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## Aurora, 1992

Eastern Kentucky University, English Department

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**AURORA**



# A U R O R A

1992

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## Tripping Down Memory Lane

Linda Caudill

Perhaps the most vivid memory of all that I have is of the season. It was late in the fall when it began -- the longest fall I can ever remember seeing. Maybe it was November, in the year of our Lord ... well He wasn't paying much attention at all that year, I think. There we were, suddenly spiraling out of control, as though someone had called for a dance. For six months all I felt was a kind of sick. Sick like I had suddenly remembered what it was that I was absolutely, positively not supposed to forget. It was like finding myself in the middle of that old joke,

"Where were you when the lights went out?"  
I wish I knew.

But one day I noticed that the firm, loving earth beneath my feet was crumbling away like a graham cracker. The dance kept on, the music was dazzling and insistent, and I kept on spiraling down and down. Dancing faster and faster, I think that I would have kept on going until I just went out like a light but for the burden that kept pulling me back. It was my cousin, Jim.

Jim was my best friend in the entire world and the only one in the family I could associate with, because the rest of them were crazy. Anyway, I had heard all the proverbs pertaining to "meeting Madness on the road" and stuff such as that but I never expected him to come right up to my front door and start peck-pecking on the glass

ever-so-nicely with that bright smile over those long teeth. Oh, wouldn't you like to be my neighbor? But in no time at all I realized that Madness had come for Jim and not for me, and we were both hard pressed to do much about it except shuffle our feet and mutter excuses. I wanted to help Jim out in any way that I could, but I made the honest mistake of taking his reality as my own.

One day Jim was sane and the next day he was not. It really was that simple. At dusk one evening he was riding his motorcycle out of our holler when just before he got to the main road, he saw the White Lady. She was calling his name, he later told me, beckoning him with those thin, pale arms, while standing out in the middle of the cornfield in a white, flowing dress that flapped in the conspicuously absent breeze. Jim was distracted enough to run into a tree, and wound up with a broken leg to show for the whole ethereal experience. I listened to Jim's story because he repeated it to me at least a hundred times ... but it still didn't make much sense. And while it was interesting, I put it out of my mind. I didn't think enough of his story to follow it up.

Just as soon as Jim had healed enough to limp around on his own, the Blue Lady came for a visit. He had looked out of the kitchen window while he was getting a cold drink of water, and saw a woman in a long blue dress. She also called Jim by his name and begged him to come out into the garden and be with her. He did just that, only for her to hurl herself upon him, biting, kicking, beating him like a monster. Only through great

effort was Jim able to escape and run back into the house, slamming the door behind him. Jim told me this story with real fear in his eyes and I began to fear with him. The difference was that my fear was focused on the thought that something must have gone terribly wrong in the darker reaches of his brain. Later on when he wasn't looking I went out to the place Jim had told me the attack occurred, got down on all fours like an idiot, and crawled around on the ground. I was only looking for any track that might not be Jim's own. I finally gave up and sat down on the grass, with my nagging thoughts biting at me like gnats. There was no sign of a fight that had happened anywhere nearby. And even after telling me those first two stories, Jim's behavior hadn't really changed that much at all. Then came the day when he confided in me once again.

"I've got bees in my brain, you know."

I remained silent for a few minutes after hearing this, acting like I was studying the rich and fascinating texture of the dirt beneath me, while I was actually grasping for a reply. When my mind finally stopped reeling, I had begun to get a grip on what was really going on with Jim. Then he went on to explain to me that his bees had been swarming about for several weeks now. At first he had only heard them, but the buzzing had become louder and louder. By the time the noise had become unbearable, the bees swooped down from the sky, entered his mind via the eye sockets, and were at that very moment bouncing around inside of his skull. The last part I could believe. This

description was followed by Jim's million dollar question: "Do you think I'm crazy?"

After thinking hard for a few minutes, I plunged onward into what I know would be a useless answer.

"Well, let me tell you about a guy I once knew. His name was Tommy. We used to party in this second floor apartment in town, it was one of those deals where there's always four or five people drifting in and out and you're never quite sure who lives there. But we were often there at odd hours. It was only about a hundred yards down from the police station. Anyway, one night Tommy felt real good -- a whole lot better than anybody else in the room that night, and before you know it he was hanging out of the window throwing beer bottles and busting them down in the street below. Well that went on until he busted out somebody's windshield when they stopped at the intersection and then the police were called. So Tommy got dressed and said he was going to beat them down there."

"So when the cops got there, Tommy was dancing around in the street with a broom, barefoot, sweeping up the glass, wearing a dress."

"What did it look like?" Jim asked me.

"Like Jesus in a dress." I said. "I believe there was a paisley print and some fringe involved. But he went on, and swept up the mess he had made. It must have been four in the morning. And he just kept on smiling, telling the cops something, I have no idea what. They just stood there and stared at him while he swept, and when he finished,

they just left. They didn't even try to take him in. I guess they had seen all they wanted to see. So then he came rushing back in screaming "The sky is falling! The sky is falling!" and then he ran back out and clean disappeared. Four hours later we found him swinging upside-down in a tree up at the college, stark naked, and he just kept pointing and asking if we could see that big crack up in the sky. So we took him back and ran a tub full of ice cold water and told him to get in and take a nice, warm bath. After fifteen minutes or so of lying there muttering to himself, he started to shiver and looked up and said, "Hey man! This water's cold, man!" And then he started to come around again ok."

"So what's that got to do with anything, anyway?" Jim asked.

"Let me get to it. A few years ago, Tommy was found way up on the side of the hill with a bullet between his eyes. His brother told me that their dad had done it to put him out of his misery. He was just too far gone. He had been living in this deathtrap of a shack and was always thinking that the CIA was hiding behind all of the telephone poles. One time he went on a fast and had nothing but a hit of acid with a glass of orange juice every morning for thirty days. That almost killed him. Come to think of it, that may be what finally pushed him over the ..." At this point Jim was giving me an utterly blank look so I broke off my tirade and reached for his hands. I gently took them in my own.

"You see Jim, Tommy finally went crazy.

You aren't there yet. You've still got hope." Or so I thought.

Jim's next symptom was a fixation on demons. Using my own vaguely religious background, I tried to help him out by taking him absolutely seriously. At the time I thought it was a good idea. I just felt the need to make some attempt to drag Jim back to some semblance of reality. He told me all about the demons who haunted him, there being Arxibel, Immoray, Hurkryne, and many others. He told me about their habits, their specialties, and their personalities. They could be beautiful and idealistic, or horrible, harsh and jealous. They all seemed to admire pain in all its sophisticated, refined forms. I prescribed Bible passages to be read and prayers to be said whenever an attack came. And yes, Jim really did try these at first but they only made his pain worse and his madness hotter and so he finally quit even trying to say his prayers. We decided that God was sitting this one out. So I didn't mention it any more.

One evening after what had been an uneventful supper, Jim looked at me with the strangest smile I had ever seen, save one of those gargoyles you see on fancy church houses. He reached across the supper table and picked up a butcher knife Aunt Lettie had used to cut up the chicken. I heard that grating sound as it slid by a big iron skillet. The knife was soon in his grip and he rose slowly from the table. That action took only a few seconds but had seemed like an eternity as I watched him. I knew full well Jim intended to

slide that knife right up between my ribs. Several times. I snapped out of my daze and quickly had the table between us. Jim followed and we had made a complete circuit around the table, and then another. I could imagine all too well the knife blade sliding easily into my heart. Our third trip around the table made enough noise to bring our cousin Teddy in, who managed to trip Jim and take the knife away from him. Seeing that he wasn't going to get to kill me that day, Jim sat down and calmly resumed eating. He delicately picked up a chicken leg, spooned mashed potatoes and some gravy onto his plate, and seemed to be in no more violent a mood than most people are at Sunday dinner. I could only stand there and shake my head, wondering what had possessed me into thinking that I could counsel or cure a madman. Jim would have to be going away for a while.

So the next morning he was taken to Eastern State Hospital where he resided for three months. I, in the meantime, mourned for my cousin. I missed him even more because he had been my best and only friend. I wondered silently if my own sanity had been tainted in some way and if Aunt Lettie was watching me as closely as I had watched Jim. No, I finally decided, I was just trying to help a friend and had been too closely involved to clearly see what was going on. I decided to be harder to draw into the ordeal the next time. If, I sadly realized, there was to be a next time.

When Jim was released from the hospital, his recovery appeared nothing short of miraculous. He even apologized. It had been a lazy, peaceful

day, and we decided to go out for a walk. Perhaps a half hour later, Jim let himself drop down onto a flat rock and proceeded to look completely miserable. Beads of sweat had popped out on his forehead and he pulled at his shirt like he was extremely uncomfortable. His eyes rolled about like little beads and he began to whisper things just under his breath. "We've got to go home now," he said. "Why's that, Jim?" I asked him. Then he looked up at me like he was ready to bolt at any second, but he only wiped the sweat away and said, "Because they're coming for me."

"Who's coming, Jim?" I asked, and when he opened his mouth I was hoping he was going to say Aunt Connie or Mary Jane down the road or her girl Karen but instead he said,

"Demons."

Now one of the charming things about Jim was that he had always been the first to know when a fit was coming on and quite frequently made the announcement. Much like the one he had just made. My mind quickly supplied me with the vivid memory of Jim racing after me with a knife in his hand, and all the motivation I needed was immediately supplied. We went off at a rapid trot, Jim leading the way as I bravely brought up the rear at a safe distance and prepared myself to dart out of harm's way should Jim's fuse turn out to be a short one.

To my greatest relief, we made it all the way home without an incident. When we went into the house, Jim disappeared into the bathroom for a good long while. When he came out, I couldn't

help but notice that he had shaved the left half of his hair and beard completely off. And that threw me just a little bit. I must have looked startled, for Jim quickly assured me he had only done so to make sure that the demons wouldn't recognize him when they came. Then he smiled that funny smile of his, and went off somewhere to wait.

That night we decided that he would sleep in his mother's empty trailer and I would lay up in the house next door to it. Now my grandfather, rest his soul, built this house all by himself, and it only had two doors and three windows. Those windows had been nailed shut when Granddad died and Grandma moved back up to the big house on the hill. I knew it was going to be a long night, so I checked all the doors and windows several times before I finally went to bed. Satisfied that the house was locked up tight, I still took my pistol to bed with me. It was loaded, ready to go, and I had an extra handful of rounds beside. Feeling a little safer, I drifted off to sleep.

The next morning I opened my eyes, apparently alive and feeling better already. I turned over to see the gun lying on the table beside my bed, but all the shells were gone. Upon a closer examination, I found there was only one bullet left in the gun. I slid out of bed, eased down the stairs, and made my rounds about the house. It was still locked up tight as a jug. Since it was still early, I went back upstairs, stretched out on the bed, lit a cigarette, and wondered just what exactly had gone on the night before while I had slept on peacefully like the oblivious moron I felt like at that moment.

Then I saw Jim coming up the hill toward the house. Suddenly he was in the house, up the stairs, and at the foot of the bed. Grinning that grin. "That's right Jim," I thought, "Grin that grin, walk that walk, talk that talk. While you still can." I made no move, but secretly calculated whether I could reach my pistol in time if Jim did indeed intend to kill me for breakfast.

"You check your gun?" he asked me.

"Yep."

His face clouded with a confused expression.

"I came in here last night to kill you," he said, "but instead I took your gun up on the hill and shot all the bullets up into the air except one." His face was oddly blank of expression and he absently played with the corner of the bedspread.

"Except one," he continued. "That one is for you. I thought you might need it."

Then he turned and stomped out of the room and was gone. When I remembered to breathe again, he was already trudging down the hill. I couldn't get my mind to work, to put things in perspective for a few minutes. I sat on the edge of the bed, staring at an old print of Alice's mad tea party which hung in my room. I couldn't get the picture out of my head all day.

And the strangest thing of all to me was I could never figure how he had slipped in and out of the house so quickly without ever unlocking a door. After a while I just let it go. I had other things on my mind. When they came to take Jim away, I was there, front row center, to see him off.

"He was a pretty good feller'" Cousin Teddy

reminded me. "Never did try to kill you 'till he lost his mind."

Jim went along peacefully, and seemed to understand that we were only trying to help him. But there was a sort of darkness about him, like he knew with absolute certainty that he would never see natural daylight again.

A moment before the door shut between us forever, he reached up with one large hand and blocked it only for a moment. He leaned out and looked at me. Then he grinned. "So what's that got to do with anything, anyway?" he asked me.

When he was gone, I didn't quite know what to do with myself, so I wandered back up to my room. I sat down on the bed and stared at the wall. Alice was still there. Directly under her was a box of Jim's things Lettie had given me to take care of. I picked all the things up one by one, turning them over, studying them. Examining them as I would the relics of some lost, mysterious empire. I had kept all of the letters that Jim had written to me the first time he had been in the hospital.

"Agent Z to Agent K:

Am continuing infiltration. Food is good but shock therapy is a bitch. Good thing I've been dead since I was nine.

Love, Jim"

Somewhere in the mess I came up with a poem he had written but never shown to me.

"O, didn't you hear that Tommy is dead?  
Not an o.d. just a bullet thru' his head.  
Between his eyes-- no surprise--  
It's what his brother said.  
His daddy did it. Don't you see?  
To help clear up his misery  
Cause Tommy was insane.  
Do tha' thorazine shuffle  
all...the way....home.....  
(Doo-wah diddy-diddy)

Now, it's not that I hadn't already figured out that the guy wasn't wound too tight, but I just felt all my self importance dropping off me like a damp, too-tight clam shell. I looked up at the room around me. Same wallpaper. Same old bedspread and pillows. Same old picture on the wall. Then I stuffed the poem down into the bottom of the box and went to fetch a teacup, eager to join the party in progress.

**i want special comforting on a rainy day**

when tiny spitting mist falls  
not enough to need umbrella  
must be like London

I imagine

walking towards home  
rainy day sadness  
bone coldness  
hungry for  
lover

lover waiting  
with soft old quilt  
hot drink  
maybe fireside  
stuffed chairs  
worn and stained  
with books piled next  
all stuffed with paper bits  
marking important lines  
we like to read aloud  
anytime of day

not just pre or post coitus.  
streets are wet enough  
my shoes soggy  
pull collar up  
elbows hug ribs  
against wind  
around corners  
up stairs

in  
halloo  
how fine to  
see you  
get out wet clothes  
stay in  
by fire  
her.

**Connie Meredith**

fall 1968 now 1991

the student's bomber jackets  
Made in Korea  
your father's jacket  
worn over Korea  
fallen leaves fly forward  
off shuffling feet  
flipping through air  
off kicking feet

windblown leaves  
piled over path  
against door  
some came in  
with wet boots  
cat's paws  
or the wind  
behind us

in fisherman's sweaters  
white, hand-knit  
bundled up  
apple cheeked  
sliced, red outlined  
green-white apple flesh  
pale yellow cheddar  
and sweet Halavah clumps

from the deli  
walking  
to laundromat  
met the pizzaman,  
the meatball man.  
dark fell over  
shining faces up/under  
harvest moon

basement apartment:  
Oriental rugs  
suburban patio cushions  
liberated  
cinderblocks and boards  
candles, books, records  
Lapsang-Souchong tea  
walls nicotine stained,  
peeling over cracked plaster  
later to be stripped  
repaired and criminally  
modernized

**Connie Meredith**

## Daweeze

untamed tongue  
inside stained  
smeared mouth  
spread crumbs  
or jelly  
over  
little teeth  
and  
mispronounced  
Louise.

fluent  
flippant  
adult tongue  
zigzags by  
syllables and  
dental work,  
diddles out  
foodbits,  
enunciates  
LOU.

but I remember  
a little face  
I smile  
for blond Daweeze.

let breath stretch  
peace from  
speech  
my mind hears  
miles  
spans years  
Daweeze.

**Connie Meredith**

## her father

### A. Van McIntosh

"No, daddy, I don't want to," she said.

"Come on, honey, just for a little while," he said.

"No, daddy, I don't like this, stop it," her voice became louder.

"Be quiet or mommy will hear, you don't want her to know, do you?"

"I guess not," she answered, unsure of why mommy should not be told.

Would mommy not like the game daddy played with her? This had been going on for at least two years, ever since she was 10-years-old. Would mommy believe her anyway? Why did he have to do and say things like that anyway?

She was beginning to hate him. He scared her, but she began to hate him more than feared him.

One night her world changed, it was years later and after the molestation had stopped, it started when he kicked her dog, Lady.

The little terrier mix had growled and snapped at him. He kicked her, then threw her against the buffet. Lady had howled with pain.

She cringed at the horrible howling of her little dot.

The dog had the right to growl and snap at him. He had been teasing her, but the animal feared him also. That is probably why Lady did not bite him.

"You didn't have to do that!"

"I'll do what ever I want to under **my** roof," he said and arrogantly swaggered to the kitchen table where he had left his coffee.

He was only a few inches taller, but was more than twice her weight. Thin gray hair ringed his head like a laurel crown. He never walked, but strutted like an oversized rooster. His chest almost protruded beyond his obese stomach at those times.

He went to the living room with his coffee.

She always had to eat or drink in the kitchen, but he could do anything he wanted, anywhere he wanted under **his** roof.

*Closing her eyes, she covered her ears to keep from hearing the dog's painful howling.*

Last Friday she had met a friend at McDonald's for breakfast.

"He wants to 'renew our relationship,' as he put it," she said and chewed her Egg McMuffin.

"What do you want to do?"

"I don't know, he'll be mad if I say 'no,' she paused. "I feel like I'm being propositioned."

"You are."

It felt like she had just been hit in the face with a bucket of ice water. She stared at her friend for a long, silent moment. Rage swept through her, she hated hearing the truth. It hurt -- it hurt bad.

She left her friend at McDonald's and went to school.

"Ms. Brooks, can I talk to you?" she asked a teacher later that day.

"Sure, what's on your mind?"

"I have to make a decision about something,

I don't know what to do.

"My dad wants me to do something and I don't want to even though he says I have to."

"Who are you going to be living with ten years from now, yourself or your father?" Ms. Brooks asked.

She was stunned by the simplicity of the answer that came to her mind. A giant weight had been lifted from her shoulders. Feeling like a feather, she thought she could fly away...never have to land...never have to go back to reality. Here was a catholic telling her she did not have to obey the word of the religion. This woman was telling her that she had to live for herself.

"Thank you very much, Ms. Brooks!"

*Lady had stopped howling momentarily.*

When he finished his coffee he strutted to the sink where she was doing the dishes, cup in hand.

"Have you made your decision?"

"Yes," she answered, but did not look at him.

"What is it?"

"No'," she whispered and put some flatware into the dishwasher. She could not look at him because he frightened her so much. she feared that he would slap her. He had done much worse on many occasions.

"If you're sure," he said in his most nonchalant manner, but she knew he was outraged.

She said nothing and he threw his coffee mug into the sink and left. She wished it had broken, but then he probably would have blamed it

on her.

Closing her eyes, she sighed with relief, at least he didn't take his anger out on her. He had done it before, and often at that.

A memory flashed painfully in her mind.

The door flew open and banged against the wall sounding like lightning had just struck the house.

"What in the hell do you think you're doing?" he yelled.

"Talking to a friend," she said, and quickly hung the phone up. She did not even say "good-bye" to the person on the other end of the line.

"'Talking to a friend'," he mimicked. "I've been trying to call for half an hour!"

"I wasn't on the phone that long," she said softly, then ran into the kitchen to escape his wrath.

"Don't lie to me, you little slut," he said and followed her. "Some one called me at work and told me that you were screwing the neighbor in his barn!" he screamed.

She glanced at him and looked away just as quickly, her surprise at his accusation evident. She had been in the barn to see the neighbor's puppies, he had not been home at the time.

Her father was so mad that his face was purple. Remembering his high blood pressure, she hoped and prayed to God that he would have a heart attack and die -- then maybe he wouldn't kill her.

Every flabby muscle in his fat body was tense with adrenalin as he yelled obscenities at her and called her a slut, whore and lush, among other

things, for the next hour.

*The dog was howling again and she put her hands over her ears.*

Pulling her hands away from her ears, she put the cup on the top rack of the antique, top-loading portable dishwasher and picked up the last dirty item. It was the butcher knife he had used to hack the cheap cut of over-cooked beef they had tried to eat for supper.

The blade, about ten inches long, was sharp and slightly curved at the end. The handle was a pretty, red wood riveted with brass.

She looked into the living room and saw him reclining on his favorite chair.

The La-Z-Boy was gold Naugahyde with flowers pressed into the vinyl. The foot rest had been broken for years and leaned at a crazy slant under his feet. He was too lazy to fix it, so it remained in disrepair.

Picturing his large belly under his dirty white t-shirt she thought.... She figured she could get at least three, maybe four good stabs in before he could do anything to stop her.

This revenge would be so sweet, it would pay him back for what he had done to her, her friends, her pet.

*Again, she put her hands over her ears to shut out the sound of her dog howling painfully.*

The cold steel of the blade touched her warm temple. She closed her eyes and remembered....

"No! Don't!" she screamed and ran toward him.

"I'll do what I damn-well please on my own damn property!" he yelled and knocked her out of the way.

The sun glinted off the knife and blinded her momentarily as she got up off the cold ground, then it was all over. Her pet leghorn rooster flopped in a pool of its own blood, making that awful, gurgling sound.

Looking up at him, she saw him smile at her as he wiped the chicken's blood off her face and onto his denim shirt sleeve. Then he wiped the knife on the lifeless mound. The bright red color stood out starkly on the white feathers of the dead chicken.

She hated him so much, he always knew what she valued most, then took it away from her. He seemed to enjoy it, too.

*The howling dog was becoming almost bearable.*

Now her revenge would make up for all that he had done to her.

There would be a pool of blood in the little hollow between his fat chest and oversized stomach. She felt cold, hard hatred, but no fright, nor guilt. It would be justice at its most basic level.

Suddenly she understood how some one could kill another person. The hatred had built up sufficiently over the years of living with this demon, she could kill him and not feel a twinge of guilt.

Feeling like a robot, or like she was watching the scene from a distance, she began to walk toward the living room and the La-Z-Boy.

It would be easy...so easy. Just raise the knife and jump to the front of the chair. It could be over in a matter of seconds. No one could stop her, surprise would be her advantage.

Continuing to watch football on the cheap color TV, he was unaware of her killing intentions as she slowly, quietly crept up behind him.

He belched loudly patted his huge stomach then rubbed his stubby chin. The dry, rough sound grated on her nerves, making her think rationally again.

If she stabbed him she would go to jail, not him. If he lived he would get the sympathy and she would get "justice." She hated him for being him.

Abruptly she stopped, the image of jail frightened her. All the books she had ever read, all the movies she had ever seen on the subject came flooding into her mind all at once.

Then she thought of the morality of it. No, that did not bother her, she did not care if she went to hell or not. It had to be better than living with him.

Thinking of Ms. Brooks, she smiled. The old woman was right; she did not have to live with him for the rest of her life, but she did have to live with herself. Justice would be served if he died, but he would not die by her hand.

*She barely noticed the sound of lady's painful howling now.*

The catholic church she was always being forced to go to told her she had to "love, honor and obey" him. They did not have to live with him though, she did and hated it.

How could a god that is supposed to be so benevolent...how could a benevolent god have created some one like him? How could a benevolent god let him live? How could a benevolent god let what happened happen? To her? To her friends? To her neighbors?

She did not believe there was a benevolent god. There were only demons from the darkest reaches of hell, and she had lived with one. She had hated him.

Where is he now? Alive, but that is all. A lonely, broken old man who has had two strokes. No longer does he strut or swagger, but hobbles because of the paralysis.

He told her that he "buried" her on her favorite mountain. He took her senior picture, had some sort of ceremony and buried it under some rocks. She will never be able to think happy thoughts about that beautiful mountain again.

Even though he still tries to have contact with her, she refuses. She does not hate him anymore.

She knows she is better and stronger than he ever dreamt she would be. In fact, she does not feel anything for him, not anymore. He can never hurt her again and she likes having the peace of mind that knowledge gives her.

He still has contact with other little girls, his own granddaughters and daughters of friends.

*But the dog no longer howls, for her at least.*

We  
intertwined  
lost children  
wandering  
past streetlights  
and hayfields  
and dusk.

Losing  
finding  
clutching to one another  
throwing one another away.  
Destroying our lives  
obsessed with our fixations  
dying a little each moment  
wrapping the umbilical cord  
tighter around our necks.

Siamese twins,  
once cut apart  
still think each other's thoughts.  
and cry each other's tears.  
living spirits  
forever intertwined  
our umbilical cord  
twisting tighter  
around our necks.

**Lisa J. Denney**

## Resurrection

You died,  
somewhere in an  
imaginary cubicle  
of my mind.

I grieved for you,  
placed flowers  
on your grave  
of soft brown earth,  
put away into  
a treasure box of memories  
all you ever said  
that was beautiful,  
all you ever did  
that was beautiful,  
and locked the box  
with a crystalline tear.

Then,  
solemnly,  
I lifted  
the black veil  
of sadness,  
shrugged off  
the shroud  
of mourning,  
and stepped into the April sunlight.

I missed you,  
thought of you often,  
but because you were dead  
fought  
to regain  
my direction  
to walk away--  
with hope,  
sealing the  
crypt  
of the past.

Why  
like Lazarus,  
did you rise again?

Lisa J. Denney

## Ashes

We walk the fields now,  
gingerly,  
alone.

And still survive  
as have that fields  
and the solitary forest,  
haunted too,  
by yesterday's leaves  
and stars of twilight  
burning through  
sharp denim sky.

Like streetlights  
at midnight  
burning the very bottom  
of my soul.  
Leaving ashes,  
dusty and grey  
as the dusk  
or at dawn.

**Lisa J. Denney**

## Ashes II

We walk the fields now  
silent and alone  
but with a peace  
flowing motionless  
through our souls.

The fields still lay sodden  
and the woods adorned  
in grey,  
but no longer naked soldiers  
of a dying army,  
merely bending  
mourning masterpieces,  
sculptures of some  
hermetic winter God.

The pain has not vanished  
or forgotten  
but the wounds  
have begun their healing,  
pink scars now cover  
the gashes.

The ashes of burnt out dreams  
are gone,  
blown with a chilling whisk  
of Autumn wind,  
blown away  
with the wails  
of the ghosts I burned  
in the stove  
that night  
long before.

Lisa J. Denney

## The U-Turn

Roy Mays

"What a beautiful service," Zona said to her friend Helen as the pall-bearers carried the casket to the hearse. It had been a merry month of March for zealous Zona; she had already attended ten wonderful wakes, and the month was but a dozen-days old. As for this fine funeral, Zona could not recall having been to a more entertaining one. Everything was perfect--the fragrant flowers, the moving message of the minister, and the solemn soulful singers. A shame that she had never met the deceased, she had heard that he was a cheerful chap.

"I don't think that I have the strength to go to the burial. My bursitis, arthritis, and tendinitis have been acting up lately, so I'll just go home," Zona informed as she rummaged through her handbag for a handkerchief to dry the tears dripping from her eyes. She then inspected the contents of her huge hodgepodge of a handbag: \$4.72 in change, three lemon Life Savers, a leaky blue ballpoint pen, and a pair of inch-thick trifocals. However, to her, something seemed missing, but, her mind being as infallible as a broken computer, she could not immediately recall which item was absent. Then, the nervous neurons in her brain reconnected, and she realized that her wallet, complete with a lucky \$2 bill, pictures of countless cousins, and her driver's license, had apparently vanished.

Zona then wedged her big belly behind the wheel of her red, rusty Roadster. Upon turning the key, she heard the humming of the engine under the hood and finally drove onto the quiet country road. As she glared at the glorious gardens alongside the rural route, the grey-haired grandma grinned. She carefully putted down the path at the pace of a turtle with two broken legs, thus infuriating the motorists following her.

Zona was a lovely, little lady, two-hundred and fifty pounds of dynamite. An active and agile ancient, she enjoyed every inkling of her life: her children, her grandchildren, and her nightly bingo games. This plump and merry matriarch idealized the grandest of grandmothers, for she was a cookie-baker, an allowance-giver, and a nose-blower.

"What's this?" Zona mumbled to herself as she cornered a curve. Zona then shrieked in horror at the scary sight of the enemy of every licenseless driver: a road block. Yes, she spotted one of those occurrences in which a police officer demands one's time and a look at one's license. Regrettably remembering that she had forgotten her license, Zona weighed her options--should she face the police officer, or should she run like a manic bat out of Hades? As she thought in introspection, the theme song from Jeopardy seemed to bang on her eardrums. Instantly making a decision, she slung the steering wheel to the extreme left, screeching the car into a "U-turn."

Closer to the floor dropped the gas pedal, and the navigating needle on the speedometer pointed toward the 25...the 35...the 45...then

approached the fierce 55. The trees on which Zona had been inspecting every leaf were now barely blurs to her bleary baby-blue eyes.

"What the...?" Officer Jack J. Jeremiah jarred as he jaunted into the patrol car, blared the deafening sirens, and chased the sly speeder and evil evader. Jack, the best law officer in Deaton County, once received a medal of honor from the governor for his heroism in battling bandits at a bank. Jack shot three times, and the three ferocious felons fell. Yes, he had always arrested the bad guy and refuse to regard this radical "speed demon" as a threat to his perfect record.

Sirens blared, lights flashed, and Zona "put the pedal to the metal," reaching a swift seventy-six miles per hour. To Zona, Route 409 in Deaton County became the Indianapolis Speedway. To the poor Roadster, however, Route 409 became Death Row, for it responded to the stressful speed by clanking, clamoring, coughing, choking, and croaking. The car had slurped its last greedy gulp of gasoline.

Jack slammed on the brakes of the cruiser and climbed out like an astronaut exiting the space shuttle after a successful mission to the moon. A hunter stalking his prey, he slowly strutted toward the stalled vehicle. Just thinking about slapping the cold, steel handcuffs on the wrists of the motorist fed his law-enforcement fetish.

Pausing for a moment, he could not distinguish the driver but found the car fairly familiar. When he arrived at the car, insight flashed inside his mind. "Grandmother, what the

hell are you doing?"

"Watch your language, or I'll get a bar of soap and wash your mouth out," Zona scolded.

"Why didn't you stop at the road block?" Jack asked with flaring nostrils and grinding teeth.

"I didn't want to get caught breaking the law. Please forgive me. I don't have my drivers' license with me," Zona explained.

Jack exploded like a ton of TNT. "To keep from getting caught breaking the law, you made a U-turn, broke the speed limit, and attempted to elude a police officer? You broke several more laws! If you had stopped, I would have just given you a warning, but I can't ignore the severity of these offenses," Jack explained as he removed the mirrored sunglasses camouflaging his angry green eyes. Like a mouse caught in a trap, the police officer found himself in a trap of confusion and indecision. On one hand, his career was punishing criminals, of which his sweet grandmother was one who had just committed countless crimes. On the other hand, this "faux-felon" gave birth to the woman who gave birth to him. Instilled in him his sense of morality and pride this woman did. He asked himself whether slinging her in the "slammer" would convey to her his sincerest gratitude for all she had given him.

"You won't put me in jail, will you? My friend Freeda said that her daughter-in-law Donna--you know the niece of no-account Neil Nezbeth--was arrested for unpaid parking tickets. She spent an hour in jail and caught head-lice. You wouldn't want your granny to get lice, would you?" Zona

asked.

"Of course not," Jack replied, "if I put you in jail and caused you to get lice, I would be a disgrace to grandsons around the world. Arresting you--or simply giving you a citation--would make me the shame of Deaton County. I can just see the headline in the Deaton County Moon: 'Ingrate grandson nabs own grandmother.'"

Zona was caught in this circle of confusion. "So, am I under arrest?" she asked.

"I'll fix you car, you can go, and I'll forget this entire ulcer-inducing event. From now on, stop when an officer of the law demands it and always have your license with you when you drive," Jack scolded as if his puppy had stained his just-vacuumed carpet.

Jack's unprofessional behavior suited his grandmother like a petite tutu on a sumo wrestler. "What kind of law officer are you?" she replied.

These words shook Jack's stomach and numbed his nerves, for no one had ever asked him that question before. That award from the governor proved to the world that he was the best police officer in the state--no, in the country. Through his clenched teeth these words chimed: "What the hell do you mean by that?"

"What did I tell you about watching your language? Have you no respect for God and your elders? Anyway, I broke the law, so I should be punished. I assume that you were taught that at the police academy. Do you, by any chance, remember the time that you, as a tearful toddler, wanted a cookie, but I told you to wait because it was almost

dinner-time? You climbed a stool and tried to sneak one but accidentally broke my ceramic jar. I tanned your tiny hide and explained that no bad deed goes unpunished. Well, I just did a bad deed, so punish me," she said.

With a grimacing glare, the grandmother gazed at her grandson. Never before had she noticed how grown-up he had become. No, he no longer resembled that lean lad who cracked her cookie jar. She noticed his beautiful blonde hair, his bushy mustache, and his elongated six-foot, four-inch frame. Also, she peered at his portly paunch protruding over his snakeskin belt, an adipose-depository developed by his daily diet of a dozen doughnuts. Then, she leered into his eyes and examined the solemnly blank stare on his boyish, chubby-cheeked face.

"I'm confused," Jack began. "First you say, 'Do not arrest me'; now you say, 'arrest me.' I am not going to arrest you. Consider this a warning and please go, Granny."

The sad senior-citizen sulked. Tears rolled down her rosy-red cheeks and stained the crushed velvet upholstery in the long red Roadster. "You're trying to get rid of me," she solemnly said through her dry dentures. "It's bad enough that you never visit or even make a phone-call. Now, you want me to leave. You know I'm getting up there in years, and I am not going to be on this earth forever."

Then, the radio in the patrol car emitted this message: "Officer Jeremiah, signal 8 the 10-40 on 29 A.S.A.P."

Jack pleaded to his grandmother, "Duty calls. If you let me get back to my job, I promise that I'll visit your tomorrow."

As elated as a lucky lottery winner, Zona smiled in delight. "I'll see you in the morning; that is, if I don't die in my sleep tonight."

Freezing in fathomless fear, Jack realized the commitment that he had just made, as he imagined the hideous horror which he would face the following day. First, she would ask a quintillion questions--Why had he not yet married? How much money did he earn? Had he been sleeping well? Had his bowel movements been regular? Second, she would pinch his chubby cheeks and cry, "Such a good boy." Finally, she would slap him with sextillion sickening servings of her pear, peach, prune, pickle pudding, a disgusting delicacy that he definitely despised.

Finally, the blood in the big boy's brain began to boil at the thought of the awful atrocity awaiting him. Furthermore, his patience had been tried to the point of absurdity. As a result, he foresaw no psychological serenity in his future unless he slapped the sad senior in the "slammer." Thus, he arrested Zona on four charges: eluding a police officer, speeding, driving without a license, and inflicting psychological abuse on an officer of the law. Soon, a spectacled, grey-haired grandma would contract lice in the county jail and read the headline of the Deaton County Moon: "Ingrate grandson nabs own grandmother: Governor revokes medal of honor."

## **Rusty Blood**

The rust and blood flowing from nails and wood  
flowed through narrow cranial streams,  
like testosterone-imbalanced (abstract) sanity  
multiplied by empty souls and lesser minds,  
I turned away from my mother while in the womb,  
before I knew.

Cubism brain confines me, the prison bars  
lacerating my psyche.

Fertile valleys could save me  
(undulating rhythms of life)  
unspoiled by my father -- himself hopelessly twisted  
polluting her world futilely,  
but mine irrevocably.

**Scott Pack**

## **Dashes of Hope**

Stomp...Stomp...Stomp...

A dust cloud rises high.  
When the dust settles and your vision returns;  
Just look down,  
See the foot prints on your dreams.

Breezes bring in dashes of hope,  
Smoothing deep imprints left behind,  
Making room for new impressions,  
On your heart, your soul, your mind.

Stomp...Stomp...Stomp...

**Denise Hensley**

## **Windows of Illusion**

**Rebecca W. Mohon**

The stately old home now sits all alone at the crest of the hill slightly to the right of a large, white budding magnolia tree. What catches the eye is the great expanse of magnificent, rounded windows. They rise arching upward toward the sky, windows covering almost the entire front of the towering mansion.

Studying the structure and placement of the windows, one suspects there is a hidden pattern or picture embedded deep within. The windows suggest hidden shadows, creeping in and out of view...old restless ghosts and memories peeking out. Playing cat and mouse with one's imagination. Yes, this is as it should be.

The great, darkened oak door squeaks loudly as it slowly creaks open on its tarnished brass hinges. The still rich luster of the wooden floor glows as the sunlight dances gracefully across it like a pixie dancing wildly in the wind. The stained-glass windows over the door reflect a rainbow of colors chasing around the room. A kaleidoscope whirling uncontrolled, faster and faster. The vivid blues, yellows, reds, and greens compete with one another for attention. The effect is as it was meant to be --- dazzling!

Wait! What was that? It seemed to appear and disappear simultaneously --- almost translucent in appearance. Perhaps the rich bouquet of colors tantalizing the eye. The light medley mesmerizes all senses. A lulled, heavy feeling of having always

been there permeates the room, overwhelming almost smothering --- reminiscent of the smell of flowers at a funeral. The aura of times past and what is not to be becomes redolent as the warming light of the sun comes pouring in, dissipating the feeling of foreboding.

All these feelings and more burst forth from deep within the cavernous void that had been the old lady's soul as she crossed the threshold into the house. It had been such a long time since she had enjoyed the rich beauty of her home. She slowly lowered her wizened body down onto the floor seeking support against the graceful, delicately carved mahogany staircase. The coldness of the wood was chilling in its intensity and her mind started to wander, falling into a dreamlike trance. The years had mysteriously disappeared and the old woman was young once again. Memories flooded into her mind like water ravaging down the mountainside destroying everything in its path.

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The lady was stunning with her raven-black, lustrous hair cascading down her back resplendent as the plumage of a well preened bird. Vivid slanted cat green eyes were calm, limpid pools of pristine water...deep and still.

"Giddy up there, Jinny," the lady extolled lightly making light cluck, clucking noises with her tongue. The brilliant hues of the autumn day surrounded the open buggy creating a plethora of colors. Fat, brown, sassy rabbits darted out along the dusty rutted track that led into town. The abundance of fall puffed in the thickness of the

rabbit's fur. The old, dappled gray horse started slightly, twitching his tarnished ears and nose at the first interruption of his slow cadence, but soon ignored the wily rabbits. A mellow aroma danced about in the crisp, clear autumn air and saturated the senses. Bright orange overripe pumpkins lay by the wayside heaped against the spent corn. A far off melodious crying reverberated from tree to tree and seemed to revive a feeling of good things to come.

"Yes, Jinny, it will be a good day," Chastina said as she carefully cracked the whip above the horse's low slung back. The horse never altered his gait, trudged slowly onwards. The only indication of having heard the lady's command was the immediate swish-swishing back and forth of his tangled burr-ridden tail with no more effort than the hired washer woman mopping at the floor.

"Come on now, Jinny," she coaxed once again. "I can see Mr. Noteworthy's office from here."

The old worm-eaten, weather-beaten sign hung slightly askew and rattled in the wind, proudly proclaiming in bold print Edward G. Noteworthy, Esq. Attorney at Law. In smaller print on the line below was Justice of the Peace.

"Good morning, Miss Provided, so sorry about your father's passing. Fine gentleman, fine gentleman indeed...one of my best clients and a close friend." Mr. Noteworthy coaxed and fussed over her while ushering her to a dark, leather chair. "Sit down, sit down, make yourself comfortable." He hurmpled several times while fumbling around

on the desk organizing papers. "Your father was a shrewd businessman--frugal--always knew a good deal--left you very well taken care of.

"Confound it, who is it?" was his sharp reply to the insistent knocking at the door. "That damn new secretary couldn't pour piss out of a boot with directions on the heel...she'd bitch if she was hung with a new rope," he muttered loudly. "Beg pardon, Miss Provided."

"Excuse me, Mr. Noteworthy, I wasn't aware that you were with a client," a tall, darkly handsome gentleman was attempting to back out of the room.

"Quite fine, quite fine, do come in, Mr. Chancey, someone in here you need to meet." Mr. Noteworthy partially raised himself from the old, squeaky brown chair waving Mr. Chancey into the room. "Mr. Ezra Chancey, this is Miss Chastina Provided, the daughter of a dear old friend." Mr. Chancey extended his hand, firmly grasping her hand in his. Chastina was immersed in his dark brown iridescent eyes, the color of a new spotted fawn about to take his first jaunt out onto the open expanse of the meadow, so trusting and deep. For a moment, she was breathless as their eyes and hands were locked together.

"Very pleased to make your acquaintance," she murmured feeling faint and giddy concurrently.

"So pleasant to meet such a beautiful, young lady on my first day as a new partner," Mr. Chancey said.

The words rolled off his tongue like pure clear water running down the freshly washed

windowpane during a driving rain. A silver-tongued devil was he, but surely his heart was pure. Chastina flickered her eyelids and then peered directly into Mr. Chancey's deep-brown eyes.

"Yes, yes this is my new partner, Miss Provided. Lucky I was to get him, yes indeed, smart as a whip. Getting old you know, need someone to help me out." Mr. Noteworthy fell heavily back into his chair, quite exhausted with portly beet red cheeks and hair awry from constant intertwining. "Miss Provided, with your permission I'd like for Mr. Chancey to care for you."

Chastina sat there in a void, time passing on, voices being heard but only vaguely aware of what was transpiring.

"Yes, yes whatever you think, Mr. Noteworthy, father always spoke highly of you. Whatever you recommend is fine," she simpered feeling like a young lovesick schoolgirl.

"Miss Provided, are you quite well...turned sorta green around the gills all of a sudden...don't seem your usual self today?" said Mr. Noteworthy, a hint of hesitation in his voice.

"Yes, I'm quite fine, thank you, just a touch of malaise, probably just the weather," said Chastina, with eyelids flickering faintly in the late afternoon light.

"May I have the honor of escorting you home, Miss Provided? The hour has grown late, said Mr. Chancey. A lady shouldn't be about after dark alone and unescorted." Mr. Chancey's smile spread across the entire expanse of his rich handsome face ricocheting a warming beam deep

into the cold, inner confines of Chastina's aforeprotected heart.

"Yes, Mr. Chancey, the hour has grown quite late. An escort home would be lovely."

"Miss Chastina, may I call you by your Christian name? You are the spitting image of my dearly departed sister. Beauty, charm, and grace were her three greatest gifts and she possessed them in abundance as you do. I sincerely hope that we may become close friends as visions of your loveliness bring back such fond memories for me." With his eloquent speech at an end, Mr. Chancey clasped Chastina's arm tightly within his, smiled down lovingly and escorted her out. Mr. Chancey was the epitome of fashion in his neatly pressed, charcoal-gray pin striped suit. His shining masses of auburn curls were slicked neatly into place. Perfect, pearly-white teeth flashed enticingly whenever he opened his mouth. Stars seemed to twinkle in his dark brown eyes.

The excursions continued throughout the fall and into the winter. Words of friendship and endearment were constantly exchanged. Mr. Chancey, ever the man of propriety never took unfair advantage. Upon departing for the evening Mr. Chancey chastely placed a solemn kiss upon Chastina's warmly accepting hand.

Chastina's state of happiness knew no bounds. A rich outer glow was evident in the rosy hues of her cheeks. Life, for her, existed in another realm. The sky is bluer, grass greener, and sunshine everyday. Mr. Chancey in constant attendance forever admiring and cajoling. All

Chastina's plans for a glorious future with Mr. Chancey were coming true. Mr. Chancey's love for her house cemented their bond further. Always glancing about, touching, admiring the wonderful craftsmanship and expressing admiration. They would be happy here. Chastina's father must be smiling in heaven and nodding approval. Ezra resembled her father in stature and facial features, something about his eyes. Chastina just knew he would approve.

"Miss Chastina, we have become close, I almost feel as if you are family. You have given me indications that you feel the same. Do you return these feelings?" Mr. Chancey asked, hope clearly evident in his voice. "I love your elegant home and long to spend more time here. The lavish carving and details of the woodwork highlight your magnificent figure. Your warmth and beauty are mirrored in the polished wood." Mr. Chancey's eyes devoured the splendor that the skilled craftsmen had instilled in every corner of the house.

"Why yes, Ezra," his Christian name flowing so easily off her lips. Ezra from the Bible would be proud to share his name with such a fine human being as Mr. Chancey. His honesty, integrity, and goodness were mirrored in his courtly actions. "I share similar feelings of closeness," Chastina quivered with excitement hardly believing her ears.

"Good, oh very good," smiled Mr. Chancey. "There is someone very special I would like for you to meet--possibly next Sunday if that's convenient."

"Sunday, yes Sunday would be fine," Chastina whispered breathlessly.

Thoughts of happiness engulfed her very being. The long awaited moment had finally arrived. The formal declaration of love would be forthcoming. Ezra, her Ezra, was bringing his mother to meet her. Visions of yards of white satin and lace wafted endlessly in her mind's eye. Satin and lace floating freely down the great, spiraling, curving staircase accelerating downwards towards her heart's desire. Ezra, oh Ezra, how happy they would be. It must be a sunny day for the wedding. The lights shining through the stained-glass windows would dazzle all onlookers. Her father's dream had been to see her married in the family home--it was her dream as well. Ezra loved the house as much as she did...oh they would be very happy together. Time moved at a snail's pace until Sunday finally came.

The clip, clop, clip, clop of horse's hooves resonated in the still air of the dim, overcast spring day. A giddiness of expectation enveloped Chastina as she peered out the window. Two people alighted from the carriage; however, dense foliage effectively barred even a glimmer of her heart's desire.

"Miss Chastina," his voice cheerily called, resonating up the stairs and stirring the strings of her heart as the master violinist striking the first chord of his symphony. "Miss Chastina, we're here."

Chastina glided gracefully down the stairs. The glow of love and expectation radiating outward

like a burst of brilliant sunshine on what had been a cloudy day. Halfway down the staircase, Chastina was momentarily blinded by the bouquet of colors illuminating from the windows. Their beauty sank inward lighting her soul. Just as quickly the sun was gone and perfect vision returned.

"Ah, there you are, Miss Chastina, here is the special person I wanted you to meet," Mr. Chancey smiled anxiously. "Miss Chastina Provided, may I introduce Miss Bellerina Surety, my fiancée," said Mr. Chancey.

Fiancée! Fiancée! ---an explosion ripped through Chastina's body as the word fiancée echoed louder and deeper within her soul tearing her into a million tiny pieces. The small crack in her smile was nothing compared to the ragged hole that ripped the heart apart. Struggling like a swimmer going down for the third time Chastina strove to hold onto reality. Finally regaining some composure she tossed her head, stuck out her hand.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Miss Bellerina," Chastina flatly stated. Her eyes as sad as a just kicked basset hound.

Miss Bellerina was a vision of loveliness. Hair flowing freely in waves, undulating gently ending in a rivulet, gossamer threads of spun gold shining like freshly mown just turned over hay. A scarlet ribbon tied around the wrist stood out against the porcelain whiteness of her skin. Chameleons...they were...one blond, light, and pristine; the other black, dark, and alluring--striking in contrast like the keys of a grand piano. Chastina

had to admire Mr. Chancey for choosing Miss Bellerina as she was beautiful. After the pain had subsided somewhat she would be glad that her Ezra was happy.

"So glad to finally meet you, Miss Chastina," said Miss Bellerina arching her eyebrows upwards. "Why, Ezra, you were so right, she could be Dresden's twin sister. Mr. Chancey repeatedly told me how much you resembled his sister Dresden, now I can see why. Dear Dresden, she and I were best friends," Bellerina rattled onward making idle chit-chat. Never noticing the agony rapidly surfacing threatening to overthrow Chastina's carefully guarded countenance.

"Do come in and sit for awhile. I'll get some refreshments," said Chastina. She badly needed a chair to support her wobbly legs.

"Miss Chastina, do you mind if I show Miss Bellerina around your glorious home?" Mr. Chancey asked.

"No, no not at all," Chastina replied. "Please do make yourself at home." Yes, make yourself at home Chastina thought while rummaging for the teaset, dropping the teacup in her haste to be done with the afternoon fiasco. Nothing was turning out according to plan. Love for Mr. Chancey constricting her heart as the ivy vines intertwine choking the might oak.

"See, Miss Bellerina, isn't it as lovely as I described---or even more so?" asked Mr. Chancey. His eyes darted here and there in his haste to point out details to his beloved Miss Bellerina. "Notice the majestic curving of the staircase as the sun

floods light through the stained-glass windows. Here, look here, the chandelier glows in harmony with the windows." Mr. Chancey almost tripped on the great Persian rug in his haste to show Miss Bellerina all the marvels of Chastina's home. "It's perfect, just perfect, the home I've always searched for. I could be very happy here for my entire life," said Mr. Chancey. "Do you think Miss Chastina would consider taking in boarders?" Mr. Chancey laughed heartily at his intended joke.

Mr. Chancey's unsuspecting words went floating into the hallway where Chastina stood transfixed. Mr. Chancey's wish for lifetime happiness in her home demolished Chastina's fragile state of composure. Chastina went hastily scurrying into the kitchen, feeling like an interloper in her own home.

"Mr. Chancey, Miss Bellerina, do come in, tea is on. I have the service ready in the drawing room." Mr. Chancey and Miss Bellerina entering the room served to increase Chastina's feelings of being an intruder. A strange sense of something shady---by what or whom---as yet unclear---settling heavily into Chastina's subconscious caused a slight shuddering motion to run up her back.

"Miss Chastina, I've often confessed how I feel as if you were family and that there is a close bond between us," Mr. Chancey said between bites of teacakes.

"Yes, yes, Mr. Ezra said that an instant bond was forged between the two of you from the first," chimed in Bellerina while gulping tea.

"Miss Chastina, Bellerina and I would like

for you to be the maid of honor at the wedding and with your permission to have the wedding here," said Mr. Chancey. "Mr. Noteworthy has kindly agreed to marry us. This house is beautiful and would be an absolute dream for a wedding."

Here---here in my house, what was to be my wedding, screamed the demon darting closer to the surface of Chastina's armor. Adrenaline pumped her blood, faster and faster causing her face to redden. Gone were her father's wishes of seeing her married in the family home...gone to the pits of hell were wishes of marrying Mr. Chancey and fulfilling her dream.

"Excuse me, Mr. Chancey, what was that?" sighed Chastina while attempting to process this new information.

"We would like to have the wedding here. Of course, I would pay all expenses and Bellerina would make the arrangements," said Mr. Chancey.

Pay the expenses...damn the expenses. What about the expense of her heart what was this worth? Spitting in his face was what would be desirable. Chastina sat upright and attempted to listen. The urge to hiss like a snake tightly held in check just beneath the surface. The anger was then replaced by a deep, dark emptiness that threatened to shroud Chastina forever. A sense of nothingness like the darkness of an endless, isolated cavern. Chastina's vision of bliss was shattered. Reality forcefully flooded all Chastina's emotions into a chasm newly created for these unwelcome tidings.

"I fell in love with this house the first time I saw it," said Mr. Chancey.

"Please say yes, Miss Chastina," Bellerina said in a politely begging tone. "I, too, love the house. It will be such fun. I want us to become close friends. You no longer have any family and can become a part of ours." Bellerina took Mr. Chancey's hand and smiled at Chastina.

"How can I say no to such kind intentions and good friends?" said Chastina with a forced smile. Part of the family...but no the part that she wanted to be. The luster always evident in the highly polished floors dimmed slightly. Secretive rustlings and whisperings seemed to emanate from the corners mocking Chastina. What was there to do? No one could repair the damage done to her soul. That it was unwilling did not matter. Lost in the forest a poor fledgling plaintively calling for rescue---knowing that none was forthcoming. A dark, abysmal foreboding and a feeling of betrayal for being abandoned like a pair of old, worn-out shoes welled up around Chastina's heart. She would never let them know---embracing Miss Bellerina while forcing a smile to her ruby red lips.

"Wonderful, oh wonderful, thank you so much," squealed Miss Bellerina laying her head on Chastina's shoulder. Mr. Chancey smiled on fondly.

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"Oh no," moaned the old lady awakening from her daydream. Reality came back into focus and along with it the long buried memories of the past. Tears welled as she slowly pulled herself up from the floor. The sun had long since quit shining and dusk had been followed by darkness.

"Miss Chastina, Miss Chastina, I've been knocking and knocking. Is something wrong? They told me in town today that you had returned," said Miss Bellerina glancing around and moving further into the room. "The house is still as beautiful as ever. Mr. Chancey loved this house. He drove by many times gazing fondly at your home and wistfully remarking that it would be so nice if you would return. Mr. Chancey always spoke highly of you. At times it almost made me jealous," said Miss Bellerina with a laugh. "Mr. Chancey has been gone now for almost a year---I miss him still."

Chastina smiled warmly at Miss Bellerina and patted her hand. A great sense of relief replaced Chastina's sadness. She had dispelled all the old ghosts that had been rattling around and could now live again in her home.

**There is a vast space**

There is a vast space between

my Brain and Skull

Filled with the liquid

Energy of my Words.

I have waded in it--

Drowned in it--

And even drifted on it for days.

Alive at the Core

(Though sometimes Dead to the Eyes)

I have often tapped into its Sweetness

Springing up from my Heart

-For it is my Heart's Blood-

Allowing it to flow

for all the World to Splash in....

**Elizabeth Bowling**

## A Lunch Date

Scott Tracy

The young man glanced nervously around the cafe, wondering if he had insisted on meeting at twelve or one o'clock. The tables were filling up inside, dashing his hopes for privacy, but it was much too hot for anyone to sit on the sidewalk. The sidewalk was always crowded except for the summer. The huge, candy-colored umbrellas that centered every table threw a good shade for the fall and spring, but they were no match for the summer, and the cafe closed in the winter so they just cranked them down to where they looked like giant cocoons waiting for the spring thaw. He wished it were spring again so they could sit outside. Frank knew it would have been perfect.

Wiping away a bead of sweat from his forehead he picked up a menu, flipped through it quickly and set it down. A waitress came to his table looking very disinterested in her job.

"Can I get you something to drink?"

He had a craving for a Bloody Mary, but thought better of it, because the mix was always thick and heavy on his stomach. It was too close to lunch.

"Better just have an Old-Fashioned."

The waitress turned around, without smiling, and left his table. A bigger crowd was starting to filter in and he glanced at his watch. It was almost noon. He took his hat off, running his hand through his brown, short-cropped, receding hair,

and picked up the paper from an empty table next to him. The waitress came back very shortly.

"We're out of bitters."

"A splash of grenadine is fine."

"Of what?" she asked flatly.

"Grenadine."

She left him again and went to the bar. He watched the bartender nod in understanding and began to read the horse-racing section of the paper. He had never been to the races but he followed them in the papers to keep up with any conversations in which he might become involved. He assumed most everyone there knew horses.

The waitress brought his Old-Fashioned with grenadine. It was still hot, even inside the cafe, and he noticed the cafe was quite full now. He took a drink and checked his watch. He little after noon. He looked around the cafe again, noticing it was not particularly clean. The tables seemed slightly uneven and too close together and the mirror behind the bar had some large cracks and liquor stains as though the little cafe had seen some interesting nights. His eyes returned to the racing section, as he took another large drink. He had never understood how people lost so much at the races. One could tell just by reading the papers which horses to bet on. He assured himself that if he ever went, he would not lose.

He set the paper down and looked out towards the sidewalk. It was still empty. He took out a handkerchief from the inside pocket of his lightly pin-striped seersucker jacket and wiped off his forehead, realizing his thinly pressed white shirt

was beginning to splotch and stick to his stomach. The crowd of lunch-goers was making it almost as unbearable inside as it was outside, and the large brass ceiling fans weren't helping much. He finished off his drink and tried to get the attention of the waitress but she was busy with another table. He looked anxiously towards the door, then back to the waitress again. Finally catching her attention, he shook his glass to ask for another. She came to the table.

"What did you have?"

"An Old-Fashioned with grenadine."

"Grenadine," she nodded, wrinkling her eyes in a way which led him to think she could be attractive if she had any personality.

He looked at his watch again. It was almost twenty after. He tapped on the face several times and annoyedly wound it up. He had received the watch as a graduation present from his older sister and it had always kept perfect time. He decided that he should have it looked at. There was a jeweler's shop around the corner he could take it to after lunch.

The murmuring conversation of the lunch crowd, up until his feeling strangely alone, had passed over him. Then, quite suddenly, he was aware of several conversations around him. It was mostly young couples talking about their plans for the rest of the day or tourists who had come for the fair. He was neither at this point, but listening very intently anyway. The waitress brought him his drink.

"Can you tell me what time it is?" he asked.

"It's nearly twelve-thirty."

He looked at his watch again.

"Do you have a phone?"

She cast him a knowing look and nodded towards a phone near the back corner.

"By the ladies room."

"Go ahead and bring me another."

This time she gave him no look.

He picked up the section of the paper with the local news and began reading. He drank his Old-Fashioned very fast and the cold rushed to his head. It hurt, but it felt good, sending a chill down his spine and tingling for a moment. He was starting to get a headache when he felt a hand on his back. He turned expectantly.

"Frank," asked a strange man facing him. "Frank McIntosh? I thought that was you. How the hell are you?"

It was several seconds before the young man could see past his disappointment and several more seconds before he realized who the strange man was.

"I'm doing fine, Charles," he fumbled.

Charles had been one of Frank's roommates at the American University in Brussels and he looked almost the same. He was wearing thin, poplin khakis, a light blue, short-sleeved button down and loafers. His hair was thinning somewhat and he looked slightly overweight to Frank, but he was tall enough so you couldn't really tell. He still had the same droopy, unassuming eyes that had helped Frank choose him as a roommate when they first met. They had gotten along well enough then,

but had come into a slight competition for the favor of a young woman in their history class. She ended up dating one of her professors, but the competition had put a strain on their friendship, and Charles moved into another hall, only because he had another friend to move in with and Frank didn't. They hadn't seen each other since.

"Jesus, Frank, how long has it been? Three, four years?"

"Five."

"No kidding? Five years? Time sure flies, doesn't it?"

Frank checked his watch. It was nearly a quarter till one.

"Yes, it does," he answered, his mind elsewhere.

Charles sat down across from him and lit a cigarette, tossing the match into the clay ashtray on Frank's table.

"Hope you don't mind."

"Not at all."

"It's a nasty habit, but I can't quit. I've been trying for a year."

Frank looked towards the door.

"Don't you think it's too damn hot over here, Frank," Charles asked, exhaling a small cloud of smoke away from the table. "I wouldn't come if I didn't have to, but the firm sends me and I don't have much of a say about it. Every year it's the same thing, someplace hot. I don't see how you stand it in that suit."

The waitress came and set down Frank's drink.

"What are you having?" asked Charles.

"An Old-Fashioned."

"Is it cold?"

"If you put ice in it."

"I'll have the same with more ice," Charles told the waitress. "It has bitters, doesn't it?"

"No, grenadine."

"Oh," said Charles.

The two sat in silence for a moment, smoke swirling around the middle of the table. Frank was looking to see if Charles had noticed the racing section, but he didn't seem to be paying any attention to it in the least.

"So are you here on business or pleasure?"

"Both," Frank answered. "I'm writing an article."

Looking over Charles' shoulder, he wiped his brow and shifted in his seat to unsuck his sticky shirt.

"About what?"

"The Fair."

"Sounds exciting. I suppose it must be exciting being a writer, though. Have you had anything published?"

"Well, not really. It's very hard to break in."

"I'm sure it is," Charles replied.

There was more awkward silence and the smoke was getting in Frank's eyes when Charles finally spoke up.

"Say, whatever happened to old what's her name? Didn't she end up with Dr. Thompson, the chemistry professor?"

"I think so. I'm not sure."

"That's a laugh."

Frank took a drink and looked towards the door. Three dark, attractive girls and an older man entered from the street, peering around the cafe. Charles lit a cigarette and waved them on to a larger table.

"My friends have finally shown. Are you waiting for someone," he asked.

"I'm not sure. I was supposed to meet someone but..." Frank cut himself off, angry now that Charles knew.

The waitress came back and gave Charles his drink along with another one for Frank.

"You sure have that waitress trained pretty well," Charles kidded. He took a sip of his drink and made a sour face. "That's a mean drink, right there. Where did you pick that one up?"

"I used to make it to cure my hangovers and got to where I liked it. It just takes some getting used to."

"I'll say," Charles wheezed as he took another, smaller sip. "Well, I can't be rude to my friends any longer. Why don't you join us?"

"I should probably wait," he answered, looking at the door again.

"Of course, I understand. You're meeting someone."

Charles got up and left enough money for two drinks.

"At least let me buy you that drink."

Frank didn't argue. It was always simpler to let whoever was offering to buy the drinks have

their way.

"Thanks."

"Listen, Frank. Are you sure you can't cover over? You can flag down whoever comes in."

"I better not," he said as he unconsciously checked his watch and noticed Charles looking down at it as well.

"Okay, but we'll all be going out to the Fair tonight and you have to join us for that."

"I don't know ..."

"I'm staying at the Plaza. Here's my room number."

He scribbled it on a cocktail napkin and handed it to Frank.

"Just have the front desk ring me and we'll come down and go to the Fair. It'll be just like old times."

"I'll try."

"Good. See you tonight, then, and bring whoever you want," Charles said as he left to meet his friends.

Frank could feel they were all looking at him very strangely as he noticed Charles had forgotten his drink. He knew how Charles was explaining him to his table of friends. He did not care.

He picked up the racing section again and finished his Old Fashioned. He didn't care about the time or looking at the door. After a few more drinks he wouldn't care about anything anymore.

## **The Seamstress**

Shadows of words  
Slide down her chin  
Like a thin thread  
And into the street

Stringing along  
Knots undenied  
Of tangled friends  
Trampled under feet

**Scott Tracy**

## **Broken Fields**

I stood in my heart's open field  
Its golden, honey covered hue  
With a sweetness sticking to my breath  
Exhaled deep in thoughts of you

All but one seed the wind had stolen  
out of reach, and out of my mind  
I went looking for the more fertile soil  
Of which you need and I've no hope to find

With time now alone to harvest your name  
The bounty still grows watered only by tears  
And it wickedly wails through the weeds of my soul  
As I pray, God, so as not to hear

**Scott Tracy**

## Our Love

It stretches  
Sometimes too taut, sometimes too loose  
Between our hearts  
Rigged up like an old, frazzled string  
The soul life line  
Connecting two weathered tin cans  
Both hollow and rusty

Too far away or too close  
I wish I knew  
Only it quivers, then snaps  
Like sheet-metal in a windstorm  
Or sticks together  
Like moist, pink bubblegum  
Squished under an old shoe on warm concrete

From end to end  
It heals and it heals  
But, still  
With every knot a dead spot  
Even time cannot untie  
It grows shorter and  
Shorter and  
Shorter  
Until the knots become one  
And we cry

Scott Tracy



