



The Griffin

THE GRIFFIN

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Peace, Quiet and Frogs

by John M. Nichols

"Anyone want to go frog hunting?" Kevin Jacobs asked, standing at the chain link fence to the Keller's back yard. Bushy-haired and lanky, he had the shady beginnings of sideburns. In his right hand hung a Daisy air BB rifle.

"No thank you," Jennifer said. She was seated on the decaying railroad ties that cut through the middle of their sloped back yard to provide level ground for their sliding-glass back door. We had been "going out" since the start of the summer, and were presently enjoying each other's company- talking about school or swimming or French kissing or something like that. I'd never really done anything with Jacobs before but I liked exploring the creek and woods that ran through our neighborhood and I loved shooting BB guns.

The last Fourth of July, I rode by Jacob's house on my black and gold Team Murray dirtbike, pads on the handlebars and gooseneck. He was leaning out the window of his room. They have a split-level and his room is on the lower level, so his window is close to the ground. Anderson was there hunched over and talking to Jacobs. Anderson was weird. He took a piss on the basement floor of his parent's house once.

I rode across the grass to see what they were doing, hoping they would have some fireworks. My mom wouldn't allow me to have them so I had to get them from older kids. One time I cleared up Jimmy Crane's patio and vacuumed his living room for a gross of bottle rockets. That's 144. After lighting forty or fifty, I got sick of them. I'm sure my neighbors did too.

Leaning on my handlebars, I watched Jacobs meticulously unwrapping firecrackers and emptying the gunpowder into a metal tennis ball can.

"What are you doing?" I asked. They both looked up at me like I was disturbing their concentration. Jacobs hands were covered with silver dust as he struggled with a Black Cat wrapper.

"Slobogan Cannon," Anderson stated. Jacobs didn't look up from his work. He was always kind of quiet. Not Anderson though. He was like a gas-powered model airplane- start it and it would fly like crazy.

"What you do is you fill a metal tennis can about a quarter of the way full with gunpowder. Then you put a long wick in it, and then a tennis ball. Then you light it and run like hell!" explained Anderson excitedly.

"Cool. You ever do it before?"

"Heeyeah. Hyeah we did," he said with his head forward and a stupid grin across his face, "Blew the shit out of the tennis ball! Heehyah ha kish-sh-sh-eet!" I couldn't understand it. Jacobs was so quiet, while his friend Anderson was so hyperactive.

They lit the Slobogan Cannon and in a great flash of light, it blew the shit out of the tennis ball.

"I'll go," I replied to Jacobs, realizing I had never been frog hunting. "I'll be back later," I said to Jennifer.

We walked down to the creek. He was wearing a shirt that had a cartoon guy on it with an exaggerated cartoon thumb held up in the air that said "Keep on truckin'." It looked like he'd decaled it himself.

We passed a sign that said, "Keep out of this branch." I pointed at it, then Jacobs joked, "I'm not going into a branch. I'm going into a creek." I laughed.

We got off the road and onto the path going down to the creek and under the shade of the high elm trees. The street bridge was to our right and we paused to look at the graffiti on the concrete. Most of it was by a guy named Billy. Jacobs pumped up his gun.

We walked to where the trails, grassless and firmly packed, wandered two feet above the dark green water. I had been down several times that summer to fish for crawdads. With my raw bacon and string, I would fish all day quietly listening to the muffled sound of the cars going by. A day of handling raw bacon and crawdads could really make a person stink.

I kept them as pets. They were cool looking, but they didn't do much. You could tell they were slowly dying. Not enough oxygen. My friend Hansen usually pitted his against each other until one lost a pincer or its eyes or antennae. The big ones usually won. But if you kept pitting fresh little ones against a big one, sooner or later it'd be-CLIP- no pincers for the big guy. It's hard to get them to fight, because their natural instinct is to spring backwards when frightened. Mom thought we were sadistic. Luckily she didn't know about the time Hansen dumped a whole bucket of them in the middle of the road. That crunching noise when the cars drove by was gruesome. Not to mention the orange mush that shoots out five feet on both sides like you were stepping on a package of mustard. I heard people eat crawdads, but Mom said the ones from the creek would make me sick.

As Jacobs walked with his gun hung pointing at the smooth water, I followed behind looking at the reflection of the trees and the sun. He was wearing faded cutoffs with white threads hanging from the trim. I wished I had some like that. My body was growing too fast so by the time my pants were faded they were too small. And I hated hand me downs.

Jacobs stopped and pointed his gun at a group of weeds on the other bank. I couldn't see anything. Except weeds.

"Where?" I whispered.

"Shhh," he said lightly.

As Jacobs aligned his gun, I strained to see and accidentally brushed a long blade of grass.

A shiny green thing with long legs shooting out like green and white streamers sailed over the water, plunked through the surface and faded underneath it. Jacobs looked at me. I shrugged my shoulders guiltily.

We walked on and soon he stopped again. Scanning the banks, I saw nothing. He aimed at a small semicircle cut into the opposite bank. I saw it! Two little eyes and a patch of green sticking above the water with a body hidden under the cloudy surface. Jacob's face and arms got tense and his eyelid looked glued in place.

Ping! went the gun. The frog jumped and a cloudy dot appeared on its back and a stream of blood followed the frog as it swam and disappeared under the water three feet from us.

Jacobs smiled, "You have to aim a little in front of them to make up for their jump."

I waited for him to begin walking. Though he had probably killed that frog, there was no way of getting it now. It would die in the muck on the creek bottom.

Jacobs laid his gun down and took off his canvas tennis shoes baring his feet.

"What the hell are you doing?" I asked in amazement.

"I'm going and gettin' him."

"Oh. Ok," I said. Now this was weird, I thought. It was a neighborhood embarrassment to fall into the creek and he was going in by choice. We weren't duck hunting. These were lousy frogs.

I watched intently as he made his way down the muddy bank and headed towards where the frog had landed. The mud oozed through his toes and clouded up the water. I could feel crawdads clawing his feet. I imagined what people would say to a man with four toes on his left foot.

He reached down and felt around with his hands, his body hovering a few inches over the water. Four fingers?

"Got it!" he said as he yanked the frog out by one of its legs. He held it at arm's length and we both looked at its dead spineless body. It was beautiful.

I related to Jacobs at that point. This creek was our sense of nature. It wasn't an ego thing like hunting lions in Africa. It was a place to go in the neighborhood to get away from everyone and think. We didn't know each other well but we shared an interest- tranquil woods and slow moving water.

I saw him riding his ten speed up the big hill on Crenshaw Road to school, slightly off balance from a musical instrument case strapped around his back. Dad would say as we drove by him, "That kid is crazy. The road's too narrow and the people drive down it like maniacs. They can't see him when they come around the turn. He's gonna get hit some day. He lives in the neighborhood, doesn't he? Stupid. Really stupid."

"Wanna dissect it?" he asked.

"Yeah. Wow. Do you know how? Because I don't wanta touch it. I guess I'm going to have to do it some time. I'm gonna take Biology in high school.

We walked back to the Keller's house. Jacobs had the dead frog in one hand and his gun in the other. Jennifer saw us and said, "My dad said he wants to make frog legs out of that." I thought about what my mom had said about the crawdads, about the creek being too polluted. Some day I would try frog legs in a restaurant, I thought.

"We're gonna dissect him but your dad can do whatever he wants to it when we get done," Jacobs said.

He and I went around back and he slapped the frog on a black railroad tie. He pulled out a pocketknife and described what he was going to do like a doctor preparing to go into surgery. He slit the frog down its whitish belly and the juices flowed out onto the dry wood. He made two slits horizontally and opened it like a pantry. With his fingers, he pulled out a long stringy brownish organ and told me it was the large and small intestines. I nodded my head but all I could think about was how much guts Jacobs had and also how much the frog had.

"Wanna see what he had for lunch?"

Still wondering if he had said what he said, I muttered, "Yeah. Sure." He followed the knife up the intestines to a white pouch organ, grabbed it with two fingers and slit it. He squeezed a lump out of it. Oozing out onto the wood came a gunk-covered pincer from a small crawdad. A grasshopper plopped out next to the lone claw.

Jennifer came out the back door and stared at the disemboweled frog. "That's disgusting," she said.

I happily agreed.

Mirror Lake

I've been running through the woods
Confusing when it rains
And unsure if I should
Go on and feel the pain
I stop above a pool
And take a look beneath
But surprised to see you
Instead of seeing me.

I gaze as I peer in
I know confusion stays . . .
(Funny how the reflection
Stays untouched by the rain)
I descend this dream lake
Confusion stays afloat
So you and I and heartache
Drift alone in the same boat.

My reflection and I
Follow the swell of the waves
Caused by when we cry
(Which causes all the rain)
So you and I drift on
Across the dark horizon
And only hopes and dreams remain
For us to dry our eyes on.

Anonymous

Untitled

In your mind my labyrinthine dream
Where all is stone seeping rain
The moss beneath my torn feet
Comforting and cool
Assuring my path to desperation

I see you in my view
A tunnel of sorts
Lighted by the breath of some Pagan god
Melpomene on my shoulder
I wander towards the
Circle of your duplicity

The walls turn to ice
And I long to be cold
but in my weakness I cry
and as it warms me
You melt away

Christi Brooke Martin

Untitled

*A simple taste of morning sun
The smell of autumn leaves
The beauty of the deer who run
Amidst the silent trees*

*From where does such an image come
Arranged in such a way
That pleases me to feel as one
with a common earthly day?*

Alvin Zamudio

ODE TO A TREE

Rise high O' grand one.
Thou lithe spirit,
Symbol of the Mother's life.
Stretching forth and grasping at the ever rising
sun.
Thou art home to creatures great and small.
Saint of another order, truly must be said.

Thy branches weigh with golden green
Drinking in the precious rays of sun.
Thy bark ascends, a map of life:
From strong tough base
To tender sapling at thy barks end.
And within thy inner core.
From root to airy tip thy sabblood floweth,
Giving thy reaches life.

Thou standest tall and proud,
Spirit of the Mother's life.
Ages pass before thy eyes.
Thou art living history.
Thou must have been a sparkle in creations eye,
For thou in grandeur reign
In lofty skies above all living kind.

This day O' grand one,
Is thine among the eons.
For all time thou hast held in dignity.
To thou the days praise belong,
To return thy timelessness
That thou hast given.
Truly thou art the symbol of the Mother's life.

Bryan Bond

The Bedroom View

Outside my window
I can see a baby sparrow
starting to fly.
I can see the dying maple
with the straggling leaves.
I see the new morning sun
rising over the hill
to settle on the horizon
but only for a moment.

Amy Lisa Puleo

A Moment Captured

Ablaze in vivid hue, the forest beckons.
Smells of Autumn fill the air in familiar welcome.
Crisp leaves crunch under foot.
The cool, brisk breeze smartly freshens.
Exuding an aura of golden red, the sun sets.

Jana Nunn

The Nature of Power

The beauty of a flower;
Speaks not for the power,
that each spring replaces
the seed held in winter stasis.

The branches of trees do bend;
When wind and rain blend,
and cover the Earth in dew,
leaving a delicate scent for me and you.

From the sun hot and white;
Comes to the world Celestial light.
Storm clouds form from ocean brine,
Rising into blue-green skies sublime.

Huge, heavy, dark clouds bold;
across the sublime skies have rolled.
Thunder filled the Heavens with sound,
as snaked streaks of lightning struck the ground.

Whilst the heart of the Earth lay still
and sunlight reflected off the moon to fill
the sky above the bells' heavy toll
freeing the frail human soul.

Daniel Louvall

Innocence rides waves

Innocence rides waves
Floating upon fears
Tossed beneath waves of
Despair.
Swimming struggling to survive
Succumbing to salt
Lost in depth.
Filtered
From light
Silently surrendering,
Sinking.
Stifled by subtleties
Stirred with undercurrents
Taken from warmth
Pulled Down, Down

Deeper,
Down.

Onto the frigid bed
Weighted forever by the
Heavy night
Drowned in sorrow
Amongst unseen tears
Swept away.

Anthony J. Yarolimek, 3/1/90

A Child's Masterpiece

by Douglas Robert Sexton

Sixteen years ago, I sat in a library much the same as the one we sit in tonight. It was smaller and not as bright, but it served the same purpose; to encourage reading and writing, and to celebrate the ideas and thought of individuals. It was not only a place where author's books were checked out and read, but it was also a place where we children hoped the things we wrote would someday be read by others. Only, that library failed for one individual. This, what I will now read to you, is that person's story.

When I was in the fourth grade, maybe the fifth, I remember writing a story about Captain Kirk and the Starship Enterprise. I would work at it with every available moment; this included at home after supper as well as between my teacher's lessons at school. I was driven by a force I could not understand. Not a tiresome or weary force, but by one that was pleasant, even exciting. It made me feel good and complete, and I felt wonderful pleasures as I labored to complete my story; my adventures into space as the courageous captain of the Enterprise, boldly going where no elementary child had gone before.

After two long months, I bound the fragile collection of pages, written with a dull lead pencil, and put them into a dark red folder. It's funny how vividly I remember that folder, and why I chose that red color. I was so proud of my accomplishment, I just wanted to shout to the world, and that's exactly what red does, "Look out, Charles Dickens, move over Mark Twain, I am here. Now you guys, go home. If it's all the same to you, I'll mind the store and take over now." I believed that someday I would be a published author just like them and the red folder expressed this sentiment ideally. It sang my heart's tune and played loudly the melody of pride I felt for my accomplishment. It framed the most precious thing I'd ever done. It held my manuscript and I loved it for that.

All this time, no one but me had known of its existence; not my parents, teachers or my friends. It was my secret project. It was the me that no one ever knew. But there was one person whom I trusted, one person whom I believed was capable of seeing my handiwork for what it was. If anyone would appreciate this book, it would be the keeper of books, the defender of literature, the encouraging force for reading for all - the school librarian.

I don't know if she was old, but I remember seeing her that way. Not in a negative way, but in a gentle positive way, like a grandmother. I didn't trust very many people, and when I say that, you must understand, I mean that. But for some unknown reason, perhaps because of my love for reading and writing, and perhaps because she always seemed to take interest in what I checked out, I trusted her and felt that she genuinely

appreciated me. If anyone would approve of what I had written, and think a lot of it, it would be her. I know she would understand what this manuscript promised. With her help, I would become a published author. With her help, I could escape from the nightmare of isolation that for many children is their childhood and their world. I decided to show her the red folder.

I asked my teacher if I could go to the library with a friend of mine. As Mr. T _____ always did, he said yes, and soon we were off down the hall with me excitedly clutching the red folder tightly against my chest. My companion didn't have the slightest clue as to why we were going to the library or what exactly that it was I cradled with my hands. This was a secret that would only be revealed to those who had a similar harmony and understood the dreams of a little boy's heart - dreams that made me alive and real - dreams that made me what I really was - a little boy. Walking up to her, with a grin as large as my world, I handed her my book - the manuscript that contained the thereto unknown stories of the Starship Enterprise. I handed her my future.

"Mrs. _____," I proudly spoke up, "Look what I did. I wrote this book. It's 45 pages long and I want to publish it. Would you read it?"

She took it into her hands, opened it to the first page and cocked her head back as she peered through her glasses. For me the room became as quiet as the vacuum of space; everything disappeared around me, except for her and my book. Even my friend who was standing next to me, seemed to be transported far away. Nothing else mattered now, only that which was before me was of any concern. And then I heard it, the sound of pages being flipped from cover to cover. Like background radio static, the hurried brushing of paper against paper rushed into my universe, filling the dome of silence created by the expectancy of what it was that she might say. With the impact of a colliding asteroid, she spoke.

"It's only 45 pages. It's not quite long enough to be a book. A book has got to be hundreds and hundreds of pages. No publisher would take this because it has too many errors. A real author writes hundreds of pages and doesn't make mistakes. This isn't a real book."

That was it. I had written the stupid book for nothing. All those months wasted, the endless evenings writing till my fingers ached from the cramps, thinking I was writing a book. Ashamed, I returned to the classroom, and tossed what I now viewed to be a shabby, dirty folder dangling carelessly at my side, into the waste can.

I never wrote for myself again until I was in the 12th grade. The fire had gone out, and as far as I was concerned, it was all the better. If what I had to write was to be measured in worth by its length and grammar, then I would not say another thing. The little boy, whose fragile and uninviting world may have seemed small and insignificant to those around him, would never again expose himself to the thoughtless criticisms of others. The door was closed, and the love that I shared with Dickens and Twain for writing and reading would be put back on the shelf, there to gather dust and cobwebs. A silent scream for recognition was suppressed and stilled in a matter of seconds by the carelessness and thoughtlessness of a mentor who was only asked if she would like to read the book, not criticize it. Buried with the rest of the day's trash, it now laid at the bottom of a garbage can.

Dream Makers

Dreamers peaked from pyramid people
Spirit-filled people
Yeast-like souls
Giving rise to me and you, beautiful
Black folk. . .
Dreams rise, like ancient totem
Rise high with faces of Blackness
Mbuti, Mandinka, Yoroban, Ashanti
My Beautiful Black Men. . .
Shoulders strong Strong shoulders
bear my weight. . .
Enter beautiful Black worlds
Ebonic women colored inside with
penile blessings
Passing pride umbilically through
Sacred passageways
Wombs of wonder
Birthing the world
delivering genius. . .
Imhotep. . .
Cleopatra. . .
Malcolm. . .
Harriet. . .
Booker T. . .
W.E.B. . .
Angela D. . .
Jesus!
Beautiful Blackness
Jesus! Beautiful Blackness. . .

Who gave birth to dreams?
Who gave birth to dreams?
My mother. . .Africa.

Lisa G. Watkins

Cold Flesh

I touched him lightly on his hand,
and felt the cold flesh
No pain, No hunger, No needs
That was all I felt
His Cold Flesh

Brandon

THE EYE

- The Eye moves out and views entirely, this raging sea.

Evil rides the vapours' sins,
Found in solace shadows.

Laughs and jeers cry from mortal mouth
At the weak who have fallen.

Reckless songs: proclaiming godhood,
Blaspheming Holy order.

Life is held by slipping fingers,
While death becomes Sorrow's commodity.

- On distant horizon's future,
The Eye beholds the Light's return.

Kingdom come will descend,
as White Stallion readies for war.

Living words of life shall cut all asunder,
leaving only them, the Light's hier.

Consuming fires,
And all that was will be no more.

- High above this raging sea,
on eagle's wings soars the Eye and entirely views.

Bryan Bond 2/27/91

Untitled

The past is not the past,
The past is now, immediate, palpable
It lives, breathes
As powerfully as he does not.

Leslie Duncan

EVERYMAN IS YOU

- Everyman shall pass through Golgotha,
Dividing the spirit from the soul.
 The vessel is realized;
 Washed clean by sacrificial blood.
 All is new.
 Eternity begins.
Everyman has entered the court of the Tabernacle.

- Everyman shall receive the oil of joy,
Just as five wise virgins.
 The vessel is filled,
 Tongues of fire rest upon the head.
 The Spirit of life.
 The Spirit dwells within.
Everyman has entered the Holy place.

- Everyman shall be baptized by fire,
And the vessel is trimmed.
 The vessel is the light of the world;
 The consuming fire burns within.
 Let the light shine,
 The cry has sounded.
Everyman has entered the Holy of Holies.

- Everyman shall be the wedded bride,
Adorned in white raiments of glory.
 The vessel is an instrument of God,
 Glorifying the son.
 The bridegroom has returned,
 The purchased possession is redeemed.
Everyman has entered the marriage supper of the lamb.

Bryan Bond 2/28/91

On the Loss of Innate Curiosity

Out of the mouths of babes have come,
Words and phrases to which we adults are numb.
But perhaps the children see,
Something long since lost to you and me.

A quality of innocence in youth,
that will not appear in men uncouth.
For what that innocence is made of
is a curiosity of Nature, trees, deer, and doves.

At the sea we see brine and foam,
but a child sees a curious place to roam.
Children in play; build castles grand,
dreaming of high adventure in the sand.

Though I think, feel, and see;
what I have lost is innocent youthful curiosity.
it is a loss that I cannot regain;
and worse yet, there is nowhere to lay blame.

Daniel Louvall

After-Life

We've gotten rid of all the tangibles,
Done away with the in and out
of it all. And
somehow it,
without that, is
Pluralistic and free,
Though I'm inclined to believe
I liked being liquified;
encaved beneath your abdomen.

Timothy James Stouffer

"Untitled"

by Leslie Duncan

He walked in a daze, bewildered, through a lush, grassy field, with a large canopy of overhanging tree tops.

He was trying to forget the torture, the pain, the grinning face of his antagonist. His life prior to this had had it's torment; many dearly loved faces, forever still in many a cushioned casket. But this suffering, new and perverse, was something with which he'd never dealt.

His career had exposed him to probably every kind of suffering known to man, except his own, now. He remembered one particular case at this moment, in which he searched for a kidnapped child, a 4 year old girl. He still remembered her name: Laura. He remembered the parents, their helpless expressions, and his passionate wish to find Laura alive. At this point, as in other kidnapping cases, the task exceeded that of job and became that of obsession. His efforts had no time clock. After a great deal of tracking he did find her, on the school playground, and by the river, and in an alley behind a bar across town. He never located the child's left hand.

Not all of his work had been like this, or he'd have quite probably quit. He was powerfully driven to help people and stop crime, or at least, crime in his little corner of the world. Now, here he was, a high official of his country's government, slumped at the foot of a large oak tree like a stringless marionette. Laura would have been 16 now. . . .

He arose again, slowly, to continue his aimless walk. no birds. Why couldn't he hear any birds singing? He looked up at the forest canopy over head. The trees' limbs were twisted and black, gnarled and bent at incredible angles. As he examined them, he wondered aloud to himself, "If trees had nerves, wouldn't these limbs cause the trees pain?"

he cast his eyes about as he walked, thinking dispassionately of death. A bright, shiny object caught his eye to his left, and he walked to it. It was a piece of broken bottle. He spoke softly, his musical accent adding loveliness to forlorn words: "Oh, appealing, friendly shard of glass, reflecting a myriad of colors like a fine diamond. Would you be my salvation?"

He lay down in the grass as the memory of his recent, horrible trauma went through his head like a freight train through snow. Images of pain and torment surged freely through his mind, he closed his eyes, longing to shut these images out, but this action only shut the pain in, cutting him off from any possible distraction. He sank inexorably into thoughts, or rather, images, of his ordeal: a knife, blood, shattered bones. As he slipped away from consciousness, he could not fight off the memory, but instead of coming to with a violent jolt, he chose to allow himself to sink downward this time. It seemed easier than fighting. He breathed unsteadily and thought to himself, "Far stronger, more spirited people than I, have killed themselves with far less cause. I don't even have to take that much initiative. I can . . . just allow . . . myself . . . to slip . . ."

The machine gave off loud, unsteady warning beeps as the patient's heart went into arrhythmia. The patient had been without change for the 36 hours he'd been in intensive care, and his friend, Nicholas, had been at his side the entire time. There was a non-medical observation Nicholas had made during this time: his friend's body twitched and writhed as though he were in a state of nightmare. Nicholas attributed this to the ordeal Adjel had survived. The tortured form was riddled with life sustaining tubes or were they pain sustaining?

Nicholas had been dozing, but now the warning sounds of the machine startled him from rest. "Doctor!" Nicholas yelled from the bedside, "He's losing it!"

As Nicholas waited for the doctor, he shook his battered friend's shoulders, and the I.V. tube coiled about in the air as Nicholas called to the dying man; "Adjel! Adjel! Dammit Adjel, don't do this!"

Untitled

*I hide from you,
you seek me out
knowing of my fear.
Never angry at long hunts
always you find me
even in the blackest
burroughs within me.
As tho' a child
with a fey beast
you gentle me to trust.
But still I flee untamed
heeding basest instinct
always minding me:
 childish laughter
 deafening rage
 sapphire promises turned stone.
Yet as I run
reasons returns
for me to wonder:
 - Will you tire of expeditions
 that end
 only to recommence; endlessly?
 - Will the crimson drying
 on bitten hand
 make the soft fur sought seem
rough?
Harsh, mocking questions
asked a coward self
locked in fruitless phobia
that replies with "yes".
Tho, as I quake
in my dark burrough
I brave to dream.
For the black seems opaque
and I seem too small
to climb from within me
unaided by you:
 My love
 my friend
 my foe.*

LeAnn Ahern

Imaginative Insomnia

Welcomed weight
lowers my lids
as tireness nags.
Still I find no
solace in the blank
subdued eyes briny.
Rather like a canvas
it fills with artistry
of the day.
Escher worries
Monet moments
Renoir characters
Van Gogh hopes
Till tho my limbs
lay relaxed and ready
sleep withhold herself from me.
Oh! If I could just
fall into the canvas
pass through the paint
leave behind the masters; the day
into alluring arms
of sleep beyond
Perhaps I could survive my 8 o'clock!

LeAnn Ahern

A Joke

Strong willed am I?
so say you.
Humorous
You know nothing
of the
plaster casing
protecting
the velvet
of me.
Why, I'm afraid
to laugh less it crack
to cry less it break
exposing me
to ruin
by harsh
elements.

So inside I content
to ache
from the pressure
as the plaster
crushes my
protected nap
to drabness.
At least I remain velvet,
or am I?

LeAnn Ahern

Maternity Pyre

A maddening thought now possesses me
Running carelessly away with my soul,
Winding itself around clear blue rivers,
Dirty, barren banks of tubulous foam
That echo Azezles's mocking delight
And bend with so much more pain insightfully.
It sickens and weakens the knees from flight.
Looking into myself, I find wicked
Reflections and memoirs, a man long lost.

Perhaps I speak only to the leaf that falls
And drops to the ground adhering God's law,

Or perhaps I speak only to the thud.

When I was a child, when I was that is,
I was younger still, still younger than hoped
I visioned thoroughly unrealized,
I desired nothing unrealized,
You know the way! The aspirations still
Of one who is many though yet to come,
I believed would come who was younger still.

Clinging, or no, not really clinging,
More so like dancing hysterically
On that tightrope my parents tauntly strung
Across the parade poles of society
Who cheered me with that rhapsody of dance
Innocently. And not caring I pranced
Dangerously, my ignorance enhanced
You know that ignorance. Down by the lake
I saw you wearing it the other day
When the wind was stilled and the seashore
stayed.

Dangerously, my ignorance was bliss.

Behind the stony New Englander's walls,
The farmers talked of talk, quietly speaking as-
suredly
Of a thing I wasn't sure of. A thing
I never understood, hearing only
That he has a child.

I hear she wants another

He'll surely plow those forty acres
Before the April snow comes, that's for sure.

I tell you that he will.

A package came
For him on Sunday, in a blue wrapper,
I tell you that he'll want another

Is Lou feeling well? I hear she caught cold,
Some congenital disease caught before
She was a mere child, only now it
Is preventing her from being her more,
It isolates her from being herself.

I know what you mean, I sometimes feel that
Way on gray Tuesdays, before my wife beats
Me with her broom, until I eat my cake.

Mother told you that you can't eat your cake
Until you've eaten all of your cookies.

She use to be so soft

Death is in her eyes. I tell you it won't
Belong before the old cows milk is cold,
In a casket, buried deep in the ground,
After being so warm before being poured.

This year's fall tulip bulb pushes itself
Hating the spring that drives its sea ward
march,
Slaying unrelentingly toward the sea,
Burning every precious thing that it torches,
Nothing escapes its tenacious, wild fury.
Fury that despises the sun's wicked and hate-
ful ways.

Mr. Jones the hamlets undertaker
Sends the postman out to hail greetings
Of good-hearted portent to the farmer,
Tell him I'm glad he's had a healthy son
In time I will pound him under granite,
Split by all the predestined madness growth
Of tulip fever under the warm sun.

Douglas Sexton

C'mon Buddy

Oh to the one who moves so slow
Without a care in the world
Do you not realize what you do
To those who drive behind?

Don't you care?

What I would give
To pick you up and force you
To heed my flashing brites
Setting free the river of wheels
Behind you

Don't you care?

I know you see us
You with your right arm so
C a s u a l l y e x t e n d e d
You glance at your mirror
Yet turn back
Away
Thinking only of yourself

And we? Well, we will just pull back
The reigns on our lives
And honk and flash until you
Get off the road

And than once again,
We will be free

Alvin A. Zamudio

Murphy's Law

Gimme a dollarI'll spend it.
Gimme a fenderI'll bend it.
Gimme a carI'll crash it.
Gimme a glassI'll smash it.
Gimme champagne.....I'll spill it.
Gimme a plant.....I'll kill it.
Gimme a key.....I'll lose it.
Gimme bad choice.....I'll choose it.
Gimme true loveI'll taint it.
Gimme silk tieI'll stain it.
Gimme a dayI'll waste it.
Gimme burnt meal.....I'll taste it.
Gimme a sweaterI'll shrink it.
Gimme a roseI'll stink it.
Gimme an excuse.....I'll abuse it.
Gimme Murphy's LawI'll use it.

Kim Shocklee

LISTEN TO ME

Dark, ugly beast
 an unwelcome guest,
Won't let me live, won't let me rest

Trying to cope, yet losing hope.
Black stormy night, no end in sight.

Just go away!
Can't take another day.
 Dark ugly beast - unwelcome guest.

Struggling within
 to get what I need.
A cry for help
 plants the seed.

They say "loosen your grasp, let it go"
"Only then will your true feelings flow."

Fear of the beast blocks this goal,
Fear that the beast will gain control.

Trying to cope, losing hope

"Don't give up, make the right choice!"
From deep within cries a frightened voice.
 Dark, ugly beast? Unwelcome guest?

With the passage of time,
 the voice becomes clear -
"Listen to me - there is nothing to fear."

The fear has faded, the beast lives no more
Instead, a small child stands at the door.

A child scarred with pain, starved for attention
. "Please let me in, I need you to listen"

Ready to listen, ready to hear
Reaching out, drawing her near.

The scars are now healing - fading away,
As this bond grows stronger with each passing
day.

Jana Nunn

Little One

Little One,
In my arms;
How do I explain?

Looking glass,
Image of;
Murder, waste, and pain.

Mother Earth,
Rotting core;
No one seems to care.

Children's cries,
Suffering;
Falling on deaf ears.

War and Peace,
Politics;
What we want, we seize.

Elderly
Destitute;
Clawing memories.

Happiness
Out of reach;
Given wings, we fly.

Little One,
Seems confused;
Please, don't ask me why.

Amy lyn McClellan

Untitled

As though i am out of touch
with reality I am at odds
And we'll keep fighting until
we pull our hair out
Shut up and the car door on my head
The beginning of a wonderful friendship
spending all my time.

I.T.

Untitled

Does it bother me
to be given reception
from a friend and a reflection
Both give me different perceptions
of the same
Leaving me with the question,
which is the better part to play
Who will I be today.

I.T.

Pontif Maximus

Death like an orgasm
wretching the soul loose of its
fleshy temple,
Raiding the untouched corners
And setting fires in cold hearths,
the night passes
as our hearts are given up
to the object of this calamity,
we beg and pray
waiting for the day
when we will come again.

Bryan Audrey

Je t'adore and Others

Oh is that what you meant.
And I need you?
And I thought I was sober
Well the past needs you
Only to remain in the light,
A sad actor, mumbling and drunk
Feeling that emotion yet blowing
your lines
Like when you stood up at the
airport
holding your baggage and cursing
your fate.

Bryan Audrey

THE TREASURE BOX

by Amy Lyn McClellan

"Can't I come with you?" I asked.

Daddy shook his head and frowned as he led me down the narrow steps to where Gram lived in the basement. His cologne lingered behind him, not the cologne Momma had him wear when he went to work or out with his friends, but the cologne he wore when Momma wore her good pearls. My navy suitcase looked like a doll's purse dangling from his bear-like hand.

"Do I have to stay all night?"

He nodded and knocked at the heavy white door. I stared at the row of flower pots lined along the concrete terrace, like little bakery cakes set out to cool, each with a twig poking up for a birthday candle.

"Maybe she's not home," I said.

Daddy frowned again. He raised his arm to knock a second time just as Gram peeked through the faded curtains. She yanked the door open with surprising strength and waved us inside in a flow of kisses and chatter.

Daddy thanked Gram and handed me my suitcase. He kissed the top of my head and then he was gone.

"Sugar cookie?" Gram said, waddling to the kitchen table and pointing to a plate of half-moons.

"No thanks." I peeled off my coat and draped it over the back of a chair, while trying to hold on to my suitcase. "I think I'll get ready for bed."

Gram nodded, her thin, pale lips wrapped around a sugared cut-out. I padded down the hall toward the bathroom, the linoleum sloping beneath my loafers and rising again near the doorway. No bigger than a closet, the bathroom smelled of talc and rubbing alcohol. The orange rug squished between my toes when I kicked off my shoes without untying them and pinched off my socks. I brushed my teeth and undressed, then pulled my flannel nightgown over my head until it became stuck. I wrestled with the cotton fabric for what seemed like an hour and finally forced my head through the collar. I wiped the sweat-plastered hair from my ears and heard the strains from the opening of the Lawrence Welk show floating under the door crack.

"This is gonna be a long night," I said to the green glass fish on the wall above the toilet. Even it seemed bored, a stream of lifeless, glass bubbles frozen on the wall near its mouth.

I closed my things in the suitcase and turned out the light, groping my way down the hall to the now darkened kitchen. When I reached the living room, I was shocked to see Gram sprawled out on the balding, green carpet. At first, I thought she had fallen. Then, I noticed the open shoe-box in her lap. Her shoulders shook. I was scared that she was crying. But then she looked up and smiled, her usually hollow cheeks puffed out like she had stuck two marshmallows inside them. She was laughing.

"Went to get my crossword puzzle," she said, "and came out with this. Had no idea I'd kept all these things."

I placed my suitcase on the sofa, on top of the stain from my cousin Craig's cranberry sauce at Thanksgiving. Kneeling beside her, I peered into the cobweb-laced box. It held a jumble of old souvenirs: a blue ribbon from a spelling bee; a leather-bound bible with a gold engraved cover; some yellowed, crumbling paper dolls; a few carefully creased newspaper clippings; a blue crystal decanter; and a stack of rose-scented letters tied with a green velvet ribbon.

"What is all that stuff?" I asked.

"That stuff," Gram replied, "is my life."

I looked at the floor and wondered if I would grow as old as Gram. Then I thought about my life tucked away in a cardboard box on a dusty shelf, with no one even caring to glance inside.

"Can I look?" I asked.

Gram nodded and placed the box between us.

* * *

Later that night, I stared into darkness beneath Gram's handmade quilt. I pictured her silvery-white pin curls on the pillow next to me and listened to the choppy rhythm of her snores. I snuggled closer to her warm, billowing body and, for the first time, enjoyed being alone with her.

Joy in the Popsicle

The joy lives
Resides within life
Like the cheery cherry flavor
Inside the popsicle
Sweet, sticky
Artificially flavored, fabricated, produced
Tasted with perception;
On hot days running
In dripping, staining
Paths from fingers and palms,
Down forearms
To the elbows, pointed;
On colder days
Remaining inside molded shape
Until drawn out
By sweet suckings and supplications
Leaving plain white
Icy, frozen form. . .

Karen Kelley

Today's News

Watching serious summer baseball,
as a blur darts across my eye.
The ball is hit as a woman shrieks.
A naked brown chest shines,
Wielding a barbecue fork.

Second baseman spins,
forgetting about the game.
Pock! Pock! a pistol spits.
It's soft like a ladyfinger,
exploding in my hand.

The black man hovers, then drops.
An anquished scream crescendoes,
and I'm the first one to the body.
Bullet through his temple,
and out his cheek.

He was ducking when it bit.
Blood pulses from the wounds,
His tan palm is a marionette.
I chase the white man,
but it is useless.

John M. Nichols

Decisions

Allow me to make,
Craft, create,
Manufacture my own
In my private workshop--
Artist's studio.
Don't intrude to observe my progress
And spew your personally conceived
Positive criticism, advice
Unless invited.
Let me feed
And nourish
My soul and self
With selected nutrients,
Preferred vitamins--
My possessed project.
Don't hinder my disappointments
With superfluous, sunny suggestions,
Outer foreign influence,
Unless invited.
Let me choose, select, elect
My own
Colors, tints, shades, media.
Don't splash my canvas
With your own blended
Manufactured hues
Covering and countering mine--
Unless invited.

Karen Kelley

Achoo!
I sneeze
In Chinese
And fall on dirty knees
In a garden full of snails.

T'pyrlla

Untitled

Boredom has set in,
The dreaded brain drain has begun to sap my
energy.
Lifeless students begin to nod off,
Jerking awake on their way to La-La land.
Doodling and watching the clock, counting
away the minutes.
Hasn't the teacher already said that several
times?
The monotone babble washes over the drowsy
bodies.
Tic-tac-toe is a source of great fascination;
As is the insect buzzing against the window
glass.
Blessed relief as the minutes tick away,
the escape draws closer and closer.
Preparing to move on to the next hour of
oblivion.

Kelly Horitz

Untitled

When they're together
They're impossible, invincible, ready for
anything the world could throw
at 'em.
When they're apart,
Each is a lovable, laughable, protective,
caring person.
Why does he go through this transforma-
tion?
It's like living with Sybil.
Then they get upset when I lose my
patience.
I'm just trying to keep my sanity and still
develop a relationship with
one of them.
I'm just not sure which one yet.

Kelly Horitz

Cardboard Silhouettes

A one-sided figure stands before me.
A cardboard silhouette against a multicolored
background.
Like a painted scene set on a stage, it is fake;
unreal.
Although tangible, it is only a mask--
A witchdoctor's attempt to hide from evil.
Only one side shows.
Turned sideways he almost disappears.
Yet when the actors are done,
When the play is over and the audience has
left,
When the stagecrew has finally deserted the
building,
The one-sided figure stands alone.
Then like a many-sided crystal turning in the
sunlight,
He explodes into a multitude of rainbows
Dancing off the walls and ceiling of the lonely
stage;
The stage is set on fire with a multi-sided
dancer
Clad in rainbow-shaded silk.
Like the music of space, he becomes multi-
dimensional,
Passing beyond our three-dimensional world,
Even beyond space and time, into an
unknown reality.
If only together we could become multi-sided,
Instead of on a lonely stage!
Maybe . . . A single question forms on my lips
. . .
Quietly . . .
"May I have this dance?"

T'pyrlla

Black and Blue Mask

ain't no stoppin fingerpoppin, inspite of her
head bashed Sojourner
couldn't escape blows upside head and eyes
swelled shut
Truth tryin' to insight protection, with a club
wearin' a black and blue mask of love.

Hammer-time bales irony in ears
while drunks drown sympathy in hennessy
and beer
again Twanna hangs her head in shame
another victim's knees buckle
 under the weight of
 ridicule and blame.

Harriet's voice thunders
Angela's rage booms
but
boodies shake on
electric slide on
drink and smoke on
'cause ain't no stoppin fingerpoppin
Even when Reality crashes the party.

Lisa G. Watkins, 7/22/90

Schizo Lover

Public heaven
Private Hell
When eyes are looking
You treat me so well
Cookin and cleanin
Even watchin the kids
Pride bubbles over
You're my lover and friend

But when the public closes their sleepy eyes
Instantly, you start to criticize
Razor sharp wisdom
Dispelling the truth
Searing my soul for being uncouth

Passionate strokes, public proclaim
Private anger, rage, distaste

Gingerly, you bandage mortal wounds
Stitching apologies for being so rude
Promising, pledging to alter your ways
To be more considerate, less apt to complain

Then, eyes seek perfection
And furies arise
Mistakes made in public
In private despised

My Schizo lover
With weapon concealed
Cuts in the darkness
And expects me to heal.

Lisa G. Watkins, 7/27/90

WEST END WORLD

boys with long hair
girls with short
a society
of the strangest sort
the affected ones
yet influenced by none
sharing inner truth
in a corner booth
of a Central West End
cafe.

Kari Cheij Stopp

The Truth Hurts

He threw the balls into the air-
one at a time, sometimes two.
Three if he could manage.
How could he manage?
I saw his bright face, made
up in white, red,
black-smiling.
Who could be so immune to
the dismal day we were
having?
I stepped a little closer.
I saw his pants were a little
ragged on the edges;
that his suspenders were
only vinyl prototypes of the
real thing;
that his boots weren't really
boots at all, just black covers
thrown over his Reeboks.
I took another step forward. I
saw his own straight brown
hair poking out the back of
this rainbow wig, and
realized that
it was only a pillow that was
making him fat.
I moved closer still. I looked
him in the eyes-stared him in
the face.
He wasn't really smiling.
Neither was I.

Amy Crangle

Dizzy

In concentrated contemplations myself I have
found
Spinning, turning, revolving repeatedly around
From back to front, fore to rear, hind to head
Clockwise--north to east to south to west
Then, the reverse direction opted instead.
I ride the lifetime carousel
Spinning emotionally, erratically, eternally
Spinning drastically, dramatically, diurnally.
No single solo seat sits perfectly, totally still,
Spinning away from day's sunlight
Into dusk, the dark of deepest night
Circling full through bleak blackness
Into the bright, sunny, dawning sight.
Spinning in the clutching centrifugal
magnetism
Of the solar center's gravity; serious guardian
ties.
Spinning yarns--and yearnings and yens,
Folklore, tall tales, gossip, rumors and lies
Amid cozy encounters, around campfires, in
dens
In select social circles, semi-circles, arc seg-
ments.
I turn. I turn to you for aid
Strong, sturdy, stable, capable, able young
blade.
I turn. I turn my back on life
Where catty contemporaries and pert peers
Contest my conclusions, or merely turn deaf
ears.
I turn. I turn to escapes. And back again.
Too much turning for this amateur ballerina-
figure-skater
Self-defier, self-denier, self-negator
Multiplied ten thousand circular times--
But never adopting the clever, professional
dancer's trick:
To avoid becoming dizzily sick,
Focus firmly on a single signalling sight
With each consecutive turn.

Karen Kelley

Untitled

As protest cries of blood for oil,
as Saudi sands can hold no more;
has blood replaced the Opec Oil?
A cry rings out in a desert land
as blood is mixed with oil soaked sand.
As war breaks out we hear the cry!
Is blood as thick as oil we buy?

And once again we heed the call
that brings us closer to our fall.
As bombs rain down on Arab land,
we see more blood mixed with the sand.
As wars rage on, I wonder still;
if oil is worth the blood we spill.

As nigh moves on we see the flight
as patriots search through the night.
And soon we hear a thundering sound
as Iraqi scuds fall to the ground.
But once again I hear the cry,
is blood as thick as oil we buy?

But one gets through this gloomy night,
and death awaits its doomed filled flight.
It hits its target, it hits the sight.
A hundred souls scream through the night.
A hundred souls are lost this day!
A hundred souls; what a price to pay.
I asked this once, I ask it still;
is oil as thick as blood we spill?

The ground war starts, the planes fly by,
carrying destruction in the sky.
A thousand souls we'll lose this day.
A thousand souls will fade away.
And yet the question lingers still;
is oil as thick as blood we spill?

Fred Locke, A Vietnam Vet

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