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THE ROARING MUSE

Literary Arts Magazine

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THE ROARING MUSE

Literary Arts Magazine



EDITED BY:

AMY ANDERSON, JENNIFER HOFFMAN, ANNIE NELSON,
ANN WILCOX, KATHERINE ALMENDINGER

TYPE SETTERS:

AMY ANDERSON

PROOF READERS:

AMY ANDERSON

Book design and layout by Shel/Don Reproduction Centre

University of Minnesota Duluth
Graphic Design Services

Cover Art by Shelly Wilcox

UMD Literary Guild
410 Humanities Bldg.
10 University Dr.
Duluth, MN 55812

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Awake

by Jesse Abrahamson

As the gray dawn rises to meet the cool night
I slumber, submerged in a dreamscape of wonder
As the first rays strike my face I begin rising
through the layers of dream
As I leave wonder I enter excitement and happiness
then to the wild terrain of fear
As I jerk awake from this horror it is already fading
like the morning mist clinging to my window pane
The only sign it was ever there
is the sweat upon my brow and a memory dancing away

Untitled

by Haley Bonar

There are five layers of sand in my stomach
each day i try to patch and press each one
that has been scraped be the sieve

my mother told me that i need to find
the root of every tear that's shed
onto my green pillow case in the middle
of the afternoon

god doesn't like it when we cry all of the time
that's it's job
we can't exactly steal it

every time i see him i
fall in love
(which layer is that,
which) clump or compound
i can't remember until it rains

he said *i'm glad you came*
and slept in my bed
and kissed my hands and cheek
even though you weren't always
in the best mood

even in your sleep, girl,
you cry.
even in your sleep.

I suppose that's why my eyes are blue,
two holes of glass and steel
i remember when he said,
*i always thought girls with
blue eyes were stupid.*
(Not you, though,
just a little strange.)

the woman at the table holds
a looking glass,
sifting the sand back and fourth
in two minute intervals

after years of hesitation,
i tell her what is really wrong
and feel myself inhale, and slowly
slip between the cracks.

The Prostitution of Poetry

by Amelia Anderson

A hundred,
A thousand times
I rip off my veils
And you find yourself
Inside me.
I cry behind cold eyes,
Praying for a missionary
That looks into my soul
And spreads my truth
And wraps my nakedness
In his own.
But, desperate, I find
Only unenlightened eyes
Looking for consensual rape,
Entertained by intimate knowledge,
Leaving me alone— exposed.

Untitled

by Katherine Almendinger



Snake Dance

by Kathleen Westcott

The past in me
written in a language of synapse
every gesture, utterance, each perception
leaps or crawls from one nerve ending to the next
through the bloody, bony, muscular fiber of the past

Ah! Those lucid moments when the past in me breaks into her dance
resonate with the rhythms of creation
revealing the otherwise hidden gift of each cells imprint
twirling in the luminous glow and spark of insight, of introspection
there, in the big dreams, in the big ceremonies
and now a days in every genuine moment, conversation, glance

I love the past in me
not so much when I am on my knees with it, paralyzed
except for the desire to escape the pain
For sure not when this diaphragm is locked and these joints are stiff
on fire
during sleepless nights and restless days
but, I love the past
that magical alchemical past rooted deep in the
ancestral soil of human condition, human longing, human devotion

As the past in me teaches me her dance
flinging me out among the stars
pulling me deep into the earth's body
she rips me free of
my confused notions that I am her
she presses me into the pulsing sound of my true name,
my only self

and on the second weekend of August
 at Grand Portage during Rendezvous Days
 on Friday night after the children's grand entry,
 after the first few hours of dancing with a small group of early
 arrivals

we join in the night, in the dance that moves us
 as one body, as the great snake moves
 weaving, nearly floating on the earth's holy surface
 star's watching

our faces spinning past each other's faces
 until dissolved, dancing, we are a sea of fluid timeless passing
 we know each other in another place
 before this body and after

we see each other in our coming to this earth and in our leaving,
 in our agreements to share a past
 to dance with it,
 to dance through it
 and then
 to dance on

Meditation on Youth

by Amelia Anderson

Quiet,
Feet sinking into the moss,
Meditation on youth—
The repetition...
The profanity...
Plants slide on the water's surface
Like last night's lace
Ripped off in a fiery moment
And discarded like a feather,
Then it ripples away like a dream...
I can scarcely remember
If anything has ever been real.
The trees, the water,
The thick smell after the rain,
Melt into an eclectic melody
That has orchestrated my life
But all I hear now is silence.
I've spent the last penny
In the kitchen canister
And everything I've accumulated
Buys me nothing at all
But time,
Kept close to my heart
In a tattered flannel pocket
Though it's death I desire,
Not immortality,
To let me touch the gods...

A Cold, Rainy Morning in a Northern Town

by Josh Magsam

The color of the sky that morning reminded him of the old saying; "Red sky at night, sailors delight: red sky in the morning, sailors take warning." He knew that it would storm like hell before long, the clouds were already roaring in over the hills, threatening to wail and moan and fester all day. Better to stay in bed, but he was hungry, and no one was going to make breakfast for him here.

He still felt sluggish when he stopped in the kitchen to pull on his boots, his thoughts moving like a snake caught outside on a cold autumn afternoon. Shrugging on his coat, he grabbed his hat from a nail on the entry and pulled it on as he opened the door. The first raindrops were falling on the roof of his house like miniature bombs, exploding with concussive force on the shingles. The wind had picked up suddenly, a barbarian horde blowing in from the northeast. He had to bend his shoulders to face into it, tucking his head down to avoid losing the hat. The cold rain brought him to full consciousness within a few steps and he remembered it all at last, who and where he was.

The old feeling hit him then like a bad dream and he stumbled. He cursed the haze of sleep that had fooled him into getting out of bed at all. Under his breath, which fogged and joined the steam rolling off of the sun-warmed streets as the icy rain struck, he committed blasphemies against the sanctity of the human spirit. He watched the water running in rivulets along the creases and wrinkles in his worn, scuffed old boots and it depressed him even further.

It wasn't that he didn't want his boots to get wet. They were old but still sturdy, tough and weathered, impervious to the effects of yet another rainstorm. He loved the boots, loved them for still being comfortable after all the years they had seen together, all the sidewalks and roads, the tiled shopping centers and the rough barroom floors. No, the boots were not the problem. It was the simple truth of the situation that was the problem. They reminded him of too many things, of people and places long gone, leaving him only with these worn boots and a collection of hazy memories. After all this time, he should not be doing this, walking through a rainstorm to a café to get his breakfast, cold and alone with only his boots for company. He should be at home sharing

the table, drinking coffee and eating eggs with bacon, maybe some hash browns and toast on the side. It would be better to be sitting inside, smiling together at the cold rain sliding down the windows, happy that they did not have to go out in it. But it was no good; dreaming about it did nothing to diminish the fact that his fingers were beginning to feel numb, and his feet - although dry - were getting cold as he walked through the rain alone. He reflected that he should have put on an extra pair of socks.

He knew that he could have stayed home and made breakfast for himself but it wouldn't have been the same. Half the time the filter in the coffee pot broke, leaving him with a mouthful of grounds. The eggs on the counter waiting to be cracked open and fried always seemed terribly wrong somehow. He usually burned the toast, his hash browns were bland, his bacon got cold before he could eat it and. But it wasn't just that. He simply hated making breakfast by and for himself, eating at the kitchen table still morning-cold and loggy, the entire meal a portent of the hollowness that would be his day. Breakfast alone wasn't worth the misery it invariably brought.

The café glowed with a warm, inviting light just ahead and he quickened his pace to reach it, removing his hat to shake it off just as he stepped inside the door. The café was nice and warm, smelling of coffee and freshly fried bacon. There were only a few other men eating at the counter, men who had no one to share breakfast with for one reason or another and didn't feel like making their own. They didn't bother to glance in his direction. He stood there for a moment, the water still dripping off of his coat, running his fingers through his hair. He moved towards the counter to take a stool but changed his mind and took a booth by the front window with his back turned towards the wall.

The waitress looked up when he entered but waited to move until he had taken a seat. She grabbed a coffee pot and a mug and came over to the table. Putting the mug on the table she poured it full of coffee and set the pot down, pulling a pad from her apron to take his order.

"Hey," she said, smiling.

"Hey." He smiled back.

"You want the usual?"

"Yeah, sounds good."

"K, it'll be up in a few." She returned to the counter, filling coffee cups along the way.

He watched her go, watched her form as she moved and wondered why he had never taken the chance. He could not understand why she was still here, in this town. She was nothing short of breathtaking, a Nordic goddess descended from fabled Asgaard, Lorelei herself come to woo the hearts of men. She was not like so many people he knew, always talking just to hear the sound of their own voice; she knew how to be still, she knew what it meant to be silent and hear things. But he was unable to decipher whether her stillness was like rainwater that collected in a little pool or still like the ocean on a calm and windless day. Was she still because she was empty, or was she still because the great volumes below the surface were engaged in more celestial matters?

In truth, he had never tried because he was awestruck by her cool demeanor and her immortal beauty. Women like her did not want men like him, men who did not have a perpetual tan and could not whisper sweet nothings in French over glasses of wine in a little bistro on the Riviera. They did not want to wake up next to men like him in houses like his and sit at tables like his in chairs like his and eat eggs and bacon. They shouldn't want to do that, anyway. They didn't deserve to be subjected to such things.

He took a sip of the coffee and grunted slightly as it burned his throat. This was coffee the way it should be made, black as the midnight sky and strong as an ox. She set the food down in front of him then, hot and fresh, two eggs over-easy, bacon, toast and hash browns, tinged yellow by the butter.

"Anything else?" She topped off his coffee.

"Naw. This looks good."

"K. Just let me know if you need anything." She went back to the counter again and began to clear off the empty dishes.

On his plate the butter from the hash browns mingled with the egg yolk, encircling the toast. A light sheen of oil on the surface of the coffee reflected a miniature rainbow; it disappeared when he picked up the cup and took a sip, wincing at the sheer heat. Maybe the grease would seal his veins and he could die here, he thought, where it was warm and friendly, in the presence of a goddess. Surely there were worse fates.

The waitress came and cleared away his dishes. As she leaned across him to reach a plate towards the back, his nostrils caught the scent of vanilla on her skin, warmed by the heat of the kitchen and laced with coffee. Beneath that he detected a faint touch of cheap perfume, the kind they sold at the discount department stores in the mall on the hill.

The honest, pure sweetness of the vanilla, the roaring blood of the coffee, the hopes and dreams of the perfume all shot directly into his veins and came rushing into his brain. In that instant, as he inhaled her scent, he knew her as well as if he had married her and slept with her a dozen years. He could smell the alkaline of her tears as she cried in happiness, felt her chest rumble under his arms as she laughed, bled when she was hurt. All at once he loved her and then hated her, desired her and despised her. She was the faceless demon that haunted his dreams, beckoning him on in angelic lust with her siren song. No matter how hotly his own blood screamed, he could not follow; he was bound tightly to the mast and could not free himself.

As she straightened his eye caught hers and he covered by coughing, smoothing his face with his hand. Just as quickly as the moment had come it passed, leaving behind only the truth. He blinked in awe.

"More coffee?" She asked.

"Yeah, that'd be alright."

"K. I'll be right back." She went back to the kitchen with her armload of dirty dishes. He took note of the strand of hair that had come loose from behind her ears and now hung down the side of her face, curving inward ever so slightly to brush the side of her cheek.

He followed her with his eyes all the way back to the kitchen. He knew now how deep her waters ran; he had been wrong on both counts. She was only a pool from whence flowed a brook that ran down the hill to the river. The quiet little pool poured itself out, poured out all of her hopes, fears and dreams down the rocky hillside; her stillness was the stillness of humanity, hip-deep and hidden among the rocks, afraid to be seen. It babbled quietly, almost soundlessly, as if it needed to affirm its own existence but did not want to be heard. She was not one of the few who ran in a mighty river to the eternally deep sea, only one of the little streams that fed the river.

He could not - did not - hold that against her. At best, he knew that he was nothing more than that himself. He had his share of doubts

and fears and had long since discovered the benefits of being still, of not drawing attention to oneself. It was one way of bypassing all the pain and suffering that arose from interacting with the cold and the cruel, the mean and the unjust people in the world, who would exploit each and every weakness as they saw fit. The ensuing wounds were not always quick to heal and only the passage of time could dull the pain. Some mornings he still bled from the last wound, a small trickle of blood running down his side, just enough to sap his strength and leave him exhausted at the end of the day. He was very, very tired of this feeling and he had been thinking more and more lately that he did not want to feel that way any more, and the only way he could guarantee that he would not feel that way was if he kept to himself.

Yet here he was again, watching the waitress, gauging her character and weighing the odds, trying to determine if she was worth gambling on. He didn't have many chips left to play with, and he had to be careful how he used them. Once upon a time, he thought, he had piles of chips and he bet them away like matchsticks. Now they were growing scarce and he didn't want to place a foolish bet.

Really, though, what did he have to lose? His self-respect? No, that had been beaten to death long ago by a line of cold-hearted women and his own foolish mistakes. After pondering the question in silence for a moment, he realized that he was just as afraid of losing access to the peaceful atmosphere of the café as he was of personal embarrassment. If he made a fool of himself and she became disgusted or disliked him for it, he would no longer feel comfortable coming in for breakfast. He would either have to have his lone egg in solitude or else find a new café to eat in. And it would have to be one that didn't employ blonde goddesses as waitresses.

Involuntarily, he reached for his coffee cup and took a sip, half-startled to find it freshly refilled. She had come and topped it off without him knowing it, a ghost slipping in and out of reality while he contemplated her existence in silence. He turned to look in the direction of the counter and saw she was clearing off more dishes. The morning crowd was almost all gone, the men having drifted off to their jobs, leaving only a stack of greasy porcelain and grimy flatware to mark their passing. The strand of hair came loose again while he watched and she reached up to tuck it back in place. The action made him wince. There

was something heartbreakingly beautiful, something achingly vulnerable in the fluidity of the motion. He quickly turned his attention back to the rain-drenched street outside the window.

As with most viciously hard rains, it had slackened considerably after the first few minutes, but the storm still showed no sign of coming to a full stop any time soon. Gusts of wind drove the rain fiercely into the windows in an uneven rhythm. He grimaced as he took another sip of coffee. It looked like the storm was going to drag on too long for him to sit it out in the café; he would have to go back out in it if he intended to get any work done today.

His elbow scraped against a slip of paper and he picked it up, discovering that it was his bill. She must have left it when she topped off his coffee. He gave it only a glance; he always ordered the same thing and the bill was never any different. Absently, he tugged his wallet out and counted out the change, digging a few coins from his pocket.

As he was about to shove the wallet back in his pocket a sudden chill struck him and he stopped. The tip. He had forgotten the tip. He placed the wallet back on the table and let it sit there while he hurriedly swallowed the last of his coffee. At length he opened it and withdrew a five, placing it on the table apart from the money for the bill. A wave of hesitation hit him again and he paused once more; what did he usually leave? Two, maybe three? The meal was only a few dollars, but she did work hard, she had to clear the tables and wipe them down herself. But at the same time, he didn't want to look too suspicious. Maybe five was too much.

"Naw," he muttered under his breath. "She deserves it."

He stood up and, leaving the tip tucked under the edge of his coffee cup, took the bill up to the register. She was waiting there, having spotted his movements out of the corner of her eye and deduced that he was leaving. As always, he laid the bill on the counter and then set the paper money on top, followed by the coins, counting out loud as he did so.

"Let's see...one, two, three...ten and ten and five and one, two, three, four makes three twenty-nine."

"He never changes," she said, almost to herself. "Always has the exact change. Everything all right this morning?"

He pretended to turn and examine the street outside the front window.

"Well...it's looking kind of downcast out there right about now, I'd have to say."

"That's got nothing to do with it. Everything all right?" She repeated the question almost reflexively. Leaving the cash register, she occupied herself with arranging the freshly washed coffee cups on a shelf behind the counter.

"The same as it always is, you know how it goes. Nothing ever changes around here, does it?"

"Mmmh." She snorted derisively as she attempted to fix her hair again once and for all, finally giving up with an exasperated sigh. Looking back up at him, she smiled and looked out at the rain.

He began to smooth an imaginary crease in the brim of his hat.

"Got a busy weekend planned?"

"Naw. Probably sleep in on Saturday, I've got the day off."

"Sounds nice." He knew that he should just shove the hat on his head and step out the door with a wave, but he could not. Somewhere in the back of his mind two ebony-spotted ivory cubes rattled in a cup, and with a once-practiced flick of the wrist, he tossed them out onto the table.

"Say, maybe you'd like to do something this weekend, if you've got nothing else going on? Maybe go out for dinner and a show, some coffee afterwards...whatever." He tried his best to appear casual and unconcerned, realizing that he'd forgotten how ridiculous the whole business was.

The dice clacked together as they rolled out of the cup, landed on the table and began to roll over and over, spotted blurs against a green felt background. He could do nothing but wait. Now he would see her smile and cross her arms over her chest as she told him that she was busy, or that she was seeing someone else, maybe she wouldn't even smile, she might just tell him that she wasn't interested. It would be best for him if he simply put his hat on and left, just walk away from the café and leave it be. It had been a foolish bet to make in the first place. He waited for the dice to turn up snake eyes.

"Sure. Sounds good to me."

He stood still for a moment, somewhat unsure of himself. Sevens. He'd rolled sevens. Well, all right then. "How about Friday? I could pick you up around six or so?"

"Sure." She grabbed a napkin and jotted some numbers down on it. "Here's my phone number. I get home about three, you can call me anytime after that and I'll give you directions to get to my place."

"Sounds good. I'll call you later then."

"K. See you later!"

She turned and picked up the coffee pot to make her rounds again. He gave a nonchalant wave of his hand as he walked out the door, turning his collar up against the cold wind. The rain was still falling hard, but the wind was to his back now. The rain was rolling off the back of his coat and hat, and he could see the side of his house just up the street.

Untitled

by Amelia Redig



Purple Fin

by Jennifer Hoffman

You are like paint
Chipping on my shoulder
And I can't break down
Your ringworm
That's wrapping its tentacles
Around your vocal cords.

3 second memory
like a goldfish sinking
and hanging itself
by a shoelace
in a box,

You were always more beautiful
wet than freeze-dried.
I pulled the tusks
From your apocalypse.

Futile Longing

by Amelia Anderson

Between night and morning,
Surrounded by sleeping silence
And bathed in your electronic glow,
I seek security and comfort.
I run to you in the night,
Desperate for your warm arms,
But as you appear under a yellowed glow,
I am afraid to ask for what I seek.
I sit on your couch
As you absently surf through late-night TV—
Both denying why I'm here,
Both unsure of where to start.
As we lock eyes in agreement,
Mouths and hands are set free,
Touching, tasting, taking
Before you send me away.
Bare feet slap the silent pavement
As I retreat to my lonely room,
Slowly realizing that I'm tired
And that you have nothing that I seek.

"Charlotte"

by Ann Wilcox



Mr. Crabtree

by Casey Beaumont

Some people love their sweethearts a lot,
 Some people's lovers are all that they've got.
 Mister Crabtree loved his too much,
 A love like his could be deadly as such.

When out of his sight he thought she'd be gone,
 Jealous of eyes that her beauty shined on.
 He wanted only for her to be his,
 No one should have her, he knew only this.

Each minute to himself he lied,
 Thought she'd be sweeter on his in-side.
 He hoped the same is how she thought,
 (Her answer he knew, "I am afraid not.")

Mister Crabtree thought "Well what should she fear?"
 Rubbing his belly, "She'd be fine inside here."
 "Come here my dear, let me touch your soft skin."
 He loved her so much it would not be a sin,
 To put her a little nearer his heart,
 The question was now; how should he start?

"No sir I will not come closer to you,"
 "I'm in no mood for what you want to do."
 Crabtree replied, "It's not **that** I desire,"
 "Just step to my side and sit by the fire."
 "Come on over I just want to listen,"
 "I'll feast on your words until the sun's risen."

She really just wanted to have a nice chat,
 Cuddling and talking, how she loved that!
 She knew that he cared quite a great deal,
 His focus was focused on how she did feel.

Her heart always said to trust his sweet soul.
If good portent be white then this black as coal.

Close to the fire she moved and they sat,
He taut like a wolf, she curled like a cat.
In such bliss was she, he thought that she purred.
Saliva, he hoped would not make speech slurred.
"Honey," He said and licked his wet lips,
"Come closer yet still." And stroked her round hips.

"Yes." Said her whisper and closer she moved.
A growl from his belly, soon to be soothed.
"What would you tell me?" he asked with a smile.
"Relating your thoughts could sure pass a while."
She told him her daydreams and other such things,
He nodded not list'ning and spied on her rings.

Grown fat were her fingers, they would not come off.
Could metal be swallowed without choking cough?
He hungered so much no wait could he last.
Nothing would stop him, not even die-cast.

"Tell me your day and don't leave out a speck."
He said as he slowly kneaded her neck.
She told him of shopping, driving and tea.
He thought of her rump, delicious with Brie.
Not one more second could Crabtree hold on.
The time had now come to eat his sweet swan.

He excused himself. (To go find a spit.)
He told her to wait he'd be back in a bit.

She thought he got up to fetch a surprise.
"Does he still adore the size of my thighs?"
"Like a suckling pig I've grown rather fat,"
"What does my husband think about that?"

"He still will touch me, get lost in my eyes."
 "But recall he married a much smaller size."
 "When he returns I'll ask what he thinks."
 "I hope he says "slim" 'cause dieting stinks."

At that very moment Crabtree returned.
 The roasting idea now had he spurned.
 All tools he would need were plate, knife, fork, saw.
 These would suffice to help fill his great maw.
 "Look now honey I've come back like I said."
 "Now lets sit close, maybe drink something red."

"That sounds great dear some wine would be nice."
 "I'll crack then the flask we have of best price."
 "Hope I can pour it without a big mess."
 "A stain on this floor, you'd kill me I guess."
 He smiled as he said this, knowing her fate.
 She cooed thinking that this night could be late.

"Sweetest hubby do you think I look fat?"
 "Remember I love you, just think on that."
 "Yes but thin me would you love even more?"
 "Your size is delicious, of that be sure."
 "I look upon you and see my gold hen."
 "No foxes I'll let steal you from my den."

"Dear you make me feel like I were a prize!"
 "You are my sweet, a king's feast in my eyes."
 "I love you so hun, you say such kind things."
 "A hen may be right my heart has grown wings!"
 "Lean in here kind sir and taste of these lips,"
 "Which you still love despite my large hips."

"A kiss a taste too small for my wishes."
 He thought as he reached back for his dishes.
 "First let us imbibe a cup of God's gift,"

"Surely that will give our kisses a lift."
"As you wish dear please pour quickly the cup,"
"To our grand love let us lift glasses up."
He gave her a glass, she sipped just a bit.
"Dearest where's yours? One glass can't be split."

Crabtree turned round and came back with the knife,
A cup, and intent to drink up her life.

A slice to the neck and he'd drink his fill,
After his drink there'd be more to eat still.
It could take two months to eat his sweet bird,
She could be rancid almost by day third.
He needed a way to eat her more quick,
Inviting some friends seemed awfully slick.
"But I won't share her, and no one I'll tell,"
"Then maybe I shouldn't, oh what the hell."
He killed her then as she lounged in his grasp.
Her breath asked "Why?" It came out with a rasp.

Mister Crabtree he ate his wife.
Cut her up and chewed her life.
Sprinkled flesh with grains of salt,
Sucked her bones sweet marrow malt.

The lesson dear Reader is only this:
Take it to heart it may bring your life bliss.
If alcohol you drink just for a thrill,
Heed then this story 'cause one drink can kill.

Untitled

by Shelley Wilcox



In My Bed

by Alexa N. Hester

There's a little bit of everything in my bed
Ink marks cause I fell asleep writing you songs
Sometimes I pass out in my cotton sanctuary
Cause my night lasted too damn long
There's blood resting below the surface
Where I've hidden the depression and pain
And there's a creak in my headboard
But I notices that the night you fucked me in vain

I don't ever want to wake up again
In this bed
There's an empty space next to me
Where you're supposed to be
In my bed
A void I reach into the next morning
And find that you've left me
In my bed
Or maybe a "Nothing" I feel asleep with too
And I wonder if you're having an affair with
"Nothing" too
In your bed

There are tearstains on my pillow
Mascara smudged across my sheets
And I remember the time you held me
Just so you could watch me sleep
There's sunshine fighting to wake me up
But I came home at 4am
Smelling like alcohol and cigarettes (feeling like shit)
Oh god don't make we wake up again

There's more than you'd think in my bed
There's pain that can never be washed out

I don't ever want to wake up again
In this bed
There's an empty space next to me
Where you're supposed to be
In my bed

A void I reach into the next morning
 And find that you've left me
 In my bed
 Or maybe a "Nothing" I feel asleep with too
 And I wonder if you're having an affair with
 "Nothing" too
 In your bed

The socks I can never find
 Are balled up at the foot of my bed a lot
 When I toss and turn
 And somehow everything comes off
 There are wisps of your cologne here and there
 Your apologies and my protests never stop
 In my ears you keep blanketing me with your lies
 So I'll take my clothes off

There's more than you'd think in my bed
 There's pain that can never be washed out

I don't ever want to wake up again
 In this bed
 There's an empty space next to me
 Where you're supposed to be
 In my bed
 A void I reach into the next morning
 And find that you've left me
 In my bed
 Or maybe a "Nothing" I feel asleep with too
 And I wonder if you're having an affair with
 "Nothing" too
 In your bed

There's this awkward girl
 Full of confusion and fear
 Reflective of the way you screwed her over
 She can't ever be a woman in here
 Oh, why the hell did I ever let you in...
 In my bed
 Oh, don't you think it was so fuckin' fun that day
 When you used me, said I was only another lay

Turtle Clan

Mikinok Dodaim

by Kathleen Westcott

My grandfather dropped his body seven months before this spring season of my thirteenth year. When he left I lived on day by day, a plant drifting alone above the earth's surface, having floated up out of the soil during a heavy rain, anxious to re-root. Missing him, I lived with a feeling of uncertainty.

Who will show me now?

Who will know me?

I continued to walk the familiar trails, to swim in the deep cold lake. Rowing the flat bottomed wooden boat over the water I would meet the dawn and the cloud fingers of evening, searching for him.

He told me he would never leave me.

He had shown me rock cliffs with caves carved into them by rushing water or steady winds; places for the breathing earth to howl and sing.

I climb into them now to bawl.

It is spring, the turtles are crossing the roads. Laying their eggs. Crossing back again. They are my Dodaim, my Clan. I pick them up to move them off the road. They pee on me. Several die here, smashed by cars that do not swerve. Shells cracked, entrails leaking out, eggs wasted.

This June morning the trail is sticky with spider webs and dew. Slippery, especially where the roots of trees surface. She is in the middle of her trail. Has she paused to rest? Is she laying eggs here, for from the water? Her stillness moves me to give her a nudge with my finger. No hiss, no flurry of four clawed feet. I pick her up, she does not pee, no breath flares from her nostrils, her paws do not swim in the air.

Wrapping her freshly limp body in my jacket I carry her home, elated. My Dad says "Well would you look at that!" He picks up a wire box from the porch and waves for me to follow him. We walk into the woods behind the cabin past the tool shed, stopping at a high bustling ant hill built on a slope that faces the morning sun. Unwrapping her and placing her gently on top, he sets the wire box over her dead body and over the top of the ant's hill, then he places a heavy stone on the box. "It will take about two weeks", he says, as we walk back to the cabin. "We will come back and check in a few days."

That evening, sitting in the boat, rocking gently with the wind. Cloud fingers touch down to the water before a brief rain.

Seventeen days passed before the ants carried off the very last trace of her body from her shell. Her shell sits gleaming in the morning light. I carry her shell under my shirt, next to my belly. My dad carries the wire box.

"I will varnish your shell when we get back home", he says, "that way the softer under belly part won't fall away from the hard top shell." We walk along quiet for a few moments, then my Dad asks "How in the world did you find a dead turtle with her shell not cracked?"

I nearly shout at my Dad, "Grandpa sent her to me!"

Untitled

by Ann Wilcox



Sun Setting on Nuclear Power Station

by Brian Blitz

My mother was absolutely beautiful before she had me. In pictures she was electric, her body and eyes seething with virgin honesty. Every part of her pulsing, throbbing and stirring for only one reason. To be true to everything she was at that exact instant of her life. When I was born that part of her died. I would like to say that I captured a bit of that essence and made it my own... But the truth is another matter. The truth is that it simply washed away like too much blood or sunlight.

I'm asleep. I'm running across a female body again. Legs and torso stretched out for miles, not a single fast food restaurant in sight. The sky rolls above and below us like silken hair in gentle water's current. Her skin gives under my feet so gently yet I sense tremendous power lying dormant, like a dream that shifts so subtly yet so cold and brutal to a nightmare. I'm lost in a world I know nothing about. Every breath I emit cries out with insolence and terror. Every breath I take cries with awe and reverence.

Eventually I climb my way to the top of her left breast. I sit with my back against an erect nipple, staring at her mouth as it struggles with the unborn thought of dreams. I can't quite make out what she's trying to say, but it's the same few words repeated over and over again, her mouth stretches open like an invitation then pushes out like rejection. I wager a guess and what she's thinking, stand up and yell: "I love you!" The words multiply and ripple across her body, echoing profoundly over every pore. They dance and smash into one another making a terrible, deafening hiss.

The static of a neglected television.

I slam my fist on top of the alarm clock and grab my penis. Apparently I had been trying to penetrate my wife's left butt cheek for the past few minutes or so. She was rolled over on her side, muttering excuses into her pillow, half/awake half/asleep. I chime a quick apology and lean up on my elbow, staring blissfully content into the ear of the one I love. She is beautiful. Why she is with me of all people I will never know. I've learned to not let things like that concern me.

My dog Vinya used to chase her tail until she vomited and passed out from exhaustion.

We'd just come through some hard times. Betty lost about half our retirement egg in Reno and I wasn't a lot of help either, being under the bottle at the time. But we're working it out. About all we can do I guess. It's no use fighting against things that are meant to happen. It's best to just lie back and let them take you wherever they want to. I stumble into work 25 minutes late, a virtual sin in the eyes of my boss, Mr. Bukowski. I didn't try to come in late. I never do that, unlike some people here. But after a while the job just gets to you. You find yourself taking extra time getting in. It's not your fault; it's just a reflex, like storing fat for a long, grueling winter. Sneaking a few quiet moments alone before the long haul. Staring dreamily into your cereal bowl. Driving slowly past the high school to watch all the kids pour off busses, screaming and laughing. Watching them always brings me back to my own childhood. Really not a whole lot has changed.

I try to brush past him as fast as I can, hopefully avoiding one of his little speeches, but it was no use. Bukowski's a small guy but he's an absolute master of taking up space. He plays the office corridors like a general, setting up defendable positions, ambushes and counter-strikes. I'd stupidly fallen into one of his usual traps, a calm little corner right behind the water cooler. I didn't even have time to mutter an "Oh Christ" to myself before I was shuffled away to the dark recesses of Bukowski's office for a "talk".

"Now you understand Mr. Schmidt, that our customers have placed a very sacred trust in us. It is our duty therefore, to respect and obey that trust. They place their very livelihood in our hands. It is your job, Mr. Schmidt, to exemplify the spirit of that trust not only at work, but in your private life as well. How would you like to be responsible for telling our clients that they have to miss a meeting... That they won't be able to pick up dry cleaning... That they may miss lunch with an important client... Because you couldn't be inconvenienced as much as to be on time!?"

"Well, I suppose I wouldn't sir." I mumbled as I made my way through his door to the time cards. I could barely hear him through the noise as I pressed onward. "Think next time Mr. Schmidt! THINK!"

I slip my timecard into the reader and sure enough the little red light blinks on. A thin sheet of paper spits out the side. Another “will-full obstruction of efficiency” and another mandatory consultation with Greg, our productivity engineer. Bastards really have you wound up tight here! I’d have to steal another air freshener from the employee bathroom before I left work. I grab my scrubs, cap and surgical mask from the dispenser up front and plod all the way back to station 19. Station 19 was usually left open for the person who’s foolish enough to come in late.

The stool was missing a nub on the lower right so it was always wobbly, the paint was peeling, and you had to use the tube just right, or you’d have a customer service dilemma on your hands.

Somewhere along the line they realize that seeing that much blood is a very, very bad sign.

I grab a stack of flyers advertising our “Mother-Daughter 2 for 1” and wedge them under the gimpy leg of my stool. I wash and dry my hands then throw on rubber gloves. With the push of a button a little silver tray whooshes out in front of me. Water, antiseptic pads, water-based lubricant, speculum, pain shot, tension shot, Valium and towels. All arranged and looking blissfully in place. Our Mother Company makes sure everything is fast and simple, instruments sanitized and packaged only four miles away. All disposable equipment individually sealed with bold instructions in Spanish, English and Chinese.

Under the window there’s a little platform housing the sink, garbage bags, twistee ties and a notorious 22 inches of synthetic tubing. We’re not really supposed to talk about the tube, so I won’t now. Except to say that the tube, like anything else, is harmless in itself. There needs to be a hand to grip a gun and a thought to grip a hand and a collective unconscious to grip a thought and so on ad nauseam...

Very early on we had made a bunch of press releases with the tube ostensibly inconspicuous in the bottom left hand corner. It was a picture of a pleasant looking attendant in her earlier thirties, smiling sweetly from her station in cap and scrubs. She was plainly pregnant. That was intended to be the focal point. Assuring in the minds of thoughtful consumers a certain trust and kinship with the woman. A big smiling face that seems to caress your troubled soul and tell you:

"It's ok. I understand."

But the series was quickly scrapped. It seemed that people just couldn't take their minds off that rather sinister looking tube in the bottom left hand corner. No one wanted to be touched by something so cold, thoughtless and unfeeling. In the future the tube was never shown in public. And, just in case some curious woman would try to peep her head downstairs to see what was going on, the tube was from then on covered in a pleasant green plastic.

Otherwise our clients were kindly reminded of the beautiful array of paintings on the New Life Room's ceiling. Each station had its own of course, Monet's "Water lilies" is a popular classic, appearing in station seven. Station eleven features the delicately pleasing "Dance on the Banks of the Manzanares" by Francisco de Goya. Station nineteen, being the least favorite, has a series by the rather short lived, but prolific turn of the century artist Festus Fallum. The series "Sun Setting on Nuclear Power Station" was critically acclaimed, but unfortunately shunned by the modern thinking public.

As I begin to sit down a little console above my head blinks to life. Number four, "The Executive". No added charge for express service, just the standard treatment plus an extra pain shot and a full dose of Valium at the end.

The car pulls forward. A dull looking woman in a black cap waits for the light before her to beam red. She stops her car, puts it in park and gets out as I instruct. I direct her to a small door outside which leads into the adjacent room. The New Life Room serves functions beyond simple practicality. First, the painting on the ceiling along with soft music and air conditioning keeps them docile, calm, and hopefully out of risk. Secondly, it allows us the time and resources to photograph, voice monitor, and finger print each patient as required by law.

She sits down, her legs trembling slightly between steel braces. She looks at me expectedly for a moment before my monitor lights up. I shoot her a dry smile and ask her for the sheet with terms and conditions that she received after she paid at the terminal outside.

"Have you read and do you understand the terms and conditions presented?"

"Yes"

"Are you now, or have you been, under any of the increased risk groups as outlined here?"

"No."

"Are you currently suffering from HIV/AIDS, or had sex with anyone in an increased risk group in the past 18 months?"

"No."

"Addiction to drugs and/or alcohol?"

"No."

"Shots, treatment by physician, recent tooth extraction?"

"No."

"Heart condition, epilepsy, shortness of breath, diarrhea, fainting?"

"No."

"Currently under treatment for syphilis or gonorrhea?"

"No."

"In overall good health?"

"Yes."

"At this time then 'Mam could you please provide proof of your status as an unrestricted recipient of health coverage by a major health insurance provider?"

She places her small plastic health insurance card on the extending metal tray. I pull it back in and run it through the machine. A green light flashes. I give back her card and instruct her to stand up as the chair unfolds, flattening it-self. "Now please remove your pants and underwear 'Mam. You'll find a small table behind you." She quickly pulls off her black slacks and removes her underwear. She folds them into a neat pile and places them on the table. "Now please be so kind as to put this on." I say as I hand her the ocean blue apron. "Please lay down on your back, place your feet in the opposing braces and try to make yourself comfortable." She lies down.

I push my stool closer to the window, pull a lever overhead, and the tube begins to warm up. As she struggles with the apron ties I prep, wiping her thighs and vagina with antiseptic, toweling dry, wiping again.

I dab two fingers of lubricant onto customer and speculum. "Are you ready 'Mam? Calm and comfortable?" I ask, in my most reassuring two-hour workshop voice. She nods.

The tube readies itself as it jitters and vibrates in place. I pull back the plunger on the first pain shot, flick the needle several times to release air bubbles, and inject into a meaty thigh vein. "You may feel a small sting." I throw the spent needle into a basket beside me marked "Bio-hazard" and proceed, picking the tube delicately from its position. After all the fuss and preparation it's really a simple job. The tube slides rather easily into the customer with the help of the speculum and lubricant. The tiniest of holes opens at the end of the tube, releasing a tiny needle and a tiny vacuum. The soft skull of the pre-born is entered, and the brain matter is withdrawn. The tube is taken out of its socket and placed aside for sterilization. A mildly uncomfortable electrical pulse is then emitted from receptors underneath the chair. The uterus contracts, expelling the pre-born into an opening steel receptacle inside the chair. More towels, more antiseptic and water, more towels. Easy as pie.

She's watching me the whole time. It always makes me uncomfortable when they do that. It's a lot of blood to be responsible for when you think about it. I quickly wipe away the bulk of it and insert a synthetic New Life Tampon. She gets another pain shot for the ride back to work, and some more Valium. Then it's just a quick signature and she's off.

She leaves nothing but a trail of thin yellow smoke as she steams away, leaving me about 17 minutes to clean and sterilize before the next one arrives. I watch her take a quick left turn from my window as she glances at her watch. You know, it may seem horrible to think, but isn't it common courtesy to at least utter a quick "thank you" after receiving a service?

The day plods on with regularity. Around my lunch hour my thoughts begin to drift back to Betty. Betty's warm body lying in bed. Betty's tenderly sleeping smile and raven hair. Betty's eyelids twitching ever so slightly with dream. Betty's mouth pursed open, crusted saliva forming in its corners.

I get home right before dinner. Betty's probably awake and reading in bed. I gently push open the screen door and yell "Honey?" over the chug of the automatic dishwasher. She answers with a silky "I'm in bed!" as I kick my shoes into the corner. "How was work today baby?"

"Just fine." I say as I cross the kitchen into the bedroom. I slide next to her under the covers and nuzzle my head against her warm back. Pulling closer I kiss her softly behind the ear and let my mouth whisper the unborn thought of dreams... .."I love you..."
...My fingers trace delicate lines through her taut belly as I lie back, thinking only of sleep.

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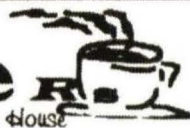
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