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AUROLA

the 1990s, the number of people in the world who are under 15 years of age is expected to increase from 1.1 billion in 1990 to 1.5 billion in 2000, and to 1.8 billion in 2025 (United Nations 1994).

It is clear that the world's population is increasing rapidly, and that the number of children is increasing even more rapidly. This is a major challenge for the world's governments, and for the international community as a whole. It is essential that we find ways to meet the needs of these children, and to ensure that they have a bright future.

One of the most important ways to meet the needs of children is to provide them with a good education. Education is the key to a better future, and it is essential that we ensure that every child has access to a quality education. This means that we need to invest in education, and to ensure that it is accessible to all children, regardless of their background or their location.

Another important way to meet the needs of children is to provide them with a safe and healthy environment. Children need a place to grow up where they are protected from violence, and where they have access to clean water and good healthcare. This means that we need to invest in infrastructure, and to ensure that our cities and towns are safe and healthy places for children to live.

Finally, it is essential that we provide children with a sense of purpose and belonging. Children need to know that they are valued, and that they have a role to play in their community. This means that we need to provide them with opportunities to participate in community activities, and to develop their talents and abilities.

By providing children with a good education, a safe and healthy environment, and a sense of purpose and belonging, we can ensure that they have a bright future. This is the responsibility of all of us, and it is essential that we work together to meet this challenge.

The world's children are our future, and it is essential that we invest in them. We need to provide them with the resources and opportunities they need to succeed, and to ensure that they have a bright future. This is the responsibility of all of us, and it is essential that we work together to meet this challenge.

Let us commit ourselves to providing every child with a good education, a safe and healthy environment, and a sense of purpose and belonging. Let us ensure that every child has a bright future, and that the world is a better place for all of us.

A U R O R A

1996

Patrons

Michael Bright

Harry Brown

Deborah Core

Andre DeCuir

Richard Freed

Martha Grise

Dominick Hart

Nancy Lee-Riffe

Marshall Myers

Walter Nelson

Bonnie Plummer

Peter Remaley

Vivian Rogers

Barbara Sowders

Dorothy Sutton

Charles Sweet

Robert Witt

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My Dream

A body twists
Then it turns
The linen on the bed gets rumpled
Unnoticed uneasiness
As I am being chased

Faster and faster I run
Like Superman moving to the rescue
My pursuers cannot match my speed
Suddenly I run into a wall
It is so high
..... Unlike Superman I cannot climb over

I turn to look behind me
There they come
Six in all
With draculan teeth
And vampire eyes
They reach to touch me
Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!

My eyes open
I look around
There's nothing but my pillow
And a disturbed dream

Jerry M. Mwagbe

Whispering Softly

**I think the same thing of course
she whispered softly in my ear
I looked at her pale white face
and saw a tear bead in her eye
I love you was all I said
and a tear gently cascaded down my cheek
and fell to the ground**

**running a soft, angel like hand
on my burnt and weathered face
love was set deep inside
her mysterious green eyes
tenderness embedded in her voice
passion contained in her soul
softly speaking
her words rang out like gun shots
eternally etched in my mind
forever yours she whispered
ever so softly**

Scott Norman

Man of the Violin

To the one who touches the great Damascus sun
crowded, in a tomb, paralyzed, executed;
your breath is removed -- with toxins that burn the flesh
impaled . . . Mutilated . . . Cremated
Sodomized . . . Raped . . . Cannibalized
necopedophile bestiality
your ashes are reduced by the wind
only memories remain
Man of the Violin

a golden flower born in the rain forest
the dew covers you completely The body beside you,
dead; covered up by spiders
they love to house the dead: feast on the dead
a cornucopia of treasures
Play upon the wind man of the violin
the music is sweet the music is soft
play for me;
grandeur: religious invention -- may man be the first
It is raining hard . . . The forest sings its lullaby
its time to sleep the dead sleep
the wind blows hard . . . Ashes scatter
fragments . . . Decimals . . . Fractions . . . Digits
perverse, you corrupt them
torture them deceive them . . . Please:
touch the hot Damascus sun;
for it will sear you
man of the violin

Dustin Smothers

Lost in the Light

“Hell casts a great shadow when you move out of the light; A mirror appears while you’re in the shadow; a reflection appears in the mirror: two entities: both peer until the flames engulf them.” -Zibanitum

A man walks into the woods,
 he comes upon a wolf;
 both stare intensely
Wondering who will move first

Disciplines comes in:
 but who for?
 The wolf or the man
a virtue: patience

The wolf starts foaming;
The man stands in nervous anticipation
 they race towards the reflection:

The mirror breaks: a great void
 clouds both die
truth dies, too

 How pitiful to be
lost in the light

Dustin Smothers

Looking For Love in All the Wrong Places

Ginger Wesley

Dangling from the edge of the cliff with only the branch of a sapling to hold onto, she began to realize that perhaps some of the choices she had made were not so smart. Not the least of these was hooking up with someone like Nick.

“Kat, hang on. Let me figure out how to get you out of this mess.”

“Grab my hands, Nick. It’s pretty simple,” Kat said, exasperated.

“I don’t want to fall too,” Nick said gallantly.

“Nick, I’ve got to hand it to you, you really know how to make a girl feel special.”

Realizing she was on her own with this one, she made another attempt to pull herself up. This time she was successful and only when she was back on her feet did she realize that, like Lorena Bobbitt, she held the dismembered branch in her hand. She charged at Nick.

“If I was in my right mind, I’d give you a push over this cliff,” she roared.

“Settle down! God, you’d think I pushed you myself.”

When Kat first met Nick, she found his lack of guts appealing. But then, she called it a man not afraid to let his feeling (like fear) show -- a man not afraid to show his vulnerable side. Some of the other men she had dated sure didn’t have a vulnerable side. No, they preferred to make her feel that way by punching her and cursing her.

So when she finally decided she’d had enough of that, Kat resolved to do something for herself. She had always loved to swim. When she was a little girl, her

parents would practically have to drag her out of the pond in their backyard. It was only natural that Kat began to give swimming lessons at the Y.

She saw Nick standing near the edge of the pool, occasionally sticking a toe in the water and immediately jerking back as if the water was fire. A little boy ran by Nick, knocking him into the water. Nick screamed for help and floundered around in the water. Kat jumped in and pulled him out of the water. Between gasps for air, Nick thanked Kat profusely for saving his life. Kat assured him that it really was no big deal.

"No, really. You saved me. I'm deathly afraid of the water," Nick stammered, still shaken from the deadly experience.

"Really, it was no big deal. It was only . . .," she stopped herself. She didn't have the heart to tell him that he had fallen into all of three feet of water and could have saved his own life if he had just stood up. It was nice to feel useful for a change and besides, he looked embarrassed enough anyway. She decided to leave well enough alone.

"I came here to take swimming lessons. I feel kind of foolish coming for swimming lessons when all the other students are eight years old but I guess it's better late than never," Nick said, glancing around at all the little boys and girls waiting for their lesson.

"You're right. We should get down to business," Kat said confidently.

Nick finally gained some control of his fear after a few lessons although Kat could still see the dread in his eyes when he got very close to the pool. But she could also see that he was beginning to enjoy swimming. He was even starting to swim at the deep end along with the children who had begun their lessons when he did. His

movements in the water were less tentative now -- he swam with a newfound confidence. She couldn't help but smile when she thought of the man who a short time ago thought he was drowning in three feet of water.

After Nick's last lesson, he walked up to Kat and asked her if he could take her to a movie to thank her for the lessons. Realizing that the other students were not old enough to get into anything over a G-rated movie, Kat accepted the offer.

Around seven, Nick knocked on Kat's door as her phone was ringing. She ran to the door and told Nick to come on in while she answered the phone. He stood there a moment, looking almost as afraid as he did when he first touched the water with his toe. But he finally decided it was safe to come in.

"Joe, I told you to leave me alone. When I said I never wanted to see you again, I meant it. No, I don't want to hear your shallow apologies. Just stop calling me." Kat slammed the phone down so hard that Nick nearly jumped out of his skin.

"I'm sorry about that, Nick. Let's get going," she grabbed her purse and headed for the door.

Nick looked relieved at the idea of getting out of her apartment and quickened his steps to catch up with her.

Once dinner was eaten and the movie was over, Nick drove Kat back to her apartment.

"Goodnight, Kat," he said at the door. "Would you like to do this again sometime?" he asked, not confident she would say yes.

"Sure, Nick. I had a good time. Thank you."

"Great. See you," Nick said, beginning to fumble away.

"Wait a minute, when are we going out again?"

"Oh, yeah . . . um . . . how's Saturday?"

“OK, see you then, Nick.”

She was amazed and pleased at how polite Nick had been all night. He had not tried anything all evening and didn't even expect a kiss at the end of their first date. She didn't realize until now, months later, that it was not out of politeness but out of cowardice.

Standing there, just a few feet away from where she had nearly plummeted to her death, Kat tried to analyze how she got from her parents' farm to the edge of a cliff with a man who had nowhere near the guts and conviction of her father. He had always encouraged her to stand up for herself and not let anyone push her around. But for some reason her father (and Kat for that matter) couldn't understand how Kat became involved in a string of abusive relationships ending with Joe. Now she was at the other end of the extreme with Nick.

She had told Nick all about Joe. Joe had treated her so well before they got married. Even her dad liked him. They would watch Monday night football together and discuss other manly pursuits. In fact, everyone seemed to like Joe. Both were strong-willed men who were nobody's pushovers. But he was kind and gentle with Kat. What bothered Kat (but never told her parents or anyone else) was that when Joe got together with his buddies for a friendly game of poker, he would often become very angry and hostile in the heat of the game. One time he even knocked Tom out of his chair after accusing the man of cheating. Tom hadn't, of course, but Joe sometimes overreacted like that. And although this behavior disturbed her, Kat felt she couldn't fault a man for standing up for himself when he thought he was wronged. Her father never did.

Once they were married, Joe began overreacting to Kat's friendships with some of her male coworkers at the

local grocery store. After work one day, Kat was talking to the manager about next week's work schedule when Joe pulled in, ready to pick her up. When she didn't rush to the car after he honked the horn, he jumped out of the car and lunged at them. He punched her boss and pulled her into the car. He slapped her and demanded that she stop talking to her boyfriends while he was sitting in the car, ready to go home so she could cook dinner. It did no good to try to convince him that there was no one else so Kat put up with this and many of his other tirades for two years.

Nick assured Kat that he would never treat her that way and so far, he had not gone back on his word. Kat was convinced that she had finally found someone who would fight for her and not against her. Since the phone call the night of their first date, she felt she no longer had any reason to fear Joe's interference. Up until a week ago, she thought she was free of him. But now she was here on the edge of this cliff with Nick because Joe had decided it was time once again to be back in her life.

In the last month or so, Kat became increasingly aware that perhaps her reasons for being with Nick were not because she liked him so much but because she just wanted someone different than Joe. Because she was as strong-willed and determined as her father, she became increasingly frustrated with how Nick refused to stand up for himself. He allowed friends to borrow money from him and treat him like dirt without ever fighting back. At first, Kat felt sorry for him but after a while, she became disgusted with his inability to take control of his life. Kat was also becoming disgusted with herself not only for staying with him, but also for taking to Nick like he was three years old. But sometimes she would get so aggravated with him. Now that she had decided that she

wasn't going to be anyone's pushover, she couldn't understand how Nick could be either.

And then it happened. Last week, Joe started calling again asking about her new boyfriend, wanting to become involved in her life again.

"I don't have room in my life anymore, Joe. Can't you get that through your thick skull?"

But Joe, always a hard one to convince, persisted.

"I'll make room! You'll see!"

Today he decided that he would make sure no one else would be able to be in Kat's life either. Nick and Kat were driving home from a trip to the mall when Kat began to notice someone was following them.

"Nick, look. That car has been behind us for the last ten minutes," Kat said, frightened.

"Relax, Kat. We're not the only ones going in this direction."

The next thing they knew, the car behind them quickly became the car crashing into them, pushing them off the side of the road and near the edge of a very steep cliff.

"Nick, are you alright?" Kat screamed.

"Yeah. Are you?"

"Sure. What in the world was that. . .," she stopped in mid-sentence because someone was coming out of the other car.

"Oh, God! It's Joe!" Kat said, wide-eyed and afraid.

Joe strode over to the car, calmly pulled Kat out, and suddenly began screaming at her.

"I told you I'd get you. If I can't have you, no one will!"

Nick sat staring at the whole scene from the car, unable to move or help. He was like a deer caught in headlights.

"I see your man here's a real winner. Too scared to come out of the closet and face the big, bad monster, is he?" Joe said tauntingly.

"Leave him out of this, Joe. This is our fight," Kat said defiantly. She glanced over at Nick and could see the fear in his face like it was etched in stone.

"You'd better believe it is, woman!"

Now Joe came barreling toward her with all 280 pounds of force behind him. He was big, but she was fast and managed to dodge out of the way of this raging bull.

Still frozen in the car, Nick sat dumbfounded at the unfolding of events.

"You never were too quick, were you, big boy?" Kat screamed, almost invigorated by the newfound power she felt she had.

"Alright now, Kat. We'll do this your way. Why don't we just talk it out?"

"I've talked to you for the last time, Joe. Now I have someone who won't push me around," Kat said, not sure if she was just stating a fact or defending her relationship with Nick to someone she claimed no longer had a hold over her life.

"OK. I tried. Don't say I never did, Kat."

This time Kat wasn't quick enough for him. He sent her reeling backward over the edge of the cliff. When he realized what he had done, Joe broke into a run and dashed to his car and sped away. This big, brave man was suddenly afraid that he might be caught at the scene this time.

The only move Nick had made through all of this was to dart his eyes back and forth between Kat and Joe.

When the dust had settled from Joe's quick getaway, Nick finally summoned the courage to open the car door. He slowly walked toward the cliff's edge, very afraid of what he would see at the bottom. From up here, the entire town appeared to him like a miniature of itself. He couldn't believe his own cowardice this time. How, he thought, could I have allowed this to happen? Now Kat's somewhere down there, gone to me forever.

He inched closer to the edge, realizing more and more how high up he really was. Nick slowly peeked over the cliff and saw that Kat wasn't gone to him forever although the expression on her face told him that he might be is she pulled through this.

By this time, Nick was calmed down immensely. Now he was trying to figure out a way to get Kat out of this mess. As worried as he thought he was about losing Kat, he didn't find it necessary to endanger his own life saving her.

Once Kat calmed down after charging at him, it dawned on her that maybe her anger was misdirected at Nick, even though he was a yellow-bellied, pitiful excuse for a man.

"Nick, am I a bad person? I mean, do I get mean with you sometimes?" Kat asked sincerely.

"Well . . . yeah, Kat. Sometimes. But I always figured that you'd been through so much crap that you were still a little angry at men. But I figured if I waited, your hostility would subside," Nick explained.

"You mean you were going to put up with my being a little cross with you until I go through all this?"

"You are more than a little cross sometimes but, sure, that was the plan," Nick said, not thinking this reasoning was off at all.

"But, Nick. You didn't have to put up with me."

"I don't mind putting up with it. I'm kind of used to being that way with everybody else."

“Well, I’m not and you shouldn’t be either, Nick,”
Kat paused for a moment. “I think we should just break it
off, Nick.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, Nick. It’s over,” Kat stated matter-of-
factly.

“OK, if that’s the way you want it. I’ll just drive
you home, OK?”

“Yeah . . . OK, Nick.”

She couldn’t believe he gave up that easily. One
minute he was willing to endure what could be an endless
struggle for her and the next he just gave up like that.

Well, Kat thought as she climbed into the car, one
of these days maybe I’ll luck out and find a man who
won’t fight me but who will at least have some fight in
him. She gave Nick a smile when he obediently obeyed
her command to floor it.

2 AM

Orion goes
Walking with me --
Cold night.

In the Classroom

Studios flies
Practicing
Aerobatics.

A Lull at Work

Eraser crumbs
Fruitful and multiplying
On my desk.

Harry Craft

Pensee

The
pond is
still and blue
and lovely, but
I don't know what lies
beneath its surface. You
remind me with sapphire eyes
that could engulf the ocean whole
how little I can see and how few
the things I fathom of the human soul.

Harry Craft

Poema

Beloved, you are a ballade
Rollicking, full of zest for life
Earthy, edgy, beautiful
As wind and rain and sky and star,
Primal,
Fire, water, earth, air,
Elements incarnate
Bringing my senses
To life.

Beloved, you are a sonnet
Romantic, like a rosebud,
Stately crimson petals enfolding
The passion of Creation,
Burning bright like a tiger lily,
Serene as a lilac,
The fragrance of your love permeating
My heart.

Beloved, you are a villanelle
Intricate as an arabesque,
Subtle, ever brilliant, ever new
Like a ruby faceted
Deep as onyx, clear as sapphire
A diamond, thunderbolt congealed
Sparkling white, piercing
My soul.

Beloved, you are a haiku
A dewdrop that encompasses the sea
Ineffable as life
Quintessence of reality distilled
To a point
Like a finger pointing at the moon

You open reality to me
A word giving intimations
Of the Word.

Beloved, you are thought made real
Language given form
Rhyme embodied
Poetry enfleshed.

Harry Craft

Trash & Dump

Yet I know still to go
away so far from here
 life is strange
 so many games
confusion hurts my ears.

Gloria Powell

Your Smile

Your smile,
a surprise attack,
I am weaponless -- unguarded --

You leave sponges for knees
My body traitor reacts
I, scholar now turned idiot, babble on
betrayed and beguiled
bewildering my sense riddle mind

The heart always wins;
my grandmother was right

Tracy Rutherford

(untitled)

I wrote of joy
I wrote of sorrow
I wrote of soul

But you have stolen
All my poetry

Now, my spirit speaks and I hear only the
clatter of cliché

You thief of Babble
Knave of hearts
you ripped my words away

Tracy Rutherford

Deathless

Will Gump

Listen:

Three and a half years ago there was born a girl with the face of an old woman.

She sits now in the same chair she always has, in the house's dim attic, dressed in an ancient yellowing wedding dress of unknown origin, apparently sized for a midget. She has never had a name. What or whether the child eats or sleeps no one except perhaps her mother, a widow of five years or more when she mysteriously became pregnant, could tell. Soon afterwards, her brother and his wife were killed suddenly enigmatically, leaving their five-year-old son in her care. He bites his fingernails, cries easily, and is very afraid of the person living in the attic. He sleeps in the basement. Earlier, he would tell others about how at night the person in the attic would pace back and forth on creaky floorboards, like a crippled horse, but like his aunt, he has now grown almost speechless. Since giving birth she has never been heard to speak out loud, and so the grim household remains silent for six days out of the week.

Once every seven days, though it has become known that something happens in the attic. Whether this was revealed by an inexplicable breach of the silence immersing this household is uncertain, but now this peculiar event draws a small weekly crowd of spectators, filing solemnly into the attic to witness what none has yet ventured to explain. The crowd, numbering only a dozen or two, grows slowly over the weeks, and the slant-ceiling attics is filled almost to capacity with the uneasy observers

forming a ring around the child in the center. The child's cousin is the only real stranger to this event, hiding under his bed in the basement every time.

When you first joined this crowd, you do not remember, nor is it important. If you thought about it, it would seem as if you had been present to witness the spectacle every week of your entire life. By your mere presence you understand that somehow you become a participant in the event, and you believe that this is true of the others also. Since you came for the first time, you have always come back. At the first time you felt, perhaps justifiably, that it was important to be involved in, or at least witness, a happening like this which was so alien to your experience and indeed from the rational world as you understand it. Since then, however, this peculiar ethereal quality to events in your life has brought you to the point where, not only are such things unsurprising, but you have become resigned to their inevitability. The event evolves into a curious point of stability.

Now the time has come again, and you stand near the center of the crowd, gathered at a safe distance around the sitting child. Some in the crowd exchange whispers, but for the most part there is only the sound of breathing and creaky floorboards. The air in the attic, as always, feels cool and damp. One window is set in the roof behind the child, and from its icicle of sunlight you can see the air is heavy with dust. With her back to the light, it is impossible to make out the details of her face, an obfuscation for which you are grateful. It is not undisturbing to see the wrinkles and scars of age on the visage of a three-year-old's body. As your eyes adjust to the dim lighting, however, you can see her scraggly light hair forming a dim halo around her blank face.

The exact time of departure has never been determined, and as such may not exist at all. This attic you feel is largely disconnected from any mundane analysis, and you wonder if it is better not to try to know. There are terrifying secrets which lurk in time and space, and the attic is a bubble that drifts freely through the unknown depths; there is a sense of place that you can lose entirely here, a mystifying inability to imagine what is beyond the walls or on the other side of the trap door in the floor.

Your mouth is dry. You shift your weight from one foot to the other. Around you, others are doing the same, trying to silently clear their throats, restless. Your hands are sweating.

It always starts with a low humming noise; you are tense for a moment as if afraid that this time nothing would happen, before you realize that the humming has been going on already for a minute or longer. Some interval of time, impossible to judge. The room is silent now except for this humming, and you are listening far more closely to this background noise than you are watching the shadowy body sitting in front of you.

The sound of your own breath grows louder, and you concentrate on controlling your breathing to minimize this noise. The humming wanes and throbs if you concentrate too hard on it, elusive like a dim star that you can only make out from the corner of your eye. With single-minded concentration you focus on trying to make out the detail of this humming, clenching your teeth, and gasping when you suddenly realize you have been holding your breath for almost too long.

It is when the light changes that you know you must pay attention to the figure at the center of the crowd.

While it has gotten brighter in the attic, at the same time it seems to have gotten dimmer. You cannot

make out detail in your vision like before. The girl sitting in the chair is illuminated better somehow, you can see her face, but you cannot see the features of her face. You imagine she is scowling, her lips twisted grotesquely and hairy nostrils flaring, or maybe you can see it after all. She wobbles back and forth. You notice she is now perched on the wooden chair like a bird, crouching on all fours.

A static feel rises in the air. You feel all the hairs on your body stand up straight.

Then it begins. Right in front of your eyes, she starts to change.

She gets bigger. You can see her shoulders broadening, her legs extending, her head expanding. Her hair blurs away and is gone completely, leaving her bald. She continues expanding, blowing up like a balloon. This time, you see, she is practically becoming a giant. Every time it is a different body. A black goatee appears on her face, whose features have flowed into those of a completely different person. It is almost finished.

Then the lighting changes again, or the throbbing hum changes pitch, and the fluidity of the person's appearance before you is gone. The figure in the chair is not the person who was there a moment ago. You and the rest of the crowd now stand before a musclebound bearded black man, obviously over six feet tall, squatting naked on the chair where used to sit the child. He faces the floor and does not look up at anyone.

There is now perfect silence.

One last step remains in the process. As you expect, the man on the chair raises his right hand, fingers splayed, and holds it in front of him. Lifting his head, he now raises his left fist clenched around a long thick nail.

You shudder, as if you were cold. The most difficult part of the spectacle for you is coming. For the

first time since you initially noticed the hum, you recover some awareness of the people around you, and some sense of their collective nervousness. What you know will come next is always like an electric shock to you, the howl of pain, the rush of light and sound. You focus your attention on the man's outstretched right hand.

The man lifts his head, draws back his fist, and plunges the nail into the palm of his hand. He opens his mouth wide, but no sound at all comes out.

He is perfectly still for a moment, a stunning moment in which the spectacle has now veered off into terrifyingly unfamiliar territory, and you have no choice but to remain transfixed by the figure that might be frozen in time if it weren't for the rivulet of blood trickling down his wrist. You hear him exhale, then he closes his mouth, then he lowers his head to stare directly at the crowd. At you.

The throbbing hum suddenly bursts back to life. You are jolted, but even so cannot break eye contact with the figure in front of you. His features start to flow, his body melts away. All the while his head remains perfectly clear and intact. The light in the room swells to almost painful brightness. You can see nothing but the head and transforming body in front of you. The light is unbearable, and through this the man's face remains perfectly clear.

The light is suddenly all gone, then on again, then off and on and off, in a maddening accelerating strobe light effect. The man's body has almost changed entirely back to that of the girl, with the nail still piercing the right hand.

The light abruptly stops oscillating. The attic is black except for a beam of light coming straight down on the figure in the chair, the man's head on the girl's body. It pulls the nail out of its hand.

The nail is a bone. It points the bone at you.
Speaking in an unholy voice:

I will show you fear, in a handful of dust.

The voice crashes through you like it's coming from everywhere -- from all sides, from inside your head, like you said it yourself and your voice was amplified terrifyingly, unexpectedly. Your most breathless whisper a willpower-crushing juggernaut. A murmur of surprise and fear ripples through the gathered spectators. Not people whispering to each other, but mumbling, some wordlessly, to themselves, as if to verify that their own voices were not obliterated by such a force.

You cannot move. You cannot breathe. You feel your heart has stopped.

Suddenly the man's face is gone entirely, and you regain control of your muscles exhaling abruptly. In his place, the girl sits as before, but now you can see the twisted lips and squinted eyes with merciless clarity, and the absolute horror and hatred on her face. Grabbing the sides of the chair with both hands, she opens her mouth wide.

Her mouth spreads wider than humanly possible. An avalanche of huge insects spews from her mouth endlessly, gigantic chittering bugs with scorpion's tails and eerie long human like hair. They look like they're covered in armor, and have huge wings like a dragonfly. The insects cover you, they obscure your vision completely, but you can hear screams of pain from all around you. Trying to keep as still as possible, you feel the bugs crawl all over your body, in your hair and under your clothing, not stinging or biting. You are afraid to breathe.

As soon as they have appeared, they are gone, as if they never existed.

The child sits as before in the wooden chair in the center of the attic. There is no humming noise or strange light.

You and the rest of the crowd do not move for much longer than is normal following a spectacle. You are frightened that the second you do move, something else will happen. There has never been such uncertainty before about when the spectacle was over. At last it is the child's mother who moves, stepping through from the back of the crowd where she always stands to the side of the girl. She picks up her daughter's right hand.

Everyone can see there is a fresh ugly scar in the center of it. Several people gasp. This has never happened before. The girl yanks her hand out of her mother's grasp, and her mother stumbles backward in fright.

You begin to feel queasy and claustrophobic, and are the first one out of the attic. Behind you, the others file out with varying degrees of urgency.

Downstairs, you see the mother surprised to find her nephew in the kitchen instead of still hiding. He is very calm.

I dreamed last night that a mountain fell out of the sky and turned the ocean red, he tells her. All the wind in the world was trapped inside four bags held by four giants, and one of them dropped a rock in a huge river and dried it up, like it was the biggest river on Earth. There was this huge blast of noise and all the trees burned down, and the moon turned red and everything was red like pain. The sun went out. There were people covered in blood. There were monsters, there were five dead kings, and there were mortal wounds that didn't kill. There were things that killed everyone. There were voices from everywhere. The skies will open . . . the skies will open

It is the forty-second month of the season of self-mutilation. Soon, something will happen.

Blackness

Blackness-
a moonless night at three a.m.
ghosts laughing quietly
in the darkness,
no faces-
their images decapitated long ago

The empty spaces of memory
with random pinpoints of light in the blackness
Rachel's little chubby hand in mine,
dancing in the kitchen to old hippy songs,
lying on the back porch after dusk
smelling the birth of summer
Rick's fried chicken on a cold winter evening
when I haven't had a good meal in a week,
The taste of Mike's come on Thursday afternoons
carried on my tongue the rest of the day

Blackness of the past
seen dimly if at all
a film of coal dust an inch thick
like on the outside of Papaw's clapboard house
after winter.

The empty quiet, soft silk blackness of death
(or how we imagine death to be)
we long for it,
yet have not the balls to achieve it
If it were only as easy
as it was for Granny
who took a nap on the couch
one cold December afternoon,
warmed by the coal burning pot-bellied stove
in that old clap board house
and never had to wake up
to tie her shoes,
iron her dresses,
listen to her children argue and be cruel
cook supper for the whole fucking family
every Sunday afternoon
and endure the blackness,
the coal soot of life
anymore

L. J. Mallory

I No Longer Look

I no longer look for you on the street
or pass your house to see if you're there
I wonder sometimes still
in the quiet of twilight, sunset and red Autumn leaves
entangled against a purple sky.
I imagine you sitting in your house
across the kitchen table from your wife
drinking coffee, pretending to be interested
in what she is saying,
pretending to be interested in life.
miserable, routine,
the same yellow light over that same kitchen table
every night for twenty-three fucking years.
You put on a mask, smile because you have to,
when you'd prefer to scream, run away,
ride down the road on that long black Harley
blue eyes embracing the red tangled Autumn tree sunset.
that Harley that your wife says is taking you straight to hell.
I don't drive by to see the yellow light in your kitchen anymore,
don't chase you down the street to hear of your misery
your straightness,
the reverence for the past rush of drugs in your veins
veins which run calmly now
thick with the simple boredom of life.
I don't think I could listen anymore
or care like I once did,
for I am apathetic, and no longer want to know your misery,
or even your beauty.
Just want to be left alone in the twilight
no longer needing your wildness
(which has been killed off)
burnt away under a yellow kitchen light
and a mask of sincerity
while your eyes rage blue,
the sunset and red autumn trees blaze in your mind,
as your hand trembles, picking up your coffee cup.

L. J. Mallory

Shaving While On LSD

and then I saw You
standing in my mirror
thinking of times past
that I still call my future
“how dare you invade my privacy”
I politely scream at the Stranger
who has so rudely interrupted my morning shave
the Stranger’s silence is His only answer
as He mimics my every move
I rinse bloody shaving cream
off my cold and clammy face
watching the red water
pour down the drain
I look up at the mirror
with horror filled eyes
expecting to see
the cold stare
of the Strangers steel eyes
instead I see only a reflection
of myself and a cold white bathroom
in the background

Scott Norman

Bear Oath

**Cuddles huddles snuggles burr
Warmth found in a soul of fur
Hug me hold me do not weep
My love will put you fast asleep**

**Monsters, beasts and crilly crawls
Ghosts, goblins, things with claws
scary visions that make you scream
They will try to haunt your dream**

**But do not worry little one
Do not screech and look so glum
Things will be fine in the end
Just smile and hug your furry friend**

**I'll hug you back and give you more
I'll smack the beasties while you snore
I'll take their claws and punch their teeth
And keep those goblins out of reach**

**They won't be coming here again
This I promise you my friend
Because I'm your teddy bear, big and strong
and I won't sleep all night long**

**I will watch and wait till dawn
And you awake and stretch and yawn
Then I'll wait for night again
To huggle and snuggle with my friend**

Hugs and warm fuzzies

Tony Adams

Granny's Basement

That single smell follows me forever.
At the timeless moment of my forgot,
It is a needed tie I cannot sever
Of days of sweet and love unsought,
A soft twist of baseball cards, a fall leaf,
Dusty, unfinished clothes, and life lessons.
The old aroma is strong and so brief
That too quick my mind loses the essence.
I beg and plead for another encore,
Yet, I cannot retrieve my yester-youth.
The musty smell of days of play is lore
Leaving behind a table-sugar truth:
 Memories of a time now gone are dear,
 But life is more precious right now, right here.

Sherry Markins

A Kiss

He kissed me.
He cupped my face
In his hands

And he kissed me.

Like a sip of water
He kissed me.
A kiss
A sip

A feather stroke
A whisper of emotion
A thousand words unspoken.

To kiss
To embrace,

To say goodbye.

Danetta Barker

Progression

When I stop to miss the cracks
in the hole in the world,
it seems like something's
out of place.

There are no memories
or silent dreams,
or whispers of wonder,
no city trains
to take you there
and back again into
my quiet thoughts that
seem more like desires
that you won't speak of
for fear of waking me
that I might call it something
other than
it is
oppressive and hindering
to put away your mind,
tedious in its expression.

Christopher Daniel

