



AGORA

*“Birthplace of Democracy, the Agora dozes at the foot of Acropolis.
Athenians thronged here to discuss, harangue, litigate, philosophize.”*

Agora

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The Bouquet

*I insert each unique flower into the metal
picks of this giant urchin, this tiny sputnik.*

*They are all beautiful, of every hue,
but there's not enough to finish the job
hiding the coldness of the frame.*

*With no oasis how can they stay fresh,
once grabbed by the alligator clips of the heart?*

–Phyllis Proctor



Photograph by Mary Moses

Your Sunset

*Your sunset is my sunrise,
My dusk your rising dawn.
At night, while you are sleeping,
I sing my sorrowful song.*

*I watch you live your life,
You dance, you glow, you shine;
As I fill up with strife
And I break, I yearn, I pine.*

*While I remain still, my spirit roams,
My thoughts carry me away—
To where you are, to where you stand;
I look, but cannot stay.*

*I cannot be where you are,
My heart is weak and numb.
And I can no longer wait for you,
For I know you'll never come.*

*So I'll retreat, I'll disappear...
My hopeless day is done.
I bid you greet the morning,
For your day has just begun...*

—Jennifer Milton



“Afloat” by Augustin DuSablon

***2008 Recipient of the Agora Art & Photography Award*

All Is Well Beneath the Leaves

*All these terms and twisted themes
They bog me down with demented dreams.
But though I pout, I do believe
That all is well beneath the leaves.*

*But thinking now I s'pose I find
That pouting is a prudent use of time.
For in doing so I've made these lines
And observed that all things are naught but rhymes.*

*That is to say, and forgive me here,
That the end is very truly near.
And the captains they do grin and stare
While the rest of us are to blind to fear*

*So, I suppose, it's fair to say
That yesterday was Judgment Day,
But the judge was bored and did not stay,
But did suggest that we all pray.*

*And pray we did, fastidiously,
While father Mammon gave the Homily
Then we smiled as we believed
That all was well beneath the leaves.*

—Earle Maxwell

A Lullaby

*Sleep comes to one and all —
Limbs grow weary;
Eyelids grow heavy.
We, like children, resist.*

*The caffeine addict eventually crashes.
Much to his dismay
These patches, beverages, and sweets
Cannot infinitely prolong the day.
The body relaxes,
But the mind resists.*

*The insomniac eventually rests.
He despises the dark
For passing by, leaving him unfulfilled.
“Tonight! Maybe tonight sleep will come.”
The mind relaxes,
But the body resists.*

*The days have worn wrinkles into this weary man.
He holds his sweetheart and gives her a kiss.
Down he lays within the earth;
His body relaxes.
His mind finds rest.*

*Tears water the sod upon his grave
Because we, like children, resist.*

—Shana Williamson

The Freeing of the Foot in Romantics 401

The foot does not want the shoe.

Foot:

*wild thing, savage feeler
of earth, primal knower of first touch,*

*Oh foot: free and streaming, splashing and sunned; the whole world's
traveler*

*what senses you know what dirt and grass and rocks well-barked
trees have taught you of
things so innocent, so pure so true*

Foot: what you know and live.

could know and live ...

But, tamed early on:

Tamed and taught that shoe is mate:

material, formed, bounded, sides and sole;

Taught to never leave home without shoe,

*That jailer of foot. Jailer and deceiver: convinced foot is to be a houser of
trends:*

Pointed, clunky, bouncy plastic and cloth,

Laced, not laced, leather, not leather, recycled tires, well-heeled

Soled for sale.

Enough!

when the foot reaches a certain age, it has had enough.

*And so it was for one foot, housed properly within shoe
one proper day in Romantics 401.*

*Shoes should beware in Romantics 401: it will be Blake who will first joust
the foot:*

GET FREE GET FREE GET FREE GET FREE!

seared by Blake, riven of its fences,

dear hard Blake brought foot to its senses.

Slung to the north, slung to the south, shoe went flying

Innocence comes back Experience stops lying.

–Dr. Ellen Weir

My Heart Will Follow Thine

*My heart will follow Thine, my Love,
My heart will follow Thine,
That I be ever Thine, in hopes
That Thou be ever mine.*

*When cloudless skies show shining through
A brilliant brightling blaze
My heart will follow Thine, my Love,
Reflecting back Your praise*

*In sleepy heat of honey hue
By glassy stillness sea
My heart will follow Thine, my Love,
And rest awhile with Thee*

*When whistling windtops shatter trees
And day turns soon to night,
My heart will follow Thine, my Love,
And comfort in Thy Light*

*In chilling palsy bone on bone
With tears beneath the moon,
My heart will follow Thine, my Love,
For Hope will follow soon.*

*My heart will follow Thine, my Love,
My heart will follow Thine,
That I be ever Thine, in hopes
That Thou be ever mine.*

—Ann Visintainer

Old Hannah

Old Hannah watched the girl pick her way up the treacherous mountain path that led to the ancient cottage. The girl was as scrawny as a scarecrow... she had probably never been properly fed in her life. She never stumbled, though...that was impressive. The path was unfamiliar to her, yet she was able to judge where all the firm footholds were. Old Hannah turned away from the window, closed the shutters, and put on a pot of tea.

Eventually, the girl reached the cottage door. Old Hannah ignored the first two faint knocks. Most people lost their nerve long before they made it to the cottage...the girl had made it this far, she would not be discouraged by no immediate answer. As, expected, the knocks came again, harder and stronger. Old Hannah ignored them again, smiling and humming softly to herself. For half an hour, the girl kept knocking on the door, each attempt harder and stronger than the last. It was a wonder she didn't break the door down, even considering her small frame.

Finally the knocking stopped. This was the defining moment... Old Hannah sipped her tea and leaned forward in her chair, waiting to see what the girl would do. As she watched, the heavy iron latch slowly lifted, and the old oaken door slowly creaked open. The girl blinked owlshly as she tried to peer into the dim room. When she realized Old Hannah was there, she gasped in surprise, and then burst out, "You were there the whole time? Did you not hear me pounding on your door? Why didn't you let me in?"

Old Hannah allowed herself a chuckle. "Why, child...I had to see how badly you wanted whatever it is you came to get!"

The girl flushed with fury. "How badly I wanted something? I have been climbing this mountain since before dawn! Does that count for nothing?"

Old Hannah patted the empty chair at her side. The girl shook her head and squared her shoulders, refusing to move. Old Hannah shrugged. "Suit yourself. It's you that's been hiking up here all day, not me. I thought you'd be tired, so I saved the chair with the best cushion for you and made us some tea. But if you don't want it, I won't be offended. And by the way, it is quite impressive that you climbed the mountain.

Most people turn back before they make it half-way up. I didn't answer the door because I wanted to see how you would react. Think of it as a test."

"A test?" the girl repeated scathingly. "Witch, it is cold out there. What if I had frozen to death?"

Old Hannah patted the chair again, and the girl grudgingly moved to take it. Old Hannah poured her a cup of tea. "Well, if you hadn't come in on your own, I would have eventually come to get you. But now I know a little bit more about you from your actions. I know, for example that you did not come for a love potion or something to help you conceive a child. Or get rid of one, for that matter."

The girl frowned. "True enough. But how did you determine that? And why does it even matter to you?"

Old Hannah smiled. "Well, you aren't sighing and gazing towards the village, for one thing. You have no ring, and you aren't eyeing my herbs and poultices as if they were about to attack you. Why does it matter? It might not matter at all, or it might matter a great deal. Mainly, I'm just curious and having a bit of fun. A solitary existence is not an exciting one, you know, and I am easily amused. And perhaps you are...special. What is your name, my dear?"

The girl hesitated, then answered, "Sarah. My name is Sarah Stone."

"Stone? Are you one of Mary Stone's kin?"

Sarah nodded. "She was my grandmother. You knew her?"

Old Hannah threw back her head and laughed. "Oh, heavens! Mary and I were inseparable in our youth. Her name used to be Mary Baker...many, many years ago. We were the best of friends...but I suppose we grew apart after she married your grandfather. Nothing terrible or painful...her days were filled with her children and running a house, while I remained alone and unfettered."

Sarah gaped at Old Hannah. "You lived in the village? You knew my grandmother? But I thought you were a witch! I've always been told that you've lived on this mountain for the last three hundred years!"

"A witch? Do they really still say that I'm a witch? Well, well...some things never change, I suppose. But come now...do you think I'm a witch? Do I really look like I'm over three hundred years old?"

Sarah hesitated. “Well...you don’t look like you’re that old, but maybe you’re using enchantments...”

Old Hannah chuckled. “I am 62 years old...the same age as your grandmother would be if she were still living. I’ve lived on this mountain since I was 17. Does that surprise you?”

Sarah shook her head in awe and disbelief. “Since you were 17? How did you avoid getting married? How have you lived all these years alone?”

Old Hannah poured herself another cup of tea. “That, my dear, is a long story. The short version is that I didn’t want to get married, so I ran away, came up the mountain, and apprenticed myself to the woman who lived here before me. Her name was Catherine...but every one called her Old Cat. I lived with her and learned from her for a year, and then...I began my life of solitude. I trap small animals for food; I grow and gather my herbs. There is a small, cool spring nearby, and plenty of firewood for gathering. Staying alive isn’t so hard...although there are times when the loneliness can be unbearable...”

Her voice trailed off as she gazed into her cup of tea, remembering her many long and lonely years. After a few moments of silence, she returned her gaze to Sarah and asked, “Why did you come, my dear?”

Sarah swallowed nervously. “Well...I...I was hoping you could...teach me things. I’m a good worker, and I learn fast. I...I was hoping for some spells or potions...but...well...even if you aren’t a witch, I still want to learn from you.”

Old Hannah’s gaze turned to a piercing glare. “Oh? And why would you be interested in what I have to teach you? What would you do with such knowledge?”

“I...I didn’t really think about that. I just...my father said that I would have to marry soon. Not right now or even within the year, but surely by the year after that. And then...what future would I have? The same future as every other woman I know. I would become a shadow of my husband, a slave to my children, to my wifely duties. And one day...I would stop caring that I had lost my self along the way. And the only way out I could see was to come to you and ask you if I could stay here for a while and learn from you.”

“What about the convent? If marriage was so frightening to you, why did you not go there? They would have welcomed you with open arms. It surely would have saved you the hike.”

Sarah scoffed at the suggestion. “The nuns are no better off than the wives. They might get a few more years of living, but soon they are lost to their prayers and devotions. Their spirit dries out and shrivels up, and soon they are nothing but...but empty husks that will be blown away in the wind. They aren’t even allowed to learn like the monks do. They are still...empty.”

Old Hannah nodded. “So it’s the learning that brought you here. Well, that’s good...and believe me, I know what that feels like. It’s like a...a hunger gnawing on your very soul, isn’t it? Knowing that there’s something more, something just beyond your grasp...”

Sarah bobbed up and down with excitement. “Yes! That’s what it is! That’s what I feel! Oh, how I envy the novitiates in the monastery...they learn to read and write. They get to read histories and study all sorts of things! I would give anything to learn like that!”

Old Hannah’s face broke into a wry smile. “That, child, is the one kind of magic I do know. If you still want to be my apprentice, I will teach you how to read and write for a year. I will teach you some basic herb-lore and survival skills...everything you will need to live on the mountain. Listen to me before you accept...if you do, there is no turning back.”

Her voice wavered slightly and she paused, gathering the strength she needed to continue. “The life of the witch is not an easy one. People will come to see you a few times a year, asking for help or advice. Some you will be able to help and heal, for others you will simply have to do the best you can before you send them on their way. The months in between these visits will be long and lonely. I will try to teach you how to deal with them during the year I am with you. At the end of a year, I will journey down the mountain to the monastery by the village. I will not return...you will live on your own from that point on...until you take an apprentice of your own. The Christians...they feel that an educated woman is an abomination in their god’s eyes. They think that the study of plants and earth is wicked and evil.”

“The monks and nuns can comfort the dying, set a bone, and break a fever. Midwives can deliver most of the babies born in the village. They can guide and lead and advise the people through most of their problems...but a witch is still necessary, and they realize that. They know that our knowledge is still valuable, and that even if we do not practice any real magic, that we have a power over the imagination. The Christians grudgingly grant us our existence, but they limit us so that our power does not become greater than theirs. We must live alone on this mountain, and except for a single year in which we pass on our knowledge, there must only be one of us.”

Sarah absorbed what she had just heard. Cautiously, she asked, “What will happen to you when you reach the monastery?”

Old Hannah shook her head. “This will be the hardest part for you to understand. When I journey down the mountain, I will take a bottle of poison with me. It will be painless...I’ll simply go to sleep and never wake up. I will take it in the presence of some of the eldest monks, they will witness my death, and then my body will be buried in unhallowed ground.

Sarah recoiled, repulsed. “Why on earth would you do such a thing? Is that what I must do if I become your apprentice?”

Old Hannah sighed. “If it were up to me, it would not be so. If I refuse to give myself over for death, then the Christians will completely destroy all of our records and all that we know will be lost forever. This is why if you accept this offer to learn and be my apprentice, you cannot turn back. Do you understand?”

Slowly Sarah nodded. “I understand. I just...need some time to think about it. Also...you keep saying ‘we.’ How many of you are there?”

Old Hannah stood up and shuffled over to a dust-covered bookshelf. She gathered eight small books and brought them over to the table. “Here are seven journals, kept by myself and the six women who lived here before me. This eighth book is blank and empty, ready for you to fill...if you choose to stay. There are other books here as well, but these journals will bring you the most comfort as you read about how each woman dealt with her life on this mountain. There is wisdom and knowledge in these books that is beyond anything you could imagine. Reading them will ease your

loneliness and guide you on your path.”

Gingerly, Sarah picked up the oldest looking book. “Will I really be able to read these one day? If I choose to stay?”

“You seem like a bright girl. I’m sure you’ll pick it up in no time at all. And I won’t be able to teach you everything in a year, of course...you’ll have to read the books and learn some things for yourself. And there are some lessons in life that no book can teach. For now...I will make up a pallet for you to sleep on. You can make your decision tomorrow.”

*The two women sat in silence, brooding over the times to come. Old Hannah knew that Sarah would accept the burden before her and choose to stay...she had the same spirit in her as all the witches once had. She needed a purposeful life...she needed to learn and grow. As she began prepare the bedding for Sarah, she glanced at a dusty bottle in the corner of a shelf. Soon, old friend, she thought. *Soon you will turn me into the dust I came from. But after all...we all must die someday...and surely there are worse ways to go.**

–Amanda Coates

Butterfly Effect

He had thought to write a story that would make him happy. This was hard to do with the girl so far away. He knew that she was probably safe and that their furlough would soon be at its end. He still didn't like feeling so helpless. He had watched her plane crash fifty times. He had seen her mugged and raped in the seedy streets of Singapore more often than he thought was normal. But when his eyes were open and his head was clear her effigy was usually safe. This was one of those times. So he thought he would write about how her bits of broken communications from abroad landed on the thistle of his consciousness like a butterfly and brought with it the most beautiful sunshine.

He thought he would write about how, when he least expected it, she would be there with him all of a sudden. He would lay his head on her belly and she would run her fingers through his soft hair while they both stared into the cracked ceiling of his dorm. But then he would open his eyes and his head would be resting on his pillow and she would be gone again.

She would come and go like this often. Sometimes he would conjure her there desperately. He would press his cheek against the painted drywall easily and it would be her face pressing back from across the globe. But again he would open his eyes and she would float on, leaving a warm feeling in his stomach and his heart low.

He tried to write about these things but got angry because thinking about her so far away made him sad. He put down his pen and rubbed stars into his eyes with coarse palms. He frowned at the dumb pad which laughed back with a rustle of pages at his failed attempt to soil it. That little pad could be very elusive.

Rising from his bed he felt annoyed at himself for being sad; annoyed at time for being slow, and annoyed at how tired he was. He put on a shirt with only a few holes and checked his vitals; cell phone, wallet, keys. He walked outside and climbed into the jeep. The diesel kicked over roughly. He moved to adjust the radio's dials and his hand mistakenly brushed over the uniquely shaped air vents on the dash. She was there suddenly; perk little breasts presented to

him. He let his fingers idle barely touching her cleavage. He smoothed his hand over the dashboard plastic and she shuttered, then she was gone. He laughed at how surprising his girl could be from halfway around the world. Placing the car in drive he drove to work with an empty passenger seat missing the hell out of his butterfly.

–Patrick Shea



“Harmless” by Augustin DuSablou

The World was Flat

—Ann Cook

*The world was flat
And she spun right off.
so much ash made up
her bellows.
She spun right off
Down to the depths.
so much mesh made up
her molding.
Down to the depths
She knew she'd go.
so much ignorance
made up her cap.
She knew she'd go
She has spun astray.
The world was flat
And she spun right off.
The world is round
But she's already gone.*

Nice

—Christy Healy

*Nice is that person
Quietly walking by me
In the bright hour
Of our noon day lunch
Taps me on the shoulder
A prim and lethal shadow
Stabs me with a smile
And cordially apologizes
Sweetly like corn syrup
Then politely asks — her face so calm
If I need any help
Like an indifferent clerk
Yet I shall be condemned
While the seconds roll by
As not very nice
If I do not assuage her guilt
With an artificial smile
As I stumble and die.*

The Player

*Standing in the wings
Flying up in your words
Lay on, Macduff!
And cursed be he who first says,
Hold! Enough!
Flying up in your words
The witchcraft of not being
Me
And you who scream in my face
Making the charm firm
Marking out for me the fear
I who am not me
Trapped in the terror
Of your words Oh, were
I away, away from Dunsinane
And clear
Oh, what profit would ever draw me here?
Where you are and are not you
So that I may fly up and away
In your words
And you, dashing backstage
With the sword the blood the blood
To hit the stage to throw
Your warlike shield before
Your body, to die, but not to sleep
Not to dream in this dream
This play within our play
Oh speaker! The director's voice
In my head
Owns me now
And only always this moment*

—Dr. Rebecca Munro

What the Metal Has to Teach

*Carry the metal,
Earn the shield.
Eat the young,
And never yield.
Beast and slay,
Plow and boast,
To the victors
Raise the toast.
Smell the metal on my breath?
Mouth is hot from kill of fresh.
Body strong,
Eyes so fierce...
Soul by slightest wind is pierced.*

–Patrick Shea



Photograph by Mary Moses

No Ordinary Man

*Mr. Barnes was no ordinary man.
This he knew and others knew as well.
Hearts fluttered over his smart appearance;
weapons set aside under his calming voice.
He was skilled with the ladies and
accomplished at calming their men.
The former all loved him,
the latter all respected him —
Mr. Barnes was no ordinary man.*

*He was the joy of any gathering,
a true asset among friends, but
not one knew
what Mr. Barnes would do
at home.*

*He had a thing for the ladies —
each gentleman has his fault,
and this one entirely understandable.
Into his chamber he would lead them
to play upon his fluffy bed.*

*The nights were long
No voice would complain of the activities,
ah, but no voice could complain.
for by morning, the girl would be gone.
Mr. Barnes never quite knew
what to do
when he was through.*

*No relationship did he want.
no fool to spread rumors
of how he spent his nights.
A pillow placed over her face
keeps most women quite silent.
Into the river the body would go
to begin its journey out to sea.*

*“Alas, another suicide by a lady
who could not secure the love of Mr. Barnes.
Poor Mr. Barnes,
how his heart must rend!”
but he was still the joy of any gathering for
Mr. Barnes was no ordinary man.*

-Shana Williamson

A Romantic (Dis) Illusion

*It was Dark outside—
dark as Midnight—pitch black—
and I had to feel Midnight.*

*The crickets chirped as I left the porch.
The rocking chairs moved in the
breeze, softly beating the wooden floor,
beating ...rocking...softly beating...*

I listened.

*I walked carefully, fearful of my dad.
He raised his pointed eyebrows
as I left—
pointed like the horns of a bull
(or of the devil).*

*The cows lowed in the field beside out
house.*

*The frogs near the swing set
croaked and called to me.
Lured and intrigued, I walked over to
them.*

*Midnight barked and the Darkness
hungered,
Yet they had captured my attention.*

I was drawn to see and hold them.

*I knew I'd get warts if I held them—
but hold them I did—
I held them and embraced
their being—
their freedom.*

And he came.

*Midnight's food watered the ground
as rainwater floods the earth after a
shower.*

It – I – lay exposed and naked.

*I had not obeyed the Dark.
Midnight howled and raged.
Nature turned against me as he came.
The frogs leaped from my hands.*

*He raged like the bulls in the pasture
yards away.*

*I heard his rushed and ragged breath—
he breathed like the mad bulls do
before they charge.*

He raised his hands against me.

I listened.

*The wind still beat the rockers.
The chairs still struck the floor.
The crickets chirped—
but only when their wings were struck.*

I blindly listened

*I heard the bulls a dozen yards from
my room.
They spoke to me of the Bull sleeping
down the hall—
sleeping, and waiting ...
waiting...*

—McKenzie Armstrong

To Her Overbearing Lover

*Possessed you wisdom or
compassion
You would not woo in hurried
fashion,
Boldly rushing toward the fray
To conquer love without delay.
Spurred by passion's fiery heat
Thou the ancient Fates would
meet,
Wrest and ravel my fleeting
thread,
And quickly hop into my bed.*

*There lays your mark of
manhood won,
Perchance the honor of a son.
In all events, my bridal dower
Would make for you a
handsome bower
In which to weave such manly
tales
That modest virtue fearfully
quails!
To you I am another sport
More tender than the game
you court,
Yet the fever of deadly chase
I often glimpse upon your face.
I am to you another way
Of seizing pleasure where
you may.*

*But wisdom comes to those who
wait,
And patience is a better mate
For maidenhead and virgin heart
Than boastful youth's alluring art.
Of time's swift passage thou dost
treat
Possessed of Mercury's winged
feet.
Thou warns of pale and ashy lips,
Faded eyes, gelid fingertips,
As if the grave's wide-yawning
maw
Could virgin dreams of freedom
flaw!*

*For I treasure this maiden-time
Headier than your Bacchant wine,
A pause on life's determined road
Before I take a woman's load.
Now let me sport me while I may
Before you swoop as bird of prey
For little independence lays
Between bed-sheets and laundry
days.
Let me roll my strength and all
My sweetness up into one ball
To hide away against the strife
Beleaguering a woman's life.
Thus, though I cannot choose my
sun,
It's fitful warmth I will not shun.*

—Esther Vish

Darkness Laughs

*I feel the breeze against my face, subtle yet sharp,
As I reflect on the past few days I laugh.*

It's dark.

*My laughter seems to echo off the canyon walls of my bedroom
And the darkness seems to laugh back.*

It mocks me, perhaps.

Or, it compliments me.

Its humor is the same as mine, no doubt.

The darkness laughs, and then it cries.

Why, I ask.

It tells me, rather poignantly, it doesn't understand.

It can't tell me just what it doesn't understand,

But it too feels the breeze.

—Earle Maxwell



“Rissa’s Hair” by Jennifer Mullis

Two Birds

*Two birds land upon my back
Perching opposite shoulders
As I walk along this endless track
Which endlessly grows colder
First, I turn to face my left
And my vision turns to red
The red, that is, of fluttering feathers
Fanning my youthful head
Of life, of vitality, of freshness and hope
Of romantic naiveté
Of the love of countless fairy tales
And the coming of “one day”*

Before...it flies away

*Now I turn to face my right
And my vision turns to black
That black of the second curious creature
Resting on my back
Tiny talons sinking in
Just enough to recognize pain
Of haunted houses, lonely lovers
And summers flooded with rain*

Before...it flies away

*Two birds battle in the sky
Determined only one shall live
Furiously thrashing until their frail bodies
Have nothing left to give
They dive behind a nearby hill
Black pursuing red
I consider straying from my path
To discover which is dead*

But...I follow the tracks instead.

—Brian Hughes

In the Silence

*In this hall of clay and wood and stone
Ancient voices echo in the silence while
a Lady watches over all who enter here.
Here I sit striving, begging to be least of these:
“Elder brother, elder sister, lend your light to me.”*

*Strength is welling from the stones,
Symbols in sunlight and shadow: crown and sword and staff,
and the cross, always the cross.
Lamp-light is shining with the red of blood and wine and fire,
The bright flame flickers, stirred, perhaps,
by some invisible movement of grace:
“In You alone is my heart still.”*

*In a hall that holds eternity, even the stones are at peace.
Each moment blessed by those who went before,
Even the stillness is an echo of their memory.
“Where is the word, the melody to match the song of their
silence, sunlight and shadow and silence?
The chill air is heavy with their prayer, as though filled with voices;
I can hear their voices.”*

*Though they are no more, their age-old chant remains
Telling the hours, counting seasons,
Vows of stability that have not faded for a hundred years.*

*Here I sit striving, to tell the words of their song,
To capture that which cannot be contained.
Perhaps if I could capture their song I would find. . .
Their voices—ancient, silent—know what I do not.*

*Vanished though not gone, their spirits sing on,
Filling this empty hall of clay and wood and stone.
Such a place echoes with all they have learned—time and eternity.
And so, they live on. Their very selves have not yet faded:
Altar, chalice, candle, cross are soaked with their prayers.
Even now, their strength wells up from the stones,
Their joy dances ‘cross the floor with the rays of light—
Elder brothers, elder sisters, lend your light to me.*

—Mariana Smith

What's in a Name?

Even though she was supporting herself with crutches, Jenny liked the way she looked in the gown, the way it set off her bare shoulders. Her dad, who rarely had an opinion about much of anything, said she made him wish he were sixteen again. The photos taken by her mom with the digital camera confirmed her dad's comment.

But that's not why Ian had agreed to go with her to the prom. They were friends, had stayed friends. When his family had come into money, a lot of money, Ian left public school at the end of eighth grade for one of the prep feeders to the Ivy League. He was athletic, good looking, and especially smart, so for him it was an obvious choice. His quick intelligence had drawn her to him even though she'd seen him use it to cut others to the bone. They had stayed in touch, and now they were going to be together again. She was nervous hoping he wouldn't be disappointed.

"I can't believe he's coming," her friend Meredith had said in a fit of excitement a week before. "You'll have to double with me and Tad." That's when John, who was standing in the dim light near Jenny's locker, came forward and put out his hand. She thought he meant to congratulate her too in his mocking way. But as he grabbed her hand, he yanked her toward him and blurted out, "Shakespeare kick in the rear." His left foot missed her rear end, but she tripped over his right leg and broke her ankle.

She knew John liked her. She caught him watching her in Algebra class, and she had seen his lame attempts to draw her in his rat's nest notebooks, which made her feel a little creepy. Why did he have to be such a jerk? In January he had placed a full cup of cold hot chocolate on the inside of the locker of one of the basketball players he couldn't stand.

When Antoine opened the door, chocolate milk covered the front of his Saints T-shirt and soaked into his low riders. Jenny's denim skirt still carried a stain from the backsplash.

The doorbell rang. It was Meredith and her dad, Professor Wicks. "I love your dress," Meredith squealed.

“I love yours too,” Jenny said, trying to gage the right amount of enthusiasm.

“I came to document this historical event in pictures,” Meredith’s dad said, holding up a camera. He laughed as if his idea of picture taking were enormously funny.

While she really did like Meredith, she felt oppressed by her dad. “The novels of Nicholas Sparks,” he once told her when she and Meredith were discussing books they liked, “are filled with emotion not adequately motivated by the events of the plot, a plot which is designed for the sole purpose of inflaming the passion and manipulating the reader’s response.” The more she thought about it, the more she hated him because she knew he was right. Who appointed him to ruin these books for her?

Standing beside her a few minutes later, Professor Wicks predictably asked her about her ankle. She explained. Then he said, “My daughter tells me you’re going with someone from another school.”

“Yes,” she said, feeling uneasy. “We were friends before he transferred to private school.”

“I see. What’s his name? Perhaps I’ll remember him.”

“Ian,” she said. “Ian McDermott.”

“No, no, I don’t seem to recall him.” There was a long pause. She didn’t know what to say next.

“But did you know,” he said, “that Ian is Scottish for John?”

Why would she know that or even care. All of sudden she felt tired. She was aware of the dull pain around her ankle and just wanted the evening to be over.

–Dr. Mike Hood

Carmel

*Strong and small, a simple fortress of peace stands
Built with bricks, surrounded by high walls.
Inside handmaidens of the Lord reside.
On the outside are the exiles from their world
So like Benedict's solitary cave.*

*Sweetly scented tomato vines mingle and entwine
Around the straight trunks of nearby apple trees
While birds bathe in the water bowl of the sleeping cat
Who lies worshipping the sun; perfect harmony in nature
So like Francis' innate gift.*

*Gentles ladies clothed in rough and humble garb
Tend to the lowly palace of their mighty King.
No task too small, pouring out their strength of soul
In scrubbing, shining His shimmering wooden floors
So like John's sea of glass.*

*Sunlight stretches golden fingertips through the glass panes
Illuminating the simple home of its sovereign Lord.
Silence, stillness abides in that saving room
Acknowledging the Presence for whom the red light burns
So like Augustine's restless flame.*

*Nameless but so unique, hidden but present
Their quiet sacrifice, utter renouncement of self
Of fame, of fortune, of family passes unnoticed
By the alien world outside, accepted only by their Lord
So like His mother's magnificat.*

–Christy Healy

Snowy Night

*Their distant world is deep silent and still
With snow piled high and harsh upon the land.
The deer stand cold atop the towering hill,
Still, waiting for the warning sounds of man.
From far away the threatening car door slams,
They break away in sudden, graceful flight.
Their steps linger behind like burning brands,
Which spoil the quiet peace of snowy night.
Voices scream across empty barren fields,
And drown the silence of the gloomy land.
To them the quiet forest slowly yields,
Evades the reach of greedy grasping hands.
 Creeping away unseen, unheard by all
 It seeks its peace elsewhere in snowy hall.*

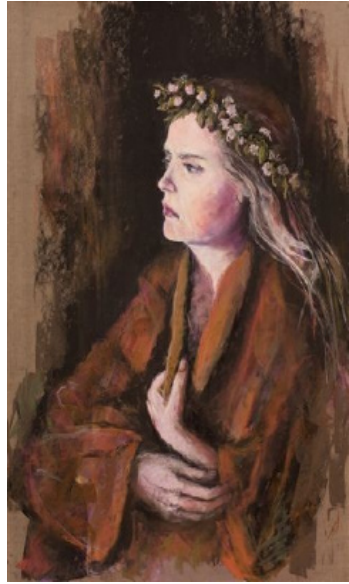
–Christy Healy

The Glass on the Wall

*The glass on the wall: it haunts me so,
It's staring eyes, its morals low.
A frightful thing: a reflection of man,
Hollow but deep, the idealistic ban.*

*To say I like it: the answer is no,
But why do I stay if I hate it so?
For beyond this mirror: I dare to say,
I wish I could take this realism away.*

–Thomas Varacalli



“Diptych: Death and the Maiden” by Dr. Ted Cooke

Heart

*Organ of circulation,
be true to thy function and
relinquish love’s sorrow.
Maybe to the ethereal soul
it is better suited, the
burden thus lightened.
Or to the cerebrum,
guardian of logic,
there to be dismissed by reason.*

–Prof. Robert Tompkins

The Viewing

*As you walk slowly
Down the aisle
In your Sunday best
I am prepared
Why are you looking at me
With your head turned to the side?
You say, I don't look like myself
Could it be that I have on too much makeup?
Don't stare at me too long
Don't try to kiss my lips
Don't touch my hands
Everything is in place
Please don't disturb my hair
And just before
You place that screw
In the groove
Near my head rest
Remember to
Let me down gently
Before closing
Before the last cry
Comes forward*

–Larry Williams, Instructor



Photograph by Ann Visintainer

October Sunset

–Coach Stephen Miss

*Ablaze they dance
fiery tongues descending
reds yellows oranges browns
descending descending descending*

*Swept up they dance
madly spinning in the arms
of breezes born warm and wet
in a distant gulf*

*They dance
but oh, so briefly
embers at twilight looking
back or is it toward
April's promise*

Slip Between Brain & Brush Tip

–Sister Jane Russell

*Before I first touch brush to paper,
the painting is fabulous in my head.
Maybe this one will make me famous
or, more to the point, quench the longing for
beauty I've lived with all my life.*

*Different blues will ooze across
the paper, kissing delicate pinks
and golds, of course leaving just the right
white space to frame that beach and breakers,
ocean and cloudscape haunting my inward eye.*

*Alas, once again it comes out boring:
the blues too dark, too flat, the “breakers”
odd curly cutouts with nowhere to go.
Only the clouds hold a hint of mystery,
wispy bridge to somewhere I'll reach some day.*

No Free Lunch

–Patrick Shea

*Crazy memories dance through
the rotten matter between the ears.
Women on parade march past
on the backs of closed eyelids.
They pass with the face I liked best on,
one smiles,
the next moans,
one pines, expecting the ugliness I represent...
The ugly faces are on display too,
expressions haunting...
I have put too many coins in the meter,
and now I fear I shall be parked here forever...*

Charity

Charity is
love
of God
 of mankind
 compassion
 for the sick
 for the animals
submission
 of desires
 of ego
good-will
 toward our foes
thanksgiving
 to our loving Creator
 to our caretakers
hope
 to those in despair.

A young boy
 outside his home
 breathing fresh mountain air
 smiled
his mother found a kidney donor
 father told him
 tears filled his wide eyes
 hope glowed his child face with joy.

My heart is empty
 I feel darkness
 I seek light
O King of kings
 I plead for mercy
 fill my heart with charity.

–Professor Gireesh Gupta

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And a special thanks to Jillian Maisano

Awards

*Jean S. Moore Award**

The Jean S. Moore Award was established in 1998 in memory of the late Jean S. Moore, an Abbey English Professor. Each year, the recipient receives publication in Agora and a cash prize of twenty-five dollars. This award represents top submission as judged by the editorial staff and is based on creativity and originality.

–Esther Vish is the 2008 recipient of the Jean S. Moore Award

*Agora Art & Photography Award***

Each year the recipient of this award receives publication in the Agora and a cash prize of twenty-five dollars. The award represents top submission as judged by the editorial staff and is based on creativity and originality.

–Augustin DuSablon is the 2008 recipient of Agora Art & Photography Award

About the Contributors

All Contributors are members of the Belmont Abbey College Community

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 - Ann Cook is a Senior and is a triple major in Theology, Philosophy & Circus Arts.
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