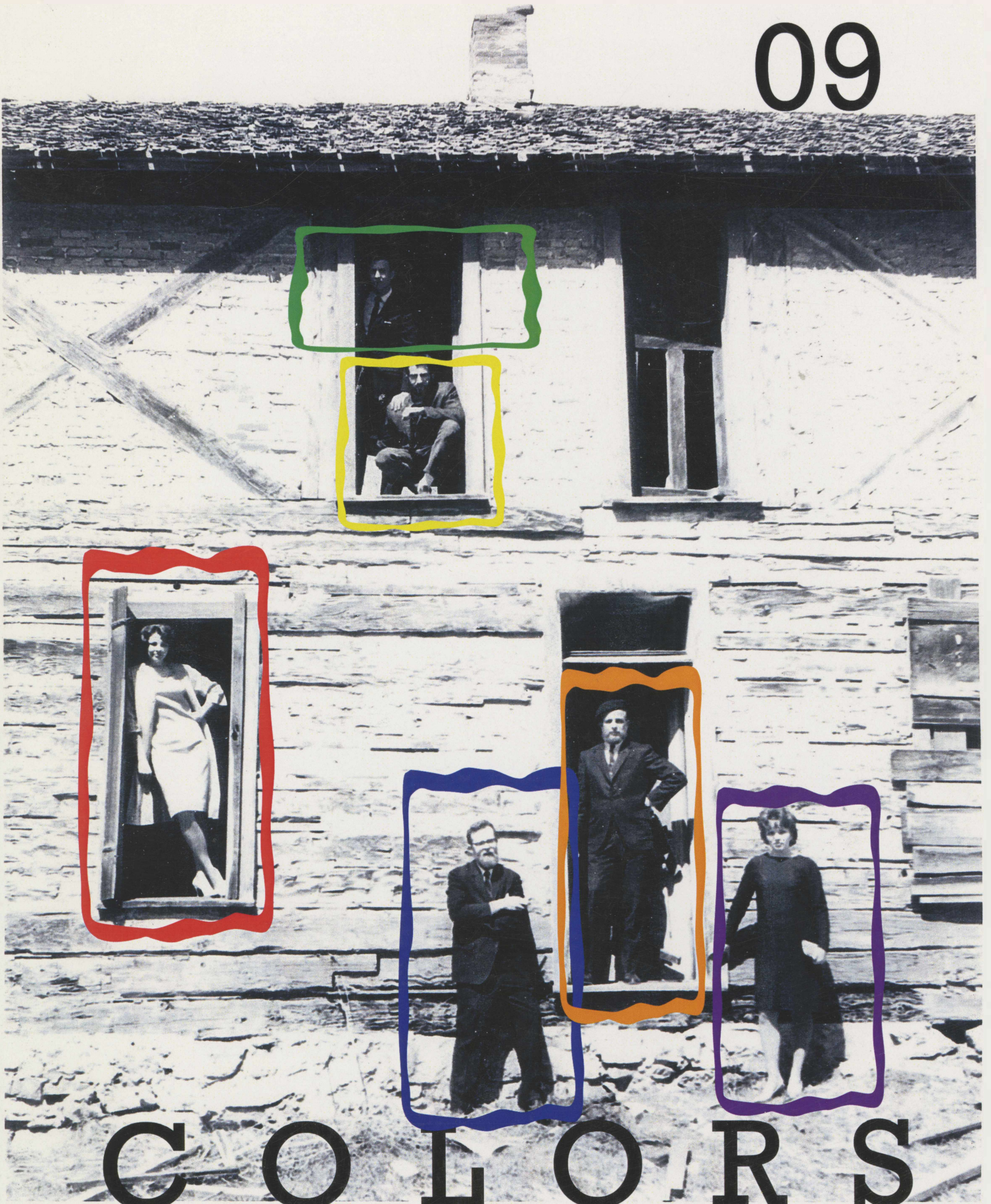
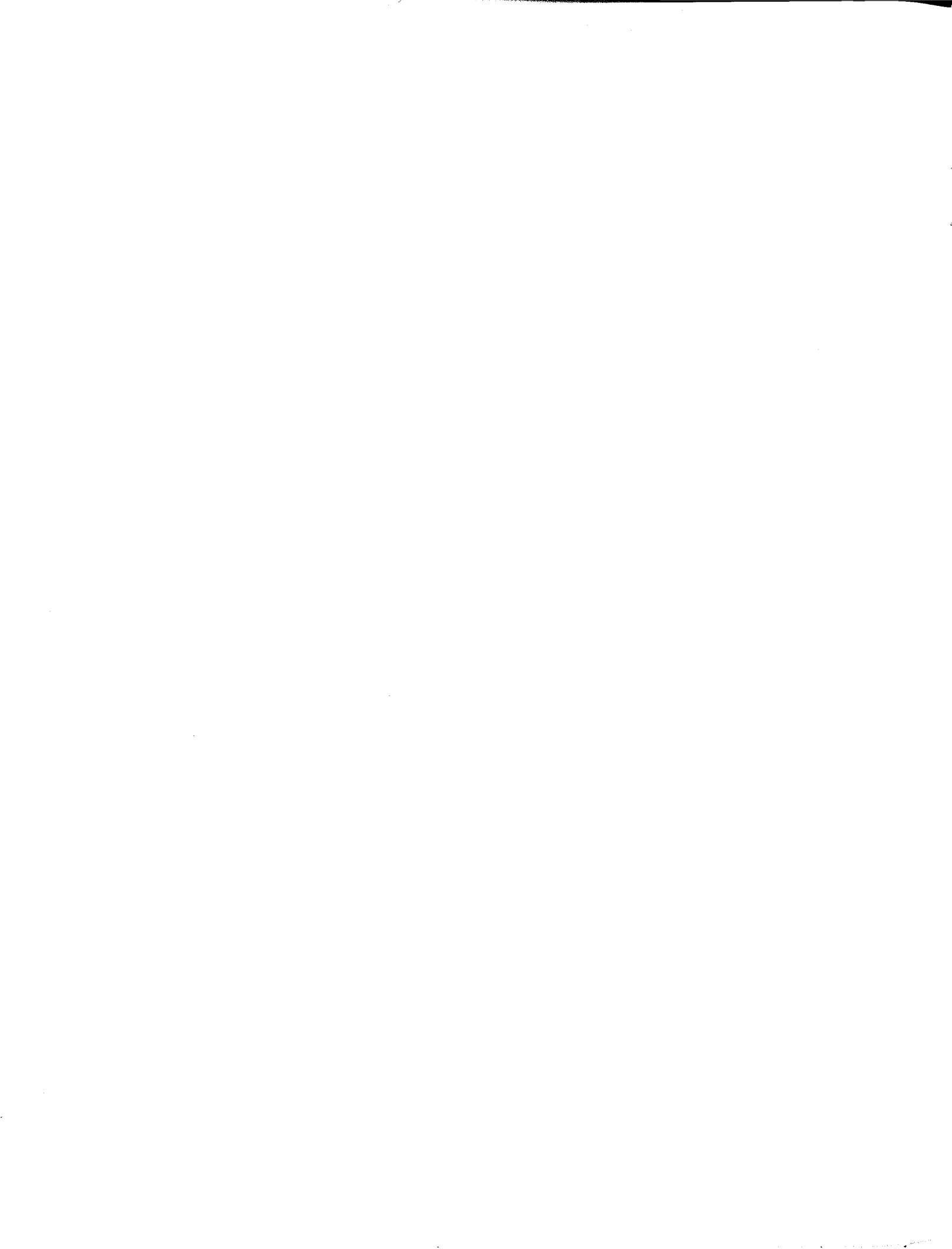


09



C O L O R S



# Colors

Carroll's Literary Magazine

Editor In Chief  
Nik Griffith

Faculty Advisors  
Virginia Reeves  
Jeffery Morris  
Loren Graham

## Assistant Editors

Randi Paul  
Briana Wipf  
Nathan Brehe

## Legend of Colors

As in his shallow pan  
The prospector sifts the grey silt, filtering  
from the muddy sand and rubble  
the precious, golden  
flecks, the colors of his avid  
searching; so  
the authors of the following  
pages have aspired to distill  
from the drear and commonplace  
dross of raw reality and everyday  
experience their colors, transmuted through  
literary experiment into the gold of translucent  
self-expression.

Anonymous

Carroll College  
Helena, MT  
2009 Vol. 16

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## Editor's Letter

Making one of these is really hard. If you haven't ever had the chance to be part of such an experience I would definitely put it on the top of your list. If you have for some reason ever been part of a publishing team, all I can do is both applaud you and offer you a shoulder to cry on. Hey, the first round is even on me.

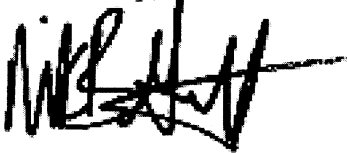
The making of Carroll College Colors has been one of the best times of my life. My editing board was made up of three people who are more dedicated to proficiency and admiration of written art than I have ever seen before. Randi, Briana, and Nate: you are all some of the best writers I have ever had the pleasure of working with, and I look forward to the day when others get to experience it as well. You are all some of the most patient people I have ever met, which is probably why I am still alive to write this.

To my faculty advisor Virginia all I can say is, "I'm sorry," and "I really do like you," though with my utter lack of communication with you I could see why you got worried. Even when you were looking at emails begging a for a meeting fifteen seconds after they were timestamped, you stood by us and had faith that we would produce a quality end product.

Finally to you, the reader, the abstract idea that I have of people reading our work, your work, and getting to see how much talent Carroll really has, I say, "Welcome to a world where people write and lives happen. It's a great place to be and we love the support you give us."

Keep reading Carroll.

Sincerely,



Nikolas Bennett Griffith  
Editor In Chief

### **A special dedication**

Sometime ago in Carroll's history, a young man named Mike Duffy gathered a group of people who wished to find a place of expression and freedom and formed a little magazine named Colors.

Every since that very first meeting of six students, Colors has been dedicated to allowing people at Carroll a voice. The people in the following pages have heard it, they have lived it, but most importantly they have captured the essences of change and experience in their words.

I am sad to report that this past year Carroll College and Colors lost Mr. Duffy. When he passed away he took with him his physical body, yet he left a sense of wonder and passion to continue to see and experience life and change through our words.

**Colors 2009  
For Mike**

# Marriage is a Bunch of Bones

### The Course of Love

Marriage is a bunch of bones  
on a swing or a flower that was torn  
up from the ground to paint  
a face with yellow streaks

Leaving is a chair broken  
smashed over a counter in the kitchen  
screaming in need of something to say  
thinking of the splinters wedged hard into the corners

Being alone sips at a drink  
nothing but pop pop bubbling  
straw sounds that mean there is nothing  
left by cold melting ice

Death came later and the kids went to both  
funerals though the sun was out  
and they wanted to play  
instead of being alone together

Some times asking why the shards of glass  
broken were left scattered over the bathroom  
floor but can't remember  
so the floor at work is swept instead

*Alexis Graman*

**Untitled**

While at the door I watch him leave our home,  
 ambling away from me with not a glance.  
 Enraptured eyes allowed free hands to roam  
 across uncharted flesh, and in a trance  
 he offers her the love that I still want.  
 I lean against the frame and watch us part;  
 I see her turn her perfect head and flaunt  
 her triumph at the gash across my heart.

And he, with eyes still fixed upon her face,  
 continues on his merry way to strand  
 me here with naught to cheer me in this place  
 now tainted by the plotting, snatching hand  
 that wove its way around his heart to take  
 away the life I had, the life I watch them fake.

*Andrea Simons*

**Sometimes**

You wander where it's dark  
 To a place I can't follow  
 Where night rests so heavy and cold,  
 You say no to be afraid,  
 But your voice is so far away.

The brambles snare; you're weary  
 Labyrinthine paths curve, curve  
 And fork, whispering slyly  
 Of madness you'll never escape  
 Of pains and losses past.

I'm lit by the moonlight  
 At the maze's end, waiting  
 "He always makes it through"  
 A silent prayer to myself  
 "He always makes it through"

I can't walk beside you,  
 Hold your hand, ruffle your hair  
 But I'm not powerless.  
 I'll shout, guide you with my voice  
 "I love you. I love you. Come Home."

*Randi Paul*



### **Estranged**

is such a word to use for this obsession  
with all that is so entirely familiar—  
and for the inadvertent ghosts that hover  
on the few books, the lone CD, your stray possessions.  
The bed, of course. Your empty closet. The succession  
of old notes from you still taped to the refrigerator  
half a year now after your departure.  
I feel as if I should have drawn conclusions  
by this time, poetic ones about love, passion  
and loss. Instead I picture the strand of your hair  
I have not yet found, but will find in some  
untouched, undusted nook—or a drawer  
long unopened—or a wound around my shirt button  
as though my heart's strange ghost had reeled it there.

### **The Contemplation of Divorce**

In an old quarter of the night, I tried  
to balance reasonable expectation  
against the overwhelming force of grief,  
as if the weighing out of guilt and passion,  
the urge to remain and the will to go,  
could somehow ensure rescue and relief,  
or at least could make catastrophe recede.

What makes love fail? Really, I didn't know,  
but I had my suspicions: maybe it fails  
when Fates decree its failure, is dispatched  
without forewarning and without appeal,  
precisely as we ourselves are dispatched—  
while we eat lunch, when we go get the mail,  
on a birthday, on Christmas Day perhaps.

The moment of collapse  
arrives at its leisure and keeps to no clock  
or calendar. It has been known to break  
down doors—it does not knock  
politely, does not wait for us to dress  
or comb, and will not hear any request.

*Loren Graham*

**In Sickness and In Health**

I've loved you more as time, your enemy,  
has moved us far past the years when you were well.  
Past childhood, where pain was unknown to me.  
And yet I'll never understand your hell.  
But though the sickness rages on inside,  
you find moments that take away your breath.  
I know that you have too much strength and pride  
to fear the pale and outstretched hand of Death.  
So please do not abandon me, my dear.  
Alone, I'm lost and cannot navigate.  
You are my lantern, banishing my fear,  
That guides me home once it has gotten late.  
For though we're two, our souls are tied as one—  
a bond not broken by the setting sun.

*Jean Saye*

**courtship**

Eight o'clock is not late for a dance,  
For an awkward kiss against brick,  
But I prefer darkness. I prefer drinking and  
A few hastily chosen songs on the jukebox.  
I prefer it in winter, when you'd be in a sweater,  
And I'd be in layers.

I prefer struggling with buttons,  
And half-clothed madness. I prefer leaving  
In the dead of night, praying my car  
Will please start.

Ten o'clock is not too late to call.  
I will tease you and tell jokes,  
And we will act like buddies,  
Because you think I am not like other girls,  
That I am difficult to buy gifts for,  
As if it's a compliment.

*Emily Stueven*

# He Killed Fred Astaire

### A Plentiful and Obvious Thing

"There was water in every direction," Henry said. "That's how I knew it was the place. Any way I went, I'd hit water."

"What about north?" his grandson asked. "There ain't no water north."

"The bay loops around," he said, tired, wishing his son and his son's new wife and the bastard of a kid everyone'd already failed in raising would leave, head over to the white condominium they were renting, tall in its line of new buildings after the storm, all built up bigger than before, whiter, more pools, more tennis courts.

Tennis, he'd never understood.

He picked up the church newsletter from the lamp stand. Karen put them together, Karen across the way, Karen he'd officially met at a square dance—what the hell he'd been doing there, he still didn't know.

"Henry," his son's wife said. "Ricky wanted to go see that battleship in Mobile. You want to come along?"

"I don't want to see no battleship, Brenda," his grandson mumbled.

"Would you please stop talking like that."

"What's it matter how I talk?"

"People will think you're unintelligent."

"You one to talk."

"Excuse me?"

"Nothin," the boy said, standing, taking the two steps it took to cross the room so he could sit in the recliner that swiveled, turning it away from everyone.

"Pops," the boy said, turning back around. "What about the heat? You got water in every direction, sure, but you from New York. It's fucking hot down here."

"Ricky!" Brenda shouted.

Henry chuckled. He flopped the newsletter back on the stand, looking at it once more before he shuffled to the coffee maker that'd been warming the same pot all day. "The design," Karen had called it. "Graphic design's my new career."

Those folks that needed careers after they retired—they were mysterious as tennis, and he'd misunderstood her meaning anyway.

"How's that useful?" he'd asked.

"What do mean?"

"I wouldn't think a church newsletter would be very graphic, so far as I see it."

She'd laughed, that dyed red hair of hers shaking in place. Thea'd never gone that route, thank God—the sprayed up hair, all one solid thing up there on the head like some rodent, he'd always thought, some big old marmot.

"Silly," Karen had said. "Graphic is the term for layout these days. It's nearly all done on the computer, see?"

He hadn't, still didn't.

He poured himself another cup of coffee.

"How can you drink that in this heat?" his son asked.

Henry didn't answer, stirring in the powdery creamer with a silver spoon he'd taken from the display on the wall. Thea had started collected them—all those damn spoons—right after they'd moved down. It'd only taken her a couple years to fill the little display rack he'd made, putting the last one in just months before she passed. Was it ten years, now? No, eleven.

"Henry?"

"What's that?" he said, looking up from the swirl of the coffee to his daughter-in-law's broad face.

"You tuned out, Pops," Ricky said. "Are you going—what's it?—that forgetting thing that happens to old folks. Todd said his grandpa just up and walked out of the house one day, headed down the middle of the street in his shorts. Took a shit in them too, but just kept walking."

"Ricky!" Brenda shouted again.

"That isn't me, yet," Henry said.

"You wear them adult diapers?" Ricky asked.

Henry shook his head.

Brenda glared. "That's enough out of you, young man."

The boy smiled, then spun the chair again, facing away from his stepmother.

Karen thought he should get rid of it—the old spinning recliner with its worn armrests. She'd said it didn't work with the room, what with her eye for design and all.

"How's that?" he'd asked.

"The colors are all wrong."

"Same colors that've been here since I moved in, never noticed a problem."

He'd thought it was a stretch anyway—church newsletter to inside decorator or whatever those folks called themselves—even though she said she had jobs doing it, which might be why she was living in the part of Spanish Cove with the big houses right close to the pool, while he was living in the trailer court part across the highway.

She'd asked him to move into that house, him with his Social Security and small trailer.

"Gabe," his daughter-in-law was saying. "Could you help out here?"

Henry looked at his son, sipping his Coke at the Formica table.

"Ricky just wants to get out of the house," Gabe said.

"Then take him," Henry said, patting Gabe on the shoulder. "You guys go see that battleship."

"Henry, we're here to see you."

"Now, Brenda, we've seen plenty of each other. Hell, it's been a week now, hasn't it? Five days, at least. Aren't you due to clear out here soon, anyway? Could be your last chance to see that ship."

"I ain't going to no battleship," Ricky said.

"That's enough."

"I ain't."

"I suppose Pops is right," Gabe finally said, draining his soda as he stood.

"Gabe, we're here to see your father."

"Right here, Brenda," Henry said. "You guys have seen enough, haven't you?"

She started to raise another fuss, but Gabe crossed over and took her by the arm.

"Pops needs a rest, I think," he said in the voice Henry knew as his whispering one, though there was nothing real quiet about it. "Ricky," he said to the boy. "Come on, now."

"We're not leaving until tomorrow morning," Brenda said at the door, Ricky already pulling it open. "So let's do dinner tonight, all right, Henry? Let us take you out."

"Nah," Henry said. "I'm still stuffed from the last one. You guys go on, now. I had myself some plans tonight anyway."

"Oh, yeah, Pops?" Ricky asked, shrugging Brenda's hand from his shoulder. "You got yourself a hot date, do you?"

"Something like that."

"Sick," the boy said, and Brenda flicked him in the head. "Ow," he shouted. "You keep your damn hands off me."

"Ricky," Gabe said, but he didn't do anything, just stood there on the other side of Brenda.

Karen wanted to meet them of course—Gabe and Brenda and Ricky, his only family, for all intents. He'd promised her the last night of their stay, that he'd bring them by her house for dinner, that they'd all go down to the pool afterward, something like that.

"Ricky, that battleship is something," Henry said, squeezing the boy's shoulder.

"See you, Pops," the boy said and ducked through them, pushing open the screen door.

Brenda hugged him. He patted her back once before he pulled away, holding open the screen that had just snapped closed.

"You drive careful."

"Good seeing you," Gabe said, putting a hand on his shoulder as he walked passed. "We'll call when we get home."

"Good," Henry said, already starting to wave.

He stood there until they'd pulled out of his short drive, then he stepped back, the screen slamming, the click of the inside door something beautiful, his coffee over there on the side table with Thea's spoon, his chair sitting next to it.

*Virginia Reeves*

### **Humble Passion**

A sun-aged hand dressed in August dust  
wiping upon a sleepless brow  
replacing sweat with rust.  
He knows these skies and how...?

This land, these reins hold his life  
a beautiful bittersweet friend  
allows the blindness to his own his lived strife  
and yes again, deprivation leads the trend.

His eyes are weak  
his hands are strong  
thick socks through old boots peek.  
His humble passion contains his time  
yet beneath his wearing hat  
a rancher's drive would never stop at that.

*Jenna Kesler*

### **Jazz Piano**

Black hands softly  
tickle white worn-down keys wrinkled  
fingers play chords and small  
wooden hammers strike steel wrapped  
strings stretched from both ends  
of the spruce soundboard right-hand  
melodies ring on naked wires releasing  
a breeze of sound that doesn't quite  
break but just bends and swings to shoed  
toes tapping newly mended  
    floorboards  
that have forgotten the trees they once  
were dark roots in a fruitless  
soil grow to bud and wind  
blows as song seeds scatter and spread  
then mutate into tunes unplanned  
new players who say that it don' matter  
where the music started while those  
black hands tickle white keys  
and steel wires sing back with laughter

*James Buscher*

**The Sweet Lady**

Caffeinated screams pour out  
the black nozzle, always flowing  
providing social relevance  
to a wide loaded lady.

She's survived many internal  
battles, and now fights  
social wounds, forgetting  
her past clogging problems  
with coffee and sugar  
doughed riches.

Another scream secretes more  
caring side effects,  
as her heart attacks  
and absorbs bloody  
messes from others.

Squeezed by her pressure,  
people resist, ignoring  
the healthy concern she piles  
on with abdominal results.

Her blurry faith  
detracts her once good  
vision into gradually poor  
chomps and chugs.

One more scream  
wobbles her to the door, slowly  
breathing, and lost in volumes  
of weight, she moves again  
to trouble another Sunday.

*Nathan Brehe*



### **Cancer**

I stand on the brink  
atop those jagged cliffs of gray  
gazing down  
blankly  
into the black abyss  
where all my fears reside like  
phantoms.  
I hear below me the thundering  
crash  
of dark and icy waves  
breaking  
upon the rocky shore,  
as I prepare to descend  
into the fray  
with no white sails on the horizon.

*Jean Saye*

### **Old World Anew**

"It's not like here," my father says distantly,  
he tilts his head toward the nonexistent sun.  
The snow falls, dusting the world  
as he remembers how the baked red dust  
coated his childhood, so much lighter than snow,  
remembering when he would play  
basketball in the empty lots of his neighborhood;  
dribbling in beat with the Tejano música.

Remembering how his mamá would yell—  
little red foot marks on worn kitchen linoleum.

He and his brothers jumping into the Gulf,  
trading dust coated bodies for bronze skin,  
then scolded for dripping on the threadbare carpets.

"Where cobblestones lay instead of dust.  
Here there are flowing subway tracks,  
autobahns instead of water. No, not like here at all,"  
he says looking at his latté-colored hands.

*Angel Martinez*

## Clutch

As I ease one foot onto the gas pedal while lifting the other off the clutch, the green Ford pickup-truck lurches backward over a small incline then down the other side. Rolling back and accumulating some momentum, its metal guts scrape against a sandstone that juts out of the dry, brittle dirt, at once throwing the vehicle off balance and making a loud scratching noise that makes me wince. I glance in the rearview mirror, and move my foot from the gas to the brake. It doesn't matter. The rear wheels, slovenly with no horsepower behind them, have already caught on a few mats of grass and dirt.

"Jesus Christ, can't you even back this son-of-a-bitch up without fucking it all up?" Liam calls. Our eyes meet in the rearview mirror. "Stop. Stop. Stop!" he shouts.

"I am stopped. What do you think I'm doing?" I call, still looking at him through the rearview. At least I have some advantage. I can see him perfectly, but he probably only sees the back of my head.

"Christ, I don't know. Trying to tear up my truck, if I had to guess," he replies. "Pull forward and get off this goddamn rock."

I shift into first gear and inch forward. The sandstone scrapes metallicly against the bottom of the truck, making a sound that reverberates all around me.

"Be careful!" Liam commands.

I pull forward about fifteen feet.

"Get enough ahead so I can pull this bastard out of the ground," he calls.

Shifting the truck into neutral, I watch the sideview as he tries to pry the rock out of the ground with brute strength. That failing, he goes to work hacking at the gray-brown dirt with a rusty pickaxe whose handle is full of splinters I constantly have to extract from his blistered, calloused hands. I rest my chin on my hand and watch him work. Characteristically on a warm spring day, he is wearing no shirt, and I can see the long, sinuous muscles in his back and shoulders contract and relax as he swings the pickaxe in a fluid, circular motion. I'm too short to use that motion, and Liam always upbraids me because I can't chop wood like a lumberjack. I listen to him muttering under his breath as he tries to extract the rock from the ground, putting all his strength into his back.

"Don't lean so hard on your back, Liam. You'll hurt yourself again," I call.

"I'm fine," he grunts, and finally the rock comes tumbling out of its nest. Liam easily rolls the roughly circular rock into a lilac bush, fully blooming and fragrant.

Our fight today is not unlike the one we had yesterday concerning the proper way to stake up tomato plants. We called a truce last night over dinner without any apologies, which is usual for us. We were both so exhausted we just wanted to be done with it.

"Be a good wife, Stella," Mama had said before I married. "Be

his lover, his best friend, his advisor. Support him when he needs it but right him when he's wrong. Apologize when you're wrong, and firmly but kindly let him know that he must do the same. If you'll do that for him, he can only do the same for you."

I wonder what Mama would say today if she knew about our fights. She's dead, so she'll never know, thank God. I tried not to tell her too much about my marriage before she went because there's nothing anyone could do, especially since what my family does seems to matter in town. I can't get a divorce.

"Okay, back up again. Slow this time, and be careful," Liam says, standing off to the passenger side and waving me back with one hand.

I ignore his directing. I don't need any help backing up thirty feet in a straight line. I suppose I brought all this on myself. If I hadn't insisted on showing him I can drive, I'd be spending a pleasant afternoon with the perennials in my small garden, preparing them for the coming summer.

"You can't drive a car, Stella," Liam had said to me matter-of-factly three weeks after we had married. "Do you know how much coordination it takes to work a clutch?"

"Of course I know, Liam. If I didn't know how to drive a car I wouldn't say that I could. I'm just saying that I can, so I can help you if you need help, and you don't have to call Larry or Pete to come out here," I said impatiently.

It was after dinner and we had been sitting in the parlor, listening to a baseball game on the radio, when Liam had complained that, when he needed help it was such a pain in the ass to call someone out to our place since his extra hand had quit him a week before and he hadn't found anyone to replace him yet. I had been reading a book - as far as I can tell, Liam doesn't know that it is difficult for one to read and carry on a conversation simultaneously, or if he does, he thinks that my reading indicates that I'm bored and want to argue about something irrelevant - when he had brought it up at the end of the seventh inning.

"Well, women shouldn't be helping on the farm anyway," he said.

"You said your mother always helped."

"That was when they just got the homestead and there was nobody else here."

"I don't think it'd be too strenuous for me to drive a stupid truck around."

"The clutch is going out of the Ford. It's harder to drive when the clutch is going out."

"I've been driving since I was thirteen, Liam. I know how to use a clutch. Besides, I learned on an old Model-T. Those are much more difficult to drive than your old farm truck." I was tired of this conversation. I wanted to go back to my book.

Liam grunted and left the room without turning off the radio. He had come in and turned it on in the first place, interrupting my quiet evening. I swore under my breath, walked to the radio to switch it

off, and returned to my reading.

The morning after, I had awoken early, as usual, to start the coffee and have forty-five minutes to myself. It was late summer and already at five-thirty, the sun was up and the air was warm. I went outside to walk a bit. After swinging around the oil well that Texas Oil Company leases from Liam and making my return trip back to our house, I spotted the green farm truck. I looked at my watch; it was almost six o'clock. Liam would be up soon. I went to the truck to see if, as usual, he had left the key in the ignition. It was there. I hopped in, my weight on the upholstery releasing the smell of manure, cigarette smoke, and man's sweat, and started the truck. The muffler had fallen off recently, so it roared delightfully when I turned the key and put it into gear. The clutch was stubborn, just as Liam had said, but it was nothing I couldn't handle. I started driving around the house, the out buildings, the garden, in a wide circle, shifting up and down, varying my speed as I went.

Just as I thought he might not be awake, or couldn't hear it (being around heavy farm machinery had left him prematurely hard of hearing at twenty-seven), Liam came running out of the house, his hair disheveled, his face unshaven, still in his underwear.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" he shouted in a panic.

"Driving," I called back over the coughing and spitting of the pickup.

I had just swung in front of the house, and he ran up to the passenger side window to unleash a barrage of Anglo-Saxon. I drove the truck forward a little, and he followed at the same pace, shouting into the passenger-side window. Laughing, I slammed the truck into reverse and drove backwards about fifty feet. He followed. Have you ever been to the doctor, and he makes you follow his light with your eyes, back and forth, up and down? Well, that's what Liam was doing to me, following me like two eyeballs. I shifted into first gear again and went forward.

"Stella, this isn't funny anymore!" he shouted as I moved my feet on and off the clutch and from the brake to the gas while shifting into reverse again.

"I told you I could drive," I said, slamming on the gas and peeling out on the dirt, dried out and dusty with the late summer's dry heat. I only drove about twenty feet forward before I stopped again.

He ran after me, catching up a few seconds later, and shouted, "Fuck, I guess you can."

I was still laughing, and, as I shifted into first gear again, began letting the truck go forward in quick lurches, careful not to kill the engine.

"So you'll believe me from now on?"

"Yeah, yeah. Just get out of this thing before you ruin the clutch," he said.

"Oh, hell, Liam. This clutch has fifty thousand miles on it yet, easy," I said with a dismissive gesture, and slammed on the gas again,

shifting into second and third, and flew down our right-of-way to the county road junction.

Since that day, Liam has begrudgingly allowed me to help him when there are no hands around. But there are today, so I don't know why he asked me.

"Stop - Stop!" he shouts, right as I had begun to shift the truck into neutral.

I turn the ignition off and grab my gloves, an old pair of Liam's that are too small for him now, and jump out of the truck. One of our cottonwoods died in the winter and Liam has cut it down. Now we have to load the branches into the back of the truck to take to our burn site a couple of miles away. We start throwing branches into the back. I let him take the big pieces, while I take what I can handle.

"You just can't treat this truck like that," he says as he picks up some branches. "You're gonna ruin it for good, and I don't want to buy another one. These things don't grow on trees." "You could've told me the goddamn rock was there. I couldn't see it," I say. I hardly ever swore before I married Liam two summers ago. Before then I was as prim and proper an unmarried lady could be in this part of Montana, as cut off from everything as we are here.

"Well, why didn't you stop as soon as you hit it?"

"I did!" I shout defensively. "And I'm not the one who threw the alignment off when you backed it into the sinkhole."

"How was I supposed to know it was there?"

"Oh, Christ, Liam, you knew it was there. You told me over and over when I first moved here to be careful of the sinkhole, don't walk through the sinkhole, over and over. Don't play stupid with me," I say, fully ready to argue with him. "If you didn't think you had to do work when you were a little drunk, things like that wouldn't happen."

"I wasn't drunk!"

"You had three beers and a bunch of whiskey. You were drunk as a damn skunk."

We had stopped working by now. Usually when we fight we can do it while continuing our present task, but this one was taking up too much of our energies.

"What does it matter how drunk I was? I'll drink as much as I damn well please. Being married to you would drive Job to drink," Liam says.

I rather like that one - to suggest that I have more power to annoy than God.

"Do you have any idea how hard it is to be married to you?"

"What have I got to do with it?" he asks, spreading his arms out defensively. "I let you get those new shoes, didn't I?"

"Oh, yes, you're too kind, Liam. My old pair only had a hole in the sole that had been repaired twice. But really, with all the money we save by me not ever getting to go to the beauty parlor, I think we could afford at least one pair of shoes," I say. I know I'm exagger-

ating my hardship, but it doesn't matter now, in the middle of a fight. And it was true; Liam lets me get my hair cut and set at the beauty shop and that's it. No permanent waves, no dyes. About a month after we were married, I told Liam I needed to go into town to get my hair cut and set, he told me, "You have a pair of scissors, cut your hair yourself." Then he had the nerve to laugh at me when I didn't get it all the same length in the back.

"Which is why you get to go to the barbershop," I had said after he told me I had given myself the worst haircut in creation.

"That's different."

"How?"

"The barbershop is cheaper. If Stevie would cut women's hair, you could go there too."

"And come out smelling like a fella," I had said.

Liam had scowled at the thought. He let me go to the beauty parlor after that.

Now he's quiet; he can't argue with the truth.

"I guess I'm lucky I get my flowers," I say.

"You're damn right you are. They waste water," he spits.

"I like them!"

"You don't need 'em. I'd take my herbicide to 'em if I was smart."

"Don't you dare, you bastard!" My temper has flared at the thought of my grandmother's red peony plant yellow and drooping. "I'll leave if you do!"

"Fuck off, Stella. Where'll you go?" he said. "And you can threaten to do that all you want, I know you won't."

Now that was true, and that's where he had me. My mother had died in January of cancer, and I wasn't really talking to my father. I can't forgive him for the trick he played on me about Liam, and without Mama, I don't want much to do with him.

I had met Liam at a dance about three years ago. I was only eighteen then, just graduated from high school, and I wanted to go to college to be a nurse or a teacher. Papa didn't want me to; he thought the whole scheme was silly and would only cost him money, but I didn't know that then. Well, I'm like most women. I have a weakness for a pretty face, and that is Liam Brady. All the women were after him. He's tall and broad shouldered, barrel-chested - all the clichés of virile manhood - with a fair, handsome face of regular features, a strong nose and mouth, and slightly sheepish eyes with long reddish lashes. And he seemed so considerate and polite when I first met him.

"I'd like very much to dance with you, Miss Gibson," he'd said to me that night, and I fell for his routine of first looking at me shyly then down at the floor.

We kept company for a year. Meanwhile, my father convinced me to put school off for a year, work a bit, and earn some money for tuition. I had, working in the telephone office as an operator in Cut

Bank. Liam came into town three or four times a month and sat with us - very dignified and old fashioned - and I thought he was the sweetest, most gentle man I'd ever known. Still, when he said to me, "Stella, I can't imagine any other woman as my wife," I still demurred, preferring to go to school, grow up a bit, and decide then.

"You're not going to get another offer like that, Stella," Papa had said to me later that evening, after Liam had asked to marry me. "Liam Brady's got lots of land and money for a man his age, and I think he really loves you."

A week of that sort of talk broke my resolve, and as soon as I said yes, my father supervised a whirlwind marriage. It took only three weeks to organize the whole thing.

Papa got what he wanted. I wasn't going to school and was marrying a rich man. Not as rich as the oilmen - but nobody is these days - and Papa hates oil men. But there's plenty of oil on Liam's property (he promised to put the property in joint tenancy after we married but has never done it), and the place reeks of crude oil and methane gas, which gives me a headache, especially during my period.

And soon after we married, I realized what kind of man Liam really was.

He has a short temper and likes to have his way. He likes to argue, especially when he gets to drinking. He rarely lets me go into town, especially when our closest neighbor, Mrs. Cavendish, a prim lady in her middle forties, invites me to go with her. Most people wouldn't believe me when I told them how bad Liam can be; he's nice to people he's not married to.

Those times during our courtship, when Liam was so pleasant, come back now and again, and I don't feel quite so alone. A few days ago, he came to me, pitiful as a puppy, with a splinter in his hand for me to remove.

"Stella, it hurts," he said, sounding like a little boy and holding his hand out toward me. A swollen, crimson caterpillar was snug-gled in the space between his index finger and thumb.

I got a pin and a pair of tweezers and had him sit on the couch in the parlor. It was late morning and hot already. He had shed his shirt but at least still wore his white undershirt, so my couch wasn't completely smeared with his muddy sweat.

"Don't hurt me," he murmured as I held his hand in mine and tried to see the wood splinter embedded in his skin.

"I'll try not to. This is awfully deep, Liam. I'll do my best," I said, pivoting around his hand, trying to get more light on the wound.

I started to probe a bit with the pin. He flinched slightly, but I could tell he was trying to keep his hand still.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"It's all right."

Digging deep into his skin, I found the splinter at last. Before I married Liam, I couldn't stand inflicting pain on other people. I've

had to get accustomed to it; Liam is worse than a child the way he comes to me with splinters, blisters, and cuts smeared with dirt and manure.

"Hold still," I said, trying to press the blister out with my thumb nail. Watery blood seeped out of my crude incision. "Sorry." The end of the splinter poked out of the skin. I grasped it with the tweezers and pulled it out. It slid out quickly and cleanly. "There," I said.

Before I could do anything else, Liam pulled me down on his lap and wrapped his arm around my waist.

"Thanks," he murmured, nuzzling against my neck. "You smell awful good, Stella."

Heck, I wasn't even trying to be sexy: I didn't know it could happen without my trying. But I'm not complaining. We stayed together until one of the farmhands came up to the house looking for him, about fifteen minutes. It was nice to be near him without fighting.

But incidents like that don't happen nearly enough for my liking. For affection, I must depend on those dogs and cats. One fewer cat since March. He killed Fred Astaire, the black and white cat I adopted from last year's spring litter. Freddie's coat was bristly, and he stood at the pantry door when he wanted to go outside, but I was fond of him.

He may be right that I'm afraid to leave, but now I pretend otherwise.

"I can get a job any place where there's telephones," I say. I had been thinking of that for a while now, ever since I found poor Freddie dead on the back doorstep, poisoned by arsenic.

"And how are you gonna get into town?" he asks.

"You can't keep me here like a prisoner, Liam! I'm not your slave. I don't see how you can be so cruel to living things."

"Are you gonna start that - "

"I know you poisoned Freddie," I say.

"Stella, for the umpteenth time, I didn't kill your cat! I was sorry he died too." he says, so sincerely I almost believe him.

"I don't believe you! That cat was all I had. I'm all alone out here all the time," I say.

That was true, too. And I want a baby so badly, and it never happens. Every month I hope; every time I'm a little late, I hope. But still I am childless.

Not that we don't try. At least I do, but I don't know how much I can help. He tells me I'm pretty sometimes, but he mumbles it quickly, as if he's insincere. Other times he makes fun of me for my small breasts. But, of course, I'm not allowed to remind him that he can only maintain his energy for ninety seconds. Ninety-three if you count foreplay.

Now, I was always told it takes at least fifteen minutes. So I've nearly resigned myself to my being childless for my husband's inabilities.

That's not how people see it, of course. It seems it's always



the wife's fault for not conceiving a child. I know people in town are whispering, "What's wrong with Liam Brady's wife?" But God knows I'd like nothing better. Even as ornery as he is, I don't think Liam would poison his own baby.

Now I don't know if he visits the girls at the White Spot when he's in Cut Bank. I wish I could find out that he does, because it would give me leave to go after the pumper who watches the oil wells on our land. He's not so attractive, and he chews prodigious amounts of tobacco and doesn't bathe as often as I'd like, but he resembles Liam enough that I could get away with it. And get some satisfaction in the meantime, because I've discovered that those ninety-three seconds are pretty pleasant. I suspect I'd like the entire fifteen minutes very much. But as soon as I get near the pumper, he repulses me - his brown teeth, bloodshot eyes, whiskers caked with something whitish.

Anyway, I suppose making such a fuss about a cat is foolish, but if I had a baby of my own maybe I wouldn't. And it's Liam's fault on both counts - that I have no cat and no baby.

He makes a dismissive gesture and sighs. "Just get into the truck. The back's full anyway. I'll ride back here."

"Why don't you ride in the front? There's no reason for you to ride back here."

"I'll ride back here," he says forcefully, pulling off his gloves and hurling them in the back of the truck. One disappears in the tangle of boughs and he swears at his bad luck.

I don't really mind when Liam gets mad at me for backing the truck up wrong or not being able to swing an axe, but when he belittles what I do in my own house, like he did one day last spring, I draw the line. It was last March, and the warm weather we had been enjoying suddenly changed to frigid cold. The muddy earth turned brittle, and thick frost coated the prairie grass. I remember looking out the kitchen window and thinking I was as barren and cold as the land outside. I'm young, I should be a mother, I thought. Instead I'm dry and withered. Liam had begun the morning unusually grateful for his scrambled eggs and ham. He was gone all day, and, in a fit of good-will, I spent the afternoon making him roast beef and custard pie. The kitchen sink had been leaking for a week, and Liam hadn't fixed it yet, but that afternoon the pipe gushed a sinkful of dirty water all over my floor. I cleaned it up as best I could, and let supper dishes pile up as I waited for Liam to come home.

But he was late, and dinner was getting cold when he finally came in. "Sorry, Stella," he said, shuffling across the floor in socks. "Ed got stuck twice. I got home as quick as I could."

He was apologetic, and I didn't doubt he told the truth.

"Dinner's getting cold. Let's sit down and eat." I took the roast out of the warm oven.

"What the hell's wrong with the sink?" he asked, eyeing the mess on the floor.

"The pipe started leaking terribly this afternoon," I said.

"Christ, I should've fixed this last weekend," he said, dropping to his knees to inspect the plumbing.

"It doesn't matter. Let's just eat for now. I made you roast beef -"

"I know. I can smell it," he said. "I'll get this thing fixed right now. Won't take long."

"Liam, it doesn't matter. Can't we just eat? It's getting cold and ruined."

"I can't leave this place falling apart," he said, across the kitchen now and rummaging through his tool drawer. "You can't even fill up the kitchen sink. What kind of house am I making you live in?"

"It's just a sink, Liam! Jesus Christ, can't we just eat dinner?"

"Not until I get this done," he said, brushing past me to the sink, carrying tools in both his grubby hands.

"Eat your dinner cold, then. I'm eating it now," I said, and piled my plate high with roast beef, potatoes, and green beans. I was too angry to be hungry, but I stuffed the food in my mouth anyway. I can't do anything right, you see, and Liam would rather fix the plumbing than eat dinner with me.

"Now Margaret," my father had said before I got married (Margaret is my first name, though I hate it. I prefer my middle name, Stella, after my grandmother of the peony plant), "A good wife submits to her husband in every way. She is obedient to his wishes in the house and out. She raises his children well and loves him no matter his faults."

I know my father would disapprove of my wifing, but I don't see any other way to act. I could defer to my husband at all times and outwardly show my happiness, or continue the way I am. Or I could forget about respectability and divorce Liam. Cavendish's place is only five miles from here. I could walk there, get a ride to Cut Bank, and take the train to Great Falls.

I have an aunt, one of Mama's sisters, who got a divorce. I remember being about eleven when I heard my parents talking in hushed, urgent tones about her.

"A divorce could ruin the family. Thank God we're not still back East, where it would ruin us," Mama had said.

"Lucky it's your family. Nobody'll recognize the name. You don't have to own up to her if you don't want to," Papa said.

My aunt never came to visit us after that. I missed her. She brought me licorice and lengths of hair ribbon.

I go around to the front of the truck and climb in, taking off my gloves as I slide into the seat. I look in the rearview mirror at him. He's sitting on the tailgate, his shoulders, shining with sweat under the warm sun, stooped slightly. I feel bad for him, and I'm almost sorry.

I wish Liam didn't look so pitiful after a fight. He excites my maternal instinct when he does that, and it pisses me off. I swear he

does it on purpose, just to end the fight and get me to submit. He did that last night, too.

"I'm just trying to help you with your plants. I don't want all your tomatoes ruined. Then you won't be able to do any canning," he had said, breaking last night's silent dinner.

"My way was just fine, Liam. That's how I did it last year," I said.

"Jesus Christ, Stella, if you left 'em that way they'd be falling over by the time the tomatoes started to get big. They're heavy, you know."

"And if that happened, I could stake them up better. All I'm saying is that they were fine for the time being," I said.

"If you do things right the first time, Stella," he trailed off, the way he does when he thinks he's teaching me a lesson.

I didn't reply, and a few moments later looked up at him. He was slumped over his plate like a scolded child, or a dog that tries always to please his master.

I sighed. "Stake them up however you want," I said, with some coldness, ending the fight without his thinking he had gotten me.

Now he's doing the exact same thing as I turn off the path that runs around our house and out buildings and up onto a small hill. The truck hesitates. I'm in first gear already, so I cannot shift down. Instead I press the clutch in slightly. Still the truck objects, and I push the clutch in more. Now the truck starts to lumber up the hill, wheezing and whining as it goes. I glance in the rearview at Liam, but I can see only his shoulders and head over the knotted branches. He's turned his head, listening to the engine and glancing at the cab. I'm almost to the top of the hill now, and the truck rocks tiredly, I push the clutch in as far as it will go. It coughs and the engine dies.

"Je-sus Christ," Liam says. I can't hear him, but I see his mouth form the words. It's something he says so often that I can hear his voice in my mind.

I hurriedly try to restart the engine, but it will not turn over. I feel the back of the pickup rock slightly and, looking back, I see that Liam has hopped off and is coming round to the cab.

"You killed the damn engine, Stella," he says. "Here, let me try it."

Angry and embarrassed, I scoot across the seat while Liam opens the door and jumps into the driver's side. Despite his coaxing, the truck won't start.

"Fuck!" he shouts, then sits still, pouting. "What the hell did you do?"

"Nothing, Liam. I had it in first, and it didn't want to go up, so I pushed the clutch in more," I say.

He sighs, putting on his pitiful puppy act. "Now we'll either have to repair this one or get a whole new truck."

He says it as if he'll have to sell the farm to afford it. I

know he's full of shit. I've seen his bank book. He has enough for ten trucks. Still, he's discouraged and I feel bad for him.

"I'll go get the tractor to pull this thing away from here," he says, opening his door. "Go back to the house. You won't be driving again."

Despite his cruel words, he still looks pathetic and forlorn. I hesitate before getting out. Liam has already exited the truck and is striding toward the barn where the tractor is parked, swearing and muttering to himself. I look at the house, then back at him.

Frustrated, I kick at a clod of dirt, but the rock inside it jams my toe in my worn-out work shoes. I feel helpless.

"Son of a bitch," I mutter as I hop onto the tailgate and sit tight, my arms folded across my chest. I'll be waiting for him to come back; then he'll get it.

*Briana Wipf*

## **Ghosts**

In a ditch that's filled with water,  
Ghosts swim and drown and ask for me.

And I plug my ears and sing the alphabet song,  
But ghost voices are on a penetrating frequency,  
Able to break up blood clots and kidney stones.

There is a network of nerves that they ride like the subway,  
Pissing in corners, staring brazenly, touching themselves.  
They play the notches of my spine like piano keys,  
Aggressively, like unmusical toddlers.

I recently bought and installed new blinds and curtains,  
But they find a crack and take pictures  
So that I can't undress and must fall asleep in my street clothes.

They say that I behaved as if I were as impervious as a politician,  
That I was bad and mean,  
That I watched important people die this year and the last  
And still haven't cried.

Ghosts are weightless, and float face up in most waters.  
Thus, they are always staring up at a person and expecting  
A confession.

*Emily Stiven*

**Rustle Away  
the Sounds  
of Horns and  
People**

**Monuments****Abu Simbel**

Four sit towering above. Ancient  
stone statues of a man of strength  
guarding the entrance to a dead empire.  
The pharaoh is crumbling,  
becoming a mountain of dirt  
as stone wears away  
dropping sand  
through half an hourglass  
until nothing is left  
of Egypt's Pharaohs.

**Mount Rushmore**

The faces of four of the greats  
carved by the arrogance  
of an empire, stand tall  
and fresh with granite cheeks  
that never flush at a foreign threat.  
Power and might hold their form  
but already a thin layer  
of fractured granite sand  
collects at the bottom of the Mount.

*Phillip Quinn*

**Journey**

Crimson vines generate endless promises from me  
to you, my gift and existence.  
Not taken from a sinister desire,  
but only for the adoration of russet pools  
reflected with intensity. Walking along the rough cobblestone way,  
distanced from the murky world  
in which neither one of us belong,  
no sound  
no movement  
only that ginger touch of eternity  
one minimal drop of liquid heaven.  
How,  
to face the still grey hour before the dawn, when  
all of our being awaits  
the splendor of the golden mile.

*Cheline Perry*

**Kelly Island: My Private Heaven**

With a brown rod in hand  
    And  
A white dog  
    at my feet,  
I step into God's playground.

"Go"  
She is off,  
    And  
We become equals.  
    Rushing down  
A narrow dirt path.  
    Everything disappears except  
The cold  
    Deep blue  
    Autumn water.

Thoughts of a gray city from the past  
    Begin to be replaced.  
    Car exhaust is swapped for  
    The smell of a late season fire.  
The gold autumn leaves  
    Of the cottonwoods  
Rustle away the sounds of horns and people.

Under a big blue sky,  
    The only worry  
Is what color fly to throw first in  
    My private Heaven.

*Andrew Moore*

**The Hills Yonder**

What hills lie yonder cover'd in heav'nly shroud?  
 I know not, yet wonder if they be there at all  
 or sent by God as proof of human flaw,  
 to see what we want and what is real to doubt.  
 I see not hills, but mountains. And a crowd  
 calls loudly, so loudly, for me to join the brawl.  
 The mass of humans scramble toward the fall  
 from truth, save for those who saw through the cloud

from the valleys below. But the refrain  
 of human screams rings out, echoing like a bell.  
 Thus the valley sinks lower and lower as they drain  
 it of dirt to bury the bodies, but not their yells  
 of defeat. So higher and higher grows the mountain,  
 but the question remains: is it of earth, or hell?

*Madeline Levesque*

**The Night Road**

The moon is down, hidden behind a wall  
 of filmy and slick black clouds.

A night road  
 stretches up in stealth from the heat-scorched, low  
 valley floor, through the cracked, naked and tall  
 peaks that stand as oppressive sentinels,  
 keeping the city men caged like a crow  
 with a woven string tied around his toes,  
 flapping his wings just inches above all  
 the dirt he should have never touched.

The path  
 is only clear at night when the white stars  
 act like streetlights, and the moon's pale beams drown  
 the valley with a glow, a soft light-bath  
 that guides the city men to places far-  
 fetched and pure.

But tonight the moon is down.

*James Buscher*



### Steps to the Sun

I watched the sun  
as it dropped tonight  
crack apart and open  
like the innocent frame  
encapsulates an egg  
its nectarine yolk emerging  
opaque but full of glory  
spread out slowly  
stained the canvas  
of another day

From atop a lonesome hillside  
I watched the painting run  
a masquerade of colors  
danced together  
exuding passionate fury  
soon blending into one

Frozen-perching anxious  
like the patient robin awaiting spring  
too often does  
I stood atop a broken stairway  
on crumbling steps  
that led to nowhere  
but to them my heart had come

No solid ground before me  
there was no place left to run  
so I tipped my head reluctant  
turned for answers from the sun  
I stared with eyes  
transfixed and hollow  
like the dolls in grandma's room  
pleaded aching with the light  
to blind all relentless memories of you

It was to here  
you brought me last  
to show me this very sun  
these same worn steps  
you led me to  
only they didn't lead to nowhere then  
but to a world of endless dawns  
where dreams had chance of being won

My face you lifted  
to catch the fleeting glow

then taking my hand  
you spun me round  
where your face preserved  
this perfect day  
the endurance of its light  
reflected in your eyes  
mirrored hope I thought I'd lost  
yet painted tears upon my heart

A single blink  
all was gone  
an aging sky, turned bitter violet  
stood withering before me  
my only scrapbook  
to this moment with you  
I'd long remembered  
But just know understood was all done

My peripherals caught the rising  
of the harvest moon behind  
and after wiping one pearly darling  
from the lashes of my eye  
I turned and used the stairway  
finally climbed out from the daydream  
you had painted just for me.

*Lacey Middlestead*

### Invernal

Turning up, the sun stayed  
while the earth keeled  
over the wrong  
way for the lively  
autumn to pass.

Late again to cover  
each gravesite, leaves  
gathered in greater  
amounts. Nothing  
but crispy trails  
expanding at a quick pace.

An old crusty lady  
witnessed this event  
from her window  
as each landed. They needed  
to be raked.

If they stayed  
they would rot, or worse,  
not be raked.

Raking meant work, slow  
work, too much work -  
plus a rake,  
and old age did not pass  
her, strapped to green  
tanks and concerned  
orange labels.

Sitting was the only  
job of choice  
people gave

to her; she had life, but not  
enough. Hers was smoked  
out many times ago,

but the dying  
season had to go away -  
then it struck.  
Inside, the answer  
came on the rough  
flowered couch she  
pondered on for years.

As the leaves  
went on dropping,  
she peeled out  
a match and put  
a cig in her mouth,  
read to ignite her day.

*Nathan Brehe*

# When Silence Crushed Our Words

### Secret Garden Tour

"Bachelorhood sucks," Seth decided while shaving off a gray-ing mustache, which made him look older, in his opinion, than his early forties, when he could easily pass for his late thirties. His charm, carefully honed, his slight and carefully retained French accent, the result of three successive summers spent on the Riviera with his mother when he was in his teens, his handsomeness, inherited from his mother, his intelligence, the happy result of an F1 cross, German father and Irish mother, his conversation and easy manners, the result of getting a degree in Ithaca and his wide reading, the result of boredom between affairs, made his success with women believable even though outstanding.

As he honed his straight razor, another European affectation, on a leather strop, he looked forward to settling down, maybe with a widow around aged 35, decent looking, with a well-kept figure, which would not be as plump as her bank account. He liked the idea of three well-cooked meals a day, reading aloud to an appreciative woman, a woman with an education, while having a single drink of good bourbon diluted with a splash of branch, before steaks and sourdough bread and split and buttered Belgian endive. He would teach his widow, when he found her, how to heat an iron skillet until a drop of water vaporized immediately when contacting the skillet, sprinkle the bottom of the skillet with a coarse salt, drop two shell steaks, or even rib eye steaks, into the skillet, watch them grab the skillet, and turn the steaks as soon as the skillet released them, repeating the procedure on the other side, and served immediately on warm plates, with roasted, not boiled, corn on the cob.

He would spend two hours each morning, after returning from the gym, writing his novel, one that he had already written several times, which a college buddy had said he would seriously consider publishing if Seth made the changes, the cuts, the additions, the fleshing out of secondary characters, and a new title, all as recommended by his assigned editor, an unbearably fussy spinster who seemingly enjoyed tormenting him with quibbles and changes of mind, the final decision for publication depending on the need of the market for another novel about a young man from the Midwest attending an Ivy League college. Seth, shaved and dressed as a gentleman, put his plan into operation by driving his New Yorker, the last model of a convertible that Chrysler had made, to the start of a garden tour. He donated ten dollars to a foundation searching for a cure for ovarian cancer, hoping to meet his elegant widow at one of the five gardens on the tour. The other people on the tour consisted of three couples, five women well past the age to interest Seth, and Nellie. He remembered Nellie from 12 years ago. She was less a grapefruit girl than a tangerine girl and still managed to be the sexiest person in the room. He remembered her unbelievably messy house, her ability to down large amounts of alcohol and remain on her feet, and the fact that she lived

on publishing royalties. Her publisher designed her novels to sell to impulse buyers waiting in checkout lines at supermarkets. The most remarkable fact about Nellie's novels was that she could write one a year, each one a financial success, with a vocabulary of two thousand words.

Nellie, under at least two pen names, specialized in novels about the upper class in various Anglophone countries during puritanical periods, the main characters invariably succumbing to natural urges rather than nurture. Seth remembered witnessing a woman abandon a box of Sugar Frosted Corn Flakes to buy one of Nellie's novels. Seth thought that writing such novels was easy money and tried to write one. He discovered that it was intolerable to use less than five percent of his vocabulary and that it was impossible for him to keep away from the satirical. He abandoned the project after 50 manuscript pages.

As her fortunes increased and her body sagged, Nellie's tastes did not improve. Seth had never introduced her to any of his acquaintances. When he saw her twice a week for six months, neither of them had ever mentioned the world marriage. She had never seen the inside of his apartment.

Nellie offered to ride with him, but Seth told her that it would be inconvenient for him to return to her car. She said, "Call me tonight."

"I'm afraid I'll be busy tonight. I no longer have your number and, no, I am not asking for it."

Standing beside his convertible, Nellie said, "Don't put me on. I would have heard if you had a current girlfriend." She took an envelope out of her purse, removed the check, and wrote on the envelope with her lipstick. She wadded up the envelope and threw it on the floor behind the driver's seat of the convertible.

"I don't like my car used as a trashcan."

"I know," she said. "You'll pick it up later. My address is on the envelope. I just wrote my phone number on it."

Seth sighed. Nellie was about as dumb as any woman he had ever dated. He admitted to himself that she was wily and outfoxed him a few times. He promised himself that he would throw away the envelope later without looking at it.

A mother and daughter hosted the first stop on the tour. They specialized in the wildflowers of the surrounding countryside, including a large bed of belly flowers, pretty if you lay down to see them, a process that Seth skipped. One corner of their garden was devoted to a circle of English brambles. Seth presumed that in the middle of the brambles, behind the locked gate, the girls were growing a supply of marijuana for domestic use. The girls were especially proud of monument plants, rare and hard to grow.

A nice couple hosted the next stop on the tour. They specialized in roses, including growing new hybrids. They arranged the bushes in neat rows, with information posted in front of each one about its name and origin. Seth could not read the information without bending down

and did not try.

A pair of elderly brothers hosted the next stop. They served canapés, Guinness, and elaborate explanations why their plants were not quite ready for the tour.

A lady in bib overalls was next. She seemed to be more interested in vegetables than flowers. She raised no vegetables that could not be eaten raw, which she illustrated by husking sweet corn and eating it immediately without the addition of harmful butter and salt. She gave each visitor an ear to try. When pressed, Seth admitted that the corn was tender and tasty.

The last stop on the tour was at the home of Mme. Foster-Smythe. She led the group in by the front door and down a strip of plastic that reached to the backdoor. Seth noticed that the trim on the house was freshly painted. The inside of the house was immaculate. Seth thought that the inside might have been designed by a professional decorator. He noticed the fireplace with split wood needing nothing but the addition of a match to start a splendid fire. A neat stack of split wood in a canvas device with handles was beside the fireplace. He noticed with pleasure that no television was in sight. The kitchen had copper-bottomed pans on a circular rack above the gas range.

Walking behind Foster-Smythe, Seth noticed that her dress was lined and obviously had not come off a rack. He guessed her age in the mid-thirties, maybe a bit more. Seth found it easy to get her into a conversation. They were soon calling each other Seth and Gloria. As the other guests were leaving, she offered Seth a private tour of the garden. He waited in the backyard until she returned from seeing off the other guests.

The walled garden of Mme. Foster-Smythe was the most exquisite on the tour, a carefully faceted jewel. She thanked him for his compliments and said, "There's no compromise in this whole garden; any plant less than perfect is plucked out like an offending eye. I insisted that the workers dig out the path six inches deep, aluminum sheets laid down, and sterilized sand added before they placed the bricks. The whole yard is on a compound angle, slanted one-eighth inch to the foot toward the far corner, the whole garden is a golden rectangle, and each bed a golden rectangle. Do you know what a golden rectangle is?"

"Yes," he said.

"Really? Most people don't know what I'm talking about when I say something about a golden rectangle."

"You compute the long side of the rectangle by multiplying the short side with a number that is obtained by adding one to the square root of five and dividing that sum by two. I was a math major for two semesters." Seth restrained himself from mentioning that the aesthetic importance of the ratio did not impress him.

Madam continued, "Each bed was dug out four feet deep and the rocky rubble replaced with garden soil, every bed irrigated with a drip system of filtered water, no carrots, no tomatoes, no deer-proof



flowers, all dedicated to beauty, like the bed in front of the white bench, where every plant has only white blooms and under a full moon on a warm night sheer intoxication."

"You obviously have a tremendous investment in time and money in this place. How long did it take you to get it just the way you wanted it?"

"Sixteen years, and it's sadly true I achieved perfection at the cost of a decent marriage."

Seth nodded and said, "I'm truly impressed. Thank you for showing me your great garden, but I must be going." On the way back through the house, Seth noticed a microwave. The bottoms of the pans except two looked new, not used at all. The fireplace had no ashes in it. Sixteen plus what? Maybe Madam was as old as he was. It was hard to tell. When he got into his car, he noticed a satellite dish on the roof of the house. He sighed, not the first time or the last time that day. He thought about going to Rathskeller because the Guinness had whetted his appetite for dark beer.

A few blocks from the Rathskellar, he pulled over and retrieved the envelope from the back floorboard, fished out his cell phone, and called Nellie. He was pleased when she answered the telephone. "Yep," she said, "I still live in the same place." Seth found himself telling her the whole story of his visit with Mm. Foster-Smythe.

Nellie said, "Yep, two perfectionists is one too many in any household. In fact, one perfectionist may be one too many. Come on over. My live-in is returning from DC in two days. It's now or later, how much later, I don't know. I scored some pot at the first place we stopped on the tour and never got to the other places. I have a jug of rum and plenty of store-brand colas. I'll put some water on to boil, and we can have hot dogs and mustard rolled up in Wonder bread. I'm getting the munchies just thinking about 'em. I promise to turn off both the television and radio while you're here. Now is better than later."

He said, "Okay," sighed, turned the key in the ignition, and started to Nellie's place.

*Bill Lovelady*

**Dye**

It burns, I say to deaf ears.  
She ignores me and continues  
Stroke by stroke she lathers  
On that embalming fluid for an old identity.

It smells like nothing  
should be allowed to touch  
It. Thick and ropy, a glue  
That refuses to bind  
Rather, it loses. A paste  
Of freedom.

She stops and thin hands  
Grip my shoulders.  
Twenty minutes.  
A helpful whisper that can  
Only make me wonder.  
Twenty minutes?  
Is that all that it can take to save  
A such a fair soul.

Burning, getting worse. I cry,  
Invisibly. Even my own fingers ignore  
It as they flip pages of People.  
Hiding the heavy drops mixing,  
Diluting the epoxy. Last ditch attempt  
recollections to save you from  
Disappearing.

Time passes without allowances.  
Then her hand grabs mine, she leads,  
Like you did. Dragging me back.  
Before the basin she flips me round  
Pushes my head back and exposed  
to the water now cascading from her hands.  
New, dark ringlets cascade down over me.  
Baptism of the character.

Lost in the moment, shocked when it ends.  
Reflections reveal everything, same  
Bright eyes you killed, obscured  
By new dark features.  
Burn, I say.  
What?  
Do you like it?  
-love it.

*Nik Griffith*

**Two Poems for My Sister**

Sis,  
I tried not to think about you today.  
But you say on top of my brain, legs dangling.

(like that summer at the lake when we sat  
on the dock and let fish nip at our toes).

You unbalance my head on my neck and it leans,  
teeters and hovers until it snaps off and rolls clear  
down the hall hitting your door with an empty thud.

The night you returned  
                                I served our favorite meal.  
When silence crushed our words the table  
broadened and deepened until it was the Atlantic,  
cold and empty; and we, like two buoys anchored  
to the sea floor, bobbed alongside each other but  
could never touch. Amid dinner's waterlogged  
remains, our sides crust with barnacles. Whales  
brush by and speak their wailing  
sad notes while causing waves.

*Carolyn Smilie*

**II**

Everything I'm dying to tell you is everything I wish you'd say.  
But I'm not brave enough. And neither are you.  
We stand closely together at night looking at the ink blotted sky,  
remembering how we used to dance under the Mexican tin star lamps.  
Our cloudy breath becomes entwined,  
our scarves become tangled  
and we both wish it were our bodies.  
But once our gloved hands touch you take a step back.  
I already know you're gone.  
In your absence I'll dance with someone new,  
feel the comfortable rhythm of our favorite songs  
with a stranger's hands where yours belong.

*Angel Martinez*

**San Cristobal**

Maybe I'll rest  
on top of you

like a cat  
on a branch

letting the wind  
blow me.

After you came  
down from the tree

top to see what lies  
in the roots, in the soil,

grass dirty leaves and  
dry, brown feet that plod

around us, I stared at the leaves  
and they rustled when I climbed higher.

*Alexis Graman*

# Order is Lost

## No Control For the Average Joe

Please! No diving  
into the depths of Hell  
without proper instruction.

Order is lost if the rules  
cannot be strictly followed.

I do believe, in Hell, cutting  
is seen as a childish game.

So Please,  
once again, obey  
instruction, otherwise, chaos  
will reign, and even the devil  
frowns when nobody listens.

Nathan Brehe

*from* **HUNTER & HUNTED**  
MYTH THE NIGHTCLUB-2 A.M.

From her secluded corner in the nightclub, Rose watched the twilight lunacy play out before her. The music blared fiercely from gigantic speakers placed about the club with overdone bass and strange techno sounds. The spotlights and other various instruments created a fantastic light show to match if not surpass the aural spectacle. Beneath on the dance floor, wild droves danced with partners, glow sticks, drinks, or various combinations of them. Their movements became a chaotic blend of freedom and insanity.

Rose and the rest of the team, uniformed like the rest of the security, were placed throughout the club keeping a watchful eye for any signs of vampires, particularly the Seekers Almos had said were the primary targets. Rose watched the frivolous dementia from above on the second level, which was far tamer compared to the floor below. Only a few spare patrons came here to rest themselves-or to take a drink or hit-either alone or with someone else. Almos and Trevor scanned the cavorting horde from the outside, circling the outskirts of the dance floor along with other guards in an effort to blend themselves in. Treasa danced among them, moving back and forth-most of the time with a partner that changed every time Rose saw her-while keeping a close eye from the inside. Rayner was waiting outside; the noise began to echo louder in his ears than in the others. For the sake of his hearing, Almos suggested a surveillance point from an ad-

jacent building to watch for Seekers if they tried to make a run for it.

At least we won't have to glare at each other all the time.

Rose could tell it was going to be a frail partnership with the Council to say the least. It was still confusing to her why they wanted to collect a team of maverick hunters to be led by their favored son Almos. There was clearly an ulterior motive to this, but trying to solve the mystery without all the pieces would be futile. If anything, it provided motivation for Rose to get the night over with as quickly as possible.

Then, Almos' voice came in through the earpiece Rose was wearing provided by the staff. "Give me a status check: Trevor?"

Trevor's normally suave tone was grated with fatigue. "I see what you see, boss."

"Rose?"

Rose adjusted the mic by her mouth. "Nothing."

"Treaasa?" No answer came; Almos looked through the crowd and sighed. "Treaasa, get your hand out of her dress and talk to us, please?"

Rose snickered when she saw what Almos did. Good to see you're getting something out of this.

"Yeah, yeah, there's nothin' here."

"Anything outside, Ray?"

Rayner's gruff voice made Rose wince and pull the earpiece away. "Nothing, kid." As she tried to put the earpiece back, he spoke again. "Wait a minute."

Almos stopped his pacing below. "What is it?"

"Police are coming in through the front. It's O'Hara."

Almos retraced his path and detoured to the exit. "Everyone keep watch. I'll see what he wants."

Rose straightened from the pole she had been leaning on and began to pace around the upper level. Winding around the breadth of the dance floor, the upper level provided a good view of everything that happened below along with some entertainment of its own in the form of a bar and several pool tables. Rose walked along the edge, her eyes turning from a couple dancing innocently in a swaying embrace on the dance floor to a pair of guys playing pool with a periodic kiss serving as an interlude.

"Rose?"

Rose flinched as her watch was interrupted by a certain smooth talker. "What, Trevor?"

"Hey, take it easy. I just wanted to talk a little." Rose looked down at Trevor to see him still scanning the dancers beneath her, his fingers touching a small duffle bag around his left shoulder. "You seemed lonely up there."

Rose returned to her own vigil. "I'm used to it."

"Easy, big boy." Treaasa's raspy voice was actually a relief to Rose now. "If ya think ya've found another young chick to nuzzle, think again. Ya remember yer Mexican buddy Jorge? Didn't he tell ya

about 'La Cazador Virgenes? "

The Virgin Hunter. Rose remembered that was one of the nicer comments she received when men were at the receiving end of her icy demeanor. She also remembered Jorge as more of a gentleman than his gluttonous counterpart now working with her.

Trevor chuckled a little. "Actually, there was another story I heard about you, Rose; I was curious about it, but if you don't want to tell me, I understand."

Let's just get this over with. "What is it?"

Trevor continued his search below, not looking up to Rose. "There's a story of how when you were a little girl, you were a blonde. You had the longest, brightest golden hair anyone had ever seen. But, after your family was killed by vampires, their blood turned your hair red, and it kept getting redder with every vampire you killed from that fateful night to this."

The story stabbed Rose's ear like an ice pick. She had never heard this one before, and she was confident she had heard them all. What hurt most was the vision it triggered in her past; her mother's blood dripping through the cracks in the floorboards, covering not just her hair but every part of her. She emerged from her hole drenched in blood and tears like a newborn baby baptized, but not in water. Her mother's body lay before her in pieces, torn apart in a sadistic feeding. Believing she was alone, young Rose collapsed, lost in her sobs. Then, a guttural sound came from behind her . . .

"Rose?"

Rose flinched, surprised by Trevor's voice and the concern in it. "I'm here."

"Is there any truth to that?"

Rose looked down at Trevor, who was looking back. She shook her head. "I've always been a redhead."

She turned away and began to make her way back to her pole at the far end. Suddenly, Rose was stopped by an erratic sensation of being watched. Her instincts were at work again, and in a kind of overdrive this time. She had never felt anything as strong as this before. She could feel more than just being watched. She could almost sense who was watching her—a vampire of considerable power as Kreutzer warned.

The elder?

Rose whipped around, seeing the whole of the upper level before her, and finding no one there.

"Very good, Rose."

Rose turned again, swinging her spiked wrist with her only to have it stopped in midair by a hand of flesh with the strength of tempered steel. Rose resisted in vain for a moment, and then she locked eyes with her adversary. He was barely an inch taller than her. His stalwart arm hardened with muscle made her thin arm look like a twig. His body, clad mostly in black save for blue jeans and a white shirt, stood calmly. His pale face, decked with black whiskers and slicked jet hair, looked on Rose with a placating resolution through eyes that



Rose could not help but be fascinated by, the left eye brown and the right blue.

Rose's breath slowed as she heard his voice; he spoke slowly, taking his time with every syllable, with a hushed timbre that enticed her to listen. "Tell me one thing, Rose. Did you come here looking for me, or for him?"

Rose looked down to the dance floor where she found a boy dancing with a group of teenage girls, lost in music and high on something they probably could not get even legally. As he opened his mouth to lick one of their necks, she noted the fangs slightly poking outward.

The Seeker!

She turned back to the elder, finding an empty space where she stood; her arm was still in place where she held it. She ran to the stairs and looked upward, knowing he would not try to leave through the front after his display. Just then, Trevor and Treasa ran up the stairs to her.

Treasa reached her first. "What happened?"

"The elder's here!"

Trevor reached the top, trying to catch his breath. "But . . . so's the Seeker."

Another voice came to Rose through her earpiece. "What's going on!?"

Rose ran to the edge and found Almos his spot on the dance floor. "Al, the Seeker's over there-white shirt, three girls. The elder's here as well. Stick with the Seeker and get to the nest." Not bothering to wait for his response, Rose ran up the stairs with Treasa close behind and Trevor laboring behind.

*Ryan Pfeiffer*

**Eat Me**

Alice learned.  
She sat down on that crappy little toadstool and figured it out.

Not us.  
We are just forever moving down one place,  
Never knowing the U of your unbirthday.  
Late Late, missing—  
I guess—  
just missing.  
Mirrors aren't one sided.  
Just shiny, hidden rabbit hole-covers.  
The queen gave up a pulpit  
and Alice had her secret.  
The only problem was—

Bitch didn't share.

*Nik Griffith*

