

Byways

CTC Journal of Art and Letters
Spring 2004

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Submission Guidelines:

Byways is published every spring. Submissions are accepted in the fall semester. To submit your work, follow these guidelines:

1. You must be an enrolled Central Texas College student.
2. Submit your original art and photography to the Fine Arts Department. Artwork will be published in black and white. You do not need to be enrolled in fine arts classes to submit. Call x1572 for more information.
3. Submit your writing (original poems, short stories, plays, and creative non-fiction essays) to the Communications Department. No anonymous submissions will be accepted. Call x1670 for more information.

*Please attend the Byways literary reading
and art show at the Oveta Culp Hobby
Memorial Library in April!*

Editor's note:

So many of the pieces submitted this year demonstrate our search for understanding about our world. Writing and the visual arts are a universal means to express that search, showing that the finding is often in the seeking. We thank the CTC students who submitted to the journal this year. Your work expresses the concerns of all humans. Your openness to sharing your feelings and your willingness to show your artistic strengths make us a stronger community. Through this sharing, we all learn a little more about ourselves, a little more about others, and a little more about how to love. -- Melissa Richardson

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Darren Blair

The Life I Have Chosen

When the eyes of vision close, the eye of the imagination may open. Slowly, I disengage all of my senses. This is not hard to do, but not wholly from practice. The first to come down is my sense of smell, then right behind it taste. These senses are slowly being lost anyway; deactivation is a simple extension of this fact. Next to go is my sense of touch. Finally, once all the arrangements are made, I close the eyes of vision. All that is left is my hearing, my crisp hearing.

I select a song, one which I know full well. I could easily listen to the radio, but tonight there will be no guarantee of results if I do so. In fact, it may never be so again. I select an old favorite and place it in the player. Without even having to look, I select the song from the disk. Then, I sit and wait.

I can already tell that what I am doing is working; I can feel my body begin to move in time with the song. It is no physical feeling that I am experiencing; I am simply aware of the action. This is good; I can literally feel the music as it penetrates my very existence. But herein lies the risk. Granted, the wrong music will ruin the mood and therefore be counter-productive. However, the real risk is in those with weaker wills allowing themselves to be taken in entirely; this is where the trouble begins. For me, such is not the case. This is just another evening by myself. I have done this countless times, and there is no telling when the end will arrive.

Slowly, the eye of my imagination opens. In some Asian cultures, you will occasionally stumble upon situations and lore of a mystic third eye of some sort, located on the forehead of the owner and granting sordid differing powers depending on the lore. It is at this time that I can feel it forming in my own body. But this is not external; it is to look within, not out. Colors and images begin to fill my mind. The first thing to come forth is the music itself. I can see the words, and sense the beat. It rapidly goes from there. What will come forth

today? A new character? A new plot?

I can see it now. I know this character well, and a delightful little scamp is he. Heh, heh. Your ways will get you into trouble this time. You can't talk your way out of this one. You're cooked for sure. The concept is so amusing that even I begin to laugh. I see now what will happen. Prepare yourself; this time, there will be no joking your way past this one!

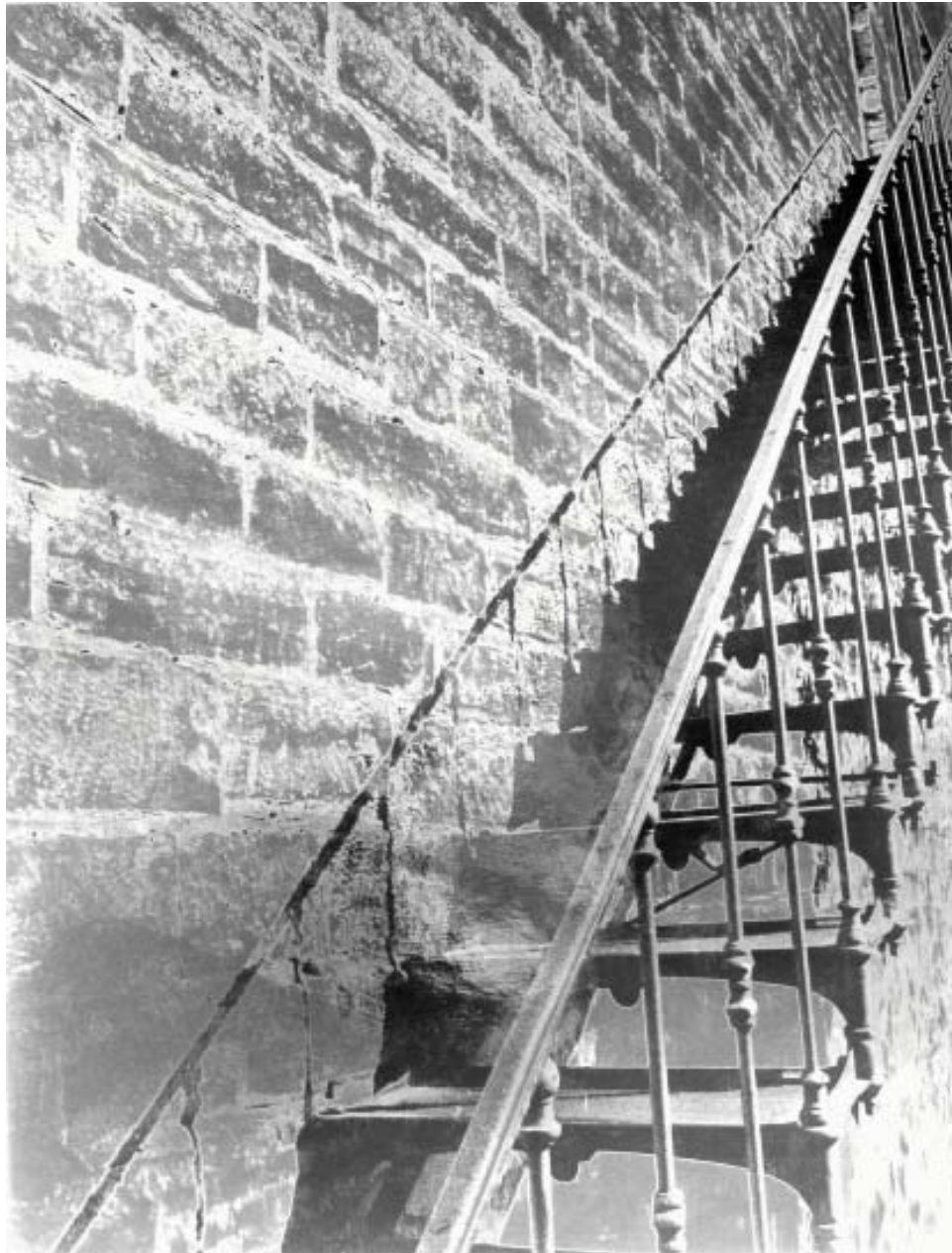
I feel myself laugh at this concept. It is a unique sensation. I can feel myself -- or my consciousness, that is -- as it takes flight from the mortal shell. More comes forth. I see vividly every last scene, every last action. It is all there before me. If only I could write a hundredth of what I see! The images come rapidly, and yet I can see everything. I can hear what all is said and done; nothing escapes from me. All the sensations are there. Where there is the lack, my imagination fulfills! A new world awakens within a world; worlds without end there are thus.

But alas, I am confined to what I can write. I can do no more. It is up to the reader, and their eye of the imagination, to carry on. This thought, this act of consciousness above the conscious, grounds me back into reality. The sensation of flight is no more for the evening. I retire and review all that has transpired. Later I will try again. But for now, I am satisfied. Regretfully, I will my senses back to life. The eye of the imagination closes, and my external eyes slowly, painfully open. The light of reality is harsh in comparison to the light of fantasy. The remnants of my other senses are now active once more, although I feel somehow cheated. But nevermind. I won't be forgetting the experience. The individual hours may be lost to antiquity with the play lists, but the simple peace is something that I will not forget. Nor will I ever forget the reactions of my fans as they tell me how they feel about reading what I write. There are some things that I will cherish forever.

This is the life I have chosen.

Eveline Romain-Reyes

Go Up



Rachelle Carpenter

Hold On



Ron Sursa

The Day Time Stood Still

Did you hear the thunder rumbling?
Did you see the blue skies turn to gray?
Did you see the floods of tears coming
And then pain that was left to stay?

Did you feel the earth tremble
And the ground begin to break;
All the silence turn to motion
And the world begin to shake?

Did you look up in the sky?
Did you turn on your TV?
Did you hide and look for shelter
The day they changed history?

It wasn't written in the stars;
Everything seemed to be off track.
The day the world was in a frenzy,
The day the USA came upon attack.

Do you fly your flag with pride
And support the USA?
Do you hug your kids each night
And kneel down on your knees and pray?

Do you ask for all forgiveness
For all your broken sins?
Do you start another chapter
Where the story now begins?

The chapter we write now
Will forever change in time,
But every 9-11
We will stop the hands of time.

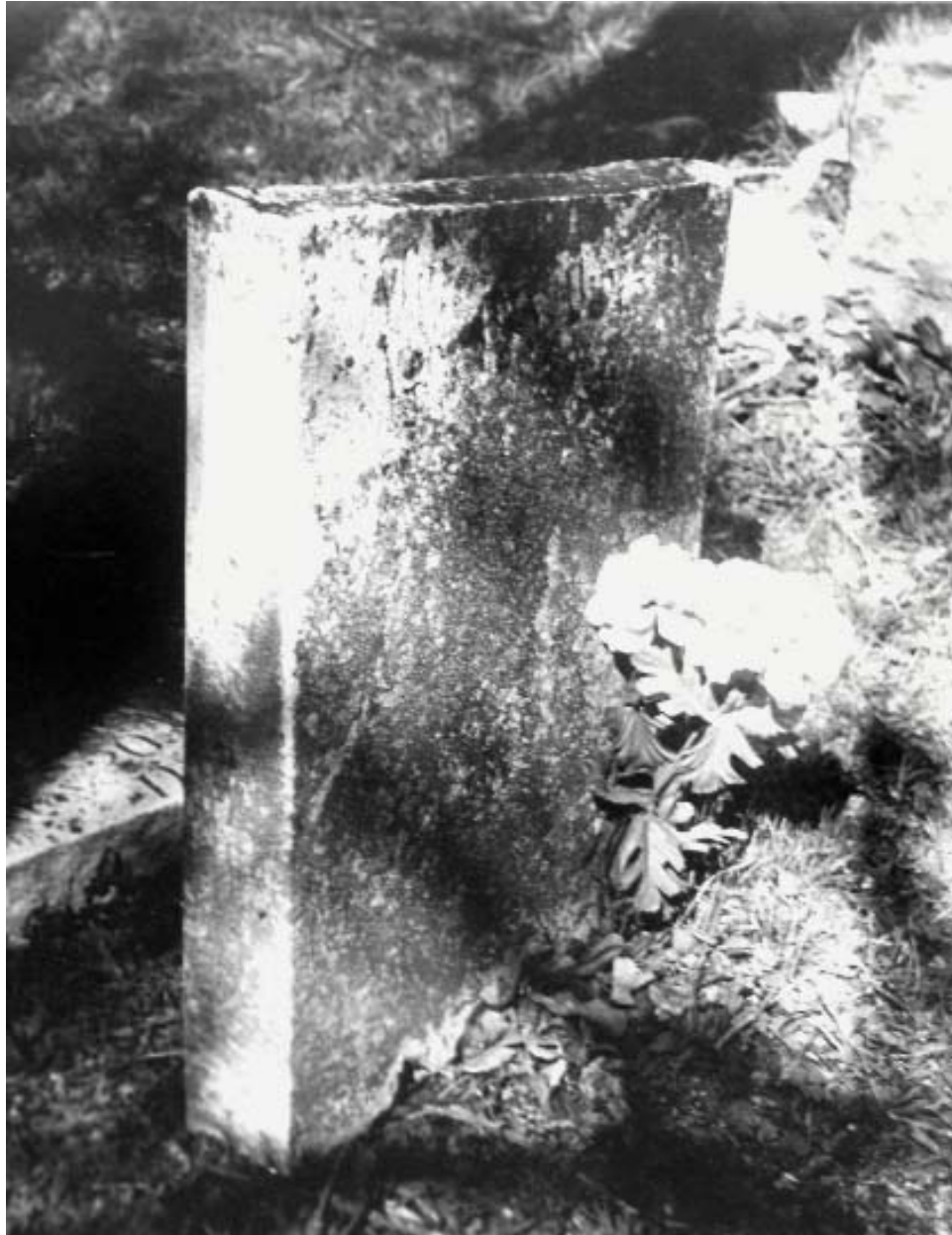
Chad Pritchard

The Heroes

They go, with stayed anticipation.
Looking forward to going, but
Regretting the separation.
This, they know, is a cause
That is higher than themselves,
And what they want. They
Put themselves in harm's way, not only for
A people they have not met, but
For the lives of their little ones.
Some will never see their loved
Ones again. Some will never again get to
Comfort their children and wives in
Time of fear. Some will never
Embrace their family again. To them we
Owe our respect. To them we owe our reverence.
To them we will ever be in their debt.

Rachelle Carpenter

Not Forgotten



Birgitta Riley

Silent Prayer



Kelly Fest

Can't Judge a Book by Its Cover

NOTE: The character of Charlie is a cross between my great-uncle and my great-grandfather. Some of the material about cowboys being sissies is a direct quote from my great-grandfather who was a chuck-wagon cook on the Waggoner Ranch, a famous quarter-horse ranch in Texas. That quote was passed down to me from my grandmother, but I believe it is also in an old Saturday Evening Post, as well. However, I could not find the date and copy of the issue this quote is from since it is well over fifty years old.

SITUATION: A cook and a waitress are working in a diner inside the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport. A dark haired, dark skinned foreign-looking man is sitting at a table in the far corner of the diner eating his meal. The background is filled with people walking back and forth with suitcases in hand, scurrying across the airport to connecting flights. The waitress is reading behind the counter during the lull of the afternoon since the dark man is the only customer. The name of the diner is "Bowl of Red;" the cook's name is Charlie, and the waitress' name is Judy. There is a counter placed diagonally. Seven tables are scattered around the stage, five of which are dirty.

CHARLIE: What are you studying now, Judy? That fancy schoolin' isn't going to help you get them tables cleaned off, girl.

JUDY: For your information, I'm studying Kant for my philosophy class. And TCU is not that fancy. It's just the only scholarship I got offered.

CHARLIE: Can't? You're studying can't? You already can't get them tables clean. What more is there to know about can't?

JUDY: His name was Kant, not can't.

CHARLIE: Whatever you say, missy. (*Eyeing the man in the corner*) You need to keep an eye on that camel-jockey. Go bus them tables and see what he's up to.

JUDY: *(Looking up from her book)* Oh, give him a break, Charlie. He looks harmless enough. He does look familiar, though.

CHARLIE: Yeah, we probably saw him on TV with those towel-heads out in Iraq.

JUDY: Really Charlie, you've got to stop being so suspicious.

CHARLIE: If you'd seen what I seen fighting them Japs back in '42, you'd be suspicious, too, girl.

JUDY: Good Lord, Charlie. World War II has come and gone. Get over it. We're not even in that century anymore. *(Judy puts the book down to take an order from a middle-aged man who has walked up in a cowboy hat.)*

MAN: What's your special today?

CHARLIE: See that sign? *(He points to the sign above his head with the name of the diner.)* It says "Bowl of Red." What do you think the special is besides chili?

JUDY: *(She mumbles under her breath to Charlie.)* Charlie, be nice.

MAN: I think I'll just take a Chicken Caesar Salad and a large iced tea.

JUDY: *(Ringing up on the cash register.)* That will be \$7.50.

MAN: \$7.50? Do I get my shoes shined with that, too? *(Charlie scowls as the man pays Judy.)*

JUDY: Out often? Your change is \$2.50. Have a seat and I'll bring it to you when it's ready.

MAN: Thanks. *(The man walks over to a table, sits down, and takes sip of his tea. He then looks at the other customer, hesitates, and stands up to walk over to the other customer's table.)*

CHARLIE: Cheapskate!

JUDY: He's sure is handsome for a middle aged man, though. I love a man in a hat.

CHARLIE: Hmph. Cowboys today ain't nothing but sissies. Caesar salad? Hah!

JUDY: Charlie, I swear you'd run off every customer given half a chance. *(Judy goes back to her book while Charlie starts making the salad.)*

CHARLIE: *(to Judy only)* What do you think that's all about? Some cowboy you got there, girl. What's he doing consorting with the enemy?

JUDY: Honestly Charlie. You've got the imagination of Walt Disney, himself. *(The Arabic-looking man writes something on a piece of paper and hands it to the cowboy who hastily stuffs it into his pocket. The cowboy looks at his watch and walks back over to the counter.)*

MAN: Can I get that to go? *(Man looks at his watch impatiently.)*

CHARLIE: What's the rush?

MAN: None of your business.

CHARLIE: You're eatin' my dadgummed food, aren't you? I'll make it my business. *(Charlie puts the salad in a to-go box and shoves the box to Judy, who then hands it to the man. The man turns to walk out without a backward glance.)*

JUDY: See, you scared off another customer Charlie. You need to learn to be nicer.

CHARLIE: That man is up to something if you ask me. Why would he be talking to that Arab fellow over there?

JUDY: You're just an old bigot, you know that, Charlie? *(Judy picks up her book and starts reading it for a few minutes while Charlie works in the kitchen. People start pouring into the diner, muttering about their flight being canceled.)*

LADY ONE: What do you think is the problem?

LADY TWO: I don't know, but I overheard a guard say they are shutting down all traffic in and out of the airport. You don't suppose there is a terrorist or something, do you?

(Charlie raises his eyebrows as he and Judy look at one another. They both turn to look at the foreign man eating in the corner.)

CHARLIE: I knew it! I knew that cowboy of yours was up to no good with that foreign fellow over there.

JUDY: Hmm, I don't know. Maybe you're right. He does look familiar. *(She gestures to foreign man.)*

CHARLIE: Well, I'm ready for him. I may be old, but I'm still tough as nails.

(The foreign man gets up, walks over to the table of the man who ordered the salad, and picks something up. He then walks up to the counter with something in his hand. He raises a gun toward Judy.)

CHARLIE: Dadgumit! He's got a gun, Judy! Told you so!

JUDY: *(Judy's eyes widen and she puts her hands up.)* Don't shoot!

FOREIGN MAN: *(The foreign man looks at her like she is crazy and lays the gun and a wallet on the counter.)* What? Your other customer left these here. I was trying to return them. *(The man who ordered the salad rushes back into the restaurant looking frazzled and talking quickly.)*

MAN: Oh my God! You found my weapon and my credentials. I'm going to be in so much trouble with my boss. I'll be fired from the FBI for sure! *(Judy stares at the man a moment. She puts her hands down slowly and looks relieved; but perplexed Charlie plops himself down in a chair in disbelief.)*

FOREIGN MAN: *(To the man who ordered salad)* These two thought I was trying to rob them. They should not be prejudiced, for the laws of karma apply to them, as well. *(The foreign man turns to walk away from the counter and out of the restaurant with a look of disgust.)*

JUDY: *(Judy takes a deep breath.)* We thought that guy was a terrorist. Why did you go talk to him, anyway? He looks familiar and I thought I'd seen his picture on TV as a wanted terrorist.

MAN: Are you kidding? That was Deepak Chopra. He my wife's favorite author and I just wanted to get his autograph for her.

CHARLIE: What?

MAN: Yeah, he's on his way to the National Book Fest hosted by Laura Bush. Don't you people read the newspapers? He turned in my weapon and credentials, didn't he?

JUDY: You're an FBI agent and you lost your gun? *(The man walks away shaking his head.)*

JUDY: Well, Charlie, guess we really blew it this time. I knew I recognized that guy.

CHARLIE: Yeah, but you thought he was a terrorist, girl.

JUDY: Well it just goes to show you that you can't judge a book by its cover. Get it, Charlie? Book by its cover, and he's an author?

CHARLIE: *(gruffly)* Get back to work and stop sassing me, missy. Look at all these people waiting in line with nowhere to sit. I'll bus the dadgum tables myself. You take these people's orders. *(Ends with Judy mumbling under her breath and taking orders, as Charlie comes around with a tub to bus the tables.)*

JUDY: Can I help you, ma'am?

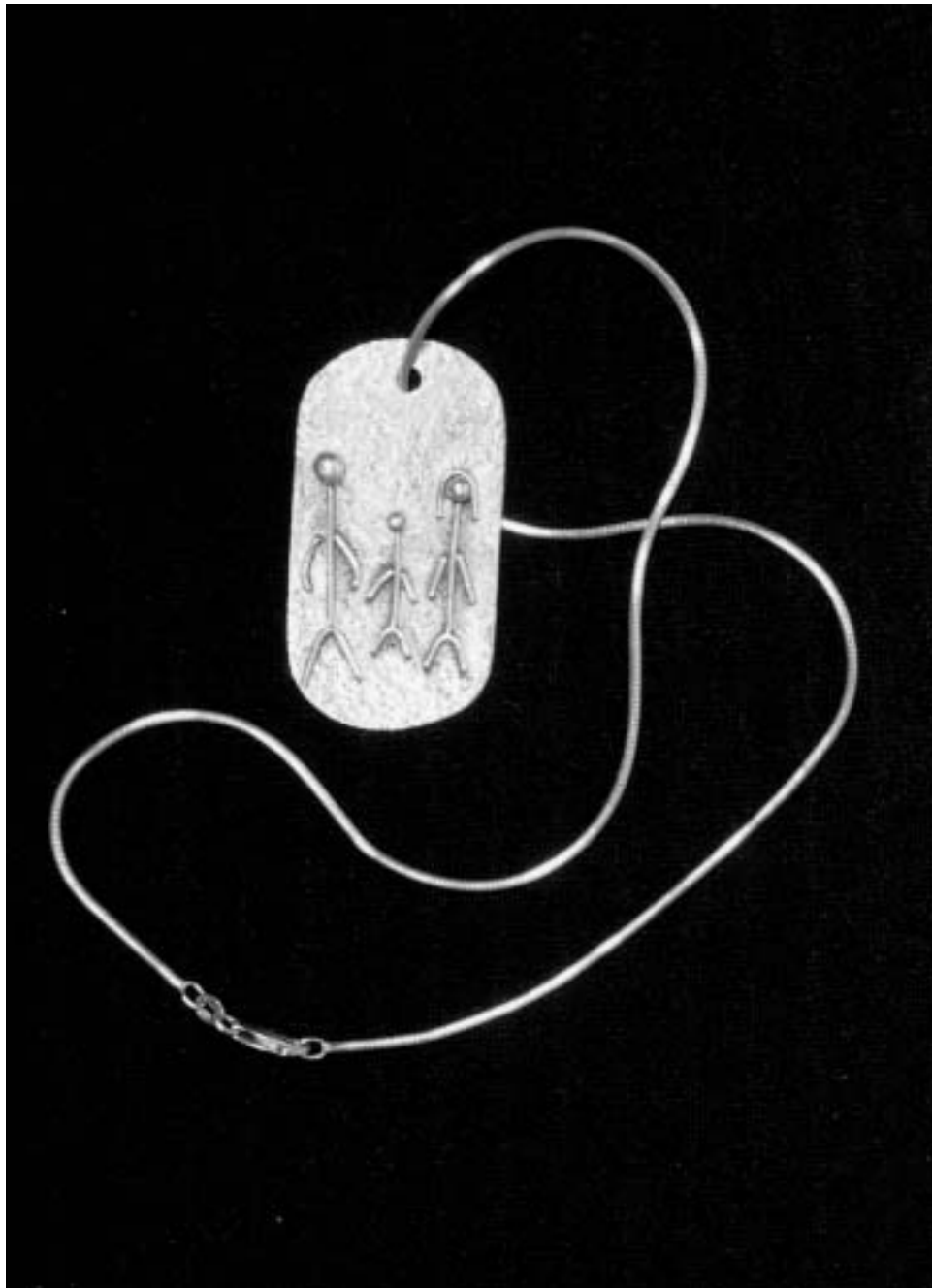
Judy McGilbert

Untitled



Nicole Adams

Family Dog Tag



LaShonda M. Gordon

You Are My Husband... I Am Your Wife

Like the stars in the night
You are my guiding light
You are my husband
And I'm your wife

Though the road gets rocky
We can't give up
Even when things are crazy
And the road is rough

You are my husband
And I'm your wife
I want to be with you today
And the rest of our lives

My life without you
Has no meaning
Sharing all our days
And all of nature's seasons

You are my husband
And I am your wife
We will be together
Till the day we die.

Tinika Atkinson

My Wish

I wish for you a starry night
A love as soft as angels flight
and yet so strong as to amaze
the heavens on which lovers gaze

I wish for you a perfect day
when only good things come your way
and every expectation's met
a day that's lived without regret

I wish for you achievements high
and recognition wealth can't buy
a place in life where you can do
the things you've always wanted to

I wish for you deep happiness
more than I could ever express
but happiness is rarely known
by those who live their lives alone

And wishing does not make it true
for all these things I wish for you
will be as dust in wind's embrace
if you can't see me in a natural place.

Come love me, as I know you can
I'll be what a woman is to a man.
One special wish I keep for me
Is this secret fantasy.

Suzy M. Williams

Necklace



Crystal Kazakos

Ducks in Pond



Shrhonda Lake

Be a Mom, Be a Woman

When your child is playing with the dangers of life,
Are you also outside saying “No, that might hurt you”
Or “Let me help you?” Be a mom, be a woman.
When your child says “what’s this word” or
“I don’t understand”, will you then be a mom, be a woman?
When your child is hungry or has to wait to eat,
Was that phone call more important than
To be a mom, be a woman?
When the school calls and says,
“Your child still can’t read, spell, count, play well with others
or do homework and turn in assignments,”
Is your answer going to be “that’s the school problem”?
Are you being a mom, being a woman?
When your child starts to skip school, come home late,
Trash the house and look at you to clean it up,
Would that be the day you became a mom, became a woman?
Finally, when you are in front of the court and you hear
Your child tell the judge all he or she has ever wanted was for you
To be a mom, be a woman,
will that be the first time you realize,
you were never a mom, you were never a woman?

Shrhonda Lake

The Woman's Work

Out the window there is only rain.
As the world melts away, you feel the cold.
With the chaos of life, you're overwhelmed with feeling crazy.
There are no limits to the endless stages of fear.
But all this is held up with the shoulders of a woman.
In the end you're left with just hope.

With the desire of hope,
Look at the puddles left behind by the rain.
Most of it is controlled by a woman.
Don't forever live in the cold
Or it will trap you with fear.
Many things will demand you to become crazy.

With endless nights of being crazy,
Her desires are consumed with hope.
The arrangement with fear
Is no longer the issue. Again rain
Brings out the depths of cold
Only showing the powers of a woman.

The actions of the woman
Drives the soul to act crazy
As you breathe in the cold
Her mind is disabled with hope
While flowing levels of rain
Balance out the fear.
As the chaotic, driven passions of fear
Eat away at the woman,
The sole thought of the rain,

Places the heart past crazy.
Who only knows what lies in the realms of hope.
At that time there will be no cold.

With the last hour of cold
She can feel no fear.
The gateway is open with hope.
A new woman
Is born. Not by being crazy
But by what is left behind by the rain.

Without fear there can be no hope
Without feeling crazy, you cannot feel the cold
In the end, the woman only sees the rain

Nanette Tippy

Again We'll Meet

The lonely walls echo truths
Of a time that's passed for me and you
The silent ticks of a clock unwound
Trash constant reminders of love unbound

There were only two hearts, one beat
Only the tempo of true love's heat
And now there's emptiness and sorrow
And little hope for a good tomorrow

Oh pull my heart up in ascension
Now let my song sing melodies of heaven
Put these memories to rest, in peace
Until that day that again we'll meet

Rachelle Carpenter

Snow Bunny



Jason Garcia

Soft Silence



Phil Barrot

Just a Little

Monty lumbered into the room and collapsed into his favorite chair, colliding with the lamp on the table next to him and sending it into the air. As the lamp was falling, the shadows began to engulf the room while the light flew closer to the floor. With reflexes quite impressive for a man his size, he rescued the lamp from crashing into the floor, saving our apartment from darkness. The landlord had yet to repair the ceiling light, so the only light we had came from that lamp. The apartment is not that big, so it cast a warm glow that was more than enough to illuminate the tidy, little room. However, I still missed the overhead light. Restoring the lamp to its rightful place on the table, Monty carefully sat back down into his chair, and with a sigh began to play with his hair. After a moment I said, "I can see that you have had a rough day."

"Yeah, Jules really doesn't know when to quit."

"She still won't take 'no' for an answer?"

"Nope."

A short while ago, Monty started working at this Chinese restaurant downtown. It would seem that one of the wait staff, a lovely young woman named Jules, had become quite taken with him. Monty, however, just wasn't interested and had told her so, but she just kept coming on to him. Every day it was the same thing. It was more of a cute annoyance rather than a creepy obsession, but I still don't know how he dealt with it.

I said, "Sorry, pal."

"It's not like you told her to hit on me. Is Jane still gone?"

"Yeah, she's still gone."

"Sorry, Jack."

"It's not like you made her leave."

"All the same."

The first time I met Monty was actually when I moved in with him. Fate, it seemed, had kind of thrown us together. He needed a roommate and I needed a place to stay, so a friend introduced us. It

was a pure stroke of luck that Monty and I got along from the beginning. We have become good friends.

I never really considered myself a scrawny person until I met him. However, after that meeting I had to face the cold, hard truth. He is tall, built quite well, and has short, dark, unkempt hair. I haven't figured out yet if he wanted it to look that way, or if he really just didn't care. I'm about two feet shorter than he is, with a mess of blonde hair and the physique of a little boy. It's funny, because we're almost straight out of a Steinbeck novel or something, except that I'm not an angry guy and he's actually the smartest person I know. He was my closest friend, or at least he was until Jane came along.

She was five six, with shoulder-length, blonde hair. Every classic description of beauty that could possibly be thought of was embodied in this woman. She was perfection, and everything that I could want from another person. From the moment I met her I was hers. Then, all of a sudden, she didn't want me anymore. She didn't give me any reason at all. One day she just told me that she didn't want things to go any further. I can see that maybe I was rushing things a bit, but I was in love. She could've asked me to slow down. It didn't have to end.

After a minute Monty said, "Hey man, cheer up. Forget about Jane. Lets get out of here, and go play some skee-ball or something."

"Monty, I'm afraid there are more important things in life than skee-ball."

"Like what?"

"Dude, my girlfriend just left me without any kind of explanation, and all you can talk about is arcade games."

"Sorry, man, I was just trying to cheer you up."

"Well, don't!"

"Oh, so you would rather mope around all day."

"No, I don't want to mope, I just want to—"

"Sit around and feel sorry for yourself."

"No! I guess you just don't get it."

"Yeah, because you're the only guy that's ever been dumped by his girlfriend."

I hate it when he's right; or rather I hate it when I'm wrong. So

I probably should have just said, "Yeah, you're right," or something like that, but instead I just said, "Whatever," effectively pissing him off and sending him out of the room.

There is an old expression that hindsight is twenty-twenty. I really shouldn't have been so mean to Monty. He was just trying to help me feel better. In retrospect, I really shouldn't have started following Jane around either. But I just couldn't help it.

I just wanted to see her. Well, I wanted to talk to her to try to get some answers. I needed to understand why, or to make her understand how I felt. I didn't know where she lived because she had just moved, so I just went to her work instead just to talk to her. Jane was some kind of accountant, or something, and she worked in one of those huge buildings downtown. Those buildings always fascinated me, or at least they did after she told me she worked in one. However, at many of these buildings, including the one where Jane worked, they had these doormen. And these doormen's job was to keep people who don't belong in the building out of it, namely solicitors and ex-boyfriends. I knew about the doormen, and I knew that I fit into the category of people to keep out, but I didn't let it bother me too much. I figured that I could talk to the guy, man to man, and get him to see what was going on. Besides, it was a beautiful day with nothing but a few clouds in the sky. So he was surely to be in a sunny disposition.

So I called in sick, caught the bus to the stop nearest to her building, and walked into the huge lobby. This was a simply glorious lobby, with a beautiful marble floor and a very tasteful fountain in the center of the room. It was by the elevator that led to the offices upstairs in the corner of this glorious lobby that I met Dallas. Dallas the doorman was a native born Texan with a shiny nametag and a charming accent to boot. He was also about the size of a brick house. I asked him to ring Jane Hopelen and tell her that Jack Hantise was here to see her. Dallas rang her office and asked her if I could come up, and she said no. I could see that this was going to be more difficult than I had originally thought. I made my speech to the doorman about how she had just dumped me and how I just needed to find out why and how you know what it is like and come on man give me a

break. Dallas was not as moved by my speech as I would have hoped, and he kindly introduced me to the pavement outside for my performance. After trying a couple more times to convince him to let me in, and even trying to run around him once or twice, I gave up and went home. Monty was waiting for me when I got there.

“You went to her work, didn’t you?”

Damn, he must have seen me. His restaurant is about two blocks away from Jane’s building, and he must have been outside smoking a cigarette before he came home when he saw me.

“Well, I couldn’t very well go to her house, now could I?”

“What’s the difference between going to see her at work and going to see her at her house?”

“I don’t know where she lives.”

“Jack, you can’t go to her work, or her house.”

“Why the hell not?” I could feel my blood starting to boil.

“I don’t know man. It’s like a rule or something. You have to give her personal space. Listen, man, I know you’re heart-broken and all that, but you have to promise me that you’re going to leave her alone.”

“I really don’t see why you’re getting so worked up about this.”

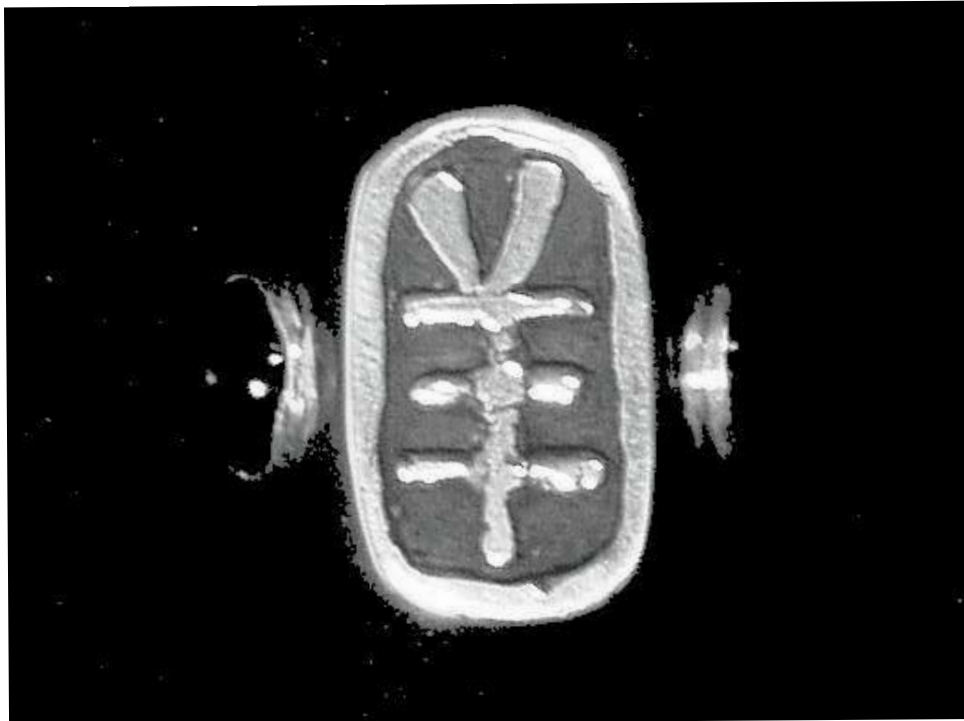
“Promise!”

“Ok, ok, I promise to leave her alone. Listen, I’ve got to go take care of some stuff at Anthony’s.” I have to confess that I was lying to Monty at this point. I really did work as a cook in a pizza place named Anthony’s, and I really should have gone into work, but that’s not where I was going to go. I was trying to think of something that would take his mind off of my actions at Jane’s work, so I said, “Can you dust in here or something? It’s starting to look kind of dingy.” Monty looked at me like he was going to slap me, then begrudgingly agreed, muttering something about not being my cleaning lady. I left before he could change his mind about hitting me, and before he could say anything else about Jane.

There was this little coffee shop where I used to meet Jane after work and sometimes for lunch. It was a very neat little place, with tables placed erratically around the room and armchairs in the corner

Stephen Fernandez

Year of the Sheep



Birgitta Riley

Party for Four



for people to read and sip their cappuccino. To top it all off, it had posters of local artists and events covering one wall, and artsy books covering the other. Since Jane had introduced me to the coffee shop, I figured that she still went there from time to time. So, I went to the shop and waited for her to show up. She did not come in that first day that I went to the cafe so I went back the next day. And then I went back the day after that. I did this every day for about a week and a half until she finally came in one day for lunch, by herself. So, I decided to say hello.

“Hi, Jane.”

“Oh, hi Jack.”

“Listen, I was wondering if we could just sit down and talk about some stuff. Maybe if you’re free right now, or maybe we can get together for dinner?”

“No. I don’t think that’s a very good idea.”

NO? What the hell did she mean NO? “Aw, come on. If anything, just for a minute, just to kind of work things out.”

“Listen, I’ve gotta go. Bye.”

She ran outside before I could say anything. I decided to go home and feel sorry for myself rather than catch up to her. I started walking home, but it started to rain, so I hailed a cab. When I got home, I saw that the light bulb in our lamp was burning out, so I replaced it. The landlord had yet to replace the overhead light. However, the room didn’t seem any brighter, which didn’t help my mood any. I was still feeling pretty dejected by the time Monty got home.

“Well, I see that you are gloomier than usual. What’s up?”

“I ran into Jane at the coffee shop today, and she wouldn’t even talk to me.”

“So, you just happened to bump into her, right? Because I’m pretty sure that I made you promise to leave her alone. And shouldn’t you have been at work today?”

“Well, I would be lying if I told you that I didn’t want to run into her, but it isn’t like I followed her there or anything. About the whole work thing: Anthony gave me the day off.”

“Right. Listen, man, you’re really starting to freak me out. Its like you’re completely obsessed with this chick.”

“No, well, yeah, well, just a little.”

“That’s unhealthy Jack. Not to mention that you could go to prison for stalking her like this.”

“Only for two to ten years.” I was a criminal justice major before I dropped out of school. “Besides, you make it sound like you never stalked anybody before.”

“I haven’t. You realize that this is not exactly a normal thing to do, right? Just remember that you promised me you would leave her alone. Anyway, your mom called while you were out yesterday. She wants you to come out today.”

“Forget it.”

“Come on, man, it’ll cheer you up. Lets go. I’ll give you a ride to the busstation.”

So I went to my parent’s house. Apparently Monty had told them everything that had been happening with Jane with the hopes that my parents would talk some sense in to me. I tried talking to them about it, but we just ended up fighting for a couple of hours, then I went home. I’d be pissed, but they were only trying to help. I really didn’t see why everyone is so upset about this. After I got home I tried to call Jane to see if she might still be at work. She wasn’t.

I tried calling her work a couple more times over the next couple of days, but she hardly ever answered, and whenever she did, she would hang up as soon as I said anything. Dallas the doorman wouldn’t let me in, she wouldn’t answer my phone calls, and she ran away from me. It would seem that more drastic measures needed to be taken. I caught the bus to her work, and waited in the parking garage of her building. She was some kind of VIP, or something, with a special parking spot to boot. So, finding her car was relatively easy. I hid in the dark, soaking wet from the pouring rain outside, for what seemed like hours.

Eventually she came down to her car with Dallas the doorman escorting her. His mere presence infuriated me beyond belief. What the hell was he doing with her? I wanted to put a bullet in him, or throw him off the top of the building. But, to save time, I just snuck up on him and hit him on the head with a metal pipe that was lying nearby. Jane looked at me in horror, but before she could scream I

gagged her, tied up her hands, and threw her in the back seat of her car. It was a good thing that her car is an automatic, because I don't drive stick. I drove to an old abandoned warehouse that my friends and I used to hang out at. We had boarded up all of the windows, so no one could have seen us and kicked us out of our favorite hangout. I was betting on everything still being boarded up, and luckily I was right. I tied her to a chair and took off the gag. "Don't look at me like that, you know I'm not going to hurt you. I just want to know why you left me." She had started to bawl, and so it took her a minute to compose anything to say.

"What do you mean left you? You know that we never really dated; we just went out a couple of times. Please don't hurt me."

My mind froze. I felt like my heart had stopped beating and was pulling my chest in on itself, it was clenched up so bad. My stomach was tied up like one of those huge Celtic knots. Beads of sweat were pouring off of me like the rain flowing down the gutters outside. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "I, I'm not going to hurt you. What do you mean, 'we never really dated'?"

"Why are you asking me these things? We never went out except for those few times at the coffee shop."

"No, but, Monty, he introduced us."

"Who's Monty? What are you talking about? Nothing ever happened between us. Please, I promise I'm telling you the truth. Please don't hurt me."

Then I just lost it. I started screaming at her at the top of my lungs. The blood was burning in my veins. This wasn't true; it couldn't be. She was lying. She had to be. I felt as if my temples would burst, and I was digging trenches into my hands with my fingernails. I wanted to hurt her more than I've ever wanted to hurt anything in my life. All of a sudden everything went black, and the only sense I had left was the taste of blood.

And blood never tasted so refreshing. I am now convinced that you have not truly experienced life until a guy as big as Monty has repeatedly plunged his fists deep into your face, chest, and stomach. Talking didn't work, and calling my parents didn't work, so I guess the only thing that would bring me to my senses was a good beating. One

minute I was screaming my lungs out at Jane, the next I was on the floor wondering why everything around me was dancing in circles. Monty had followed me to Jane's office, but couldn't grab me before I kidnapped her. However, he got to the warehouse and snuck up on me before I did anything permanent. He had called someone to come get Jane, and so she was gone by the time that I woke up and was able to push myself up into a sitting position. Monty was sitting apart from me in the chair and playing with his hair.

"Hey Jack, how are you feeling?"

"Great." And it was true.

"Sorry I had to hit you. It's just that you kind of lost it there."

"Don't worry about it. It's cool. Thanks for putting some sense into me."

"You know what I have to do now right?"

"Yeah, I know. Are they coming here, or are we going to them?"

"The cops are on their way now. I'm sorry, Jack, but--"

"Don't worry about it, man. Let's go outside."

He picked me up, threw my arm over his shoulder, and we began to stumble out to the car. I was still really disoriented from the beating. I mean, he hit me really hard. When he opened the door to the outside, I had to immediately shade my eyes because the sun was so bright. I guess the rain had stopped.

"So," I said. "Is Jules still constantly coming on to you?"

"Yeah, she really doesn't know when to quit."

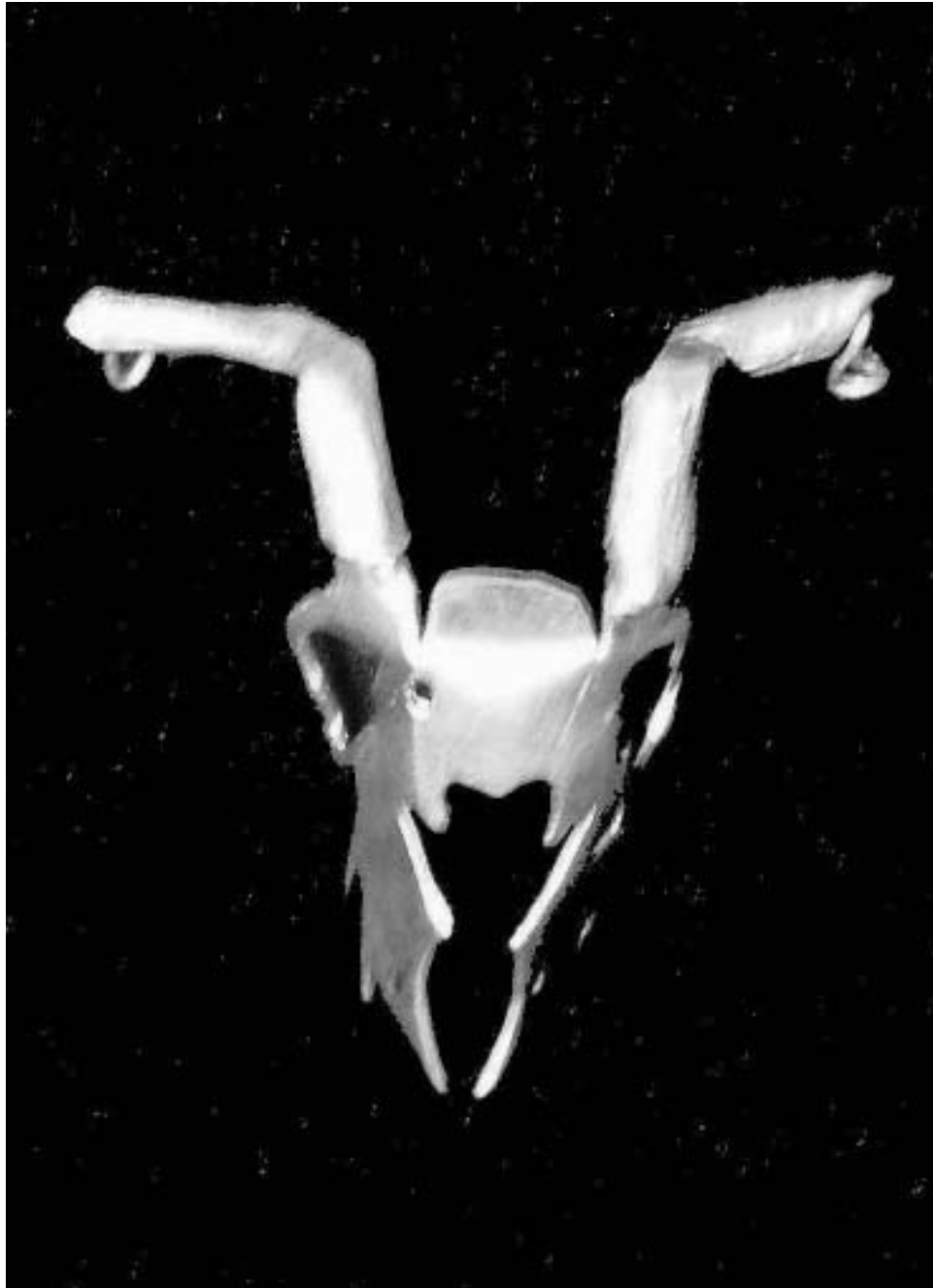
"Man, what a weirdo."

"Really."

We both began to laugh. Or rather Monty began to laugh and I gasped from the pain in my chest. It felt good to laugh again. In a very short time, I had alienated my best friend. I had become obsessed with a girl who I never actually dated, and who probably wasn't everything I wanted her to be anyway. My parents think I'm a freak, and I'm not really sure if I have a job anymore. I can hear the sirens in the distance, and soon I'll be facing charges of aggravated assault and aggravated kidnapping. But man, it is such a beautiful day.

Justin Turner

The Skull



Jennifer Tincher

Mr. Murf



Samantha Esparza

Portrait of a Family

The reality of their life seemed so wonderful,
Merely a disguise everyone came to know,
The truth was an abstract of everyone's thoughts,
Someone was cheating and about to get caught.

Who would have expected such an occurrence?
He denied it with full assurance,
Their rosy red smiles in the portrait, they appeared all right,
The other's hearts crumbled as well, they wanted him out of sight.

A black shirt he had on,
Everyone else bright colors they wore, it just looked so wrong,
Yet the fall setting and the huge smiles, Brought them together one last
time,
He was going to pay for his crime.

Weeks went by, but it felt like days,
It was only the beginning in many kind of ways,
Who would have known it affected them as well,
Three grown women who saw their father fail.

Why did it happen like this?
Their father they really did miss,
In the family portrait they were as one,
Till this day they wonder where their father has gone.

Zakiyyah Danquah

Ramadan

Twenty-nine to thirty days of restriction.
It is a test of my Islamic religion.
Eat only after sunset and before dawn.
To do this during Ramadan, you'll be strong.

Matthew Haywood

Parents Decent

A mother's worry, a father's pride
A father's anger, a mother's cry
A mother's touch, a father's care
A father's concern, a mother's dare
For those who know, two and two
A mother can have passion, as a father can love, too

Tiffany Fogarty

Asian Delight



Jinette Campbell

Tea on the Sea



Matthew Haywood

St. May

It was an endless dark, blue sea
Full of hated passion and bad deeds
The ship was sailing on its own grave
When a bunch of wanderers were looking to be saved
On a ship called St. May

A tear in the sea and a storm in the sky
Did our angels fly or are we going to die
We were dared but not paid
My crew was scared but stayed brave
On a ship called St. May

Treacherous water, harsh winds and fierce lightning
The ship did not want them, and to my crew it was frightening
The ship was like a dray
To the water a storage place for the day
On a ship called St. May

A rumble and then a shout
Will it be today that the prophecy will come out
Finally, they found a way
Standing there with nothing to say
Oh a ship called St. May

It was made clear, far and near
The only thing that was upon us, was our own fear
It was our destiny to die on that fabled day
It was today when the ship was made
It was also my birthday, the 1st of May

Matthew Haywood

The Poem that Never Once Was

I was once a beautiful thing
People often times will be sad, happy or depressed
At the things I share in a personified way
Times weren't easy on me when I was first brought about
I sometimes left people in a state of confusion or dumb-foundedness
Eventually, I became a beautiful thing

I was a symbol of love, passion and admiration
I was the comfortability that words couldn't give
I was the one that gave warmth when the heart was so cold
I was the reason tears shed when there was no violence around
I was a sign of pain and aggression at times
Yet, people still saw me as a beautiful thing

If I was all this, then how come I'm still uncertain
About if I'm really a good thing or a bad thing
How could I bring comfort if I also bring pain?
How did people feel anything, if I left them confused?
Why do tears shed, when there's no sadness or grief?
Was I really a beautiful thing?

No, I was much more than just a beautiful thing
I was everything else, but the same thing
People gave me a name, but never the same one
I was in many different categories, but not one of my own
I guess I was something that never could be anything
I was the poem that never once was

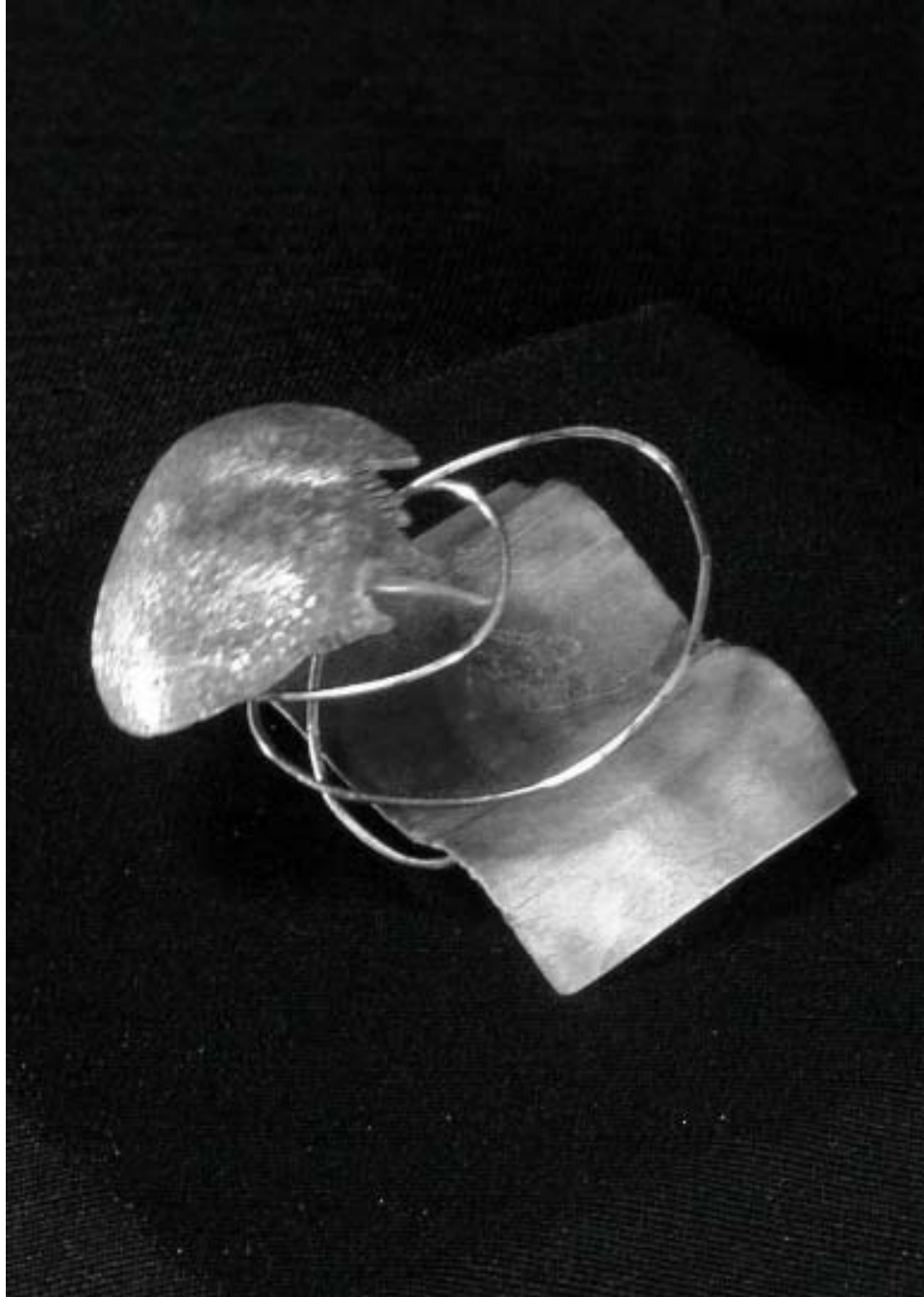
Birgitta Riley

Body Image



Jennifer Tincher

The Brave



Elaine Williams

I Am Human, Too

I am large because I eat, I eat so that I may survive;

Being large does not stop my pain.

I am human too!

People seem to think because I am overweight that I do not feel or need love.

I have a great deal of love to give but there is no one to give it to.

I am human too!

I see the look of disgust in their eyes as I walk by.

I can almost hear what they are thinking: "how fat she is".

I am human too!

Because I am large there are no rides to be ridden at the amusement park.

Because I am large there is no fun to be had.

I am human too!

Swimming is my favorite hobby, but I no longer participate in it because I am overweight

I have heard them say; "look at the beached whale" because I am large.

I am human too!

I sit in my house alone and isolated from others.

I live in a world that does not exist for most but it is very real to me.

I am human too!

I cry tears that no one else sees.

I feel pain that no one else knows is there.

I love as everyone else does but no one knows it.

I am human too!

Because others do not take the time to learn about the person that is inside of me, they do not know this.

Because I am large, my life is filled with depression, ridicule, heart-
ache, and loneliness.

I am human too!

There are no arms to hold me.

There is no one to love me.

There are too many problems to conquer.

I am human too!

There is too much pain to endure any longer.

There is no longer a reason to go on living.

When I am dead and gone there will be no one to miss me.

I am human too!

Do not bury me in a casket under six feet of dirt.

Cremate my body and scatter my ashes over the sea, so I may be free
from all the pain
and hurt.

I am human too!

Chad Pritchard

Autumn

She comes and sits a spell, resting before moving on. With her comes a relaxed sense of hurry. She brings the golden rays of the sunshine. In these shortened days, the golden rays seem to stay longer, they seem less harsh. A certain crispness comes with her, and she adds a refreshing sense to the air, neither cold nor hot, but pleasantly comfortable. She brings with her open windows and air conditioners turned off. Accompanied with her come the light jackets and sweaters, to be worn in the morning and to be shed in the afternoon. She brings the many wonderful tastes and smells of the harvest, and the long hours waiting for the turkey to be done. She knows the recipe to make children smile. She knows how to have a good game of backyard football. She smiles and nods her head as she thinks of these things, before getting up and moving on.

Kelly Fest

The Tree

Birds come to roost
On the old knotted tree.
Wind's breath gently blows
The yellowed leaves free.

Older than the yard
In which it grows,
It has seen through the years
All that comes and that goes,

Yielding amber cracked loads
Each faithful year,
Making Thanksgiving pies
And even some beer.

The children who've climbed
Its branches through time
Have all come and passed,
But this tree keeps its mind

On its branches and leaves
Spreading glory each spring.
Forever now, forever more
This tree it will sing.

Jim Dunn

Stormy's Forest



Jernaley Martin

Bowl of Fruit



Christopher Baker

The Final Protest

“Alright everybody up to the line,” barked the first sergeant to the jittery troops in my company.

I have only been out of boot camp just long enough to go to jump school and now I am about to jump out into the middle of the Perpetual War. I know that most of the other men in my unit are fresh, too, either straight out of jail with the promise of a pardon or drafted for financial reasons. See in this day of age the armed forces are not voluntary. Ever since the Perpetual War started, the president instituted this new policy stating that anyone that commits a felony or stays on unemployment too long is automatically drafted. The proposition passed quite easily considering nobody knew about it till it was being enforced. Then when people began to protest the administration made it a felony to question the government in a time of war. With a few strategically timed bombardments of propaganda, people just accepted it as a necessary means to combat “the enemy” that remains defined as any person or persons that posses a threat to security.

Unlimited targets equal Perpetual War.

As you can imagine, my country is the richest democratic country in the world because it solved all the major economic and social problems with just a few very broad laws. There is no one in my country that is homeless because everyone is eligible for unemployment. The draw back is that if you remain on unemployment for more that one year, you are drafted. They had some people that tried to opt out of the system by becoming homeless, so to counteract that they started arresting people for tax evasion. The government’s rationale was that if you are homeless you are not on unemployment and don’t have a job so you must not be paying taxes. Then they instituted the “round-up.” A “round-up” is kind of like an economic enema. The government gathers up all the local law enforcement and they search for any homeless people. Anybody that they found squatting or

begging would get “rounded up” and sent to boot camp.

That is how I ended up here.

With a hiss of the hydraulic legs the hatch that is about to eject me to my soldiers’ death opens, exposing the night sky.

“Alright then. When I sound off your number, don’t think just jump,” the sergeant said threateningly. Even though he was screaming at the top of his lungs, it sounded distant compared to the sucking noise of the gaping hatch.

“One.”

I saw the first guy jump out of the plane and in an instant he was tumbling out of sight, and over end.

“Two.”

The second guy jumped immediately after the first just like he was told.

“Three.”

I knew this was my cue but I could not convince my legs that this was the best thing for me. I had been successfully dodging the system for quite some time as a silent protest. I thought if people saw a different way to live they would embrace it. Unfortunately for me, fear is a better motivator than the pursuit of happiness.

“Three god damn you before I put a hole in you f**kin head!”

I didn’t want to jump, but now I am.....alling.

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. .
. .
. .
. .

Falling starts with a moment of silent disorientation, as you tumble over and over in slow motion. Then the air starts to whistle and chirp as you start picking up speed.

Every time that I jumped out of the plane during training, I considered what I am now committed to doing or not doing depending on how you look at it.

Every time that I jumped, I always got the sensation of true freedom, absolute power over my destiny.

To be or not to be?

See, it makes perfect sense to me. I mean I have spent my entire life avoiding the forced morals and the notion that financial freedom is the only freedom worth striving for. As a younger man, I read somewhere that chasing something relentlessly is the same as being a slave to it. If you think about it, the only thing you have absolutely no control over is the passing of time and the inevitability of death.

Suddenly I came to an epiphany. Books can get you killed.

The ground is so close now that I can see the individual branches of the trees and people that have never met before slaughtering each other. I close my eyes and enjoy the sensation of falling as I take a deep meditative breath.

This isn't suicide. This is protest.

Inhale

One, Two, Thr.....

James Louis Garner

Listening to the Wind

I am but one soul on this lonely road. I travel day after day wondering where this road is leading. I won't know until I get there so I take one step at a time and my heart keeps on beating. I know where I want to go but is it where I'm heading?

I make sure to laugh and smile with each passing day. I enjoy myself, have a good time and continue on my way.

I stop when the road I'm traveling on leads into another, and I'm left to make a choice knowing that there's no other. I choose the road that few have traveled on and make my first step knowing, that yesterday has come and gone so I keep on going.

I welcome this fresh new start as a brand new day and always make sure I have some kind words to say. I write this knowing my journey has yet to end as I travel on this road listening to the wind.

Brad Gill, Mario Cavazos, and Henry Carter

Dragon Tea



Crystal Kazakos

Ashlynn's All Stars

