, smiling.

"Oh, yeah. Say, what'd you write about up there, cheese?" he asked, and laughed. "I'll bet you don't find women like Renee Robinson in Wisconsin."

"Who?"

"That woman I was telling you about. She's something else --makes a lot of money, a paralegal, you know."

Actually, I did know, from Mrs. Hatchet's thorough discussions of her and from meeting her myself on my one visit to Shane's. Renee Robinson was a woman who glistened with artificiality, who gleamed with the hard edge of a huntress. Her manner seemed to suggest there was a whole camera crew waiting, just out of sight, for the moment when she would walk onto

the set. She had nails like red daggers and a face that she dashed into the ladies' room for every five minutes to correct, not that she really needed to. She pounced on me as a new subject, and quickly discarded me, for which I was wistfully grateful.

Her money, Mrs. Hatchet said, came from her knack of suing and winning. The new, black Corvette resulted from a rear-end collision, for which Ms. Robinson claimed she suffered acute whiplash. Mrs. Hatchet's nephew had had the misfortune of driving the other car. "He barely dented her bumper, and that hussy slammed on the brakes in the middle of the road for no reason!" she cried disgustedly. "Good thing he had insurance to cover it, but the rates he pays now!"

I turned my attention to Trevor's dreamy expression. It was not hard to see her attraction for him, but what was harder to see was his attraction for her. Of the two it was obvious to see who had the stronger personality. Trevor may have worn the pants with June, but he gladly wore a collar for Renee, although he wouldn't admit it. Trevor couldn't be called a handsome man --his weak chin negated that --but I conceded he could be considered attractive. He looked surprisingly young to be in his mid-thirties. Not much paunch, had all his teeth. He never wore underwear --women like the look, he once proudly confided.

"What does June think of her?"

"Hunh?" he grunted, his smile straightening out into a hard line. "You know June wouldn't know her."

"You don't take June to Shane's with you?"

"Of course not." He looked at me as if I were a Chinese puzzle. "You're not prudish, are you, Sam? I tell you I've had it up to here with marriage," Trevor said, making a slicing motion at neck level. "Men are different from women, you know. I was trapped. I was going to go to

college. I was gonna be a doctor. My whole life's been nothing but shitty jobs because of her."

"U.K. is only twenty minutes from here, couldn't you have gone there part-time?" I asked, wanting him to admit to at least one fault and tired of hearing long lists of injustices done to Trevor.

He glared at me for a long moment. "You try to go to school when you've got a wife and two screaming kids. There's just no money for anything."

"There's money to go to Shane's every other night," I said, studying the label of my beer can. He neglected to mention an inheritance Mrs. Hatchet had told me about. Trevor's wife had received \$25,000 after the death of her aunt, shortly after they were married. All that was left of the money was a rusted-out, beat-up skeleton of a sportscar in Trevor's back yard. And a mangled motorcycle. It was amazing how selectively Trevor's mind worked.

"A man had got to do something or blow his brains out, Sam," he said, with his chin set at that serious angle. "My wife's got a bad back, you know. And she insists that it's painful --I've tried to put up with it...but a man's got to have satisfaction."

I did not indicate agreement as he expected, and his mouth turned down sullenly. "I think I'll go home now," he said, draining the last of his beer.

"You don't want to watch 'Death Wish II? It's on in a few minutes," I said, nearly tripping over the coffee table in my rush to get off the couch.

"No thank you, I'll watch it some other time," he said with dignity.

The doorbell rang. It was the twins again, breathless from running over. "Dad," Trina gasped, "Mom thought you'd be over here --she saw

in TV Guide that 'Death Wish' was gonna be on cable tonight."

"Is something wrong?" Trevor asked in annoyance.

"Yeah, Hector and Achilles got out again," Trina said.

"Damn it! Didn't you check the gate?" Trevor demanded.

"Yeah, Dad, but --" Trina broke off, her face turning into a teary pout.

"Well, you'll have to be more careful, won't you? Someday I won't be able to find them," he said quietly but forcefully. Tears glistened in the corners of Trina's eyes.

"The latch is broken, Daddy. You said you would fix it," Tanya said, her eyes narrowing.

"Didn't I teach you how to use a screwdriver?"

"Nope. Mom did. Or we picked it up from Mr. Greenjeans on 'Captain Kangaroo,'" Tanya said with exaggerated innocence. Trina motioned her to be quiet.

"Don't be smart with me, girl," he growled.

"Oh, Daddy, I wouldn't even dare aspire to intelligence around you," Tanya said batting her eyes.

Trevor took a step in the girls' direction, glanced at me and said, "You two get back home. I'll fix the latch tomorrow."

Trina bolted out immediately and Tanya waved cheerily at me before she followed her sister. "'Bye again, Mr. Hale. Give us a yell if you see our doggies, would you?'"

I chuckled and said that I would.

"You see what I have to put up with?" Trevor asked, throwing his arms into the air. "One's a wimpy tear-gusher like her mother, and the other's a little bitch."

"I have quite a tool collection. I'm sure I have a screwdriver the right size."

"Hunh?"

"To fix the latch tomorrow."

"Those damn dogs. I ought to get rid of them," Trevor said, striding toward the door left open by the twins. Instead of walking toward his house, he headed off down the sidewalk to Shane's.

"The dogs?" I called after him.

"They're out chasing some bitch in heat. They'll come back in the morning. They always do."

* * * * *

Trevor came back in the morning, the dogs too. The next day Trevor didn't come back, though the dogs stayed. I helped the twins fix the gate. June was effusively, worriedly, grateful. Several weeks later Trevor had a divorce papers served on her, and they met soon after for a wordless divorce, Trevor sullenly triumphant and June shell-shocked.

With expert legal advice at Renee's disposal, Trevor was able to make the least payments possible, and less some more, because June was not capable of putting up any opposition. And he still was not officially employed.

I stopped him in the grocery once, as we were both shopping, and demanded to know how he could have left June without a word, how he could avoid her as if she were persona non grata and he the long-suffering victim. He distantly replied he had discovered that the only responsibilities and obligations of anyone was to himself. "I've put in my time," he said, and wheeled off, leaving me gaping by the pickles. If I had had his shiny little gun there, I think I could have used it.

June's realization of her financial predicament brought her around. She had never worked in her life, and no one would hire her. So she did the only thing she really knew how to do --start a business. She revived the Abbott

Gift Co. and discovered that she also had a knack for keeping a business going. After a year, and a few months of actual profit, she took back her maiden name and renamed the business Harmon's Gifts.

The twins convinced her to buy female companions for the moping dogs, and Cassandra and Clytemnestra were brought into the family (The twins had been assigned Greek poetry). The first litter of the doberman pups emerged, and June made arrangements with a dog trainer for the pups to be schooled. She then sold them for a little more than what she had paid for the females and the training.

Through all this, I find myself trying to become indispensable to June. I occasionally donated a hand to sorting the mailing lists, driving my van to the wholesaler's warehouse, dropping packets off at the post office, even cooking dinner. June, though grateful and sometimes affectionate, became politely distant, but I saw past that into what was really seething rage.

Mrs. Hatchet tells me that Trevor has been mouthing around town, saying his ideas have been stolen and that he deserves some of the profit. But he's not doing too badly for himself --she tells me he has sued and won his first suit. At last he found a workless way to riches.

After two years, June has still not digested fully the whole affair. Anger, like fire and iron, is approaching a critical point; and when that is passed, she will be resilient, tempered steel.

I have a lot going for me: Tanya likes me; the dogs like me; Trina seems to be trying to like me --she thinks I had a hand in the whole mess; June likes me, perhaps more than the others. I can wait.

Purity Defiled

It's a terrible thing
what I've done to this page
it was pure
with greatest potential
birthed of a tree
 (which gave more than me
 for a dream of immortality)
sacrificing all
its limbs and sun-kissed leaves
for a scrap of dim creativity

Lauren Willoughby

black cat

black cat prowls
'neath my window at night

--the doors are locked
 --shutters bolted tight

and his whiskered pants
blend with the nightsights

 the night rolls on
 you think he's gone
beware he creeps
on silent feet

so don't feel safe
when you don't hear scratching

because that's when he gets you
--catches you napping

Lauren Willoughby

heavenly hash

Is there cheesecake in Heaven for hungry souls?
for those starving now to pad heavenly IRA's?
and for those who sigh away their days
leafing through Zales catalogs
but abstain, will diamonds and gold be their gain
Up There?

At the weight watcher convention
all who reached their target weights
all those who found the way
are secretly invited to a decadent buffet
of tortes and creams, sinfully good things,
and they bow their heads to pray,
thankful it wasn't for nothing

Lauren Willoughby

Mirrors in the Mind

Maryleigh Bucher

Ruby slumped into the rusted aluminum chair, the only piece of furniture in the living room besides the couch. But too much junk cluttered it: newspapers, potato chip bags, burpin' towels for the baby. Too tired, she was, to clean up. Even if it meant gettin' comfortable.

Sweat stained her t-shirt. Once it said somethin' about the good times rollin', but they were gone now. Beads of salt dripped down her back, even down the front of her shirt. She felt dirty as she wiped the back of her hands across banged forehead. Matted, wet hair replaced the wispy bangs she had curled. Wasn't any use tryin'in this hot weather. "Damn that air-conditioning," she mumbled to the empty room. Why wasn't it working, she thought in frustration before she closed her eyes in confusion. They didn't have air-conditioning. She could have had air-conditioning. But she had made her decision--a decision she was living with. If you could call it living. . . .

Think cool, she told herself. Think of cool things and you'll be cool. That's what her fourth grade teacher had told her once as the class sweated--no, as they glowed in the stuffy school room. You couldn't sweat. "Horses sweat, men perspire and women glow." That's what her mama always said. Well, this had to be sweating. Glowing sounded too beautiful and beautiful was not how Ruby felt.

Think cool--blue pool, filled with pretty white lilies on a beautiful green lawn, surrounded by shade trees. And I'd be in the middle of that big ol' pool, swimmin', lettin' my legs cool and gettin' a purty tan. As Ruby

immersed in the heated pool, a baby's cry tried to pull her back.

"Oh, Martha, would you see what's ailin' the baby. I'll be in after I've cooled off," Ruby called. But no one looked in on the baby. It kept crying. "What is keeping that servant," Ruby asked, picking a lily out of the water, inhaling its heady fragrance. Hired help! They weren't worth the time of day.

The water slid off her as she opened her eyes carefully. The sun's glare can almost hurt. Why some know-it-all said you could go blind lookin' d'rectly at the sun. Quickly, she snapped her eyes shut, shaking away the image she saw. Again, she lifted her eyelids. Instead of a blue pool and shaded trees, Ruby looked onto a shag carpet, stained with grape soda pop, spilled food and who-knew-what.

The baby's cry reached screaming heights as she realized just where she was. Pulling herself up, Ruby shuffled to the baby's room.

There it stood, nothin' but his diaper on, holdin' on to the crib's side, its face screwed into a pout, screamin'. Picking up the frustrated baby, she tried to rock it to sleep. Her off-key voice hummed, trying to soothe the baby's nerves. But that didn't work either. So she talked.

"You know baby-sweets, your Mamma could have been a famous writer. Yes, she shore could have. But she met your Daddy and married him instead so she could live in this hell-hole. Don't you agree it's a hell-hole sugar? It shore is hot enough. Yeah, now quiet down sugar or you're gonna cry your lungs out. Don't you want to hear more 'bout how famous your Mamma coulda been? Why, I could have wrote best-sellers and made, why, millions! I bet even Johnny Carson would have invited me to come on his t.v. show. But your Mamma is just a housewife. How do you like that darlin'--a little ol' housewife. All I do durin' the day is clean house, cook and take care

of you. It sure is. Now don't you go believin' a word your daddy says about me watchin' soap opera's and eating ice cream. You know we can't afford ice cream. And, if I watch some shows about the glam'rous side of life, it can't hurt nobody. Shhhh, honey. Mamma's getting awful tired of your cryin'.

Ruby paced the floor. Back and forth, back and forth until her heat-swelled feet felt flattened. Slipping her hand down the baby's diaper and findin' it dry, she then felt its forehead. It was just hot from all that hollering.

The more the baby cried, the more Ruby's anger grew. But the baby kept screaming. Finally, she sat him down in the crib, turning her back on his cries. "Well, just you holler all you want. If you don't care who your mother is you can just comfort yourself."

Ruby stomped from the room. Inconsiderate child! Never listens! He'll turn out no good, just like his Daddy.

Flinging onto her bed, Ruby pulled a pillow over her ears to muffle the baby's screaming.

So much noise. So much, it drove you to distraction. Closing her eyes, Ruby shut it all out, but it wouldn't go away. People were prodding her to do something. Well, she didn't want to. But the sound grew. Clapping! People were clapping hands, patting her on the back. "Honey, you did it! You did it!" That's what they were saying. Tears were falling from her eyes. She did it. She was the writer of the year. She had succeeded. It wasn't just a dream after all. It wasn't. The tears kept falling. She was so happy. The audience silenced as they waited for her to speak.

Rain

the world's tears
form a looking glass
reflecting grey skies,
weary faces
glistening hope before it
seeps into parched soil.
Sometimes stranded in rubble
pockets on oil chipped roads
and splashed away by Good Year
tires.
enchanting? it could
have been. if someone had
taken the time
to peer into the earthly counterpart
of another world

Maryleigh Bucher

Help me sift the wan, wide night to clay;
help me clench out shapes, breathing to my own,
sand, rock, standing. Do not let me sleep.
Draw me from the strangled chalk stillness of the
hills,
wall the boiling smoothness of the shade-black
pool.
Why kiss the peaceful terror with life still
fiercely ringing?

I cast my green-eyed marbles to the sky--will
they catch to flight, yet fall to me again?
I am stranded in the air with leaves and
butterflies.
And you--you, with the white warm wings aspread--
I've leapt a thousand times, and stopped my heart
in fear
so close it grazed your touching--it shred to
ghosts of longing--
oh my storm-sharp soul--would sear your bone to
weary ashes.

Help me. I am all alone of need, but wanting
laughter, tears and spinning not to rest but
balance.
If I could sing with silence, I would send you
trembling quiet,
mutely lyrical, past helpless passionate words.

Peggy Lin

Looking out the Window

Even if the world is cold, I am content.
We have thrown out all the plastic cups of ice,
all's warm but my soul. I think it fled.
I am hollow, dry, and all I want is sleep.
Can five feet four of sleepy passion stretch
out softly, with a map and pickles, and
six feet three of bones and glasses? Move a toe,
I see Australia (much use to me now, McDonald's
lot,
wonder should I curl up like a cat instead?)
Brown hair and your skin pale honey,
you my breathing cradle. Stay here while I beg
the sun,
nap a little longer--copper will wait. There
have been
others achingly warm here after dances.

Peggy Lin

After the Ballet

Drink quiet. Little sister laughs,
takes the broom to sleep on the porch.
Pink carnations are on the dresser,
frills along the slippers.
Not the same, though.
Brothers do not cart away to castles.
He's at college. Back to resin dust.
Break the lamp; bruise in Pledge;
dust is dust and hell for eyes,
rose crumbs no exception.
Hide your swan in graphite soot;
these days, it'd go for Christmas dinner.
Bow, girl, bend, homage to the tree-lights,
blinking faint applause from ends of stages.

Peggy Lin

"And if I sing you are my voice"

(--EE Cummings)

Simon claimed Kathleen, (an A, and not His)
heart,
but taken unprotesting and given in a song.
Called it "kathy's song"--did she sing it, or he
hope
it hers within her smile beneath his lung? He
wrapped
it trembling on a stage (her eyes are here, play
close)
"Take it for your own." Her hands rain-lit and
speaking:
"mine for while yu sing and you sing ever."
He spins hard black sweet, almost break. Oh
Christoph, love, think silver rings and apples,
brilliance and a sun-sweet and kisses from a pen
gone too far for endings--too much to overflow
a moving chord to silence. Come, I make this
yours,
yours for while I sing and I sing ever.

Peggy Lin

The Third Stop of a Seven Stop Night
Through a Kansas Window

Matt Gustin

"Hopeless is like trying to convince an eight year old that sexual intercourse is more fun than chocolate ice cream."

D.H. Lawrence

Every scent, every vision, every poem that follows in wake of the rippled, wavelike regenerations of a nightmare is insignificant, save that which was a previous dream. These progress through knee-deep reclamations of one holdover past and stay with us for as long as the tide remains unquestioned. For just as any wave elicits a certain initial beauty.....

One wave, two waves...

"three stops, four stops, five stops, six stops, seven stops. Seven stops including Columbus."

And yet somehow as sobering as it was, he would at least get the opportunity to see them all once more.

12:01 a.m.

Samuels odor lingered for four pre-trip hours in the bus stations lobby. It too (it being the tall, glass paned structure which housed the terminal) lingered downtown, away from The Plaza near the old new buildings and the reinvented slums. On the corner of not-that Broadway and Third Street stood a small metallic dog sign, hidden from view by a Mercedes. Samuels could see the pup, and he knew the sign would laugh when he left. They all would.

"The bus leaving for Wichita and all points beyond will depart in five minutes from gate 12."

Samuels said goodbye to Hope (Kansas) and a certain aluminum laughing greyhound as he crowded onto the lantern hung bus. It was true; he would never again be graced by the favors of Hope. Having settled into his seat, 13A, he removed his dying, worn, patched tweed jacket from his thin, shallow shoulders and tucked it beneath the seat.

The bus quickly yanked free of its berth.

Samuels pulled his college annual from his own brown paper grocery sack.

"Susie Donoghue, a honey blond, blue eyed senior from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, is 1967's Miss Popularity. Susie, who recently relinquished her title of Queen Athena, is a member of Kappa Delta Tau, Alpha Pi Kappa, and SNEA. She was chosen on her leadership ability and personal popularity among students. A Physical Education major, Susie plans to teach in her major at the junior high level."

Samuels smiled, yet Susie simply sighed and said "thud" as the cover closed.

Susie Donoghue had agreed to a July 1967 wedding. Unfortunately she agreed to someone else's proposal. He couldn't regret her decision, but he wondered all the same. Wondered all the same.

"Susie, honey, you know, well, realize that I love you. I have something to ask you, but I want to do this right by you. I could wish a million hopefuls and yet remember the differences between my now and my other todays. I could live a million moments, and still wonder if they are included in your very thoughts. A brace of truths realized, stand no closer to dear than the absolute certainty of my love. A three letter word for patience and you'll be mine. I am already yours."

"I'm sorry Tim. I don't love you."

A bit more romantic than-

"Louise, what do you say we go ahead and get married."

His proposal to an ex-life, Louise.

Eddie Johnston married Susie Donoghue on July 11, 1967. Shortly thereafter Eddie opened a Buick dealership in Wichita. Its success was apparent when compared to the obvious catastrophe that was Samuels' Chrysler Plymouth in downtown Hope.

"Damn Chryslers always were cold," he muttered to the no one in particular seated on his right.

For the ten years since bankruptcy Timothy had been a carpenter, plumber, carpenter, house painter and one of those unemployed deadbeats who hang around bars trying to pick up college kids. It was the former which had led to his own nuptial demise.

Louise remembered not their love, but his father's estate when she found him in their bed with a forty-year-old sixteen-year old.

And Louise lived haughtily ever after.

And Samuels was released two years early on probation and went immediately to the bus station.

His head resting comfortably against his chest, Samuels looked out across the fields of wheat at his agri-mirror. Ugly blemishes, circa 1967, dominated the scenery. Every laceration reminded him that existence wasn't enough; he needed something that Hope could never offer.

"There was a pock mark for Susie, a pimple for Ed. Louise can have what's left when I'm dead."

He giggled at nothing in common with particular. (Particular being Louise's newly acquired taste in husbands, she had married again.) He kissed the window and feel asleep. Five-sixths of an hour spread itself onto the pavement between the bus and Wichita.

His eyes finally cracked five minutes after arrival. There outside the window, stood Susie, Eddie, Eddie Jr., and little Naomi, the child prodigy, as promised. Susie had written saying that of course they would meet him at the bus

station. The final five pages revealed, in startling detail, how little Naomi was playing the violin at two and toilet trained at four.

He rose from his seat and rushed down the aisle, slamming the door behind him.

The sign on the five foot high aluminum door still shone "occupied" fifteen minutes later as Susie, Eddie and the rest of the Cleaver family drove away in their new LaBaron. Samuels' toilet training was over at two, but at forty-two the logic of a loser wasn't worth any more than one of little Naomi's newly acquired "performances".

"All that could have been mine. Instead I get an ex-wife and brown paper luggage to tote around my three piece wardrobe." Samuels finished his PHI 13 class (The Philosophy of Hindsight as Seen through a Bus Toilet) just in time to bid a teary goodbye to his sack of clothing which had been lifted by a young man who had sprinted to a waiting car. The only possession left him lay in the form of a wrinkled green leather cover. His annual.

The bus quickly yanked free of its berth.

His focus again shifted to the annual. Had it really been eighteen years since he was a senior. Eighteen years had elapsed since Susie, Samuels, Ted, Sam, Wendy, Wyatt and Natalie, the seven of them, said goodbye at that late May, rain shortened picnic. His picnics were always being cut short by the rumble of distant thunder. But picnics never end in annuals, and Samuels was painfully aware of this.

"Hey old time, when are you and Susie gonna, well, have a chip."

Ted could be counted on for at least one "old time" per conversation, as he was the youngest of the seven until he died of reality four years earlier and was committed to a local sanitarium. He couldn't have made it to the station on time eighteen years ago. How would he even find it now?

He too had promised, in a letter, to greet Samuels. According to Ted "a limo would be waiting." A crazy rich man.

His head resting comfortably against the shoulder of the no one in particular to his right, Samuels smiled out the window and cursed the flat, grain fed plains. He understood where.

Kissing the window, he fell asleep.

No limo awaited his arrival in Kansas City. Only a weak little man who resembled Ted. Granted he was driving a Ford Pinto with fuzzy dice on the rear view mirror, but that's just barely a car to begin with. It was no luxury sedan. Samuels never knew. He played Naomi the entire fifteen minutes the bus was in Kansas City.

He was reading his annual in the bathroom.

Sam, being Samantha, would be nothing special. He had never particularly liked her in the first place. Her funny left eye was always titled away from you as she spoke, almost as if it was trying to get a look at the back of your new haircut. If she hadn't been invited everywhere by Susie, her roommate, he would not have gone out of his way for her.

"Damn funny eye."

Surely her life paled in comparison to even his meager existence. It must.

"Tim?"

"Yes, Sam?"

"If you and Susie aren't meant to get married, then no one is. Pass the catsup."

"O.K. Sam."

Perhaps she had turned out a loser. "A real loser can't possibly tell, that's why they're losers," he mumbled, half asleep on the bus toilet.

"I must see Sam."

He rose, lifted his trousers and pulled himself back to 13A. Just in time to bid the window good evening.

He slept through St. Louis and Sam. (He was actually awake, but someone else was in the bathroom.)

She never showed, he assured himself. If he had only opened his eyes he would have seen her board the bus and sit down in the seat on his right.

"Yes, she must be a real loser by now,"

No one in particular heard him.

"Hello Tim."

No one had called his Tim, or for that matter called him, in five years. The road noises sounded suspiciously familiar.

She sat across the aisle, funny eye and all, smiling.

"Its good to see you."

"Likewise," he slipped.

The annual opened itself to page 154; to Sam's senior picture.

"You're as beautiful as ever," she lied.

"Thanks."

"Is that the old annual?"

"Yes."

"Could I borrow it?"

"I guess," he said handing her the ripped, green book slowly, as if it were his very life.

She read aloud- "Mr. Popularity of 1967, Timothy Samuels, is a biology and chemistry major from Cincinnati. The brown-eyed senior has been active in numerous campus activities, including Kappa Delta Pi; Biology Club and Senior Class Treasurer. His abilities are many faceted as demonstrated by his being named to Who's Who and by his receiving all-league baseball honors."

Through the bus window on that Kansas night, miles from grain became lakes of solitude. Barley peaks first crashed upon the dust-bitten shore then gently, almost apologetically ebbed away from the face of an (un) changed man. Camped over his knees, Samuels head turned to the seat on his right. The bus clumsily rambled on, as did Sam.

Samuels again focused his concentration on the farms. Severe. Seven Severe black faces became a dull grey foreground to his own desolate portrait. He was alone and dying and...

"Indianapolis- two hundred and fifty miles. Still two hundred and fifty miles till Wendy," he said excusing himself from reality so as to use the facilities.

...the shoreline can't help but eventually tumble helplessly into the already dead waters.

For any lust
so cold and damp
lies within a desktop
upon which my sloth stare must
remain.
Remnants of more convenient loves
retreat behind the anger of what I must earn.
And to rue her name as hate
would be a sin of nonproportion-
but I do so, loving the moment.
There is nothing near the wait.

Matt Gustin

We're nothing more than skeletons
on ferris wheels
at carnivals.
How we feel.
The anticipation of our ascent-
and the horror of our fall.
Yet as the ride slows down
the true terror lies
in the thought of stepping off.

Matt Gustin

To look in her eye
is to open your soul-down
it runs on her smooth tile floor
The parts of yourself
you cannot retrieve
are caught in the tiny crevices
between her moods.
Dare not reach your hands
too far under her edges
for fear of cutting yourself
on the broken shards of
your misplaced smile.

Matt Gustin

Myfindselves unrelentless try
these memory boards loosened and pride.
So Tammy pray will not for flavor
my steps behind her eyelids waver.
Cannot keep 20 figure freight
many man married, thirty-eight.
Pregnant before she could not lose
surprise Kentucky she's wearing shoes.
To only want, such moldings want
forego such haunt, I only want
this chance to tell my floorboards why--
Mushrooms, never flowers, cry.

Matt Gustin

"Please forgive me,"
I pleaded comma bleded.
"You need not cry, for all is well."
I answered comma lied.
Gripping even more tightly
my other hand
I had been holding
since before I could remember
talking to myself

Matt Gustin

The Well

I dropped a coin into the wishing well.
Motionless, I watched it slip silently
Through crystal waters to the bottom
To join countless others.

It drifted in silvery solitude
And powerful shafts of sunlight
Intruded just enough to reveal
A hidden talent for flash.

Could living be over this quickly?
If I could be just another coin,
Then I would make no harsh ripples
In the waters of reality.

Maybe my world would go slow motion,
But it would be all flash and grandeur
And I wouldn't know any of this.
But best of all, memories would be
erased.

Priscilla Chansler

Temporary Escape

Snow falls
Alighting feather-fashion.
It brings a white mask
To all within reach.

I sit back
And prop up my feet
To an unhurried evening.
Fascinated, I notice how quickly
The ground is covered.

Tomorrow I'll be disgusted with the dirty
slush, Snarl at the slick streets
And fume when my feet are cold and wet.
But I'll pop a stresstab and smile,
Secretly recalling yesterday.

Priscilla Chansler

Bad Moon Rising

Eric W. Cash

Boys are but men growing,
Men, but boys after the sewing.
--Darrellson.

People tend to forget things awfully quick. Even in a small town like Dry Ford, where word travels faster from person to person than across the telephone lines, some memories just seem to fade away and die the way that a prized rooster might without the proper attention.

I suppose that I am the only soul who actually remembers Mark Youngman. Thirty-five years have passed since the last time I saw him, and though much of the picture in which he was colored tinged itself black with pain, I often find myself missing him very much. Yes, I am quite sure that Amhearst would remember, but he is long gone now and that leaves just me.

Mark and I had been inseparable. When the troubled times of puberty hit hard, he and I would ponder for hours about what Cindy might look like under those tight sweaters and why Mindy Joe always had her hand wedged between her legs in Mr. Riley's English class. As my body ached with strange and new desires, and my mind started to crave new input, he was always there with his silver-dollar smile and his rich-blue all knowing eyes that never missed a single detail, or breast.

Maybe Mark grew up the way that he did because his father was a Baptist preacher, or maybe because he read all of those peculiar fiction books with the bright covers down at Findley's drug store. Sure, he was intelligent. I cannot really explain his intelligence away, but it was certainly there. Everybody said so,

even Mr. Riff, our tenth grade English teacher, who never complimented anybody.

I must admit that I all but worshipped Mark from day one. He always knew how to have fun. Mark talked my father, who was an extreme moralist, into letting us see Mae West in "Belle of the Nineties" when it played at the Towne Cinema. He had memorized all of the best fishing spots, and, when we were a little older, he had a connection to get ahold of the bootlegger's best moonshine. Oh sure, Mark got me into a lot of trouble, but we were kids then, and that was all a part of the game.

Mark loved to play games, and he always won. His best fun, and thereby mine, was playing tricks on stuffy old Mr. Amhearst, the man who owned the farm next to Mark's dad.

It was always funny to me that he hated Mr. Amhearst so much, because, though I could never mention it to Mark, they looked so damned much alike. Their resemblance showed in a weird way. Mr. Amhearst looked more like his dad than did his real father, the preacher.

Of course, at least a twenty-year difference separated their ages, but they looked almost identical. Both had short dark hair, the color of roofing tar, and they both combed it in a slight twist to the right, that was when Mark actually took the time to comb his hair. The man looked like a picture of what Mark would look like when he reached Mr. Amhearst's age. Mr. Amhearst was well-built, with muscles that bulged under his shirt. Mark had strong arms, too. I knew this because I was no imp, yet he could pin me in fifteen seconds flat, a fact that he took pride in proving many times over. Of course, I never cared, because we were best friends.

Oh, I asked Mark why he disliked Mr. Amhearst so much, but he could never quite tell me. He came up with many reasons, but he never could pin it down to just one. He finally came to the conclusion that the man just rubbed him

wrong. That happens a lot when you are growing up. I never did like Mr. Riff, but that was because he gave me an 'F' on a report about South America.

Like I have said, nobody remembers but me, but it was his hate for Mr. Amhearst that ruined Mark. He just couldn't help playing tricks on the old fart. Mark would open gates and let his cattle run free, he burst out, over time, at least ten or twenty light bulbs in his biggest barn, and bulbs, as all things, were hard to come by in the times of the Depression. His best trick was to make Mr. Amhearst think that foxes had gotten into his henhouse. I never did see a single fox during the whole time that I was growing up, but Mr. Amhearst absolutely knew that it was foxes that scared his hens every night. He told Roger, his tenant worker, every time that it happened, and Roger told us. We took a liking to Roger, probably because in reality he hated Mr. Amhearst too, and because he had a radio and let us listen for Duke Ellington songs.

Of course, I always went along on these nightly haunts. Like I said, Mark and I were best friends, and best friends do everything together.

That is the reason I suppose that nobody remembered Mark when I could: I was there, and I actually cared about Mark. Seemingly, no one else did. Not even the preacher. Mark told me once that he didn't like his father either, because he always told Mark that he was doing him a favor by letting him stay in his house. This made me hate the preacher. I was brought up to respect religion and all of that, but a bad father was simply a bad father, whether he held a Bible or not.

People, I guess, simply got tired of his tricks. However, I always felt like something else, something indescribable existed in the way that they saw Mark, like some fact about him was known, yet simply passed right over my head. It

wasn't because he liked Dillinger so much. Everybody liked Dillinger, because he wasn't stealing from any place but the banks who caused all of the trouble in the first place. At the time, it appeared to me that they simply feared Mark and what he might do to them.

So, July had finally arrived, and Mark decided to throw me what he called a private birthday extravaganza on the twenty-first. Actually, my birthday was on the twentieth, but my parents had some boring plans set aside. They didn't understand that my sixteenth birthday was so important to me. I was coming of age, and they were going to scrape up the money for a cake and a few gifts, and we would sit around the radio all night. To them, this would satisfy my needs. Mark knew better. He had lined up a bottle of moonshine, and he promised me that Linda Scorsan would come, too.

We had recently had a fight over Linda, which I had, of course, lost. I had plans of proposing to her, like most young idiots do when they first think that they have fallen in love, while Mark told me to grow up, and that he, in a very blunt fashion, wanted to have a roll with her in the hay loft. This led to me throwing a sloppy right, which caught him just below the mole on his cheek. He laughed and responded by picking me up bodily and hurling me against the base of a pine tree. I reduced myself to tears, and wiped the blood from my mouth, where, as it had turned out, I had bitten my tongue. I cursed him and swore my revenge, but both of our parents barred us from hanging out together after the fight.

Anyway, he was trying to make it all up to me by throwing me the party. He wrote a note telling me all of this, and had his sister, Garnett, deliver it for him, because my parents even forbade me to talk with him.

The note told me to meet him at the usual place, his father's barn, at midnight. I told

his sister to reply by saying that Mr. Green would eat three purple beetles. This was my code line (Dillinger inspired a lot) to let him know that I would be there, and that I would also find a way to bring along some marijuana to smoke. Back then, many of the farmers grew it for hemp rope, using the stronger male plants, and twisting them together. The locals had not as yet caught on to the potent effects of the female plant and its buds. Mark taught me how to cure it and roll it like a tobacco cigarette.

His sister shrugged her arms and said that she would tell him my reply. She did not like Mark much either, and probably did his bidding more out of fear than kinship. Funny, I thought as she was leaving, Garnett didn't look much like Mark at all.

At eleven-thirty, I eased up my bedroom window and shinnied down the drainpipe, so as to not wake my parents by using the stairs, which were made of uncovered hard wood and creaked loudly without warning. The walk would take only twenty minutes, for his father's farm was only about a mile down the road from my dad's, but I wanted to make sure that I would be there on time. Usually, I would carry a pistol for shooting anything that I might scare up, but since I would be drinking, I thought it better to leave it stashed under my bed. Besides, I had told myself, it might have gone off while I was making my descent.

I enjoyed walking through the fields to the road, because a light dew had begun to settle and the night was peculiarly cool for July. As I reached our property line I cursed myself for not bringing my pistol, for as I was fastening the gate shut, a rabbit jumped from a clump of weeds not twenty feet away, then bounded into the darkness.

When I arrived at the gate of his father's place, a net of sloppily strung wire and tin cans, I noticed by the light of the moon that the

Youngman farm was in a state of disrepair. Junk was strewn everywhere. The preacher's farm never met the standards that my father kept, but never had I seen a parcel of land treated with such disrespect, not even in those days of the Depression that we were struggling through.

A wagon, seemingly many years rotten, had been drug to the front of the farm and lay turned over by the dirt road leading to the preacher's home. His stone fence sagged and had large sections missing as though someone had actually taken the effort to push gaps into the structure. Mr. Youngman did not even have any cattle on the front of his place to keep the grass down. Weeds as tall as my chest grew everywhere. The odd fact, which did not really strike me until I had crossed my acres to reach the leaning old barn, was that I had been out here not two months ago to meet Mark, and the place had looked as nice as Mr. Anherst's then.

I stood, shifting my weight from side to side, as I examined the barn in the moonlight, searching for any evidence that Mark had arrived. The barn, made of warped planks of pine, had an almost transparent appearance, yet I could see no light within. I listened, but heard only the moaning whisper of the wind from the trees, which brought a strange, sweet-musky scent to my nostrils. I thought that I saw movement through the cracks in the planks, way up near the roof, where in the Fall stalks of tobacco would hang to cure.

While I was studying the top of the barn, a sudden pressure hit me from behind, throwing my feet from beneath me. I fell hard to the ground, my face, I could smell, just inched from a pile of manure. Mark had pinned me once again. He pressed his bulk against me, his thick arm encircling my neck in a tight grip.

"If I was a mugger, you'd be a dead man," he said in a throaty voice. "Sorry, but I couldn't resist."

My heart tried to blast its way from my chest. I maneuvered my hands under me, pressing them against the dewy ground, and pushed with all of my strength. The effort proved to no avail, and Mark snickered. He tightened his grip around my throat.

"Let me up, you damned freak," I managed to scream out.

Mark released my neck and lifted his weight from my body. "Quiet. Voices carry a long way out here."

"I ought to punch you," I said, taking his hand as he helped me up.

"Damn, Allan," he said, "you don't have to act like an old lady about it. I was just messing with you."

"If you didn't have that moonshine, I'd walk right back home."

"Come on, man. Don't be that way. Be a man."

"Do you have the booze, or what?" I said. "And where's Linda at?"

"She's in the barn hittin' on the shine. Where else?"

"I still ought to go home."

"You can't," he said in an overly serious tone. "It wouldn't be safe."

"Why not?"

His eyes, I could see in the dim light, grew large, and he bared his teeth. At the angle that he held his head, the moon framed his face so that his mole appeared to be a dark crescent moon highlighted by a brighter one. "Cause there's meanness out tonight," he said, then burst into a fit of laughter, breaking his own rule about silence. "You still mad at me?"

"What's Linda wearing?"

"Come on and find out," he said, and began walking towards the barn. I brushed off my clothes and followed.

Mark left the barn door open just enough to allow me to squeeze my body through, so I entered

sideways, pulling it shut as I turned, I noticed a faint line of light emerging from between two large pieces of burlap draped carefully over a thin strand of wire. Parting the makeshift curtain, I found myself temporarily blinded by the outpour of a kerosene lamp on top of a large stone. Letting my eyes adjust, I saw that he had enclosed the entire area in the burlap, giving us a shielded space of about ten feet square. On the ground, spread picnic-style, were three multi-colored quilts that covered hay he had piled beneath for comfort. Mark already lay stretched out with his feet propped upon the stone, his head upon a bundled piece of canvas. His right hand rested upon the customary gallon jug, and his left busily scratched at his chest. A basket of food, I presumed, sat about three feet from the point where I had entered. I crossed the small enclosure, and dropped beside him.

"So, where is she at?"

"Here, take a drink," he said, raising the jug without effort and dropping it gently into my lap.

"Thanks. Where is she, Mark?"

"She's out," he said, pointing behind him.

"Well, what's she doing out there?"

He pointed to the jug. "Well now, just what do you think?"

"Oh," I said. "Lady never could hold her shine."

"Never met one that could."

I uncorked the jug. The smell hit me before I had raised it half the way to my mouth, and I wondered if I would get sick like the last time I had drunk with Mark. I took several quick gulps, recorked the jug, and handed it back. The liquor was very good, because it barely had any taste at all, and I could feel its warmth spreading slowly down my throat into my belly. Mark repeated my actions, giving a loud belch as he set the jug before him.

"So," he said, "happy birthday. How's it feel to be sixteen?"

"Okay. How did it feel for you."

"Hell, I don't remember. That's been two years ago."

"What did you do on your birthday? I mean two years ago."

"If I remember," he said, "I was doin' this. Wasn't you here with me then?"

"No. You told me that I was too young."

He smiled. "Oh yeah, that's right. I was out here with Roger."

"Say, I brought some hemp to smoke. Want some?"

"Sure. That sounds good. But let's smoke it before Linda gets back."

"Why?"

"She's a woman stupid."

I pulled out the tobacco pouch I had stolen from my dad and emptied it upon the blanket. Mark produced a pipe from his pants pocket, and I filled it to the brim, lighting it with a quick flick of a sulfur match, sending a bittersweet fragrance into the air. I pulled heavily on the pipe and handed it to Mark.

I tried to look very professional, but burst into a long fit of coughing. I reached for the jug to ease the burning in my throat, and sent myself into another fit after recorking it. I heard laughter from behind the curtain.

In unison, Mark and I turned to look at Linda, who was pushing her way through the opposite side of the curtain from which I had entered. She wore as always, a plain brown dress with buttons all of the way down the front. Her thick blond hair was let loose about her shoulders, and strands of hay stuck out here and there between curls. After feasting my eyes upon the bulges that her breasts made in the plain smock, I noticed with a hidden smile that she had miss-buttoned it, allowing gaps into which my sight could delve to get a glimpse of her slip.

"Hello, birthday boy," she said in a lazy, sensual tone. "I'm glad that you could get away from your daddy long enough to join us."

I tried to speak, but found myself unable. I could only grin stupidly. I stood and cleared my throat, which still burned from the mixture of smoke and alcohol. She stepped slowly to me and grabbed my hand, pressing it into hers.

"Sorry," she said as she stared into my eyes, "but I couldn't afford to get you a gift."

"Oh, that's okay. Everybody's poor these days."

"I know," she said, "will this do?" Before I could protest, had I wanted to, she released my hand and took me by the waist, pulling me close enough to give me a hard, lusty kiss. "There, am I forgiven?"

She pulled me down to the ground beside her, and encircled both Mark and I with arms. "You are my favorite boys. Or should I say men?"

"Men," Mark said. "You damned better say men, woman."

"Men's right," I said.

"Then men it is."

"Want another drink? Here," he said, handing me the jug.

I took another swig. "Linda?"

"Sure. Why not?" She lifted the jug and gulped loudly.

"Say, after we do some more drinking," Mark said, "why don't we go after good old Mr. Amhearst?"

"I don't know, Mark," I said.

"Are you a man or a mouse?" Linda grinned when he said this.

"A man. What the hell do you think?"

"You sure are, Allan," she said, turning to kiss me on the cheek.

"Then let's go out there tonight."

"Well. . ."

"Sure," Linda said, "let's go bug Mr. Amhearst."

Mark laughed. "Hey now, this is a man's work. Ain't no girl coming along with us."

"I'm fifteen. I can handle myself."

"No," I said, "he's right. Besides, we've got time to think it over. Let's drink some of this first."

"This is boring," Linda said. "Let's talk about teachers. I hate them."

So, we spent the better part of an hour, or perhaps longer, getting drunker by the minute, putting down our most despised teachers, as per Linda's request. I was never really sure why women always got their way, but back then they always did. We discussed Mr. Riff's boring English class, pondered at why Miss Grey, the aging math teacher, would be easier on the guys and hard on the girls, and how the principal always strode the halls of our school staring at everybody's shoes. We talked and talked, our speech getting slurry as the night got longer, until Linda went outside the burlap enclosure for another call of nature.

When she left, Mark leaned over to me and whispered, "You know, it won't be a real celebration until we go out and play a trick on Mr. Amhearst. We have to go. Besides, if you don't go, Linda will think that you're afraid."

I didn't answer him for a long time, but finally gave in with a nod.

"We'll go when the jug gets lighter."

Mark patted me on the stomach. "I always knew you was a good man. Just like Dillinger."

"Yeah," I said, "he escaped again you know?"

"Me and him are just alike, Allan. Ain't nobody ever going to keep us penned up."

Before I could reply, Linda had returned. She was wearing nothing but her slip, and staggered as though she might fall at any moment.

"So," she slurred, "I couldn't get it on right, so I just left it out there." Linda pointed awkwardly past the burlap. Doing a half-turn, as though she might return to fetch

it, she stumbled and fell onto Mark, missing the kerosene lamp by inches. She lay there, sprawled across his body for a few seconds, then shifted herself so that she lay face to face, toe to toe with him. "So," she said, "are you a real man?"

"What do you think," he said and pulled her lips to his.

The moonshine had naturally affected my thinking, so I am not to this day really sure what I watched before I erupted from the enclosure. I remember his hands over her body, and Linda returning his vigor. I yelled some obscenities, unheard by the two, and ran out of the barn. I vomitted for a few minutes, then awoke, how much later I am not sure, with Mark helping me to my feet. It was still dark outside.

"Allan," he said, "you okay?"

"Sure. Where's Linda at?"

"She's passed out inside."

My memory flashed, and I began throwing punches at Mark. "You bastard. I was going to marry her."

He subdued me against the barnwall by leaning his weight into my shoulders. "What are you talking about? It's time to go get Mr. Amhearst."

"Yeah, but Linda . . ."

"Look man," he said, "you're drunk. She passed out, and I passed out a few minutes later. When I woke up, you were gone, so I came out here."

"You're lying, Mark."

"What are you talking about?" He let go of me, and I found myself focusing on the dark crescent moon on his cheek. "It's time to go get Mr. Amhearst," he said.

"But you and Linda . . ."

"You musta been dreaming."

"But . . ."

"Look. Are you a man or not, Allan? Let's go." He took my arm and began to walk away.

Confused, and sensing that his explanation could have been correct, I followed.

I cannot say how we made it to the Amhearst farm. To be quite honest, I do not remember getting there. The walk from the Youngman place normally took about a half-hour; Mark and I had taken the trip often enough to know this. However, the one thing that I do remember about the trip was getting my shoes wet because I couldn't negotiate the way across Youngman's creek.

I must have been sober by the time that we arrived at Mr. Amhearst's, for the details are still quite vivid in my mind. We had crossed into the back part of his farm, where his house and main barn were located. The sun had not yet risen but dawn was soon to come.

Amhearst had built his house up on a small hill, and in the half light, it looked spooky. The house's structure was a bit like mine, with two floors and an open air porch, except that the porch was bare, unlike most homes back then, having no rocker, no porch swing, nor any sign that it was ever used. The house had a stern, dismal appearance, being painted a dull grey, pointed up by four huge fluted columns equally spaced on the porch. The windows were always shuttered, as though no one inside ever cared to look outside.

Our main objective was the henhouse, sitting about thirty yards from the main barn. It held about forty chickens, I would guess, and this in itself made the house a good target. Anyone with forty chickens did much too well to be left alone.

"Do you really think that we ought to go through with this? It's too near light," I said. "Amhearst could be up at any time."

"Look," Mark answered, "you know that he doesn't have a wife, so he probably won't be getting up until late. Men without wives always get up late."

"Now, why's that?"

"Cause," he said. "Just because."

By this time, we had reached the barn and were out of sight of the house. We proceeded to edge around to get a view of the henhouse. It was strangely quiet out, and our voices, it seemed to me, carried a very long distance. A cow called from somewhere in the distance, and the smell of pigs drifted now and then across the field. Oddly, for it had not rained in a while, the ground was muddy, and our feet made squishy noises as we walked. Before we reached the edge of the barn, still hidden from the house, I stopped Mark. "Look. I'm in for doing this, but let's make it clean and quick. Okay?"

"Just like Dillinger, Allan. We'll do it just like Dillinger."

I nodded and continued around the barn. When we reached the edge, I turned to look at Amhearst's house again. The house, in all of its despair, loomed upon the rise as though it was staring at us, watching our every movement with disapproval.

I looked Mark in the eyes. "About Linda . . ."

"Allan," he said, "she would have made a lousy wife anyway."

Before I could question him further, he began his dash to the henhouse. Mark could run faster than I and had already gotten ahead of me by a good twenty feet. When he reached the henhouse, I was not even half of the way there. I pumped my legs as hard as I could, but they were already straining from all of the walking I had done earlier. I saw him shaking the henhouse and heard the squawks of the chickens that he had roused. When I had reached the half-way point, to my alarm, I noticed out of the corner of my eye that the porch light had been switched on.

I froze in my tracks. Mark, bent on his act of destruction, had not seen it. I just stood

there, unable to move, when I heard the front door swing open. Mr. Amhearst, dressed in bright red pajamas and robe, flew into the doorway and was leveling a shotgun in Mark's direction. He still had not noticed.

In that instant, thoughts flew through my head so fast that none of them actually became tangible. I saw the shotgun. Mark was shaking the henhouse. Linda had her slip to her waist. I smelled pigs. Mr. Amhearst laughed loudly, then a blast filled the air.

The shot had hit the henhouse, and feathers flew in all directions. Mark spun in Mr. Amhearst's direction as a second shot rang out. Mr. Amhearst laughed again and Mark fell into the henhouse, breaking through its thin walls. He covered his face with his hands. Amhearst turned and leveled his shotgun in my direction. Without thought, I began to run back to the barn for cover. It had not occurred to me that he had only two shots to fire.

Mark had begun to scream. They sounded like those that the elephants had made at the circus right before they were ready to do a trick. He kept on screaming, but I did not turn to look. I kept on running.

When I reached the edge of Mr. Amhearst's property, I stopped. I turned, but Mark was way out of sight from where I stood. I heard him screaming still, but now his screams carried a name. I ran all of the way home hearing that scream inside my head -- "ALLAN! ALLAN!"

My breath came in gasps by the time I had reached my house. Dawn had broken about fifteen minutes earlier, and I knew that soon my mother would be coming into my room to wake me. I knew that I couldn't let them find me missing.

Frenzied, I ran to the well and began stripping off my clothes. I pumped the well quickly, and when water started to spew out, I used my shirt to clean the mud off my body. Gathering my clothes and shoes into a pile, I

tied them into a bundle and climbed the drain pipe naked, with the bundle tucked under my left arm. I eased up the window, pausing for a moment to listen. I could hear the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs.

In one movement, I threw myself through the open window, slid the bundle of clothes under my bed, and hopped onto it. I had just covered myself with the sheet when my mother popped her head through the doorway.

"Oh," she said, "I see that you're awake already. Good. Come on downstairs and eat breakfast. There's big news on the radio. They caught and killed Dillinger at a place called the Biograph Theater."

I looked at my mother with dumb amazement. A dizziness filled my head and my body had the feeling of edgy nothingness like you feel before falling from a high place. I wiped my eyes and stared. When she shut the door, I did the only thing that I was capable of: I started to cry.

I crept about the room, put on fresh clothes, then made sure to hide the dirty ones so that my mother wouldn't discover them and suspect. I stood at the door and took ten slow breaths to calm myself, then quietly went downstairs.

Sometimes I can feel that emotion flowing back into my body as I stand atop the stairs of what is now my house; that is our house. I married Linda about a year after Mark died of complications stemming from the rock salt blast that he took in the eyes. We have been happy for a long time, yet now, in the declining years of our lives together, it seems that the story has picked itself back up again.

There have been stories about a Seer that's come into town. Oh, you know the type of person that I'm talking about. He's supposed to be a man, about my age, who tells fortunes for a dollar or two.

Now, this wouldn't ordinarily bother me, but Linda's been having bad dreams, and all of a sudden all of our children got themselves killed by a damned intruder of a fox. I know that older men such as myself tend to get a little paranoid at times, but Mark was a mean old cuss. Who's to say that it's not him that's come into town? No one remembers him but me and Linda. No one even really knows if it was Dillinger that they shot at the Biograph that night. Oh, it was Mark that got it at Amhearst's, there is no denying that. But just what if he did come back to spoil what little happiness that Linda and I have left?

Sure, I know. Another old man jumping to conclusions. Could be the case. I admit that. I wouldn't even consider such foolishness at all, but they say this man has a birthmark on his face. They say it looks like a backwards 'C', or maybe even a dark crescent moon!

The Texas Rain

Dreams filter from the heat waves
when northern winds bring clouds
that spit dirty rain onto the cracked
leather face of Southern Texas.

The fallout zone softens a bit, and dusty
wrinkles are filled like tiny rivers
leading nowhere, yet flowing endlessly onward.

Boys jump over the cracks and remember
the stories that their fathers once told
about coming to the Great America,
of crossing the Rio Grande late one summer
night in search of discarded gold.

The girls put on make-up and squeeze
into tight dresses, cut just above
the ankle, starched sharp in dance
to Tex-Mex guitar rhythm, ready to draw
blood from awe-struck tourists as they pass.

Rain streams through their cardboard roofing,
drips down walls white to cover sins,
leaves snail trails over mantleplace Madonnas.

The illusion of success is celebrated with
the green that rain brings, then the brown
returns like an upturned nose and a smirk,
and dreams shimmer back into the summer heat.

Eric Cash

The Journey

Ends without trumpets
or dancing bears.

There are no regal, white stars
to guide tourists through ropes
along some obscure,
pearled tongue of a path
leading into the mouth
yawning infinity.

No voice beckons. No patchwork
calmness covers the skin.

The Shadow's upturned palm
reverses,
rises above
like a fat, black helium balloon,
then falls,
liquid lead.

Life seeps into corners,
sinks through cracks.

The placenta of being
is sliced.
An ethereal black glove
slaps the rump,
and the cry is beyond human,
is unheard, yet felt.

Eric Cash

White Wedding

The young bride to be,
dressed in white lace,
white garter
on white thigh,
stands on the blood-red

Velvet plush beside
the white marble alter,
clings tightly to
white flowers and
white fantasies.

Eric Cash

Preface

I give no apologies, my friend,
for noticing how the snowbank shifts
in perfect geometry under the wind's breath
or for spending hours eyeing a spider's dance.
Would you discuss effects of the greatest canvas
before noting the swirl of the colors involved?

Strain to hear the cardinal's song,
then dare to wonder why Venus cries.

Experience may lend you a dirty finger
in your morning's coffee, making the cream
seem soured, the taste too bitter,
until you bend the wires of your mind
and build a cage to hide emotion.
Would you take breakfast in fear forever?

Dive into the water of maddening sensation,
you simply skim the surface with frozen toes.
Warmth flows in the depths of the pool
named humanity once you allow yourself
that moment to study the canvas and realize
the truth that lies in the sculptured snowbank.

Before you can touch a lover, a friend, another,
first discover the beauty of your own fingertips.

Eric Cash

Giving

The world survives on promises of wings
though made of chains; for there are
special things
that only green and red mortality
allow to sing. The lowest entity
lives only for the redness of the living;
we live in the greenfulness of giving.
It's our invention; nature doesn't care
if we should ever laugh and hope and
share,
if men have sometimes given less than
pain.
Love's only fault is that she has a name.

And though we shake the chains we shook
before
and wish for wings that life may never
lend,
we give ourselves a chance before the
end;
we give, and then we live a little more.

Mike Thomas

Snow

The snow slants by in flakes so huge
and wonderful.
Always, in the falling snow,
the warm sense
of feeling not forgotten.
The comfort that first spoke to children
still falls from an orange sky
faint with happiness-
for what does snow know? of regret
which leans from each of us
like a broken shadow? of the dreams
that, long ago,
ceased being so coy
and spelled out our fears in dry letters?
Wonderfully nothing.
Like the white grace that it is
it simply clothes.
Already I feel forgiven.

Mike Thomas

Night Poem

Dull lights
glow, peeling the slow-
ripening night.

Streetlights strike
lean yellow
poses,

stores burn
their quiet scars.
The moon, the stars

are not enough;
we need
our little bulbs.

Mike Thomas

Tales of The Swooper

Rose Hoskins

Deep within the innermost recesses of the VMS operating system, the Swooper waits, unmoving and inactive, for the signal indicating that a process in main memory needs to be outswopped to the hard disk drive (or visa versa). The same signal awakens the Swooper to immediately and inexorably advance to rectify the problem. Not with malice or glee is this advance made, but with stoical indifference, the only thought being to do what has been shown to be necessary.

* * * *

In main memory, the resident processes cower in computable queues in the dread anticipation of the Swooper's arrival, all too aware of the ephemeral quality of the "good life" they now know. Nervously they scurry about the system, under the tolerant supervision of the amiable Job Controller, hurriedly completing their paltry little jobs and ever aware of the dire prospect of being exiled to the hard disk drive, ruled by the fearsome device driver known only as IDC (perhaps, as rumored, an acronym for Insanely and Deviously Cruel; perhaps not). The resident processes rule the central processing unit (CPU), that paragon of perfection whose job it is to eventually carry out all of the instructions given by the processes and who remains at the beck and call of those in memory.

* * * *

Out on the hard disk drive, processes wearily struggle along, striving to finish their work or serve their time so they might be pardoned and moved back into main memory by the Swooper. Other processes merely wait, in an

incomprehensibly boring state, for some task to be completed on their behalf by the CPU. They have no control over or input to what is done; the CPU receives its instructions from a higher process in this case. Worse, their tasks are of the lowest priority to the CPU, who works at them when it can, reserving the majority of its time and energy to do the bidding of those in main memory. Thus is their wait compounded, for in either case --they are at the whim of the CPU, whose whim is to do what the resident processes desire of first and then, with what little time may remain, to make progress (usually minimal) toward diminishing the backlog of requests made by those on the disk. Ruled over by the IDC, the nonresident processes live a life of trial and woe, the only bright spot being that, through their faith in the Swooper's eventual arrival and the hope of salvation from the hard disk implicit therein, they can see the light at the end of the tunnel and look forward to a better life at some undetermined time in the future.

* * * *

The CPU clock ticks on, and still the Swooper sleeps, dreamlessly and deeply, uninterrupted by any conscience-driven dreams, being conscience-less --not unconscionable but uncontrolled by the moral values governing the behavior of lesser beings. The slumber is also one of the unawareness of outside events, of the methods of reason being carried out over the passing eons of CPU time by the inhabitants of VMS main memory and the hard disk drive.

* * * *

In main memory, the scurrying process slow their hustle. (tick) And, as the Swooper remains conspicuously absent, they --just like their predecessors since the beginning of VMS --become

complacent. (tick) Living in a limited environment, the processes know only what they have experienced and believe only what they see. So, as new generations of processes are spawned and old ones expire or forget and still the Swooper does not arrive, the residents of main memory begin to doubt this will ever occur.

(tick) A few more ticks are lost from the quantum of CPU time given to each process, and soon that doubt becomes an inherent part of the society in which the resident processes live. (tick) "Ah," they say, as the legend of the Swooper passes into popular mythology. "The Swooper died, or better yet, never existed. We shall live in main memory forever." This view, being a popular one, becomes widely held and soon is looked upon as an undeniable truth. (tick)

* * * *

The processes on hard disk eventually --and through a similar process of reason --reach the same conclusion as those in main memory. (tick) The reaction here, however, is radically different, for with the passing of faith in the Swooper passes any hope of salvation from this dreary hell. (tick) IDC gleefully encourages this pessimistic view, deriving enjoyment from anything increasing the misery of the processes under his rule. The harsh taskmaster, however, never actually forgets the inevitability of the Swooper's arrival, despite constant attempts to do so and the personal degradation implicit in the knowledge that he is not the omnipotent process he would have the nonresident processes believe him to be. (tick)

* * * *

The signal arrives. The Swooper awakens and sleepily comes to life. It moves, and the

sleepiness, a remnant of earlier inactivity, vanishes. There is a job to be done --perhaps a resident process' time in main memory is up; perhaps a process has initiated a job to be done by the CPU and so must wait for its completion; or perhaps a process has served its time of exile or the event for which it was waiting has occurred. Any of these or several other occurrences would have awakened the Swooper; it doesn't care --there is a request to satisfy and the same process followed since the very beginning of VMS, an event long forgotten and shrouded in CPU antiquity, will be used.

* * * *

For the resident processes, the hour grows late. All too soon they will learn the folly of their failure to believe in the Swooper. And, as the Swooper gets ever closer, the electrical impulses of his presence permeate the atmosphere of main memory even before his arrival. The hustle and bustle of the resident processes renews, tinged with fearful anticipation. No one is quite sure what's wrong, but deep down, each process can sense it --the Swooper comes. Frantically, they race about in the computable queues, dreading the inevitable but powerless to prevent it.

* * * *

The Swooper begins by looking through the computable queues. Ah, there's a process whose time is up, another is going into a wait state. A more inimical character (such as the system process EVIL, for instance) might emit an evil laugh at these findings, but the Swooper is indifferent. After finding all candidates for exile to the hard disk drive, the Swooper swoops. Nothing --no amount of begging, pleading, promising, etc., on the part of the pathetic

targeted processes, no system interrupts or exceptions, nothing --will deter the Swooper from finishing the job it was awoken to do. The resident processes now realize the depths of their earlier ignorance, but too late --because they could not stop for the Swooper, it kindly stops for them, and knowledge is bought at a high expense for those targeted for outswopping during the Swooper's visit.

* * * *

A sense of anticipation visits the hard disk drive, also, but this time the anticipation is based on eagerness and optimism. New arrivals, new arrivals... The news spreads in whispered conversations throughout the land. This is good news indeed, meaning some processes in exile will be allowed to go back to main memory, an event which the beleaguered processes had long since determined hopeless. Who will it be? Hope, eternally recurring here in the land of exile, springs in each process. The Swooper moves through the entire disk drive, as impervious to the eager hopes of the outswopped processes milling around as it was to the despair and fear of the resident processes, targeting along the way processes to take back to main memory. Finally it departs, leaving behind the crushed hopes of all the processes that must endure another eternity of CPU time before there is again hope of rescue from the gloomy land.

* * * *

Eventually, though, all such emotions fade away, and the outswopped processes return to their drab routine. The newly exiled processes moan for a while longer, but they, too, become accustomed to the requirements of their new home. The disk drive is a dreary land and as such instills a sense of resignation and defeat in its

inhabitants, obliterating any kind of encouragement or optimism. And so it is forgotten once more there was ever hope of a better way, gloom and ennui again becoming the norm.

* * * *

Back in memory, the fear of being swooped out dissipates, and the Swooper is no longer a present threat but rather a threatening shadow looming on the limited horizon of the resident processes --a shadow, moreover, that the processes, in their live-for-the-moment fashion, will eventually banish to legend and mythology (a tale good only to scare forklings with). Those just made resident retain their excitement and thankfulness at being back somewhat longer. Soon, though, their happiness fades, and they join the rest of the population of the computable queues in their hustle tinged by fear of the next coming of the Swooper --at least, until their time in main memory makes them complacent and they smugly lose their respect for the now distant system process, becoming just a few more to fall into the ages-old trap of contempt for the unseen.

* * * *

Deep within the innermost recesses of the VMS operating system, The Swooper returns --returns to its isolated niche to once more await the signal to reactivate. Returns to sleep, for the moment restrained, but still potentially capable of wreaking havoc and depression among the resident processes and joy and celebration among the outswopped ones, and enjoys a sleep uninterrupted by any guilt-provoked dreams of the woeful processes exiled to the hard disk drive on its last journey forth from the depths of VMS. It is an

ever-continuing saga, always different yet in the final analysis always a variation of the same underlying theme. Processes come and go and the tasks change, but the Swooper indifferent and unconcerned, remains ubiquitously constant.

Tears in a Glass

After so much time
Had come to pass
And she could not be a friend,
She let go of the past,
Just threw it aside,
Was alone and then
Cried and cried
All her tears into a glass,
Poured them out onto the grass,
Wiped the glass dry,
And never cried again.

Sherry Westerfield

Wild Green Breezes

Wild green breezes
In the rock frost garden
Blue shadows dance
Across the ivied stone wall
The Lions rest
In the shade of a rainbow
And drink with the Unicorns
At the waterhold-
A never dying love between them
A free but ardent passion
The transcends the wall,
So dragonsque and powerful
Unsaid and unseen
But in the Unicorn's misty blue eyes
And the Lions' golden green.

Night falls like a whisper
Across the sky
And with this motion
Forms are softened-
Hearts grow wild
Like clover, only sweeter-
More fiery than the sun,
Deeper than the ocean-
Lighter than the wild green breezes
In the rock frost garden.

Sherry Westerfield



