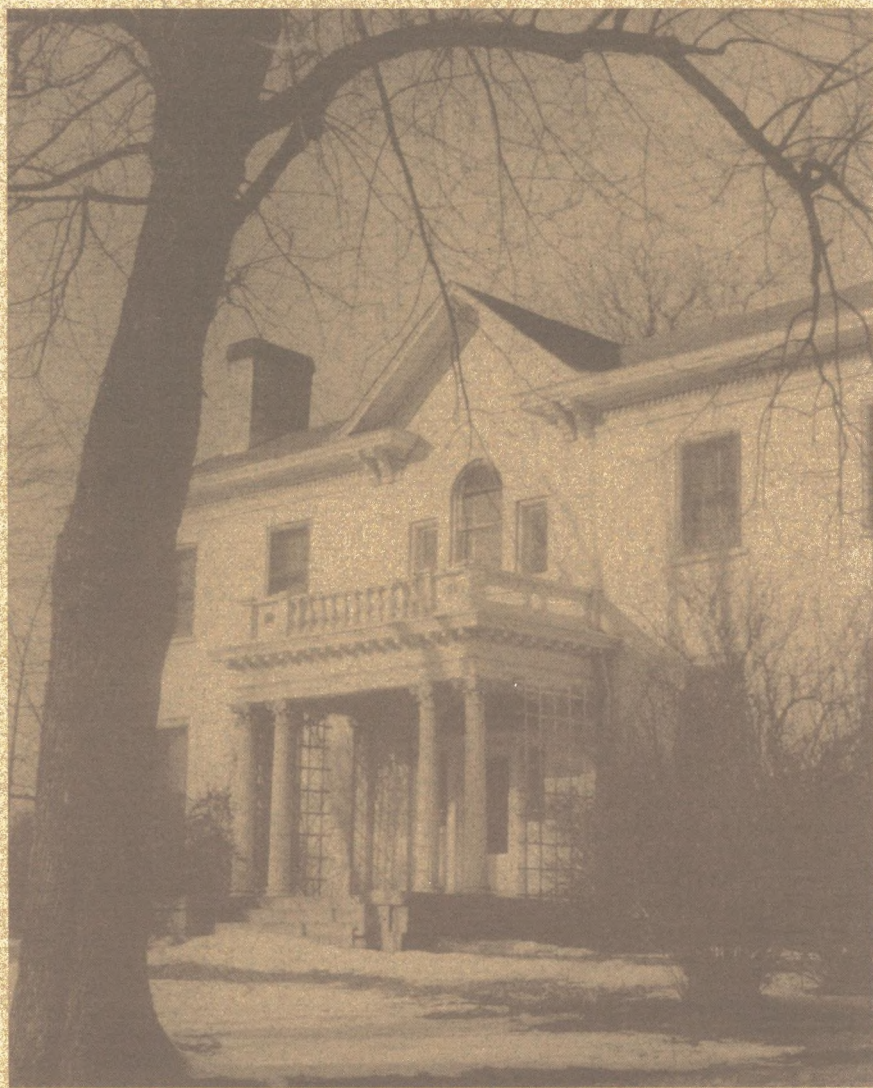


Harbinger 2000



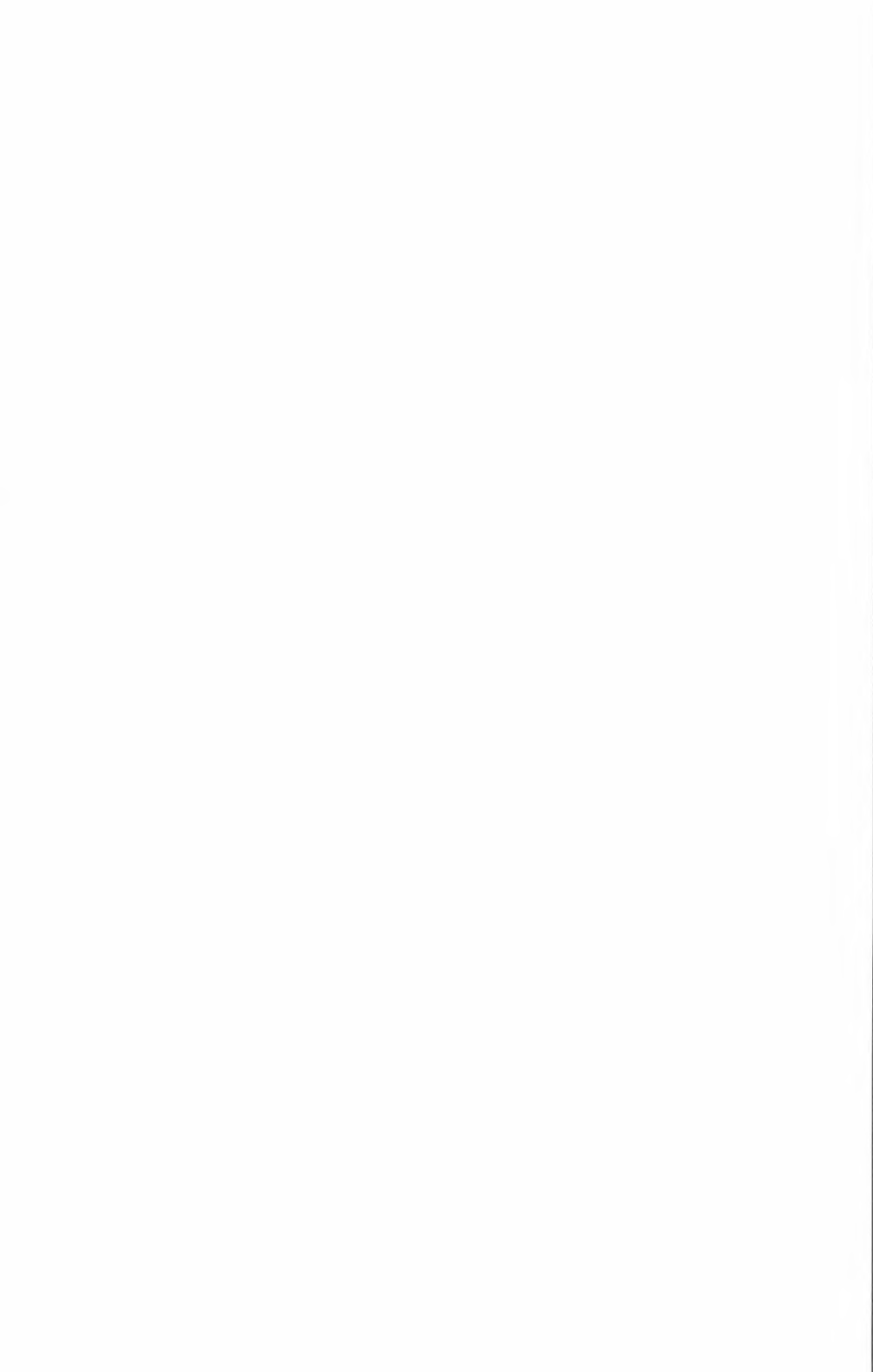
Stephens College

Harbinger 2000

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The Columns
Alan Havig

The Fallen Columns
Alan Havig





2001 E. Broadway
Alan Havig

Behind the Scene
Alan Havig





Gordon Manor
*Courtesy of
Stephens College Archives*

GORDON MANOR

1820s-1999

by Alan Havig

The old house that overlooked Stephens Lake and the college's golf course, which Stephens people called Gordon Manor, served as a family home following its construction in the late 1820s. David Gordon was a wealthy farmer, land speculator, and slave-owner who moved his family from Kentucky to frontier Missouri shortly after the latter became a state in 1821. Drawing on southern visions of what a rural home should look like, Gordon, his sons, and skilled slave laborers constructed the four front rooms of the structure and a detached rear kitchen. Gordon heirs and Stephens College added rooms, which joined these original segments. One of the Gordons' sons and two grandchildren owned the house until James Madison Wood, the college's president, purchased it in the summer of 1926.

Gordon Manor served Stephens College in many ways: as the home of an administrator, a "country club" or club house for student athletics, ranging from field hockey and archery to golf, a residence hall for a small group of students who considered themselves fortunate to live in a park-like setting removed from the main campus, and as a retreat center for student organizations. It served many late 20th century Columbians, who could view it from busy highways below the hill on which it stood, as a dignified reminder of the entire community's heritage. In 1983, Gordon Manor gained a place on the National Register for Historic Places. The structure's significance to college and community disappeared on November 9, 1998, when a fire destroyed the building beyond hope of restoration. A wrecking crew removed the remains during the summer of 1999. Pictures of the structure remind us of what we have lost, some of which appear in this volume.

*Harbinger 2000 is dedicated to the
memory of Gordon Manor.*

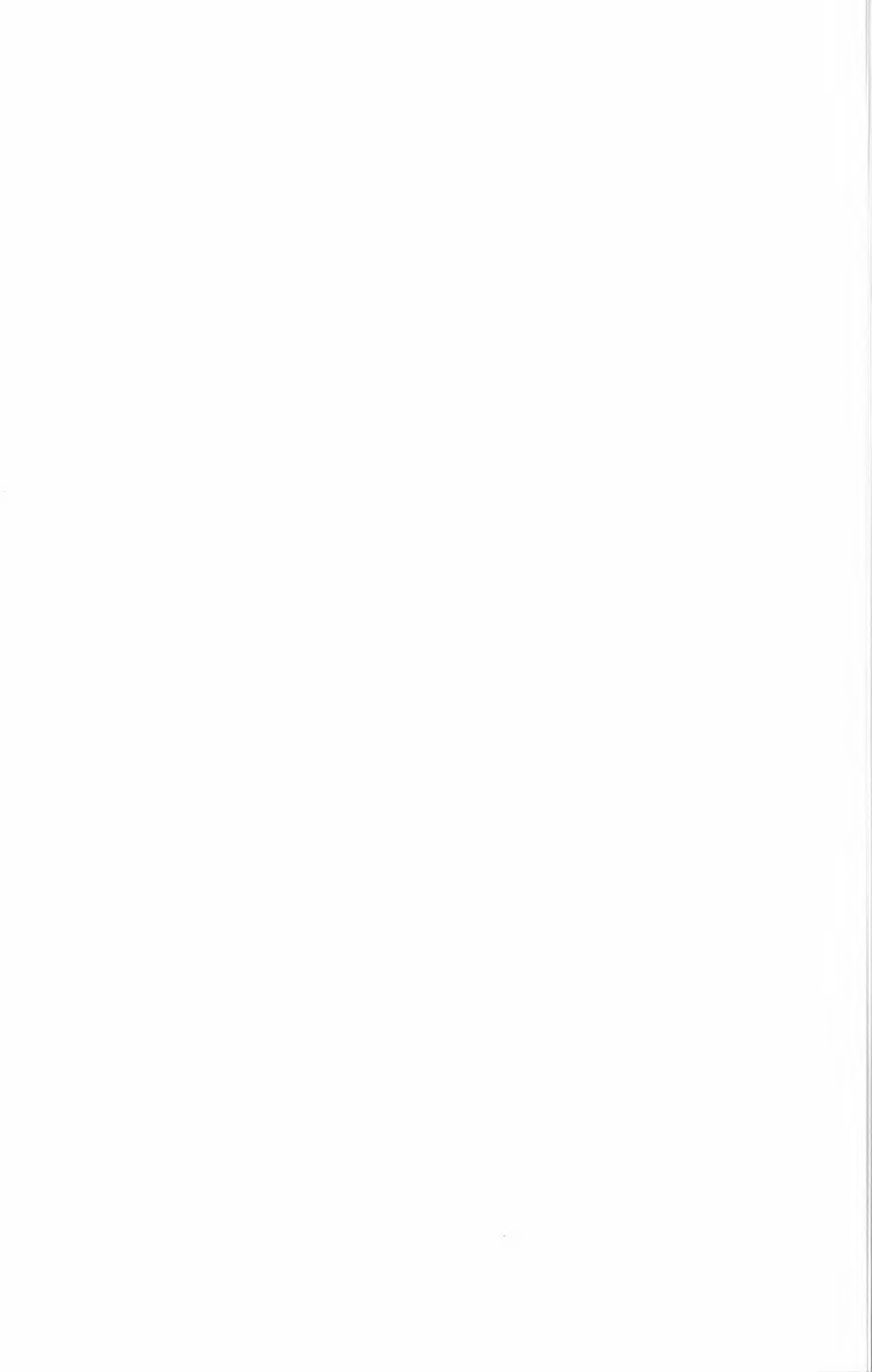


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RAIN
Beth Jones

“He always leaves me standing in the rain.” These words float into my head as I watch him walk away, slowly, until he becomes hidden in the rain, fog, and night. I realize that I have heard these words somewhere before. Maybe in a song, a movie, or maybe in a poem somewhere, but whatever their source, I can identify with them. He has always left me standing in the rain. As I stand here now on my front steps, I find myself staring at a crack in the pavement and memories flood over me in torrents.

I was six years old. It was the first time my father left. He and Mother had had an argument over something or another. They had always argued, but lately the arguments had grown worse. Everything in the house, including my brothers and me, had become a minefield waiting to be tripped over by my parents.

I was so young that I didn't know why they were fighting. For a while I thought it had to do with something that I had done, and then one day, my father had it out with the eldest of my brothers. From then on, I thought it was Ray's fault, and I blamed him for ruining our once quiet family.

The day that Dad left was one of the loudest days in my memory. There was so much yelling that I crawled into the closet underneath the stairwell and hid there, holding pillows to either side of my face, tears raining down the front. I have no idea how long I stayed like that, but all of a sudden it got very quiet. I took the pillows away and I heard heavy, hurried footsteps going up the stairs and doors slamming above. A few minutes later I heard the same footsteps running down the stairs, and my father yelled one last time at my mother. I crept out of the cramped closet space in time to see my father stalk out of the front door and slam it hard. My mother stood in the kitchen doorway, arms wrapped around her waist, as if to hug herself warm from the chill of that door slam. She saw me but couldn't meet my gaze. She turned and walked back into the kitchen. I looked back at the closed front door, and ran towards it and outside. The rain hit my face hard, and I couldn't hear myself sobbing because of it. I ran down the front steps, and in my haste I tripped on a crack

in the pavement. As I fell to my knees I looked up to see my father walking down the middle of the street away from me, into the storm. I yelled and yelled after him, begging him to come back, but my voice was drowned out by the rain, and I didn't know if he heard me or not. I stayed out there for a long time. I stayed until I couldn't see him any more, until I was soaked through and exhausted. Then, I slowly got up and went back up the stairs to the house. I walked inside, up the stairs to my bedroom, and lay down on my bed. I felt a puddle forming on my blankets from my wetness, but I didn't care. Eventually, I fell asleep.

I dreamt I was drowning in some horrible river. There was a storm and I was caught in the middle of it. I was in the river, floating fast downstream with the current, and there was no one there to save me. I kept yelling and yelling, but no one heard me over the raging river and I kept floating faster and faster . . .

I woke up to find myself yelling and soaked. I couldn't tell if I was wet from the rain or the river or my tears, but I never felt like I fully dried off that day.

Three months later I came home from school to find my mother and my father sitting at the kitchen table. My mother had her elbows on the table, face in her hands, and my father was looking at her intently, hand holding her forearm. It is a scene that was engraved upon my memory. One that I had visualized over and over again. They sat like that for a few minutes, oblivious to my presence. I stayed planted where I was for a while, until my excitement to see my father and my nervousness about my mother won. I entered the kitchen. My mother lifted her head at the sound of my patent leather shoes as they hit the cold linoleum floor. She quickly rose and walked to the sink, turning her back to me so that she could smooth her hair and dry her eyes. My dad pushed back his chair slowly and rose. We stared at each other for what seemed like an eternity, and then he slowly fell to his knees and stretched out his arms. That was my cue. I ran into his embrace and buried my face in his fatherly chest, my tears and nose running into the fabric of his shirt, while he sent kisses and soothing sounds into my hair.

Things were pretty good after that. Dad sometimes brought flowers home from work to surprise Mom, and she made special dinners for him. I thought things were getting back to normal.

Actually, I thought things were better than normal. A few months after Dad came back, he announced that we were going to take a family vacation. We had never had a family vacation that I could remember, so I was incredibly excited at the idea.

We went to the nation's capital. All of us piled in the station wagon for a week, Mom, Dad, my three brothers, and me. Mom and Dad in the front while Ray, Charlie, and Tim, in descending order, were in the back seat. I had to sit in the back-end of the car, so I could never quite see where we were going, always where we had been. I felt like that a year later, when Dad left again. I felt like I had no idea where my family was going, but that I had been there before.

He left this time on a Tuesday. I was home from baseball practice because of the rain. This time there was no yelling or screaming, only crying. I was doing my homework at the kitchen table when Dad came home from work. He came in the kitchen and gave me a kiss on the "noggin" and then asked me where my mom was. I told him she was in the living room and he went in there. They raised their voices a little bit, but there was no yelling. A few minutes later, Dad went upstairs and packed a bag. I could hear the angry stomping upstairs and I went into the living room to see what was happening. My mom looked at me, and then, as if she could bear my gaze no longer, she got up and walked to the window, arms crossed around her body in that familiar stance. The rain drummed against the windowpane and echoed in the stillness of that moment.

A few minutes later, my dad came down the stairs and walked into the doorway of the living room. When he saw me, I started to cry and I flung myself at him, as high as I could reach. He pried himself free of me, cupped my face in his hands, and said, "Celia, I'm sorry." With that, he turned and made for the front door. I ran after him and tried to block his way, but he gently pushed me aside with another apology and walked out. I stood there dumbfounded as he walked down the front steps without even bothering to close the door behind him. Again I chased him down the street, and again he was lost to me in the rain. It seemed as though tears were falling on me from every direction, soaking me inside and out. I sat on the curb in the rain, not knowing what else to do, until my brother came outside, picked me up, and carried me inside to my bedroom. He helped me out of my clothes and put me into bed. I wanted to tell him. I wanted

to tell him that Daddy didn't hear me when I yelled, because if he had he would have surely come back. I wanted to tell him about how I had hidden under the stairs the first time that Dad had left. But no words came out of my frozen lips. Instead, Ray tucked me in and kissed my forehead, and left without saying a word.

I waited for days, weeks, for him to come home. Weeks turned into months and months turned into years. Four years later, three days before my eleventh birthday, the doorbell rang. My brothers and I were sitting around the living room watching television and doing homework. When the bell rang, we all raced to the front door to see who it was, as most children do. Charlie got there first, and kicking us all behind him, he opened the front door with the grin of an Olympic gold medal winner. We were all laughing until we realized that Charlie's smile had vanished. It was our dad.

Dad stayed with us for nearly six years after that. That time in my life was probably what I consider to be the most normal, as far as normal is concerned. Mom and Dad never talked about what had happened, or why. Rather they carried on as though he had never left us alone for four solid years, with no contact. I found out later that Dad mailed us a monthly check, but Mom never wrote him back.

Those next six years of my life were full of changes. There were both the physical and emotional changes of growing up a girl in a house full of boys. I started high school, and my life became very full. Dad and I became close again, and I began to forget all the hurt he had made me feel before. It was like living in a bubble or some sort of time warp. Like we had all just pushed "pause" on our lives for four years, and when Dad came back we pushed "play" once more. No one ever spoke of it. From the outside, everything seemed normal. We ate dinner together at night, went to church on Sundays, and sometimes Dad surprised us with little gifts he would pick up on his way home from work, or he would stop and pick wildflowers for "his girls." But on the inside, there was always something missing. Sure, Mom and Dad would joke and tease each other, but there was always some underlying current in their playfulness, as if it had a deeper meaning. And while Mom tried to get involved in her only daughter's life, there was a distance between us that was never bridged. It had started the day I saw Mom standing in the kitchen doorway, hugging herself, when I was six years old.

During this time, Ray and Charlie graduated from high school and went off to seek their fame and fortune in the world. Now it was just Tim and me. Tim only had one year of high school before he left too. In a house once so full of people, there was a loneliness that clung to everything in the house. It emanated out of the furniture and you could see it in the family portraits. Sometimes it was so thick it was hard to breathe, but other times it was only in the background, to be inhaled at one's leisure.

Tim left the week after he graduated, to destinations unknown, and I was left alone in the house with my parents. It was in the fall of my senior year of high school that Dad left again. This time there was no fighting, no yelling, and no raised voices. Mom and I had gone to the supermarket during the afternoon on a rainy Saturday, and by the time we got home it was pouring. We had to unload groceries in the rain. As I carried the brown paper bags into the house, trying to hurry before they turned to mush, I realized that the house was quieter than when we had left it. The loneliness that was always in the house seemed to leap out at me when I opened the front door. I immediately knew that Dad was gone. But this time, I know it surprised Mom as much as it did me. She came inside after me, shielding the groceries as best as she could with one arm, and as she walked inside, she yelled for Dad to come help carry the groceries inside. By the time she had made it to the kitchen with the bags and no one had answered, she realized something was wrong. She ran from room to room, hoping to find him asleep on the couch or something. When he wasn't found, she turned to me, and wrapping her arms around herself in a hug, she told me to get the rest of the groceries. When I came inside with the last load, she was upstairs and I didn't know whether to go up and be with her or not. Instead I went to the front windows and stood there, watching the rain fall.

I stood there for hours, just looking into the rain and wondering what had gone wrong. I had tried so hard to be a good daughter. I had made good grades, good friends, and good jokes. What had I done that made him want to leave us again? I looked down at myself and realized that I had unconsciously wrapped my arms around myself the way Mother always did when Dad left. I felt a chill, but it was an inner coldness, and I wondered if it was the same coldness Mother was trying to warm herself from when she stood this way. I

stood there watching the rain and watching the road until night fell and I could see no farther than a few inches from the glass. Then I went to bed.

It was quiet in the house with just Mom and me living in it. If you could feel the loneliness of the house before, it cloaked you now. You couldn't be in that house without feeling its shroud, and you couldn't be outside of it without feeling its remnants still stuck to your hair and clothes. Mom and I didn't talk much. We couldn't find much to talk about. Mom lost a lot of weight and began smoking. I threw myself into my studies at school and was careful not to draw too much attention to myself. Christmas came and went without so much as a candle to mark its arrival. The boys didn't come home, but instead opted for the telephone, and for the first time ever, Mom didn't cook her Christmas ham. It was just another night of Mom smoking by the window, and me reading in the corner I preferred. The spring seemed to come much faster, and before I knew it, graduation was upon me.

There was little of the ceremony that accompanied my brothers' graduations, and unlike them, I had no immediate plans afterwards. I didn't even get a new dress for the occasion. The graduation ceremony was originally planned to be outdoors, but rain threatened to make an appearance, and so all the graduates, their parents, friends, and other assorted family piled into the high school gymnasium. Moisture clung to the skin and clothes of the crowd, and humidity hung in the air of the stuffy, over-packed building. The only person I had in the audience was my mom, looking frail as ever in a worn out Sunday dress, the white flowers on the blue print faded so that the whole dress appeared gray from a distance. Her hair was pulled back in a bun, and little wisps of gray managed to wriggle free and frame her aging face.

I watched her from where I sat in the crowd of anxious teenagers. I watched her watch nothing. She wasn't paying attention to the speeches that were given or to the choir as they sang. She didn't even seem to notice as the names were beginning to be called and person after person went up to accept their hard earned reward. She looked into nothingness. She was seated beside an excited family, and she stared ahead as they fidgeted and giggled, waiting for their child's name to be called. She seemed oblivious to the world,

including me. My name was called and I made my way up the steps to the stage and traded a handshake for a rolled up piece of paper tied with a string. As I walked down the steps on the other side of the stage, I saw him.

He was standing next to the doors, a navy blue suit clinging to his expanding build. His hair was thinner but the same dark brown it had always been. He caught my eye as I caught my breath, and we looked at each other. I forgot to walk down the rest of the stairs. We just stared at each other until a girl came up behind me. She had curls bouncing and was holding a diploma like the one I had in my hand, but had yet to look at. She tapped me on the back bringing me back to reality, so I gathered up my insides that had spilled and walked back to my seat. I sat in my chair looking at him until the end of graduation. Mom looked at nothing, I looked at Dad, and he smiled at me.

As the crowd began to spill out of the gymnasium, I found my mom and walked arm in arm with her back to the car. The outside air was considerably cooler than that in the gym, and it felt good to breathe in the breeze that had started to blow. The air was thick with rain, but it seemed to hang in the clouds, hovering over the earth as if teasing. I kept my eyes peeled for a sight of Dad, but I had lost him in the crowd and I had to wonder if I would ever see him again. I didn't mention him to Mom, but wondered if she somehow knew he was there and that was why she was so indifferent to her surroundings.

The car ride home was silent, and I watched the fog on the windows grow from the heat in the car. It seemed strange to me that the temperature inside the car was so warm compared to the outside, because the silence itself seemed so chilling. I was staring out the side window of the car as we pulled into the driveway and heard my mom stiffen with a sucked-in breath. I looked out the front window and saw Dad, sitting on the front steps, his blue suit wrinkled. She stopped the car where it was and got out. She ran out of the car towards him and then stopped suddenly a few feet from the front steps. She stood there in front of him for an eternity, arms wrapped around her waist, her eyes locked with his. All at once it was over, and she walked slowly past him without a word, went into the house, and shut the door.

As I peeled my legs off the vinyl of the seat, I thought it odd

to be sweating when I felt so cold inside. I smoothed my hair and got out of the car and walked to him. I stopped and stared at him for a minute, but he couldn't meet my eyes. I didn't know what to say. So instead, I sat down on the steps beside him. He reached for my hand, looking at my face for permission. I gave it to him and he held it like that for a long time. We just sat there on the front steps not saying anything, holding hands.

The sun, already faint in the sky, began to disappear completely as clouds took over. We watched it together, and then we listened as thunder rolled in the distance. Another minute passed and then a flash of lightning cut the sky in the distance. I counted the seconds in my head, just like Dad had taught me to do when I was little. Seven. Then I heard the thunder again. I looked at him and he smiled at me, knowing that I had counted too. I smiled. A few drops began to fall. It was the fat kind of rain. The kind where the drops are so heavy and full that they are isolated from the rest. It fell to the earth straight down instead of traveling at a slant. It was the kind of rain that I had always liked.

As if on cue, Dad rose. He turned to me and bowed his head. I stood up beside him, noticing that now, I was almost as tall as he was. I knew he was leaving again. And this time for the last time. He took both my hands in his and looked at them for a minute before the right words came to his lips. Holding them, he raised his head and for the first time I saw tears in his eyes. His voice was shaky when he spoke, but he spoke clearly. "I love you," he said. I felt my eyes close at his words and all I could do was nod my head. I opened my eyes as my hands slipped from his and I felt the rain falling on my face. Without another word, he turned around and walked away. The same scene I had seen before, only this time, he looked so much older, as if he had aged years in just moments. I heard the thunder and looked up into the heavens. When I looked down again, I could barely make out his figure. I knew it was over, but now I knew that he did love us. Three simple words had fixed twelve years of my life.

He always leaves me standing in the rain. I stood in the rain and watched him walk away, out of my life forever. I turned around and glanced at the house and saw my mother in the window, looking into the rain with her arms wrapped tightly around her waist. I turned

back to the road but could no longer see him.

Here I stand on my front steps, my arms at my sides, face in the rain.

GRANDMA MOSES

Reneé Reed-Miller

“Ain’t no nigger woman
gonna outdo a man,”
brags the anvil
in the master’s hand.

Iron boulder meets stubborn brow,
an unknown soldier
falls
to the ground.

Resurrected savior,
with dented crown,
tries,
succeeds,
answers,
divine commands.

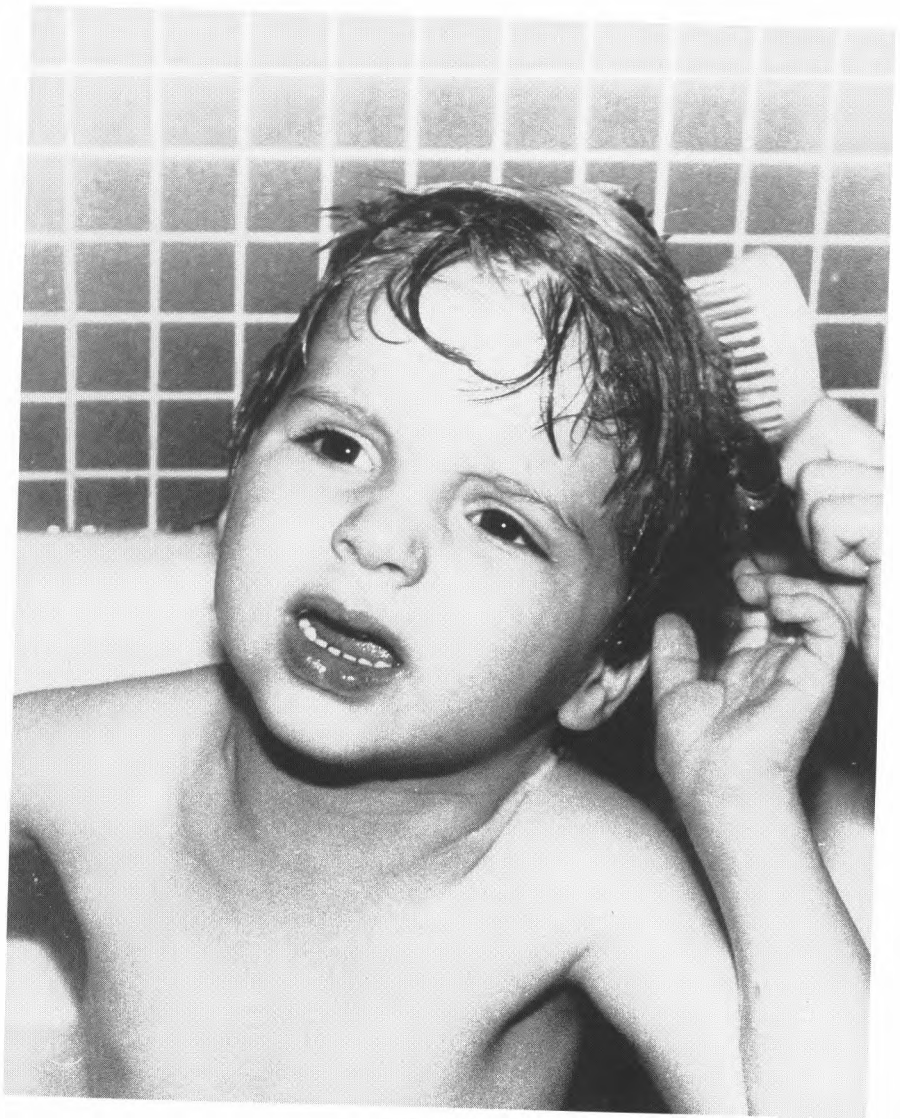
Branded Brothers, slave-bound sisters
Pay rail mistress a toll:
“No singin’
No rejoicin’-yet.”
Just starving,
sneaking,
in steel-toed,
stolen shoes.

March on
Freedom Train,
cautiously,
North to the Promised Land.

Calloused palms
stifle crying babes.
Footprints dissolve
into swamp puddles,
escape
ravenous
bloodhounds.

River-mud shackles
Hug Harriet's feet.
A child walks on water
astride the train;
on her shoulders
Grandma Moses
carries the weight

too big
for a man.



Daniel
Rachel Anissa

Excerpt from
THE LIFE OF CHANEL
Pat Kelley

We were meeting them for dinner at the Legion Club. The Legion Club was painted completely in aqua, with a dark blue carpet. It gave me the feeling of being inside a fish tank and that, consequently, there wasn't really enough air in there to breathe.

Mary Ann's hair is bright blonde. She always wears it so that it seems to curve as far away from her head as it can at the part, and come back as close as it can to her chin. Her skin wrinkles, from being overly tanned, under the gold chains at her neck. She has two sons who are already in college. She dresses almost always in white.

When we first met her a few years ago, I told her all the jokes I'd memorized from a book of jokes I had. She laughed at every single one of them. I don't know that I even thought they were that funny, but I wasn't sure what else to talk to her about.

She and Dad were already sitting next to each other at the edge of a big, round table.

"Hello, kids!" Mary Ann said when she saw us. "Oh, you girls look so nice. You have such attractive girls, Harold. How are you, Dave?"

At the Legion Club you could have a steak and a baked potato or a hamburger and French fries. Dave ordered a hamburger because that was the only thing he ever ate. The rest of us had steaks.

After we'd all been eating for a while, Dad cleared his throat and started in saying, "I believe that marriage is a fine institution, ahem." He cleared his throat again and continued, "Admittedly it didn't work out for your mother and myself, but I have never quit believing in it as an institution—a fine institution..."

By this time we were all staring at him while he just trailed off. Mary Ann pulled out her left hand, which she kept hidden under the table. I noticed a white flash on her ring finger.

"Wish me joy, kids, we're getting married!"

Stephanie practically squealed. You'd think she'd gotten a ring. She stood up and leaned over the table to look at it. Dave put down his hamburger for a minute and said, "Congratulations." He shook hands with Dad, and then went back to eating his hamburger.

Stephanie finally sat down but she kept asking questions, like “Have you set a date?”

“Are you going to have a big wedding?”

Mary Ann told her that it’s going to be a small wedding, and then they went into all the details.

I concentrated on eating all of my baked potato out of its skin. When I looked up I noticed that both Mary Ann and Stephanie have hair that moves like one piece, right along with their faces when they talk and bob their heads up and down.

I didn’t say anything, and after awhile Dad said, “Serena, do you have any questions?”

I didn’t have any real questions, but even Mary Ann and Stephanie were quiet for almost a minute, so I asked Mary Ann what her sign was. She said she’s a Gemini. I read a book about relationships and astrology, so I told my Dad, who I knew was a Leo, that he would be happiest with a Sagittarius.

Stephanie kicked me under the table, Mary Ann kind of laughed, and Dad said that he’d have to find a Sagittarius in another life.

HIS DEER
Toni Henzler

She was cold, tired, and going to shove her rattling antlers up his ass if he didn't quit making fun of her for carrying them. For three weeks all she had heard from him was, "I'll take you deer huntin'. I know where the deer are. I always get a deer. You won't start cryin' when I shoot one, will ya?" Three weeks before that, all she had thought about him was, "If you don't get your head popped out of your butt, and soon, my Christmas shopping is going to be much, much easier this year!"

Thus far, deer season had consisted of six days of getting out of a perfectly warm bed at two-fucking-thirty-in-the-morning, standing in the biting wind and freezing rain until she couldn't feel her feet, then walking up and down "mountains" so thick with briars and brush a rabbit would need a machete to get through it. And had she seen any deer? If you count their butts, she'd seen two...fleeting glances of bright white flags bouncing through the jungle of blackberry bushes and multi-flora rose. She was pretty sure they were mocking her. That was Day One. They hadn't seen so much as a deer *turd* since then.

When he told her that he would take her deer hunting she'd been thrilled. "I've always wanted to go but never had anyone to take me." Oh, God! How delightfully pathetic she had been. She might as well have poked her finger in her cheek and trilled at him. "You're so big and strong and I'm so small and manipulative." How perfect it would be, she had thought. Renewing the bond with her lover; in the woods all day, sipping hot coffee from a thermos, warming her hands in his. Witnessing the majesty of nature unfolding every morning then basking in it until darkness forced them from the forest. Then, they would eat some wonderful casserole she whipped up for supper and cuddle in bed until the next magical morning. What the hell had she been thinking! Had she *really* expected this week to be different from the last 47 weeks? Stranded in the forest for the sixth straight day with "Billy Bob of the Backwoods," choking down ice cold coffee, wondering if her fingers (and toes and ears) were going to fall off, she failed to see what was so damn wonderful about deer season. And after five straight nights of chili, under the covers with "Billy Bob" was the LAST place she wanted to be.

In the beginning, she read every book and magazine she could get her hands on. She watched hunting shows and hung out in the sporting goods section of Wal-Mart reading labels and comparing the claims on various deer urines. She decided that she could use the antlers he had, that had fallen off the wall and split in two, to rattle in a big buck. Since she wouldn't be carrying a gun (he only had one deer rifle) she thought calling a deer for him would be her contribution to the hunt. She didn't want to slow him down; she didn't want to be a burden. When she told him about her plan, he laughed at her. He told her she was more than welcome to try it, but he'd never used any of that nonsense before and he *always* got *his* deer. He made sure she knew she would have to carry her own gear. "I'm not gonna pack those things for ya. You wanna rattle 'em, you gotta carry 'em." She wondered if it was worth the teasing and embarrassment. Still, she practiced until she thought it really did sound like two love-crazed bucks fighting to the death over some moon-eyed little doe. Now, here she was. Frozen, teased to the point of homicidal fantasy, and deer-less. It just didn't get any better than this!

So, he decided to humor her, finally, and yelled down from his tree stand, "I'm comin' down! When I'm on the ground, rattle them horns and we'll see what happens." Whatever. When his feet hit the ground she hit the "horns." Slammed and twisted 'em for all she was worth. She stopped and looked slowly to her right. Nothing. She looked all the way to her left. Nothing. She looked straight ahead. Something. Holy Shit! There was a deer! A buck, at that!

"Look, there's a deer, it's a buck!" Billy Bob looked everywhere but where she was pointing.

"Where? Where!" Idiot.

"Over THERE!" She hissed at him in desperation.

Finally, he saw it. He raised his gun and shot. And shot. And shot...

Nobody knows how many times he fired his gun. She knows he reloaded three times and the gun held five bullets. When the smoke cleared she helped him dig through the leaves to find spent cartridges. She trudged up and down the "mountains." Again. Looking for "his" deer. She slashed her way through briars and brambles and stickers. Looking for "his" deer. She forded the creek...twice. And never, not once, did she ask him to carry "her" antlers.



Untitled
Rachael Wallen

HEATED ADOLESCENCE

Syria Haynes

I can tell you about them
In days
Nights
And love
They grew up around
The corners of local liquor stores
Said “Shit,” because they thought
It made their opinions mean more.
Colored their strands
In platinums
Burgundies
Just to stand on high
Those curls never fell
When making out with Mike, Eric, James, or DJ
Thanks to all that spritz, & Blue Magic
Them sisters could spell sex
Never let kisses
Slide below the neck
Never opened a book to study
Just to check the newest trends.
They skipped Mrs. Jenkin’s class
To get the first copy of Silk’s CD
Snuck into R-rated movies,
They squealed with girlish laughs
From midnight ‘til dawn
Puffing cigarettes
In the frigid air
Just STANDING.
Underneath the light poles
Of Mercer Avenue
They talked
About where they were going
And how
Alone
In their rooms

They fell to their knees
Crying
New tears
Into embedded cloth of
Retired ones
Yes
I can tell you about them
Girls
In nights
And love
For the days they are
No more.

Excerpt from
SHADOW PUPPETS
Janell Irving

When you're seven, the world around you seems so magical. The old, brown oak tree in front of your blue, diminutive house is actually a shiny white, five-story castle. In it, I, Princess Mary Pearl, dwell. Hiding from the hideous and annoying cries of my little brothers Gem and Jewel, and the sinister yells of Father.

When you're seven, eating dinner is an adventure. Brussels sprouts are actually military soldiers, camouflaged in their green uniforms and makeup. I often hide them under their white tents, the squared objects that Mother proclaims are napkins. Mother believes that I should clean my mouth with these tents, but that is nonsense. I would much rather use them as a safe haven for these men so that I don't have to devour them. Instead, when Mother turns her back, I launch the men into their tall black rubber tank, which sits in the corner of the kitchen.

When you're seven, imagination is your friend. A ride on the merry-go-round turns into a 10:35 airplane ride to Disney World. On it, I endlessly turn while bursting through the clouds until I finally reach my destination. "Hello, Mickey and Donald." I pretend to see them as I wave, giggling and singing. In reality, it is the skinny branches of the thorny rose bush, swaying to the rhythm of the wind.

When you're seven, it's okay to eat the mud pies that you serve to your Cabbage Patch Doll every once in a while. However, at age seven, there are some things that are not okay. It's not okay when your father embraces you as his wife. It's not okay when he touches you in forbidden places and says that everything will be okay.

THE BAND
Sarah Isenberg

Judy looked down at her wrist for the millionth time that day. She would finally be rid of what her friends called the “shackle.” She had never seen it that way, but she would be rid of it regardless. It was a shiny silver band most thought was an ID bracelet. On closer inspection, one discovered it was an ID bracelet of sorts, but not the kind instantly imagined. To most, the bracelet was out of style, out of fashion, out of mind. Not to Judy, who read the memorized lines every day, every hour, every minute, to never forget.

She didn’t want to, but she imagined him, as he was, right then, a fleeting glimpse of a man missing, far from home. Dressed in green fatigues he had worn forever, his body folded to fit into a darkened bamboo hut, barely surviving on a watery rice soup diet, worsened by the parasites attacking his body, as insanity tries to attack his soul. He’s sustained, he fought, because in his heart, he knew, prayed, someone back home still cared.

She remembered the first day that she got it. She had been seventeen; so young, so trendy, so foolish. All her friends got one, so of course, she had to have one. With her blond hair flowing straight down her back and her hip huggers riding as low as permitted, Judy was the spitting image of all her friends. And the bracelet, the band, the thing that would become her ever-present handcuff, was the trend of the season. To not have one was social suicide, but to take it seriously, to actually understand the significance was almost as bad. Maybe even worse. Sure they all knew why to get one, but to care about it was not allowed.

She glanced down at the silver band once more and silently repeated its inscription, almost as if saying a mantra. Judy knew that losing it was more than just losing the strip of non-tanned flesh on her wrist. The band had almost become part of her, like shrapnel under the skin. But she had to part with it. The one reason, the only reason, she would quit wearing it had finally occurred. After today, the band served no purpose.

Sometimes she wondered. Wondered if he was even alive. But then, that wasn’t something she would allow herself to think. She wondered where he was; was he hurt, scared, terrified of

being left there? He was only a few years older than she was and by now he could be home with a family; instead, he was fighting a battle that wasn't his to die for.

When she first got the bracelet, it had served no real purpose, save ornamental. It was pretty, everyone had one, and to her honest delight, her father disapproved. What more could a girl ask of a new piece of jewelry? For her entire senior year she wore it, flaunting it to her angry father, demurely showing it to schoolmates, all the while wondering if there was a reason some people took it more seriously. Jewelry had never made her father so upset before, not even when she had asked to get her ears pierced. And some girls, the girls that were not now and never would be popular, seemed far more attached to this silver bracelet than she was. But why she really didn't know. Oh, well, the trend would soon be over.

Others took their bracelets off as the trend faded but Judy was still a little too unsure of her social standing to take it off too soon. She wanted to, but somehow she couldn't. She imagined what he looked like. In her mind, he had been the captain of his high school football team whose lack of direction after graduation led to his accepting the draft as a life decision made for him. He had been a good kid, a smart kid; the boy the town rallied its collective hope behind, the boy who would not only outshine his parents, but everyone around him. He scored the winning touchdown in the state championship, running the ball in ten yards on the final play. The fans' chanting matching his own heartbeat. Teammates lofting him above their heads, screaming and yelling their victory, as he seeks his parents' proud faces in the crowd.

Then it happened. She had been walking to her locker after school when one of the fanatics, a faceless girl who actually understood the bracelet, approached her.

"Are you going to the rally?" the girl asked, like she had some right to talk to Judy.

"What are you talking about?" she responded, too abruptly, too callously.

"Hey, man, just saw the bracelet and thought... well, I thought maybe you were above the trend. Guess not."

As the girl walked away, a girl who may not have been popular but knew what really counted, Judy felt the silver band burn her flesh.

The shift was lightning-fast. For the first time since she got the bracelet, it wasn't just a piece of jewelry. This simple band was far more: it was a symbol of pain, of suffering, of loss. But more importantly, it was a symbol worn in hope. And in hope, she would wear it. She couldn't take it off. She knew that if she didn't, maybe someone else wouldn't either. She would not take it off just because it wasn't trendy anymore. To take it off was an insult. It just couldn't be done. To take it off, to betray it, would give permission to forget, to openly say it didn't matter. It did matter, not just to Judy, but to others. Others who had their own shackles to wear, their own handcuffs to the not so very distant past, their own crosses to bear. And they must and they do it gladly. To remind, to never forget. The band would not leave her arm until...

Here she was again, a life-altering moment based solely on the silver band on her wrist. But this moment, this one was unexpected. Her handcuff, her shackle had become obsolete, no longer representing a hope for the future. Just memories of a young woman learning that there were more important things in this world than following the trends. Others didn't, couldn't, understand. Why remember when it was all being pushed so nicely under the rug? But Judy had discovered that one could become attached to a piece of "jewelry" and it could leave a lasting effect.

The second she removed the band her heart ached. Her wrist, her entire soul, felt naked and she felt so very alone. Part of her was gone and it could never be replaced. There had been different ways this could've ended. This was the hardest, not just because she had to lose the band, but because she had nothing to show for her fight, her persistence. This was the ending she dreaded, not just for herself but for all involved: family, friends, other warriors with handcuffs of their own.

She placed the simple band, so much more than a bracelet, on the coffin and turned to leave. Someone stopped her, a touch, a hand on her arm. A woman spoke, too young to be so wrinkled, with prematurely graying hair, tears and hurt flowing from her eyes, cradling a folded American flag in her shaking arms.

"He was a good boy. Always did what I asked of him. Never wanted to hurt anyone. When he was four, I got him a kitten named Boots. He loved that cat. He loved kids, too. Wanted to be an art

teacher. Used to paint pictures of that cat. Thought he should serve his country, never thought to leave. Somehow the draft knew that. Wanted to buy me a house someday. Felt he should take care of me. He always gave me the pictures of the cat and I cherish them. Looked just like Boots. He took real good care of that cat. Would have made a great teacher. But now . . .” Her voice trailed off as the tears welled up in her eyes and spilled down her cheeks.

Judy watched as the woman walked up to her son’s coffin, picked up the silver band, and read:

LCPL Lucas P. Jackson
USMC 9-4-68 NVN

Judy read along with the woman, knowing that for the first time in three years the woman could sleep through the night knowing that her son had finally come home. He was no longer missing.

PITA (XUBZ)
Reneé Reed-Miller

Rising, falling,
heaving, sighing.
Restless slumber on
a copper shield.
Powdered masks;
flat faces
bake
atop open flames.

Bubbles boil,
break
under pallid skin;
freckles form,
darken and crack.
Crisp black moles
age
dough
into bread.

I reach for a piece of xubz,
lovingly tear a portion of
Jerusalem flesh.

This is my body.

I am anointed.
Olive Oil baptism,
Mediterranean butter,
green, aromatic,
translucent.

Precious pouch,
body of Christ:
broken, bruised.
Dissolve
on my tongue.

I am made whole.

LIFE OF THE PARTY

Janice Derr

Alexis Frond awoke, or perhaps she had never really been asleep, and turned to face the glaring red eyes of the clock. 11:00 p.m. She rolled over on her back and stared at the ceiling. In a little more than an hour she would be fifty.

Richard had planned a party for her and thirty of their closest friends. He had said it as if it were the greatest thing since sliced bread. A barbecue. Idiot. As if that was what she really wanted. A huge reminder of her failed life.

She turned to look at Richard, who was lying on his back, mouth open, snoring. Oh, God, how she hated him. She hated him for planning the party. She hated him for snoring, and she hated him for the long hairs growing out of his ears and nose. But most of all she hated him for being an idiot. She wondered if he knew how many times she had wanted to take her pillow and smother him.

She supposed she had loved him once, or what you mistake for love when you are young. But that was twenty-five years ago. To her that seemed like a lifetime.

She didn't get accepted to any colleges, but that hadn't really bothered her at the time. She had things going for her. She was fairly pretty, came from a nice family, and was one of the better tennis players at the country club.

It was her mother who suggested that she should get married.

"Alexis, you can't spend your entire life fluttering around going from one party to the next. Life is so much more than that. Its time that you get serious about your future and settle down."

Of course she already had the perfect candidate. He was tall, not really handsome, but he did have a nice smile. And more importantly he was going places. He was in his second year of law school. He wasn't really her type; he was too serious and he didn't even play tennis. But there was a niceness in the way that her slim bronze arm fit around his jacketed arm. And he was ambitious. When she was with him she really felt like she was going places.

Once they were married she realized life wasn't all that different from before. There were still parties, but now she was the hostess. It was her job to make sure that everything was in its place,

perfect and pleasing to the eyes of Richard's friends and co-workers.

She was well liked by everyone, but they weren't her friends. They liked her for her shiny blond hair and delectable crab cakes. But none of them took any time to get to know her. They all sat around and talked about cases, who had made partner, and politics. Those things made Alexis feel dizzy and out of place. So she just smiled when people spoke to her or laughed when she heard a joke.

When Lilah was born she felt like she might have finally found her true purpose in life, to be a loving and nurturing mother. For a while she took some comfort in the golden haired child, but it wasn't long before Lilah wasn't a baby anymore. She had grown into a sweet, clever girl, her daddy's girl.

She remembered thinking maybe some children are just like that. So she tried not to take it personally when Lilah cried for hours whenever Richard would go to work, or when she refused to go to bed until he came to tuck her in at night. She figured she and Lilah would be closer as Lilah grew older. When they weren't, Alexis wasn't entirely surprised. She had learned a long time ago that things seldom worked out as one has planned. Now Lilah only came home on the holidays. She was going to Richard's alma mater. She had little to say to Alexis.

A tear slid down Alexis' cheek. She was so tired. Tired of wondering what had gone wrong. Tired of wishing she was young again and could start all over. Tired of crying. She wished she could stop time.

She looked at the clock again. 11:47 p.m. She sniffed, and wiped her face. Maybe she needed some fresh air.

She got up and went to the patio doors; from there she could see their circle drive and perfectly manicured lawn. She could just see it. All of those people wishing her happy birthday, eating barbecue.

"Oh, Alexis, you look stunning, as usual. How are things? How's Lilah? I'm surprised Richard could put together such a great party without your help. Did I read that cake right, you can't possibly be fifty."

She shuddered and opened the doors to let in some cool night air. Richard rose up a bit and mumbled groggily, "Alexis, shut the doors. It's freezing." She turned to say something. But he had already lain back down and was breathing heavily. It was just like

him to give orders and expect her to do as he said. Well not this time. Alexis pushed the doors open as wide as they would go. She stepped out on the balcony and leaned against the railing, letting the breeze wash over her.

This was all she had. These moments in the middle of the night when she could be alone and free. She felt like she could do anything. The last time she had felt like this was a long time ago back when she was a girl, skipping and picking wild flowers to bring home to her mother. She closed her eyes and could see herself. She looked like Lilah. She twirled around with her arms above her head. The cool night air licked her skin. That smooth skin on her flat chest and rounded stomach, her pubic area without hair and that spot between her legs where no blood had flowed, no man had been.

She opened her eyes and gazed out at what was before her. She couldn't see the party anymore, no more guests, no more snide remarks, no more barbecue. Now the railing seemed like a big white stage. She wondered if she could stand on it. Of course she could, all she would have to do was drag one of the patio chairs up to it then she could step up on the chair and easily stand on her stage.

She was a bit surprised at how easy it had been. She smiled, but the moment was interrupted by the grandfather clock in the hall striking twelve.

No, she thought, not now. I'm not ready. I'm not ready for it to be tomorrow. I want to be like this forever. Suddenly she saw herself as she really was, a forty-nine year old woman, almost fifty standing on her balcony railing in her blue satin nightgown. What would people say? Lilah would say, "Mother, my God, what are you doing, what would the neighbors think?" Richard would yell, "Alexis what are you trying to do, catch your death and take me along with you?" And her mother, "Alexis, you can't spend your entire life flittering around going from one party to the next. Life is so much more than that."

The clock continued to strike, four, five, six. "But Mother," she whispered, "it really isn't. It's all just a party and I'm ready to go." She took a deep breath and let herself fall.

It was a short flight, and not as glorious as she had expected. She hit the pavement with a sickening thud. She lay there quivering and broken, and drew her last breath in silence.

Excerpt from
THE PHILOSOPHER'S TALE
Pat Kelley

Our Home Under Construction

During the spring my husband and I hired a contractor to undertake some major remodeling of our home. It was scheduled to take three weeks. Three weeks turned into six months. For six months we lived in a state of absolute chaos, flies buzzed in and out of gaps in the walls where window frames had been, laying siege on every frozen pizza or ready-made salad, which was all we ventured to serve during that time, even while sweet corn and berries were fresh in the markets. The only time it rained that summer was the day our roof was torn off. We cleared out one room after another for workers, stacking all our belongings into piles of unfathomably lost, inaccessible stuff. I've been told that talking about your home remodeling is a bit like talking about your surgery. If you've had an old house remodeled, you probably know exactly what I mean.

Part of the project was to replace our old storm windows and screens with new ones. The old ones were ripped off sometime in April, and new ones were ordered, and back ordered. Once, some arrived that weren't the ones we had ordered, then new ones were ordered again. These were sent back. When they finally came in, they didn't fit our windows either, and were finally filed off around the edges to fit.

While we were waiting, my husband, Charles, began restoring and repainting our hundred-year-old sash windows. Charles is a wonderful man who is patient in most things, but these windows frustrated even him. He filled in the scars in the ancient wood, sanded off layers of paint, repaired the broken sash cords, and replaced the brittle glass he broke while he was doing everything else. People told us to replace our windows with new vinyl ones, but our windows opened at the top and the bottom, and were beautiful models of quality that we could never buy nowadays. If it took us forever to fix them, we knew they'd last even longer.

Setting up our window air conditioners seemed pointless under the circumstances, when at any moment windows were coming out of their frames or going back in. Fortunately, our house was designed before air conditioning existed; it had high ceilings, windows

positioned for cross drafts, and was surrounded with shade trees. We lived comfortably without air conditioning most of the time.

Even while we worked around paint cans, lumber, and piles of our stuff crammed in the corners, while our lives and the lives of the workers who came to our house sometimes meshed, and sometimes didn't, we learned to use our house as we felt it had been meant to be used. We hung out on the front porch in the evenings, slept on the sleeping porch at night, and during the hottest part of the day we went to the basement, sometimes leaving whatever windows we happened to be working on at the time out of their frames, hanging on their sash cords like wind chimes, still, in the thick humidity. Feeling as though I'd been taped up in a plastic raincoat, I'd grab a pitcher of iced tea, Charles would grab our old cat Buttercup, and we'd head downstairs where the temperature never rose above 78 degrees Fahrenheit.

The Basement

Downstairs a carriage house door leads from a driveway into a basement garage. We would open this door for light and fresh air, and spend wonderful afternoons reading, writing, talking, or slightly dozing away drowsy summer days such as hardly anyone ever does anymore.

Now and then a neighbor would stop by and remark that our basement was almost as cool as their air conditioning, but Derrick, who lived nearby in an upstairs apartment without air conditioning, was the only one who stayed. Derrick was an older student who had gone back to school after working in a series of small appliance repair stores that had gone out of business. He had done well in classes, and had recently changed his major from Business to Philosophy. Soon we came to expect that he would stop by with his book and his bottle of Mountain Dew to spend the afternoon.

One especially hot Sunday afternoon we'd all been in the basement reading for almost an hour. I was lazily turning the pages of a fashion magazine I had already read, when Charles, who had been nodding sleepily over his book, The Lone Trials of a Wild Bird Hunter, suddenly snapped it closed.

"I'm sick of just sitting down here in this basement!" he said.

"I think it's kind of fun," I said. I was absent-mindedly looking through a photo story about *Red: The New Neutral*.

"It's an excuse not to do anything," I added.

If I didn't know better I would have said that my husband absolutely glared at me, and that his soft blue eyes turned downright grey and steely as he said, "You never want to do anything anyway."

I didn't think that was fair or accurate.

"You're just crabby because you can't handle the heat," I said.

"That's it!" Charles said. He had been kind of lounging, but now he put both feet down on the floor and sat straight up in his chair.

"I can't stand it! I'm going back upstairs. I don't care how hot it is. These windows have to get done. Do you have any idea how long this is taking? We're not even two-thirds done."

"You'll have heat exhaustion," I tried to reason with him.

"Just wait until it cools off a little," I said, but I could tell it was useless. Charles stomped up the stairs, while I pretended to be completely absorbed in an article called *Brown: The New Black*. Derrick had just kept his nose in his book while we were having this tiff, and I was pretty embarrassed because my husband and I didn't usually disagree like that.

We could hear the sound of the electric sander upstairs, but just for a little while. Soon Charles was back. I looked up from my magazine.

"So the basement wasn't so bad after all?" I said this even though I knew I wasn't being very nice. Poor Charles was looking so defeated. He looked very old at that moment, slumped down in his chair, his blond curls turning to grey, sweaty and matted over his forehead.

"It wouldn't have been so bad if it had been the living room," he said. "But the kitchen, that's the hottest room in the house. What makes it so hot?"

I had been worried about Charles, but I was glad to see him back to his old self slamming his fist on the arm of his chair.

"What makes a room something that you just can't stand to be in?" he continued. "It's downright stupid to have a room that you won't go in!"

"Lots of people have rooms they don't use all the time," I said.

"Like who?" Charles said.

"I did once," Derrick said.

"Hell, your whole apartment's too hot."

“I wasn’t thinking of my apartment,” Derrick said. “This was in the middle of the coldest winter.”

“Oh, then the room was too cold,” I said. “Our back room gets so cold that by January we can’t stand to go back there.”

“No, it wasn’t especially colder there than anywhere else in the house.”

“Then why wouldn’t you go in it?” I asked.

“Never mind. Forget I said anything,” Derrick said, looking down at the floor and pulling at a loose thread in the fraying jeans he wore even when it was incredibly hot.

“Was it just too ugly? Did it have lime green shag carpet?” I asked.

“Oh no, nothing like that,” Derrick said.

“Don’t tell me you thought it was haunted?” Charles asked in his most annoying sarcastic voice.

“Well, actually,” Derrick said. Then he paused. He seemed angry with Charles for being sarcastic, yet not sure what to say next.

“Are you serious?” my husband asked.

“Really? Was it haunted with real ghosts? I’ve never met anyone who’s seen a real ghost!” I exclaimed.

“That’s because there’s no such thing as a real ghost,” Charles snapped.

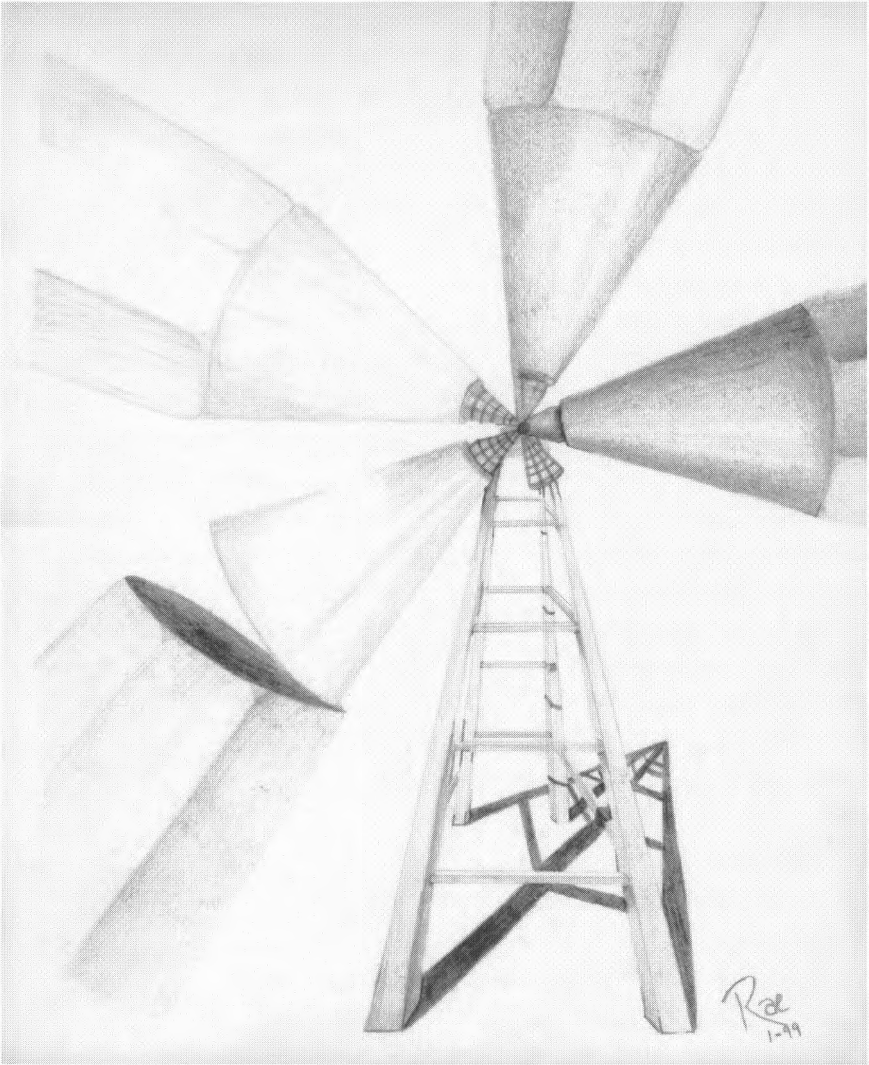
Really he was crabby today.

“Derrick, would you tell us about it?” I asked.

“Derrick, don’t tell me you believe in ghosts,” Charles said.

“I didn’t used to believe in ghosts,” Derrick said. “But at the time that this happened to me, I didn’t think that it was true. I knew that it was true.”

In our cool basement with the flies darting in and out by the door, Buttercup stretched out on the floor blinking in a patch of sunlight, and the steady hum of a neighbors’ air conditioner in the background, Derrick told us a story which even in the heat of that summer afternoon seemed to draw out all one hundred years of moldy winter damp from the brick and stone walls, and exude the cold from the floor, sending shivers and chills down my spine. Even Charles was strangely quiet, for we had gotten to know Derrick well enough by that time that we knew that the story he told us was true.



Untitled
Jessamyn Rae

THE DAY AFTER FOREVER

Syeria Haynes

The day after forever
Came like a ray of sun
Hot on the hairs in the
Meadow of my back, yet
Cool and breezy like air
After the rain, misty and sweet

My breath came sharp,
Slow and pierced tears
On my cheeks,
Rolling like thunder.
20 years of that onyx
Skin and raisin eyes
Pushing hell through
The doors he opened.
He lay lazily in the bed
Over my pain, sacrifice, and tough
Love and only used his voice to snore

I wish I would have known
Of the flamed horns and pitchfork
In his back pocket, where an empty
Billfold was filled with wishful money.
Cocooned in sickness that loved him well,
He felt as if nothing was left;
The end.

He prayed into hours of the night
If he wasn't gambling 'til dawn.

She
A sole survivor sowed strings
He cut loose, stepping through his dusted
Shoes to be the parents to both of their young,

Filing fury in bedtime mirages.
She knew of no better place,
And never stopped at the velvet rope
Or piece of bright red tape.

And never stopped at the velvet rope
Or piece of bright red tape.

The day after forever hit
Like bricks in the pit of my stomach,
Heavy as stones.
Away in the navy ride, the lights flashing,
The brakes screeching as
Handcuffs anchored the hands
Of guidance heaven bestowed to me.
And somehow after the shadows
Into the dark—
I was glad he was gone.

BLANK

Mandi McMillan

A blank screen
Sitting before me,
Wanting me
To feed information
Into its mind.

For the moment,
As I sit staring,
I have nothing to say.
And it echoes
Through the quiet hum...
Nothing.

The screen, bright white,
Has me mesmerized.
Oh, why can't I think
Of anything to say.
Anything will do.
Anything.

My body melts into the chair.
We mold into one.
Still, nothing runs
From my head to my hands.
No messages to send.
My mind is blank.

SOME LIKE IT HOT
or
MATING RITUALS OF THE COLLEGE AGE FEMALE
Jenny Schwade

“Different is good,” or so the Arby’s commercial tells me. Different can mean dying your hair emerald green or wearing your underwear outside of your clothes, it all depends on the norm of your situation. For instance, I won’t name any names, but there are certain girls in the dorms that are obsessed with *hot* guys. I swear, they wouldn’t even know if the guy they brought home was a convicted serial killer, if he happened to be *hot*. He may kick puppies, eat his own boogers, and cheat on them every night, but if he’s *hot*, all is forgiven. Of course he is deemed *hot* if, and only if, every girl on the floor states that he is indeed *hot*, a minimum of 3 times. A typical Friday night getting ready process sounds something like this:

Stupid Girl #1: “Ohmygod, did you think he was *hot*?”

Stupid Girl #2: “Yeah, he was pretty hot, but not, like, totally *hot*. What fraternity is he in anyway?”

Stupid Girl #1: “I don’t think he’s in one.”

Stupid Girl #2: “What?! Okaaaay, so obviously he is *not hot*.”

Stupid Girl #1: “You’re right. But maybe he’s independently rich or drives a really cool car.”

If this is the norm, I must strive to be different. I will not succumb to the temptation to seek out only genetically blessed men with IQs lower than what they are able to bench press. I will not be satisfied with a dumb jock. However, in order to be different from these superficial girls, I must remain the same.

It is not always easy to remember that looks aren’t everything when a girl brings home some gorgeous, seemingly cut from stone, homage to all mankind. Perfect in every way, until he opens his mouth, of course. “I play football for Mizzou,” is what often mindlessly tumbles out. They just blurt that out and stand there breathlessly anticipating your gasp and reply, “Oh cool! What position?” Giggling is optional. My response is usually a mumbled, “That’s nice. I need to check my e-mail now.” Never followed by any giggling.

Dumb people are not interesting. If the conversation begins to wane after he describes his gym schedule and various protein diets, I know it's going to be an extremely long evening. Going out with a good-looking guy is fun, but most of them are more concerned with the size of their pectoral muscles than your emotional well-being. This makes it all too easy to dismiss them as conceited pigs. These men are easily recognized in a club or a bar. They're the ones standing there in a size too small, usually black, Spandex shirt with too much gel in their hair. And their arms are crossed so their muscles bulge out fully. You might mistake them for a bouncer at first, but instead of guarding the door, they're slinking around the dance stage searching out attractive, tipsy girls to hit on. The bouncers have to wait until closing time to do this. A general rule of thumb is that if he actually flexes his biceps midsentence, run.

Girls that are attracted to this type of guy are female versions of the classic dumb jock. It's like having a jelly donut with no jelly in it. It looks nice in the bakery display, but tastes like crap because there's no substance to it. The perfect donut has layers to it, sweet, crispy on the outside, and chewier under that. Finally when you get to the heart of it, there had better be some delicious fruity jelly or you've just wasted your time digesting all the other stuff. If all you get is a mouthful of air you feel a little gypped. I hope to become the perfect jelly donut someday, cherry flavored of course.

SILENT CICADA

Vicki Smith

We stopped, stooped,
cradled the thick camouflaged body
once carried by strong laced wings,
in our hands.
It's ours.
It's hours
gone.

POWER OF SUGGESTION

Reneé Reed-Miller

Got home tonight,
crashed on the sofa.
TV was blaring;
you left it on this morning.
Ran out the door
in a huff?
(Just so you know-
wasn't me.
Haven't seen the
morning news
in weeks.)

A blonde-bobbed Bambi
lured me to
the boob tube.
"Welcome to Powerball!"
Bursting out
of her britches.
Those ping-pong balls
bubbled and bounced
in the popcorn machine.

Then I saw your ticket,
"325019,"
on the coffee table.
"Nobody wins these scams,"
I thought.
But Bimbo barked,
"Better get those tickets ready!"
Decided to watch
for kicks.

You won 300 bucks.

Left the TV on for a reason.
My ticket's on the table-
(Same place you left yours.)

See you in the morning,

Moneybags.

BOUND
Janice Derr

The first hit had surprised her. It was an open handed slap and Carrie hadn't even seen it coming. The next two were punches, one to the eye and one to the mouth. It wasn't until Carrie tasted blood that she started to cry.

She sat on the couch with her head in her hands, feeling sick. If she wasn't like this all of the time Marcy wouldn't have gotten so mad. She had to get herself together, stop letting this thing control her life. Marcy shouldn't have to feel like she needs to take care of her. She was always trying so hard to make everything better, to fix her.

Sure Marcy had pushed Carrie before, maybe even grabbed her arm a little too roughly, but she had never hit her. She would never do anything to hurt her. She loved her. Not the kind of love that you spoke about or signed letters with, but an unspoken love that meant more to Marcy than anything else.

Carrie had probably just bitten her lip. She hadn't hit her that hard. God, why did she hit her at all? Marcy sat with her back against the bathroom door. She had been smoking cigarette after cigarette, using the toilet as an ashtray. The smoke had filled the tiny room, giving the appearance of a dense fog. Marcy wondered, if she kept smoking, if the air would become a thick gray blanket under which she could curl up and hide.

She first saw her at the post office. Carrie had looked rather small in her loose brown dress that she had half-heartedly belted and thrown a sweater over. She was a fairly unremarkable girl, wearing no make-up, her dark blond hair pulled back into a sloppy knot. But there was something about her tiny mouth and her large blue eyes that were set a bit too far apart, that caught Marcy's attention. From that day on she made special efforts to run into Carrie whenever possible. At the super market, in the coffee shop, it even turned out that they lived in apartment buildings on the same street.

Carrie had never seen Marcy like that. Her jaw clenched and her mouth set. She was usually smiling, or laughing, her brown eyes

sparkling. But they weren't sparkling a minute ago. They were blazing with anger. Anger that Carrie had caused.

"Carrie, what's wrong?"

"I don't know."

Marcy leaned over to hug her, but Carrie shrugged her away. Marcy's face took over a look of confusion.

"Why won't you let me touch you?"

"I don't know. I don't want to be touched. I don't want to talk about it. You are always pushing me, trying to get me to explain things to you. How can I explain what I don't even understand?"

"Carrie, I'm just trying to help."

"You're not my therapist, why can't you just accept me for who I am?"

Carrie couldn't explain her sadness. It had started when she was thirteen. Everyone assumed it was just a phase, but if that's all it was it was turning out to be, a very long one. Ten years later she still had her spells. Sure she had good days, but every once in a while it would sneak up on her, her old crippling depression. It would strike her down for no apparent reason, leaving her paralyzed, a virtual prisoner. Sometimes she would sit alone and cry for hours, other times she would just stare off blankly at the wall. This lasted a few days, a couple of weeks, maybe a month. She never knew. All she could do was wait until the storm passed and she could go on with her life again.

"Are you ever going to get dressed?"

Carrie pulled her ratty green bathrobe around herself tighter and ignored Marcy's comment.

"Goddamn it, Carrie, are you just going to lie around and feel sorry for yourself?"

Carrie pretended to busy herself by looking for loose threads.

"Carrie!" Marcy pounded her fist on the coffee table.

"CARRIE!"

The first time Marcy saw Carrie cry she thought her heart would break. She wanted to take Carrie into her arms and hold her

rocking her gently and smoothing her hair like a baby doll. Her very own baby doll.

There was a light tapping on the bathroom door.

“Go away.”

“Marcy, please let me in.”

“I said go away.”

“Marcy just open the door.”

“Why, so I can fucking hit you some more?”

“You don’t mean that.”

She hadn’t but she wasn’t about to open the door. She couldn’t look at Carrie’s sweet face all battered and swollen.

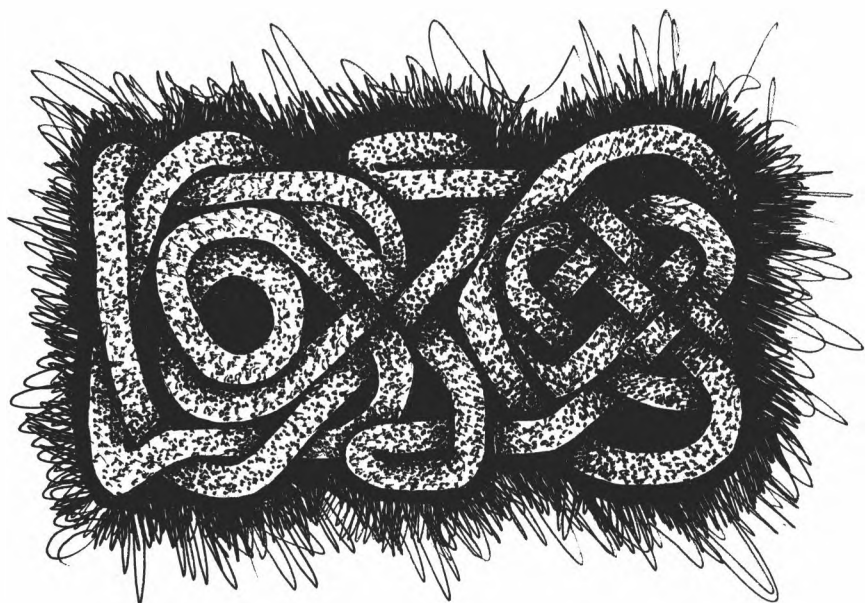
“Carrie just leave me alone.”

Marcy had finished her last cigarette an hour ago. For sixty minutes she had successfully fought the urge to get up and get another pack, but she couldn’t do it any longer. She took a deep breath and stood up. She accidentally caught a glimpse of herself in the mirror; black sticky circles surrounded her eyes.

“Carrie I’m coming out, I just want to get a pack of cigarettes, so please don’t talk to me.”

She opened the door. Carrie was sitting on the couch, still in her bathrobe, her knees drawn up to her chest. She looked up but didn’t say a word.

Marcy went to the bedroom. Lying on top of the dresser was a pack of cigarettes, some change, a couple of pictures and her keys. Marcy’s hand started for the pictures, but she stopped herself. Instead she picked up her keys, fished out a couple of cigarettes from the pack, leaving the rest for Carrie, and started for the door.



Untitled
Javan Roy-Bachman

“SO THEN DIANE CRIED AND BEGGED ME TO STAY...”

Sarah Isenberg

I sit across the table from some guy wondering just how the fuck I got myself into this. He drones on about his latest theory on how he's the pinnacle of male sexuality, while trying to casually put the salt and pepper shakers in his coat pocket, I attempt to recall when exactly I asked for this. Sure, maybe an alcohol induced depression caused me to blurt out that I was a tad lonely, but I never said I wanted to be set up with every college-aged klepto suffering from inflated ego syndrome. Yet here I am with bachelor number five in just three weekdays, unsuccessfully pretending to actually care about the words coming out of his mouth, thinking that if I hear the name of one more girl that's joined a convent or became suicidal after he left them, I may very well choke him with his napkin. Of course, I'd have to rescue it from his pocket first.

The waitress approaches the table, as Dave or maybe Charlie, I really don't care, takes his thieving hand out of his jacket. He winks a knowing, 'we share a secret' blatant wink and I mouth 'please kill me' to the waitress, who I'm sure I'd be having a better time with. She smiles a pity smile and asks to take our order. Presumptuous, Andy, maybe, orders a full meal: the chicken fried steak and mashed potatoes with gravy that the little diner he took me to was famous for. Then he orders a half meal for me: a little fresh garden salad and water, like I don't need nutrients. I know the second I ditch him, I'll have to eat a second dinner. Another waste of a date; I don't even get a decent meal.

“Then I had two girls fight, I mean, eye-clawing, hair-pulling, clothes ripping off, fight, all over me because...”

So Carl, I'm sure it's Carl, continues to talk and steal while I test the sharpness of the dinner knife. I couldn't stab him with it but it might slice the pale skin at my wrist. I don't want to, but I will if forced. Jesus Christ, I shouldn't have to kill myself to get out of the déjà vu of bad dates. But this guy may drive me to it.

“So, really, enough about me. Tell me about you. Do you like places like this? It's my favorite place to eat and one time...”

I look around this mom and pop diner, that is no longer run by a friendly couple, but an abusive ex-husband and father, with a

crack problem, that underpays his ex-prostitute waitresses, thinking I'd hate to die in such a run-down time capsule of 1952. What a way to impress a date. And...um...B-name, B-name...uh...Brandon, here, who wants very much to get in my pants, somehow thought this little dive would be the place to convince me it's a good idea.

I'm sure I could overlook the fact that he is reaching across the table to grab my silverware before the waitress notices, under the guise of holding my hand, which he hasn't noticed is under the table, I guess assuming that I eat with my hands. The fact that he brought me to a place covered in Formica, is an unforgivable offense. And he has the nerve, not only to think I'll be impressed, but that he'll be getting some action tonight. And from me no less.

I hate this crap, these blind dates that are the worst of America's Most Wanted, wasting an evening of my life I'll never get back, hoping it doesn't suck so much that I kill myself, each date slowly putting out the glimmer of hope I have to find a Mr. Decent to settle for. Instead, I have Mr. I'm-so-boring-no-one-remembers-my-name blathering on about himself, telling me what a great catch he is, when I just want to mutilate him with the hook. Or throw him back, whatever gets him away with the least amount of talking.

"Then this random stranger tells me he wishes his daughter would marry me instead of the idiot she is because I not only respect her father but I also..."

"Hey...uh...Tony, I forgot to feed my cat and I don't want her to die, so...uh...I have to go. Sorry"

As I walk out of the diner, thinking that I could be at home curled up in my pajamas, eating ice cream straight out of the container, watching T.V., having a better time than I was before, I hear him yell:

"I'll give you a call. And by the way, my name is John."

BEAUTIFUL

Leah Wyllys

I want beautiful people
to look and stare,
use words like
smooth,
lush,
irresistible.

I would smile my radiant smile
and know what I have on

is rich.

Instant moisture.

SPF 20, vitamin E, natural oils that won't dry.

I can slip it on in the morning,
feeling so new,
wearing it all day,
wouldn't have to reapply.
I would choose *Peach Blossom*,
Mustard Seed,
or *Nude*,
Because I'm worth it.

Sometimes people would wonder,
Is she born with it, or is it

Lipstick?



Green Sweater
TiKati Stovall

PREY
Toni Henzler

Tex got up every morning at 5:00. He had to get up early during hunting seasons, and he found it easier to stay on that schedule than trying to adjust to it periodically through the year. Besides, he liked to watch the world unfold.

“Whether you’re watching your first sunrise or your ‘hunert’ and first, you never know if it’s going to be your last. Better see every one you can,” he said once to a Boston man who came to hunt elk on the mountain.

“If you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all,” the Bostonian claimed. Tex chewed the corner of his mustache for a bit before he asked, “You haven’t really *seen* one at all then, have ya’ feller?”

Tex was convinced that every sunrise unveiled some new and mysterious color and he didn’t want to miss a single one. He claimed the fog never rolled out of the valley the same way twice, that the birds never sang sweeter, and he never knew for certain who would come to visit in those earliest hours of the day.

Most always there was Lefty, the aged Mule Deer buck he had watched grow from a tiny spotted thing staggering around on his circus stilts into the battle-scarred boss of the territory. Lefty was safe from the trophy hunters because he only had an antler on the left side of his head, he never had grown a proper pair, but it didn’t seem to hinder his sparring ability. And there was Rita, the mountain lioness who lived in one of the rock caves near the top of the mountain. He hadn’t seen her since the accident, but he suspected she was still around.

During the off times when he wasn’t guiding any hunts, for dudes who had more money than sense, he caught up on (sometimes even got ahead of) “chores.” And while splitting wood was far from his favorite job, it presented him with an opportunity in which he took great delight. He had strategically located the splitting pile near a window where *she* could watch him. Oh, he knew she watched him. He could feel her eyes devouring him, drinking the sweat that ran down his rock hard body. He was fully aware of her desire for him, her suffering for him, and he reveled in it. On the hottest mornings he stripped off bare to the waist, grabbed an axe, and worked in her frustrations.

He really didn't know why she was still renting the small cabin out behind the main house. It didn't make any sense to him that she hadn't moved out after he came home from the hospital. He knew she hadn't waited for him, believed she didn't love him. So it confused him that she hung around.

She liked to watch him through the bedroom window. It had become her morning ritual. She would get out of bed, fix a cup of cream and sugar with a splash of hazelnut coffee, and retire to watch the show. She was totally unaware that he had choreographed the entire program. Instead, she thought she was pulling another one over on him.

Tex had never gotten around to telling her that he loved her. He had planned to tell her, he even bought her a ring. Then there was the accident and everything got screwed up. Tex thought she knew how he felt about her. Hell, he always took her to all the dances and they went to town every Friday night to see a movie. He never went on dates with anybody but her. She had been his first and only lover, and he hers. He had believed that then, anyway. But when he had been in the hospital for 4 months, she went out with damn near anybody that asked her. It had cut him pretty deep when he found out. They hadn't dated since. Should he ask her out again? Maybe that was what she was waiting for why she hadn't moved out of the cabin...

He decided to go for a ride. He always thought clearer with a horse between his legs. As he brushed and saddled his sorrel gelding, Tex flashed back to the accident. It was early spring. He had taken the "books" to the accountant's office to have his taxes done and had run into a friend he hadn't seen in quite a while. They got a bite to eat and caught up on old times. When Tex and his buddy parted company, it was getting dark. While his mind raced about the "Good Ol' Days," he hadn't seen Rita sitting in the middle of the road eating a deer. When he realized she was there, he swerved and hit a patch of ice. The last thing he saw, before his Jeep plunged off the road and down a ravine, was Rita streaking for the trees, part of the deer's carcass dangling from her mouth.

A shudder brought Tex back to the task at hand. He finished saddling his horse and hauled himself astride. He guessed he should be thankful he was alive, from what the doctors had told him. But it

still pissed him off that his body wasn't 100% as strong as it once had been. He figured he was at about 90%. He knew he would be back to "fightin' fit" soon; it just wasn't soon enough to suit him.

As he rounded a bend in the trail, he saw Lefty's broken, half-eaten body lying under a pine tree. Who(what)ever killed him had tried to cover him up with pine needles and dirt. Tex heard the mountain lion growl just before his gelding reared and screamed in terror. As he struggled to get the terrified horse under control, Tex caught a glimpse of Rita on the rocks above him. He knew in his gut it was her. He decided to give the gelding his head and get the hell out of Dodge. The last place he wanted to be was between a hungry cat and her kill.

After he cooled his horse out and put him away, Tex headed for the house and a cold beer. He grabbed a beer out of the fridge and was startled when Lorraine stepped out of the shadows.

"Mind if I join you?"

"Reckon not. There's plenty of beer in the fridge."

"Why don't we go outside? It's so nice out. We could sit in the swing under the pines," she purred.

"Okay," he tried to smile.

They walked outside and settled in the swing. Neither spoke. He finished his beer and stood up to go back in the house. She pounced on him. Digging her claws into his back, arching her body against him and devouring his mouth with hers, she moaned and growled his name. Startled at first, he recovered quickly and soon his moans and growls joined with hers.

When she finished with him she curled her legs around his and picked the pine needles out of his hair. Tex was certain of one thing. He was sure gonna miss the sunrise.

VIRGIN SEEDS
Reneé Reed-Miller

Blossom banners, black and yellow.
You strong stalks,
flag-poles of the thicket,

Remember: you are in danger.

Bow reverently
to the garden chief;
hide your peppered helmets,
maintain your speckled-faced courage.

Wave the warning of sunshine splashes!
Awaken the summer harvest.
Bravely sway to the beat
as soldiers march into your domain.

Gatherers pillage your virgin seeds,
gorge on meaty,
salt-free treasures.

Weary faces,
Broken open.
Defeated.

Dry, crumbling honeycombs,
Why do you sacrifice your succulence
to the greedy altars
of summer salad feasts?

HOSPITAL SKETCH

Janice Derr

I was trying to think of a six-letter architectural word meaning “round window,” when I overheard a nurse tell the woman sitting directly behind me that her husband was dying. At that point I wanted to get up and leave, but I couldn’t. I didn’t want the woman to realize that I had overheard. So I slid down in my stiff blue armchair, trying to be invisible, for what seemed like an eternity while the poor woman sobbed behind me.

The woman finally collected herself and went off somewhere, mumbling under her breath that she had to be strong for her husband. I felt no relief at her departure. A heavy sick feeling had embedded itself in the pit of my stomach. It was if I had just realized that none of these people were getting out of here alive. They were all dying. I did the only thing I could; I got up and ran for the door. Faces around me blurred together as I desperately raced for the stairs. Faces, hairless with yellow skin and sunken eyes, stared at me, their emaciated bodies trying to steady their heads bloated by cancer. I wanted to throw up. Or scream.

I burst into the stairwell and ran down five flights of stairs. When I reached the bottom I realized I didn’t know where I was going. So I turned and started back up. Jesus Christ, I had never been so close to death before. Some lady gets a “Sorry your husband is dying,” and I’m doing a goddamn crossword puzzle! How sick is that? People weren’t coming here to get well. They were coming here to die. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, what if I had been that woman? What if that nurse had told me that my mother was dying? No. No way. Not my mom. She’s not sick. She’s not dying. She’s not like the rest of them.

I ran and ran until I thought my legs would give out. My heart was pounding in my ears and I could barely see through my swollen eyes. I was just about to the top of the stairs when I ran into a man wearing hospital scrubs. He grabbed me by my shoulders.

“What’s wrong? What’s wrong?”

I sank down to the floor, crying. The only word I could mutter was, *oculus*.

ROTTING PIÑATA

Sarah Isenberg

I try to kiss your mouth
and you push me away,
unwilling to receive
the only gift I have for you.
My heart is dead,
a slowly rotting piñata,
ready to drown you
in sickly sweet red candy
bits of emotional residue,
given to you only after
I am beat.



Center Stage
Alan Havig

Stunted Growth
Alan Havig





Beams Through the Window
Alan Havig

“Glory Days”
Home of Newton D. Evans
State Historical Society of Missouri
 (“Boone County—Homes” Original
loaned for copying by Frank St. Clair)



Home owned by Mary Gordon Evans and husband Newton D. from 1896-1926. She was the grand-daughter of David, and daughter of David, Jr. The Evans sold to Stephens in 1926.

