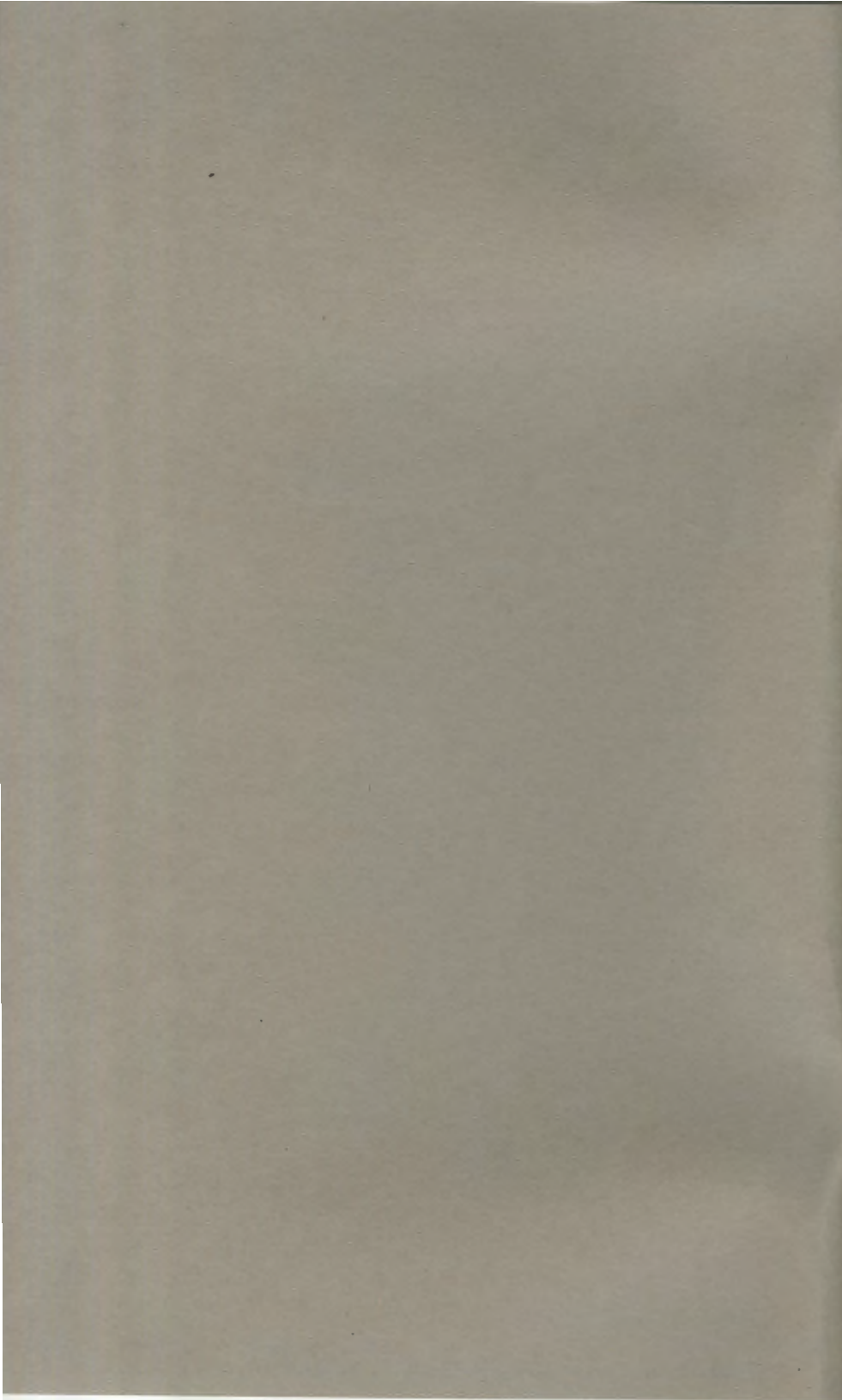


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Shannon Dudec

*Standing alone in a corner,
she smiles at everyone
and no one.
People pass her by,
never taking a glimpse.*

*They drink beer
and get rowdy.
She holds her cup
with both hands,
but never takes a sip.*

*Someone takes a step closer.
She beams.
He walks to another in a corner
while she is left
just smiling at herself.*

Saul

They were the picture-perfect couple, of course, except that they were crazy. Off our rockers, she thought with a dizzying tickle of laughter, peddling away behind his jaunty and junky bike. His head looked like a square chunk of rock fitted exactly onto his shoulders.

The streets let them pass more swiftly because it was night. The streetlights cast wet splotches of light at various intervals, and the blackness would lighten then. She would be in the spotlight for just a moment, then it was gone.

She kept staring hopefully at the empty plastic basket perched on the front of her bike, expecting it to be already filled with goodies, delightful treats that the supermarket would regurgitate upon them. She pictured herself and Saul standing sweetly before the cashier. The cashier would see how special they both were. They were a cute couple after all; anybody could see that. She smiled as Saul looked behind at her following him; she smiled brilliantly with the gleam of the whole street.

'It's o.k., Saul! It's o.k., I'm here!' She waved at him a trifle too hard, too grotesquely for the common eye, and she felt the extremity of the movement, but also that she couldn't control it.

They careened smoothly into the yawning expanse of the empty parking lot of Boyd's. The recent rain made the lot look polished, all decked out to see us, she thought.

'Saul!' she said the word decisively. She screwed up her eyes at him, remembering to look displeased because she felt displeased with him.

'We can't stop here, Saul! Our bikes will get stolen!' She was so upset with him; he never realized the importance of nice things. She wasn't that way. She knew the importance of nice things, and she never gave their furniture away the way he did, leaving the rooms so bare. She screwed up her eyes at him. He opened his large red mouth, like a clown's mouth, gaping at her intelligently, knowingly.

"No, honey, we don't have to leave them here." He said each word so slowly, assuredly, that they took on great and lasting significance in the silent lot, like words going down in historic texts. She didn't pay any attention, though.

'Saul, listen. Listen, Saul. I thought to myself as we came in here that the parking lot looks all decked out to see us! Isn't that funny? I think that's so funny!!' She laughed, too loudly for the common ear, jerkily, as a car jerks that isn't in gear.

He smiled vaguely, indulgently. They wheeled their bikes up to the front of the store and the wheels spun around crazily, clicking like hens, drops of rain

sparkling off the rusty spokes.

The whole store is lit up inside like a glaring scene from one of those. . . She stopped, trying to remember what she wanted to say, to think. "From one of those science fiction movies!" she screamed, enthusiastic because she remembered. "It's so empty and there's no one left there anymore because the whole planet has been wiped out, and there's only the hero alone on the planet!" She cast her dark eyes on Saul radiating her discovery at him. He would understand what she meant. She could tell Saul anything.

"Let's go down all the aisles, Honey." He spoke at her enchanted eyes, but her face fell at his words.

"No, Saul, no. I don't think we should. Let's just get what we need. See? I have the list. Stick with the list, Saul."

He looked at her, troubled, but he didn't speak. He looked mournfully at her, and his own dark eyes, darker than tar pits, were unusually lit up by the reflecting fluorescent light of the store. They were shining behind a dark screen.

They moved stiffly inside and began going towards the aisle containing candies, cookies, sweets. "Oh look at the caramels! I used to eat caramels all the time," she cried whimsically. "Oh, it's so much fun, Saul! Isn't it so much fun?" She looked at him with indulgence. He replied with a gurgle in his throat, almost a purr of agreement.

They moved slowly down the aisle, two linked together before the moving wheels of the shopping cart, staring at the foodstuffs.

The parking lot outside lay empty and black around the well-lit store in which they moved down aisle after empty aisle, choosing what they wanted, staring and touching. The little heap of things in the cart began to burgeon colorfully as they wore along.

"Saul, we can't get that; we've exceeded our limit, Saul."

He stared hard at her, disbelieving, suspicious.

"But Honey, you said we were shopping today, and I'm just trying to shop with you."

"Well, we are shopping. We are shopping. Come on."

Their footsteps were soundless in the empty store. Their presence there was unknown the next day as hordes of daily patrons scrambled in and out of the store under the glare of a hot summer sun. But then, those two preferred to shop at night when the streets would let them pass.

Allison M. Hastings

That night at the Newburgh station,

you left me

waiting for a bus that was late.

Your white pickup took us there in thirty easy minutes..

you left me

frozen in thick July heat.

Silent, I read the twisted story in your eyes

and stood

Shocked into nausea

among hungry strangers.

Two hours before, the water in your bed

slashed in time to your lust

and my panic.

Your eyes filled with something

not about me

as you rolled away and I studied the ceiling

for telltale cracks.

Later, you felt my tears but did not see them

as together we drove on

for the last time,

your knuckles hard and white against the wheel.

You left me, and sunshine burned

happy and free

into your hair.



Janice E. Brill

I let my fingers trail through
the carpet
as I lie on my bed
contemplating the dots on the ceiling
and I wonder why it is that
the mind distorts
more than a fun house mirror
and if I shattered the glass
would reality reconvene
or would I lie in splinters
on the ground
waiting to draw blood
from an unsuspecting muse?

M. Rainer

Spring

*The earth's awakening lushness
disturbs my slumber*

*I look out my window
desiring to*

enter the forest

and wildness

dance in

enchanted groves

and swim in

deepest pools of

mercurial light.

*my bedside clock
flashes red
reminding me of
the day*

*I pull the covers
over my head
and return to
restless dozing*

with the scent

of wildflowers

in my hair

Mike Melnotte

The Doctor's Office

Jake hated it.

It wasn't so much the waiting as the knowledge of what lay ahead that bothered him. He had been a patient of Dr. Pilger's since high school, and once again he found himself waiting in the brightly lit office for his turn to be examined. Jake didn't even bother trying to read a magazine to pass the time. With a glance at the coffee table, he could see that they were the same issues of Popular Mechanics from his last visit, some eight months ago. What had he been in for then. . . a sprained wrist? Well, it was no surprise anyway. The magazines never changed. For as long as he had been a patient, those magazines had been there. The room even smelled the same.

'Mr. Metzelaars?'

Jake looked up to see the nurse towering over him. His medical file was clasped against her oversized chest, and he wondered at that moment how she ever escaped the NFL draft. With her size she was a born offensive lineman, or better yet, an offensive line.

She too was a fixture in the office, along with the plastic geraniums and the faded sign requesting notice if one was a Blue Cross or Blue Shield member. She was to Dr. Pilger what Alfred the butler was to Batman; old and faithful, except her moustache was darker.

"The Dr. will see you now," she said, pointing the way with Jake's file. Standing there in the doorway, she did a good job of blocking out most of the light behind her.

Jake followed her to the examining room where he took a seat on the table. The long sheet of white cover paper crinkled under his weight. As always, he felt he was being housebroken, and the uneasy feeling made his heart beat a little faster. 'I just need my ears flushed out,' he said as the nurse began to scribble in his file.

'I need it done every year or so.'

Without even a glance, the nurse left and shut the door. Jake could hear his file placed in the slot outside the door and the footsteps of her tiny size twelve feet padding along the carpet.

Jake was left in silence to wait for Dr. Pilger's arrival. He amused himself by glancing around the room at the various charts and diagrams.

I don't think people truly appreciate the true beauty of the human skeletal system, Jake thought as he counted vertebrae on a picture of the spine. He stopped counting at nine for fear that he was having too good a time.

His eyes wandered over the cotton swabs and tongue depressors that lay in jars along the counter. What caught his attention was the tube of K-Y Lubricating Jelly next to the sink. He didn't even want to think about the doctor using that to poke around you-know-where. He made a mental note to eat more fiber.

Despite the silence from the outside corridor, Jake's eyes were drawn to the door. As if by will, the doorknob began to turn slowly.

"Here we go," Jake thought.

The door swung open several inches and stopped. Jake could see the skin of a wrinkled hand and the sleeve of the doctor's starched, white coat. Before he could question what the hold up was, he realized the answer. He could hear Dr. Pilger trying to catch his breath. After all, it was a long walk down the hallway.

The door moved silently on its hinges and in shuffled Dr. Jacob Pilger, still a practicing family physician at age 71. Most of his patients had left him years ago for the obvious signs that the doctor was losing his mental acuity. (One episode of coming to work without pants lost him five patients in one day alone.) Still, those who remained did so out of a sense of duty for the man. He was jovial, alert most of the time, and it seemed he gave competent medical advice. (Although there was a pretty high rate of second opinions among those patients with ailments more serious than the flu.) Perhaps the doctor's key trait was, for lack of better words, that he was just a nice man. One couldn't help but like him no matter how many times he forgot your name. It was difficult for many to leave someone like him.

"Hello Timmy, how have you been?"

"Doctor, I'm Jake Metzalaars...remember me?"

"Oh that's nice to hear." The doctor said with a genuine smile.

"What do we have here today?" Opening the file, the Doctor squinted, giving his face new, wrinkled dimensions. Despite the wear of age upon his face, Jake asked himself, "How does he keep his head so smooth and shiny?" Dr. Pilger's hair had never been a part of Jake's memory. A naughty urge came over him to pat him on the head and Jake smiled.

"Gary, can you tell me what this says? You know I can't read my own writing."

Jake thought of informing the doctor that his glasses were resting solidly upon his head but decided against it. However, he was concerned that the sun's rays would set the doctor's head on fire if he stepped outside. Judging by the thickness, they looked to be pentafovals.

"Here, let me take a look, Doc."

Jake gazed at the pages and saw nothing that resembled the English language. The case of physicians' handwriting being chicken scratch was never proven better.

'Why, this says I need my ears cleaned out,' Jake said, handing back the file.

The doctor looked at the file again and scratched his head, finding his glasses. He smiled and put them on.

'No, no, no...this says nothing of the sort. You need a complete physical. It says so right here.'

'Doctor,' Jake responded, 'You've got it wrong, I'm.'

'Son, it says so right here and the file never lies. My anatomy teacher taught me that back in, what was it, '47? Or was it '48?'

'Dr. Pilger, really it.'

'Don't try and change the subject son, you haven't had a check-up in five years, now get your clothes off and I'll be back in a second.'

He left Jake alone in the room to undress. He sighed and shook his head. Man, he was really getting old. . .and now stubborn too. True he hadn't had a physical in a long time, but all he wanted was his ears cleaned out. He sat there for a while and let his anger fade away. Some said he was too easy going, and maybe he was. He thought about it some more and said to himself, 'What's the big deal? I need to get a physical sooner or later, why not now? Besides, it will only take a second to get my ears cleaned out afterwards. Two birds with one stone.' Two birds, he thought and started to undress.

When his clothes were folded neatly over the chair, Jake sat up on the table again. Sitting there in his jockeys, goosebumps on his arms, he somehow knew when the doctor came back another patient would see him when the door opened. It always happened and always with women. It seems Jake was as shy as he was easygoing.

Where was that guy, Jake thought impatiently. Almost 10 minutes had passed now. Maybe he was seeing another patient? But he was the last appointment of the day. He gave him another five minutes. Still no doctor. The hallway outside remained silent except for the hum of the fluorescent lighting.

After another five minutes, Jake decided he had had enough. He put his clothes back on and grumbled softly to himself. With a scowl, he left the examining room and walked down the corridor. Turning the corner to the receptionist area, he saw the doctor seated against the wall in his nurse's chair. His chin rested squarely upon his chest.

He's dead. . .was the first thing that passed through Jake's mind, but even he knew corpses don't snore. Dr. Pilger was sound asleep.

Jake surprised himself with his anger by yelling loudly, 'DR. PILGER!' The doctor's head snapped up and turned to look at Jake. With a confused look he said, 'Yes?'

'Doctor. . .my physical! I've waited.'

'Oh yes, well if you need a physical you'll have to make an appointment with Clara. She's gone home for today. I'll see you then, Marty.'

He reached behind him and grabbed a lollipop which he placed in Jake's hand, and shuffled on down the hall.

Jake stood there, alone in the office, with a look of bewilderment on his face. He simply couldn't believe it. Shaking his head, he put on his jacket and left.

In the car on the way home, Jake drove with the radio off. He listened to the rhythm of the wipers and breathed deeply. A smile appeared on his face, but it was a sad one. I hear Dr. Johnson is pretty good, he thought, and drove on through the rain.

Rosanne Raneri

Red Maples

bark, dark wood,
soft, full of water
sienna and burnt umber in vertical, ragged shapes
stretching their seasoned skin up into
hands full of leaves,
hands full of sun.
light in each vein,
saved by each cell,
thrusted before death into
blinding colors, spilling over hills
into valleys. the sky
swells with this last brilliant sigh-
arch of pure oranges and reds-
paper fire,
only to let go that final breath,
release everything to the ground.



Jennifer Hershberger

Often he sat in a wooden chair
in front of a canvas, mute and bare.
Through an open window he sent his gaze
searching for words in the morning haze.
Though strained with their search, his eyes seemed to dance
hoping to discover what is found only by chance.
An object of love, or hate, or beauty they did seek,
to set loose an emotion and move him to speak,
As the young day grew older that haze turned to gold
and it entered the window, (for noon's light is so bold).
It ran through his red hair like an open flame
with a brilliance that could put an eve's sunset to shame.
Homely, some said, was his pensive expression
but those freckles indeed gave his face sheer perfection.
He clasped his hands, still stained with paint,
a green smear on his knuckle just now growing faint.
Suddenly something in his poor heart stirred
as he found what he needed, a single word.
He had something to say, but did not make a sound,
instead picked up his paints and began mixing them round.
He grabbed his big brush, its bristles so thick
and shouted with purple to make his point stick,
Then, becoming calm, he spoke in blue
smooth, clean strokes of which there were too few.
For he soon hissed with orange, his passion renewed
and poked at the canvas, for such was his mood.
A proud gold took its place, and so he began to sing
his voice growing sweeter with each tawny ring.
His speech went on for many a day
until he grew silent, his paints put away.
How desperately had he hoped that someone would hear,
for living alone may have been his greatest fear.
This fear was incessant, for he was thought of as mad
trapped with his thoughts, lonely and sad.
So many could not hear, and still don't understand,
that he spoke through starry nights and vast fields of land.

Chocolate is a substance derived from the cocoa bean; sugar is added, and cream or milk is also blended in for smoothness. Chocolate contains, among other things, caffeine, an addictive substance also found in coffee, tea, and most colas. Also in chocolate is phenylethylalanine, a chemical that accumulates in the pleasure centers of the brain, a phenomenon that occurs also during sexual arousal.

I just know that it tastes good.

My first passion for chocolate manifested itself with chocolate milk. The liquid form of such a heavenly substance was not dictated by choice, but necessity; I did not yet have teeth when my lifelong affair with chocolate began. I was just a little blue-eyed babe in arms when I was introduced to what would become my obsession.

Now that I have replaced tender pink gums with sharp, hard incisors and molars, I am at liberty to enjoy chocolate in all its different forms. Growing teeth was not the only physical change that happened to me; my blue eyes turned dark brown, not very different from the color of rich, dark, chocolate.

How do I love thee, chocolate? Let me count the ways. . .

I love chocolate ice cream. On a warm summer evening, nothing comes close to the joy of walking or riding my bicycle to an ice cream stand for a chocolate cone. It makes no difference whether the ice cream is hard or soft. A chocolate milkshake would be fine, too. To light up those dark brown eyes of mine requires only three words: "hot fudge sundae." The rich, warm chocolate sauce slides off the cool smooth ice cream, taking with it the sweet dollop of whipped cream, sprinkled with chopped nuts, and as a final adornment, a dulcet red bulb of a cherry. What bliss!

Chocolate candy bars are sublime, too. The varieties push even my imagination to its outer limits. The delicious substance paired with almonds or coconut or peanut butter or toffee or caramel or peanuts or nougat or wafers or some combination of these sweet tasties makes for many moments of indecision in front of the vending machine. Which to choose?

The realm of chocolate pastries provides another delicious dilemma. Chocolate chip cookies, warm from the oven, are a tasty memory from the days of my first set of teeth. Oreos dunked in milk are a similar trigger for flashbacks. Savory brownies, so moist and warm they stick together (so I have to take two), rival the appeal of the cookies. Yet I cannot forget about the plain but elegant chocolate cake, a birthday standby. I prefer my chocolate cake dressed in cherries and rich chocolate icing dripping off the top of the cocoa plateau.

Better than even pastries, though, are truffles. They may be small, but they are so rich that the size is insignificant. A single truffle sends me into throes of ecstasy that are embarrassing; I cannot eat a truffle in public. Life truly began for me the day I first was given a truffle.

The only thing wrong with my affair with chocolate is that it is never healthy. The chocolate I am so taken by is quickly consumed by my passionate appetite, leaving me craving more. I am a jealous lover; I will share my adored sweetie with no one. The whole affair cannot possibly be good for my heart. Ah, my dulcet chocolate, my love for you shall prove, in the end, to be bittersweet!

Sean Kelly

One cold December night
My body pressed hard against the sheets
And dreams of summer days
And playgrounds and friends
Of long ago.
I could see the stars
(Through the cracks in the blinds)
And hear the window
Fighting off each wave of attack
That the violent gusts could muster.
Never had I felt so safe and warm
As I did on this night
And never had I felt like jamming
The rust-dulled edge of my father's fishing knife
Two feet into my half-inch wrist
So much as I did then
on that cold December evening.

Rosanne Rånieri

Hidden Inside

*hunched inside the half tractor tire
planted in dirt
between the crowded swingset and the
basketball court,
my shallow breaths suck in the breeze
full of warm rubber, june grass, and goldenrod.*

*I've been hidden for a long time,
like a snail with a shell
too big to carry.
minutes pass, seem like hours
they settle in my curved back and
sweat beads collect dust that floats in
on the sun.*

*I hear screams chased away by boys
and laughter, circling
like a disturbed flock of morning birds.
overhead,*

*quick steps in odd rhythms
jump from one tire to the next.*

I wait to be found.

*a sharp whistle stops all motion
for an instant.*

heads turn, drop with disappointment.

I come out squinting.

no one noticed I was gone.

Michael Cocuzzi

I was at a meltdown
Flocks of airplanes reigned overhead
Stones heard tapping the creek's floor
I thought her evil without a word said

Familiar faces came to me
Breathing
 sighs of fright
Telling me to 'get a grip'
Of all I was feeling that night

The Maples performed a ritual dance
Stretching,
 grabbing all that stared
Forcing me to explore another world
Rigidly, I sat wonderfully scared

I turned to face the crowd of lights,
Loud,
 as a band of uncoiled doors
Less deafening than the clapping glass
Masked by colliding brick stores

The melting has stopped for now
Stars no longer raining down on me
Yet the experience remains clear
Reminding me how it feels to be free

Janice E. Brill

*if i listen carefully
i can hear the sound of the ocean
i can smell the briny air
and feel the warmth of the sun
mist catches on my eyelashes
and wet sand oozes up between my toes*

*shivering
i open my eyes
and discover i've lost the ability to see colors
all is muted*

shades of grey edged with barbed wire

*i catch a glimpse of myself
in my dried up mud puddle of an ocean
indifferently i note the shorn head
hallow cheekbones
and tattoo punctures on my forearm*

*and i wonder whatever became of the children
with the sad eyes
arms raised over-head
'pulled from the bunkers by force'
or so they say
such a strange game of simon says*

*terror flashed across their faces
as they huddled in the corner
willing themselves invisible
such a strange game of hide and go-seek
when the opponent seeks with machine guns
and burns down your hiding place*

if i listen carefully
i can hear them screaming
i can smell the fetid air
and feel the chill of the wind
icicles form on my eyelashes
and mud oozes up between my toes...

and i wish for the salt of the ocean
so i could walk along the horizon
and fade away into nothingness...

Michael C. Gray

rocking back and forth
gap-toothed man smiling
singing

'come here come here
what's that you say
step closer step closer
whisper in my ear.

But I got too close and
he bit my head off.

Eric Noel Perry

Rain and its tympanic beauty,
the furious choir of the wind,
a violin concerto from the fiddle of a cricket,
the explosive brass of thunder;
Nature unleashed in its orchestral mastery,
at the conductor's podium stands Jehova.

Paul Trapani

Nights Comes

*The night comes in the city;
It is time to put aside the toils of the day
And revel in its glory;
But not when you don't have a home,
Not when the night means
Pulling your blanket tightly around you
And shivering from the cold.*

*The bright lights outshine the stars,
But you don't notice the stars,
Lying in the alley,
Watching for rats and cockroaches.*

*The city air is filled with smells,
The smells of all-night Chinese food and pizza,
But you don't notice those smells
Because the stench of the garbage nearby hides it.*

*And there is danger in the night,
You could have your money stolen;
But not when you don't have any money to steal,
Not when they'll beat you because you don't.*

Laura walked out to the fields. Even as the sun set she could make out the old, dried up nest where she had watched the baby eagles as a child. It sat long abandoned in the great growing tree, the light breeze threatening to blow it away for good. To the south was nothing but acres of green wheat, stretching beyond imagination in a sort of sick suggestion of some insatiable hunger lurking within the shadows. The darkness began to settle. The final calls of departing sparrows rang against the empty basin of the night. Laura hugged her bare arms and hurried toward the stream.

He sat like a demon by the water, his black reflection demented by the silent motion of the small stream. The image advanced and withdrew, advanced and withdrew; it gave no real indication of its once true shape, offered no boundaries. Laura touched his arm. He took her silently into the water, held her gently as her pathetic body struggled helplessly under the ceaseless flow of the stream.

Why Why Did You Come?

hideous screams

Why Why. Go. Go Away.

motion

no wait mama mama?

silent whispers. no one hears.

I'm sorry, Mrs. Robbins. There's really nothing we can do at this point. The level at which her brain is currently functioning is minimal. You have to understand that it would be completely unrealistic to expect her to be able to recognize you at this point, let alone to interact in a normal manner.

No!

I'm sorry, Mrs. Robbins. There's really nothing we can do at this point.

I'll be back next Tuesday, Doctor.

Of course that's best. There's really nothing we can do at this point.

Blue bubbles flowing in and out and in and out and in and out and blue blue bubbles flowing in and out and in and out and on the counter small orange blocks of crumbling, crumbling small orange and wow how the green strands of wind blow against the window and smile, smile, smile at me. Friends. My Friends. Smiling at me because I'm free free free.

She's really been remarkably cooperative this morning, Mrs. Robbins. Of course she can do nothing on her own, but there's been no destructive behavior at all. We feel that the new drugs are just what she needs.

May I see her now?

Big black MONSTER!

MONSTERS!

Out of the shadows, like a demon in the water like all the like the like don't you see

MONSTERS!

go go go go go away away away

I'm sorry, Mrs. Robbins. We had no reason to expect this at all.

Doctor, my daughter, my only daughter, just knocked me down. She pulled out my hair, Doctor. She clawed my face. You claim to understand her disorder. It's obvious you don't. Just tell me, straight out, right now, is there anything at all you can do to help her or is this just some stupid game?

All we can do right now, Mrs. Robbins, painful though it is to hear, is to wait. Her signs are hard if not impossible to read. She's not getting better, but then she's not getting worse. Our drugs do stabilize her. And our therapists do everything in their power to help her. Anything further is a matter for time to decide. Go home, live your life, and come back next Tuesday.

Round and round in the golden light in the air in the air in the light, no darkness, not now, no night no shadows no black mirrors into forever just light light golden light and then rest. Listen! Birds. Trees, small, little, growing into the light no death not now not for us, we trees and birds and rays of light.

WHO!

"Whoa! Take it easy, now. I'm just fixing up some of these bushes for the institution. Just gardening. Making things pretty. Or trying." Smile, long, nice smile, and a little little tufty laugh.

Making things pretty?— silent whisper, no one will hear. . .

"Yup, that's me, just puttering around the garden like some sort of grandpa. But it's nice, steady work. Sets the wife at ease."

Family?— it's a question in the eyes only, just the eyes

"I've got a wife and four little kids at home. Three boys, one girl. Girl's the oldest, though. And tough. Not one of them could ruffle her. Makes the wild life sort of impossible. Unnecessary, too. Say, you're pretty quiet. Mike's like that. The littlest, so I guess he's sort of overpowered sometimes. Seems to me he finds other ways to say what he wants. Damn special kid."

isn't he afraid?

"Sometimes I go with just one of the kids to the park or the movies, when we've got the money. Seems like we see a hell of a lot more bushes than films though." The smile, tuffy laugh. "One time I took Mike all the way up to the big state park. I was doing something, setting up the tent maybe, when all of a sudden I feel like Mike is calling to me! He didn't say anything, mind you, I just sort of felt it. Well I went over to him, trying to figure it out, when this bear comes sidling through camp. We moved far away as possible, and he didn't do no harm, but just the same I'm glad he didn't come up behind me unannounced. Mike was scared by the bear, but we painted pictures in the earth, pictures of his fear, kind of, and then we just let the earth take them deep inside, because what did we want with fear like that?"

i don't i don't know i know i don't know. . . pictures?

"Yeah, well, I can tell I've talked your ear off. Me, I come every Sunday. Maybe I'll see you again. I'd like that, you know." Long, sweet smile. Like a song.

This is not the Museum of Modern Art, Mrs. Robbins, and we can simply not allow your daughter to vandalize the walls at her whim.

It's the first times she's expressed anything.

We give her paper, Mrs. Robbins. She's not in jail. We give her paints and crayons, and the only place she ever uses them is on the walls. Much as the damage means an expense for us, the potential damage it can do your daughter is even more important. Our greatest hope is for her once again to be a normal, functioning, tax-paying member of society. And normal, functioning, tax-paying members of society do not go around painting on the walls.

So find out why.

We'll deal with this, Mrs. Robbins. Why don't you go home? We'll see you next Tuesday.

over the mountains over the clouds over the STREAMS and the wind and the day and the night and the everything everywhere, the long slow smile runs gold and purple and good good green

"Well hello again. I see you like this spot."

the smile

"It's good to see you. I told the family about you. Well, you know me. Give me a chance and I'll tell you my life story."

yes

"Mike said if I saw you again to tell you the pictures work best with a strong stick so you can stick it deep into the ground; really let it all sink into the picture. He wanted to come and tell you himself, but I told him you were sort of shy. I wasn't sure. . ."

Mike? little boy smiles with shiny blue hair to touch and to laugh at to take the boy running, fast, South, before the hunger hits, before the fear digs in too deep even for pictures, before the mirrors jump up all around and scream no good! no good! and call you names and throw the black of the undefined reflection with the force and tearing tearing of an antimatter nuclear bomb onto over all all around

'Hey, hey, what's the matter? What's that you're thinking there? Come here, come here.' And no smile this time, frown, furrowed frown of worry worry sweet and simple.

forgot forgot i forgot i did i swear it i forgot everything's okay all okay with you here now i know i know it's gone now i didn't mean Mike i know Mike has pictures no bombs for him no fear no running running escape to the stream to the river to the back of the mirrors where they can't hurt you any more and it hurts because it takes out the flip side of fear the love hope courage sewn with the threads of the spirit to the lost, lost flip side gone with the angry red pellet of the fear under the water washed far away yes yes yes yes it was yes yes

'Hey, I'm going to get you inside. I know, I know, things get scary sometimes. It's okay in the end though, you know. Here. We'll just take you to see the doctor and he'll help you. And you remember the pictures and remember Sunday. If you want to see me you can find me on Sunday. Always.'

I want to know what he was doing with my daughter! How she ended up in his arms! She can't protect herself, you know, Doctor, and if any stranger can just walk in and he isn't even noticed, then maybe she shouldn't be allowed in the yard. What the hell does she care anyway? What the hell does she care?

no smiles no earth no sun light birds happy stories tufty laughs
dark dark dark dark dark dark dark
NO NO NO NO NO NO NO NO

No harm was done, she was located within the hour, and no damage appears to have been done.

That's fine, Doctor, but why did she run away? What do you do to her here that makes her run away?

I don't believe it can be considered running away in as far as she only 'ran' to the yard.

Well how do you know that next time she won't go farther?

There won't be a next time, Mrs. Robbins. She will be under strict supervision. I do recommend, however, in light of the circumstance, that her daily trips in and around the yard be reinstated. It may sound like nonsense to you, but I have documented tests that clearly illustrate-

Yes, yes. Fine.

where where where where Ah.

'Well I've missed you, friend.'

Friend. Ah.

'Did you find a new pal to keep you busy on Sundays, or something? Someone who didn't talk so much and look so funny?'

No, no. Only you on the sun days.

'Well, I'm glad you came today. Mike's been asking about you, too. He was scared for you. Me, I just figured you had something better to do.' Tufty.

Oh yes! How is Mike? I haven't been drawing. . .

'I'm just about finished here. Didn't see you till late today. I'm afraid I'll be late for dinner if I hang around much longer. Oh! But wait! Wait here, and I'll be right back.'

Blows away, trails of safe safe smile. Moments of peace.

'There! I've been lugging this here stick around for weeks, since I haven't seen you. It's from Mike. Said it was a good one.'

Ah, yes. Thank you. Thank Mike. My stick. At last, at last. Feels good in the hands. A stick that can define, with deep, strong lines. That can create.

'Thank you.'

'Found your voice, have you? Well, you're welcome. Mighty welcome. I'll tell Mike you liked it. And maybe he'll come next week, now that you're back.'

Yes, good. You and Mike. On the Sun days.

Wishweed

A disillusioned lover, trillionth of my kind,
feeling like a fallow seed, left in the sun to dry.
I turned my sheets around,

inside-out

upside down

(kind of like my mind)

and wished I could go back in time
to have another try.

Sleeping on my stomach (I never slept that way)
I wished for an unconsciousness to take it all away.
technicolor taken shaken shattered

splattered

and thrown about the bed

splashed across my mind
reduced a man in pain to a boy in chains.
Increasingly fetal

curling up

my eyes were little buds blooming in reverse
sheets so big they buried me

and bones dissipating like a biscuit drowned in milk,
backwards through that path I took

and rolling down my twisted sheets
in a pool of lashing tails

blinding me

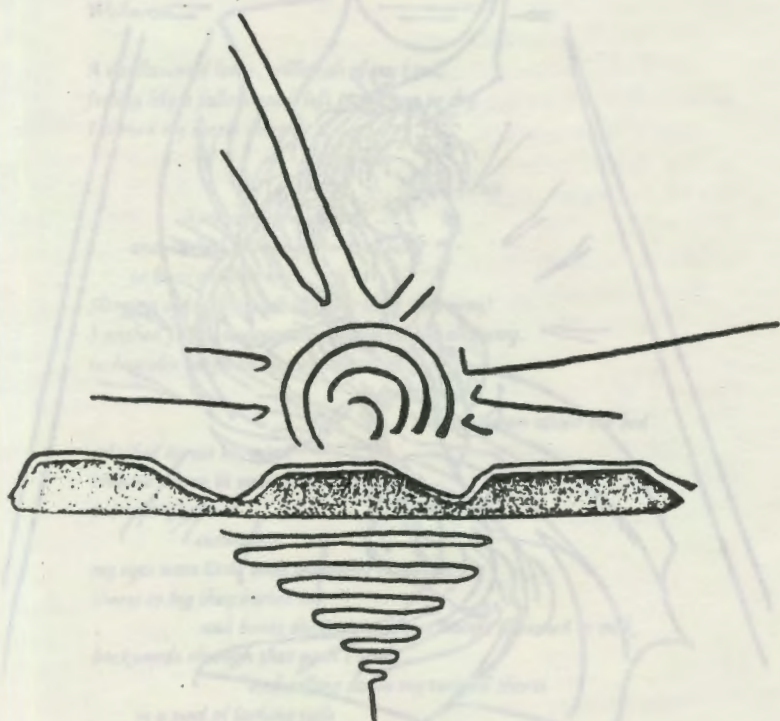
whipping

crippling

broken and dead

I guess I don't have to go to school tomorrow.
Hell, I'm not even born yet.





Mara Goodman

Dream

It was a cold
gray day,
and the wind
stripped the air
of its softness.
The icy water
smashed
against the barren shore
with terrifying insolence.
The deafening silence
echoed
through the wasteland
and the only voice
was that of stillness.

The sun began to set,
and the coldness
became last
in the gauzy
film of twilight.
The grayness silvered
and what was metallic
became opalescent.
The scorched earth cooled
under the soothing moonlight
as the roar of waves
became a pacifying lullaby.
The stars sprinkled
their dreamy dust
onto the heavens.

*Here my story begins,
in a dream,
a euphoria of senses,
a feast for the
raw soul.*

*It was night,
that fantastically dangerous
stage of existence
when reality and illusion
mesh
in an intricate tapestry
of silk and steel.*

*I stand,
on a cliff,
between sky and earth.
The wispy arms of darkness
stroke my body
and caress my consciousness,
while taunting me
with the knowledge
of the night.
Here I stand
motionless,
paralyzed with options,
but the night is young.*

*I dive
into an abysmal lagoon,
a beam of light
into a pool
of black,
where life,
an electricity
surges
through my body
The blackness is fluorescent,
and I am illuminated.*

I begin to float,
my body buoyant,
supported
by the water's complete strength.
Accepting my weight
without yielding
to my pressure.
It won't let me sink,
won't let me fly.
I have no wings,
and even the night's magic
knows the truth.

I emerge
from the water,
to resume my stand
on the cliff.
The sun begins to rise
and the film is uncovered
from the misty world.
I shield my eyes
from the expected horror
and wait
for a dismal end,
that does not come.
Instead the earth awakens
with a refreshed yawn,
and coats the air
with a shiny glaze.
I watch
the skies brighten
and then I hear
the miraculous sound,

of laughter.

C.E. Reynolds

A stranger led me down a path
that he often took
and saw it in a different light despite
the darkness that surrounded us
our toes gripping the slick stones
down to the river
filling up the gaping silence that
stood between our shivering bodies
I dipped my hand in the frigid water
at his command
and he in turn
let the drops roll off his palm which rested
on my cheek
we emerged in a forest
and he told me to lean upon a tall
pine so that it might dance among the stars
but they wouldn't dance for me
I guess he knew them better
maybe they were jealous that he had
brought another lover
into their bedroom
knowing all the time that he would return
their love being eternal

Corinne McKay

Full Term

Inside me-

*Those ten months and two weeks
That I'll never let you forget.*

*You didn't like to rush even then,
And after so much time, you were still
So tiny.
I'd roll you into my arms like a warm loaf,
And kiss you to sleep.*

*So now you tell me that someone else
Is doing what I did.
That his shoulder is the beginning
And the end of your sleep.*

*Now I remember the feeling I had
(It wasn't comfort)
When your father wiped my tears
From just-born you, and said,
'Don't worry, she will grow'*

Mike Toner

King of Bees

*Buzz down on suburbanite picnickers.
Yellow black battle fatigues
force mothers with large hair to the Astrovan.
You are free
to plunder
potato salad.*

Paul Trapani

The Essence of Life (as told by Pac-Man)

*Pac am I!
Dot by Dot, my Life.
a sudden burst of Power;
gone are the Ghosts that haunt me.
with a vengeance they seek to destroy me
and Greed proves my demise.
to Run and be Chased
to Eat and Score
to get the Power
that is my Goal; my Life*

