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THE ROARING MUSE



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THE ROARING MUSE

POETRY



Semantics

I have trouble writing the word tower.
It seems to smoke and
ashes fall down with bits and scraps of paper.
I search through the rubble to find another word
but none comes to mind. Broken falling
words split and burn.
People say move on with your life
but two months later smoke still rises.
Here is this burning heart, seething
anger. A meltdown of compassion.
What has taken its place is hard
as steel. Determined as a tank.

-Nancy Fredericksen

Spider Webs

(after the terrorist attacks of September 11th)

There's no easy way to say this:
two airliners aimed at the twin towers
cut a path into windows and walls -
severed a nerve in America.
Debris spread far and wide.
Ordinary words disintegrate.

Two days later a woman came home to
find a black, walnut-size spider
in the midst of a three foot web of
invisible threads expertly woven
between the phlox and the azure maple.

In sunlight she could see the whole web -
the center: a black aerialist, motionless.
As if it had nothing to do with spinning
the translucent, shimmering threads.
As if this were not an intrusion.

She could see the infrastructure of
a species, lace work of an artisan,
network of tenuous filament,
gossamer strands of silken intention.

As if intention were enough.

-Nancy Fredericksen

Untitled

If I were to justify
 my every thought
And impulse
 you'd see me like a feather -
So inconsistent in
 form and substance
Not even the wind can
 blow a straight motive in me -
But you may still ask me
 to justify and the only thing
I have is a question
 involving the truth of human nature -
How do I worry about the
 world self-destructing in
One spectacular Vesuvian
 moment, or
Consume myself with
 endless nail-biting over
Whether you do or
 don't love me enough
When I'm too busy
 reacting to the color of
A sunset or drowning
 in your misty blue eyes?

-Samantha Jo Majhor

The Path That Is

Do we adapt to the changing race of our country - accept our changing face?

Recently history that is fresh, left like tracks in the snow,

Even now seems ancient as we've been melted together so much so.

Yet, I can tell, at some point, yours were driven from Africa,

And his tongue rolls the Spanish "r" from whatever part of South America,

And most people call me a Caucasian woman

And even if my skin don't say it, my history is the first born in this nation.

Soon everyone in the country will be half-breed, like me,

And the terms of separation will solely exist in memory and photo albums.

This brings the inquisition -

Because whether the path be celebrated or regretted

Our path lies in the very certainty of the nation being hybrid -

Will we be wise enough to embrace it?

When we're more apt to keep drawing lines and waste it?

My simple point is that maybe I should mate with another American Indian

To keep my blood percentage running for the next generation,

But the truth is I fell in love with a German

And it doesn't make my future children

Less Assineboine, Yankton, Dakota, Cherokee

Less German

Less American

Less human.

-Samantha Jo Majhor

Untitled

There's a feeling in the air,
that tingle
before the silver frost,
that spice
after the heat of a summer
long gone
and sleeping
like a lazy dog
on sweet and gentle grass.
There's a moment
when my heart bursts open
like clouds
dancing on the eaves of heaven.
And I know this moment.
Its fingerprints brand me
like fire from a maple
when the morning sun
dashes its lovely soul like paint
that ignites the blue sky
and whispers
through leaves
to dapple its voice
among the blades of
grass.
There, right there, they laugh.
Where reeds grow tall
and a bench holds me still
while I watch them walk

on the wooden boards,
their footsteps fading,
the silence remaining
and I smile.

Like the strong boughs
of the balsam
and the sweet scent
of the cedar
this memory
will find me
when the mountains
rise tall
and the walk becomes long.

-Christiana Kapsner

Untitled

There are moments in life
when you meet someone,
like a dewdrop
on the grass
where the sun reflects
a light
you couldn't ever find within.
Funny how time works.
How years
keep your life the same
but
a mere five months
can turn you soul inside out
and you find yourself
on a beach
across the world
with a beer in your hand,
a dream on your lips
and sand between your toes.
Strange how we met.
You and I on polar sides
without the constellations
to guide us
and remind us
of each other
when separated by water
but how the stars fly
when we remember...

days in the sun
coffee at ten
yarn in our fingers
and a lifetime of memories.

-Christiana Kapsner

This Ragged Soul-Quilt

My ragged soul
sits in cooling waters
and if I imagined
for a minute
that you'd understand
the pieces of my life,
I'd give you the patches
freely
so you might attach them
with the thread of you laughter
and the needle of you truth...

But I refrain in person
what I might say in dreams:

I've loved.
Passionately.
And in that love I've bled
like the sunrise over Sicily
where blood-oranges
slip between fingers,
falling to the floor,
somehow forgotten while the wine
became her soul
and her daughter fell to silence.
I've befriended.

Painfully.
And in those friendships I've cried
like the rain over Maryland
on a foggy morning
where the eyes are unable to see
as footsteps fade
and a friend has chosen to leave.

I've left.
Happily.
And in that leaving I found freedom
like the lake behind their house
on a sunny afternoon
where the Two in Michigan
gave me their time, their memories,
and the shadows lifted.
The pain healed.
And I knew that life would live.

I married.
Peacefully.
And in this marriage
there are mornings over coffee
that pass like minutes
but last for hours
and evenings like hours
but really just moments.

I write.
Enthusiastically.
And I might not
win the admiration from millions
but a life raining sunshine and
water,
leather and lace,
is a life where a soul can be ragged

but somehow beautiful.

Take my patches, then,
Dearest Friend,
thread them with your thoughts,
fill the spaces with your life
and tell me what you see.

Then let me do the same for you.

-Christiana Kapsner

Untitled

i
a heaving giant
sleeping
in the great green thicket.
a sad monolith
dreaming of lilliputians
like tadpoles in church.
spring has risen
my lazing fears
stirring from an absence.
one marigold
lasted the winter
almost embarrassed
in it's gold
and burgundy.
how shyly i cried
when they came for you.
i wish i had told them
how to
tend the garden.

-Andrea Wood

To a Friend of Many Years

You have ditches of disappointment.
I see them etched upon your hands.
I hear it in the lyric of your voice.
And I appreciate the war
That earned you scars on a heart
of gentle breezes.
But a turn in conversation,
as coffee fogs the air
and light filters through foliage,
awakens my senses.
I bend my ear to your words:
a tune of strength,
a whisper of rocks and cliffs
hardened by time and desperation.
I lean back and tilt my head
to better view this change.
This evolution of thought.
The reversal of what I imagined you were,
but no longer are.
Or perhaps the blindness of my judgment
has broken down.
I took you for granted in times of peril,
forgetting to call you in triumph,
and I sat across from you
on a log in the middle of trees
while our coffee steamed,
the lake glittered,
the sky mumbled,

and I realized I never thanked you
for the times I broke
and you bent,
the days I cried
but you somehow made me laugh,
and for the sunshine strength
you lit upon my path
as I stumbled through mistakes,
and mischief and life-wrenching pain.
But more than anything, beyond the talks,
beyond the time well-spent,
I appreciate you as far more than a friend
of many years.
You are a universe of one
where strength defies gravity
and where the heavens saw fit
to create a friend for life
so I might be a better one myself.

-Christiana Kapsner

Marriage

Can you help me, my dear,
help me
plant the rows of lettuces
and the vines of grapes?
Let's splash them with our souls
and watch them grow
watch them grow
watch them grow.
I can hear unborn children
laughing
on the field we purchased
on a tiny plot
of a great space
that from the stars
remains invisible.
but oh--
do we see it.
We envision,
we plan
and our minds
roll like one
toward dreams yet awakened.
I see the moss

on a dead cedar
but let's not cut it down.
It speaks of fairies
and dreams and silver moons.
Let us sit beneath it
smiling serene
with years on our hearts
but wind in our souls.
Let age have its way
but like the cedar
with its patient moss,
let's carve a place
of love, of art,
of peace.

-Christiana Kapsner

Blindman's Rainbow

you told me to go
so I stayed
no sugar without cream

you told me you were cold
but I was golden hot
feel the iron engine steam

you told me to stop
but I didn't
on the hot sand and sea spray

you told me to frown
so I smiled white
a yellow cloud and child's play

you told me to go down
but I went up pure blue
steel ladder and wooden hammer

you yelled I was not
but I laughed at what you thought
without words I stammer
pistol sharp and silver new

blow that away today
colors for you just don't pay
but I will paint it anyway
blindman's rainbow here to stay

-Missy Klajda

Drunk Again After Dinner

drunk again
after dinner.
fat and fermented.
the wine
all gone,
and i'm still
not brilliant.
scarlet plume, haricots verts
i can write
about lust
but can't feel it.
timid, torrentially triste
i pull
in my tether
hand
over hand
waiting
for finally,
noon after moon.
i know contempt.
the dark side
of annoyance.
i put that rock
in his shoe.

in my pantry
there is a window.
i look out
among my shelves
here
a snakeskin potato
a hex upon my mind
staring
at the new one.
cold
about the old fun.
stocked up
on flowers
and on souls
waiting for the siege.
i say,
now,
don't ingratiate your-
self
to me please
hmm.
i am out of shovels.
la bisou
la bisou
if i bleed for you
it is by accident.

sometimes
you need
a little change,
sometimes
a jackpot.
it's a matter of
a phone call
or laundry.
hold, hold,
hold.
boredom finds me
locked in my cage.
i hide
in a corner.
sneeze quietly.
hope the wrong wish
doesn't see me.
outside
the late light
rests on its sheet.
i wave my wand
dance fades
to shadow
and then,
oh,
hush
and sigh.
poo poo
i acquiesce
headlong
into you.

-Andrea Wood

Untitled

heart thrust high
a running rabbit
oh
to where
i can't remember.
the idiot maestro
in his oxford cape
is gone, gone
gone.
my skeleton bag,
a rattling quiver
of white arrows.
dear me
i can't remember
this time.
i mingle
through
a fallen beer
a wet sock.
nearby
a myth
stands
knocking at my door.

-Andrea Wood

How did I Spill You

How did I spill you
Carelessly fumbled to the floor
Who is bent down now
Wiping me away from your dirty tears
Rubbing my reflection out of your flooded eyes

-Mitchell Tavernier

blur

the world shifts a quarter inch to the
left
outside the sun sets a second too soon
just a second
the yellow is gone now.
gone how
it shook me into blue

you
a second too soon
gloom

shifty little place here
nearly unstable
stunned and undone
we dissipate
and ate and ate and ate and ate
i ache
too much
not quiet yellow enough
to fuck the rough edges
off

stripes dear
strike me here
here!
hear it tear
fill it up
fill your cup
we came already
we came into yellow
passed through
now i'm blue

-Summer Barton-Taylor

PROSE



Two Quarters

by: Adam Putz

There never was much hope for him once his heart started to swell. Every day after school that year I had walked to their house to study the deep lines of his face, and every day I found that they looked the same: heavy and dark. But his eyes glowed with a dew and blue from underneath his soft white eyebrows, furry like caterpillars. If he was dead, all that warm, moist color was too, I thought, as I knew that while he slept there were only those wrinkles, and now that would be all the time. When he would notice my staring, he was fond of saying: "Take a good, hard look, because nothing lasts forever," but about this I was always confused, but I came to know what he meant. During recess, every afternoon after he died, as I stepped up to the plate to wait for my pitch, I heard the word death fall softly from the lips of the players in the field. The sound of the word had always been something strange and unsettling, like the hoarse boom of an umpire's call before it fades to leave the word safe behind. I fevered from my fear of it, but I wanted to see its raw and rigid certainty.

My uncle Charlie was sitting on the sofa, watching Tv, when I came in for dinner. As I stared setting the table for my mother he said, continuing a conversation with characters on the show:

"Yes, absolutely ... Yes, I do believe that something in him had changed ... but it was nothing new ... nothing worth mentioning. Although, it's strange he was always ... I'll tell you what..."

At that, he trailed off and began racing through the channels, apparently allowing his mind to focus on its thoughts. Idiot! My first memories of him were of the times when he would come back to Saint Cloud from somewhere out East. He used to bring everyone a

little something and tell stories about all of the big cities he had seen. My favorite was the one about the time he had to barter with a vendor for over an hour just so he could bring me back a miniature of the Statute of Liberty. But his stories got old, and in time, they started to sound the same.

"I think ... I know," he suddenly began again, "It's really just one of a hundred instances of the kind ... It's really only a sad story when you look at it ... it's nothing really ... But, well ..."

He started searching the channels again, never finishing his thought for us. Coming in from another room, my father saw that I had finished setting the table and said to me:

"Well, that was your grandmother on the phone. The arrangements have been made just as your grandfather wanted ... Tomorrow I will be picking you up from school after lunch for the wake. Then on Friday, you'll be out all day for the funeral. So ... don't forget to let your teacher know what's going on when I drop you off tomorrow morning, understand?"

I nodded my reply.

Conscious of their eyes on me as we sat to eat, I began devouring the meal despite my lack of hunger. After looking over at me, my father began explaining to my uncle:

"You see, Chuck, he and dad had started spending a good deal of time together once school started up again for him this year. I needed a place for him to go after they let him out for the day, and, besides, they seemed to get along alright."

My father and my uncle looked at me, I received the weight of their scrutiny with weak shoulders, but did not meet either set of eyes with my own. Each returned to his plate, and after a moment my uncle turned to my father.

"I don't know that I would've liked my boy spending too

much time with him," he chewed, "seeing what he had become toward the end."

How's that, Charlie?" my mother asked.

"What I'm saying is that how can a boy learn to be a man ... when he is shut up all afternoon with someone who ... Couldn't you have sent him anywhere else?" asked my uncle.

"Where's better than with family?" answered my mother.

"My point is ... what's best for him ... He should be outside with other kids his own age, his peers, don't you agree?" he asked my father with a huff.

"Certainly, let him grow up with those his own age, step up to the plate, like we had to when we were boys ... But you know mom, she thought it would be nice for dad, and she wasn't alone in that respect," he nodded toward my mother.

"What would they do with all that time?" asked my uncle.

Well, sometimes when I'd come to pick him up they would be sitting there, just sitting there ... talking ..." my father explained.

"really, just talking ... What did mom have to say about it?" asked my uncle.

"Nothing much really, just that sometimes they'd sit outside, sometimes in, but always talking... other times just sitting there sort of staring at each other ... But just last week she said dad started telling her about it ..." my father said.

As he began to explain further my mother stood and hurried started clearing the table before my uncle could inquire on.

"Anything more Chuck?" my dad said to my uncle.

"No, no thanks I've had more than enough ..." he answered.

Pathetic! Boiling from a confused anger, I left the table without excusing myself and went up to my room for bed.

It was almost the early morning before I finally found rest. I

felt anger, almost rage, toward my uncle for thinking of me as slow to become a man: I struggled to find what meaning I could in his half-sentences. Swallowed by the darkness of my room, I saw the face of my grandfather in relief, its heavy lines lending the image depth and texture. I tried to shut it out, I shrank into a ball underneath the sheets, hoping to roll away down some warm, grassy hill. But at the bottom, I looked up to see it looking down at me, its watery eyes closed. It turned, and as my eyes followed its direction I understood that it wanted me to climb the staircase toward which it now faced. I felt myself cower into a cool, comfortable corner of my imagination, and there I saw it waiting for me. It turned and began for the staircase and I wondered at how it moved so seamlessly and why it never looked to see if I followed. Then I remembered what it looked like when it slept and realized that my eyes were also closed.

The following afternoon after lunch my father picked me up as planned. When I climbed into the car somber faces greeted mine. I did not need to be told how to behave. Everyone faced forward as we lurched onward.

When we reached the funeral home we were welcomed by my grandmother. She spoke to my father in hushed tones but kept her eyes fixed upon me. I took my mother's hand as we walked toward the doors, which were propped open by two large, decorative decanters filled with baby's breath and chrysanthemum. When we were inside I recognized the faces of my many relatives, while many that I saw were new to me. Several of these strangers had encircled an easel to read the placard propped upon it and to admire the photographs tacked around the lettering. I found my place alongside them to read:

James Prosemeuth
June 16, 1929 - May 20, 1991

My he rest in peace.

All lowered and shook their heads in sadness upon reading the words. Were it like any other day that spring, I would have been freed from school to find my way through their house and into the backyard to see him quietly sipping lemonade, his face red from the sun. On the way out my grandmother would likely have given me his medication. This system always started him laughing, and so I would have to be the one to press open the bottles while he sat shaking with a smirk. Once received, the pills were unlikely to make their way into his mouth and down his throat, as his thick hands were no longer sturdy anyway. If one fell, he stubbornly sent the rest showering across the yard, cursing at them as they flew. It was the ferocity of these fits that prevented me from ever daring to scour the grass in search of the debris, abandoned, so often, to some end.

I wanded to go into the chamber, arranged like a small chapel, to look at him while he lie there in place of an altar, but I was afraid to wade through so many more strangers alone. I slowly stuck my head around the open door, and saw only faintly the tip of his nose peak above the edge of the open casket. I stepped back and out through the atrium in search of my mother. As I passed out of the dimly lit room, I caught pieces of conversations as their somber words sulked through the air. I took my mother's hand and held it while I squinted at the bright light of the sun. Standing there I was surprised to find that I was filled with warmth by the blooming spring day. The overcast thoughts that my uncle had infused me with the night before had dissipated, and I felt that the somber faces and conversations of my family and the strangers all around bore no more weight upon my will. Instead I started to remember all that I had learned from him.

He started playing ball as a boy and he taught me how to hold the bat with firm yet gentle control. he told me about all the great players like Joe DiMaggio and Ted Williams and about the teams that they had played on, and about the significance of the many different signals that players and coaches use to communicate with each other, so their opponents can't anticipate their next move. He often quizzed me with questions about what to do when you get behind in a count or ahead or when you first step into the box, and as a base runner, at what point to steal or slide or tag-up. These dilemmas displayed for me the subtle intricacy of the game, linking all of the elements that I had once found so simple and separate. It all became so solemn a system that I marveled over how anyone ever achieved the levity to just play and be played. I was not surprised when he told me that those who had excelled wrote volumes about it afterwards, revealing their nefarious love affairs with the game. When pressed for answers about this I could hazard nothing but childish and stuttered guesses. If I did try, he often smiled and merely muttered in reply, his mouth hovering above his beverage.

While riding home I leaned my head against the warm car window trying to remember the words of my uncle and the end of my dream from the night before. I closed my eyes and saw the staircase and remembered noticing that at the top a light seemed to be dying, as the hissing sound of static became clearer. I remembered feeling that for all of its perplexity, I was in a place with which I should be familiar - the ballpark, I believed. But I could not invoke the dream's end.

I slept soundly that night, and the following morning my parents took me to St. Peter's to attend my grandfather's funeral. It was early, and the dew on each blade of grass and on every leaf of every tree reflected the dawning light of the day's tepid sun. The

priest welcomed us into the small space where the parishioners gathered after mass on Sundays. My mother and father each shook his hand and smiled, drawing me into their circle. The sacking of the priest's vestments folded all around him as he knelt down to lean forward, putting his head at a level even with my own. I first looked at his huge gray eyes, then up to see my parents staring down at me. My mother told me to hold out my hand. In it I received two shining quarters, while in my ear I received instruction of my special duty during the ceremony. I lingered, just staring at the objects as each rested in my hand. As they moved through the doorway and into the great hall of the church, I was persuaded by my mother's glance to take my seat between her and my father. I sat, waited, all the time fingering the two coins, turning them over and over in my pocket, while I listened to the sermon. The time came.

I stood from my seat and stepped around my father into the aisle. The dust adrift in the air above was infused with the ruddy hues cast by the dull light shining through the stained-glass windows adorning the church. I followed the line of my cousins, moving forward with my head down and hands folded over each other. Once each reached the coffin they placed inside it the objects that they had brought forth: a baseball, a glove, a cap, and old photograph. I knelt, and then rose to place what I had carried, the two coins, without fear and with care, as instructed, one on each of my grandfather's closed eyes. He seemed to me so massive, his body now occupying such a small space. As I turned I remembered my being on display also and, turning to move from the coffin, I crossed myself and walked back to my seat.

After the service, the congregation passed out of the great hall and into the open air. Some said their final fair words to my grandmother before leaving, while others simply waited to go. My

mother, father and I stood by as the rest of our family gathered around to watch as the last few lingered and then left, as well. Once all the others had gone my grandmother rejoined us as we walked toward our car.

I stood at the bottom of the stoop while my grandmother unlocked the front door. The others were getting out of their cars, carrying the food that they had prepared the night before, situating it on the table before going to my grandmother's refrigerator to retrieve still more. I found a place in the living room near where would soon be seated both my grandmother and my aunt. Once we three were settled, my mother announced that the food was ready and that we were to come in to fill our plates. Running in from outside, my cousins proceeded to parade through the room, and then were gone again. I took my plate as last of the children and returned to my seat in the living room. After all others had moved through the line my mother, aunt and grandmother took their share. I was nearly finished when they fill the empty seats around mine.

None of us spoke until everyone had finished with their meal. I collected the empty plates to bring them into the kitchen and heard my mother's voice first:

"It was a nice service. Father Wells really performs a pleasant mass."

After she finished her sentence I quietly came back into the room. Both my grandmother and my aunt, after a moment, nodded in agreement with her. My mother smiled and then looked at me, And so I began nodding my head, as well. She, again, addressed my grandmother, asking:

"The preparations all appeared to have gone very smoothly."

"Oh, yes, quite smoothly, all according to plan," my grandmother said, "Of course we had spoken about it and contacted the

necessary parties once he was diagnosed. Then we started setting some money aside, not much, but it was enough ... We were quite ready for it."

Of course nothing can prevent anything like this from coming to pass."

"... Of course not ... nothing anyone can do about it."

"Was he ready for it?"

"I think he was quite ready ... But he was someone different at the end, different than before we knew ... Did he seem different to you?"

"Certainly ... yet he was still full of spirit, quieted maybe but ... certainly not... um... overcome or subdued or resigned or anything."

She lifted her glass to her lips and sipped, then began again:

"H looked so calm lying there, like he had just closed his eyes for a nap. I never imagined I'd see him look so peaceful ... Oh, I am sure he has gone to a better place."

"That's just like what Winnie next door said. She's been living next to us from about the time we first moved to 35th. She said that never in her time knowing our family had she ever seen Jimmy look so at peace ... that he must be off somewhere better."

"Certainly you can find you own peace in that?"

"Yes, certainly I can try ... But poor Jimmy ... I just hope that the work he did in life finds him rewarded in death. You know how hard he worked, how much he loved baseball, playing and coaching, then umpiring games, announcing games, and all of that. Oh ... how he was gone all the time ... and how it strained him."

"Yes, I know, and so did everyone. He was loved for it, and I imagine it was that ... That's what they say he'll be remembered for ... his devotion to the game."

Below the din of my cousins playing outside, a slow, deep breathing could be heard. Both my mother and grandmother sighed at the sight of my aunt slumped in her seat, asleep.

"Such a sweet girl," said my grandmother, "She's sleeping ... She is such a saint, with all that she helped me do in the last few days. What, with all of the last minute arrangements, calling the Daniels's funeral home and Father Wells. Then getting everything squared away in the Times for the obituary notice and this Sunday's story. On top of that she had to deal with me ... Oh, look at her sleep so sound ... and so sweetly ..."

"She is, she is such a sweetheart," said my mother.

My grandmother sniffled and then smiled before wiping her eyes with her delicate handkerchief.

"Yes, there's nothing like family," said my grandmother, "Nothing you can rely on ... in the end, there's nobody you can trust like family."

"That's true, and now that James is gone don't forget that or forget us ... now that he's gone he won't have forgotten you," said my mother.

"I know, I know," said my grandmother, "He won't be crawling into bed once the game is over and the TV off, nor you stopping by on Sundays to see us ... Oh, Jimmy!"

She sobbed to herself, and my mother went over to her. After a time, my mother returned to her seat and my grandmother sat upright and said:

"You know ... there was something afflicting him lately ... a way about him that I had only ever seen once, maybe twice, before, and then only briefly. Often when I would bring him out his dinner, either in there or out there, I would find him staring down intently, with his left arm thrown down the side of the chair while he used the other, propped on its elbow, to methodically smooth back his hair."

She paused and then looked at me for a moment before continuing on:

"Despite all of that and all of what the doctors said he still believed that he'd get back into the booth to call a game or two this season. He would tell me about how much he missed it ... How he missed watching the players go about the field ... and the stadium lights as they began to wax while the daylight was on the wane. He said he wanted to bring me up into the booth with him so I could help him with it ... I told him only if he got on the waiting list for a new heart. The doctors said that only if he received a new heart would he be able to get back into it. Still, he was set on it ... Poor Jimmy ..."

Then she took out the handkerchief to wipe her eyes and nose again. Putting it back into her pocket, she closed her eyes for a moment and said nothing.

"He was too temperamental, almost volatile," she said, "Everything he involved himself in ran him hot ... I suppose this was something he brought upon himself."

"Yes, you could tell he was a very intense man," said my mother.

At that, neither said anything for some time. My mother simply looked down, folding and refolding her hands. My grandmother sighed her calm, quiet breaths. I reached to the floor to find my glass, and then sipped from it silently. At last my grandmother spoke:

"It was once everyone knew him. People would always ask him to do this or do that ... That was when it started. Certainly they'll say he was happy to help in whichever way he could, I mean. But ... They'll say it was his choice. Oh, poor Jimmy he was so willing ..."

My grandmother sighed.

"It got to him," she said. "And it wasn't long after that he

was diagnosed. At first, we slowed him down gradually, but pretty soon he began brooding about the house or in the yard. We hardly spoke anymore, and that's when I thought some afternoon company might do him good. And I thought it had been. Then on Tuesday evening Winnie stopped by for coffee and asked me where James was. I told her that I had let him go for a drive, to relax. She said she knew as much, that she had heard him leave over an hour earlier. I guess I had lost track of time. As we were finishing our coffee the phone rang."

She stopped herself. I listened to the sound of my cousins outside, felt the stillness of the room. I knew my grandfather was lying in the ground, still in his coffin, two coins balanced atop his eyes.

My grandmother continued:

"It was a man from Beaudry's Bar on the east side of town ... Then, of course, I knew what had happened ..."

What Lies Beneath the Biffy

by: Chris Mcclaird

"Okay, this is a murder mystery." I emphasize the "this" part 'cause there is so much shit out there that pretends to be original and good. "Well, I think we're gonna check out Vampiyaz. Thanks." Are you kidding me? Christ! If you were looking for shit, the Biffy would have provided better entertainment. So I say "Alrighty then." How corny is that? But once you start saying something in zombie-mode you keep regurgitating it even if you are busy thinking about how cool it would be if you were an X-man. Like thank you. Why the hell would anyone say thank you to a guy who just came in to use the toilet? Thank you for giving Jane and Billy a better alternative to Vampiyaz? Or to people who come in and return their movies late. What I should be saying is damn right you bring your movies back. Bitches. The added bitch is like the barbs on the end of a whip; it hurts, but a couple of seconds later true agony rips into your brain. On second though, I'd save the bitch part until after I drop my bloody bat onto their slippery linoleum: Next time bring yer movies back on time...BITCH! I'd be my own Boondock Saint with a cockeye like the guy from Friday. Chicks dig that sorta thing. And if they don't, THWACK! They could be my sexy sidekicks though for when those late movie returners come back for revenge.

That's when we bust out our newly legalized assault weapons and roll around on the ground, cappin' fools and snappin' their necks with a triple air kick to the dome or doing a Karate Kid midair kick that sends 'em through the wall. Nobody fucks with Mr. Movies.

"Hey that's my gumball!" I look over just in time to see some kid push his sister away from the vending machine so he can grab the gumball first. I shake my head, mind-boggled and bewildered as the girl runs back and tries to wrestle it away. Her dad gave her two quarters, so what the fuck? God kids are ridiculous.

Damn, I can't remember what I was doing.

Afternoon Outing

by: Adam Putz

It was our oldest brother who brought Middle Earth to us. One day after school, he cleared a special space on his desk for his beautiful copies of *The Hobbit* and each volume of *The Lord of the Rings*. We were welcome to them, and every afternoon after that we would gather in the close of our backyard before striking out on that day's quest. But he never took a place in our party opposite a band of the neighbor boys that included the Brysons, Tim and his pudgy younger brother Tom. With luck, we waged our epic battles, laying siege to our enemies and chasing them through the woods down to the river. But here we were forced to either flee or fall upon their swords. Despite our valor, we were never the winners, and each campaign ended with Tim's victory parade leading us back home in time for dinner. The Brysons' house was down 35th avenue from ours, and the breeze carried the scent of line-dried laundry whenever you walked past it on a summer day. But Tim played too recklessly for those of us who were not as big or as fierce. He looked like some sort of savage when he marched us out of the woods, mud painted on his face, banging a garbage can lid with a blunt stick, yelling:

"Hail! All hail your triumphant king!"

Years later, all were dubious when it was learned that Tim and Tom had founded a joint insurance and real estate firm. But there was no denying it.

Some rogue identity had crept in among us and now presided over all and all knelt piously before it. Made marginal were and differences in age or attitude. We had solidified our ranks, some intrepidly, some out of duty and some to make good on former cowardice, and I counted myself among these, the hesitant soldiers who feared to

appear too reflective or too timid. The literature of Middle Earth, though similar to my own tastes, left open far too many opportunities of escape. And I read the reality of this on the fighting faces of my comrades.

One day at school while we were reading aloud for Mr. Clement, Tom Bryson was caught with his copy of *The Two Towers*.

"Speak up now, Bryson ... Do you have the passage? '... Then He was asked by those around ...' That's right, very good ... now keep it up. What was the question? 'What were they to do if... ' Have you not read it? Surely you have heard it before?"

Mr. Clement slid back his chair and slowly stood, starting toward Tom. Shifting nervously in his seat, Tom knocked from his desk the other books in front of him. Before he could move to pick them up, Mr. Clement had reached down to retrieve *The Two Towers*. He paged through it, leaving the leaves open for a time before returning the book to its place on Tom's desk.

"Yes ... I remember liking that one very much," he said, "Hang on to it ... It's really good. Now could someone pick up where we left off?"

Tom looked over and smiled at me, relieved.

Mr. Clement's complimenting indifference to the episode completely crushed the mystery of Middle Earth, and the grinning fat face of Tom Bryson stirred up something sorrowful in my spirit. After that, the ability of school to assuage my appetites quickly faded, and I began to lust after adventure, for an experience that the reading of those tales had once offered. Our afternoons of play became as dull as anything in school. I wanted something real and exciting to happen. But something of this kind, I concluded, could never happen here. It could only be had elsewhere.

The winter's snow had not long since melted when I vowed

to free myself from at least one day of drudgery. I convinced Tom Bryson to join me alongside my brother Charlie in organizing a day's endeavor. We pooled what money we had, and planned to meet at nine in the morning the following Friday on the southern bank of the Sauk River, near where the Boy Scout bridge crossed into the woods. Tom said that Tim had vouched for him in the past when he really was sick and that it had worked, and that this time would really be no different. The same was the case for us, with the exception that our sister could also turn in a note said to be from our mother.

The Scouts always kept a canoe on shore below the bridge and we planned to paddle it down the Sauk to where it reached the island that marked the merging of it with the Mississippi. Tom was worried that the current would be too strong and that we would get swept away. But Charlie assured him that he had watched the Scouts do it hundreds of times, and that if we kept close to shore we would be just fine. This seemed to settle the matter, and I brought the meeting to a close by collecting their money after showing them my own. We met one last time to purchase some provisions and make sure that the canoe was, in fact, still there. As I watched the river gently flow, all my excitement was subdued. At our driveway Tom left us, and we three shook hands, Charlie and Tome each laughed a little and said:

"Farewell, Mr. Sawyer!"

"Until then, Huck!"

That night I slept a restless and dreamless sleep. At breakfast I hardly ate and watched as Charlie consumed a plate of pancakes the quantity of which shamed the amount eaten by any of my other brothers. As the rest moved to ready themselves for school, we darted out the door toward the bridge and the river. I could hear the calm chugging of the current as we neared the water. In the tall

grass lining the bank we found an oak tree beneath which we could hide our books. The morning was chilled by the mid-April air, but some welcome warmth could be felt the higher the sun climbed in the sky. Charlie and I saw to the ordering of the canoe while we waited for Tom. We loaded what little gear we had: our rucksacks carrying our lunches, Charlie's fishing pole and some bait. Then we sat, and I watched the water as it overtook the expansive concrete dam and pass round the massive stone pillars that the Boy Scouts had built to support their bridge. Above, the budding boughs of the tall trees teetered in the gently breeze, casting shadows on the river that stood still upon its stream. The aluminum of the canoe was slowly baking in the sun, and I moved to expose that part which I had been covering to rest myself against one of the warmed areas. Charlie did the same. After we were settled for a few moments, he pointed out that it was well past nine and that he thought something must have happened to Tom for him not to show.

I said nothing against his judgment, only that I thought we could afford to wait on another half an hour or so. There was nothing I could say against his suspicion. Despite our being the same age, Tom and I were not really friends. But he and Charlie always had been. While we waited for the time to pass, Charlie and I went together to the water's edge and dipped in a toe each. The sharp sting of the cold confirmed my fear of falling in and, almost in jest, I tried my best to harden my will against such failure. After kneeling to tie his shoe back on his foot, Charlie said that it had just past ten o'clock and that we should get going. I made one last check of everything before I climbed into the canoe and pushed us away from shore. Charlie let go of the gunwale and took up his paddle in bow.

The rain that spring must have raised the level of the river, as it shot us between the banks. Charlie like to paddle hard and with

his head down, making our simple conversations nearly impossible. It hardly mattered, as I was busied by trying my best to both steer the canoe and admire the undulating landscape. To my right stood a steep sandy ridge several stories high, its walls slow to waste away. If I tried I could make out, amongst the trees above, the tops of peoples' homes, marked by their many colorful shades and brown brick chimneys. Opposite this, reaching the water edge, sprawled a forest thick with broad hardwood trees and scrappy tangled brush. Sometimes the light would shine through, showing some stone or path. With a shout, I told Charlie I was pulling us over. He did his best to aid me in guiding the canoe to an open spot ashore onto which he could hop.

Though we weren't paddling long, Charlie agreed that we seemed to be a little ahead of schedule, despite the morning's setback. I suggested that we might drag the canoe into some brush and then head into the woods. Not much further down I discovered a narrow trail to follow. We walked along as the path paralleled the river before cutting hard to the left through the trees. As soon as the sound of the river receded, I could hear Charlie humming to himself while he walked. Then he stopped his song and paused before tearing off to chase a squirrel up into a nearby pine, brandishing a barbed stick he had found and scaring off a flock of birds nesting there. I continued along the path as it wove its way around the many granite boulders and tall tree trunks. Looking up, I could only see the sky in blue patches. I heard Charlie's quiet humming resume as he approached, and we met before the path reached the grassy clearing of a hill. At the top grazed two doe. I guessed that at least one fawn was somewhere near. Charlie smiled at me and then looked up the hill again. Finding our numbers to be too few to successfully carry a charge, Charlie and I backed off the challenge and chose to return to

the river instead. We cursed Tom all the while we walked, laughing as we wondered how big a beating Tim would give him after school.

By the time we reached the canoe the sun was high in the sky. The walk back had heated the both of us, but the river was far too cold for swimming so we cooled ourselves by splashing some water on our faces. The refreshment stayed us, and we sat on for a little while. I leaned back in the grass, folding my hands behind my head. Above flew a flock of Canadian geese, and I admired the precision of their perfect formation. I meditated on the image for a moment before looking over at Charlie. His look met mine and we laughed. I closed my eyes and laid back, letting the sun warm my face. I felt calm. Thoughts of school and home faded from my mind. After awhile we stood, brushed ourselves off and put the boat back in the water, skirting a narrow island to the right in favor of the main flow of current coursing around a bend. Looking over, I noted how the sandy ridge had sank, giving way to the woods, allowing them to meet the water's edge, surrounding us on either side.

Further downstream the current started tossing us around, and we took our time to make our way by carefully picking through the rock and the spray. When the flow of the river finally smoothed, I could see the grain elevator of Hein's Mill standing high above the trees on our right. As we drifted along I could hear the stiff shouts of workers while they toiled to load their heavy cargo onto trucks. If I listened carefully I could catch the coarse voice of one or another of the stout workers shouting something, prodding them all along. Then the men scattered as a whistle groaned. My own hunger told me that the sound signaled lunchtime. Spanning the mouth of the Sauk, just below the mill, crossed over the river a bridge. I aimed us left, toward where I knew there to be a landing that began beneath the base of it.

After securing the canoe on shore, we walked to shore we could see our destination. Marooned on the island was a rusty fishing boat with a bladeless prop. Beyond the wreck were discarded buckets, cans, nets and various other treasures. I turned to look back upriver but the bridge blocked most of my view of the mill and anything beyond it. I sighed and followed the river forward toward the island. Charlie sighed, too, making for the canoe. He grabbed our bags and we brought them to the top of a little hill above the riverbank. I ate slowly, watching the crooked swirling line of crosscurrent forming and flowing and reforming above the island. Charlie said that a handful of people every year paddled right past here down to the Gulf of Mexico from Lake Itasca in a canoe no different from the one we were using. He said that someday he would do that, and even I, watching the Mississippi flow past, believed him. I closed my eyes and imagined the history and geography diligently delivered to me in school slowly taking shape before my eyes, many miles downstream.

It was getting late and we were too tired to make it out to the island. We had to be home in time to meet our brothers on their walk home from school in order to avoid the suspicion of our mother. Charlie looked disappointedly past me at the island, and before he would smile again I had to tell him that he still had time to fish if he hurried. Charlie darted down to the water and I listened for him to make his first cast. Rather than go to the water with him, I stayed up on the hill to sit with my exhausted thoughts and the little that was left of my lunch.

We were alone on the point. Charlie arranged a hypnotizing rhythm of casting and reeling, and I sat listening to this for some time until I saw a man approaching us from the far end of the bank. I watched him passively as I popped off the heads of dandelions,

pulling them up separate from the stems. He came along the bank slowly, taking a broad arcing line below the hill. With his head down and both hands in his pockets, he placed one foot very directly and very delicately in front of the other while he walked. He was poorly dressed in a worn denim of a bluish-gray color. He looked quite old, as his beard was silvery-white. He passed above where Charlie stood and below where I sat but did not raise his head to look at either of us, keeping on his way. I watched him walk on for another thirty yards or so before aborting his progress to turn and retrace his route. He made towards us with his same measured gait, always one foot lightly in front of the other, so calculated were his movements that I thought he was searching for a specific spot on the ground or something he had lost.

He came to a place between the ridge and the river near where I was sitting and extended Charlie and I each a formal greeting. I said hello but Charlie said nothing. Then he turned up the ridge, continuing to take his time. He sat down beside me and started to make small talk about baseball and the weather, telling me that this was the highest he could remember seeing either river since he was a boy. He talked about how happy he was then and that he would do anything to be my age again. His thoughts bothered me a little, but I did nothing to steer the conversation. Then he began to talk of school and his favorite books and he asked me if I had read the poetry of T. S. Eliot or anything by Albert Camus or Franz Kafka. I recognized the names from listening to my older brothers talk, and so I said that I had read some of their works. He believed my lie, and said:

"Really? Well you do look the type. But he..." the old man started, nodding toward Charlie, who stood fishing on the bank with his back to us, "he's not, though, he'll be quite content with that."

He continued talking about books and how he had everything by Camus and Kafka at home and how he never bored of reading their words. But he said that some of what they wrote a boy my age should not read. I asked why - a question I quickly regretted asking because I was afraid the old man would catch onto my lie. He smiled, exposing his yellow-brown teeth. Then he asked had I ever been in a fight at school. I told him no, that I had never been in a fight. He smiled again and said that surely I must have been in at least one scrape. I shook my head and looked forward. Then he asked about Charlie, and I said that he had been in a few. After that I sat quietly for a few moments.

"How many were you in?" I asked squarely.

The old man smiled like before, shaking his head, and said that when he was younger he had been in many fights.

"All boys," he said, "get into fights."

How vividly he recalled this part of his childhood struck me as strange for a man his age. Although, I did not mind his honesty and thought him reasonable, I hated his words as soon as they fell from his mouth, and I wondered why he nervously turned round and round his finger a ring inlaid with a small gold cross. He kept up the conversation and I noticed how plainly he spoke. He never switched subjects and smiled as he recalled how he missed the school yard but, for all that, he said he didn't miss school, and that he still preferred nothing to a good hard fight. He spoke as if he were simply relaying me some fact or other that he had read somewhere he did not remember. At other times he spoke in hushed whispered tones as if divulging me, his privileged audience, some piece of knowledge which would someday serve me well, if only it were kept a secret. Always he circled round and round a point, fixing his mind on it, seemingly furling further by his idle voice. I kept my eyes on

Charlie's back while I listened to the old man repeat his phrases.

After a time, he stopped his speech and stood, saying that he would only be a few minutes. He slowly walked away, and I watched him as he walked back to where I first saw him. I sat quietly, waiting for him to fade into the woods. Then I ran down the bank to Charlie.

"I haven't caught anything, yet," he said.

I made no answer to him nor did I really even look him in the face, and he asked:

"Were you talking to someone up there?"

"Yes," I replied, "and in case he comes down here to talk to you, your name is Tom and I am your brother, Tim."

Then I darted back up the hill to wait for the old man to return. I had not sat long before he sat down and started speaking again, declaring:

"Now that I got a good look at you ... Yes, you're one of Jimmy's boys!"

"I don't know who you're talking about ... sir," I replied.

"Yes, yes ... I am certain of it, one of Jimmy Prosemeuth's boys!" he insisted.

"I'm sorry, but I don't see how I could be ..." I replied.

He seemed puzzled by this, but did not press me further on the matter. Then Charlie let out a shout. He had caught a whopper of a fish. The old man and I sat, watching him grapple with it while he tried to take the hook out of its mouth. Successful, Charlie released the fish into the water. Then he began again his rhythm of casting and reeling.

The old man sat and said nothing for a time, and I again took to sorting from the stems the dandelion heads. He broke our silence by telling me he thought my brother to be too simple a character,

and asked me whether he got into a lot of trouble with his teachers. I wanted to tell him that we went to a very good Catholic school and that our mother had raised us very well. Instead, I said nothing. His mind was already in the throes of thought and when he began again he spoke about girls. He talked about how he liked nothing more than to look at a pretty girl smile. He said that a boy like Charlie needed a girlfriend. He said that there was nothing that could turn a boy like him into a man like a girl. His awkward remarks struck me and, as I reeled from them, I looked up at his face. My gaze met his pair of pale blue eyes and I quickly turned my head away.

The old man kept at his speech, seeming to have forgotten his recent romanticism. He said that if ever he saw some stupid boy talking to a sweet girl he would drag the boy away and smack him around. And if the boy cried from the beating, he would beat him for that, too. He said that if ever a boy started a fight or told lies about being in one, that he would beat the boy for that, too. He said that there was nothing so justified in this world as that. The old man ran rampant round and round this point, describing in detail just what he would do and how he would adore doing it more than anything. On this matter, in particular, he seemed certain and spoke of it with unusual care.

I patiently sat until he stopped, and when he did I stood slowly and made politely that my brother and I had to go home. In my tone I made sure not to betray my fear, trying my best to speak with confidence. I said farewell, and as I descended the bank I began to tremble for fear that the old man might tackle me to the ground. I quickened my pace and shouted to Charlie:

"Tom! Tom!"

I shouted his pseudonym several more times in my air of bravery before he answered the call. I was relieved when he turned

around and shouted back, setting his rod and reel down to step forward. I felt sorry, as I knew that I, too, had really only ever resented him.

Faith

by: Samantha Jo Majhor

Reflections of naked birch and forest pine fringe the steel sky that ripples in the lake's center. The moment of beauty is caught and tucked away as I whip along the highway. This lonesome drive has become a familiar comfort, a time for thought, and song, and, sometimes, some momentary amalgam of natural significance and consciousness. These rare moments of clarity stick like roses amidst the brambles in the history of my thoughts: the death of an ant on my fingertip, the release of an incarcerated bee, the crisp autumnal wind so recently turned Southward from Canada sweeping my face when I am still, peering at the lake shore opposite, the illusive twilight that puts the world of trees in deep shadow against the navy-blue sky, my arms open to the snow against a negative photo of the living world, my hand stretched out the car window as if I could pet the passing wheat fields of the Midwest, on and on these singular moments of lucid truth reappear and catch hold of my inner eye.

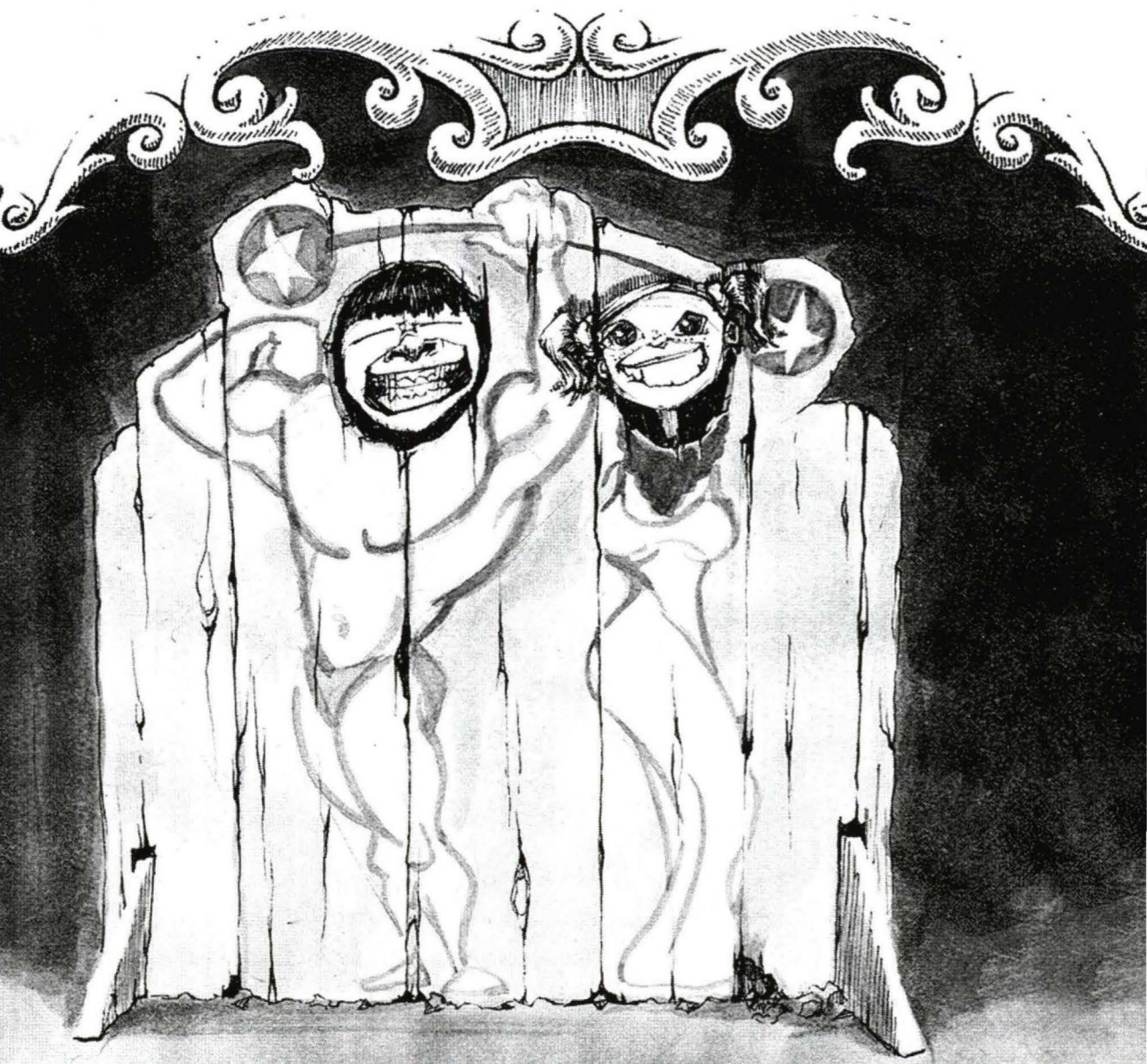
Yet, none compare to my first awakening. I had been lost amidst the insidious gossip and internal criticisms of teenage life. The world was blackened out to my spirit and I was utterly alone. I swung between the apathy that let boys use my body for their pleasure and the fear that drove me to punish the girls who would love me best. And I would not keep my thoughts from questioning the existence of God and the purpose of this life.

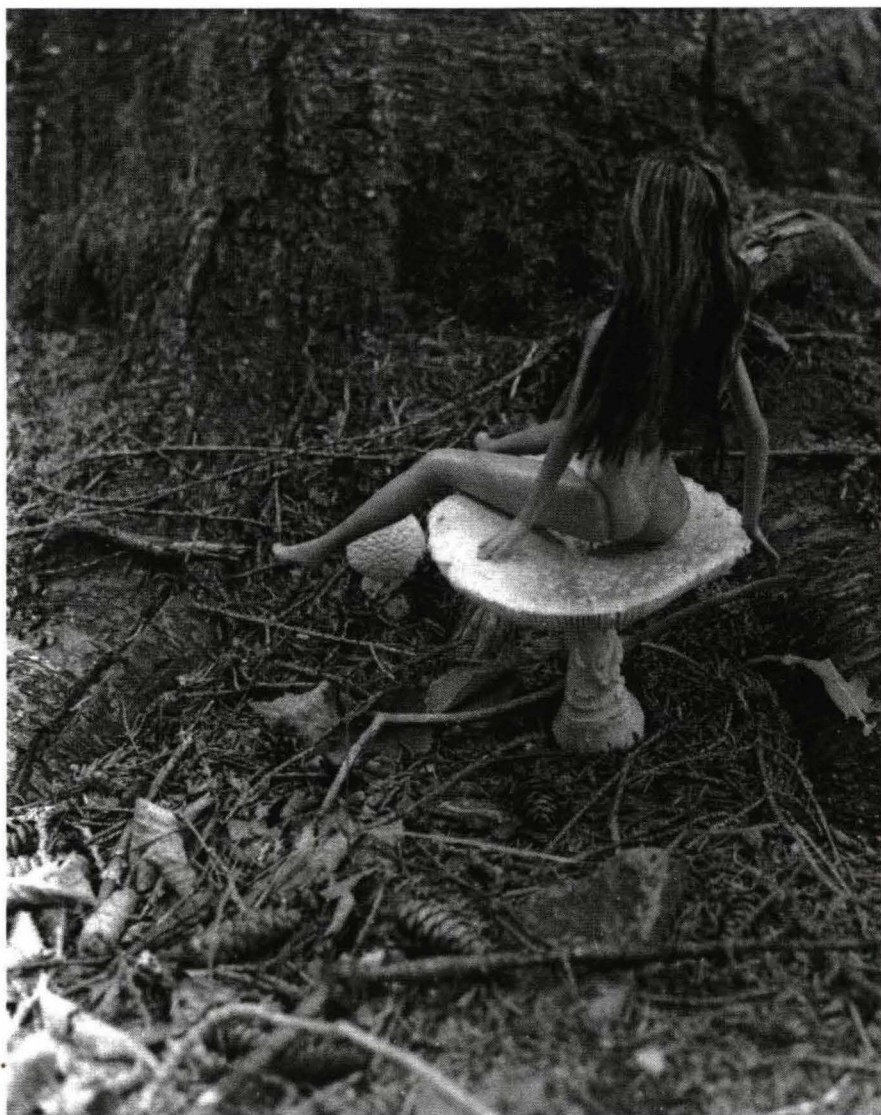
When the religion that had guided my mother's entire life told her that she and her children were damned for a divorce she never wanted, my sister and I were free to sleep in on Sunday mornings from the small ages of three and four. Ten years after our renun-

ciation of wafers, incense, stained glass, statues of the virgin, and Latin poetry, I found myself a regular at the Wednesday-night confirmation classes for teens, looking for some answers to my unrelenting mind. One of my closest girlfriends was forced to attend church at St. Mary of the Lake, and was grateful for my company. So, I walked to her house every week and we rode to the church together. I've never been able to muster up the disdain for Catholicism the way so many others seem to, despite my early break with her tenants. However, I must admit, the Wednesday-night classes provided me no answers, nor did my education there inspire any conviction in or against God. I remained alone ...alone ...alone.

Walking home alone from school one day in that early fall, I asked God the question that has been echoed by human lips since the beginning of thought - Give me a sign! Give me a sign of your existence; I implored the cloudy sky as I sank into the curb, alone. And I was given the standard answer. The wind picked up, making the trees of the empty near-by park sway with the seats of the abandoned swing-set. Then, the moment of clarity, I was awakened as a single leaf landed at my feet. I gingerly fingered the crispy foliage as I stood to continue home. And I knew, without a shadow of a doubt, as I know to the core of my soul now, ten years later, that God offers no answers. There are no signs.

PHOTOGRAPHY





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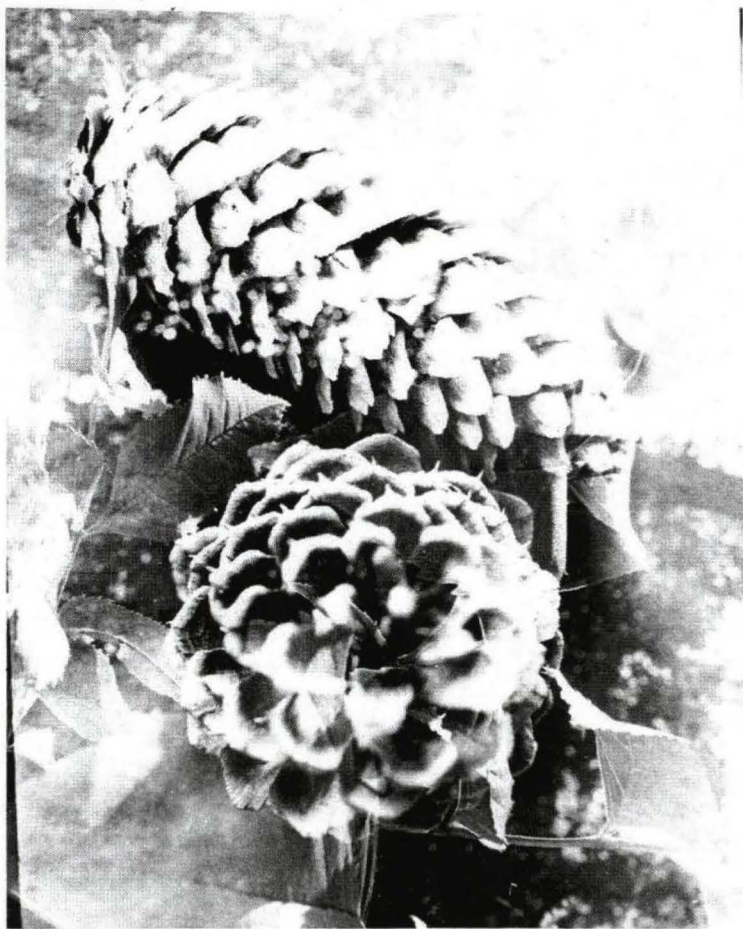
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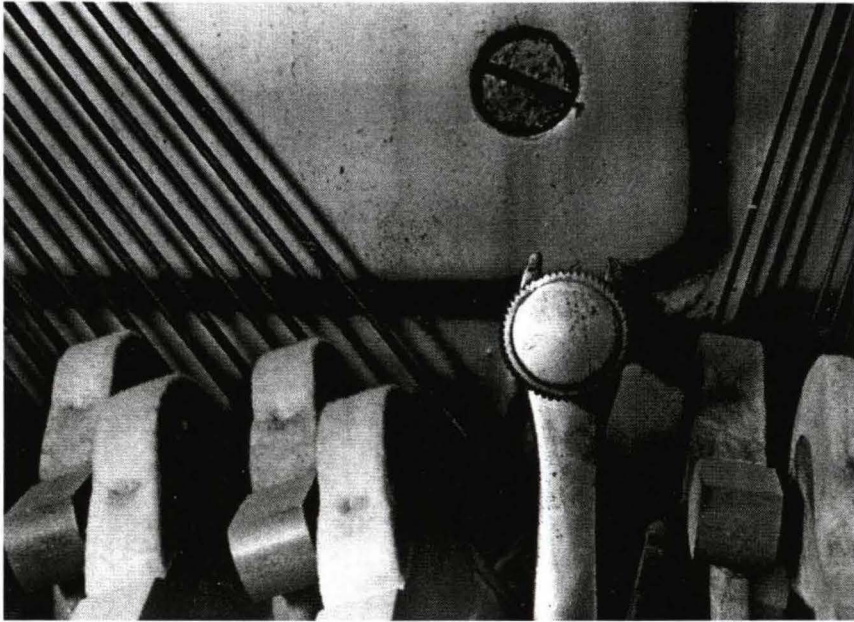
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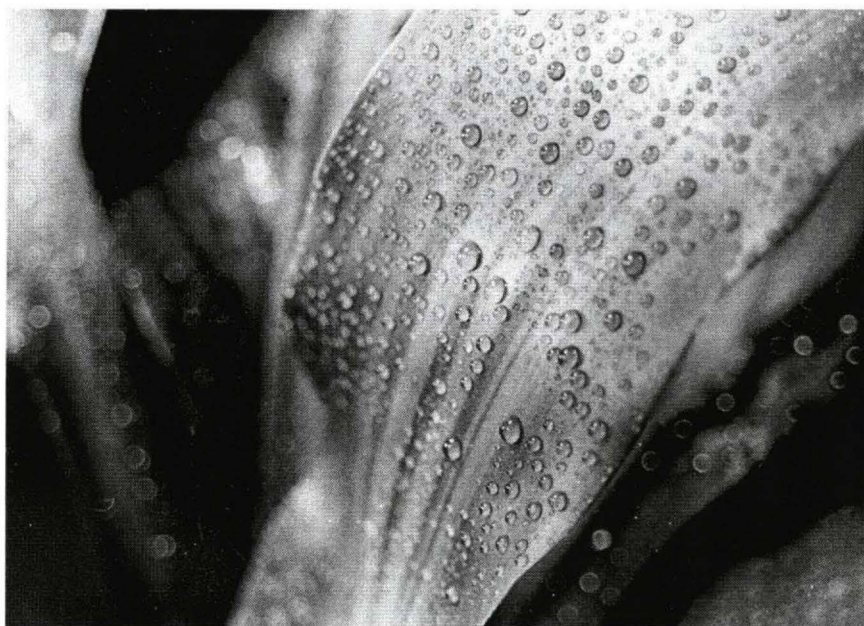
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'Piano'

Sarah Stone



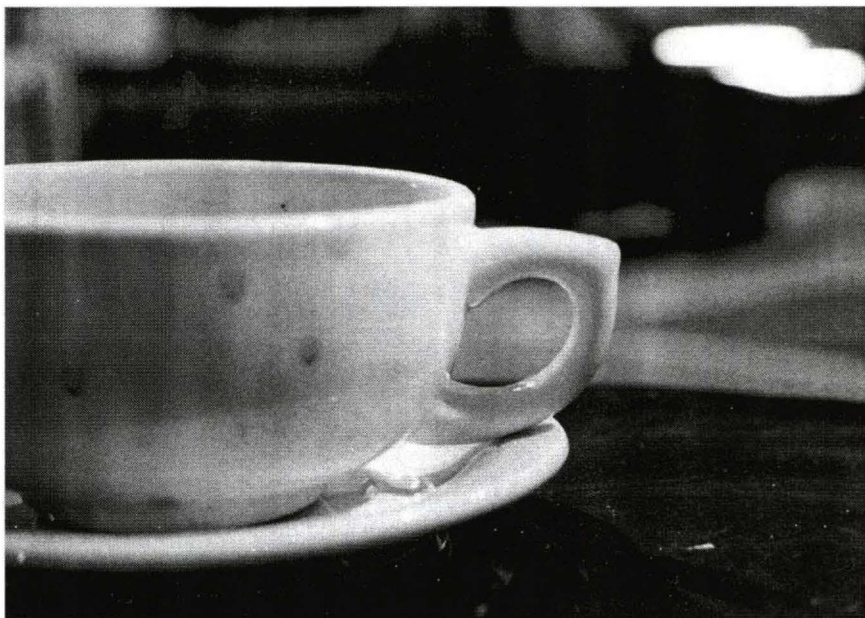
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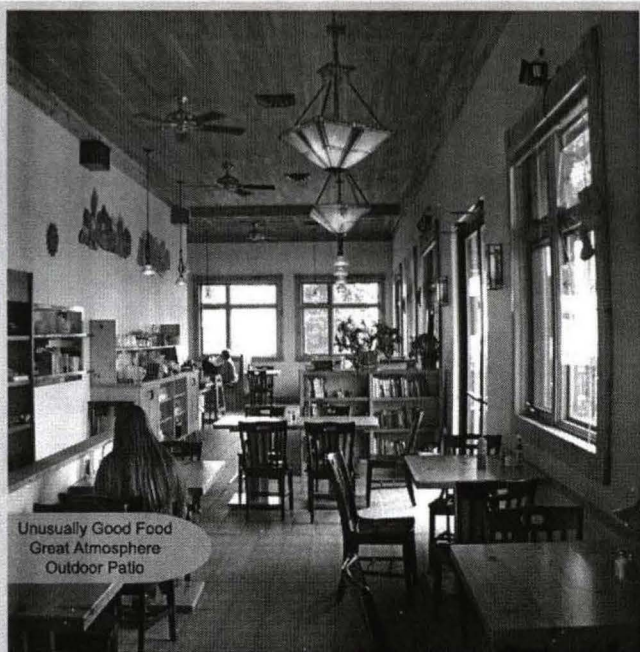
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The background is an abstract painting with a palette of reds, pinks, and dark tones. A large, dark, irregular shape dominates the center, resembling a silhouette or a shadow. The texture is visible, suggesting a thick application of paint. In the bottom right corner, there is a faint signature that appears to read 'H. T. 1971'.