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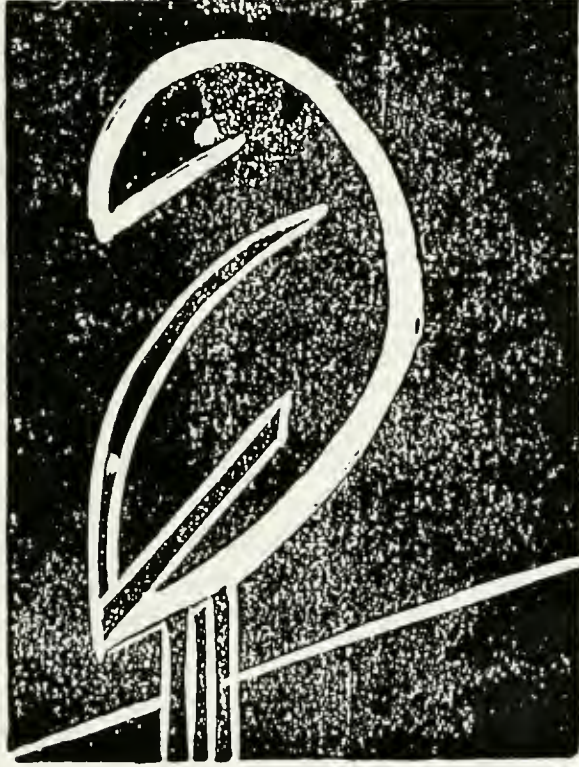
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Legacy 1992





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Legacy

A picture is worth a thousand words? Then how much is a word worth? Surely more than a thousandth of a picture.

The two aren't equal. Each is powerful in its own way, and a well-chosen word can show things a picture never can. A carefully written piece is a picture of the author that will also, as Shakespeare said, "hold a mirror up to life," and reflect an image of the reader.

Although there are no pictures in this book, I like to think of it as a picture book, full of images of the authors. And if the reader looks carefully, he or she will also find images of himself or herself.

Thanks to Mr. Durichek for the use of his computer lab; Monte Mitzelfelt for his help; Deana Abdel-Malek, Rosemary Dibbins, Sheila Draper, and Helen Pyke for judging the contest entries; and the officers of the Writer's Club for their support.

The selections in this book, except for the prize winners, are in the order that they themselves suggested to my subconscious. If there is any pattern or order, it is purely fictional and accidental.

I hope that you enjoy this picture book.

Eric Rochester
Editor



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The Organist

by Tanya R. Cockran

In fierce grace,
She releases each breath,
Thrusting language
Into heaven.

With calm repression,
She manipulates each sigh,
Forcing complexity
Into knowledge.

In ravenous petition,
She conjures each exhalation,
Hurling intelligence
Into masses.

With orgiastic attack,
She liberates each respire,
Injecting passion
Into entities.

Sense of Direction

by Randal Gilliam

I hadn't seen her for a while. I used to look at her and say to myself, "I'm going to marry that girl." Now I know you've heard people relate that same experience before--still, it seems special.

I saw her today and remembered why God allows mankind the weakness to forget. I also remembered what she told me on her way out of my life.

She said, "We started dating at such a young age, and we dated for such a long time--I just feel like I haven't allowed God a chance to really lead in my life."

I used to tell myself God had led me to her. Looking at her today made me remember that the primary source for my sense of direction used to hang much lower.

But it wasn't just her I saw today--I saw him as well. He looked like a Calvin Klein advertisement clothed and come to life.

Seems God's got good taste. Or maybe, at some point, we all share the same sense of direction.

Color Rising in the Morn

by Sharlene Robinson

Color

Rose and stretched its bronzed arms,
Rubbbed its bright eyes,
And yawned white clouds over its
Sea-green bed.
It cast its rainbow shadows across
The paisley floor,
And hung a pastel nightgown
Upon the bedroom door.
It brushed its silver teeth
With a paste of translucent beams,
Then sat to drink the
Richly-painted morning
In serenity.

Nursing?

by Tonya Abercrombie

I wasn't planning on going to college because I couldn't decide on a major. I refused to take two years of generals and have nothing to show for it as my brother had done. I didn't want to hate all my classes as my sister did. I told my parents, "I ain't goin' to college."

They both stared at me for a minute then my mom said, "Oh yes you are."

Through academy, I had thought of some options for a major, but there were problems with most of them. My sophomore year I thought about working with people who have eating disorders. I knew I would become discouraged, because I know they just do not listen to reason. I love animals, and I thought about being a veterinarian, until I found out it took eight years of college. Once in Bible class, at the beginning of my senior year of academy, my teacher went around the room asking everyone what their major was going to be. When it was my turn, I leaned back in my chair, stared at my desk and replied, "I ain't goin' to college."

My senior year was also the year I played basketball, or at least tried to play basketball. Since I couldn't dribble, shoot, or throw the basketball, I played bulldozer. If a player from the other team was beating up on one of our players and the referees didn't see it, I would run into the player of the opposite team hard enough to send them out of the games for a few minutes. While this showed the other teams that we could not be run over, it left me bleeding, bruised, and swollen. I would have to go home and try to get myself back together by the next game. It didn't take long for me to realize I liked nursing myself back to health. Suddenly I decided what my major would be in college. It would be nursing. I decided on the two year RN course because I would have "hands on" training in the hospital within two months of starting.

For two months I learned how to take vital signs, give a patient a bath, change a bed, and give general care. We practiced over and over on each other in the nursing class.

Before I really had time to think about it, I was going to the hospital for the first time. I chatted on the bus with my instructor and got my pen, papers, and stethoscope ready. When we got off the bus, one of my friends asked me if I was nervous. I told him I was, but I thought I'd do all right. We went into the hospital, and our instructor, Mrs. Springett, told us exactly what

to do. She said to take vital signs, get the patient ready for breakfast, bathe the patient after breakfast, and make him or her comfortable.

My patient was ninety-five years old and had congestive heart failure and acute cystitis. She was bedridden and had a catheter. Her name was Ella Martin. I should have known at ninety-five, with heart problems, she wouldn't be sitting up in bed ready to carry on a conversation, but I was too nervous to think about that.

I walked into her room, looked down at her and almost left, thinking I had the wrong person. She looked just like my grandfather. I checked her bracelet. It read Ella Martin. Taking a deep breath, I bent down toward the woman.

"Miss Martin, Miss Martin." No response.

"Great! She's dead," I mumbled to myself. But then I saw she was breathing. I put one of my hands on her shoulder, and with my other hand I took her hand. I had to force myself not to jerk away. Her shoulder felt like it had no skin on it, just a bone sticking out. Her hand was cold and felt like plastic. Taking another deep breath, I gently shook her shoulder and called her name again. I looked at her eyes and thought they weren't going to move, but slowly one, then the other opened. I felt as if I'd been thrown into the future and was sitting with my sister in her old age. Miss Martin's eyes were the same shape and color as my sister's. I took a deep breath, trying to remember this was a stranger, not my sister.

"Miss Martin," I said as loudly as I could without embarrassment.

"Miss Martin, I'm going to take your vital signs, OK?" I thought the lady probably didn't know what vital signs were, but I also knew she wouldn't care if she didn't know. Slowly I turned her wrist over and took her pulse. Next I listened to her heart and lungs. Then I counted how many breaths she took in fifteen seconds. When I was getting the thermometer ready, the nurse came in and introduced herself, but I couldn't remember her name even right after she told me. She also told me what she thought of Miss Martin's condition, but I couldn't remember what she said about that either. I then realized exactly how nervous I was. I couldn't even comprehend a simple name. Since we couldn't get Miss Martin to open her mouth, the nurse put the thermometer under the lady's arm. In my nervous state I knew if the nurse hadn't been there, I would have tried taking Miss Martin's temperature rectally.

After the nurse left I walked over to Miss Martin to take her blood pressure. I put the cuff on her arm, found her pulse, and put the stethoscope up to my ears.

"Oh no, I can't remember how to take a blood pressure," I thought,

horrified. Every cuss word I'd ever heard rushed through my mind. I knew I had to get control of myself.

"Yes, I can. OK, calm down, Tonya, and take the blood pressure." But I was too nervous to listen to myself. I felt my throat grow tight and my eyes fill with tears.

"No, no!" I mumbled.

"I ain't gonna cry. I ain't gonna cry. I ain't gonna cry," I started telling myself. I continued telling myself that even as my tears ran down my face.

"What if someone comes in, like the doctor, or the nurse, or even worse my instructor, and here I am staring at Miss Martin, crying?" Quickly I took off the blood pressure cuff and went to the sink. I washed my hands, staring at myself in the mirror until the tears stopped running and my red eyes turned back to their natural white. I walked out of the room, found Mrs. Springett, and told her I couldn't remember how to take a blood pressure or anything else I'd learned. She told me to calm down, the same thing I'd been telling myself for the hour. She went in and helped me take the blood pressure. As we worked, I felt my throat grow tight and my eyes fill with tears again. Mrs. Springett tried to talk to me casually, but I was afraid I would burst into tears. I only nodded yes or no to everything she said.

When Mrs. Springett left, I began getting the things ready to give Miss Martin a bed bath.

"What am I doing?" I thought through tears. "I've always said I wasn't going to college. Here I am through two months of it, and I can't remember anything I've learned. I told everyone I couldn't make it in college and no one believed me. I wonder if it's called job abandonment if I just take my stuff and leave, right now, without telling anyone. No, I think it's called failing and being killed by Mom." I smiled to myself thinking of everyone's surprise if they had found out I had just walked out of the hospital and gone home.

"I can't just leave. There's too many consequences. I'll just have to make it through this, somehow." I felt trapped, and started crying again.

I finally finished giving Miss Martin a bath. The bath had been a complete one, meaning I had washed her everywhere. As I dumped the dirty water into the sink, I glanced at my hands and sucked in my breath. I put the water container down and raised my hands in front of my face, remembering that Miss Martin's bath had included washing around the catheter. I stared, wide-eyed at my ungloved hands. They were ungloved now and had been during the entire bath. Quickly, I set aside the water container and washed my

hands over and over again until they were red and tender. For the first time that day I laughed. Then I stopped laughing and stared at myself.

"I'm crazy," I thought. "I cry over not remembering how to take a blood pressure and laugh when I realize I don't have gloves on and could have just caught some incurable disease. That's it. I'm looney. I've flipped."

My realization of going loco didn't help the rest of my day. I couldn't get Miss Martin to take any of her medicine. I couldn't remember how to chart my nursing procedures. I was still close to tears and couldn't talk when we drove up to Wright Hall an hour later. I never wanted to see another hospital for as long as I lived. I could feel my heart beat faster just by thinking of going back in two days. I dreaded it. It wasn't any of those things that bothered me the most, though. It was a thought that was driving me crazy.

"I had the most horrible day that I've ever had. But it somehow proved to me that I picked the right career. I'm going to make it through these two years and be a great nurse, somehow."

Out of Line

by Randal Gilliam

I want to be a writer. I have my degree and have no practical motivation to become a writer. But I want to. Before now I've just been in line.

I completed the requirements for a B.A. in Journalism in December. I have no special interest in journalism, but law schools require applicants to have an accredited, four-year degree prior to admission. Journalism has served as a means toward that end. But I've always wanted to be a writer more than a lawyer.

My best friend's dad died during the Christmas break. He has always wanted to be a baseball player. He had the talent. But not so long ago he stood in line at school registration to wait his turn to hear the advisors tell him to pursue a more practical dream.

He led his short life in the sensible, straight-line way he always knew he should. He got in the same lines, at the same stores, to buy the same suits, to wear to the same kind of job as all his business friends. But during his corporate coffee breaks he daydreamed about wearing a baseball uniform.

At the funeral chapel we all filed out of the pews in perfect order. One behind the other, we waited our turn to take a close look at the end of the line.

My best friend's dad was buried in one of those suits. The trophy inscribed "most valuable player" he won as a boy in Little League was placed next to his casket.

I suppose I'll still go to law school. It's the sensible, straight-line thing to do.

But for this semester, I'm a waiter at Appleby's and a writer. I'm getting out of line.

Liquid Joy

by Sharlene Robinson

Merriment
Like sound
Dribbling across cool water of a lake
Dancing, bounding, lightly
Washing over,
Leaving a trail of helium-filled
Bubbles;
Popping like lightening
Flashes
Glimmers.
Transient sparkles on a
Tray of liquid glass,
Gliding and leaving
Laughter in its wake.

Sticky Fingers

by Randal Gilliam

The good things go
 like popsicles

Lick them so they'll last
 or crunch them quickly
 or hold them and watch them melt
But the good things go

So I thank God for memories
 and for sticky fingers

Two Halves
by **Thomas Irvin Duerksen**

We are like a shell
two halves
delicately connected
by just millimeters
of tissue
But meant to be as one.

The Mating Game
by **John Lamb**

The rain pours.
10:55
20 Minutes,
to finish your thoughts,
to have a fight.
11:00
Curfew
15 minutes grace,
to say I love you,
to hold her.
11:05
10 minutes,
to close a conversation,
to say goodbye.
11:10
5 minutes
Run!
4
3
2
1

Drive Real Slow by Randal Gilliam

"So you say you're a romantic," he said.
 "Yes, I've always thought so," she said.
 "You think maybe you might manifest the romance somewhere, in
 some other way, besides a tear or two at a sad movie?" he asked.
 "Sure," she said. "Somewhere, someway, someday, with someone."
 "How about with me on a long, one-handed, afternoon drive to
 anywhere without a word?", he asked.
 "I don't think I want to rush into anything," she said.
 "I'll wear my seat-belt." he said. "And I'll drive real slow."

Start with the Second by Randal Gilliam

Certainly's certainly
 not what it seems
 Firm grips turn fluid
 seem so awake in the dreams

And just when you've taken
 all you can take
 You'll find what a difference
 some difference can make

Hope is the hook
 makes the memory your master
 But what you thought was the book
 now's only a chapter

Though feelings leave you famished
 with a yearn unreckoned
 The first can't be finished
 'til you start with the second . . .

Worthwhile Pulses

by Julia Kim

Oh thou,
Wasteful one,
Utilize thy time;
And produce thine own rhythm.
See,
The patterns of prudence.
Hear,
The motions of motivation.
Taste,
The tides of tenacity.
Smell,
The swirls of success.
Touch,
The waves of wealth.
And pray,
That they promise peace and prosperity;
Not provoke,
Pompous pride.

Poet's Eyes

by Thomas Irvin Duerksen

I hate poetry.
I don't like the rhythm
I don't understand the rhyme.
There's more to life
than poets' words.

But sometimes
I wish I could go back.
Sometimes
I wish I could
love the rhythm
understand the rhyme
Just one more time.

Sometimes
I wish I could see
once more
The world
Through the poet's eyes.

Memories of Me: Faces & Names by Dittes

17

Faces & names, faces & names
Songs of innocent childhood games
Fear is forgotten, the future is plain
When it's given a face and a name

Prophecy prophecy, signs found in space
Glaring predictions all over the place
Nightmares that come in the night leave no trace
When they're given a name and a face

Faces & names, faces & names
Fear that keeps pounding away in my veins
Nothing is different, yet nothing's the same
Till your future has faces & names

Thinking of you every hour of the day.
Months upon end never knowing the way
To find out if your love is as true as you say--
What emotions would your face betray?

Everywhere pictures of your faceless face,
Signs with your nameless name cover this place
Only a letter signed, "Your friend always,"
 Is it too late to love?
 Too late to embrace?

Faces & names, faces & names
So much to answer, so much to explain
So much of love that is washed down the drain
Till we give it a face and a name.

Faces & names, faces & names
Somebody somewhere is tired of games
Somehow there's something in love more than pain
And someone with a face and a name.

**like humans, and widen with understanding
by Adrienne Cox**

like humans, and widen with understanding.

for each person. They are individual

me. I see countless paths, one

one must travel. Not for

narrow way, a fine route

insist on one

They

The Shot

by Sabine Vatel

Marjorie first noticed how hot it was in the room. She pulled her t-shirt away from her chest so some air would flow on her. It was noisy, too. The scolding and reassuring voices of parents, the wailing and laughter of children, and the chreech of metal chairs being pulled on the linoleum blended with the buzz in her ears. She touched her ears. They were hot. She held on to Manmi's hand, careful not to touch the strangers surrounding them.

They approached one of the tables behind which a nurse was sitting. She gave them a quick smile while lifting her hand toward a chair. Manmi sat down and Marjorie stood beside her. Marjorie glanced at the lady holding the baby. The lady sat next to the table nearby. There was another nurse and she was holding a syringe. Baby didn't seem to notice. It had fat cheeks and looked cross-eyed. Marjorie wondered if it was a girl or a boy. It suddenly smiled. Marjorie told herself that whatever it was, it was very silly. Its smile widened and Marjorie grinned.

It made chirping sounds and pulled its mother's hair. Marjorie figured the lady holding it was its mother. When the nurse pinched its shoulder, Baby looked at her then at its mother and at the nurse again. When the needle pierced its white skin, a dumb smile lingered on its pudgy lips. All at once, it frowned, turned red in the face and jerked its body. And it cried and cried. . .

"Marjorie?" Manmi impatiently shook Marjorie's shoulder. Manmi's voice softened. "What's the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing," Marjorie lied. "Nothing, Manmi."

Manmi looked at her for a long time and had to turn away because the nurse was asking something. "Her full name. . ." she asked again.

"Marjorie Lea Merime," Manmi said.

"Four feet eight inches, eighty pounds. . ." the nurse continued as she read the paper before her. Manmi nodded and shot glances toward Marjorie who stood straight and tried to look brave.

Baby was laughing again. In the corner of her eyes, Marjorie saw the lady with Baby in her arms get up and leave. Someone else was taking their place. Marjorie turned her head. It was a girl who looked her age. Before Marjorie could turn away, their eyes met. And locked. The girl had grey eyes like the sky sometimes when it's about to rain hard. She was skinny and kind of lanky like Domi. Except the girl was skinnier and short like Marjorie. She had a square face with lots of honey colored hair on top. Her hair was gath-

ered to the side but didn't seem to want to stay tied. A strand fell across her face. The girl abruptly pushed it away before shoving her fists deep into her pants pockets. Her lips were a thin line. As she and Marjorie looked at each other, her pale eyebrows arched upward. Marjorie liked the way her eyes grew big and wide, and couldn't help smiling. The girl smiled too. She was missing some teeth in the front. A heavy hand fell on her shoulder, and she looked up at the plump lady behind her. Her mother, maybe, Marjorie thought. The plump lady and Manmi saw each other and nodded their heads in each other's direction. "You know them?" Manmi whispered.

Before Marjorie could answer, the nurse asked Manmi, "Will you hold her?"

Marjorie jumped on Manmi's lap. Manmi stretched out her long legs. Marjorie felt her warm breath on her neck. "Oh," Manmi said lightly, "she's a big girl."

"Hum." The nurse said politely as she shook a tiny bottle. Marjorie cringed inside. Grown-ups only called her a big girl when she was expected to do something really unpleasant. Nothing fun like riding her bicycle to the store. She wasn't big, then. She had to be particularly big when Lele had made her take the purge. She couldn't swallow the thick, smelly oil. She had managed to swallow enough that she had spent the day running to the bathroom and cursing Lele, and her stupid oil. The nurse was taking cotton balls out of a box. Marjorie wondered if tasting and smelling the purge was worse than getting a shot. She decided to forget about the sickening purge. Forget that she was here in this clinic, that the room was too hot, that she was getting a shot, that she was scared, that, that. . . . But she couldn't be scared. Otherwise the nurse would think Manmi was a liar.

The nurse grabbed Marjorie's arm. Marjorie shivered. Manmi held her tighter. Marjorie wanted to tell her she only shook because the nurse's hand was so cold. But she didn't dare speak or move. Suppose the needle slipped and hit her heart. The nurse rubbed the top of her arm, and it felt wet, and quickly dried. The smell of alcohol flooded Marjorie's nostrils. The smell was strong and made her eyes tear, but she liked that. The nurse pulled out the needle. Marjorie's brain screamed. She looked down at Manmi's legs. Manmi wasn't wearing stockings like she usually did when she went to teach at the University. Her legs were brown with shades of gold and smooth looking. The nurse pinched Marjorie's arm. Help, God. Lele said that calling God made things less scary.

"You will only feel a little sting, Marjorie." The nurse said.

Liar, Marjorie thought. Her eyes roamed around in the room. They

fell on grey eyes again. Their intensity startled Marjorie. The girl with the honey hair grabbed her shoulder and squinted her eyes. Marjorie nodded, and as the needle went through her flesh she closed her eyes shut. She thought she might cry like Baby. Before she could, it was over.

"She has tough skin," the nurse said. And she said Marjorie was a good patient.

Marjorie thought that Manmi would say she really was a big girl, a good girl. She didn't, and Marjorie shrugged her shoulder and told herself that if she hadn't been a big girl, a good girl, Manmi would have told her. As they left the room, Marjorie looked around. But the girl with the honey hair and the grey eyes was no longer there.

Rush Hour

by Randal Gilliam

Time she is your mistress
time she is my master
Got no time for foolishness
got to do it faster

See me in the front glass
see you in the back
Won't catch me on the next pass
we're on a different track

Velocity is a virtue
patience makes you poor
I'll be walking on Park Avenue
when you're walking out your door

So part with the poses
and push to the power
Run over the roses
it's rush hour

Complete Coverage by Adrienne Cox

Half a wo rd
Half a sen tence
Half a para graph
Half a sto ry

Half a vi ew
Half the pic ture
Half the lig ht
Half a li fe

Half the tru th
Half the under standing

Maybe I'm Not by Randal Gilliam

See the old man, on the corner
now he sees me
Sees a scorner

Holds high words, he shows to save me
mumbling mourner
He's just a crazy

Amalekites at a traffic light
his hands fall not
He has to fight

Thinks fervant feelings, what we've all got
wonder who's right
Maybe I'm not

Roadside Decay

by Adrienne Cox

A street musician you gaily admired;
He with recorder in hand
offered melodies reaching, longing.

Cap's outstretched hands before him,
holding few silver, much copper,
sheltered melodies reaching, longing.

Dark eyes filling desirous pits,
leaping for more and falling again,
formed melodies reaching, longing.

Delicate fingers, no callous you saw,
covering silent holes for silent ears,
touched melodies reaching, longing.

The lean body's sole shield:
old, soiled strips of want and wear
reeked melodies reaching, longing.

Large feet, solid foundation to you,
rubbing raw blisters, soothing scarred sores,
trampled melodies reaching, longing.

Sorrow's cavity, 'mid knashing teeth,
biting cracking lips, tasting blood,
devoured melodies reaching, longing.

Freedom's Fort

by Julia Kim

Soft, sweet words ooze sluggishly in my ears
As my love endeavors to dismantle my wall of wrath.
I build up block-by-block in solid granite slabs
The walls of rock that begin to engulf me in immenseness and
depth.

Betrayed successively,
The mask of my lover's beguilement becomes as transparent as a
young woman's summer skirt when doused by the ocean's waters.

I will feign innocence no longer,
Too much pain was exposed before the walls were raised;
And now, with its construction complete,
I feel shielded in its periphery.

And there I will remain,
Away from destruction.
Away from You.

Children by R. L. Mitzelfelt

Sitting in their small houses.
Staring at their large parents.

Wondering what will happen.
Craving attention
The way a vulture craves rotting flesh.

Surviving in that jungle.
Growing through another day.

Listening with imagined ear trumpets
To Mom and Dad fight and yell.

And their pain grows larger as they do.

Heirlooms

by Eric Rochester

When I was fifteen, I visited my mother in the hospital for the first time. She sat up and welcomed me, saying, "Hello, princess." I gave her flowers, which she smelled as I talked of what we would do when she was home.

Everyday after school I walked or rode my bike the six blocks to the hospital. In eight months, I'd be able to drive myself there, but Momma had said that she wouldn't be in the hospital that long.

Daddy used to come with me, but after a month, he quit visiting her. Two weeks later, he never mentioned her. Once, he sent me to my room for talking about her.

I remember one visit, a week after he punished me, when I watched my mother lie in the hospital bed, a spidery, thin-skinned, pile of bones in the middle of a knot of wires, gadgets, drips, and IVs.

"I went shopping yesterday after I saw you." I felt ashamed and unsure of myself talking to her. "I didn't buy anything."

Momma glanced at me.

"I made this dress in home-ec class," I said.

Her voice murmured.

"It's not very good, really," I answered what I imagined she had said.

I stopped. Momma's silence embarrassed me. I sat beside her and stared at my lap.

Just before I blurted another stupid comment, Momma's hand crawled across the sterile linen bedspread and up the railing to take hold of my wrist. I leaned back, repulsed, then blushed at my reaction. Her lips moved, stretched, then closed until she found the strength to make the words reality.

"Thank you." Momma's voice was remarkably strong.

"It's nothing. When you're home and everything's all right, you can take me shopping."

Momma squeezed my wrist. "No. Thank you for coming. You didn't have to."

I patted her hand. Deep down, I hated my Daddy for making me visit her alone. But I kept that a secret, even from myself.

Momma continued, "You kept me company." She smiled and her hand fluttered over her breast. "Thank you."

"It's okay, Momma."

She finally took her hand away. "You've talked so much. It's my turn today." My mother never talked. But when she did, I listened.

"When I was a little older than you, my mother was in the hospital with this." She raised a hand and swooped it down her body before letting it droop into her lap.

I got a romantic thrill to think that I would probably have what my Gramma (whom I had never known) had had and my Momma had now. In my dreams, though, I was cured by a handsome young doctor, whom I would marry and raise lots of kids with.

I pulled my thoughts back to my mother.

"I used to visit her, and she would tell me stories about when she was a girl. She also told me that I would die like this."

Momma reached for her glass of water with the straw in it, and I helped her to get a drink. After a moment, she continued. "I'm going to tell you a story." Momma swallowed, then went on.

"I almost didn't marry your father. I wonder sometimes what it would be like if I hadn't, but I try not to think of that too much.

"I met another man at a party six weeks before your father's and my wedding. His name was Henry, and he was a friend of a friend of mine who was home from med school for the summer. We had a whirl-wind romance. He sent me cards and flowers and wined and dined me.

"I hoped that Henry would be able to cure me once I got sick with what my mother had died of. But I never wanted to hurt your father, and I was careful so he wouldn't know.

"I almost told him, though, to call off the wedding. Then I found out that Henry had a girlfriend at med school, a nurse or something, whom he was engaged to. The next time he called, I told your Grampa to tell Henry that I didn't want to talk to him. Henry didn't ask why, just hung up. I was listening on the upstairs phone. Then I knew that it was true about his fiancée and all, and I went to my room."

"Then what happened?" I asked.

Momma looked at me. "Then I married your father." She sighed. "I don't expect you to understand." She looked old and tired.

"I don't regret the time I spent with Henry, but I do sometimes wonder what would have happened if I had called off the wedding."

That night, I thought about the story. Momma was right, I didn't understand it.

The next day, I went back to see Momma, but they had moved her into a new room. I told Daddy. He already knew. He said we'd go see her

tomorrow.

The next day, she didn't tell any stories. She said a few onion-paper thin, rustling sentences. And she told me not to forget her story.

Daddy sent me home. He would stay the night with her. However, the next morning, he was home. I yelled at him for leaving Momma. He just stood over the sink and cried.

Today, as I write this, I'm five years older than Momma was then, but I'm dying too. I married late, a doctor. I'm a patient in the hospital where he works. He's treating me, as best as he knows how, I'm sure. It's not enough. I hold my tongue, but he knows I blame him for this disease and for all the late nights I spent alone while he was on call.

I have no daughter to visit me or for me to pass secrets on to. When my body dies, I die, and this disease with it.

I don't regret marrying the doctor, but I wonder about some of the boys--I thought they were men then--whom I almost married. I remember one especially, an artist, who loved kids. He couldn't have saved my life, but he could have made it worth living.

A Dismissal

by Adrienne Cox

My piano teacher loved to go to church.
She played, sang, prayed, spoke
with unequaled enthusiasm.

She said of her good, holy church,
"It's everyone's haven 'til we get to heaven."

This church, especially, seemed a genuine haven,
for it prided itself on friendliness--
a true, hospitable place.

Their member hosted dinners, games
and outings for all who would attend.

The ministers on stage smiled
full, understanding smiles
while preaching, teaching love.

My teacher sat down front every week.
She seemed to be a valued member.

Then, one cold, icy afternoon
she got a divorce.
And the church cancelled her.

Perspective
by Adrlenne Cox

What if
it's all
a lie?

What if
there is no
being above
the sky?

What if
we've invented
someone who
answers all
questions?

What if
we've created
an immortal
king to grant
immortality,
to conquer
Death.

Then, we
wouldn't have
to see our
true habitat,
its inhabitants--

ignorant,
empty,
barren,

destitute,
helpless,
worthless,

despairing,
struggling,
wretching,

wrecking,
wounding,
writhing,

dying.

My Shadow

by Thomas Irvin Duerksen

You say I'm
scared
of my
shadow,
But if you
knew
My shadow,
You would
understand.

The Bitter Meal

by Julia Kim

Gnaw on the wood of despondency,
Let slivers of doubt cut your tongue.
Down slides the blood-filled anxiety,
To the pits of depression and dung.
In swirl insults and some gossipings,
Out comes the result with no lies.
If what goes in causes upset and tears to flow,
What comes out will attract only flies.

