

THE GRIFFIN

*This creature was sacred to the sun
and kept guard over hidden treasures.*

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the Griffin staff, Spring 1986

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In the Ozark Hills of Maries County

Early morning breezes waken the forest
Dancing messages of red, yellow, and gold
Sail and glide, seeking purpose, seeking rest
Alluvial humus, nature's placenta, stills the cold

Silently, a Shagbark Hickory drops a seed
Cradled in the loam, rocked by winter wind,
Kinfolk gather to protect, supplying every need:
Coyote piss, coon, and possum dirt---a fertile blend

Fiery fingertips in May massage the womb
Alarms sound, wakening dormant caverns of soil
Laboring, tentacles pierce the surrendering tomb
Sprouting for the heavens, life begins in toil

Seasons visited, shared, but lost
Mother lies under marble, part of the forest

--Frank Pointer

Dessert

Ivory microwaves and dinner beeps
Well done, warmed over rehash pulling
Noses out from television's news...

After small talking in supper sips
My stomach rumbles against the habitual
Silence tabled, sat Soft Souper's stifled
Yawns, intake of the sodium restricted.
They cross legs, a polite action
To banish hungry pain, any guttural bark
From under the dining table,
Below the belt, level of sinfull
Sliding of hands, a left over grissle grease
Rib tossed behind the foot, like salt
Over shouldered Fortune to be poodle-pawed.
"Down Fifi, run along, run alone," weakness
Whispers teasing a spoiled rotting toy.

Passing a petty pity sentence in powdered wig
Shaking the authority finger, the smart-assed snub
Accusing puffs of Bobby's club wagging to and fro...

Self conscious drops my conversational stare
Into the exile of a dark dessert,
De served mound a mammoth chocolate mousse
Drooling from the tomb where failing diets
Moo and moan in guilty gulps.
Digging sweets awakens an anorexic martyr
To crunch lust memory held within ice.
Stainless steal sunk in mire mud pie
As I scoop up ice screams, the nutmeg spice
Biting bits of almond bone and berry gourds.
Chews the ravenous relish of pottery past
And I scrape the porcelain bottom, slurp colors
Crisp ashes stirred upon the stoven cave wall.

Their hunt ritual growls primitive appetite,
With only a gravy-stained linen cloth to dab
My chin, grins.

--Wes Morgenthaler

Highlighters?

I colored my scriptures
So seen through and readed
By fluorescent strip-light vibrates,
A double under-line's over emphasis,
Tint tainting of the Word?

Is so white, it bleeds,
Burning being
A melt down mending of marked-up
Slashes to pale too pastel invisible.
Missing the message in between
Of simple space, truth full.

The stress shocks of doctrine
Ink-blot's a pity scar, staining
Gilt golden tissue soaked in
Bat-black bracket's blind bind
Seraphilm (wing's air) swirlings.

Cartooning of the prodigal Son,
The stick-figure of the prophet's
Philosopheed for phosphorescence.
O Christ in the box? Him humming
"Pop goes the weasel"
To true disciples of the Divine
Doodler.

But the Sunday schools serve,
Along with kool-aid cookies dipped pink,
A preach to sheep to crayon
The Angel's breath always blew,
Far from the pulpit shouts:
"Child, Stay within the lines."

--Wes Morgenthaler

New Wave Movement

On westward pavement a clumsy Kabuki,
Timid touching a dew dance,
Recorded rite, a sonic halo of ears
Phoned rainbow playing over head,
Till the morning Ch'in was blasted off

Thundered through, tin talons grip
With syntho screech streak of jet
Flight striking dumb.
Noting now a fair hare raising
Tensed to a saving flex,
The savored recoil over hollow pot.
Holes, falling past and long gone.

Super imposed a listening pleasure, Sung
Of Buddha cross legged, raining Fan-bai
Silky and silicon seated upon micro-chip,
Plucking muzak mystic on magnetic
Memory from reel to real.

Still, half steps, a channel turning,
Left the noise that clings dry static
Sparks of 'lectric Rock lightning.
New tune right in
Some solitude of water falling,
A dawn drumming the Tao.

--Wes Morgenthaler

Kiddy-Cat-Came

Shoulder tapped, I toy-top spin,
Turning to a tickle
Of some One's slight hand?
To find in my face
By the sneaky back way
Little Leo dropped from some star,
Brightening a day.

Poof, purr-fur sliding salutations,
A laughing lick of prickle,
Nudging snugs snoozing my lap.
Quiet strokes of a Golden cut gaze,
Bearing his belly's velvet vibrations,
Finger tips warm, sinking in too.

Napped anew,
Bouncy whisper whiskers brush
Round my eyes whip swirling
Fur winds
Of perfume floats, hairs clinging
My woolen scarf to hold cloudy breath,
A God send
Savor from biting weather.

Lingers, the shiver bell tinkles
His liquid leap to invisible shelves.

--Wes Morgenthaler

Let dusk be the child
Of darkness and light,
And dawn be
Morning in her infancy.
The afternoon
Be life's longing for itself,
And evening
A chance to bid farewell
To a sleepy sun.
In darkness
We sleep.

--Celia Angel

-*

*Two tiny tears
that drop

in to
crystal line
a mazes.

Treble trembles
weeping for

flesh a

lone *
*-

--Wes Morgenthaler



--photo by Suzie Woodford

Once, a man asked
To hold my hand,
For no reason
Other than to comfort me.
His words
Filled me with wisdom,
While his heart
Ached with mine.

And I thought--
Why must there always be a reason?

He felt no shame
In holding my hand,
Yet, it had been so long
Since I had offered.

Once again, I thought--
Why must there always be a reason?

As we strolled together
I felt like a little girl again,
And soon after
Our journey ended.
I was sorry.
It was then
I discovered,
We were still holding hands
My father and I.

--Celia Angel

The Inn

Even though Winward was an old man and his inn was full of shadows, he still held his shoulders straight. His dignified bearing made him look a little like a military man, but his voice was soft and sometimes his mane of white hair stayed tousled till mid-day. Nevertheless, he managed to present himself very well on no notice, despite the fact that in these dark times there was seldom anyone for him to present himself to.

Most days he spent the largest part of his time by the window at the end of the bar, holding the curtain back with one hand, looking out at the wide, flat, inexorably arriving wall of black in the east. It must have been as high as the sky, because no light came over it. Perhaps the eastern horizon had curled up into space. If that was what had happened, then his wife must be up there somewhere, as well as the best parts of his son.

He stood there now as he had every day since it had begun, centuries ago. With one hand he held the curtain, with the other a short beer in a teacup. Still out there, he told himself. He fancied he could detect movement in the darkness, but he always thought that.

He let the curtain drop and walked back to the bar. A sudden crash made his chest go tight, and he turned stiffly to its source. It was the boy, fallen from his chair again, lying on the floor like an enormous overturned beetle. "Yang yang yang," he said, wagging his head futilely and looking imploringly at Winward. "Umma umma."

"There now," Winward said, putting his arms around the boy's chest and lugging him to his feet. "You're all right." He sat the boy down in the chair. "You're all right now, Bobby."

"Yomma," Bobby said softly. He nodded vacantly and his sparse locks of long hair shifted in the dead beer-smelling air. Winward squeezed his shoulder, and he looked up and grinned. His teeth were still sound, his muscles still hard, but every

ounce of discretion and awareness had been scooped out of him.

"Talk to me, Bobby," Winward said.

"Yo no," Bobby whined. "Tock?" He threw his hairy arms around Winward's neck and kissed his cheek. "Yet's tock, Papa," he said. He patted Winward's face and turned away. His toys were on the table in front of him, and he played with them.

Winward watched his son, silently mourning the brawny arms and the delicate fingers and the once-bright mind that now busied themselves animating a double handful of little plastic toys. "Bobby," Winward said weakly, not loud enough to be heard, his head wobbling a little. Bobby said "Bick! Bick!" and made one plastic man strike another.

Winward looked at the boy for a moment longer, feeling the weariness come over him. At times it was so great that he could scarcely overcome it, so it had to be hidden. The boy probably couldn't tell the difference between one mood and another, but Winward could.

Winward returned to the bar and refilled his teacup. The beer was not cold, but ice had been very hard to come by since the sky had gone black in the east. By now he had pretty well accustomed himself to the warm, bitter pilsner, and he no longer had to make a face when he drank it.

He propped his elbows on the bar and absently watched the workings of his son's strap-like back muscles while he thought. He thought of the first day the sun hadn't come up on time, hidden by the distant high band of black that had swallowed the horizon. At first there had been nothing but confusion. There had been communications breakdowns. Contact with anyone outside the neighborhood had become impossible, and a tiny piece of real estate had taken on compass coordinates and territorialities. The blackness had inched up the sky and the days had grown shorter, little by little winding down toward a brief red morning that melted into the west. Even now Winward had to look almost straight up to see the sky when he faced east, and people no longer came from that direction.

He had thought about leaving, moving further west, but it was not an attractive notion. In that direction people had stopped talking. Winward saw them from time to time when they came in for drinks, but they were always alone,

sipping silently and sadly at their beers, gazing out the east window at the blackness, waiting, already sickened by the anticipation of sickness. Perhaps Winward would leave when he had to, but not until then.

He finished his beer and rinsed the cup with a dipper of water from the bucket. Folding his arms across his chest, he stepped to the window again. Try as he might, he could not see into the darkness. Sometimes it seemed to have nudged against the wall of the inn, yet he could still see a good stretch of ground through the east window during the short day.

There was a movement. There was definitely movement this time, and in an instant the distant shadow of trunk and arms and legs and head became a man, as if a translucent wall had been stepped through. Two men now, the first dragging the second along. They were coming directly toward the inn.

Winward stepped from the window, letting the curtain fall back. His eyes felt dry and scratchy, and he knew he hadn't blinked in a long while. He looked at the boy, who was still playing quietly in the half-light of a candle, driving a little plastic truck around the perimeter of the tabletop, looking for an off-ramp.

They would be here any minute, and Winward knew he could not trust them. There was a sickness, a corruption, in that blackness, and they would have it. He could duck out the west door with the boy, but that would be the beginning of the end--the first wound, which would generate a down-spiraling series of complications. So he stood behind the bar with his arms crossed, his face blank.

The door opened and the first man pushed his face in. He saw the boy first, but understood at once and looked for another person, finding Winward. He regarded the old man with dangerous, lupine eyes, slowly drawing his lips back from his teeth in what resembled a smile. "How goes it, old man?" he said, pushing the door open and slipping inside soundlessly. He was short and wiry, and every muscle in his body seemed to be tensed.

"You tell me," said Winward cautiously. He tried to see past the man's shoulder, but was deliberately

blocked.

The man grinned wider. "I'm Elmo," he said, shoving his thumbs into his back pockets and hunching his shoulders. His grin was ingratiating but opaque, somehow feral.

"Who's your friend?"

"Oh, yeah, him," said Elmo. "His name's Solly. He's working the pump. He'll be in in a minute."

"Not if he has it." Winward put his wrinkled old hands on the bar and looked straight at the stranger, whose eyes never stopped their wild, random flight about the room.

Elmo's grin disappeared, but his teeth did not. "Has what?" he snapped.

"Why even bother with that?" Winward said. "We all know what it is."

Elmo's eyes smoldered, and Winward thought he could see the short hairs on the nape of the man's neck beginning to stand up. "He ain't got it," Elmo growled. "You turn yellow when you got it, don't you?"

"I've heard some do," said Winward, "but that isn't the important part is it?"

"He ain't chewed nobody's gizzard out yet, if that's what you mean." Elmo tilted his head to one side and looked at Winward from the corner of his eye. "He ain't got it," he repeated. "He's just tired. We're both tired. We had a hard time of it."

"You couldn't have gotten away without getting it," Winward said stonily.

"Shut up!" Elmo screamed suddenly, quivering with impatience. "I'm through screwing around with you." He dug his nails into the padded edge of the bar, breathing heavily, then snapped his head around to look at the door. "Solly," he yelled, "come on in!" There was no response. He gave Winward a brutal look and bounded through the door, every muscle working.

Winward looked at Bobby. He was still sitting there playing. Elmo had probably not even distracted his attention. He had placed a plastic rocket in the middle of the table and was arranging spectators around it.

Winward thought about drawing himself another short beer, but decided against it. Here was another chance to leave, to abandon the place to Elmo and his friend. But Winward wanted the quick way out, even though the quick way could involve an eon of confusion and clawing pain. His wife had gone the quick way. When she knew she'd been

stricken she and Bobby had started home to Winward, but she had arrived in a coffin. Her dead face had worn a look of anguish and indignation, as if untried, uncaring hands had probed a bitter wound. All the pain of separation was gone then, and emptiness, a dull persistent discomfort, had replaced it. The long way just meant waiting, wondering when the quick part would begin.

Elmo was back now, pulling Solly along by the belt. Solly was tiny, a single skin-covered bone with a bright pelt of red hair springing haphazardly from his head. He wobbled uncontrollably as Elmo helped him onto a stool, and when he sat down the sparse light of the bar-lamp shone on a large circular patch the color of a bruise on the side of his head. It looked as if the wide flat implacable face of a sledge hammer had struck him. He reached up to touch the place every few seconds, panting feverishly, his eyes closed.

"He's got it, you bastard," Winward said, glaring accusingly at Elmo. He felt something breaking inside him, something that had been bound up with steel bands and was now flowing out of control.

"What the hell are you talking about?" yelled Elmo, pounding on the bartop with the flat of his hand. "He's got it, you got it, I got it-- Everybody's got it." His face convulsed threateningly. "Look at him!" he said, pointing at Bobby. "He's got it!"

"I kept him safe and he got over it," Winward protested, his voice breaking. "He was one of the lucky ones."

"Jesus Christ, old man, you don't even know what it is, do you?"

"How do you think I can fight it if I don't know what it is?" Winward said, unable to give his voice the volume he knew it should have.

Elmo shrieked--with laughter, this time--and pounded the bar again. "Well, maybe you're right, old man," he said. "Maybe he don't got it. But he's still a idiot. Now which is better?"

Winward tried to meet Elmo's eyes, but even the pale bar-light seemed too bright to face.

"Hey, old man," Elmo said, poking a claw-like finger into Winward's ribs, "What do you say? He's a idiot, ain't he? Ain't he?"

Winward turned away. It wasn't so hard to face the light when Elmo wasn't in it. "He could play the piano,"

Winward said, working hard to keep his voice from giving out completely. "He and his mother were back east--"

"Never mind!" barked Elmo. "Just shut the hell up."

"What is it that you want?" Winward said with an effort.

"Right now I want you to shut the hell up," Elmo cried, reaching across the bar and giving Winward a resounding slap on the back of the head. "Now turn around here where I can see you."

Winward turned slowly back to Elmo, his face weak in the pale, flickering light.

"I seen it, you know," Elmo said, shivering violently. "It takes a guy and rakes him to death. Like he was a pile of dirt or something, it rakes him till he isn't even a person. I seen it." His voice had taken on a rasping quality, and he couldn't seem to get enough air. "And then the guy rakes you, maybe, like somebody who's raking the guts out of you because you got it even though he's got it, too. He don't even have to want to rake you; it's just that somebody done it to him and it's something you pass on."

"Not everybody has it," Winward said, pulling up a brief stubbornness from somewhere.

"Well," Elmo said hoarsely, fixing Winward with his yellow eyes, "they're going to get it."

At his table, Bobby was ready for blastoff. The little plastic rocket shuddered on its launching pad and then took off. "Yet's go!" Bobby cried, raising the rocket to the extent of his reach.

Elmo growled derisively. He slapped Solly on the arm, and Solly whimpered briefly and licked his lips, then opened his eyes. They were completely yellow.

"I told you," Elmo said. "I told you."

He slipped back from the bar into the shadowy edge of the light and crouched there, and all Winward could see of him were the two shining points of his eyes.

--Dave Henderson

Crevices, Caverns, Cavities

Hollow, and yet, hopeful holes
Inroads leading, enticing, luring
Darkly, deceivingly to dimness
Dusks, defeats
But, happily housing
Hopeful hoards.
I dig--and!--deeper
Into days and dazes,
Dents and other depressions
Crawl and cringe, creep into crevices
Where I wear wary wants, wishes
Craving the cradling solitude
The concave depth of separation.
Whole, hearty, hardy holes:
Measured movements into medicinally morose moods.
And marked with melancholy.

--Karen Lumpe

Joy in the Popsicle

The joy rides and resides,
Lives within life
Like the cheery cherry flavor
In the popsicle
Sweet and sticky
Artificially fabricated, produced;
On hot days,
Running in dripping, staining paths
From fingers and palms
Down forearms
To the elbows, pointed;
On cooler days
Remaining captive inside shape
Until drawn out
By the sweet suckings and supplications
Leaving the plain white
Empty, icy, frozen form.

--Karen Lumpe

FREEDOM RING

for Dr. Martin Luther King

Dr. King, Dr. King,
When did you hear freedom ring?

When the bloodhounds growled & wailed?
When the sheriffs locked you up in jail?
When you sat up front in a bus?
When you overcame for us?

Dr. King, Dr. King,
When did you hear freedom ring?

When the tap clicked on your phone?
When you prayed at night alone?
When a child returned your smile?
When you walked the extra mile?

Dr. King, Dr. King,
When did you hear freedom ring?

With civil rights writ into law?
With klansmen pounding at the door?
When you won the Nobel prize?
When you looked into deep dark eyes?

Dr. King, Dr. King,
When did you hear freedom ring?

When you lunched with congressmen?
When you marched with gargagemen?
When your dream lit up the night?
When your soul beamed in the light?

Dr. King, Dr. King,
When did you hear freedom ring?

When you climbed the mountain high?
When the bullet let you die?
When your spirit rose to speak?
When you turned the other cheek?

Dr. King, Dr. King,
When did you hear freedom ring?

--michael castro



Getting There

I'm riding the bus to work,
got my plaster-spattered Cardinal
cap on my head, a bag of lunch,
the morning Globe.

Historic Soulard neighborhood crumbling
out the window.

She gets my attention
by sitting right down next to me,
looking straight at me,
breaks me out of a brick-laying
reverie

by saying right to me:

"You got a cigarette?"

I'm taken aback a bit

by this directness,

but I recover, glibly:

"Yeah, sure, fine, by

all means, here..." I

can look at her now:

youngish, maybe thirty, a little

frazzled around the edges, but

energy sharply focused

toward her center, her face, her mouth, something

incredibly attractive

in her forthrightness:

"You got a match?"

Right at me like that--crisp

as a newly minted bill, in a normal matter

of fact tone--loud

in the silently crowded bus.

"You're not gonna light that thing!"

I gape, incredulous citizen,

pointing with my pack of Camels

at the NO SMOKING sign blaring

over the seats. She

looks at me like I'm from Mars.

"Fuck yeah, I'm gonna light it.

And I'm gonna smoke it too."

forthright

with those clear hard eyes.

She leans down & does
light it, peering up at me
with a funny smile,
looking me over.
"Where ya going?" she says.
More mocking than flirtatious.
"To work?"
I nod, the lunch bag
suddenly heavy between my legs.
Her smile turns inward as
she leans back & smokes.
Then she whips around as if on impulse:
"You know where any jobs are?"
Her earnestness tugs at my heart.
But I've got no answer.
Just a sad shake of the head.
She stretches,
breathes in
& out, billowing smoke, expansively.
Tuned to
Where she is
going (as if
 knowing)

meanwhile,
the driver has stopped the bus.
He is standing & turning & looming
over the passengers.
"Is someone SMOKING on the bus?"
he ventures, like a pronouncement from on high.
A sea of eyes--the old, the infirm, the deranged,
the vulnerable, the flotsom, the handsome--
ride the waves
from the driver
to the girl, who sits calmly, blatantly
puffing on a cigarette
next to me.
I feel myself sinking
as she seems to rise
buoyed up by the blue whisps of smoke.
The driver strides purposefully toward us.
He is a large, serious, Black man.
He stops & stares.

"Miss," he says,
as their eyes lock,
"either you put out that cigarette,
or you get put out."
He's right to the point, clear
in his direction too.
That's why he's the driver.
Inside eternity,
she pauses. Then nods
crisply. She bends
her upper body forward
& furiously pumps her right arm
up & down to crush the offending glowing cigarette on
or through the floor--
all the time looking up at the driver,
defiant, as if to say, "THERE!
(asshole!)"

The confrontation more or less
over, the driver turns, grimly--
a sheriff doing his job, shuffling wearily
back down dusty Main Street.
He plants his butt
in the saddle, eyes
the clogged up road,
& with a whine
we wheel

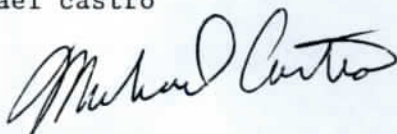
She slumps down in the seat next to me
as if sighing
with her entire body.
Within seconds
I feel the back of her hand
tapping my leg.
Turning slightly,
I catch her demented grin.
Looking down,
I see smoke
licking up from around
her curled fingers.
Cupped deftly in her palm,
the cigarette is still alive!

Low-riding, she smokes
that sucker
clear down to Broadway,
which is where she's going.

Getting off,
she smiles at me, & murmurs,
"Thanks for the light."

Later, as I work on the wall,
above the sad city,
she stays with me.
"Thanks for the light..."
I should have echoed
the thought, I think,
loud & clear,
right back to her.

--michael castro

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Castro". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "M".

Revision, Revision

Re-righting red roses and
Redoing wrong rhyme-lines
Reveal ridiculous reasons and
Results in write righting.

--Suzie Woodford



