

5-1-1997

Aurora, 1997

Eastern Kentucky University, English Department

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Recommended Citation

Eastern Kentucky University, English Department, "Aurora, 1997" (1997). *Aurora*. Paper 30.
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Aurora

A U R O R A

1997

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Flight

Betina Conley

Claudia grabbed her thighs. She'd been Sweating to the Oldies with Richard Simmons for a month now and she could tell the difference this morning!

"Yes!" she screamed raising her arms like a triumphant Jane who'd caught a prize fish for Tarzan. Only Claudia, she didn't have a Tarzan. She had Doug, super lump of a husband for twenty long, long years. She'd resigned to live her life with the Lump until she heard from the airlines then it was, "C'est la vie! Doug!" because Claudia knew conversational French and Spanish.

Claudia stretched on the floor in front of the TV. She was charged from exercise and morning vigor. "Claude, baby, let's check the mail." She leapt up, spry for a woman over forty, and headed for the door. Her yard disappointed her. If she hadn't heard from the airlines by next year she was going to replace the marigolds and geraniums in her yard for birds-of-paradise and plumeria. Feeling a little flighty, Claudia slapped the mailbox.

"Come on Delta, Continental, USAir, Ugandan Airlines . . . come on fellas! You know you want old Claude. Just listen . . . Claudia . . . doesn't it sound exotic, Scandinavian maybe?" she pulled down the tongue of the mailbox and the junk mail fell out like throw up.

"Oh God" Claudia mumbled, "Now I have to sort through all this horse shit!" She shuffled the mail into a rough stack and headed back up the walkway. "Oh no Miguel! Hold on darling baby! Claude's coming!"

Miguel is the only thing that could take Claudia's mind off the mail from the airlines. Miguel tall, dark and Mexican-American hosted a Tex-Mex cooking show on Lifetime. After she herded Doug out the door she kept her date with her aerobics tapes and then with Miguel. She

loved him for many superficial reasons and imagined him as spicy as the roasted tamales which were his, and now her, specialty.

Claudia slid into Doug's chair, the one that made him a lump. It was positioned directly in front of the TV. She had programmed for the TV to change channels at exactly 10:00 a.m. so Miguel was discussing the romantic quality of cilantro before she had even gotten comfy.

"Oh baby! I need some agua!" Claudia practiced her conversational Spanish. Miguel yammered back and forth in English then in Spanish.

Claudia began to drift off having attempted a few too many adduction extenders to "Daydream Believer." She dreamed of Doug, the super Lump, lying on the beach with her. Doug kept saying his name over and over in her ear. Soon the noise of his voice became so surreal she heard him say, "Doug, Doug, Dug, Dig, Digging . . . I'm going to bury you Claudia. Doug, Dug, Dig, Digging . . . I'm going to bury you Claudia."

Doug's clammy hand on her shoulder did touch her then, but only to wake her. She screamed "No, no, no . . . Miguel save me!!" Claudia had slept through the afternoon.

"Who's Miguel, Clod?" When he said her name she knew he meant clod.

"My lover!"

"Sure. What's for dinner?" he began lumping.

"Uh . . . I don't know." she said. "Maybe you shouldn't eat; you might be more interesting as a half-starved savage, darling," she thought but didn't say.

Claudia stumbled to the kitchen to grub something up. Then, like sparkling confetti, she saw the junk mail heaped on the edge of the kitchen table.

"The airlines!!!" she had forgotten!

Like lightening she whipped up an instamatic dinner: unthawed meat and rehydrated boxed vegetables

and starches. Claudia and Doug ate like strangers, as always. She couldn't sit still thinking she could be a stewardess in less than a week! Claudia always read her mail in the bathroom; she liked the quietness and the solitude of white porcelain.

Doug raked his white bread around in his plate sopping up any paste left. He made her sick. Without a word he left for his chair. Claudia knew she wouldn't have to deal with him for the rest of the night. She grabbed the mail and headed for the bathroom. Once there she grew calm and checked her wandering jew to see if it needed water. It didn't but she needed a smoke. Right behind the jew, Claudia kept a fresh pack of Virginia Slim Ultra-Light Menthol cigarettes. She took one, turned on the exhaust fan and smoked.

Claudia checked herself in the mirror, no pepper in her teeth, fresh lipstick shimmered. She shuffled through the mail.

"Junk, junk, junk . . . ah ha!" Claudia trembled and held the envelope to the light. "Please. Please." She opened the letter and read.

"Dear Mrs. Fell:

Thank you for your interest in working for our airlines. Unfortunately, we prefer our stewards and stewardesses to be single and frankly, a bit younger. The job does require an excellent physical condition which you never addressed. Please accept our gift of one thousand frequent flier miles . . ."

Claudia reached for another cigarette. Her eyes watered from smoke and disappointment. She felt like her bathroom porcelain: stark and stripped.

"Flier miles my ass!" She opened the door to the medicine cabinet; she checked for pills, she checked for razors.

“God it’s never like the movies!” she was crying now. Claudia bowed her head into her hands and wept like a small child. Miguel burned in her brain behind her closed and stinging eyes.

“Come on Claude! Get together” she told herself. “There’s always bartending school!” She closed the door of the smoky bathroom and sat with Lump through the evening.

Liaison

Tonight, my unshed tears linger for you,
 My love,
All the trite phrases
 of village scholars hover in my
 asphyxiated heart.
My tongue's turned dark with unuttered syllables.
Names - word puzzles - affixed to my soul
 And you, my love,
 tangled, torn, treacherously linked-
 in liaison-
 with all.

Tracy Rutherford

Audible

Accidental word
plunged into fleshy soul.

Stapled pain to memory.

Maladjusted syllables
embossing
self-inflicted wounds.

Boiling
belief into destiny.

Tracy Rutherford

Escape

The smell of peach was in the air.
Spring brought with her a release
of fragrance and colors.
Pinks and yellows swirled together
creating a watercolor, sun kissed garden.
Fruits and flowers mingled
in a place where convict and nun might sit
and discuss the green of the grass,
the blue of the lakes,
the amber colored sun,
or that with a passport and plane ticket
one could fly to a tropical isle
where Autumn never comes.

Kimberly Gentry

Stranger

A stranger never felt this close by my side.
One night, an empty room
except for the cigarettes and TV.
Your mind made love to me --
a rhythmic beat pulsing through my veins
honesty and talent caressing every inch of me.
Silhouette on the window pane,
body on the bed,
this stranger made love to my head.

Kimberly Gentry

Leap

Elizabeth C. Nalley

At the end of July in Kentucky, the days are long and yellow and hot and hard. The air is like an unwanted lover pressing tightly against your skin until you can barely breathe, and there's no escape to be had. Even inside, the heat sits outside the windows, shoves next to doors, waiting to suck you in again once you dare to leave safely air conditioned rooms.

One of those days before my senior year in high school, my three closest friends -- Jeremy the charismatic drama king, Christie the warm Cancerian mother, and Zach the brown-eyed Buddha prince -- and I, Marianne the awkward angst-ridden poet, broke our bondage to the dry cold air of my house and drove to the only relief that could be found: the archetypal swimming hole in the cradle of the gorge.

The water lay flat on its stomach, as wilted and whipped as we were by the heat, the surface of it shimmering like a blue memory of amniotic fluid. We shed the t-shirts and shorts we'd thrown over our swim suits and slid into the cold liquid waiting under the tense hot skin of the pond.

"Ah, Jesus, that's fabulous," Christie sighed, coming up for a slow drink of air. Her short brown hair clasped her head like a bathing cap, her arms long, white and slender like the stems to some alien flower as she ducked them slowly into the water and then raised them worshipfully to the sun.

"Baptism," I said, transfixed by Jeremy's long red hair, moving atop the water like a slow underwater plant as he floated skillfully on his back.

"Always a metaphor with you," Jeremy teased, oblivious to my stare with his eyes tightly closed against

the sun, “or symbolism or some such shit. Girl, can’t you appreciate cold water as just plain good old fashioned cold water?”

As Zach and Christie laughed in agreement, I moved stealthily toward his beautiful tanned body, stretched out on the water with an effortlessness that was almost miraculous. I laid my small hands on his head and shoved; the games began.

For a few minutes, we were sea otters, sliding in and out of the tangles of one another’s bodies, Christie squealed, sweet cheerleader girl, and Jeremy played macho, lifting us easily and dropping us from the thick air into the smooth pond. Zach as always abstained from the carousing, swimming slow circles around us, dodging the wake of our revelry with a deep chuckle.

“Let’s dive,” he suggested as we three calmed ourselves, gasping for air and laughing.

“It’s a tradition,” Jeremy chided, seeing my familiar instinctive cringe.

“So is my cowardice,” I returned.

“Back off of her,” Christie said, the eternally protective mother. “She doesn’t have to do anything she doesn’t want to do.”

“Chicken,” Jeremy teased.

I lunged toward him in the ritual defense of my reputation. “That’s Miss Chicken to you,” I yelled, throwing my body against his and dunking his head below the surface of the water. He slid his arms around my waist and pulled me under with him. For a moment we were alone together in the thunder of muted sound, the yellow-prismed blue of the glorious water, our wet bodies cool as marble, as a skipping stone against each other.

I was stunned by it, the day’s heat banished from my body by chills. I stopped mid-battle and he pulled me up to the air too hot to breathe, the sun too bright to see by.

“Are you okay, kitten?” he asked. “Jesus, you scared me.”

Christie and Zach were staring at me, both having counseled me various times after a chance intimacy with Jeremy had left me in tears. I’m overly-emotional, the stereotypical super-sensitive girl. The queen of unrequited love, kept chaste by a fear of rejection and a crippling self-doubt.

“I’m fine,” I said, suddenly sickened by my own cowardice. He was standing, holding my trembling limbs to his unshakeable chest, his green and gold eyes so soft with concern, his voice too velvety with it. He certainly had no romantic intentions at the moment, but who’s to say what could be built from the sturdy box of his friendship? He certainly cared for me. But I would never risk it, just as I wouldn’t risk the cliff. Just as I cowered behind safely sensual metaphors, never confessing the deepest truths; sincerity was still embarrassing, my own earnestness a shameful hidden thing.

And suddenly I couldn’t bear my own skin, which felt drum-tight and silent, unable to make any music even in the lullaby of the warm and cool water swirling, even with his hands humming against the small of my back. I was certainly not fine, and I had to get away from them, from him, from everything that I was as I floated in the water next to him.

“Marianne!” Jeremy cried as I kicked suddenly away from him. I swam quickly to the shore and pulled myself onto the hot smooth ground.

“I just need to get out of the water for a minute, my stomach hurts.” I shoved the lie quickly from my aching lungs and kept walking forward, sparing no glance back.

“Marianne!” Christie yelled, and her voice confessed more than my pained expression, my stiff unhappy posture, my fast nervous excuse.

I heard Zach recommend leaving me alone, so calm, always in balance with the universe, and I loathed him for it. I loathed all things that possessed equilibrium and certainty, Christie her confidence in her ambition to become the archetypal mother as well as the successful lawyer, Jeremy his bright self-assurance that carried him through the lead of every production at school like a star falling brilliantly through the atmosphere, and Zach his inner fucking peace, his brown eyes as smooth as flower petals, unknowing and unquestioning.

I was irrational; I realized it. I know my weaknesses and I knew I was wiggling out. But I also knew that to remain this same self under this skin begging to be shed would drive me crazy. Senior year loomed ahead of me like a prison; the change had to come NOW or I would drudge through the coming year, cast permanently by ritual and habit. This was a doorway and I had to pass through it.

I had forgotten my sandals and so the rocks and scraggly plants on the trail up to the Peak cut my feet like unwanted kisses. It felt good to scrape the skin off; it felt like a ritual of purification. I moved with that beautiful quickness that rage and hate bring, the intensity of my emotion fueling me, making me suddenly uncharacteristically graceful. The trip took an oblivious five minutes and there I stood, looking down the strong young bodies of my friends in the water.

Up there on the peak there was a slight breeze of hot damp air rubbing against me like an insistent cat tongue. I closed my eyes against it and against the vertigo sweeping over me. I was chilled suddenly, remembering my acrophobia. Distantly I heard my friends calling my name as they noticed where I stood, Christie an hysterical shriek, Zach so rational, Jeremy demanding. Their voice, the memory of them, suddenly as tiny as kittens.

And then I was falling through the air, my hair grasping at the thick air in an effort to catch myself, and when I hit the flat cold glass of the water, the whole world shattered and was new.

The Widow

I sit on the river bank,
curled into myself as
solid and small as a
pebble. Having slipped
behind the spring green
cloth spun of tree limbs
and leaves, unprepared
and inescapably I faced
Water. The river is one long
intestine of it, gurgling
and greedy as boogeyman,
foamed white as a corpse's
finger pointing ever onward
to the sea that swallowed
him easily as a tiny sweet
cake, as an intake of breath.
I imagine a strand of
silver bubbles from
his familiarest lips,
those lost pearls
traded for this wedding
band grown discontent
without use.

Even bathing
has become a torture. I
loathe the ease of water
sliding down my body,
drowning me but parting
like a curtain to let the
air in, while he, fallen
fisherman, could not rent
the thick cloth of water.

The river rushes ignorant
of its crime. It is only a
thing which swallows,
unknowing, not tasting
the salt of his skin
but hoarding it,
burying it inside
its blueness, its whiteness
its unstoppable motion.

Uncurling, I move as
slowly as five years
toward the thunder
of it and immerse
myself -- an arm,
a leg, the skin he
knew -- a small thing,
once loved, to be
devoured.

Elizabeth C. Nalley

III. The Holy Ghost

The intangible who inspires
blooms like a passion flower,
tangling into every crevice.
It knows nothing, merely
recognizing your soul as
soil, then sifting through
to root into the bedrock.
It exhales silently. It
neither calculates nor
loves, but feeds and is fed.

This is the flame curling,
Gulping oxygen, and the dove
slipping dumbly through its
smooth flight. It is an
instinct or a muse or a
heartbeat sustaining you
blindly. It arrives and
alters and then abandons
you rippling and newborn.

Elizabeth C. Nalley

La Lluvia de Rosa Linda

or

Rosa Linda's Rain

There are three things which are too wonderful
for me, yes four which I do not understand:
The way of an eagle in the air, the way of a serpent
on a rock, the way of a ship in the midst of the sea,
and the way of a man with his virgin. Proverbs 30:18-19

Victor Cuellar

A strong, moist, semi-sweet scent filled the dawn, but the promise of storm yielded more vitality in semblance than in tangible natural power. The rain, though heavy in spurts, was sporadic and uncertain. Distant thunder trailed infrequent lightening. The wind alone maundered about like a child in tantrum, so that the denizens of the valley could not judge the storm's origin, whether a northerly or a southerly. In either case, it lacked bite.

"Es una lluvia loca,"¹ mused a drunk who slouched against the bar of a small, drab saloon that did not recognize the word closure.

"Es una lluvia santa."² pronounced an elderly lady with wiry gray hair that, massed in a ball and wrapped with a coarse black shawl on top of her head, made her appear like a sickly owl. In the dim of the cold, decaying church, her large, alert, dark, glossy eyes amplified her birdlike quality. Her daughter -- the youngest of three, but whose countenance nonetheless showed the wear of her own motherhood, which had produced among four ruffians the flower that presently knelt between them quietly reciting her prayers -- lost in thought seemed not to hear her. Rosa Linda, on the other hand, paused her murmuring to hear what her grandmother had to say about the storm. Perhaps the old woman would have one of her revelations.

¹It is a crazy rain.

²It is a holy rain.

Nothing.

Rosa continued her prayers with as solemn, dutiful, and abstinent an air as she could feign; her thoughts, nevertheless, fluttered. She imagined the old woman loomed over her, peered at her, like a hen pecks corn. Rosa twitched. She felt exposed as if her thoughts were in the air for all to see. She pulled her shawl closely about her as if to ward off the cold, but meant in truth to shield and comfort her. She was warm.

The loud sudden clank of the church's heavy, ancient, iron door as it opened jolted her. Instinctively, Rosa began to turn her delicate head to look, as the others had, but she restrained herself and stared instead at her moist palms. The wind's whistle at the door revealed to her what her eyes could not see.

A thin, masculine figure stood silhouetted against the dull late morning light, caught between whether to venture forward or to step backward. The door seemed to have judged for him as he stumbled forward under its weight as if nudged from behind. It slammed closed with a loud, dull thud that startled the three little girls and caused them to giggle.

"Is that not Ernesto, the chicken-farmer's boy?" the grandmother asked her daughter with a proud, declarative air at having almost immediately recognized him. The mother, who had not looked back as the others had, now twisted to look at the boy.

"Yes, it is him."

"I wonder...since when he has been interested in the Holy Church?"

The mother shrugged uninterested.

The grandmother looked back at the boy again momentarily, then turned to face her granddaughter and said, "I see."

These words sent a surge of goose bumps down the length of Rosa Linda's spine. She was shaken. She crossed herself abruptly and stood with her back to her grandmother as she gathered the folds of her long skirt as she prepared to sit down. Quickly, she glanced about the

room for the boy; he sat alone on the last bench -- a frog among daisies. His easy eyes and sloppy smile full of chunky, chalky-white teeth reached out to her. Both pleased and alarmed by his boldness, she plopped down aware that the pleasure was master of the two. As she wondered at this, the priest entered from behind a faded, velvet curtain.

The priest, a light-skinned, short, fat fellow, with stubby arms and legs wobbled over to the podium and greeted the parishioners with a smile that was more flesh than teeth. The thick, elastic skin of his face contorted in small rolls of fat, and a few white whiskers that had escaped his weekly shave floated along with the movements. Minute specks of his morning bread which he had devoured, as was his way, in chunks, here and there too coasted along like debris on the waves of his obese face.

“Esta lluvia es una de dos cosas. Es una lluvia loca, o es una lluvia santa. Cual? No se.”³ he chuckled nasally. The flock smiled politely.

To the girl, the priest's voice was a distant, dull bell that clanged in the open countryside lost among solitary trees. She thought only of the boy. She sensed him in the dark watching her and the urge to turn her head tempted and tormented her immensely. But the threat of the old woman on her right held her. Rosa painstakingly fixed her gentle eyes on the stationary priest and, fearful they might betray her, rarely moved them. All the while she wondered how to respond to his advance. How could she let him know that for weeks his image had filled her mind with the mysteries of love, that in the ghostly hours when the glorious light of the moon gingerly seeped into her room as she lay on her straw mattress they shared their hearts, their dreams with tender adoration? How to tell him that she loved him from the first?

³This rain is one of two things. It is a crazy rain or a holy rain. Which? I do not know.

He had come to deliver eggs in his father's place one day before her fifteenth birthday. His papa was not well, and he, the last son of five, had to fulfill his father's obligations. As she stepped into the big, front square part of her house, which served as living room, dining room and kitchen, their eyes met. While they waited on her mother to pay for the eggs, they admired each other. His thin, sun-baked face marked by large cheek bones, which the bright morning light danced upon, pleased her. When he smiled at her his thin lips elongated, and his protruding nose pointed down towards his large teeth. She smiled in turn and, somehow, an endearment stretched through the silence, and she embraced it freely, innocently, instinctively. She sensed that he too was touched. Her mother dropped three coins into his open palm which clinked softly as they landed. For an instant, he stood there like a big silly dog waiting for more affection at the foot of his master.

"Algo mas?"⁴ her mother asked. Momentarily dumbfounded, he looked at the coins without recognizing them, thanked her mechanically, and stumbled out the door. Rosa laughed tenderly.

She realized suddenly that she was daydreaming and that her mother and grandmother were standing -- the old woman staring down at her like a crow. Flushed, he hurriedly stood. Her grandmother reached for her hand, and Rosa intuitively drew it away and adjusted her shawl in pretense. At that instant, it occurred to her that her opportunity was at hand -- communion.

The priest called the worshippers to the altar. Rosa Linda's mother moved left, and her grandmother stepped right as she motioned with a downward stroke of her left hand for Rosa to follow after her. Rosa turned and hurried after her mother. She glanced at the boy who had not moved and nudged him with her eyes. He stood.

⁴Something more?

As she stepped into the aisle behind her mother, she noticed that her grandmother, on the opposite aisle, stared at her.

I have to let her make it to the front before me, Rosa thought and slowed; the old woman matched her pace. Rosa hurriedly looked about for an escape and noticed that some to her waited to enter the aisle. She stopped, smiled, and waved them on; they smiled in turn and motioned her on. She waved insistently. They nodded stupidly and stepped forward. She glanced over at her grandmother. A small group that trailed the old woman forced her forward as if she were a small stone carried by a stream. Unable to resist them, the old woman soon found herself at the altar.

Rosa was exhilarated.

“Hijo, con mas animo, no?”⁵ the priest encouraged the boy who, straw hat in hand, had not moved while the progression settled. Though they had knelt, many now turned to look at him. The grandmother watched him intently. The mother did not turn. Rosa, who had knelt at the far left end of the row, bowed her head and closed her eyes to calm herself. The boy walked up slowly with his eyes to the floor, not knowing how to answer the question in their gazes. Once at the front, he hesitated. He looked up the row, then slowly retraced it to the other end, and seemed about to make up his mind when the weathered priest cleared his throat impatiently. The boy swallowed, then hurried and knelt next to the girl. The drama settled the parishoners turned to face their shepherd; the old woman sighed heavily.

Though Rosa Linda kept her eyes closed, her mind was the mouth of an open pickle barrel; she took in all types of sensations. She felt the warmth that exuded from him. She heard him breathe. Then, she sensed a faint stir in the air around her. He moved in some way, she thought. As she strained to pinpoint the movement, his finger tips

⁵Son, with a little more enthusiasm, no?

tentatively touched her wrist. Intuitively, she unfolded her clasped hands that rested on her lap, then slowly lowered her left hand to him. Searching clumsily with the glorious sense of touch, she felt her hand at last fit snugly into his bony, cool, rough hand. Soon a gentle pulse ebbed and swelled in their grasp.

As the service dismissed, Rosa did not remember that the boy had released their clasp as the priest approached with the sacraments, nor did she recall communion. Simply, she rose and turned from him, unable to withhold her smile and her blush. She drew her black shawl tightly around her neck and face to secure her happiness and moved away, even as her grandmother called her.

The small crowd of worshippers stepped into the cold, gray afternoon and dispersed with only an occasional courtesy among them. The storm had proved something entirely beyond them.

“Que dia tan terrible,”⁶ groaned the old lady to them both. Her face looked weathered and weary and a shadow seemed to cover her weak, diminutive, ash-colored eyes. The mother said nothing.

“Si, que dia tan terrible,”⁷ sighed Rosa Linda as she looked after the fleeting storm in the far horizon, her radiant smile, though hidden beneath her shawl, glimmered in her dark, lovely eyes.

⁶What a terrible day.

⁷Yes, what a *terrible* day.

Drifting

The irony of you sitting there
While I write these words
About you
Tell this empty book about you
And why I don't want you anymore...
Doesn't escape me.

But it escapes you
Just like everything else
Falls from your fingers.

It begins with the absence of words-
You have nothing more to say...
And I drift, unwillingly at first,
But the waves carry me
And I rejoice and love them.
My arms and legs grow sleek and strong...
They carry me to the horizon.

You-
Waiting back on the shore-
Finally realize
I've gone too far
And to follow would be to drown.

You cry out
Beg me to come back
But I am already submerging
Finding me real life
Engulfed by my own waters...
Delighted by the stillness
And silence of this new place
Where you can never reach me.

Shannon Maria Smith

Disintegration

...And all the world culminated
as I spoke those last words,
“I don’t love you anymore.”
All I had known
and all that made up my tiny world
exploded in the second I uttered
the end of it all.
And never again will my heart
rest the same against the strong,
tall realities
holding fast in my mind.
The universe spun fast around
your face
and the crash our dreams made
sounded very loud
in your empty living room.
All I can say
is all there ever was to say
in the darkness or the light
or the twilight shadows
behind your garage.
I’m sorry, I’m sorry...
but your fluttering warmth
will not touch me
again.

Shannon Maria Smith

The Kitchen Floor

Dana L. Bowling

Charles looked up fearfully at his wife Miranda, who stood on firmly planted feet, arms crossed imposingly across her ample bosom. Miranda giggled as she contemplated her handiwork. "Girl Scouts paid off," she chirped.

Charles groaned and tried to mumble through the wire contraption in his mouth. "What are you dune 'Rnada?" he beseeched her, straining his chafed wrists against the tough nylon ropes binding them. His brown cow eyes implored his wife, whom he was beginning to suspect had finally gone mad.

Miranda looked at Charles like a teacher might look at a third grader picking his nose in class. She placed one hand on a meaty hip and cocked her head. "Why I'm going to kill you of course," she replied, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world. A shaft of late afternoon sunlight shot through the kitchen window and caught the lunatic glint in Miranda's eyes. Charles began struggling against the ropes binding him to the wooden kitchen chair. He whimpered a little as a dark splotch appeared in the crotch of his overalls. The stain seeped down the leg of his pants as Miranda began her tirade. "It's all over now," she crooned softly. "Oh, my dearest, most precious love, it's all over, aaaaallll over." She peered into Charles' face, her head like a heavy pockmarked moon hanging in front of his. "I'm sick of you!" she spat. "Ever since you fell off the chimney last month, when I told you to leave that fool bird alone and not climb up there after it in the first place, and you broke your flippin' jaw and had to get it wired shut, well sweetheart, you've become just a teensy bit annoying." These Listerine scented words poured out two

inches from Charles' face, causing him to grimace, and shrink back even further in his chair.

Miranda abruptly stepped back from Charles. "I need to get this place cleaned up," she stated, "for when the police show up. They will probably be taking some pictures, and it wouldn't do at all to get a reputation as a poor housekeeper." She glanced contemptuously at her husband. "Living with a pig like you makes it impossible to keep this place clean. I mopped and waxed the floor this morning," she continued conversationally, as if there were nothing more natural than carrying on conversation with one's husband while he struggled to extricate himself from the kitchen chair he was tied to. "I should make some cookies," Miranda said cheerfully. "I'm sure the nice policemen will enjoy some of my Miranda's Surprise Choco-Chunk Cookies." She began bustling about the kitchen, a perfectly Betty Crocker scene, except for the struggling scrawny man tied to a chair in the corner.

Suddenly Miranda turned to Charles, her furious eyes blazing. "I thought I told you to get me some sugar!" she shrieked. A vein bulged unattractively above her eyebrow as she howled at her captive husband. "I told you to get me some more sugar!" she wailed. "But did you listen? No! You never listen to anything I tell you, you no good piece of varmint droppings! Well, buster, I've had it with you." Miranda growled menacingly. "I've had it up to here with you," she said as she drew an imaginary line across her neck. "You've been acting like an invalid here lately. Just because your mouth is wired shut doesn't mean you can't do things for yourself. Although those bony little arms and legs aren't doing you much good now are they?" Miranda shrieked with wild laughter at her joke. She finally regained what passed for composure in MirandaLand, and wiped the tears from her eyes. "I've slaved in this kitchen for you every day, making your special pureed food," she complained, shaking a pudgy

finger at Charles. "You've been a real pain in the derriere," she commented, pacing back and forth across the kitchen floor. She stopped and stared at Charles for a moment. "Well, love bug, that's all over with now. I've reached the end of my rope, so to speak. Game's over. Time's up. Olly-olly oxen free!"

Miranda shot one more withering glance at her cowering husband and strode to the refrigerator, then to the silverware drawer. Charles was helpless to do anything but watch his wife as she shred her last vestiges of sanity. He worked his hands furiously against the slick ropes, and there! One gave a little. But Miranda turned from her rummages in the silverware drawer, holding her prize -- a silver Oneida tablespoon -- aloft over her head. "Don't you try to escape now, my little birdie," she cooed. "I've got some medicine for you." She held her skirt out daintily, and began twirling about the room, singing. "Just a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down, medicine go do-own, medicine go down!" Charles caught a glimpse of the bottle Miranda was clutching.

"Syrup of Ipecac

Vomit Inducer

Keep Out of Reach of Children"

the label read. Terror overwhelmed Charles as he recalled the words of Dr. Collins. "Now if you are to become sick, and are going to vomit, use these pliers to pry open your mouth," the doctor had warned. "Otherwise, you could choke on the vomit, and strangle to death." Charles hadn't paid much attention. He had a great deal of pride in his cast iron stomach. 'Old Nellie,' he called her. In fact, he hadn't thrown up since the county fair eleven years ago, when he'd gotten directly onto the Scrambler after winning the apple cobbler eating contest.

Miranda tired quickly of her Mary Poppins routine and strolled nonchalantly towards him. Charles shook his head empathically "No," and clamped his lips together.

Miranda, not to be deterred, waved the spoon invitingly in front of his lips, then smiled brightly and squeezed Charles' nose shut. Charles made a valiant effort, but his need to breathe finally overwhelmed him. As he opened his mouth the little bit possible, Miranda forced the bottle into his mouth (chipping a tooth in the process) and dumped half the bottle's contents down his throat.

She then sat down primly at the head of the kitchen table, and waited patiently. She held her Polaroid ready to begin taking pictures at the first sign of action. It wasn't long before her efforts were rewarded. Miranda watched with interest as Charles began gagging and retching. His throat worked convulsively, trying to still the rising vomit, but it was no use. His cheeks were soon bulging with the vomit unable to escape his mouth. Miranda took a couple of pictures as some streams of chunky red vomit dribbled down Charles' chin. "Doesn't taste too good the second time around, does it honey?" she chortled. "I bet you wish now you hadn't insisted on pureed chili for lunch today, hee hee."

As the stench began to spread through the kitchen, Miranda was reminded of her childhood, when she had thrown up at school one day. This wasn't an uncommon occurrence, children threw up at least once every four or five weeks, but little Miranda had had the misfortune to regurgitate her lunch on a day when spaghetti had been served in the school cafeteria. It had gone all over her desk and her dress, and splattered everyone nearby. Miranda's wandering mind was brought back to the present by a bizarre bubbling noise Charles was emitting. She saw that vomit was coming out his nose and strings were dripping onto the floor. "Puke in the bucket," she ordered. "I got on my hands and knees scrubbing this floor this morning." Charles stiffened and closed his eyes as he made a horrible strangling sound. Elated, Miranda rushed to feel his pulse. Her hasty, untrained fingers found none.

Miranda walked to the telephone and dialed 911. When the operator came on, she stated, "Hello. I just murdered my husband, and I thought you'd like to know." Before the operator could respond, she gave her address, and calmly replaced the phone in the cradle. She strolled to the window. "I need to get some fresh air in here," she mused out loud. Just as she began to open the window, she heard the sound of splintering wood, and a revolting belch and splatter. She whirled around to find Charles standing away from the busted chair, a few streams of vomit still dangling from his lips. Miranda's last sight before her neck was broken was the river of vomit on her freshly waxed kitchen floor.

Unsilence Me

Into the harbored night
I go without anger.
Unsilence me
as this serenity grows unbearable.
Wandering through helplessness
as the surroundings grow unknown.
Consider me unfamiliar
to what enchants my heart well,
so well that I may fly

Into the fabled morn.
I go seeking rest.
Unsilence me
as this serenity grows unbearable.
Pillowing the dampness
as these eyes allow not much.
Consider the story unfolding
to trembling hands,
from blue iris fading to brown,
through a wavered heart
that may fly.

Hardy Whitaker

Surgery

This pump
It works quite well
never stopping
In spite of the dropping

I've tried to repair
Tape and bandage
even stitches and glue
Nothing works well, what can you do?

Are you a surgeon?
If so, open me up
Help me fiddle inside
And sew me up

For my fingers fumble
And I have no sight
an extra hand
to hold the light

Brent Ward

Landslide

I fled
from your
words-- stumbling
in fear from the bruising
truth and crushing knowledge
until I suffocated in a burial of denial.

Rebecca Reynolds

Night Chills

Stumbling on the eve of winter,
waiting for the chill
which settles deep into the bone,
and dashes away slumbering bliss
While frost forms on early morning dreams
of warmth and passionate arms.
Acknowledgment of summer's last days
brings weariness to the heart
of those who remember the heat of the sun.

Rebecca Reynolds

Message Written in the Sand of a Deserted Beach

It doesn't make up for the piercing salty sting,
This recent healing sea bird,
Making a descent from wild blue to barren beach,
There is no belief in peace is the thing,
Moments under the golden god pass,
My weaknesses begin to submit to thought's leech,
This beach is for those who will never go home again,
Clatter, smash, glide, and scatter,
Waves are crashing to be heard--

Lance Yeager

Hawks

Two hawks are afloat in a cloudless,
embracing, blue November calm,
They rest on wires in isolated fields,
north of the country store,
The one with the Royal Crown Cola sign,
A silent, yet always present, player in hazed gone days.

Where have the petals blown, leaving you?
Those petals of juicy youth gandering,
They have hidden I think,
in the eyes of the hawks,
Recovering from scorned dreams
that had scattered them, crushed them,
and left them to the bluster of southwestern winds.

I have watched the hawks wander
through gliding and fluttering exits,
Stopped by the side of the road,
I make passing cars swerve a little to miss me,
It's not always I can find you now,
And the hawks are showing me a way--

Lance Yeager

