

SPRING 1994

THE CRUCIBLE



THE LOCK HAVEN UNIVERSITY LITERARY MAGAZINE

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Tim Burdick

Traveling with Elizabeth

The unexpected landing.
All dark and quiet
an old movie in slow motion
as passengers' silhouettes whip forward
and stain the plastic.

In a torn blackened winter jacket,
I push up from my seat, begin to wade through
the children trying to get out.

There was
 a sharp tug
 on my elbow
behind me
 a glimpse of your face.
 I turn
into the dark
 pray you follow.

A crippled old man.
He reaches for my arm and begs
begs for help. Eyes wide, skin pale, white
hair slicked back against his scalp.
Steel straps hold his chair to the floor.
I rush past

Your mitten-covered
 hand on my shoulder
behind me
 I jump into
 the blurry light
covering the distance
dark into light

The airplane crash. Lying on the
cold ground, a broken toy, the plane misses
its tail section as if a child shakes up
the glass globe: a cloud of powdery snow mushrooms.
Gray smoke mixes with flame.

I fly
 several feet
 I feel
 the hard frozen earth
 beneath me
 the warm pain aflame
 in the backs of my calves
 I float back
 from the soupy black.
 Next to my arm
 your body rests
 your breath
 rises in the
 wintery night.

Sharon Conteh
Fighting

It's already too late.
 I'm cold
 all at once.
 The lamplights lit,
 still red leaves.
 Traces of black sky,
 no wind tonight,
 our voices still, echoing
 in the distance of night
 knocking at my empty house.
 I can't answer.
 You're still
 quiet. Silence filed day
 down to nothing
 left to say
 for us in darkness.

It's already too late.
 Dusk leaves lasting
 shadows, lingers
 unsure of its own
 darkness. I wander
 to find my way
 back home.

Susan Sarvis

A Road's Journey

Black-topped and
tar-melted
sliding through
passive treed ridges
sneaking across
rivers
mudded in brown
silence
slithering—masked
under a yellow stripe
finding its way through stacks
of humorless houses
it dances like
coal shining
and moves on

Jessica Stull

Living the Good Life

I bought a little city. No, wait, it wasn't a city. I could never afford a city. I bought a little farm. Although I guess it wasn't really so little. But it wasn't really big either. Ok. I've got it. I bought a farm. Kind of a medium-sized farm. Nothing really special. It had a big old rambling farmhouse—the kind you read about in stories. Hey—this is a story, isn't it? Well, anyhow, it had a house on it. A nice house. And a red barn—freshly painted. And a garden, full of all sorts of green, growing, potential foodstuffs. I liked the idea of living the farmer's life, eating fresh foods and living close to the land. So I loaded all my earthly possessions into my 1974 Chevy pickup truck and moved in. And I was happy.

I spent a lot of time taking care of my farm. The barn was full of animals—mostly cows, with a flock of chickens living in a shed out back. The cows had to be milked every morning and then let out to pasture. When I first moved in, they seemed to be under the impression that this should be done early in the morning. They used to get very upset when I didn't show up to do the milking until nine o'clock. So I tried following their schedule, but I kept falling asleep on the milking stool and once fell underneath a very large cow who only narrowly avoided stepping on me. After that I decided that the cows would have to adjust to my schedule and not vice versa. Understanding that cows become very set in their ways and often don't deal well with abrupt change, I took it slow. Every morning I got up five minutes later, and in a month or two the cows grew accustomed to not being milked until well after sunrise: so much so that they became quite agitated when I took a short vacation and left the farm in the care of a neighbor who firmly believed cows must be milked at the ungodly hour of five o'clock in the morning. Generally, though, they were happy. So was I.

The chickens and I didn't get along too well. Limited exposure to the world of poultry had led me to believe that chickens—particularly hens—had been put upon this earth to provide humanity with fresh eggs for breakfast and an occasional angel-food cake. In exchange for this service, they got to stay in the barnyard and off the dinner table. Apparently no one had ever bothered to explain the logic of this system to my chickens. They hid their eggs. Oh, sure, for a while the eggs were conveniently placed in the nests inside the chicken house, but about the time the cows and I got everything worked out, the chickens devised a cruel game. One morning the nests turned up empty. I pawed through the straw desperately—I had in mind an angel food cake on that particular day—but found nothing. Every once in a while a cache of eggs would turn up in the oddest place, but for the most part the chickens came out on top in this strange game of Hide and Seek. Finally, I called a general meeting of the hen population and laid down the law. "Eggs for breakfast or fried chicken for dinner!" I insisted. Chickens are stubborn, too. I hired a neighbor boy to perform the executions and filled my freezer with chicken thighs and breasts and legs. I bought eggs in the supermarket and had fried chicken every Sunday night and I was happy.

When I wasn't fighting with the chickens or taking care of the cows, I worked in the garden. That garden took up an awful lot of time—I was always weeding and hoeing. After a couple of days, my back started to hurt something awful. I talked to one of my friends from the city and he said that one of his friends had bought a couple of sheep to keep their lawn mowed. Weeds are a lot like grass, and sheep aren't all that smart. So I bought a couple and put them in my garden to eat the weeds. I explained the difference between weeds and string beans very carefully. Sheep are even dumber than I'd thought. They did a very good job of eating the weeds, but they forgot to leave the string bean plants behind. I put the sheep in the barnyard where the chickens used to live and let them out once a week to mow the lawn. I sold my lawn mower and used the money to buy string beans at the grocery store where I got my eggs, and I was happy.

Soon after I got my sheep, the cows stopped giving milk. I thought maybe they were just resting for a day or two, but after a month straight of drinking nothing but water, I took one of the smaller cows to see a veterinarian. He checked her out thoroughly and then had me put her in a pen behind his office while we talked. I was very worried about my cows, and the vet saying that this one seemed fine and offering to call a stud service for me. I didn't quite understand how impregnating my cows would put milk back on my breakfast table, but trusting in the wisdom of a trained professional, I duly had each and every one of them serviced by a very expensive bull. Several months later all of them became mothers at about the same time. I enjoyed watching the newborn calves stumble around the pens and learn to nurse, but when I tried to milk the cows, the young calves reacted very poorly, butting with their bony little heads and kicking with tiny feet. Bruised and battered, I called the vet and asked for advice. Imagine my surprise when he told me that I had to sell the calves away from their mothers in order to get my milk. Those calves were just so cute and cried so pitifully that I couldn't stand to separate them from their families. So I left them alone to grow up in peace and bought milk in the grocery store with my eggs and string beans. They were happy and so was I.

I lived on my farm for a good many years, living off the land with my sheep and my cows and my garden. Life settled into a pattern: every spring I planted a garden full of string beans and when the weeds got too high I set the sheep loose in the garden. They still haven't quite gotten the hang of the job, but they're getting better. This year they left one string bean plant in the corner of the garden. I have high hopes for next year. The cows keep on having calves and I keep adding onto the barn. The cattle population threatens to become overwhelming occasionally, and then I sell off a couple of cows and calves, making sure that the buyers promise not to split up the families. I never did buy any more chickens—there isn't room for them what with the sheep and all. Every week I go to the grocery store and buy fresh vegetables and eggs and milk. I'm living off the land and I'm happy.

Susan Sarvis

We Are...

Cattle lingering in a pasture
chewing randomly at pieces
of grass and weed
with eyes
vacant as lots of pavement
rolling endlessly
mulling over
which
fly to swat
next.

Gary Renzelman

Shucking Corn On A Hot Hot Southern Day

In cut-off jeans with the pockets showing through,
She squirms upon a hot seat as they shuck the corn that grew.

The tailgate's down for her legs to dangle loose,
Her old friend, dad's friend, is talking to her close.

With his college education and seventy years,
She trusts him as a soulmate for her teenage fears.

The sweating task of shucking is lightened by the talk,
His straight-arrow answers, a solace as they work.

The beauty of the memory is the generational sweep,
Its telling for this listener was enough to make me weep.

Thank you, lovely lady (you're not a "motor-mouth"),
I loved your poignant story in your lilting tone of south.

Gary Renzelman

Banner County Sand Storm

(Near My Childhood Home Of Scottsbluff, Nebraska Circa 1945)

Thirty-miles south over Wildcat Hills
And thirty more west to La Grange, Wyoming
With my salesman dad out collecting bills
Through a paint-peeling sand storm worse than dreaming.

The bucking winds raked our '37 Terraplane
With gritty seeping sand finding all hidden orifices.
Covering ears, eyes and nose 'gainst sere puckering "rain"
We plunged from out the car to gas-garage's offices

To await a calmer time.

In the interim since the 40's
Vast wheat fields have eked surprising riches
And, come and gone by the 90's,
Nuclear siloed missiles no longer in their ditches.

In "no-town" Harrisburg, the County Seat,
Sits my father's '49 Chrysler
For an annual parade in the summer heat
Out the tin-can museum by a farmer chauffeur.

The sheltering sandy soil of a nearby pseudo soddy
And the stifling dust in the museum barn
Reminds us sharply of bodies shoddy,

Our span on earth
Returned to same,
The calm time after storm
A settled serenity.

Amy Freeman

The Fat Lady in the Back

The fat lady
in the back
always used
to hold me
up
on her lap
in church
when I was very young.

She had a big soft
breast
and a lap that
sloped downwards
and I always
almost
fell off
but I didn't
because she kept
pulling me back
up
to the Heaven
of her great Self
while
she sang
while
I listened to her voice
while
she talked to God
humming to the Universe
in me
while
I slept on her strong shoulders.

Preachers would preach
and she would
chant and cheer
and laugh and cry
and *Amen* the preacher
to death

to Life
to God
and stand on
strong
feet raising me
with those great arms
to the sky
with herself
where I could look
over a sea
of big hats
and tight girdles,
a million handkerchiefs waving
like so many clouds
in the sky
that I could never see
standing
on the floor.

And then she would tell me
how much I had grown
in just an hour.

And then she would tell
someone else
how light I was
and easy to carry
passing me joyfully on
to someone
else
strong enough
to lift up
another
woman child

where I found myself
on other knees bony
still bouncing
to the music long after
I had finally grown

tired.

After years of music
and harmonic prayers
blowing like wind
forever rocking me
on my shoulders
of my sisters
I found myself

sailing

in my own strong boat
with shoulders like masts
through a sea
of hankies waving
like clouds in the distance.

Along the way
sometimes I find
another
woman child
peeking underneath
the pews
counting the colors
of all the shoes
and a lifesaver
she found on the floor.

I reach to lift her
out of the water
to show her waves
and the sea
and the sun
and new techniques
of sailing
and building a boat.

But alas, she has fallen
upon me sound
asleep
secure and safe
from storm and typhoon

with a smile
on her face
on my shoulder
on my small boat,

rocking
to the rhythm of my
sway.

Then Michael came

I kept wanting to tell him
to wait his
turn.
He didn't know he had
taken my place.
I was coming along
as fast as I could
to change the world
but he got there
first.

So I let him
go ahead
in my place. After all,
he was doing a pretty
good job
on my behalf.

In my house,
I was never allowed
to speak to
him. He was
my shadow.

Michael
from home
Michael
was the name of the
exchange
who would blow the trumpet
making the music
that would change
the world,
much like the other night
who granted a young girl
Good News
about her self worth
and the Gift to the World
that she carried
within.

To mention any other
Michael
was so.

So no one ever knew
how much I watched
the signs
dance and blow
his power and persistence
into me.
He was a child.
He was my age.
He was me.

I originally encountered
him
when he took my stage.

For years it was my secret
intention
to impact the World
before I was twice
(Christ was twice.)

Amy Freeman

Michael

In our house,
Michael
was the name of the
Archangel
who would blow the trumpet
making the music
that would change
the World,
much like that other angel
who granted a young girl
Good News
about her self-worth
and the Gift to the World
that she carried
within.

To mention any other
Michael
was sin.

So no one ever knew
how much I watched
the singer
dance and blow
his power and persistence
into me.
He was a child.
He was my age.
He was me.

I originally encountered
him
when he took my stage.

For years it was my secret
intention
to impact the World
before I was twelve.
(Christ was twelve.)

I didn't know why
I wanted this.
I didn't sing or dance
but I was always trying
to discover myself,
tired of the fallacy
that children
didn't matter,
didn't understand
anything,
couldn't make a difference.

Well, someday,
I thought,
I'll show them.

Then Michael came.

I kept wanting to tell him
to wait his
turn.
He didn't know he had
taken my place.
I was coming along
as fast as I could
to change the world
but he got there
first.

So I let him
go ahead
in my place. After all,
he was doing a pretty
good job
on my behalf.

In my house,
I was never allowed
to speak his name,
hear his music
or watch his image.

But when I was young
 he made me know
 what that other
 Michael
 could not.

It is possible

to change the world
 by just being
 who
 I am.

I didn't know why
 I wanted this
 I didn't sing or dance
 but I was always trying
 to discover myself
 from the folks
 the children
 didn't matter
 didn't understand
 anything
 didn't make a difference
 Well, someday
 I thought
 I'd show them
 When Michael came
 I kept wanting to tell him
 to wait his
 turn
 He didn't know he had
 taken my place
 I was coming along
 so fast as I could
 to change the world
 but he got there
 first
 So I let him
 go ahead
 in my place. After all
 he was doing a pretty
 good job
 on my behalf
 In my house
 I was never allowed
 to speak his name
 but his music
 or watch his image

Gary Renzelman
Words Revisited

"Valley of the shadow of death,"
 "His sheep securely fold (hold?) you."
 "Bryant," "Longfellow," "Lincoln," "Roosevelt,"
 Familiar in my youth as surface sounds:
 Phrases from church;
 Names of schools.
 Vague connection to Bible, Hymn, Poet, President,
 Seeping toward a simple sense
 That Words have their origins
 And Old Age its beginnings.

When my museum was completed, I was excited to finally get to see... I want to
 have a party with all my friends to celebrate. I mean, it's not every day someone gets
 their own personal country museum. But as before, they were otherwise occu-
 pied. So I parted alone, and I must admit, I was rather good company.
 I went to see my museum every day. I cleaned off the poop from the birds that
 lived in the shade tree. I made sure that no weeds grew too close. I checked all around
 for any doggy droppings. Most importantly, I made sure the caretaker was always
 informed of my findings. He really liked it when I helped him do his job. I could tell by
 the way he'd walk and nod at me.
 My friends must have been jealous of my museum. They refused to ever know
 and see it and they hated when I talked about it. Twenty years, they stopped coming to
 see me as well. By November, I hardly ever saw them at all. My mother claimed it
 wasn't normal to want to spend time at my museum rather than with my friends.
 How could I expect her to understand she never had her own personal museum like
 I did.
 All winter long I kept the snow away from my museum. The caretaker let me take
 care of it all by myself. He told me that unless something too complex for me came up
 I had complete control of my plot and I didn't have to talk to him every day. Come
 spring, I was even allowed to mow the lawn around my museum. I painted a little
 flower garden around it. I have to say that no one else in the entire county hills
 Protestant cemetery cared for their museum like I cared for mine. But I wasn't
 going to be picky.
 Today, February 18, 2012, at the age of 78, I still take care of my own personal
 museum. The shade tree is hunched over a bit more. The other plots are a bit
 shadier. My friends have either moved away or died. I'm not sure which. I buried my
 mother twenty years ago. And I'm traveling in the tenth cemetery next Tuesday.

June Ann Knerr

My Own Personal Mausoleum

They told me not to do it. They said it was a stupid thing that would just be a waste of my inheritance. Being as stubborn as I was, their objections convinced me to go through with it. My mother couldn't even stop me. It was clearly stated in the will that I was to spend the money on something eccentric and expensive, no matter how silly it seemed. So I did.

At the ripe old age of 15, I went and bought me a mausoleum of my very own. Yup, a mausoleum in a quaint little Protestant cemetery. Why? It's really simple—I wanted one. I had always wanted one. When my opportunity came along, I seized it.

On a sunny Wednesday morning, in early June, I made my purchase. It was to be built on a little plot of land in a corner, protected by a shade tree. I liked it. I wanted all of my friends to come and see it, but all three of them claimed to be busy. Just between us, though, I don't think they were.

When my mausoleum was completed, I was excited to finally get to see it. I want to have a party with all my friends to celebrate. I mean, it's not every day someone gets their own personal cemetery mausoleum. But, as before, they were otherwise occupied. So I partied alone, and I must admit, I was rather good company.

I went to see my mausoleum every day. I cleaned off the poop from the birds that lived in the shade tree. I made sure that no weeds grew too close. I checked all around for stray doggy droppings. Most importantly, I made sure the caretaker was always informed of my findings. He really liked it when I helped him do his job. I could tell by the way he'd smile and nod at me.

My friends must have been jealous of my mausoleum. They refused to ever come and see it and they hated when I talked about it. Pretty soon, they stopped coming to see me, as well. By November, I hardly ever saw them at all. My mother claimed it wasn't normal to want to spend time at my mausoleum rather than with my friends. How could I expect her to understand; she never had her own personal mausoleum like I did.

All winter long I kept the snow away from my mausoleum. The caretaker let me take care of it all by myself. He told me that unless something too complex for me came up, I had complete control of my plot and I didn't have to talk to him every day. Come spring, I was even allowed to mow the lawn around my mausoleum. I planted a little flower garden around it. I have to say that no one else in the entire quaint little Protestant cemetery cared for their mausoleums like I cared for mine. But I wasn't going to be picky.

Today, February 18, 2045, at the age of 70, I still take care of my own personal mausoleum. The shade tree is hunched over a bit more. The other plots are a bit shabbier. My friends have either moved away or died, I'm not sure which. I buried my mother twenty years ago. And I'm breaking in the tenth caretaker next Tuesday.

I don't want you to think my life hasn't been fulfilling. Quite the opposite. At 15 I bought the one thing that I'll have forever. It seems only fitting that I take care of my mausoleum while I can. After all, who's going to do it once I'm in there? At that point it won't really matter though. Once the plumber, the electrician, and the interior decorator get done with the inside, I'll be happy enough to let the caretaker tend to the outside of my own personal mausoleum. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have some packing to do.

Amy Freeman
Shelter

My mother never told me
I was not beautiful.
Zits and rotten teeth
crowned with silver and gold,
she loved me
so that when I laughed,
she said,
she could always see the gold
of me
flashing in the light.
Since my mouth was always open,
talking incessantly,
chirping
like any other baby bird,
she fed it with the riches
of herself,
reflecting light into me
until I saw my own shining
in her mirror
sparkling quietly
deep down.

What is it like when
someone
beats your mother?
I cannot imagine.
My mother was never
beaten.
Even though my father
was a hard man
he could not
beat
my mother.

She was too soft
and any blows
he may have thought
to make

were absorbed in her
softness,
like a bed
with too many pillows
and he would be
lulled
to sleep,
over time becoming
a pillow
himself.

I met a girl
who saw her mother
beaten
every day.
Never enough food
stamps to buy back
self-worth.
I could see it
in her face,
the reflection of her
mother's face lost,
swollen,
eyes distorted,
mouth bleeding into her

Mirror.

I saw me
in her
somewhere
where
mothers are not
beaten
every day.
It was a far, hard place
to find,
demolished by the storms
inside and outside.

But I could not stop
the storms
from coming.

So I built for her
a shelter,
a hiding place
where she could go
sometimes
when there was no
home.

Sharon Conteh
Loving

It's a hurting
I intended to keep
lodged in my throat
until swollen
tears tumbled down
my cheeks, my chin,
my breasts wet. You kissed
the cooled skin; I'm hot still
I can't touch you,
too close to breathe. In fear,
I can't move. Without touching,
your lips to my eyes
across my skin
down over my mouth, onto my neck
you whispered there
I'm weak.

under her feet.
It was a long time
and I was
She was
I was
down at his
Gentleman,
She said the
The
He moved his
lips and offered
"I think you
"God,"
"It is
"It is
and attempted
"Of course,
you
they," he
the safety of
She thought upon it. "Yes, hundreds must do this every day, everywhere. They're

Sharon Conteh
At the Junction

The two rail lines crossed at the junction of Waterloo. Having left the Southport line, he waited on the platform nearest the Kirkby line for the next train to Garston, two stops after the city. It was late in the day. The train slowed into the station. He then saw the dark haired girl in the window, looking out.

She wasn't watching the door open, then close behind him as he stepped aboard. The rest of the carriage style seats were emptied, yet he chose to sit in front of her. She crossed her legs at the ankle, straightened her back in her seat, and fixed her eyes on the passing fields and fences.

He looked over the public schoolgirl uniform, unbuttoned blouse and loosened tie, the shape of her breasts, the smallness of her waist and hands, scraped and scabbed knees, untied laces and disheveled socks. He never saw schoolgirls on Southport trains, maybe with chauffeurs in schoolyards. Her cheeks were flushed. She licked her chapped red lips moist and remained still, unaware or uninterested in his stare.

He slid his wet tongue across his dry mouth and tapped a box of cigarettes against his wrist. He placed a cigarette to his lip, struck a match. The burning flame and tobacco took toward her, and she turned towards it, then turned away.

"Does the smoke bother you?" he asked the girl with a politeness he was certain she was not accustomed to.

His question received no answer, so he withdrew further solicitation of conversation and contented himself with the pastoral passings.

She was watching his reflection in the glass window. Nice and steady green eyes. Honest face, she thought. Grayed black hair. Dapper and distinguished. She glanced down at his shiny black shoes, crisp trousers, camelhair coat. Supple leather briefcase. Gold initials. His strong veined hands, clean and manicured. Southport bred wealthy gentleman, she concluded.

She slid the loose strands of her hair behind her ear, and turned to him nervously.

"Do you have another cigarette?"

He moved his hand to his pocket, pulled and opened the packet of cigarettes, wet his lips and offered her one. She accepted. Rubbed the golden end of the cigarette smooth across the tip of her tongue. He waited to light hers up.

"Thank you," she exhaled. He watched her mouth move. She crossed her legs slowly at the knee.

"It is bad practice for young ladies to smoke," he suggested teasingly.

"It's the lesser of many evils." She spoke with a sad wisdom he mistook for distraction.

He opened the top button of his shirt and pulled loose his tie.

"I have to admit I probably started smoking when I was 16 or 17," he laughed, "about your age, I should imagine."

She listened to his laugh and liked it, how the crumpled edges of his eyes and mouth turned up. She quietly smiled back. The quiet remained for some time.

"Does the train arrive exactly at 4:52?" She was concerned about the lateness. She must not be late. Being on time. It seemed she could not spare or waste time. There was an urgency in her voice that he could not identify.

"Nothing's certain in life. Other than death and taxes," he mused. She laughed. Hard and loud. Hearing her voice unravel and fray, she swallowed, pulled back in her seat and sighed.

She paused, tightened her fingers around the cigarette, and dragged her hands across her face through her hair and held it.

"There aren't any stops left now until the city?" she thought aloud.

He fumbled at his watch on his wrist.

"No, dear. This train keeps going on until its terminal. There won't be another return until after 9 tonight." Pleased to be of help, he waited for her to continue.

"No return," she repeated. "No return." She spoke in soft sighs touched with a sadness that reached for him. She was too far along to turn back.

He was unsure of the stillness and sat silently, waiting for her next cue, willing her to bring him the words.

"The destination remains the same, always. We all know where we're bound." She hesitated, momentarily inhaled then forced the last of the cigarette to its ashy end under her feet.

"It's the schedule that gets screwy," she said, "your timing is off and you get completely rerouted. Everything you've planned and prepared becomes a waste. Unless, you take the alternate route... and you have to; you have no other choice."

"Yes," he supposed, without much thought, "the train can be rather unreliable, but you will always get to where you should be." He smiled, "God willing."

She took it in for a moment. Rewound and replayed, letting her hair fall loose again.

"Do you really think it's the will of God that carries us from place to place?" she implored earnestly.

He had unfolded the newspaper at his side and briefly glanced at her, having only half heard her speak.

"Yes, dear. You said...?"

He saw the girl then, young and innocent, and felt the tenderness of her talk. He felt her hurt somewhere in his heart, recognizing troublesness and not distraction.

"God," the word nearly broke on her teary and tight voice, "it's by the will of God that we reach our destiny." She edged to the front of her seat towards him.

He was confused by the scruffy little girl in the school uniform, scared and unsure, and attempted to console her.

"Of course, we'll get there. We're safer here than on the streets. Don't worry, darling, you won't be late. Hundreds of people take the train everyday and they're alright, aren't they?" he assured her with unclear affirmations. The reason, he concluded, involved the safety of the railroad transport.

She thought upon it. "Yes, hundreds must do this everyday, everywhere. They're

okay." She seemed to console herself. "I'll be alright." The words lingered without ending. He waited for her.

Sensing fear in her voice and seeing fright in her eyes, he took her hand into his.

"Is there something the matter, dear?" His voice so sincere it softened her strong grasp.

She pulled away, backed into her seat, and held back the tears on her dewy lashes. She sighed and slid the hairs back behind her ears. He leaned slightly towards her, anxious and alert.

"Yes, it's okay. It's alright," she assured him with convincing certainty.

He waited. She thought aloud. "I'll get there. It'll be alright." Her voice was vanishing, "I'll never have to come this way again."

Her thoughts were interrupted by the announcement of her approaching arrival.

"Liverpool, next stop. Liverpool" whined through the train speakers.

She took the next few moments to tie her shoelaces, fold her socks, button her shirt, and readjust her tie. She pulled her hair into a smooth ponytail at the nape of her neck. She was composed and calm. He watched her stand to leave.

"Thank you." She offered her hand.

He took her hand and stood next to her. As he looked down at her, she momentarily glanced away and returned again to smile sadly, yet shook his hand firmly.

"Thank you," she whispered.

Nothing left to say. He remained standing as she walked through the doors onto the platform. She did not move, even as the train pulled away.

Alone and understanding, he cried tears after tears, for the lost child.

Sharon Conteh

Escape

The boy
with night hair and eyes
silently squeezed
above the sand
below the sky
laid himself out
on the edge of cliffs; jagged
sharp piercing pinpoint holes
in the black day broke through.

The tangled truths
that torment
his thoughts twisted
like trees thrown up
by the hillside.

Warm winds, screaming
with a laughter
that echoes like skimming
stones across seas,
washed over him.

In peaceful waves,
he woke
without stirring. In stillness,
when the calm cries,
he was moved.

Susan Sarvis
Sea

Shallow frothy
water dissolves
past awareness
and begs to melt
with you under
the scorching sun.
You ripple
covered in waves
you feel the Blue
Whale
and be.

Michelle Runk
Japanese Fighting Fish

I watch you swish around
in your bowl
as you search
for bits and pieces of yesterday's dinner.
Sad eyes never blink or see,
they just stare.
When you realize the emptiness
goes much further than the lack
of a few flakes,
you slowly
sink
to the bottom.
Hungry and lonely for companionship,
you stare again
at your provider.
I place a few morsels
at the top of your fresh spring water
and wiggle my finger to stir it.

You dart quickly to, then dash away
with only half of your desires.

Heather L. Pecoraro
Desire

Forced **HERE**
 in this hard, habitual, hermit's
 shell for **FOUR** insatiably
 delicious, dark years.
 Scratching and clawing with **ONE**
 gorged and glowing pincer
 in the vast obscurity.
 Swallowing tenacious words
 like shards of brittle glass
 falling from your shattered world.
GULP.
 Tearing and raping those
 neverending pages of your
 yesterday,
 longing to drink from the fountain
 of tomorrow.
 The black light shrinks your red,
 swollen, probing eyes
 into the gallows of your desire.
DESIRE.

Deb Daniels
Down A Dark Cave

We are swallowed
 By the quarry walls.
 Submerged in silence
 Intense enough to smother,
 We creep cautiously into
 The rocky mouth of the earth.

Enormous slabs of rock
 Hundreds of feet thick
 Hang threateningly
 Above,
 Suspended like gaping,
 Hungry jaws
 Ready to close and
 Crush.

Inching my slight frame
 Through crevasses,
 I wish for spinelessness—
 Literal, not figurative—
 As, in the tightest spots,
 I stick like a pill
 In the throat.

We descend, and the world
 Outside fades.
 Reality becomes the
 Increasingly surreal
 Monochromatic world around us.

The damp darkness
 Condenses on the rocks,
 Leaving a grey-beige film
 That makes each step
 More difficult, more
 Treacherous.

The dim beam of my flashlight
Tries futilely to penetrate
This gaping chasm of black.
Other worldly structures materialize
Like skeletons of victims
Undigested
By the earth's gastric juices.

Mineral-rich water
Drips like saliva
From the fang-like soda straws
Suspended from the ceiling

While beneath me
Stalagmites,
Tastebuds on the dragon's tongue,
Grow from the cave's floor,
Hindering my passage.

My throat
Constricts
As the musty shadows surround us
Like a sudden storm.
Visions of Jonah,
Helpless, unwilling
In the belly of the whale,
Come unbidden to my mind.

But I am not Jonah.
I was not swallowed
Unwillingly
By a sea monster;
I descended into
This creature's gut
By my own
Free will.

Hours later,
With the cave's murkiness
Still sticky on our skin,
We ascend
The earth's rocky throat.

As we emerge from the cave,
The blinding daylight
Seems as surreal
As the eerie darkness
Hours before.
Descending the quarry's outer walls,
My legs quake
From exertion and fear.
My mind questions the reality
Of this expedition into
The belly of the earth,

And

When morning comes,
The only reminders
Of that descent into
The intestines of the earth
Are the bumps and bruises
That erupted in the night
Like the stalagmites
On the cave floor.

Pat Lockridge

Fame and the Snow

We stood at the window, my family and I, marveling at the beauty of the falling snow. The next day we again stood at the window and marveled at how much snow had fallen. To be precise, the ground was covered with 29 inches of snow.

Being marooned inside a house that is surrounded by snow brings on a terrible craving for food. And, if food is not seen in abundance within the household, names such as Donner Pass and airplanes in the Andes drift faintly through one's mind.

We consumed everything edible in sight within 24 hours. The snow plows were also consuming snow in other areas, but our street was not on the list. In desperation, we shoveled. My daughter and I shoveled out cars that could not be moved. By now in a state of panic, we shoveled a path through the center of our street to meet with the main road.

As we stood in the middle of the partially plowed main road, I was struck with an inspiration. "I know what we'll do," I said to my daughter. "We'll pull the old blue sled down to the supermarket, load up with groceries, and pull it home." "Mom," she said, "we live on the hill. The supermarket is at the bottom." "Trust me," I said, "it will be a piece of cake."

Within minutes we had collected the sled and set off through the snow for the supermarket. Twenty minutes later, we arrived at the supermarket. The bag boy, with a smirk on his face, said, "Ma'm, let me park your sled here with the shopping carts so you'll know where to find it when you come out." Handing over the sled, we strode confidently into the supermarket. Twenty minutes later, and fifty dollars lighter, we emerged with six bags of groceries and proceeded to load them onto the sled. We pulled out of the parking lot onto a street that had been plowed while we were in the store.

Imagine the noise it made as our sled slid over the cinders on the bare road. Noticing the drifts of snow along the side of the road, I maneuvered the sled over and onto these uneven patches of snow. The problem now became one of balance. As the sled bumped along, the groceries began to fall out. Of particular annoyance was a gallon jug of milk. It developed a life of its own which did not include riding in a sled. We developed a rhythm, pull hard for ten paces then pick up the jug of milk from the road.

Passing cars were also a menace. There was barely room for a car, let alone two women with a sled. When we were forced to the extreme side of the road, our footing became treacherous. Twice I found myself lying beside the jug of milk on the road. People we passed on foot also developed a sense of humor. One wit said, "That's the way to go. You don't have to worry about front wheel drive." We also received numerous requests to ride in the sled.

We pulled, we fell, we picked up the milk, and finally we arrived home. As we carried our very dirty groceries into the house, the telephone was ringing. It was a friend from

school, and as I disgustedly related our adventures, I commented that the final indignity would be to pick up tomorrow's paper and find ourselves pictured there in all our glory. We laughed. Oh, how we laughed.

The next day both the plows and the paper came. Naturally our picture did not grace the pages of the paper. Traffic began to move again, and at the end of a long day, I retired early. Shortly after 11:00 P.M., my son burst into my bedroom shouting, "Mom, Mom, you're on T.V."

I ran out into the room to see myself, in my glory, trudging through the snow pulling the groceries on my sled. The Eyewitness News camera was whirring as the announcer commented on the novel ways that people coped with the snow. My face burned as I watched what looked like 2 bag ladies pulling their possessions through the snow.



John Woods

Dead to the World (Too Cold to Care)

There is a realm not far from here
 Where worms do not persist...
 Where water falls in shimmering walls,
 And voices fade in mist.
 There sunlight shines
 In broken lines,
 And roses grow at night
 While,
 Fizzling down the dead-blue sky,
 The moon,
 Like Alka-Seltzer,
 Fries.

John Woods

See You There

This seasoned little meatball we call earth
 Is stirred around the sun not just for fun.
 Tonight the guests will show all full of mirth,
 And gobble us up before we think we're done.

Deb Daniels

Thirteen Ways of Looking at Stars

I

A string of pearls broken
And scattered on the ballroom floor,
They wait for a hand
To pick them up one by one.

II

I wonder, do the stars get dizzy
Whirling around a whirling world
While the whole system whirls
On the edge of a galaxy?
The universe sees more spins
Than all the ballgowns at a cotillion.

III

I once wanted to soar
Among the stars,
Not as an astronaut,
But as a bard,
Dancing with legendary heroes.

IV

A telescopic view of the stars
May excite the astronomer's mind,
But a poet gains nothing—
Legends do not live
Through an observatory's
Magnifying lens.

V

For the thousands of stars
Visible in the night,
Millions more are
Hidden only
By the curtain of distance.

VI

Flaming gaseous spheres,
Hovering chunks of rock, and
Barren planets not unlike our own
All seem starlike from here—
What can we learn from this?

VII

A shooting star,
Someone has died,
Yet still we wish on it.
What morbid creatures are we
To wish on the souls of the dead!

VIII

"Star light, star bright,
First star I see tonight. . ."
Silly child!
A distant star
Won't reward idle watchfulness
By granting your every wish!

IX

How do the stars
Fall into our eyes
The moment we fall in love?

X

The light of a single star
Journeys light years
Before reaching the earth,
As centuries-old legends
Journeyed through generations
To reach our world today.

XI

Your future is
In the stars, they say.
Do they really mean that?
Heaven only knows
What will happen.

XII

I wonder is it true
 If I study every night
 Will my head expand,
 Grow denser and denser
 With knowledge
 Till at last it explodes
 Like a supernova star?

XIII

Star light, star bright,
 Do the stars really care
 What I'm wishing tonight?

Warren Krysiak
A Little Scrape

Me and my brothers love goin' for bike rides around all the neighborhoods near my house. There's a lot of hills, and sometimes you can get goin' really fast. Our bikes aren't really that good; we all have the kind of bikes with the long banana seats and huge, motorcycle-type handlebars. Mine is practically homemade and in really bad shape. In fact, I had to wrap a bunch of wire around the coaster-brake because the screw fell out.

I have a route that I always take when I go out for a ride: down Windover (my road), make a right onto Spring Valley, another right onto Short Road (I hate that hill, I usually have to walk my bike up), then a right onto Cherry Lane, and finally back onto Windover Lane. I love it because I can rest a little as I race down my hill at top speed, and if I'm too tired I can stop at my house, though I usually go right past. That's the route I'm gonna take today, all I gotta do is pump up my back tire (it's got a slow leak, but still has plenty of tread), and then I'm off. It's such a nice day I know it's gonna be a great ride.

Okay, I'm off...I love doin' jumps off the curb at the end of my driveway. I like to get a lot of speed up here because it's pretty flat and there's a little hill at the bottom of my road. Now I make a right onto Spring Valley and ride over to Short Road. I'd rather take the road that's all the way down Spring Valley (the hill isn't as long or as steep as Short Road's), but my Mom told me not to because there's no shoulder on that road and the cars drive fast. She worries about me all the time. I don't understand why. I'm almost eight now. Spring Valley is easy because it slopes down just a little, so I can go slow if I want to rest.

Here's Short Road, I just gotta get enough speed goin' down the little hill that leads up to the big one and go as far up as I can...Ugghh, this hill sucks, I wish I had a little motor on the back of my bike. I guess I gotta walk it up the rest...Okay, I'm finally up. Now I coast down the other side to Cherry Lane.

Sometimes I have to walk up that little hill on Cherry Lane, but I think I'll make it today...yea, that was no problem. Now I just gotta ride up to Windover Lane; it gets easier as I go along because the hill flattens out as I go along. Okay, Windover is right up here.

It's all downhill from here...This long turn to the right is easy, I just gotta watch out for cars. I gotta be careful around that sharp left turn coming up because there's a lot of cinders left over from winter, and I don't want to skid out and fall like I did last year. Okay, that was no problem. Now I get to race down my hill at top speed! I always ride facing traffic like I'm supposed to. Whoa, I'm flying...here comes a car...he's not leaving me much room, I'll have to move further over. Whoa, these cinders are slippery, whoa... whoooooaa...OUCH...ugghhh...aww man, my hands are killin' me. I gotta find my Mom...

"Mom! Mom! I fell on my bike..."

There's Mr. Gambutti; he'll help me. He picks me up and runs over to my house. My father takes me from Mr. Gambutti and rushes me into the kitchen. He lays me down on the kitchen table. I can't open my eyes because of all the blood. I think I cut my head open, but it doesn't hurt. I still can't move my hands.

All I hear is my family moving around me and my father yelling at my mother to "find the fuckin' gauze pads." I hope I'm not in trouble; I didn't mean to do it. Please don't yell, Dad, I'm sorry.

Nathan Lilly

The Billboard Prophet

(Lights up on a stage with two people on it. There is a bench with Dreamer sitting on it and a billboard off to the side with Cynic standing by it reading the letter. Cynic is wearing a dress outfit possibly resembling catholic school clothes. Dreamer is wearing bright colors and patterns resembling plant and animal life, happy colors in any case.)

Cynic: I don't believe it! He did it again!

Dreamer: What?

Cynic: Oh, this guy. He's been putting up these depressing essays or poems or whatever. This guy is a loser.

Dreamer: This guy?

Cynic: This loser. Listen to him. (starts reading melodramatically)

How can I start? How can anyone start? No one can know who I am. **(You're a LOSER!)** I'm anonymous. I can imagine a lot of the people I know acting weird if they knew who I am. I don't want that; I'm enough of an outsider already. What did I do? **(You started writing these letters.)** What did I hope to accomplish by starting all this? Tragic isn't it, that even I don't know. Who am I? I don't know. **(Yeah, well I do.)** We are on the edge of the world. Being alone isn't bad sometimes, but mentally I'm always alone. I guess I was looking for a kindred spirit. People hear but they don't listen. I mean, after all, even a dog can hear, but only people can listen. Zucenas. (pause.)

Dreamer: Maybe he's got troubles.

Cynic: (crumples up letter) Everyone does.

Dreamer: He talks about them! He's crying....

Cynic: He's a LOSER!

Dreamer: (resigned) Why?

Cynic: (surprised) What?

Dreamer: (resigned) Why?

Cynic: (confused) Why what?

Dreamer: Why?

Cynic: He just is!

Dreamer: What MAKES him a loser?

Cynic: What?

Dreamer: What....

Cynic: He doesn't use his name.

Dreamer: (takes off his hat as if in introduction) Zucenas.

Cynic: What?

Dreamer: Zucenas.

Cynic: (looks at and scans the letter) Yeah. (pause) I never saw it before.

(Dreamer puts hat back on. Cynic re-crumple letter, throws it out and starts to leave.)

Dreamer: He's not gone.

Cynic: Out of sight out of mind.

Dreamer: He still exists. (pause)

Cynic: (revelation) You know who it is.

Dreamer: No.

Cynic: It's you!

Dreamer: I don't know who it is...

Cynic: IT IS!

Dreamer: But can anyone really know themselves?

Cynic: (disappointed) It's not you.

Dreamer: Whatever. (starts reading)

Cynic: Besides, this has to be a guy. (pause, then to himself) He writes like a guy. Like Shakespeare.

Dreamer: (takes off hat) Plato believed that the human soul contained masculine and feminine parts.

Cynic: Probably wears a lot of black.

Dreamer: (picks up a book with a happy cover but serious contents) Can't judge a book by its cover.

Cynic: (disturbed) Who are you protecting?

Dreamer: (puts hat back on) Myself.

Cynic: I give up. See you in metaphysics. (exits.)

Dreamer: Bye. (continues reading. Looks around and takes off hat. Pulls out letter like the first one and tacks it up. Collects books and continues reading.)



Gary Renzelman

**Bill Backward: 1993 College Joe
(A Lock Haven University Sight)**

A tuft of hair pokes above the sizing strap across
his forehead,

The slight bulge of chaw under the lower lip,

The raging acne responding to unknown allergies
as it plows its topographical destruction,

An oral spew of socially conscious inanity
binding like-minded buddies,

All sharing a forward backwardness,
unison baseball caps with bills to the rear,

Unshielded dead-empty eyes toward a futureless nowness.

John Hartman

Sucking Down Beer on a Friday Evening

Whose beer this is I'm sure I know.
My friend is in the bathroom though;
He will not see me sitting here
drinking his Bud before I go.

My drinking pal would think it queer
To find his mug emptied of beer
Because he said, "Watch this for me,"
Then stumbled off to drain more beer.

Just slug it down, that is the key,
But if I do he won't trust me.
This quandary could affect my sleep.
The answer could be drinking tea.

His beer has body dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep;
Here is one beer I'll let him keep.
Besides, the brew is really cheap.

Amy Timko
Joe's Place

The drinks always flow here
 Everyone slinks to the rhythm
 of the jazz band.
 Pulsating beats
 of the bass guitar vibrate.
 Frenzied notes blow from a muted trumpet.
 Wild fingers dance over the piano keys.
 All of the individual melodies
 blend together
 in a kaleidoscope of sound.
 People sliding
 with smooth sexiness
 Enjoying new freedom
 Strutting. . .
 The aftertaste of rebellion
 and past risks taken.
 Addicted. . .
 to the rhythm,
 the sights,
 the alcohol.

Michelle Runk
Ode to the Ashtray

Ode to the ashtray
 sitting on my desktop.
 Lipstick covered trunks float
 in your pool of grey soot.
 Sulfured sticks ignite fresh trees—
 embers burning your contents to stumps.

Mary Jo Hatala
Women's Work

She hadn't really meant to kill him. Frighten him, yes, shut him up for a while, maybe, but not kill him.

Molly sighed impatiently, tossing the smeared knife into the sink of scraped breakfast dishes. Well, now what?

She propped her stained fists on her hips, turning slowly to regard her sprawled husband. His right arm had knotted through the wooden slats of his chair as he slumped, and his stiff elbow lodged awkwardly into a mocking salute. His legs had doubled beneath him, a crumbling last effort to kneel—to pray? Too late.

At least she didn't have to look at his face. His head dripped down his torn back, a broken puppet, one eye gazing sleepily at the greasy ceiling. A thick, bright mat of blood seeped around him, circling him, and his splashed handprints polka-dotted the kitchen table like large paw prints. His free hand curled tightly into his lap, hiding the colored fingers.

She wagged her head in disgust. "Dammit, Walter! You can't even die without making a mess!"

It was just like him. She fished the limp sponge from the cold dishwater and slopped it across the table, suds freckling the top like spittle. Walter's frantic, bloody finger-prints dissolved to pink streaks, watercolors.

Molly scrubbed the blurred brown bruises, circling the table until she glowered into Walter's sagging, graying frown. "Cleaning up after you—again," she mocked. "Isn't that the story of my life?"

Even upside down, she swore his eyes could still roll jeeringly to the ceiling. Well, that was why she had left him only one.

She wrung the sponge in the flat dishwater, clouding the sticky bowls and cracked coffee mugs. Like a shark fin, the tip of her knife jutted from the tinted water, dulled and stained.

Molly knelt on the slippery tile, tiny warm tongues of blood sucking her bare knees as she rocked back and forth with the dripping sponge. Her dirty fingers were already crinkled, wrinkling and shrivelling in the darkening puddle.

The sponge slapped her husband's thigh, and his clenched claw shuddered in his lap. "That's all right, Walter, don't bother getting up," she snorted. "Don't bother lifting a finger to help, for Christ's sake. Aren't I used to that by now?"

She shoved his limp legs in disgust, stepping over him to the sink. Always in the way. The water now smelled like rust and blood. She watched the ruined sponge sink, slow, settling lightly against the dishes. Damn him, couldn't he have washed his own dishes before he died?

She dried her sticky hands on the front of her robe, squeezing past Walter's lolled, broken head to open the refrigerator. Almost empty, as usual; but she was only cooking

for one now. She snatched a can of cheap beer from the bottom shelf...Walter's last one. Bottoms up.

The smell of blood was stronger. She buried her nose against the opened beer can, fizz spitting her face. The table was tinted pink, and fresh threads of blood spidered around Walter's legs, crawled from his folded lap.

"Go ahead, Walter," she sighed. "Bleed all over my clean floor."

Even dead, he was a slob.

She licked the stale beer, trying not to taste it as she sank onto the only clean chair. How could Walter drink this stuff?

She should do something with his body before she tried to clean the blood again. She never could get anything done with him around. Oh, and then the dishes. Then... then...

It would wait. She lifted the newspaper Walter had forgotten, still folded neatly to the sports page. She would finish cleaning everything soon. Later.

Molly glanced at Walter over the top of the paper. "A woman's work is never done, you know."

He didn't answer.

She sipped her beer.

John Hartman
Toothbrush

Long slender handle
 by the sink
 emits winter mint.
 The prickly stubble of
 stained bristles white-washes
 delicate, stone teeth.
 You are safe beneath
 the cover of my clenched fist.



Lack Haven University
 offers creative writing workshops
 in poetry, fiction, and drama.

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Like Horace
Tombstone

Long slender haugh
by the sink
coats winter mist.
The prickly stubble of
stained bristles white-washes
delicate, moss teeth
You are soft beneath
the cover of my clenched fist



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