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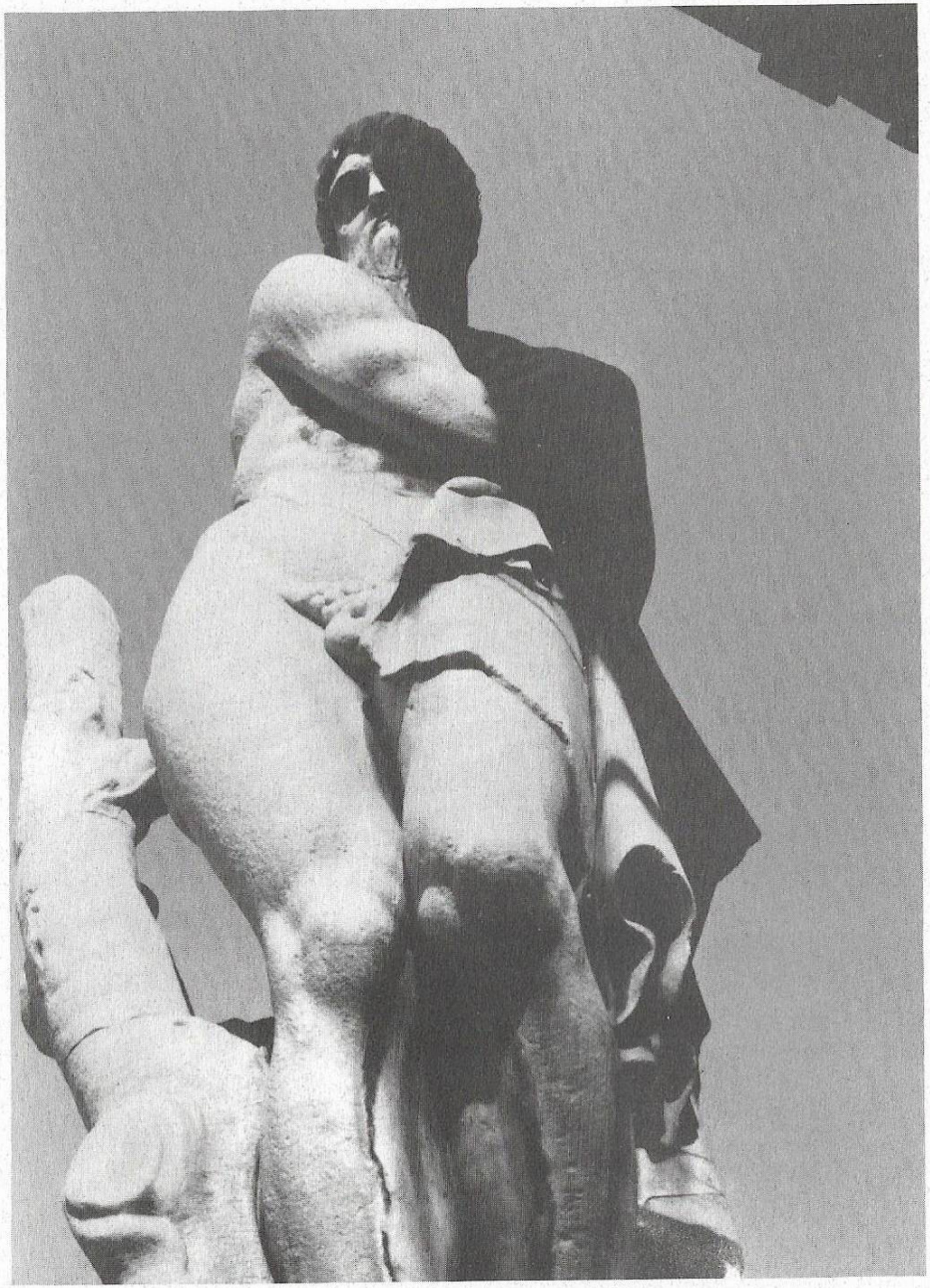


We've Sent Too Many Young Men to Die

By Lisa Wyckoff

I don't remember very much, only rain, mud, and drilling. We drilled all the time, but after several months we still hadn't seen any fighting. I don't remember the men, either. I vaguely remember that they did not like me. They were always calling me boy, with a sneer on their faces.

"You gonna run, boy? Sollars, you gonna run?" I couldn't blame them. After all, I was young and small, and very quiet. However, I knew I wouldn't run. I had seen more of this war then any of them had dreamed of. They came from northern cities, towns and farms. I came from the war zone of Missouri.

As we marched out to meet our first battle, the men were all chatting about what strength, skill and valor they would exhibit. I didn't say anything, but then, I never said anything. Instead I brooded over the past. Memories kept coming back to me, more alive than the rain and the mud and the men. I wanted to escape the past, but the past can never really be forgotten.

I remember a little farm in Missouri and a little boy running from the barn.

"Rose!" he had cried with excitement. "Rose, Rose, Rose!"

"What are you so excited about, Nicholas James Sollars? You don't have to scream, you know."

"But they're here, Rose! I saw them! They're here!"

Rose ran from the house, her calico skirts flapping about her legs.

"Rose, come back here and finish your chores."

"Mama, the kittens!"

The two children ran into the old barn, that smelled of hay and warm animals. In a back corner there lay a beautiful orange cat, surrounded by her new babies.

"Aren't they ugly?"

"No, Nicky, they are the most beautiful things I have ever seen."

Nicky looked carefully at his sister, then reached up and felt her forehead. "Stop it," she said as she pushed his hand away. He laughed.

"They are uuuuuuuglyyyyyyyy."

Rose bent down and touched one of the kitten. Chrysanthemum didn't mind. She knew the children wouldn't hurt her babies. Nicky pushed her sister's long braid out of the way and picked up a kitten.

"Careful, Nicky," their mother whispered as she walked up behind them. "they are very young."

"Was I this ugly when I was born, Mama?"

Rose smiled. "You were the ugliest baby ever. Never was such an uuuuuuuglyyyyyyyy baby."

"Oh, you was only two. You don't know anything."

"Were. You were only two."

"I wasn't two when I was born."

"Never mind."

Nicky gave his sister one of his "that was stupid" looks. She scowled at him angrily. Nicky had put the kitten back in the straw, so Rose felt safe in pushing his head down into the hay. He jumped up and pushed back. She grabbed him and knocked him against the wall. With her hand on one side of his head, she pressed it against the boards.

I was glad for the rain as a warm tear of pain and regret slipped down my cheek. I knew I should have been kinder. I didn't know how lucky I was then.

The War Between the States was the birth of a new kind of battle. Such death and destruction had never been imagined before. My regiment did not know what it was getting into. Most of the men had seen acquaintances leave for war, only to end up on one of the casualty lists, but that was the closest they had come to war before now. I was different. I had seen war, but a different kind of war, one that took a much greater toll on the innocent.

There were very few regular troops and regular battles in Missouri. Unlike in the east, it was not about noble causes like freedom or unity. It was about greed, hate and revenge.

Guerrilla troops, loosely associated with the Confederate army, would sweep through an area, robbing, burning, looting and killing. They would be followed by anti-guerrillas, loosely associated with the union army, who would use basically the same tactics. Together they created a very real hell.

"Get down there, Nicky, fast! They kill boys!"

"He's only a child, Mama."

"He's fourteen. That's old enough. You don't know what they might do. Thank heaven your father has left to join the army already. He wouldn't be able to handle the hiding."

Nicky climbed down into the cellar while his mother and sister slid the rag rug over the door in the floor. Men rode up to the house, their horses making noise like thunder. The door slammed against the wall as the guerrillas came inside. They were wearing ordinary clothing, but that meant very little. They could be Confederate guerrillas or Union anti-guerrillas pretending to be guerrillas. You could never be sure what side anyone was really on. Rose stood firmly on the rug as she stared at them, wondering what side they were on.

"Got any food, ma'am?" one of them asked. He was a young man, no more than twenty years old, probably younger. However, there was an anger and hatred in his face that made his look quite frightening. He sat down at the table. Rose looked over at her mother.

"Not much," Mrs. Sollars replied. "The war's been hard on us."

"On us all, ma'am. My mama and sister were arrested for a time and my baby brother was killed."

Mrs. Sollars stared at him for a few seconds, unsure of what to say. Then she decided to go on with the conversation. "we've got a little bread that you men are welcomed to, and some potatoes, just what you see here."

"You ain't got no cellar?"

"No. Never had much need, and with no men around it's awful hard to dig one. We don't have anything hidden upstairs or in the barn, either, if you want to check."

"Already got someone on that, but thank you for not minding at all."

"I do mind, but there's little I can do about it, is there?"

The young man laughed. It was a very hard laugh, with no joy in it. "I guess you're right. Little miss. You. Bring me some water, if you will."

Rose glanced at her mother, then left the house without a sound, coming back after a couple of minutes with the bucket of water. She was so nervous that her stomach hurt.

After the men had eaten their fill, the leader turned back to Rose. "You're a pretty girl. Bet you like to sing. Do ya? Ha, not gonna answer, hey?" He got his young face close to hers. "What do you prefer? 'Battle Hymn' or 'Dixie?'"

"Rose's chin went up a notch. "'The Battle Hymn of the Republic,' sir. It's to the tune of 'John Brown's Body,' you know."

The young man leaned over and whispered in her ear, "Wrong answer." They stared at each other for a minute before the leader stepped back and smiled at her. He glanced at Mrs. Sollars, then looked at Rose again. "We'll be seeing you all very soon." The with a tip of his hat and a hard laugh, he left the house with the rest of his men.

A bullet buzzed past my ear. I barely noticed while I reloaded and shot into the grey haze of smoke and the grey enemy I knew was on he other side. I hardly flinched at the prospect of being bitten by one of those bullets. I wanted a pain that was real, that was tangible, something I could grasp and hold onto, instead of deep, soul-deafening pain that was eating away at my heart. Perhaps the bullets would bring that darkness that wipes away all pain, even the very deepest. And maybe I would kill some of my enemies in the process. You see, I was fighting

a war of revenge, just like the guerrillas, but I would not fight it how they did. I would not prey on the innocent. I would fight an army that could fight back.

When the day was over, I sat near the fire with what remained of my regiment.

"Didn't run, did you, boy? You fought real hard and real brave. I thought you'd run for sure, but I must admit, I felt a little safer after awhile, knowing you were fighting there beside me."

I looked up from the fire at the soldier sitting next to me. "Thanks," I said. "You fought hard, too. We can all be proud, I guess."

The other soldier smiled. "you know, Sollars, I think that's the most I've heard you say."

"Well, it's hard sometimes, hard to deal with what you've seen."

"Yep, that sure is true. You're a little different, boy, but you're all right."

A certain bond develops when men fight together. You need to trust the soldier next to you, or the army won't hold. I had learned to trust the men around me, and they had learned to trust me as well.

The still, dark night had suddenly been ripped apart by winter thunder. Rose and Nicky ran to their mother's bedroom in the pitch black of the moonless January night. They could hear the breaking of glass down in the kitchen as the guerrillas broke into the house. Then came the sound of heavy boots on the stairs. Rose pushed Nicky down under the bed, then she and her mother pulled their robes on over their nightgowns to make it seem like they were not surprised.

"Men, get ready to charge! Get ready to charge!"

I crouched behind the embankment, ready to strike at my enemy. I was so nervous my stomach hurt. I held my rifle tightly. Every muscle was strained. This was the moment of judgement for all of us. Kill the hated enemy or die on the bloody field, or maybe both.

"Steady men, steady. Charge! Charge!"

"Hello, ma'am, miss. Good to see you both again. Your husband and son still not here? That's too bad. Would have liked to meet them."

"Would have liked to kill them, you mean," Rose said bitterly.

The young man walked over to her in two strides. "Now, that just isn't a nice thing to say. Watch out or I may like to kill you."

Rose looked him straight in the eye, then spit in his face. He pushed her against the wall.

My thin legs pushed my body across the field as I yelled out in anger. Bullets screamed past me as men died all around. I felt a sting as a bullet grazed my leg, but I couldn't stop to attend to it. That would mean failure and suicide.

"Stop it! Stop hurting my sister!" Nicky had climbed out from under the bed to stand between Rose and the young man.

"Nicky, no!" she cried out.

"So here is our little boy, coming to help his sister. Ain't that nice. How stupid," the young man said with a smile. "I wouldn't hurt her, if she'd just behave herself. You, on the other hand, are a different matter. We can't have no more dirty Yanks going off to fight, now can we? We can't have no more killers."

The smoke burned my eyes till I could barely see, but there was little to see anyway. My heart was beating so hard it seemed about to burst out of my chest to fly into the air.

"What you got to say, boy?" The young man's face was close to Nicky's as he pushed the boy against the wall while holding a gun to Nicky's head. Rose's heart was beating incredibly fast. "Want to beg, or bargain, or pray?" Rose could see her brother shaking. "Our Father, which art in Heaven...That's where you're going, Yank, or are

you going to hell?" Rose tried to pull the man away. He pushed her back and turned the gun on her. "I don't want to kill you, sweetie. Ain't no reason to 'less you make me. Arnie! Hold her!"

Rose watched helplessly as the man pressed the gun against Nicky's head and pulled the trigger.

I screamed as I watched my brother's body slide to the cold floor.

Suddenly I found myself right in front of the grey line. I let out a scream as I raced forward with renewed energy. I came face to face with a boy of about fourteen years of age. As I plunged my bayonet into the boy, I watched the boy fall to the ground, just like Nicky. I continued fighting, but no longer for revenge. I was merely fighting to survive, and to end the war as soon as possible, so no more boys had to die, and so I could see the beautiful green hills of Missouri again, no longer dripping with blood.

Untitled

By Tonya Maddox

She was lying in bed and it was way past noon. She wasn't asleep--she hadn't been for the last hour and a half--she just couldn't make herself get up. Okay, she didn't want to get herself up. She liked the weight of the comforter on her body and the way she could hit a cold spot in the sheets but quickly warm them up from the heat from her body.

She'd lain in bed that afternoon and was just daydreaming when she caught sight of the underwear falling halfway out of her dresser drawer. The blue ones. Well, they used to be blue. God, how long had she had those things? she wondered. The elastic showed through, its whiteness even brighter against the faded blue of the cotton. None of her other underwear had done that, she thought, no matter how long she'd had them. It was as if some of the material around the waist just disappeared. Why did it do that? What made these underwear different? Then she caught herself. "Whoa," she said out loud, "it's just a pair of underwear, don't get philosophical about it." She knew as well as anyone it wasn't really healthy to talk to yourself, but as long as no one else was around to hear her, what did it hurt? Sometimes you have to hear a voice, even if it is only your own.

She let her mind and her eyes wander around the room. She didn't let herself think too hard, after all, it was still sort of the morning--she was in bed, so it counted as morning. As soon as her feet hit the floor it would become afternoon. Those were the rules.

She caught sight of the picture she had stuck in her mirror so long ago. She had not thrown it away yet and knew it in the back of her mind. It was one of those photo booth pictures, in black and white, the two of them making funny faces all the way down to the bottom of the photo strip. She told herself it was okay to leave it in the mirror because she didn't notice it very often. She didn't notice it very often because it had been there so long. But now they were not together and

had to ask herself if it was acceptable that she had not gotten rid of the picture. She could have at least plucked it out of the mirror's edge and stuck it far back into her cluttered desk drawer. That way, she would not run into the picture, the memory, of him until she could handle it.

There, in the bottom picture, on her face, was a smudge. An ink smudge. They had taken two strips so they could each have one and when she had written the date on the back of one, it had rubbed off on her face. On the picture, she meant. Not on her face, really, but the picture. But that was sort of true. The smudge had come off on her, too. In real life. They were over and she could never really get rid of him. There was a mark on her that would not go away no matter how many weekends she got drunk and flirted with other guys. Most other people would have allowed the spot to stay, they would not have fought it. But she did fight it. Okay, she admitted to herself, she tried to deny it.

The neighbor's dog was barking its head off. At what? It couldn't attack anything, it was chained to the ground. And nothing ever hurt it. Didn't that damn dog ever get the picture? It was barking in vain. "You're barking in vain," she said out loud.

She closed her eyes, rolled over onto her back, and laid her arm across her face. She fought the exasperation and slowly turned it into anger. She opened her eyes, rolled on her side, and there were those damned underwear again. Boy, were they damned. Why was she keeping them? Why hadn't she ever noticed how ragged they were before? But then, what did it matter if she wore good underwear anymore? No one was even going to see them. It wasn't like it used to be, when she wore her best underwear when she went out on a date. If she wore these would they make her feel as ragged as they were? Couldn't she be as sexy with old underwear?

"Oh, who cares?" she asked herself angrily out loud. But she knew that it did matter. Those underwear were a statement. She made a little "Pros and Cons" list in her head. If she kept the old underwear she could wear them any day. She could save her expensive pairs for other

days, when she had other dates. But a certain amount of self confidence came from the knowledge that if you were actually in the car wreck your mother always warned you about, that the good-looking doctor would not find you in your religious underwear. Holy. Holey? They've got holes in them. Where did that material go? She wondered to herself.

She got out of bed in a huge single motion, practically jumping out from underneath her comforter. She grabbed the underwear from her dresser--God, they look tired, she thought--and as she pulled them out they ripped, caught on a splinter in her pine dresser. She laughed at the irony and checked out the damage. She had no choice now. She flung them in the direction of her trash can, not even making sure they made it in, and headed for the shower.

Curlew's Call

By Cynthia Ottens

--the inborn restlessness of a human heart beating,
burning, fierce and free
sucked through the gaping holes of incivility
Peace and rage joined together in a symbiotic fusion
suffocating under the plastic bag of personal delusion
Living like a Gael, living on high
An annoyance, a provoker, a hideous gadfly.
Yet indolence is real, as water is wet
there is a part of me as sweet as the lips of Juliet
    I am the storm trooper trapped in the stagleg
    The luxurious sturgeon egg
    A wise woman conquering fantasies and dreams
        even evil schemes
    An angel in bright raiment rolling the stone away
    I the lodestone of a seemingly forgotten day
All bondage cease, all fetters from me fall
The rocky shore splendor of the haunting curlew's call.

Honor Gone
By Cynthia Ottens

Oh! the bellowing of that savage sea
Its safe harbors greeted me
Washed up upon a wretched shore
at odds with the eternal war
All because I covet His truth!
Recalling the turmoil of man's youth
The bubbling sand quietly murmured
While within me vastness stirred
Foresaking like a flood's thick foam
A sea-born treasure far from home
I journeyed there for riches untold
Danced around mirages of gold
Then the sweet sun had undone
What my gluttony had begun
From the mouth of Death I stole
My God blessed mortal soul.

The Scare
By Brian Caldwell

He is laid against the cross, Not by nails of ignorance but by ropes of spite. Hung there like a forgotten marinet, or was it a martyr? Sole secret purpose was to protect the lost, and give the joy to the hopeless. Stuffed with hatred with a cause, it radiates form them like the weeds that sprout from their clothes and bones. Their job was thought to protect from the winged black beasts, but they perched right along side the vultures in the dark sky. These birds sit on the shoulders of this creature, born in human clothes and a frame of dead trees. They stand watch over the grain and fields. At night they look so alive hovering just above the horizon, can you feel the twisted perverted energy? On a dark and stormy night, when the birds are flying in waves over the sky, despite the thunderous danger. For the danger is no longer being held in the air by a cross shaped bed. They are awake once again like times of old...I found an empty cross and followed those footsteps. In the distance I saw those abominations dancing through the maze-like brush. Only a feign real glances as lightning struck, but that was enough. Coming closer I could feel the rush of the of wind combined with adrenaline surge across my body. I then lived my fears all at once as I stared into those eyes possessed by another. I wasn't the fallen angel, there was no sign of his work, but something other that of God. We stared at each other wondering what to do next. For that eternity something inside me showed through in my eyes. I wanted to dance too, with them I could be free, even if for only a moment my life would have a meaning,. It held out its hand seeing my desire in my soul, I took it and as the dance began the storm seems to grow...I awoke late that afternoon to find myself dried by the summer sun, under the feet that were never meant to touch the ground. Yet they danced more elegantly than any other among the living. When your spirit is true, and desires are clear, walls crumble. It took the simple dance of the scarecrow to teach me the wisest thing. I'll never forget that, dream?

Mr. You
By Jodi Fowler

Shine through me, Mr. Flower
Lead me through my darkest hour
And if the seasons pass me by
Do not forsake me when I cry

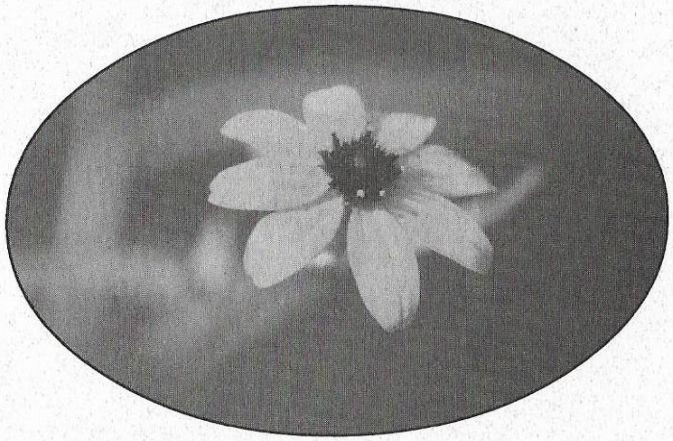
Bloom within me, Mr. Rose
Hold me fast as strong wind blows
And if my lips do not reply
Just listen closely when I cry

Loom above me, Mr. Oak
Give me breath when I do choke
And if your shelter you deny
Do not be shaken when I cry

Pulsate in me, Mr. Dove
Flap your wings to send me love
And if the clouds make gray my sky
Remember sun comes when I cry
Circle round me, Mr. Air
Let your breeze caress my hair
And if my inhibitions fly
Don't try to catch them when I cry

See right through me, Mr. Owl
Show me demons on the prowl
If from your wisdom I do shy
Spare me lectures when I cry

Take me over, Mr. Man
My heart lies beating in your hand
And if you drop it from on high
Lick the tears up when I cry.



Untitled

By Mike Hargett

For those who list to these tales I tell
Who hear my tales of Heaven and Hell
Shall hear the truth of a lover's woe
Who is trapped inside this inferno,
Because in the past I had done wrong
I shall never hear the angel's song
Never be part of the holy grace
Which God denies this fiery place.

In life before I had sought to love
A woman God had set high above
Any of his creations like me
But oh! how I hoped that it could be,
I sought to best the will of The Lord
To shun the Angel's fiery sword
I failed and eternal is my pain
For love of a woman spent in vain.

Dreaming

By Mike Hargett

There is that millisecond between sleeping and waking
When all seems clear, dreams are still reality, and fantasies come true.
Last night I saw you next to me in the sweetest dream I have ever had,
You slept by my side, moonlight falling all around, and you stole my heart,
In that time between asleep and awake you were there, with a gentle smile on your face, dreaming by my side.
Then I realized that I was not asleep, and you were really there.
Waking with you beside me was truly amazing, better than any dream,
And I could wake to it every morning.
So I wait here in that moment between asleep and awake, so I can wake to my dream again.

To Lie Beneath A Stormy Sky

By C. Anthony Leminger

To lie beneath a stormy sky
and to feel
the warmth of a midsummer's eve
retreat before an invading phalanx
of frigid aerial warriors.
To rise and watch a wall of darkness,
an intangible beast, stalk through the hills
and glide over the plains.
To behold brilliant shafts
of cold blue fury
shatter the earth, the trees, the sky,
and to hear the rumble
of prophetic drums and cannon blasts
roll through the resonant air.
To stand before a bloated bird of prey
and know the purely wild.
This is to sink your teeth
into the flesh of life
and to taste
the primal blood of vitality itself.
And, as sheets of rain fall down like bullets,
and the parched earth becomes
a saturated bog,
I would drink long that sanguine juice
and wait for the stars and moon
to rise in the startled heavens.

#766

By Brad Buckner

We whisper sweet
Enormous visions
I lust for you
Like a delicate diamond
That tastes like chocolate
And shines like a summer
Symphony.

Returning From Church

By C. Anthony Leminger

You ran down the wide
stony path in your growling
box, and crushed me
like so many nuts between
your jaws.
Did you even look back
to see me pulling myself slowly
across the path, broken
and weak, with my two good limbs?
Ah, but I was brave,
I tell myself with my last breath,
to dash madly before you.
Yet, I know that truly,
it was fear
which drove me to destruction,
to fall beneath your charge.
And did I have dreams,
dreams which were shattered
like my spine?
And do I hate you so
for taking all I had?
If God is truly good,
you shall not know the answers
until your heart may bear
to know, and to feel as well
the wild fires which burned large
within my small body
while I still danced
upon green stages
and in the soaring heights
which were my home.

I would now make but one wish--
to leap once more between precipitous boughs
as the fiery leaves lay down
their lives upon the browning grass,
and to know that you,
if yet no other heart,
shall soon recall me in a sigh.
For yes, in autumn winds I live,
and yes,
I also die.

Two Dollars and Ninety-Four Cents

By Eric Viele

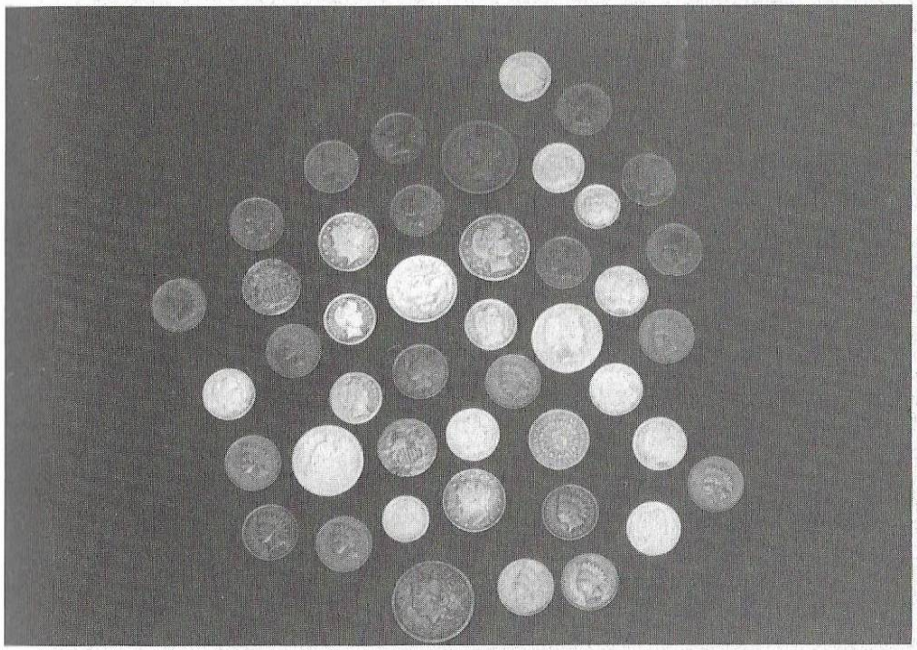
Two soft tacos and a nacho supreme--minus tomatoes. The cashier replies, "Your total will be $2.94." I pull out my checkbook, not knowing the consequence. Then it happened. A bounced check. I thought, "No problem. I'll mail Taco Bell a check for $2.94, and the problem will be resolved."

One year later...

The problem just began. Taco Bell *misplaced* the check, which caused the Fulton Police to toss me in jail. The reason: writing bad checks. Thanks Taco Bell, for a miserable night--or was it? That night caused me to do something in my life that I never really had done before. Think about life!

I've been thinking for just an hour.
I've got some things on my mind.
How did we get here? Where are we going?
Why is life so hard?
Life is funny...it's a mystery.
Just for an hour, my thoughts ran endlessly.
Who can you trust? Who are my true friends?
Am I out here on my own?
Some days it seems like nothing could go wrong.
Some days I wished I would have slept right through.
But after that one hour, of just thinking.
I became thankful for experiences both days.
Life, it challenges me everyday.
To one simple challenge.

It asks me to find myself.
Can I do it? and if so, how do I know?
For that one hour, of just thinking.
I thought: Do things really happen for a reason?
And again I was stumped, without a definite answer.
That one hour of thinking was good for me.
But then I thought,
could too much thinking like this drive a person crazy?
Thank God I only had one hour.



Found

By Mike Hargett

"A Man's reach should exceed his grasp else what's a heaven for."
In beauty so rare
In grace so fair
In a heart so strong
In a moment so long

In this I have found my youth
My reason for living and absolute truth,
I have found love once again
But I still don't know where to begin,

In a moment's hesitation
In pure fear of condemnation
In a time that is lost
In a prize far worth the cost,

Today I give you the word
And hope that it will be gratefully heard,
I shall tell you that I'm in love
With you my gentle snow white dove,

In a heart that wants you near
In a place of pure joy and cheer
In a smile from maybe just a friend
In a beginning not an end

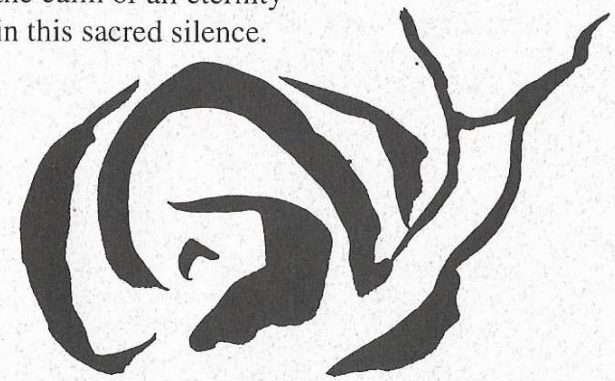
Let my words not frighten you
But please know my love is true,
And if you don't return this love in kind
In me a friend you can still find,

In a friend who will be there
In a heart wanting to share
In a chance to know someone
In a moment spent in the sun.

In this Sacred Silence

By C. Anthony Leminger

It is four a.m.
Beyond the dark curve of the earth,
a pale light shines in the heavens.
Hilltops and mountain peaks
hum deeply against the starry sky
as they rush in awesome silence
to the east.
Otherwise, all is quiet and still.
It is a time for reflection
and time to prepare.
In this dark night,
one may look up
into the deep, dark blue
and see infinity.
In this early hour,
as the world moves onward
to morning,
one may drink the fallen dew,
and as the stars fall to their rest,
one may touch with reverent hand
the calm of all eternity
in this sacred silence.



Untitled

By Kate Whitsit

I once heard a saying:
Selfishness is the root of all evil.

Animals act on selfish needs.
Shelter Air Food Water—Procreation
Humans recoil at the sight of white wings
Flapping up and down and water droplets fling through the air.
—A swan rapes his mate.

Trying to be "good" poses problems for humans.
Ironically, they have defined this for themselves.
Thoughtlessly, humans use others to fulfill their human needs.
Never questioning that some day there might be no one else to use.
Are humans really "looking out for themselves and their survival?"
Have they belittled the word they have created?
Or all they all evil?
They could never just be animal selfish.
The curse of humans is being conscience.

I never knew people "looking out for themselves"
Could affect me so much.
—We rape each other of our lives.

Oceans

By Trey Davis

Looking back on that day
I still wonder
what made you pack your things
And say goodbye
Was it me
or the skies that I kept you from
toss another thought into the ocean
And watch it sink below

Watching the ships go by
looking for you
aimlessly hoping
The lighthouse sees all
Purple columns
rolling in from the West
A storm is coming
It's too late for me
The ocean is yours
mine's the tide
the moon above
Keeps me from your side.

One

By Andrea Ravens

He bounded into my life
And swept me up into his world
Danger
Excitement
Freedom
Passion
All in one blonde bombshell.

He took all of me inside him, enveloped me
Innocence
Trust
Adoration
Purity
All in one blonde angel.

A deep, black sea loomed ahead
Threatening to swallow our love
Glances of disdain
Words of warning
Pleas to end
Orders to stop
What we could not
What we would not.

We pulled closer, tighter, spinning and twirling
Lifting each other higher and higher
Hearts pounding
Faces laughing
Spirits soaring
Desires Growing
Rising to our world of passionate rebellion.

Living off of each other
Needing only each other
Devouring
Using
Feeding
Thriving
On bodies, dreams, souls.

Always wanting more
Never being satisfied
Until we reached that one special moment
And then
Nothing
remained

We hurtled down
Falling
Grasping
Frightened
Crying
Crashing into the sea.

Not the One

By C. Anthony Leminger

Your smile is a thunderstorm
which quenches the flames of my burning heart.
Your knowing glances pierce my soul,
and slowly tear my weeping mind apart.
Your soft touches could only be
white-hot needles for an inquisition;
they probe so deeply, seeking out
my most tender spots for slow destruction.
Your obsessing scent should rather
become known to me as so many raw
and putrid odors most noxious,
and your fondest wish, the most unjust law.
For your warm embrace and loving
caress are chains and flails of misery,
and your kisses are such utter
torture, for you give them never to me.

A.M.

By Trey Davis

Swirling thoughts as the man in the moon comes out to play,
each one racing to beat the other,
and I, resting my mind on the hillside,
decide whether or not to smile or laugh aloud.

Looking up, I see trails of existence criss-crossing,
time not knowing what lies ahead,
each cloud of purple and pink give the artist a background,
and I the viewer have no colors to give.

But in each moment I spend in thought,
the closer another painter comes to a masterpiece,
if only I could provide the inspiration,
the trees, the streams, the flowers—the brush.

I look up again—what was blue has turned to grey,
and I stare at the road in front of me,
friendships passing by, one by one,
then someone new stops and says hello—I smile.

Sometimes you think that rivers can never stop flowing,
or that the grass will never be greener,
but everything changes, beaded lights come and go.

Good friends are like works of art, a friend told me,
some take lifetimes,
some take moments,
and some are like nothing you've ever seen before.

Voices

By Jennifer O'Donley

Afterward, I sit on your lap in the kitchen
and listen to the room fill with the quiet of the dusk.
The shadows grow longer, reaching in for us through
the open window.
I feel your breath warm upon my cheek
and hear your voice struggle with the intimacy and
the task.

Uneasy with your accomplishment,
you watch my mouth, waiting for words to fall.
My face buried in the curve between your neck and your shoulder.
I know everything I need to say.
The silence catches up with the shadows.

A Contemplation

By Cynthia Ottens

In front of the White House and across the nation
unheard thousands join in demonstrations
for improved
race relations
less
male domination
and
taxation
the need for more
women's liberation
and even the teaching of
our very own creation
While
Unheard Church congregations
join to pray for salvation
to save our souls from eternal damnation
and thus are given credit for saving civilization
While
The temptation

to kill *entered the souls of the unheard man*

who witnessed a violent sensation
of T.V. coverage of these violent demonstrations
He came out of his lazy-boy hibernation
only to become a member of the prison population

His *unheard* victim forever living with frustration
that she will never recover from his violation

listen—hear the disintegration

Dance Floor Lovers

By Emily Boling

Your heat is one with mine,
Ours is one with the crowd,
This crowd of
dance floor lovers.

Together, we are embraced
by a rhythmic heat.
Entranced by the dancing lights above,
but much more--one another.

The soft caressing notes measure
and sustain our lovemaking.
Through song after soothing song,
beat after delicious beat.

Moving, swaying, loving into oblivion.
Even for just this night,
On this dance floor,
Leaving this pressing crowd behind.

We exist only tonight my phantom man.
You'll never again know my touch,
I'll never again feel the gentle pressure of your hand,
We'll never again be one.

For now, let us savor each other,
Stay suspended in time forever.
Tonight let's pretend that we are more than
dance floor lovers.

Taking Flight

By Jodi Fowler

Lovers only reach their destination when the method of flight requires little concentration on elevation for lovers that are truly in love cannot divert their gazes long enough from one another to focus on the task at hand, thus they are resigned to falling in a helpless tangled heap on the ground. Yet no tears are shed because the external wounds will heal; no tears are shed because the heart remains uninjured, safe within the grasp of the other lover, protected by the magical, poetic power of passion.

In the case of our Miss and Mister, a destination was never reached. Flight, for that matter, was never taken. Instead, we join our couple lying languidly beneath a weeping willow in the Turtle Meadows Estates neighborhood park on a crunchy October afternoon. Miss lies on her back, causing her jeans to crumple in what she supposed an unflattering manner. Placing laced fingers behind her head and sucking in her stomach, she looked over at Mister who was, at present, concerned only with the squirrel scurrying to and fro from tree to tree, so expedient at his task that our lazy Mister grew fatigued just watching. Miss inadvertently reached up to rub his shoulder and absent-mindedly ran her hand up the nape of his neck through the short, buzzed hair on the back of his head. As he turned, he did not smile or laugh or even grimace before he began tickling her ribs and sides and stomach, hoping at last to find the infamous ticklish spot. Though she smiled at his poker-face attempt, she remained still and unticklish, yet not unaffectionate as she pulled him down toward her saying, "Someday you'll find it . . ."

In 1993, life for our Miss and Mister consisted of all night phone calls, countless movie dates (which quickly became euphemisms for two hour make-out sessions), love notes passed via locker slits, and finally, perhaps the only activity which distinguished our Miss and Mister from other sixteen-year-old experiencing the downward spiral

sensation of falling in love--literature reading. Our Miss and Mister, whose intelligence allowed them to coast through advanced high school courses with little effort, read to each other for hours on end--poetry, short stories, but most often classic authors, their favorites among Hawthorne, Bronte, and Shakespeare. The pair imagined themselves the hero and heroine, the tragic couple as hopelessly in love as Catherine and Heathcliff. These fantasies, though in the minds of both, were never spoken or shared. To our Miss and Mister, internalization took precedence over verbalization. They envisioned their love to epic proportions, though in reality they were two privileged teenagers growing up in the late twentieth century in just another American suburb. Don't, at this point, however, underestimate our young lovers, for although their love grew in a typical manner, their destinies loomed before them all but ordinary. An underestimation on our part could cause a tragic mistake, just as an underestimation on their part caused the same.

As their tale unfolds, sometimes neatly like a napkin at a five-star restaurant, sometimes violently like a storm across an ocean, likewise their intertwining personalities unfold, and thus another love story is recorded. Yet, of all people to have ever recorded a love story, I have to be the least likely, the least romantic. Lovers who never reach their destination and who are, in fact, too engrossed in the other's eyes to ever take flight leave behind trails of intrigue for those whose redhot loves have faded into paler shades of pink or for those, like myself, who have never loved at all.

We now join our Miss and Mister at a roller skating rink, holding hands, laughing at the twelve-year-old regulars trying hard to couple skate and fall in love to the tune of gangster rap.

Miss says, "What happened to Cyndi Lauper or Boy George--our roller skating music?"

"They've been replaced by rappers who name themselves after household pets and appliances."

Miss smiled, accustomed, but not at all immune to his wit. Driving around the suburb in Middle America, searching for a destination on a Wednesday night, Miss had spotted the glowing Skateworld sign and

squealed with delight, recalling the many hours she spent as a child circling the rink and doing the hokey pokey. She grabbed the wheel from Mister and made a sharp left turn across two lanes. Mister's annoyance, though always coolly subdued, bubbled in his stomach at her split-second decision and passenger-seat driving. His anger subsided as he looked at her honey-chocolate eyes sparkling with anticipation.

Mister says, "I'm really good. A shuffle skater. You're gonna be worse and you're not gonna be able to stand it."

"A. I'm probably better. B. I had my own speed skates. And C. Even if I was worse, I would be able to stand it."

"No--you wouldn't."

"Get out and open my door please."

As she got out of the Toyota, the lights from the sign reflected in her sun-streaked blonde part and he couldn't resist touching her hair. Though she pushed away his hand, acting annoyed, he saw her lips curl upward as he held it tightly in his own.

Giggling at pre-pubescent skaters, Miss lifted her brown skate for Mister to lace.

"Are you handicapped?"

"No, actually I'm perfectly capable of lacing up my own roller skate, but I am presently engaged in a moment of nostalgia and would have appreciated your services. But now I've wasted so much time explaining to you why I wanted my skate laced in the first place, my nostalgic moment is ruined and I will just lace it myself."

"Give it here," rolling his eyes.

"It's OK--the moment's over."

"Damn it--let me lace your skate, all right?" Softening.

She smiled and lifted her skate again to his lap saying, "If you insist."

Back in the Toyota, Mister says, "You're a good skater."

"Likewise."

"But I'm better." He owed her.

"Perhaps, but I'm better at turning and going backwards, and those brown skates just aren't the same."

"Good compromise for a girl who can't stand to lose."

"What should we read tonight?" Miss asked, changing the subject off her shortcomings.

"Considering we've roller skated to Snoop Doggy Dogg for the past three hours with a bunch of Judy Blume readers, I vote for something extra-refined."

"Faulkner, then. The Unvanquished." Miss knew the novel for every occasion, and nearly always, he agreed with her choice.

"Before we go home, can we drive through Sonic?"

"Let me guess--for an extra large Diet Sprite with cherry."

"Did you ever have a doubt?" Her honey-chocolate sparkled.

He read to her that night by the soft light of her bed lamp. Miss rested her head on his stomach, closing her eyes and letting her senses flood with Mister's amazing voice and Faulkner's amazing sentence composition and the Ralph Lauren in pine needles smell of Mister's amazing flannel shirt. She wondered at that moment if this was love she was in, or deep infatuation--with Faulkner of course. She had known from their first date that she was in love with Mister, though they had never spoken the words, scared as always of ruining the magic. Words to them were poor manifestations of emotions felt expressly with the soul. Besides, with the words came the leverage (for whoever didn't speak them first) and leverage, in a tumultuous relationship such as theirs, is always precious.

Parental interference ended the night's correspondence and the Toyota carried Mister the four miles to his two-story home in Turtle Meadows Estates. Before parting, Miss and Mister had discussed the irrelevance and inconvenience of that parental interference in their private lives; both understood the necessity of parents in a sixteen year old's public and financial matters, but really, what could unhappy, middle-aged, sexually frustrated workaholics have to contribute to the private affairs of two cultured, brilliant, passionate youths on the brink of maturation? Their discussion ended with a long goodbye kiss, bodies and minds pressed together with exhilarating force. Released at last, Miss turned and walked slowly inside while Mister stood marvelling in her grace, drowning in her lingering scent.

I, a novice at the ever-fierce game of love, must wonder exactly how our Miss must have felt, our how any woman feels for that matter, who knows she has captivated the heart and soul of a worthy man. I say worthy as if Miss were a prize to be won; don't misunderstand. Our hero's talents and charms measured equally with those of our heroine and his attention was equally as desired by members of the opposite sex. In his brooding, he created mystery and in this mystery, he created an aura of unattainablity. In unattainability, as every deep-feeling woman knows, lies appeal.

Miss first pursued Mister after peer-reviewing his English composition on Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter. She had noticed him before, silent and reflective in the back of the classroom, but had pegged him just another shy intellect full of ideas but unable to effectively communicate them to the rest of the living world. She pegged wrong. The essay caught her attention; the note she wrote at the bottom caught his.

You might be the best writer in this school. I agree that Hester's "A" has dual meaning of adulteress and angel; however, I disagree with your assertion that the angel "wins out" over the adulteress-- why must they be in battle? Sins of passion, though sins nonetheless, are sometimes the most heavenly. Your passion shines through your writing and I find myself attracted to you. I would very much like to continue this discussion in person. By the way, I, too, might be the best writer in this school.

Mister called. Miss played. Mister fell. Miss fell, in spite of herself. They landed together in a tangled heap on the ground, (as most lovers do who never take flight) writhing in the ecstasy of discovery, feeling with every kiss and every touch the real emotions that only people at a decision-making age should be able to feel.

We join our Miss and Mister now a year and eight months after the essay invitation, which is now in a box in Mister's room full of notes and books and heartfelt presents from our Miss. It was Christmas vacation of their junior year. Everywhere in America, wreaths were hung and halls were decked. Santa chuckled, shaking his bowl full of jelly, while Mister cried, shaking his head in disbelief. Tears on such a

handsome face are like drips on a fudgsicle; Miss with all her soul wanted to lick them from his cheeks and reaffirm her undying devotion. Instead, she pressed her forehead against the frosty Toyota window, feeling the cold outside and the cold blood in her veins and the cold words frozen in the air. Was it she that had spoken them? Her voice, which quivered as her eyes filled with tears and that lump in her throat grew bigger and bigger, hardly seemed her own.

"This is the only rational thing to do. We're just too young to be this serious and I hardly have any other friends. There's so much more I want out of high school. You'd be happy living in our own private little world without ever having contact with other people, but I'm just not. You know we fight all the time and really I wonder if the happy times outweigh the miserable. You--I mean, we're holding me back from having the high school life I always wanted to have. I just don't want to look back and have any regrets . . . "

And his icy reply.

"You'll regret *this*, more than not having eighty people at your New Year's party, more than not being president of some club nobody cares about anyway, more than not having a trillion meaningless friends sign your yearbook. I can't believe you can throw us away for stuff that's so irrelevant."

"That's just it--it's not irrelevant to me and you will never respect or understand that."

This went on for about half an hour, each growing angrier and more bitter with every word spoken. Miss finally got out of the car, slamming her door and marching inside and finally letting the tears gush down her face. The first person she saw as she walked in the door was her mother, whom she shot a look that was colder than the fiercest of December weather, recalling their you're-too-young-for-this-kind-of-relationship-talk the previous month. After the thought was planted in Miss' brain, it festered and finally burgeoned into an insurmountable obstacle in Miss' thought processes. After long deliberation, sleepless nights, and a couple of fights which pushed her over the edge, Miss told her heart to tell her brain to tell her mouth to tell Mister that their relationship was unhealthy.

It was over and it was the coldest December evening either had ever felt.

Devastation over the separation was, for both parties, an understatement.

Though our Miss and Mister's love never quite left the terminal, time indeed took flight. Mister kept on brooding and amazing his teachers with his brilliance. Miss kept on succeeding and surrounding herself with the witty and outspoken. On one occasion, a glance at Mister in the hall left her reeling. Her noisy friends and meeting agendas disintegrated around her and time again stood still. Cheeks ablaze and tears afloat, she turned and followed him with her eyes all the way down the hall, waiting for him to feel her gaze and return it with his own. Head down, eyebrows knit, he walked in his classroom without looking back. Soul connections fade when severed, Miss thought, and returned to her dizzying daily atmosphere.

Miss ate her breakfast of Crunch Berries and honey toast, reading the paper in her cheery California home, reading the date, November 3, 2003, and going over the proposal for her business meeting the next day in Dallas.

"Oh, honey," she screamed up the stairs, "Don't forget I'm leaving for Dallas this afternoon. You'll have to pick Charlotte up from day care. My plane gets back really late tomorrow night."

"I'll miss you."

"I know."

He came down the stairs dripping from the shower and said it again before she stuffed her papers in her briefcase and kissed him and her daughter goodbye. Driving to work, her thoughts were cloudy and her usual optimistic attitude was replaced by one of extreme anxiety. She suddenly contemplated the meaning of her life thus far.

Mister drank his huge cup of coffee and smoked his cigarette, still sitting at his computer from the night before, going over every last detail of the manuscript he was presenting to a publisher in Dallas. Debating between sleep and one refreshing trip down the mountain before leaving, Mister chose the latter. He skied out the back door of his Northern California condo and took the lift up to the most difficult run. As the air

became thinner, his thoughts always became clearer and he suddenly had the strangest sensation of someone's eyes following him. He turned, and saw only the empty chair lift behind him. Still, his usual pessimism seemed to be lifted and a feeling of hope overcame him as he whooshed down the mountain.

Miss sat in her seat, making mental reminders to finish her marketing report and buy Charlotte a present. Settling in, adjusting her pillow, when suddenly, she was startled.

"Miss, what would you like to drink?"

"Oh. Diet Sprite with a cherry, please."

Miss closed her eyes and dreamed of a favorite stuffed puppy she lost as a child.

Mister helped the elderly woman in front of him lift her carry-on to the storage area above their heads before taking his seat. Opening his backpack, he fished through tapes and journals until he found his airplane entertainment--John Updike's Rabbit Run. Settling in, fastening his seatbelt, when suddenly he heard the most compelling voice ring in his ears.

"Diet Sprite with a cherry, please."

Before his head could turn and his eyes could see, his heart knew.

Unplanned reunions have a tendency, in my experience, to reveal true colors, be they bright or dark. Many giggle nervously, stammering niceties and racking their brain for conversation. Others smile politely and retreat back into their shell, offering little personal information. And then there are those who begin recounting every major and minor life event which has happened since the last meeting, leaving the other with more information than he ever wanted to hear. These reunion scenarios also heavily depend on the nature of the realtionship previously shared. For one with a keen ear (like myself) the relationship can immediately be detected as old neighbor, friend, teacher . . . lover.

Mister stood above her momentarily before placing his hand on her shoulder. Before she woke from her dream, before she opened her eyes, she smelled Ralph Lauren in pine needles and her heart knew.

In the first two hours of the six hour flight from San Francisco to Dallas, the typical catching up was done, though only essential words were spoken. Occasional silence was necessary for their souls to reconnect.

"I'm married, with a child. Her name is Charlotte, nineteen months - she's beautiful. I work in an advertising firm. Slowly working my way up."

"I'm an English professor. I also teach some Spanish and do some freelance writing. In college, I spent some time abroad . . . I met an American woman in Paris and we were married within the month. Divorced now; I never thought I would be another statistic pointing to the downfall of American society, but I guess no one ever does."

Silence.

"Charlotte," says Mister, finally, "after your favorite author, Ms. Bronte, I presume."

Through sparkling eyes and a look of heart-wrenching anguish she says, "You're the only person in the whole world who knows that's who she's named after. Not my husband, not my mother--I'm not sure why I didn't tell them. I guess I sort of enjoyed keeping the secret, as if it were a private bind between Charlotte and I . . . and now you. They just thought I chose it because it was a pretty name."

"It is. A pretty name, I mean."

The next two hours were spent in a deeply spiritual, almost cleansing, reminiscent journey down the path of their sixteen-year-old romance--a romance full of screaming fights and sexual explorations and quiet, lovely summer evenings. It should have seemed silly, but they didn't laugh, too much. She inadvertently rubbed his shoulder and ran her hand up the nape of his neck, amazed at the man he had become. In response, he held her hand, in awe at the loveliness of this sophisticated woman, yet still able to see the girl he fell in love with long ago. The reunited lovers reached a euphoric silence, stealing glances like frightened children and making excuses to maintain bodily contact. In this silence, Miss reached down into her bag and pulled out Wuthering Heights. She always knew just the right novel for every

occasion, and nearly always, he agreed with her choice.

That morning, I had gathered my knitting and my cross-stitch and packed my floral suitcase. Visiting my college roommate who now lived in Dallas was an annual tradition. Only a total of ten years had been skipped over the course of about forty since we graduated. I was prepared for a long, boring flight, but I, as you may have suspected, was the passenger lucky enough to choose the seat behind our heroine and experience perhaps the most emotionally draining plane ride ever taken. In all my sixty-two years, I have never fallen in love. Watching my parents live together in hate, I grew up scorning the notion of true love and destiny and spending your whole life with one person. I don't consider myself lonely; I'm proud of my independence and self-reliance. Well, after witnessing this reunion, even an old skeptic was moved to tears and an old cynic began to question her life philosophy and wonder if maybe true love wasn't such a foolish notion after all. One notion of mine, however, was confirmed: if delightful intangibles such as soul-mates and true love do exist, they nearly always end in tragedy . . .

As Mister read to Miss, life on the ground was forgotten and for that six hours, their love, for the first time, was allowed to take flight. That time gave Miss and Mister a bittersweet glimpse into the crystal ball of the unknown, the answer to the what-if question most of us wonder about our whole lives. The pilot's voice dripped with disgusting reality as he announced the arrival time and I wanted desperately to go to the front of the plane and tell him to keep flying forever, to never ever land the plane. I realized that I was willing to fly around in the air for the rest of my life if that meant these two people who so obviously belonged together could stay together. But that wasn't my sacrifice to make. To ease my soul, I have decided instead to record their story for the world to hear, though I'm sure a heart that's as void of love as mine can hardly do these people justice. Two more passionate people, separately and as an entity, I have never since encountered. As children, they imagined themselves as hopelessly in love as characters in a romance. If nothing else, I can give them that.

As the plane grew closer and closer to the ground, Miss and Mister fell further and further out of their trance He helped her collect her belongings; she sat stoically trying to think about marketing reports and Charlotte's present . . . Suddenly, with passion, Miss says, "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

"We were young. You probably did the right thing. It's all right."

"No. No we weren't young, " her voice rising, "and, no, I wasn't right. We knew more about life and love then than we do know. You know it's true. I forgot what right felt like because I hadn't felt it in so long. Now I remember."

"I remember too." He stroked her hair and fell in love all over again.

"Too much time has gone by . . . we can't . . . "

"You don't have to say it." After ten years, he again got lost in her honey-chocolate eyes. He struggled to find his way out, to find a way to tell his soul to let her go. To let her go.

She walked off the plane without looking back though she felt so dizzy and heartsick, she wondered if her legs would crumble beneath her. Their last words echoed in her ears forever.

"I loved you, more than anything," Mister had said.

"Why couldn't we say it? Why couldn't we have known?" she had said quietly.

"We did . . . " to himself, "we did."

Mister sat staring at the empty seat next to him, unable to believe he had held her in his arms. She already seemed galaxies away. Once again, he was left marvelling in her grace, drowning in her lingering scent.

Lovers truly in love only reach their destination when the method of flight requires little concentration on elevation for they cannot divert their gaze long enough from one another to focus on the task at hand; thus they are resigned to falling in a helpless tangled heap on the ground. Yet no tears are shed because the heart remains uninjured, safe within the grasp of the other lover, protected by passion alone. In the case of our Miss and Mister, a destination was never reached. Flight, for that matter, was never taken.

From This Cloud

By Jennifer O'Donley

Lying on her back, through yellow-tinted glasses, she sees a dog in the sky.

"Look," she tells him flatly, pointing at the cloud.

Lying on his side next to her, he turns his head to see what she sees. The bright sun burns his naked eyes; he squints at the pure white clouds floating above.

"Where?"

"There." She points again. He tries to trace her finger to the mystery in the sky, but still doesn't see it.

"It's right there, plain as day," she tells him. "A dog in the sky."

"That does not look like a dog," he answers.

"You're not looking hard enough. You have no imagination, you know that?"

She sits up and shoves her short sleeves up to no sleeves on her shoulders. Crossing her legs, Indian-style, she looks out at the mothers watching their kids play in the park.

"You're getting sunburned," he tells her, poking at her skin turning pink. The diamond in her wedding ring scratches her arm as she brushes his hand away.

Taking off her sunglasses, she grabs her ballcap off the ground and pulls it low across her eyes. Looking down her nose, she watches him pull himself up to sit beside her.

Ants are invading his edge of the red and white checkered quilt; he makes a quick swipe at them with his shoe, in defense. "Are you ready to go yet?"

"No," she says, watching an old man sitting on a park bench watching her. "I am not ready to go."

He lies back down, lifting the sunglasses out of his shirt pocket and putting them on.

"I said I was sorry," he forcefully tells her.

"And I said I forgive you," she answers back, hearing her mother's voice come from somewhere to fill her own.

The Web

By Mike Hargett

Spiders know which of their strands are the sticky ones
Why can't people be that cautious,
We set traps and snares to free ourselves from others, or their problems
And end up catching ourselves, being ensnared instead of ensnaring,
Becoming entangled in the things we most want to stay away from.
It is not so easy to be freed as we might think,
We cannot gnaw off an emotional paw,
Even though our animal instinct might tell us it is best thing to do,
We try to play others like a violin, only to find that we are being tuned for the orchestra,
Are we meant to be the trapper, or the trapped, the weapons used to defend our friendly shores, or sanity, become instruments of aggression, and reasons for mistrust, when pointed at us,
And an attempt at kindness or an act of kinship becomes insult with the least misunderstanding,
At what point does our fortress become our prison,
When does the web start catching spiders.