



AGORA



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



Agora

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A Mundane Wonder

*The ancient oil oozed then splattered
Accepting nature's plundered
Precious offering.
Tied to life and human heritage,
The simmering, scented herbage
Surely brimming
With all the years of practiced art
Sheaved from a practical start.
Wrists are bared, hands are tense
For this mundane wonder,
As the knife tears the flesh asunder
Knowledge guides sense
And the senses stir the pyre
Of nourishing fire.*

—Annemarie Maimone



Photograph by Daniel Rice

A Sailor's Kiss

You were born in May, the month of the epitome of springtime. I was born on February 29th, the only day that occurs once every seven years. My parents forgot my birthday a lot because it was so rare. Sometimes we just didn't celebrate it. I think I could have been great. I could have been the crowning glory of our parents, but then you were born. Ma told me I was an ugly kid. It's hard to forget when your own mother calls you ugly.

You were a beautiful boy, and our parents loved you. Through grade school, you were everything I thought was perfect. Some of the kids made fun of me and called me a girl because I liked to sing. I never thought it was fair that you were perfect, but I never really did anything about it until you picked a fight with me at school. That day, I was dragged to the principal's office because everyone told him the fight was my fault. You called me a sissy, taunted me, and slapped me in the face until you practically asked for the punch in the jaw I gave you. I was happy I gave it to you, but Ma punished me with the whip. I guess it did look like my fault, but I never forgave you for lying to her about the teasing.

You raced through grammar school with ease and excelled in all forms of athletics. I hated how the girls stared at you. I was a lonely young man, almost a year older than you. We were Irish twins, you and I, and I should have been the better man, and accepted my natural isolation. I had asthma, but conquered it to sing in the school play. For playing the part of a nun, you and your friends ridiculed me. I will have you know it was the most challenging role I have ever played on stage, and it was even difficult to wear that confounded habit.

You crossed the line when you asked Betsy Summerlin to the spring dance our senior year of High School. Since age eight, I had admired Betsy from a distance, pining, pathetically I now admit, for the touch of her hand or, at best, a glance in my direction. Betsy was very pretty, but plain. It was her musicality I was in love with. She positively radiated melody in her walk, her lips formed the perfect music in all the school musicals, and she loved to perform. Her voice was pure and innocent. I never forgave you when you stole that innocence from her.

The year was 1941. You were a robust and charming twenty-year-old in perfect physical condition. On your arm, you had Rita Warner, a beautiful secretary known for her incredible typing speed and petite sophistication in social circles. The morning of December 7th, your life changed. Due to your impressive athletic prowess, the Navy was avidly recruiting you at the onset of the United State's involvement in World War II. Like every other pleasing and patriotic young man, you quickly enlisted after the draft, telling

beautiful Ms. Warner you would perhaps not come home, and you could not bear to have her wait for you. Like most girls would, she cried and begged you to be hers forever, telling you over and over she would wait for you. It wasn't until I met with her after your departure that she understood you wanted to be available for nighttime "sick visits" from the ample nursing girls who frequently met with the lonely Navy boys.

I was not drafted. To this day I am not sure if it was a blessing or a curse, but for some reason unknown to me, the military took you, my younger brother, but not me. Ma blamed my asthma; I blamed my supposed femininity. I worked in a factory at the onset of the draft, but ended up a clerk. In my khaki pants and white button-up-shirt, I became just another forgotten face, ridiculed for being left at home, injured by the blow to my pride, disillusioned by the casualties inflicted by the cruelty of man. Over a few years, I watched man after man come home lost, lacking something they had before. Sometimes, the man who passed me had lost an arm, a foot, a personality, a talent, while some people didn't come back at all.

I worked all day and wrote all night. Some days I didn't even sleep. I became a closeted poet, regressing into isolation apart from my daily occupation. I withdrew into myself so deeply I wasn't sure I would ever come back. I lost what little personality and pride I had left in myself, and I never came back.

I spent the nights wondering if you were alive. I wondered if a uniformed soldier was going to come home and knock on the door self-importantly and solemnly hand over your name engraved on the same thing they label dogs with. I tossed and turned at night, getting angry with myself. I was indecisive in my consideration of my reaction to the hypothetical death notice. I wasn't sure if I would miss you or not.

You were back in New York in early August in 1945. Others came back maimed or missing some of their former lives, but you came back in a flurry of stories, enthusiasm, songs, charm, and good humor. I'm not sure why I expected anything less. I still struggle with my feelings I had when I heard you were alive and well. I'm not sure if I was relieved or disappointed. I drove many hours to reach Times Square where you would be because Ma asked me to. You had been in the city for a while, and were getting off the subway.

It was August 14, 1945. You heard the news about the end of the war through a radio, and were so excited, you ran through the streets kissing multiple girls of various ages. It was so very like you; it was impulsive and silly. A photographer named Alfred Eisenstaedt was just passing through the streets taking pictures when he noticed you about to kiss a girl in a white nurse's uniform. Her name was Edith Shain, and you didn't know her. On an im-

pulse, you were immortalized in what was to become one of the most recognizable pictures in modern history. It was published in *Life Magazine* and became a smash hit in post-war photography. The picture has various names such as the direct “V-J in Times Square” or the most artistically abstract “A Sailor’s Kiss.” I’m not far from you in my clerk’s uniform. I think you can even see me in the back of one of the multiple versions of the photograph, seemingly the only person emotionless in the city as humanity celebrated an end to war.

It felt like I was the only person who saw the truth. War was mankind. Thomas Hobbes believes all men to be inherently quarrelsome, and as much as I now hate to admit it, I truly believed that to be true as I stood in the middle of blissful surrender to vulnerability. I was the bitterly enlightened one, and I was right. Some time later, America was encapsulated and trapped in yet another war known as the Cold War, which gave rise to more and more violence. You were naïve, and I was disillusioned. You gave up everything for moments of ignorant celebration, which is ironic because a petty thief, who had a quarrel with you because you would not give him your wallet, shot you a few days later, and you died.

Many years later, a man stepped forward who looked very much like you, and claimed to be you. He followed many men who claimed to be the blissful sailor, but he was finally chosen after futilely extensive research to be the one true man. He got the fame in the end, and you got nothing. I’m just the blank clerk in the back in khakis and a white-button-up, your brother, who knew the truth but kept it to himself.

– Rebekah Sewell



The Priest

I would have washed clean,
If sanctity were possible.
Water blessed, innately holy
Running through my fingers.
I would it burned rather than flowed
Tinkling in the bowl—
Cut glass to catch my iniquity:
See, it overflows.

– Esther Vish

***2009 Recipient of the Jean S. Moore Award**

You are free to leave your fins

The bone of man brought the beginning
Such that a whimper could bring the end
Like the destruction of crowded streets
A choker on a singer's neck
Renounce the voice
And cut all sympathy

Mark the day when you can lay across
your bed
Your back faced north, and your head at
west
Those noises from the cracks lay at ease
New bed cloth

Wrapped at the feet of mine and yours
The room slightly colder than the year
before

We lay and reminisce:

"I do not come to bring the fall
But to hear your steps
When one leads the other on"

Why keep the time
When having none to count?
I see this in the presence of passing talk
And passing lights
And the passing gesture of an ill wit
manner

I mean none of this at all

I come without a torch and a
kind word at best
At times I crawl the ocean floor
And make amends with the
breaking dawn

The cooling water to ease my
talk

(Only you could part the seas
And meet my eyes)

Let us dine with guests
Familiar faces to start the season
A game of chess to pass the
hour

When you, more than any, know
all within the cupboards

The taking of wine for a
communion of thought
Should I wait for you to start?
Or should I leave, without a
voice at all?

– Abbigail Selig



(Facebook) Status

January 20, 2009; 8:15 AM

Rajive is watching the sun rise/ after eight/ years, centuries/ as the first/
snow finds its way/ gently/ a black son/ sprouts over/ the white horizon/
let there be light

– Dr. Rajive Tiwari

The Christmas Star

I lay my head down on my sister's white lace trimmed pillow and curl up like I have done so many times before. I close my eyes and pretend she is facing me and life is still the same. I can feel her breath brush softly across my face and I hear her voice as we talk. However, reality smashes my happiness as I realize she is not lying there and the air I am feeling is only from the vent above her bed.

My parents have not changed one thing in her room. We all catch ourselves coming into this room to remember life before she was diagnosed. Last Christmas she was so sick and weak, though her desire to participate in Christmas was greater than her illness. She enjoyed every sweet smell and found strength to help us decorate the tree and determinedly opened all her presents with a huge smile. That was the last month her mind won over her body's aches and pains. She lost her battle on January 18, 2008. That was the day I began not breathing as fully, not laughing as loudly, and not seeing all the colors of life as before. I missed her so much.

Christmas is here again and I find myself hugging on this pillow more and more. She loved Christmas with all our traditions. This year the traditions bring along painful emotions.

Putting up the Christmas tree did not feel right without her telling us where each of her ornaments was to be placed. Now her box of ornaments was sitting in the corner, no one brave enough to open it; each of us promising each other that we would place the ornaments on the tree tomorrow. The Christmas tree star that was her favorite was not working this year, but no one wanted to replace it.

There was emptiness in the air even though the sweet smell of mom's pumpkin cookies filled the room. The tradition of opening one present Christmas Eve was happening tonight and I was missing her so much! My parents would always exchange their gifts and then we would exchange ours. She would wrap my present in the biggest box she could find, no matter the size of her actual gift. Last year she got me a bracelet with a half heart charm that said, *I am always*. It took me almost five minutes to find the bracelet through all the pink peanuts in the oversized box. My sister giggled the whole time I was digging. I so miss those things she did and all the times we shared laughing together.

As I smelled the cocoa that night and saw the bowl of marshmallows and chocolate chips on the coffee table, my heart sank again. This was my sister's favorite tradition. The logs in the fireplace were aglow with bright orange and blue and my parents were waiting for my signal to begin opening presents. My sister was missing though. My mom winked at me and my dad

patted my back as I fixed my cocoa with lots of chocolate chips and no marshmallows.

My parents exchanged presents and I watched the show begin as they both pretended not to know what they were opening. My sister and I always teased over their acting abilities. Then they looked at me and said that I could pick one present from them to open. I paused and thought about it and then decided instead to open my sister's box of ornaments. That would be my gift, to see her ornaments on the tree that year.

My parents' eyes filled with tears as I walked to the corner to get her box of ornaments. I opened it up and there inside, placed in the center with a red ribbon around it, was an envelope with my name on it and a tag that said, "Open on Christmas Eve." My parents were frozen and life seemed to stand still as I wiped my tears and read this note aloud to everyone:

Dear Elle,

I miss you so much! I hope the Christmas Tradition of present opening is going well. Please drink an extra cup of cocoa with plenty of marshmallows just for me! (I know you don't like them because they get slimy but give it a chance this year!) Was mom's and dad's acting a '10' this year? I did not want you to be left out so here is your present. (Sorry it is not in its usual package!) Please know that every Christmas I will remind you in some way that "I am always with you!"

Much Love,

Your Sis

I pulled out the other half of the charm heart she had given me last year. It said *with you*. My heart felt so full and empty at the same time. After all the ornaments had been placed on the tree, we prepared for our yearly Christmas prayer in front of the tree. My family prayed together all the time, but this prayer was always so special. We held hands while my dad prayed thanking God for our many blessings and asked for help in the year to come. As he prayed, my body filled with warmth.

When we opened our eyes the Christmas star was shining brightly as a full prism of light was hitting the wall behind the tree! Breath filled my lungs fully for the first time since January and I felt so much love. The star shined bright all night and throughout Christmas day reminding us that—**My sister is always with us.**

—Victoria Miller

Cross Walk

The puzzler pounced from a passing car,
“A nice cross walk, was it not?”
Computing the clues, I toss out
all intersections lately traversed
and gape at the smiling stranger.
Her blond hair eventually clicks
to frame a sister-pilgrim on Good Friday’s
Way of the Cross.

“Yes,” I affirm, after the barest pause.
Yes, we did Belmont proud.
Yet “nice” is a non-descript word.
Say rather “devoted,” devout, descending
to mystery: meeting outside
Holy Comforter Lutheran, reading
words from the Word about Jesus’
Gethsemane groans. Hefting a splintery cross
and hiking down Main, two blocks at a stretch.
The motley crowd of ministers, spouses,
random disciples and children from eight
congregations has gathered to bring devotion
back to the public square
where, after all, these events
transpired. Especially apt is the stop
before City Hall, where spineless

Pilate caves to a lynch mob
and dooms a man who has done no wrong.
(Thank God that never happens today!)
After each reading, the call: who will carry
the cross? I’ve answered more than once
and staggered under the weight of weathered
beams. Teams of cross-bearers sweat in shifts
towards the end-point church on the hill.

On further reflection I see the Cross Walk
was intersection indeed,
Christian brands all blurring
around the Tree.

– Sister Jane Russell

Dr. Seuss in Love

*Oh my darling, oh my dear,
Will you go and leave me here?
I must tell you, you should know,
My life is over if you go.*

*Me and you, you and me,
Together always we should be.
You and me, me and you,
Nothing can come between us two!*

*How can I put this?
What can I say?
What on earth would make you stay?*

*My love for you will never die
As long as stars shine in the sky;
As long as sun goes down, comes up,
My love will burn my insides up.*

*One foot, two foot, three foot, four,
A thousand miles or maybe more,
Five foot, six foot, seven foot, eight,
I'd run to you- don't make me wait!*

*You know, together we could be
As happy as lovebirds in a tree.
We would be a perfect pair;
Why won't you stay- why don't you care?*

*You know, I'd love you in the rain,
On a bus or on a train,
Here or there or anywhere-
And still you tell me you don't care?*

*But if you really have to go,
Even though I love you so,
Even though my heart is true
As is the sky the color blue,*

*I'll let you go, I'll let you fly
(Don't expect me not to cry,
For my heart is broke in two
And can't be fixed by any glue),*

*I'll let you fly, I'll let you go,
But, this fact you have to know:
Another love you'll never find
Who can so wonderfully rhyme.*

– Ann Visintainer



Photograph by Monica Davis

****2009 Recipient of the Agora Art & Photography Award**



Breads by Nicole DeCastro

Liturgy

Morning tea, steeped in
White porcelain, poured
Steaming into the cup.
The calm of pillow shams
And a coverlet of ivory.
Venetian blind sun stripes
Cool brown ceramic tiles.

She prays aloud, gestures
Toward the Crucifix
And the wafer. Kneels,
Bows, stands, speaks,
Sings—caresses the liminal,
In stained glass window
Repetition, recitation, recollection,

That it may relent
And make her weeping real.

– Dr. Rebecca Munro

On the Heath

*From far off fog an eerie song strums
Black mists rise but never will clear
For something wicked this way comes.*

*A thousand days past a thousand red suns
Never beheld such bloody crimson seers
From far off fog an eerie song strums.*

*Witches wild a tuneless taunt hum
Their squally mocking draws no bitter tear
For something wicked this way comes.*

*No power can silence those ceaseless drums
Hailing the advent of his fatal bier
From far off fog an eerie song strums.*

*Long forgotten conscience newly numbs
Burning from the faint caress of icy fear
For something wicked this way comes.*

*By the pricking of my thumbs
No final remorse or hope found here
From far off fog an eerie song strums
For something wicked this way comes.*

– Christy Healy



Through the Window by Marshall Morris



Fresh

Thirteen empty bottles were staring back at him when the late afternoon sun streams finally convinced his eyes to open. Begrudgingly, he stretched and a raspy, dry, “ecch” escaped his throat involuntarily. Advil and a gallon of water replaced the foul, whiskey film in his throat.

The shower was next, all the way hot. Steam and heat pelted his body, and permeated his conscious. The shower hid his body from the world, and the pain killers hid his mind from his body. He allowed his back to slide down the stained, yellow-brown fiberglass until his butt caught his weight on the shower floor. Hot water washed his hair over his eyes and kept them closed. They didn't mind, he had made work difficult for them today, and they enjoyed the time off. He could feel his pores opening in the hot box, calling for a cleanse the way the weeds in the backyard were calling with a long stretch after the last bit of sunlight. From the floor he set to work scrubbing every bit of the scarred and calloused body. He couldn't get to his stomach, or his liver, or his heart, but he tried to. His heart seemed to raise a tired eyebrow in thanks for the effort.

He stood up finally and the lime-cruusted knobs squeaked hostile, signaling the end of his vacation. He sneered at them while his hand floated around the door to find the dirty towel. Face first, then chest, and arms, and legs. He stood naked in front of the mirror and shook his head like a dog, throwing moisture all over the bathroom. He had to sit back down on the toilet because his head did not like his canine impression. He took advantage of his situation though and relieved himself. Then he cursed for putting his waking rituals in a backward order.

Feeling dirty again, he washed sippy toilet tissue off his hands. He used antibacterial soap that she had bought him then splashed the wet lather on his face. The smell of lilacs replaced that of the lingering mildew from the towel. He let his hands and face air dry. The room was a mess and his stomach wouldn't let him hold anything down, so he set to work on the place. Cleaning can satisfy a hunger that food never will. Bottles with cigarette butts floating in backwash clanked together in bags filled with fast food containers from last month, and old magazines. White shoes were relieved of their red clay, and relocated from under couches to under closets. Crusty tomato sauce met crustier steel wool. Dining on renewal is gluttonous, and the feast continued for some time. Clorox washed away what water could not, and Resolve reduced regurgitation. Rugs and pillows were tortured and hung. Hoover deafened and assaulted dust wards. He finally cleaned the old towel. Sweaty and exhausted he had had his fill, so he made a sandwich and collapsed on the couch. No dust rose from under his weight. Out beyond

the back porch the sky was on fire. Orange blaze filled the room and he breathed it in; it smelled like Pinesol. Serenity was exhaled. He could feel his muscles ease for the first time in eight long months.

He heard the sound of keys in the front door and all peace vanished. He cringed as the door lock creaked open. He couldn't see her and she no longer could be heard, but her perfume invaded the room instantly. Her scent was too old for her, and he missed the Pinesol so he stared hard at the setting sun. She scoffed when she came through the foyer, and saw the back of his almond colored head. "No work for you today, I guess." Her name was condescension.

Her voice seemed far away. His eyes were glazed as he searched behind them. He had known she would come, but he hadn't planned on it. She simply wasn't in the picture. He blinked finally: "I quit." She nodded her head slowly, tongue in cheek. She took another step inside and was inhaling tirade when Pinesol finally arrived through the dense Chanel. Off guard, she took in the shining rebirth and was speechless. Thanks be to Pinesol.

Her voice returned distractedly: "The place looks good." He was still off in the orange and remained silent. Her eyes scanned the cleaned apartment. The sparkling appliances and the gleaming floors. Even the old couch seemed devoid of fault and follicle. She jumped as the dryer buzzed and she automatically walked into the closet where it was housed. She popped open the door, and the only fabric was his aged towel. It looked bright and clean though, and when she pulled the warm garment out she smiled. "It's about time." She folded it neatly over the back of one of the wrought iron dinette chairs. Still he was silent and her smile faded as she recalled her purpose. Her posture straightened and her hands ran down the front of her coat to smooth imaginary wrinkles. "I'm leaving," she said purposefully with her head held high. Then she exhaled, and deflated slightly. He returned finally. He stood up, but remained looking out the window. "I know."

He remained at the window, feeling his blood pump for a while after she had left. Finally he turned and surveyed his work. He walked with bounce to the kitchen table where she had flopped his paper. The classifieds were his aim, but he was distracted briefly by the clean towel hanging from the chair. He grabbed it and stuck his face into the cleanliness. There he stood and breathed in the fresh.

– Patrick Shea

Sir Lucien and the Golden Tongue

Lucien looked longingly at the deep purple sky slowly churning out the colors of the despair and anguish in his still-beating heart. “Oh, woe is me!” he cried to the dark abyss over him. The stars winked at him, as if they had heard his pained whimpers at this un-saintly hour. “Woe, woe – and again I say it! Woe!” He collapsed into a pitiful heap onto the thick carpet of grass, shadowed by his own folly.

It had been three years since he had ridden into court – just a lad then, he remembered. His hair had still been long about his shoulders, and the sword at his side was still the wooden training sword Sir Baxley had given him, for he was just a page. His father had given him up to the life of chivalry when he was but twelve and he had been serving as a lowly page, and then a squire, for the better portion of his life. He often cursed being the second-born male. Robert received the lands and riches of his father’s house, and Edward willingly left to the monastery to become property of the church. However, Lucien, a frail and sickly child of body and nature, had to slave away in heavy chain mail, holding and cleaning his master’s sword.

Yet he had found such tender peace in the court of King Perrin. Within two months of living in the kingdom, he was knighted for winning the coveted joust, knocking off Sir Rolf, the King’s best and most favored knight. Lucien went from frail lad to brave knight in a matter of one lucky match. But now, he was in a fever of something not even all of his master’s trainings over the years could have prepared him for.

“Sir Lucien,” the humble stable boy was shocked to see the great knight wallowing in the grass, groaning as if he was suffering from a horrible stomach ache. “Sir Lucien, are you quite alright?”

“Oh, no, boy,” he groaned from his back, still looking up into the dark sky, reflecting his own misery. “Oh, no! I am far from all right! I am in dire straits of what is to become of me! My life is asunder and naught can fix it, I fear!”

Distressed to hear such utterances from the brave knight’s mouth, the stable boy, Simon, dropped to his knees. “What can be done to save you, Sir Lucien? I will do my best and think of it as my greatest honor to serve you thus!”

“It is a secret,” Lucien rolled over, his eyes wild from his fevered heart. “A secret I am ashamed to tell to anyone!” Simon looked at him, unsure of what to say to the knight, who was acting quite foolish. “I *love* her!”

“Love her?” Simon scratched his head. “The plague of such a knight as you is sure to be something much more fearful than *love*!”

“You know not what you speak of, boy, you are too young. Nevertheless

in a year or so, you will see. In my many years of wars, jousts, and dragon-slaying – never have I faced a beast as big nor as frightening as this thing called ‘love.’” Lucien sighed and grabbed his pained abdomen, crying out and shuddering at his thought of a love he could never obtain.

“Then who is the foul beast? I will slay her!” Simon decided.

“You shall not!” Lucien turned over quickly, flabbergasted. “You do not slay ladies, young boy! Ladies are rather frail little things. The thought of slaying them would surely make them swoon.”

“Ladies?” Simon wrinkled his nose. “Now we talk about ladies?”

“Not just any lady, mind you,” Lucien propped his elbows up on the mossy turf and stared back towards the castle wall. “The most beautiful lady I have ever in my life set my wondrous eyes upon!”

“They all look about the same,” Simon explained. “They were the same fashions, just in different colors. They all hide their faces with paint and fans from exotic places. They giggle, sway, and move in just the same way as you cannot tell one from the other. They lose their own selves when they mingle. Sometimes, I wonder if when a lady is in the company of the other ladies – if they stop having names altogether and just become a mass of women.”

Lucien looked on, horrified by the speech. “You are an insolent little fool, are you not? You do not talk of the ladies this way.” He pulled at his hair. “Oh! If only I possessed the Golden Tongue that allowed me to speak with her!”

“Where can we find this Golden Tongue, Sir Lucien?” Simon asked, his eyes growing round.

“That I do not know,” Lucien replied in an agitated tone. “I suppose I should seek the company of the Sage.”

“Yes,” Simon agreed. “The Sage would know. He sends everyone on their magical quests every year. If anyone were to know about a magical and Golden Tongue, it would be him.”

“I shall seek him now, by the cover of midnight. But I implore you, by my liege, to find my lady and find out what she does think of me,” Lucien grasped at his heart in agony.

“I shall, but how do I find her?” he asked.

“She was wearing red at the ball – a strange color for a woman to wear, I think. Most of the ladies were wearing purples and blues this night.”

“Observant, sir,” Simon smirked a bit. “I shall seek out our mysterious Lady in Red right away.”

“You are too kind,” Lucien bowed slightly, brushing himself off from the grass blades, which clung to him mercilessly. “Now I am off to implore the wisdom of the Great and Mighty Sage of his wisdom upon finding the Golden Tongue.”

Simon reentered the castle's wall and began his perilous search for the Lady in Red. His eyes roamed through the still lingering crowd of men and women, unwilling to leave the castle and its entire splendor, though it was well past midnight. To his despair, Simon faded into a sea of purples, blues and greens as the dresses swished around him and he felt the silky fabric brush his skin. The faces began to blur together as he looked around the room.

Then he saw her. Their eyes met briefly, only for a split second, but Simon knew it *must* be her. Her long dark hair fell far below her waistline, the corset wound tightly around her midsection made her skin all but dance in the moonlight. Her dark eyes sparkled in a seductive manner, luring anyone who dared look at her, which many were. Besides all of that, she was the only lady wearing red.

Gingerly, he approached her. She smiled and extended her hand. "And whose page are you, that your master inquires of me?" she asked, immediately.

Confused, Simon kissed her hand like he saw the lords around him doing. "I am not a page of anyone," he replied.

The Lady in Red recoiled her hand quickly with an air of disgust. "Then who are you?"

"I am Simon, the stable hand," he replied. She backed farther away from him and began looking hopelessly around the room, wanting someone to save her. But spirits had whisked away the better portion of the party and no one was paying her any heed. "I have come on behalf of the greatest knight of them all – Sir Lucien."

The Lady in Red looked back at the boy, quickly. Her eyes lit up. "Sir Lucien?" she squealed. "The beautiful man who sits to the right of King Perrin himself? He is the most coveted among men in the ladies' court. We gossip about him all the day long! He is the bravest, most splendid knight of all! Why, he is even greater than my poor husband."

"You are married, madam?" Simon replied.

"Yes," the Lady whispered. "I am the wife of Sir Rolf – but I do not love him. Not in the way I love Sir Lucien!"

"But my lady – how can you love a man you have never met?" Simon asked, innocently, for he did not know the ways of the court.

"I have been struck with a fever, ever since I laid eyes on him the first time," she sighed, her eyes showing the great longing she had kept to herself. "When he took off his helmet in the middle of the field after defeating my husband, I saw his curly locks of gold, brighter than the sun itself and his smile that would make gods jealous, and I could not help myself but instead, allowed my tender heart, so unguarded, to fall passionately into love with

him.”

“But my lady – ”

“He is perfection, young lad! So much so, that even the muses themselves could not have conjured him up from the crevices of their minds,” she sighed again, looking longing outside. “How I wish to speak to him!” she decided, standing abruptly. “Take me to Sir Lucien, boy!”

“I cannot, alas,” Simon said. “Before he can speak to you, he seeks out the Golden Tongue, to make himself more than worthy for your ladyship.”

The Lady in Red began to fan herself. “Oh, but isn’t he perfect in every way! Give him this!” She took off one of her intricate lace gloves. “Give it to Sir Lucien as a token of my undying love. Tell him to hurry quickly, or I will become absolutely impaired by my faithful love to him and shall love no more!”

“But what name shall I impart with, my lady?”

“Bid him that my name is Elaine – the fairest of ladies. But I beg of you, sweet Simon, to not breathe a word of this to anyone but my love! If news of my love for Sir Lucien reached the ears of my husband, all will be doomed!”

“I swear to you, my lady Elaine, I will tell not a soul of your affair,” with a little bow, Simon allowed himself to once again be swallowed up by silk dresses of green, blue and purple.

Sir Lucien was pacing, his brow knit together in anticipation. He was pulling anxiously at his collar, as if he could not stand the midsummer heat. Nervously, he wrung his hands together, waiting. His eyes lit up when he finally saw the boy, carrying something clumsily. “I talked to the Sage. He told me where to find the Golden Tongue! The Wytch of Eagor has it, stored among her useless treasures, guarding it without a purpose!”

“The Wytch of Eagor?” Simon gasped involuntarily. “What a cruel joke has been played upon you, Sir! You cannot beat the Wytch! She kills every knight and knave who comes hither and hands their heads from the branches and briars outside of her hovel!”

“Yes!” Lucien agreed. “With a quest so dangerous, she is sure to fall in love with me!”

“She already *does*,” Simon procured the glove. “She sends this as a token of her love and begs you to be safe on your journey.”

“Does this lady have a name?” Lucien asked, his heart finally pleased.

“Elaine,” Simon answered.

“What a beautiful name for a beautiful lady! So fair! So tender! So – ”

“Married, my lord,” Simon broke in.

Sir Lucien’s face fell. “Married? My lady is already wed? To whom?”

“Your greatest rival, Sir Rolf,” Simon answered.

“Egad! Can this night get much worse?”

“Well, Sir Lucien, you *are* going to see the Wytch...”

“Silence, fool!” He covered his face with his hands and wept. “Yet, married as she may be, I love her still and will make her mine! Like Paris to Helen, I will sweep her away in the dead of night and be gone before the world can find us!”

“Paris lost Helen in the end, Sir,” Simon broke in once more.

“I said ‘silence!’” Lucien roared. “You! Go and fetch my horse! I will take back the Golden Tongue and gain my prize! I defeated Rolf once and this time, I will take more than just his title and seat next to the king!”

Simon shook his head and brought forth Sir Lucien’s magnificent steed. “Here, Sir Lucien,” he said, handing over the reins. “Peace be with you in your journey.”

“Give this to my lady,” he said, handing over a small dagger. “Tell her to wait for me, and I will come for her by dawn in five mornings!”

“This I will do,” Simon sighed and watched the knight ride off into the distance. He walked back inside, enveloped by silk again, fighting his way through to Lady Elaine, still sitting with her back against the wall, eagerly awaiting for Simon’s return. “My lady,” Simon began. “I bring with me a great treasure from my lord, Sir Lucien.” He brought out the dagger.

“Oh!” Elaine’s hand flew to her mouth. “Whatever am I to do with this?”

“I do not know, my lady, but it is what my lord gave me to give to you,” Simon shrugged as she took it carefully and hid it in the folds of her dress. “He is now foolishly seeking the Wytch of Eagor to steal from her the Golden Tongue. He says to wait for him and in five days he will come back for you.”

“The Wytch?” Elaine gasped. “What a brave and noble knight he is! And all of this is for me?”

“Yes, my lady,” Simon agreed.

“Then I will wait faithfully,” Lady Elaine said. And she waited as faithfully as a woman in her position could, watching for him every day outside of her window. But five days passed and Sir Lucien never appeared. Soon, Lady Elaine’s heart began to fall. “He does not love me,” she whimpered to herself. “He has left me for another woman.” Just as she said that, though, there was a knock on her chamber door. She opened it to see Simon standing there, holding a round object.

“It’s a bauble, my lady, from my lord,” Simon said.

“Oh thank heavens, Lucien is back!” Elaine cried. “Let me grab my things and we can be off!”

“I am afraid you cannot,” Simon said sadly. “The Wytch has put a

horrible spell on Sir Lucien. You see, he sought the Golden Tongue and she cursed him by making his real tongue solid gold, as well. He cannot speak at all, madam. It took three whole days for him to make me realize he wanted me to bring you this pointless trinket.”

“Oh my, this will never work,” Elaine pursed her lips. “But I still love him, I think, so bring me to him and I will see if none of my poultices will cure this sickness.”

“As you wish, my lady,” Simon said, hurrying back to where Sir Lucien sat, his tongue sticking out just a bit, the sun glinting harshly off the golden tip.

“My love, Lucien!” Elaine cried, running to him. “You have been cursed, indeed! And for my sake, so I do bear some responsibility!” Lucien mumbled something in reply, but she could not understand him. “Just tell me of your undying love and never shall we part again!” Again, Lucien replied, but she could not understand him.

“Halt!” Sir Rolf entered the courtyard. “Elaine! Why are you next to my sworn enemy? Why are you holding such a pointless bauble?” His eyes grew wide in recognition. “Jealous, I have become! You, Lucien, who stole my title and my seat next to the king! Are you so greedy you will have my wife, as well?” Lucien backed up, mumbling in a higher pitch. “Do you mock me? Say something, knave, or I will cut your tongue out!”

“I would like to see you try it,” muttered Simon.

“Silence!” Elaine and Rolf cried, and Lucien mumbled.

“I see you will not answer me,” Rolf said, drawing his sword. “I see you have no weapon, either. Where is your dagger, Sir Lucien?”

“Oh!” Elaine fumbled along the hem of her dress. She pulled it out. “See?” she turned to Lucien. “I have been faithful! Tell me of your love!”

“Speak or you shall die!” Rolf cried.

Lucien tried, but no sound would come.

“You do not love me!” Elaine pouted throwing down the knife. Lucien scrambled for the dagger, but Rolf kicked it out of the way.

“You do not love your life!” Rolf cried, enraged. “Jealousy has blinded me just like love has blinded you! I plunge this sword into your heart, the way you have plunged yours into mine!”

“Oh, Rolf! Stop!” Elaine begged.

Rolf would not be stopped, however, and stabbed his sword straight into Lucien’s heart. Lucien fell, lifeless, onto the cobblestone courtyard floor. “Now,” he turned to his wife, “for your treachery, I send you to a convent!”

“I will not go!” she cried. She picked up the knife from the ground and stormed off. But she tripped on the abandoned bauble, sending her sprawling, so that she landed on the knife’s tip, breathing her last.

“Elaine! My Elaine! You are gone and I am disgraced for killing an un-

armed man! I will never let the king see me in this state! I ride into exile tonight!" Rolf cleaned his sword and ran off, weeping, from the castle.

Simon surveyed the scene before him quietly. "I hope," he said quietly, "I slay the foul beast called love before it slays me."

– Lauren Stepp



Ecorche by Dr. Ted Cooke

Portrait of the Artist

she draws in conté crayon
red chalk on smooth newsprint
high cheekbones thick lipped
mouth downturned at sides
eyes below arched brows burn
broad forehead and hairline
straight close-cropped chisels
face all red conté all brown-
gold newsprint still he blue-
black shines burnished bronze
rises up elemental majestic
brow-bent sullen wide nose of
youth of manhood compressed
under this bright bared skin

he draws *her* in conté lines
gold oldness brittle paper of
forty-three years red crayon
fresh as new as blood as rage
his anger suppressed exudes
each stroke beauty pent up of
princely head and neck and
muscled shoulders blackshine
of red chalk from red clay from
man from Adam the lost place
where she bell-bottom collages
streaked across doors shapes
holds hand to lips in awe
and fury and marks the page

– Dr. Rebecca Munro



Conté Portrait by Rebecca Munro
(Africa, 1964)

The Shark

She never looked more beautiful to a man than she did on that afternoon to the shark. It was New Year's Eve in Alabama and it was 89 degrees. She was fit for a young mother and looked like she could have been a dancer. Her big chunky shades hid the bags and turned green eyes black. She sat with her toes holding each other in the sand, warm Corona held loose, looking up at the shark. Her face was slightly amused, and slightly annoyed. It screamed, "Yeah? Who's next?" But the shark would not be so easily deterred. Through gin breath and bleached teeth he told her that he wrote a column in the *Charlotte Observer*. He explained that the *Observer* was running a piece on single mothers in the south. She had tended bar since she was sixteen and she knew bullshit. She also knew men and she knew when men were bullshitting her. But the shark was a professional. Or maybe it was just his lie. The paper, a flash in the dark monotony of Montgomery, maybe it was that faint, fresh print paper smell of hope. Single mothers in the south, single mothers in print, single mothers on *Oprah*, *Good Morning America!* Goodbye LuLu Buffet's Bar and Grill. She lied to herself.

Or maybe it *was* his smile. Big white teeth, perfect, straight, and pearly. He smiled full, bearing the fierce desire in his nature. A shark's teeth cut. And she bled out her phone number the night before, at work! To a man! And now she sat drinking flat beer, in the stinking hot Alabama sun, on the last day of another rotten year, staring straight into the cool black eyes of the shark. He circled her with conversation, not wanting to strike while her guard was up. A girl can only tread water for so long. And so the shark circled, and she grew tired of dodging. She grew tired of fighting, tired of fronting, and tired of Alabama. The shark had worn his prey; she was feeling drunk and he was feeling hungry.

Her Dad had the kid for three more hours, and she spent that time on the shark's 46 foot Post fishing cruiser. She knew she had been duped, that she had given up and given in. But she was the one smiling now. There is a muted echo in the mind after fight and just before the strike. That last second suspension when nothing matters. When none of it ever did matter. It felt so good to finally just sink. She sank, and her breath left with a peaceful surrender. It was a sweet surrender, not to the millstone, or cancer, or even to Jesus Christ. She surrendered to the shark, and his razor sharp teeth.

– Patrick Shea

Happy Ever After

*Dim torches once so bright
Burn slowly
So soon spent out
The excitement of credulous youth
With its flaming ardor
All a faint memory
Her heart no longer stirs at his voice
Breath does not quicken
Or hands flutter nor lips promise
An undying love
That brief flame
Sputtered, stumbled a while ago
Her richness spent on an idle fop
And his moonlit vows
Who now lazes about an empty room
No more scaling high walls
To approach her forbidden window
Full of infatuated schemes
For this same Romeo
Of middle aged melancholy
Drinks too much wine
As she sighs for days gone by
Of youthful revels
And illicit elopements
And impassioned duels
He now dines with her
His chubby Juliet
A brood of children later
Yet for this frozen life
She ponders:
Her father she flaunted
Her mother she scorned
Her companions she fled
Then looks at her daughter
Mirror image of her youth
Reflecting bright torches
Rich and burning still
And thus confides her bitter wisdom:
Look to Paris*

– Christy Healy

A Hunt for Love

The house was beautiful, or at least it had been back at the pinnacle of the Civil War. It was the governor's mansion. Home to the governor, of course, his wife, their three beautiful children and a makeshift bed and breakfast for important guests who wanted a good home cooked meal and safe sleep for the night. Now it lay, in near shambles, as the scorched summers and frost bitten winters had left it a disheveled hump for nearly a century and a half.

Tripp wheeled the Ford pick-up into the pull around driveway just after noon. He shot Luxx a quick glance out of the corner of his eye as he parked. She was holding her head in her hand, half leaned out the window. Her legs were pulled up to her chest and she looked quite placid and serene sitting there. He couldn't help but notice that she wasn't wearing a bra underneath her white muscle tank and shifted his neck subtly to try and catch a glimpse of what lay beneath it. The leather seat made an awkward farting sound and Luxx shifted upright and stretched her arms out to try and wake herself up. Tripp snapped himself into behaving and looked straight ahead.

"You have a good nap there, kiddo?" He said sarcastically. Luxx rolled her eyes over to him. "I'm not a kid, you ass."

He gave her a playful rub on the head; her hair was so soft, he just wanted to pull it around his fist and thrust her head into his for that one amazing kiss...She gave him a soft punch back and he jolted for fear that his day-dream might have been detected by her.

Kayo gave a small jump in the back and hollered up front, "Okay goof balls, let's go get this stuff set up, quit kissing up there."

Josiah laughed as he helped Kayo out of the truck. The two of them were smitten together from day one. It was a wonder to the other two that they weren't married with a hundred kids yet. They both knew that Tripp was head over heels in love with Luxx, and they both knew that Luxx wanted to feel the same, but something was always holding her back from admitting her feelings. The two were just comfortable with each other. For Luxx, comfort worked, but for Tripp, comfort was....well it was uncomfortable. It was half past four when they had finished unloading the truck. The house was now brightly colored with extension cords running from the left and right, top to bottom. Since it had been condemned, the power was shut off throughout the whole property and the gang had to come up with another source of electricity. The blue wire was set for the tools, the yellow wire ran for the lighting, the orange wire carried in music from the truck and the green wire did something relevant but nobody was quite sure of what. Kayo and Luxx had set themselves up in the kitchen and started to make dinner, which consisted of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and potato chips. All

the same, it was dinner. Kayo was like a little sister to Luxx. They had been friends for a long time and Kayo's warm hearted spirit and humble humor worked right into Luxx's schedule of life. Kayo always had a way of making things work out and kept the peace in a confrontation or pressured situation. She was the heart of the operation and Luxx was the brain. They worked well together and got along perfectly.

As the boys shuffled in for their sandwiches, Josiah planted a wet sloppy kiss right on Kayo's forehead. She let out a little giggle as she told her man to go wash his hands before eating. "Yes, ma'am." Josiah joked with her.

"You guys make me sick sometimes you know that? I don't think I'm in the mood for food anymore." This was Tripp talking.

"Oh you shut up," Luxx said lovingly "You're always in the mood for food. You're like an ogre."

Tripp scrunched his face up and furrowed his brow and began to walk around like a Neanderthal. Even with his face looking miserable, Luxx couldn't help but love him. He was a great friend and she was glad to have him as that, but she sometimes wondered what life would be like if they were together. She always noted how gentle Josiah and Kayo were together and wished that she could find something like that. She wasn't jealous at all; in total contradiction, she was happy for them. When Kayo had first expressed interest in Josiah, she was too nervous to do anything about it, so Luxx came up with an idea. She told Kayo that if she didn't act fast, she herself was going to take Josiah for her own. Of course, she hadn't really planned on it, but something about the little friendly competition revved Kayo up and kicked her butt into gear. The next day she and Josiah were talking excitedly about their upcoming date...which happened to be the next day. It was cute, but Luxx wanted more than that. She wanted somebody she could fight with and have them still there in the morning to love and talk to. She wanted commitment and dedication. She wanted somebody to understand how she worked and how she thought. It all boiled down to Tripp. Tripp had been there with her through thick and thin. They had always been best friends, and nothing would ever change that. The only thing, only plausible thing that Luxx could come up with to hold herself back was that...Tripp had sticky fingers. He was a man after all. He wanted a girlfriend in both the emotional connection and physical aspect. And Luxx wasn't sure what she would be to him.

After dinner, everybody washed up for bed and headed into the tent where they had cots and sleeping bags set up for the two nights that they would be there. Working with old houses meant that they didn't have much time before the police came and locked everything up or put it onto the realty market to be fixed up and made into a million dollar lot. Luxx and Tripp slept next to each other, and Kayo and Josiah slept adjacent to them at the

foot of the bed. The next morning was going to be a haul and a half, going through mostly trash as they began sorting. Kayo and Josiah kissed each other good night and bid everyone else a good night's sleep. Luxx smiled at Tripp and said good night, and then closed her eyes. She kept them closed, but knew she wouldn't fall asleep for at least another hour while she listened to Tripp breathing just to make sure that he was all right through the night. Across from her in another sleeping bag, Tripp watched Luxx's eyelids flicker as she fell asleep and went off into a dream state. He wondered what she was dreaming of, and wondered if he had ever entered her thoughts. He smiled as he watched her, feeling his own eyes get heavy and breathing slowed down as he sunk into a peaceful slumber. The next day awaited them in patience.

– Bridget Bayes



Oneida

*I looked out and saw the dark,
the real dark, before Edison brought the dawn.
A slab of coal granite sky — cold black water
drips from its surface and only the hint of faint gray light
bleeds into the air and onto this milky ceiling.
No sound, no comfort in this icy place.
But isolation, elemental silence. Nothing new.
What has been exists here. What time brought
extinguishes when the light dies. Untouched by progress,
this darkness shrouded our grandfathers' fathers.
Now, as we move away from this museum of atmosphere,
we must close our eyes to see it.*

– Emily Williams

The New Unmoved Mover

Two dimensional fireballs
burn bitrate brightly into cold surface
television Pandora box
warm eyes, warm cortex and a cool operator
quick push x down b up right double tap:
Death eminent

Great war fought on command
of comfortably worn sofa crushed by
the impressed species of unmoved mover
with sweaty palms and sweaty brow
intellectually invested in lost causes,
distant places, not home.

Stimulated emotions stoked in
energy, the opium of lights
a proverbial high: yet reality of addiction
perfect stand in for studies undone
Thoughts unfinished

Quick push x down b up right double tap:
Death eminent; yet still...
black screen flashes gold letters,
spells "Defeat" and played once more.

– Mitchell Button



Housewifery

Lying on the counter an overdue dry cleaning slip
Cluttered on her desk an ominous pile of unpaid bills
Her sink overflowing with an Everest of unwashed plates
A pervasive layer of dust and dirt throughout her domain

Yet she sits quiet on the sofa after refilling his glass
And pretends to watch the game

– Christy Healy

Ghosts in the Garden

*Where is the tradition of ancient yew to comfort us here?
We could feel peace in the presence of past grief;
The stains of moss and lichen would remind us of time,
We would remember that we are neither first nor last.*

*Centuries pass and these stones stand here still:
Some will come to read our names before they wear away.
Those who stop to listen will feel the heavy quiet of the past,
In this green corner, where one is never wholly alone.*

*Human hearts can be stilled, but the spirit sings on:
And so I stop to speak to the ghosts in the garden.
Once, they stood where I stand now, on sacred ground.
In this place, I am neither first, nor last, nor alone.*

– Mariana Smith



Photograph by Abbigail Selig

If You Had a Million Dollars

*In cases such as these,
There isn't any grass
On the other side—
It died for lack of sun
Beneath the Chinese
Carpet.*

*The finger paintings
Lost to Goya
Above the mantel,
And sandboxes
Are superfluous
Without children
Or cats.*

*Japanese kimonos
Hang crystallized against
Eggshell walls,
Neither quite white,
Quite bridal,
Just mute.*

*The double range laughs
From the kitchen—
"His and Hers" but there
Is no his about it
Only hers.*

*The bedrooms add
A familial air:
Named for Easter
And Christmas
Occupants.*

*Do you ever wish
The "Opium Den"
Came alive at night
To drug you from a
Valium sleep?*



Sarge by Paul Toscano

– Esther Vish

Old Age

I don't know whether you have noticed it or not, but everything has gotten much heavier. I first noticed it when my wife and I went to buy some roofing tiles which came in 100 pound packages. A young man brought the three packages on a lift to the trunk of my car, easily hoisted them off and dropped them in my trunk. When we got home, I was told by my wife to put them under the porch in the backyard. When I went to lift them from the trunk, I discovered that they were glued together, or so I thought. I tugged, I pulled, I moved this way and that for better leverage, but nothing worked.

I remembered back when I was a 16-year-old and worked in a small candy factory. On Saturday, a truck would come with 10 bags of peanuts, each of which weighed 100 pounds. I would snatch those bags off the truck onto my shoulder and march to the storage area in the rear and place them gently on the floor. I noticed that these packages of shingles were marked "100 Pounds." I could only suppose that weights were like money: you had to allow for inflation. What was 100 pounds when I was sixteen, is now that I am 77, more like 250 pounds. This made perfectly good sense to me.

Therefore, I brought my wheelbarrow to the trunk of my car, and wrestled these three packages of shingles, one at a time, out of the trunk and into the wheelbarrow. Then I laboriously pushed this load to the backyard where I unceremoniously dumped it under the porch, where the shingles remain.

It was this event that alerted me to how things had gotten much heavier. Now when I mowed the grass, I noticed how much thicker it had grown and, therefore, how much harder I had to push the mower. When I took the cover on and off our pontoon boat, it had become a much more difficult task. Probably the cover had shrunk over time and needed more tugging and pulling than in the past. In any case, it took more time to take off and especially to put on.

Did I mention how much steeper the steps going up from the yard to the back porch were now? When we moved in 12 years ago, I could go up those steps with no difficulty. Now they were much steeper, and I had to hold onto the railing and stop halfway to catch my breath.

A related phenomenon to how heavier physical things have become and how steeper inclines have grown, is how much younger are the students being admitted to college. I have been teaching college students since 1960. At that time the Admissions Office only admitted students a few years younger than I. Now the Admissions Office admits children the age of my grandchildren. One young man came up after class and told me that I had taught his father. Now how could that be?

Thus, I have concluded that the world has changed while I have stayed

the same. I am just as strong as I ever was, but things have grown heavier; I am just as flexible as ever, but steps have grown steeper; I am still the same age as when I received my doctorate, but the Admissions Office keeps letting in younger students.

Someone said that old age ain't for sissies. I say that old age ain't for those who can't rationalize.

– Dr. Robert Preston



9:30 AM

*The sun filters through jagged branches.
It drips from the leaves' fingertips,
hangs in an uncertain limbo
before splashing on broken bricks.*

*Sunlight rolls like oil up her neck,
over lines and hollows of her face.
She squints and rubs the luminescent liquid
from her dark tired eyes.*

*Sunlight washes over him, he is drowning
in waves of warm, lively currents.
He inhales the new day's light
and lets the glow submerge him.*

*The sun burns fiery, lemon-sweetness
through flame-tipped leaves.
The bright yellow heat consumes me,
as I trip slowly over burning bricks.*

– Morgan Castillo

The Casting

*The Brilliant Colors,
Silhouetted against
Autumn's light.
Cast shadows down,
An inalienable right.
The sun fades; in all her glory,
From another beating heart,
Within man's story.
At end of day
Contempt of man
Is utterly, and literally
Washed away.*

– Marshall Morris



Duomo at Florence by Annemarie Maimone

Kerry Slide

*With Caherdaniel now, like the sun, at our backs
I fight it round a sharp
bend, clinging to a slender road
born before automobiles*

*More than half-way round the Ring
we are journeying anticlockwise —the way
the old men in Killarney all tell you
you must go*

*Experience, like time, is a thief they say
so I laugh when she asks
Do you think those who live here
ever get used to it?*

– Coach Stephen Miss



Ecological Love (The Inconvenient Truth)

1.

*I love you like Global Warming:
You melt my icebergs.
You engulf my cities.
You burn my skin.
You take my breath away.*

2.

*I love you like overpopulation:
You raise the birth rate.
You consume my resources.
You overload my circuits.
Your footprint crushes me.*

3.

*I love you like urban sanitation:
I feel trashy for you.
You want my garbage.
You carry me away.
I ripen in the landfill of your heart.*

– Dr. Rebecca Munro

Mistaken

*I heard a bird outside of my window
Too early to tell the location
Too late in my slumber too early in
my waking
Somewhere in between emotions
I was somewhere
I was nowhere*

*I thought I heard a train too
I had always heard trains
Where orange and yellow fell like rain
The living skeletons immobile
Those cages of life
Just memories*

*I wanted to see for myself
Struggled to discern
Was my dog barking
After some calf by the creek
I could hear the wind in the wheat
The rustle of the dried cotton leaves*

*I was somewhere
I was nowhere
Waking
Mistaken
This was my bed
This was my head*

*I heard the bird
I heard the train
Not my dog or cows
No wheat no cotton
I swear it was
For a moment it could have been*

*I heard the train whistle
A distant moan
A bell rang
A bell droned
George, Mary, Walburga
I was somewhere*

– Elizabeth Suaso



Train of Thought

*The sign says, “Tracks Are Out of Service,”
But still, I feel a little nervous,
And thus, before I cross the track,
I stop to look both forth and back.*

– Dr. Martin Harris

The Lady with the Pet Rock

He was still nursing his first beer when she sat down at the empty bar a couple of stools down from where he'd settled in. She pulled out a rock from her tote bag, gently placed it on the counter and ordered a boilermaker. The rock was about the size of a small potato.

Without hesitation, she tossed down the whiskey. "It's a pet. The rock is a pet."

She was talking to him.

"I guess everyone should have a pet," he said.

"I got him after my husband died."

She closed her eyes and took a couple of long swallows of beer. She was well put together, still attractive even though it was obvious she'd traveled some hard miles. There was something about her that seemed familiar.

"Sorry to hear that . . . about your husband."

"He was the Mattress King."

"The what?"

"Over at Larry's Mattress World. He was Larry, the Mattress King. I was the Mattress Queen."

"Sure, I thought you looked familiar."

Before he'd shipped out to Iraq, he'd seen the ads on late-night TV while watching reruns of the *Odd Couple*, waiting for sleep to take him. "Be the king of your castle," the voice-over urged in an English accent. The Mattress King was sitting on a four poster wearing purple silk pajamas, a crown resting aslant on his head with an imposing scepter in his hand. His adoring, tiaraed queen leaned provocatively against a bolster beside him.

"My rock is a great pet. He never chews on my shoes; he can even do tricks. Watch this. It's his best trick of all." She put the rock against her ear as she stared into the distance over the top of his head. "He gives me a riddle. Now you try to answer. Ready? What goes on three wheels in the morning, two wheels at noon, and four wheels in the afternoon?"

"That's easy—spoiled suburban white boys. Tricycle as a child, a ten-speed later, and then a BMW at sixteen. That about covers it."

"Wow! You're good."

"Let me try." He reached for the rock.

"Be gentle. He's not used to strangers."

He took the rock from her hand. It was warm like something living.

"He likes you, I can see that."

He put it to his ear and waited a moment. "Okay, I'm getting it. Here it is, 'If your uncle's sister is not your aunt, what relation is she to you?'"

"Your mother!"

His face lit up. "You're pretty good yourself. This little guy would be great at parties." He rolled the rock into her outstretched hand. She dropped it into her tote.

"By the way, my name is Jo." She extended her hand.

"Ed," he said taking her hand in his. Her touch was strangely comforting.

Happy hour had started and others were now coming into the bar. "Let's take that booth over there, okay?"

"Okay," he nodded and ordered another round.

His limp was always more obvious after his ankle had stiffened from sitting. The alcohol made him less aware of the pain. As he slid into the booth, he saw that someone had written $JMQ + ENMK = LOVE$ on the counter top like an algebraic formula.

"So what happened to your leg?" When she pushed her hair back over her right ear, he noticed that a small stone was missing from one of her earrings.

"Iraq. On patrol."

After a moment, she looked up at him and said, "My husband got killed in Iraq on patrol."

"I figured it might be connected to the war since he was the picture of health on TV."

"He could've been an actor."

"I guess he was in a way."

"He loved making those commercials."

"If you don't mind me asking, where'd it happen?"

"All I know is that he was south of Baghdad where the three roads meet. They were ambushed during a sand storm."

"That happened more often than you'd think. Just like your husband, my unit got whacked in a sandstorm in the same place. It happened fast like a bee sting. I fired off a few rounds before the Humvee hit an I.E.D. That's how my ankle got busted up. Everyone else bought the farm. They found me the next day unconscious buried in the sand."

"Small world," she said as she tossed down the second shot of whiskey and chased it with more beer.

"Yeah, it just goes to show you." He had no idea of what that might be until she said, "It's all chance, like we're just a bunch of random atoms bumping into each other. It's hard to make sense of anything."

"So it goes," he said staring off at the bottles lined up like soldiers in rows against the mirror behind the bar. It was hard to tell the real bottles from the reflected ones. He ordered another round.

"Hey," she said, "this is depressing. Tell me one of your best memories

as a child and then I'll tell you one of mine. Okay?"

"Okay," he said. "Let's see . . . I must have been around five or six. It was a beautiful day at the beach and my father and I were wading in the tide. He had me by the hand and when a wave came in, he'd pick me up and the water would splash over us. It was one of the few times I can remember him picking me up."

"That's lovely."

"But as it turned out, if you don't mind me telling you, he wasn't my real father, good man that he was. Before my mother died she told me I was adopted."

"And your real parents?"

"I don't know. The records were sealed."

"I know how that works because—now don't look down your nose—I put a child up for adoption once. Blame Larry the Mattress King! I was only fifteen and didn't know what else to do. The condition of the adoption was that it had to be anonymous. I didn't want anyone to know. As it turned out Larry and I were married after graduation, but then nothing, no more children."

"You did what you had to do. "

"Now all I have is a stupid pet rock."

"But how many pet rocks do riddles?"

She smiled through gathering tears which she blotted with a cocktail napkin. He waited for a moment. "Now, how about one of your childhood memories?"

"Okay. This is more like a series of memories wrapped up into one. My mom used to go to a woman named Madame Clara. She told fortunes and had herbal remedies for sale. When my mom went into the Séance Room with Madame Clara, I played in her living room done in zodiac wallpaper where she had books on astrology, stars hanging from the ceiling, a shrunken head on the mantle (too high for me to reach—it scared me anyway), a flat-earth 'globe' on a mahogany table by the window, a telescope in the corner, and lots of other paraphernalia. She always had incense burning in the saddle on the back of a large brass elephant. To a young girl, it was a magical place. But there's a complication."

"Isn't that how fortune tellers stay in business?"

"Maybe. On the day I got the curse, the day my mom said I wasn't a little girl anymore, I went with her as usual to Madame Clara's. But when Madame came to the door, she was clearly agitated by my presence. Later in their session she whispered horrible things about me to my mom. I'd never seen my mom so upset. The upshot was that I would become an abomination to those who knew me best. I guess she was on to something because three

years later I'd have a child out of wedlock.”

“That was a bit of an overreaction,” he said. “Having a child like that happens all the time, and it’s certainly not an abomination. Isn’t every child a blessing? Come on, she was just a crazy old lady. Besides who could predict anything in a world driven by chance? Right?”

“You’re too sweet.”

“So what happened to Madame Clara?”

“She blew town the next day, just disappeared. End of story.”

“End of story,” he repeated.

“Come on, let’s get out of here,” she said with revived enthusiasm. “Let’s go someplace where we can be alone.”

“Sure.” He drained the last of his beer. As he got to his feet, he felt the pain in his ankle and thought about being buried alive in sand. In the bar mirror he caught a glimpse of himself standing alone. Then she was there with her shoulder for support. He smelled the perfume from her hair and felt as if he’d known this woman all his life.

– Dr. Michael Hood



The Dance

*She longs for the linguistic
Simplistic yet intricately exquisite
Electric shock leaps between surroundings
As rain carries the passion dance*

*Dance, dear lady, prance
Waltz to your heart's melody
As invisible music plays in the imagination
And solidarity hears the soul*

*So Tango around the perpendicular
Dance not the square box
But sing a game of safari
To ease the pain of uniformity.*

– Rebekah Sewell

Meinrad

*I was in the middle of somewhere
But I was not sure.
Europe, it could be, with rolling hills.
They graze in the pasture.
They eat their fill.*

*And up on the Hill,
Great towers of stone
Spiral towards heaven
Where They Who Are Alone
Eat bread unleavened.*

*At half past seven
The Great Bell rings
With a half dozen others
As they chime and sing
Calling fathers and brothers*

*To greet the First Lover.
The loved ones file in,
Like a murder of crows,
Black and black without end.
They for fire are coal.*

*Ravens along an ancient road,
Not sure of place or time,
Where the norm is not the standard:
Alone with God and with the mind.
To what place have we wandered?*

*What fortunes have been squandered?
These lacking everything but nothing,
We grasp at shadows, fire being too
strong,
To think the eyes might be bluffing.
Yet blindly we will to follow along.*

– Elizabeth Suaso



Transcendental Puppet Show

*Twilight, beware!
An open wound
Incompletely devours the darkness.
Orbs of great light, hung
By the strings of the Puppet Master.
An excess of light encompasses
The Mourner's shroud of dusk.
Controlled, each turn, predestined
By the gentle tug of above.
Wretched blackened shadow!*

*Let go this hold you have;
Till moonlit path is followed
Blinded by my sight.
The curtains close slowly
As the ropes pulled by Hands of
Time.
And then we're buried in the
midnight
To twinkle in the sky.*

– Lauren Stepp



Photograph by Courtney Paquin



Spirits by Marshall Morris

Brink of Slumber

*In the mid of night
Cool summer breeze
Lightening flashes on the horizon*

*Leaves tossing about
Whispering sounds on the wind
Soft raindrops falling on the sill*

*Silence is loud tonight
The sky is shifting about
Relaxing lullaby of nature*

– Laura Myers



Drugs and Televison

*The bicycle man says
It's pharmaceuticals.
He has become a butterfly.
He is happy. The world
Beats a path to his door
Every day. Clouds part.
Nothing seems impossible
Anymore. Children study
Harder to make new
Chemicals to make us happy.
They laugh in the hallway
All day. Never was there
Such a time as this.
My wife has left to
Pick up her prescription.
My boy can't seem to stop reading.
And I don't feel so bad myself.*

– Dr. Russell Fowler

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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.

–Abbigail Selig is the 2009 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.

–Nicole DeCastro is the 2009 recipient of the Agora Art & Photography Award

About the Contributors

All Contributors are members of the Belmont Abbey College Community

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- Bridget Bayes is a Freshman and is Undecided.
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- Morgan Castillo is a Freshman, majoring in English.
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