

1987



# THE GRIFFIN

APRIL, 1987

THE GRIFFIN

April, 1937

Sacred to the sun, the griffin  
kept guard over hidden treasures.

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## Apology to Felicia

Only  
I  
Have managed  
To  
Tarnish  
Something golden:  
Envious--  
For  
I  
Don't shine  
...or so I choose to believe.  
And now--  
We  
Both  
Are weathered  
As I have,  
Selfishly,  
Stolen  
Your "day in the sun."  
Still, relentlessly,  
You offer me  
Great wealth:  
Your love and friendship.  
Yet, in a struggle  
For  
Self-acceptance  
My own  
Self-pity  
Has kept me from  
The same offering.  
Once again,  
I have cheated you:  
Making  
Rare  
The days  
I tell you  
I love  
And admire you,  
Felicia...

Forever blaming  
Time  
As my excuse,  
When  
The  
Real  
Thief of opportunities  
Was  
(My) Pride.  
You knew all along.  
Yet, quietly,  
You said nothing  
In fear of  
Hurting me  
As  
I,  
Countlessly,  
Caused you  
Great pain--  
Pain not deserved.  
And now--  
As I  
Add  
To a collection  
Of  
Regrets,  
Distance apart  
Has caused me  
To realize  
My foolishness  
As I long  
For your friendship  
And a  
Chance  
To tell you  
I love you.

--Celia Angel

Last chance good-bye  
A kiss...  
A cry...  
Last chance hug  
A heart-felt  
Tug.  
Last chance to say  
"Don't go--  
Please stay.  
I'll miss you,  
Good-bye."  
Last chance farewell  
In the distance  
We yell  
"I love you,  
Good-bye!"

--Celia Angel

Contemplation.  
Serious thought about nothing special.  
Concentrating on the trivial, the unimportant  
as if it were worth the mental effort.  
Mind wandering aimlessly, but knowingly so.  
Imagining the impossible or improbable.  
Questioning the absolutes.  
Considering the because's instead of the whys.  
No conclusions, no decisions.  
Careless thought.  
Careful thought.  
Contemplation.

--Teri Pinter

THE QUESTION (On Giving Final Exams)

Is why?

I suppose you want  
me to answer yours  
before you answer  
mine...

Well,  
I haven't had it put  
quite this way before,  
and...

You see  
well, they set aside  
this time--they gave me  
these two hours

And  
uh...  
busy minds, happy hearts  
as they say.

Well  
it must have started  
when we got kicked  
out of the garden  
that's when everything else

Got started  
and the questions came  
with the Fall  
like the rest

Besides

how can you tell  
what you have learned  
until you see  
what you say  
to quote Auden and  
everybody else who  
has been quoting  
Lewis Carroll  
who was quoting  
Alice and who  
wrote all about her  
and all her trouble  
in getting out of the garden--  
where everything stared back at her  
and for every question there was  
another question or a comment

Everyone

is always trying to get out;  
no one wants to stay  
anywhere, and

If

you want all these things  
and want to get out  
you've got to answer  
these questions--

Why?

Because

they are there  
like the Alps

And because

I have this little book  
with a space at the end  
which says

FINAL

--Howard Bennett, April 1987

LOVE SUCKS...  
you up into a vacuum  
so that sometimes  
you just can't  
SWEEP.

--Chris Campbell

In the race to find  
my true self,  
I struggle across  
the finish line,  
Only to find the crowd  
has stopped cheering.

--Chris Campbell

Stark, bleak outline  
standing naked against  
the cold greyness.  
Stripped of your covering,  
left fragile and vulnerable  
in the face of the on-coming winter.  
The failing sun pulls down night  
through your bare, outstretched arms.

--Michele Fehlings



## The Smells of a Country Fall

All of the woods celebrate  
the end of one more summer  
as a light rain releases hidden aromas  
and welcome in the freshness of fall.

Like a pot of savory soup,  
mixed with a pinch of this and that,  
fills a house with tantalizing odors,  
the smells of the country mingle together  
and touch the fall air with comfort.

As the sassafras tree erupts  
in a fiery red, a snap of the branch  
delivers a scent of tangy lemon  
tingling in my nose.

The plump, juicy persimmons,  
softly toasted to a ripe orange by the sun,  
drop to the ground, emitting a spicyness  
like pumpkin pie laced with cinnamon and nutmeg.

Crushing a cedar branch between my fingers,  
the pungent fragrance imparts  
the warmth of Christmas, filling my mind  
with thoughts of the holidays.

--Michele Fehlings

## Below the Bridge

When I stepped onto the bridge and saw below me  
The strips of chocolate-milk water  
Between the wooden planks I remembered being there before.  
I didn't remember the bridge,  
Or the water,  
Or even the house on the other side.  
I remembered the feeling,  
The fear of walking across the bridge.  
That anxiety rushed back to me as I peered down through  
the creaking planks,  
Carefully watching where I placed my foot  
Each time I took a step.  
Would my foot go through if I slipped?  
Some of the spaces were as wide as my ankle.  
And surely the wood had aged and rotted away more  
Since the last time I had walked across it.  
What if I fell through, into that silent, stagnant water,  
Backwater, so different from the flowing river  
several yards away.  
The river was alive, constantly moving.  
If I fell into the river it wouldn't be the end.  
The current would carry me on to another place.  
But if I fell from the bridge the muddy, murky water would  
pull me under,  
Leaving me to be nibbled by the snapping turtles  
That kept poking their heads from the water,  
Looking for something.

--Michele Fehlings

### The Princess

Without knowledge concerning the dungeon or hell  
The princess lived in an earthy heaven  
Over the cool stone her body was draped  
In between the Jack-O-Lantern teeth  
High above all on the rim of the tower  
Like the nubile child in a world of giants  
She sat in the comfort of her own embrace  
Her eyes peered across the meadows  
Searching for those of her knight far away  
Suddenly lost in the forest of her dreams  
The nymph tipped off the crest of the castle  
At the end of her tumble on a current of air  
She landed upon the back of a crocodile  
Swimming along the moat, this counteous creature  
Carried the searching princess to her destiny  
Awaiting on the other side of the fortress  
A peasant hero with luring eyes and outstretched arms  
Possessing the grasping hands of a creator.

--Elaine Francis

### Maturity

A pause  
A breath taken  
To separate time  
A symbol of independence and freedom

--Elaine Francis

## Perfection

Your youthful smile  
is molded to delicate perfection  
and so cleverly done  
it almost looks real.  
I have seen the evolution of this smile  
from its crude beginnings  
to its now artistic state.  
I am awed.  
You are a master of your craft  
but it is too practiced,  
too perfect...  
You forgot  
that it is human  
to be flawed.

--Elaine Francis

## Imperfection

An oil lamp with a chip in the glass  
Is sitting on a wooden table,  
Legs uneven and finish scratched,  
In a room of walls with chips and stains.

A word spoken at an inappropriate time,  
Laughing at what others take seriously,  
Fighting over blunted principles,  
Crying over an imperfect rhyme.

In this world cows with two heads  
Will grow and live and survive,  
Their existence a self justifying fact.  
People with complexions pale, dark, and red

-Variety abounds, all cities are not Rome,  
But the flaws are virtues.  
Imperfections give identity,  
And is not the same true of a poem?

--John W. Lohmann

## Mary and Maria

Mary was a mother for nine years and then she suddenly wasn't. She was still a wife, of course, but wife and mother were like a pair of hands, neither able to clap alone. So she began smiling after Brian's funeral and kept smiling until her husband encouraged her to get out of the house.

"What would I do?" she asked. "I know two things in this world." And though her words might be invested with a certain grim inevitability, it did her good to say them. It was too long since she had had the opportunity to remind herself of the rock-like certainty of the words "wife" and "mother," even if in doing so she reminded herself also of the squeal of tires, the heart-breaking explosion of her son's flesh. It was her mother's dictum that had given her strength then: "A woman is compassion."

For the first few months after Brian's death she spent a good bit of her time shopping and going to matinees, but she soon grew tired of toy stores, and films like Snow White and The Swiss Family Robinson paled when there was no Brian to nudge when the good lines came. Often, too, she had found herself staring at a screen that was supposed to be filled with cartoon figures only to see her husband's accusing, tormented face blaming it on her all over again, and she would promise for the hundredth time that he would never again see anything in her but compassion, compassion and sacrifice.

Finally she was persuaded to take a couple of courses at the university. She had no very clear idea of what she wanted to study, but her academic adviser was at last able to determine that her interests lay under the general heading of "liberal arts." He told her this meant, of course, that she would have to demonstrate proficiency in a foreign language.

"Proficiency?" asked Mary. She was not sure what the word meant, and when she said it she chopped it into soft syllables and smiled in a sweet, motherly way, her eyes nearly shut, her lips closed but stretched wide. She was actually quite attractive.

"Yes," said her adviser. He was a short, elderly man with a wispy fringe of white hair and a very red face. He licked his lips continually. "Do you speak a foreign language? Did you take, say, French or Spanish in high school?"

Mary shook her head and smiled again, as if to say that she had never even considered it. When she was in high school her only thought had been to finish as soon as possible and marry Lance--who was then a tall, handsome boy with white-blond hair and a lean, muscular physique--and bear his children.

"Well, then," said her adviser, his eyes flashing, "it would be a good idea to get a jump on it and take care of it right away. Do you have any idea what language you might like to learn?"

"Oh, no," she said. "I really had no idea I would have to learn a foreign language. It must be very hard."

"That depends. Perhaps you'd like to take Spanish. That wouldn't be too difficult. As a matter of fact, that's the language most of our students opt for."

"Do you mean most of them take Spanish?" she asked.

Her adviser smiled. "Yes," he said. He looked steadily at her, and his teeth clicked faintly. "Can I go ahead and put you down for the ten forty class?"

She thought about it very hard, frowning and feeling the dimple in her right elbow with the fingers of her left hand. "Well," she said earnestly, "okay. That's what I'll do."

So she was in.

The Spanish instructor was a thirty-two-year-old named Pablo Manhera. He was not tall, but he was firmly built, with a thick chest, solid heavy legs, and straight broad shoulders. He had a lovely head of jet-black hair, every strand of which was always plastered carefully into place, and body hair poked out at his cuffs and collar.

He stood behind his desk on the first day of class, his muscular arms crossed, and watched his students file in, putting his large white teeth into a friendly yet formal smile. From time to time he would give someone a short nod and say "Buenos dias" in his deep, resonant voice. He dipped his head slightly in appreciation when a student responded appropriately.

Mary took a seat in the row by the window and stacked her textbooks in front of her. They had very colorful matching covers: smiling Latins with baskets on their heads and a string of words with an exclamation point at either end. She had sat in the livingroom the night before, while Lance watched TV, and leafed through them, but hadn't been able to get a great deal out of them. She had told Lance she was afraid she might not be able to become a student again at this point in her life, and he had looked at her impatiently and said, "Well, if you don't try you'll never know, will you?"

She had given him a smile, and Lance, toying idly with the seal on a fresh bottle of vodka, had said loudly and rapidly, "Just go ahead and give it a try, okay, Mary? Get



some education and you'll be able to get out of the house." He had stopped abruptly and poured the drink, then muttered, "You spend too much time at home."

Her smile had never flagged. "I belong at home," she had said serenely, as if Brian was still quartered in the next room.

"Goddammit," Lance had said, looking off somewhere over her left shoulder. They hadn't spoken again for a long while.

Now Pablo Manhera spread his arms out to the assembled class like a choir conductor. He was smiling beatifically. "Hola, class," he said vibrantly, moving his hands in time to the syllables. "Hi, class."

One evening about three weeks after she started school, Mary was standing at the sink emptying one of the clear, crystal-cut bottles when Lance suddenly entered the kitchen. She carefully lowered the bottle into the sink, letting it rest there, and turned to him with a warm smile.

He held a slip of paper half-crumpled in his hand, and he was clearly angry, red spreading from his collar to the roots of his pale hair, his white brows a sharp vee. "Why did you drop your math class?" he demanded. "For Chrissake, you were only taking two classes."

Mary shrugged placidly and crossed her arms. "Oh, it just wasn't me, I guess," she said.

Lance made a sound like paper tearing. "It wasn't you," he scoffed. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

Mary reflected for a moment, her eyes twinkling. "I suppose it's just too pat," she said.

"Too pat!" Lance yelled. He turned his back and threw up his hands to the wall, saying, "Eighteen hours of college-level mathematics behind me and now my wife, my lovely wife--who's had no stinking math since ninth-grade algebra--tells me it was all pat. That's beautiful! Just beautiful!"

Mary waited patiently for Lance to turn back to her. This was another one of his accusatory moods, and she had promised herself, she had promised Lance, that she would make these occasions unnecessary. When Lance turned back again, she said, "Math is all one way, honey. You do it and it all just falls into place, but only one way. How do you suppose those numbers feel? Why, if you were a two, every time you met a three it could only mean five." She laughed with delight.

Lance shook his head and smiled sourly. "Two hundred and seven dollars, all because you couldn't decide to drop this class two days earlier." He shrugged. "If you had dropped on the fifteenth you would've gotten the refund. Two hundred seven dollars." He let the slip of paper fall to the floor with a vaguely satisfied look. He walked

toward Mary with slow, even steps. "Why don't you tell me what's on your mind, Mary? Haven't you got a secret you want to tell me? You think you can cover it up with this Goody Two-Shoes crap, don't you?" He made a ticking noise with his tongue and teeth. "Some day," he said, his satisfied look grown to a smile, "it's going to happen, Mary. You--the whole thing-- It's just going to blow up." He shook his head. "Boom."

"Buenos dias, Maria," said Pablo Manhera, his bright black eyes enthusiastic, nodding for a response.

Mary pursed her lips and concentrated hard. "Bonos dias," she said at last.

Pablo's concentration eased. He closed his book on his index finger and spread his arms to the class. "Buenos dias, clase. Repitan, por favor."

"Buenos dias," the class murmured.

"Okay. Muy bien." Pablo set the book down on his desk. "We are now six weeks--seis semanas--into the semester, yes? And it is now time to think of our mid-term."

The class groaned and Mary looked around her, astonished.

"Si, si," Pablo said good-naturedly. "It is now time to think of our mid-term examination. So I will be asking you to please go over what we have learned so far, because everything"--with an expansive gesture--"everything will be covered." He counted off points on his fingers. "First we have our greetings and salutations, our counting and arithmetic, yes?--uno, dos, tres, cuatro-- Maria, por favor, say 'nine hundred' en espanol." He stood regarding her calmly, the fingers of one hand interwoven with those of the other.

Mary smiled, touching her cheek. She shook her head gently, almost as if Pablo were a beloved but mischievous child. Finally she started leafing through her notes.

"Juan, por favor, en espanol--'nine hundred'," Pablo said, turning away.

It's just not a good day, Mary thought, turning to look out the window. She studied each day, and even if the language was falling into place only slowly, its flavor, its feel, had already smitten her. Perhaps more than her studying itself it was Pablo's habitual asides on the culture of the Spanish-speaking peoples--the lisping king, the Moors with their algebra, the Alhambra, Seville, Pamplona--that captured her. And even if there was more of Carmen Miranda than Queen Isabella in her conceptions, the pictures she conjured were vivid with a romantic sort of ennui and the devil-may-care of too much drinking.

"Maria, Maria," said Pablo Manhera. "Once more, por favor. Buenos dias."



\* \* \*

Lance had been in the back yard for a quarter of an hour, and now he came through the kitchen door with a dirty cloth sack under his arm. His face was red with exertion and tipsiness, his eyes a study in abstraction. He set the sack down on the counter and removed a bottle from it. "Mary," he said, absentmindedly reaching for a glass and slopping clear liquid into it.

Mary turned from the refrigerator and gave him her madonna's smile, lips stretched wide but not open, eyes half-closed with gentleness. "Yes, honey?"

Lance tossed off his drink expertly, seeming not even to swallow. "Mary," he said, "do you ever remember?"

Of course she remembered. Perhaps she did nothing but remember. At times it seemed that the Lance who stood before her was no different from the lean, vigorous boy she had married. When she thought of those days it was his stiff, unruly blonde hair, the way he rolled his shirt sleeves up to show his sturdy biceps, the firm muscles of his thighs shaping his tight trousers, that she recalled. These things, and the thousand football games--now all one game--that she had followed him to, along with their associated memories: the comfortable scratchiness of his letter sweater on the bare flesh of her arms, the wait outside the locker room with the other girlfriends after the game, the boys emerging all in a group with their scrubbed-pink skin and freshly slicked-down hair, the traditional drive through the burger place and, afterward, down to the bottom road where they parked. Lance was the first and only one to get her into the back seat of his car, something that became an obsession to him, a closer of the habitual distance between them ("I get tense," he told her. "It makes me relax."). Best of all was the memory of how her dream, the dream given to her by her mother (who had gotten it from her mother) had been fulfilled. It was as plain as day: Lance standing there with his hands in his pockets, awkward and a little ill-at-ease as usual, refusing to meet her eyes as he said, "Well, Mary, I guess we're going to be married people now," and oh! the sky fell, the mountains slid into the sea, the shape and demeanor of her life were set instantly in stone, and her motherly wifely guileless smile came fully formed to her face just as it had been passed down through the generations, just as everything that followed--the wedding, the baby, Lance's scramble for education and solid employment--fell into the pattern so neatly that she was consumed by something like *deja vu*.

There was, however, in addition to this lovely chain of recollections, the memory of the spring of the previous year when, hearing the yelping of tires in the street outside, Mary had run out the front door and jumped the three porch

steps to find a strange, distraught woman weeping hysterically over Brian's body. Mercifully, this memory was beginning to fade (and, mercifully again, without taking Brian with it), but there was still the indelible recollection of Lance's arrival, wild-eyed, incoherent with torment. Mary was uncertain who had notified him--she hadn't done it--but once Brian's body was in the ambulance Lance had turned to her and met her outstretched arms, her compassionate arms, with animal fury. "How the hell did this happen? Where were you?" he had yelled, pushing his savage face into hers, digging his sharp fingers into her soft biceps. He had pushed her to her knees and she had stayed there, dissolving. She remembered.

"Of course I remember," she said.

Lance poured himself another drink and finished it as quickly as the first. His eyes reddened and he sucked air through his teeth. "Well," he said, nodding slowly and thoughtfully, gazing at the ceiling, "what I wonder--what I really wonder--" He paused to pour his third drink. He did it more slowly this time, and swirled the liquor reflectively with a small circular motion of his hand. "What really bugs the hell out of me--because, you see, I don't understand it--is how you've managed to live with yourself all this time."

Mary let the refrigerator door fall to and gazed at him, her face a solid mask of sympathy. "Oh, Lance," she said gently. She walked to him slowly, her arms spread, but he wasn't looking at her. She was certain there must be a nimbus of angelic light about her. She was about to touch him with healing. "Lance," she said again, and reached for the bottle on the counter.

His hand shot out and they both held it. "What the hell are you doing?" he growled.

"Lance," she said for the third time, her voice rich with comfort.

"Let go," he said in a low, dangerous voice.

"Goddammit, you can pour it out when I'm not looking, but I'm damned if you're going to do it right in front of me."

"Lance," she said, as if turning his voice into a mantra was the physic he needed. They struggled briefly and Lance's glass jerked, spraying them both with the aromatic liquor.

"Lay off," he said, pushing her hard enough to force her to take three quick steps backward. "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph." He turned the bottle up and gulped painfully. "Sure, you remember everything, don't you?" he said, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand and belching moistly. "You remember." The loathing in his eyes was undisguised. "Well, I remember too, sweetheart. Only too well. You pushed him, didn't you, Mary? You didn't know I saw you, did you? You pushed him. Nine-year-olds don't run out into

the street in front of cars. You pushed him."

He made a short sound of disgust and carried the bottle with him to the livingroom, from where, a few moments later, Mary heard the popping on of the television and the high static of a cheering crowd.

Walking through a door, Mary thought, is like stepping into another world. The door into a church, the threshold of a new home, the double-swinging way to a delivery room--all of these were markers as vivid as any tombstone. One could never be certain what lay on the other side of such a door. Perhaps she took such things as a matter of faith, and perhaps when she left Pablo Manhera's class at eleven thirty each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday she was surprised that she was no longer Maria. But then, she wondered, who or what was it that drove these changes, provided them with the cosmic stamp of reality or make-believe?

All of these musings came home to her when, late in the afternoon, arriving at home, a tall dark Latin man met her at the front door. "Maria, Maria," he said in a rich, amorous voice, taking her hands in his. "It is I, Manuel." And with that he began to sing "La Paloma" in a tenor luxuriant with glissandos and vibrato. When the song was over he raised her hands to his lips and kissed them adoringly. "Maria," he said passionately, drawing her close, "my beautiful Maria. Say that you will be mine."

She found herself eyeing him haughtily, and without a word she turned majestically away to see palm trees billowing in wind, a dark sea crashing on its shore. She heard Manuel fall to his knees, felt his arms go around her legs, his face pressing against her stomach. "Maria," he sobbed, "tell me, my Maria, what must I do to make you mine?"

"Nothing, Manuel," she said coldly. "There is nothing you can do. I am Roberto's."

Manuel's voice broke and tears flowed from his eyes as he said, "But--but Maria-- Roberto--he is--dead!"

She looked at him, strangely beautiful with some perverse triumph of the spirit. "It does not matter, Manuel. I was born to be Roberto's woman. I will always be his woman, no matter what. I can belong to no one else."

Manuel cried out and slipped to the floor. . . .

"Mary," said Lance. "Mary?" She felt his rough hand on her shoulder. "What the hell's the matter with you?"

She turned to him. Her eyes were foggy, but when they met his they suddenly shone with a bright and frightening light. "Roberto!" she cried. "Roberto--my love!"

She was all right after he slapped her a couple of times, but he said nothing to her while she fixed his dinner, merely sat at the kitchen table drinking vodka



straight from the bottle and eyeing her intently. It was like the best of their times together, she thought, when, filled with love, he couldn't take his eyes off her.

"I think I'll eat in the livingroom," he told her when she served him, and picked up his plate and the bottle and left her without another word. She followed him and sat in the overstuffed chair opposite his, balancing her plate on her knees and picking delicately at her food.

When the clock struck the hour she reached for the remote control and pointed it at the TV, but before she could push the button Lance wrenched the box from her hand and flung it at the couch. "Don't," he said.

"Why Lance, it's time for the movie," she protested good-naturedly. "It's a very good one tonight and--"

"Did you hear what I said?" Lance barked. He stabbed bitterly at his untouched food and let the fork clatter to his plate, watching her all the while.

"Lance, honey," she said, reaching out and half-covering his large hand with her small one.

With a deliberate motion he removed her hand from his and reached for the bottle and swigged powerfully. He had had enough that it didn't even make him wince. "Just leave the goddam thing off," he said hoarsely.

There was a silence that should have been uncomfortable, but Mary passed it in romantic concern for Lance and Lance filled it with another drink.

"You know," he said at last, propping the bottle on his knee, "it's getting worse all the time."

"Oh--"

"Shut up while I'm talking. I'm going to talk for a while and you're going to listen and not interrupt me with all your hokey sympathy bullshit." Another drink. "I'm going to tell you. I've been wanting to tell you ever since I knocked you up, lo, these many years ago. Are you listening? Just nod your head. Don't say it. Just nod. Okay." He leaned forward into her face, breathing hotly. "You make me sick to my fucking stomach. I wake up in the morning and when it's you laying there next to me I want to throw up. And it's always you there now, because I'm always tanked up on this sauce and women won't look at me any more. Sometimes I even wish I'd die in my sleep. I'd really like to die in my sleep, you know? Just to save me from waking up next to you in this goddam house with that goddam street out front."

He had been moving closer and closer to the edge of his chair, and now, when he suddenly leaned back, he was sprawled almost flat on his back. He tipped the bottle till it emptied. Mary half-rose to come to him, but he raised his foot quickly and, kicking out sharply at her breast, fired her back into her chair.

"You didn't know I was there when you killed Brian, did

you?" he asked, letting the bottle fall to the floor. "You thought I was at work." He paused to work his mouth momentarily, running his tongue along his gums and teeth, and cleared his throat. "I've got a power," he said. "I've got a way I can tell without even being there."

He brought himself up straight again, pushing his face into Mary's. "What are you smiling about?"

She was sending out compassion with all the strength of her soul. A woman is compassion, she thought. She opened her mouth to speak and Lance struck her open-handed on the ear. Her head was an explosion of bells.

Wagging a chastising forefinger at her, he said, "I told you not to say anything." He laughed. "You don't really have anything to smile about, do you?"

He pulled open the drawer of the end-table next to his chair and, to Mary's surprise, removed a fresh bottle of liquor. "Salud," he said with a slight nod, tipping it back. He pushed the bottle at her and said, "Want a drink, sweetheart? There you go, smiling again, you silly piece of meat." He poured a liberal portion over her head, smiling pleasantly. "I told you not to smile," he said, and struck her on the ear again. "All right. You want to smile? You want to smile."

He stood up unsteadily and, seizing her leg, pulled her off her chair and dragged her behind him like a piece of lumber down the hall and into the bedroom. Roughly, he pulled her from the floor and slammed her onto the bed, driving her face into the headboard. "Go ahead," he growled. "Now you can smile all you want." He threw the hem of her dress over her face. "Now you're going to get a goddam reason to smile."

But it was suddenly over. He turned from her, his anger spent, and walked to the bedroom door. He gave a short, humorless laugh. "Never mind," he said. "Just never mind. I don't think I even want it."

He must have gotten completely drunk that evening. When Mary crawled out of bed the next morning she found him asleep on the livingroom floor with an empty bottle hugged to his chest, his head under the coffee table. Somehow, she managed to get him onto the couch and tucked him in with an afghan. Going into the kitchen then, she found a couple of half-empty liquor bottles in the cabinet over the counter and emptied them into the sink. The window was broken, and beyond its jagged edges she could see a third bottle in the back yard.

She was surprised to find that it was past noon. She had no idea she had slept so long, in fact could not remember having gone to sleep at all. But what was foremost in her mind was the knowledge that she had missed class. Giving a whimper of alarm, she got her sweater, smoothed her

hair as well as she could without a brush, and, clutching her books to her painful breast, hurried out the door.

Her first impulse was to ask Pablo to acquaint her with the material she had missed, but this was soon replaced by the desire to apologize for her absence. She went to the liberal arts building and rode the elevator to the third floor. A short, blonde-haired girl with blue eyes, whom Mary recognized from her class, was coming out as Mary went in. The girl looked at Mary with shock, stopping in her tracks for a moment. Mary smiled at her and brushed past into Pablo's office.

Pablo was bent over some work at his desk, matching the numbered lines of a test paper with those of the answer key beneath his left hand.

"Buenos dias," Mary said softly.

"Buenas tardes," Pablo said absentmindedly, without looking up. "It is afternoon now, Maria."

"I know," Mary said. "That's what I came to talk to you about. I'm sorry I missed this morning--"

"There was no class today, Maria," Pablo said carelessly, writing a score at the top of the paper he had just finished grading and taking another from the stack at his elbow. "Today is Tuesday. Hoy es martes." Even as he was saying the words, realization came to him and he turned to face her. His eyes widened with something much like fear. "Mary," he said then, standing up, "what has happened to you? You are hurt."

"Oh, no," Mary said, giving him her smile. "I'm fine." She licked her dry lips. "The last few days have really been hectic. I guess I just got confused." She turned to go.

"No, no, Mary," Pablo said, walking to her quickly and laying his hand on her arm. "I think you are badly hurt. Please, you must see a doctor."

Mary mouthed the words "Oh no" and smiled harder. "I'm fine. I'm all right." She moved her arm slightly and Pablo pulled his hand away. "I'll let you go ahead and get back to your work now. I know you've got a lot to do." She felt a stiffness in her face which seemed to grow with each word.

"Please let me take you to the doctor, Mary," he said, but she shook her head again. "Then at least promise me that when you leave you will go on your own. I believe you are badly injured."

"All right," Mary said.

This wasn't what she had needed. She had needed a Spanish class. She had needed Andalusia with its fields of ripe grain.

Walking out the door into the strangely thick air, Mary thought: Saint Patrick was an engineer. His day was coming up, and the engineering students had hung green banners



reading "Erin Go Bragh" all over campus and, as usual, the most enterprising among them had hung one between the twin spires of the student union.

The air was thick and it was very brown outside and she heard a deep hum. For an eon she stood staring at the sidewalk cracks--the lines of roads and rivers and the contours of fields (Andalusia!)--from her spot many miles in the air. Her head was a spacecraft hovering, hovering, and the air was very brown, brown and green and very thick.

Oh, Saint Patrick was an engineer. He chased the snakes from Ireland. Yes. She would have done a jig if her leg hadn't been so stiff. It was a song, but those were the only words she could remember: Saint Patrick was an engineer he chased the snakes from Ireland. Mary. Yes. Mary was a good Irish name. A pale-faced lass with ebony hair and eyes as blue as the skies of the Emerald Isle. The sailor's hornpipe plays in the wee corner pub and she lifts her skirts and dances and the boys stop throwing darts to watch.

The air was so thick. Still walking, she thought: I am still walking, I think. She passed a group of young men. They were very drunk. Their arms were around one another and they were singing "Rosalita" at the tops of their lungs and giggling hilariously. One bumped into her and she became a lump of molten metal and the brown went black and only came back after several moments.

Saint Patrick is leaping from hill to green hill and the snakes are slithering, screaming, to the sea. The serpent is gone, she thought. She thought, The serpent is gone. Saint Patrick is an engineer. He's chasing the snakes from Ireland.

At some point or other it became night and the brown was a very deep brown indeed. She thought she was still seeing, and, if she was, she was standing before the broken kitchen window, through which a chill wind was blowing, whipping the curtains about her ears, and outside scrambling from hole to hole was Lance, clawing at the earth with his bare bleeding fingers. He had already dug up a couple of bottles, but they were broken, empty, and at last he slumped to the earth, exhausted.

The wind picked up. It whistled past the jagged glass. From a far corner of the house she could hear the faint strains of "La Paloma." She listened. The wind died down, and flowers were fluttering out of the sky, burying everything. The air was brown, thick as concrete. The kitchen door opened and "La Paloma" bathed her like a soothing lotion.

Manuel said, "Buenos dias" and "Buenos dias," said Maria.

--Dave Henderson

## I Dare Say

A life upstairs  
just can't compare  
to going through  
the living room.

It's no surprise  
just synthesize  
a couple thoughts  
you can entomb.

What did he say  
Before he prayed?  
--Nothing so much  
as worth his doom.

With pain I've paid.  
I had it made  
back to my birth  
back to the womb.

--Debbie Masek





## The Great Culinary Challenge

(from a work in progress)

I get the feeling that Murph thinks the whole thing is MY fault.

"This whole thing is YOUR fault, Beasley!" he growled, sipping his icewater and playing with the remote control for the TV set.

He probably doesn't really mean it. It's just that the last few days HAVE been rather trying. . . and Murph gets irritable if he misses "Wheel of Fortune."

It all started because we needed a fourth for our regular Sunday afternoon poker game, usually held in Henderson's garage. Tom Henderson's garage is almost the ideal place for our poker games. It's almost warm and almost dry, and there's plenty of room since Tom's wife made good on a long-standing threat to get rid of his beloved bass boat at one of her frequent garage sales. (Tears still well up in Tom's eyes when some insensitive lout asks about it, but that's another story.) Troutman's wife called to say he wouldn't be coming because he had the flu, and Hayes cancelled out on us because his wife was about to have their first baby. He said he felt he should be there. Murph remarked that such behavior should be expected from Democrats. I suppose just the three of us could have played, but Henderson has a tendency to grin like an ape if he gets any pair higher than a Jack, and Murph likes to use what he calls "creative gamesmanship." The rest of us call it cheating. I've always felt poker is more interesting if there are more players, so I brought along my next-door neighbor Roger Kirby.

Kirby can be insufferable at times. He keeps his lawn nicely trimmed, doesn't whine about taking out the trash, holds the door open for his wife, and says he votes on the independent ticket during the presidential elections. Such behavior isn't so terrible, I suppose. It's just that the rest of us get a little tired of being compared to Roger Kirby by our spouses. Murph has said that if he keeps hearing about how he should be more like Kirby, he'll either divorce his wife, or murder Kirby, whichever involves less legal fees. No one takes him seriously, but he does tend to

finger his hunting knife whenever Kirby's around.

I guess I should have realized that the outcome of the poker game would be inevitable. Kirby is the kind of person who is naturally lucky. Unfortunately, Kirby is also the kind of person who expects us to pay when we lose. That really wasn't the problem. What led to The Great Culinary Challenge was one of the highlights of our regular poker get-togethers. Food.

Everybody usually brings something, besides beer, I mean. Murph showed up with his usual anchovy and onion pizza, and Henderson brewed up a pot of his famous Spam chili. I thought Twinkies would be fine for desert. Kirby brought carrot sticks, celery, and cauliflower, in Tupperware. When Murph referred to his fare as "wussy food" Kirby got rather offended, and turned several shades of green and yellow when we insisted that he at least try some of the other delicacies we had so thoughtfully provided. When he declined, Murph accused him of being a vegetarian, like people from California or one of those other strange places. It was actually worse. Kirby declared himself a gourmet, which brought some slightly derisive snickering from Henderson and myself, and some editorial wind-breaking from either Murph or Henderson's dog, Bruno. Kirby said our taste-buds had burned out long ago, along with a good portion of Murph's brain, and that we wouldn't know good food if it walked up and bit us (a nice bit of irony if you ask me). Murph, on the other hand, as self-designated spokesman for our side, replied that Kirby was being a wussy and was incapable of finding a certain portion of his anatomy in a dark room with both hands, adding that he doubted Kirby was man enough to survive without a four-star restaurant guide. The discussion degenerated from that point to more name-calling and might have ended up in a brawl, had I not come up with a brilliant idea. My suggestion was that, next weekend, Kirby accompany us up to Henderson's small fishing cabin at Lake Wapello. The four of us would have to fend for ourselves, with no prepackaged or purchased food of any kind. We would only eat what we could catch or find, the perfect opportunity to prove that our less-discerning attitude about what we stuffed down our throats left us better prepared to face whatever the cold, cruel world might have in store. Kirby, of course, would be given a chance to prove that his supposedly better taste was more than just elitist snobbery. Henderson was reluctant at first, the mention of Lake Wapello having brought back painful memories of his beloved bass boat, but finally agreed to the plan when Murph reminded him that Kirby had referred to his famous chili as "Alpo." The Great Culinary Challenge was on.

The four of us met before dawn the next Saturday. Murph objected somewhat profanely when Kirby suggested he

and his turquoise 1964 GMC Carry-all undergo a thorough inspection before we left. Murph's fine speech about the lack of trust between gentlemen might have been a bit more effective if a Three Musketeers bar hadn't fallen out of his pocket. After the discarding of several tuna fish sandwiches, a bag of Cheetos, and a six-pack of vienna sausages, the trip finally began.

The trip up to Lake Wapello only took a couple of hours, and was mostly uneventful, except for one minor incident with a state trooper, when Murph threw Kirby's Pavarotti tape out the window. Luckily the trooper was a Cub fan too, and understood Murph's need to listen to the game. Murph drove the rest of the way to Lake Wapello happily disputing Harry Carey, and searching for the potholes while Kirby tried to rewind his Pavarotti.

When we arrived at Henderson's cabin, Murph and I scurried down to the lake to see about catching lunch, while Henderson unloaded the Carry-all. Kirby eyed Henderson's cabin with distaste, gathered up some paper sacks, and strolled off into the woods.

After an hour or so without a nibble, Henderson and I began to get a little worried, and hungry. Murph, however, seemed unaffected by the indifference of Lake Wapello's fishy inhabitants. By lunchtime, Murph, still the picture of confidence, recommended we cover all our bases by breaking out the rifles and shooting some game. It wasn't until I asked if anyone had brought any ammunition that cracks started to appear in Murph's composure. When Murph gets upset, his right eye has a tendency to twitch. For me it was a case of mixed emotions. The lack of ammunition made finding something to eat more difficult, but Murph's twitching made me glad his gun wasn't loaded.

By late afternoon we still hadn't caught a fish. Murph had run out of his usual profanities, and was trying out new variations on various inanimate objects, such as Henderson and me. The possibility of defeat seemed likely, and we were too hungry to jump around and kick things like Murph.

"How far is the nearest McDonald's?" moaned Henderson, his stomach growling.

"Forget it!" snapped Murph. "I'll starve to death before I'll let that wussy get the best of us!"

At that moment the topic of conversation came strolling out of the trees, carrying his now-full paper sacks. Kirby smiled and waved, then disappeared into the cabin. It was obvious that he had found something to eat. Henderson and I looked at each other.

"Don't even think about it," growled Murph. "Just shut up and keep fishing."

About the time it started to rain, a vaguely familiar and delicious smell came drifting from the cabin. Henderson looked at me and I nodded. When Murph sloshed a few feet



into the lake to retrieve his tackle box, which had been tossed in by Henderson's rather sudden and uncharacteristic temper tantrum, we made a break for it. We were about halfway to the cabin when we heard enraged screaming from behind us.

"Get back here, you spineless wussies!" screeched Murph, jumping up and down in the shallow water, cursing and throwing things.

When we opened the cabin door, the deliciously warm and mouth-watering odor crashed into us like a wave. Kirby was at the small woodstove, stirring something in a large iron skillet.

"Uh. . . look, Kirby. . .," I drooled.

"Sit down, guys," said Kirby, grinning. "I'm not going to make you suffer."

Kirby's somewhat magnanimous attitude was a little irritating, but I was too hungry to quibble over a trivial matter like personal pride. The three of us enjoyed what I have to admit was an absolutely delicious meal of fried mushrooms, seasoned with wild onion and other herbs.

About dusk, the door swung open and a soggy Murph trudged in. He had a bedraggled look about him, and his right eye was still twitching. He glared at Henderson and I through bloodshot eyes, and stood there with a tortured expression on his face. Kirby let him stand there and suffer for over a minute before Henderson broke the spell by letting out a rather large and satisfied belch. Kirby was really enjoying himself. He pulled a chair from the table and made a broad, sweeping gesture, like one of those snooty waiters in a fancy restaurant. It may take a while, but Murph knows when he's been beat. He shuffled over to the table and sat down heavily. Murph stared at his plate as the grinning Kirby ladled a heaping pile of steaming mushrooms onto it.

"You guys can take care of cleaning up the dishes," said Kirby, stretching out on one of the bunks. "And by the way, the Department of Conservation says most of the fish in Lake Wapello were killed off about four months ago. A rare fish disease, or something like that. They haven't restocked it yet."

Murph never said a word, but glared at Kirby, grabbed a shaker and salted his meal as his right eye twitched unblinkingly.

Murph didn't say anything until the next morning, when the four of us began to get violently ill. What he said then isn't easily repeated in polite company.

They put all four of us in the same hospital room. I guess it saves them time since we all have the same thing. The doctors say it'll take a week or so for our systems to be purged of the poisonous mushrooms. For the first couple

of days we're restricted to icewater and intravenous feeding. Then maybe we'll get some nice chicken broth. I kind of feel bad about the whole thing. Henderson is trying to figure some way to keep his wife from selling the fishing cabin, and Murph keeps eyeing his bedpan and Kirby's corner of the room. Kirby just lies there and looks out the window, trying not to watch "Gilligan's Island." I guess Kirby isn't such a bad fellow after all. He seems to have developed a slight twitch in his left eye.

--R. L. Reighard

### Seadreams

I sit and ponder many thoughts.  
One thought rolls in on the water's waves.  
All others are pushed aside.  
My mind is lost in foreign caves.

I am in a foreign house,  
Although I have been here before.  
I am not alone.  
My love is here to adore.

He stands facing me.  
His smile warms me like the sun.  
He makes me feel loved.  
He must be my only one.

His shining brown eyes  
Capture my reflection.  
We're trapped within a spell  
Like a rose in a crystallized ocean.

I dance in his arms.  
My perfume sweetly mingles  
With the spice of his cologne.  
His soft as sand touch tingles.

Suddenly, the water's waves  
Fall back to the sea,  
Lost in a lonely wilderness  
As new waves surround me.

--Susan E. Sagarra

## Sea Captain

The Sea and I have been friends since our first meeting when I was just a boy of six years. I was a small child, slender, with spider-like arms, and long brown hair that blew wild in the wind. Father was strong and tall, a fisherman--captain of his own ship.

He never spoke to me about the ship, or fishing, or the long hours he spent each night planning for the next day's catch. His deep blue eyes were ones I could never read. Why couldn't I walk with him to the water each morning? When I asked Mother this question one day, she sent me to my room. I strained to hear what she was saying to Father: ". . . happening! Can't listen. Never listen, do you? Well, he is not growing. . . you or YOUR father. . . Know the kind of life that'll bring him. . . ." Unable to understand much of this, and too afraid to spy any longer, I slipped away from the door and waited in the dark room until dinner.

He said little at the table that night: "Got a bit too close to the rocks today; tore a hole in one of the nets." I replied with: "Father, Father, could I see the rocks tomorrow? Please?" Mother flashed a quick look into Father's deep blue eyes and he was silent. "Get along to bed now, Timothy. Your father has had a hard day." Tears formed as I ran from the table. "And don't forget your prayers," I heard Father say.

It was nearly an hour before I stopped crying. Why didn't Father talk to me? I prayed: "Bless Father and Mother and our house and Father's ship (and someday let me see her) and. . . ." But my prayers were interrupted by Father's as he made his usual rounds around the place, seeing that everything outside was as it should be (he loved this time to talk with the Lord): ". . . made the choice for myself--so did my father before me and his father before him. A doctor, even a butcher, would be so much easier, so much safer for the boy (and she knows it). It's a hard life, true, but wonderful. . . ."

His voice trailed off as he passed my window. My tiny heart still did not understand (which made my next actions all the more surprising). Hardly knowing what possessed me, I lay awake (like Father, planning for the next day's catch) thinking of how I could stow away on his ship the next morning! What must have been two hours passed before I gave

in to sleep.

Morning came and I was awakened by Father's footsteps. It was a game now: the house--a prison, Father--a guard, Mother--the warden, and the open sea--freedom. From the prison I could see Father outside, gathering the lines and nets together to take to the ship (making sure once again that there were no holes to mend or knots to be undone). He started down the path. I knew Mother would be furious and Father would no doubt punish me, but I crept out of my room to find the front door. Although I had hoped this wouldn't happen, I was stopped by the oak table in the hallway. I held my breath. Tears from the pain this caused me filled my eyes, and I froze (hoping the noise wouldn't arouse the warden).

I was safe, so I left the house to follow the path. The early-morning sun gave me its light as it chased away the fog. I wasted no time running down to the water. Before I knew it, I stood (out of breath) not fifty feet away from the scene I had only dreamed of until then. The crew worked hard (as they did every morning) lifting nets and crates onto the ship, a proud relic which stood silent, ready to battle the endless waves that would attack it from all directions. Yet, towering above them all was Father. Posed against the backdrop of blue-green water, his face seemed to glow with the anticipation of the day's journey.

Mist from the water hitting the rocks tickled my face as my feet, barely touching the sand, moved me closer. My eyes filled once more with tears (these, however, tears of joy) as I ran towards him and embraced him with all the strength my small arms could manage. After only a moment's hesitation, his strong, hairy arms grasped me; and he carried me aboard with a long, proud smile I will never forget.

--Randall Siefert

### Grandma

You tell me a story,  
And rock me to sleep.

My childhood memories  
Of you, Grandma.

I lay in your arms,  
Now safe in the night.

The joy of a dream  
Come true, Grandma.

A tale is woven  
With kindness and care.

I'd listen forever!  
You knew, Grandma.

But, eyelids grown heavy,  
A Kiss and a whisper:

"Please never forget  
I love you, Grandma."

--Randall Siefert



**Lazy Breeze, Awake!**

Lazy Breeze, Awake!  
After oh so long a rest.  
You're welcome once again,  
Birds singing in their nest.

Wintertime is gone!  
Her sting will not be missed.  
So, now it's time for you to come,  
Come give us all your kiss.

Summertime is here!  
The hot sun ever burning.  
Lazy breeze, Awake,  
The seasons ever turning.

Take a deeper breath!  
And blow throughout the trees.  
Refreshing is your gentle touch,  
Our hearts, once more, are free.

--Randall Siefert

## Impressions

I walked downstairs expecting something entirely different than what I observed.

I sat in relative quiet, or what I thought was quiet for approximately five or six minutes.

Then I began to notice little sounds emerge. First, the sound of the furnace, humming a low note in the next room (a constant noise that steadily increased in volume). Other noises became noticeable through the background of the furnace. One was the washer and dryer doing the weekly laundry, almost in perfect rhythm with the furnace. An occasional pop and crack from the house settling became evident. Almost a staccato drummer to the bass background of the furnace.

Added to the ensemble was the drone of conversation from my family upstairs, raised and lowered in varying levels as people came and went from the house. The sound of conversation was spiced by the lilt of laughter from the children of the second generation.

As it went on, a live element in the basement intruded as the sound of a cricket in the corner seemed to be adding vocals to the orchestra.

What started out in silence turned into a cacaphony of sound. I tried to discern the various noises that became evident in the time I was there. Just as I began, the noises outside the basement windows became louder. The neighbors were leaving their house, alternately yelling and slamming house and car doors.

I found myself looking at my watch, mentally pushing the hands closer to the twenty minute time limit I had set for myself. The noise was becoming deafening. My head was beginning to hurt from the strain of trying to shut out the sounds.

I climbed the basement stairs. Everything fell into familiar perspective. Silence can be so loud.

--Burma L. Wilkins

### Begin Again

Hesitation haunts my pen  
Like an old ghost  
Snakes silently through the air  
A presence of true reality  
The beast in my skull  
I am the one who does not exist  
Except as the lingering smoke of desire  
An obliterated flame  
No flesh, no edge  
Am I to believe I will rise from these ashes  
Purified, alive to the core  
Moving meaning over the page  
Which lies now so pale and wan  
My sick child, my old love  
My memory of more.

--W. Zumbrennen

### Natasha's Birthday

Her little cat body arches high  
She doesn't know anything about birthdays  
but moves rhythmically across the room.

I watch her struggle to reach the window top.  
Once again I know the old ache of bones  
the leaping of the bones in the flesh.

Silently she watches the world emerge in light  
the saying of the rose  
at the rising of the day.

Then she returns to my bed  
curling down into a cuddle bunny  
a lollipop of time.

--W. Zumbrennen

Child of light  
In the morning of knowledge  
Child learning  
In the light of wisdom  
Seeing the world unfold  
Watching people journey  
Through the flowing of life  
And the passage of days

--Lisa S. Morris

Walking through time  
Leaving a trail of joy  
A trail of happiness and light  
For those who follow  
So that they may have courage  
To see the peace of love  
And the quiet strength of compassion

--Lisa S. Morris

The lone dancer on the rock  
In rhythm with the ocean's waves  
Isolated, yet one with the sea.

--Lisa S. Morris

### There is a Quiet Time

when trees wait for orders of the day  
and birds sit, mute and enduring  
across a breakfast table we digest  
newspapers and six o'clock news  
that metallic human voice  
an alarm that keeps on ringing  
coffee cups and toast move like automats  
outside the window nodding branches  
signal a brief response  
a bird flits silently by  
the day is gathering, is inevitable  
like the sound of your voice or mine.

--W. Zumbrunnen

### Was It You Who Woke Me in the Night

I know my father hides high in hills  
where I myself will visit someday  
and dream as I am dreaming this night  
of roads that curve like a journey  
down to a valley and the old house  
whose windows I swim through like a mist.

Out back a slag heap silently rises  
crushing this house, this art, this life  
and I ask why and how this can be  
questioning the villagers growing  
like pert wildflowers on the green.  
A message drops like bells from tongues.

What happens next is strange to tell.  
Memory rises like a sanctuary.  
Its arms curving round the emptied house  
and fear leaves and knowledge begins.  
A final talisman rises in the sky  
out of the memory, out of the house.

--W. Zumbrunnen

### The Mistakes I've Made

Hell's hateful demons dance and sing.  
They circle my already-battered soul.  
They tire and leave with boredom.  
I stand motionless--like the trees.

I wait in pitch blackness.  
Emancipated jackals nip the remains of a once cared for  
soul.  
They feast and leave with glutton bellies.  
I cry with hallowed eyes--at the mistakes I've made.

--John McKee

### Untitled Inspiration

We stand like two ancient towers.  
Blow for blow  
We go at each other with a primitive ferocity.  
The feeble stones crumble under the weight of our attack  
Leaving naked truth exposed.

We retreat like two battered knights.  
Wound for wound  
We try and rebuild our walls  
Callousness and vanity, our stone and mortar.  
We prepare ourselves for another siege.

--John McKee

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