

2002

Legacy 2002

Southern Adventist University

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Leg·a·cy *n.* 1. money or property
bequeathed to another by will.
2. something handed down from an
ancestor or a predecessor or
from the past

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Lit·er·ar·y *adj.* 1. of, relating
to, or dealing with literature.
2. relating to writers or the
profession of literature.

Win·ner *n.* one that wins, esp. a victor in sports or a notably successful person.

Poetry:


Alexa Merickel	<i>Apathy Wipes</i>	7
Becky Gerrans	<i>Joshua Tree</i>	17

Prose:

Kelly McAuliffe	<i>Losing Some</i>	37
Stephen Lundquist	<i>Fingernails</i>	29

People's Choice:

Gabriel Henton	<i>Sage</i>	11
Kelly McAuliffe	<i>Losing Some</i>	37



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Po·et·ry *n.* **1.** the art or work of a poet. **2.** a poem regarded as forming a division of literature. **3.** the poetic works of a given author, group, nation, or kind. **4.** a piece of literature written in meter; verse.

I am a goddess among goddesses,
Who reign among gods.
I am a woman among women,
Who educate themselves among men.
I am a sister among sisters,
Who excel among brothers.
I am a girl among girls,
Who play among boys.

Convenient! Quick!
Pull the tab,
Wipe away your spills.
New! Travel size!
Fits in your purse,
Your pocket,
Your life.
Now easier than ever
To forget those little accidents
That spot and stain
Your new clothes
And make you feel dirty.
Strong enough to handle even the toughest cases
Of neglect, and abuse
And dirty men saying dirty things in dirty cardboard boxes
beside dirty streets,
Starving alongside a bastard child,
The mother
Raped alongside the road.

Enjoy your life!
Forget your cares.
Improved formula won't cause irritation.
Now moisturized for your comfort.

Depth of center crowd, center stage,
frenzy of a pulsing mob
arms, legs, waists abbreviate
into claustrophobic knots.

Forced to give ground,
sway, this and that way,
the squeeze, intense,
more, more,
without relent.

Shove against them,
dense, intimate demons,
fused to sweaty flesh.
Focus in, and see them form faces,
fierce eyeballs, scorching from inches away.

Fling one hand up, above, floating free
of the drag, pull, lug.
Struggle to breathe in
all my lungs can take, and scream,

Mercy!

one moment
one thought captured to be experienced
shocking
crude
sometimes ugly
a statement
an observation
the briefest feeling
a glimpse made into an event
the tiniest wisp of the ultimate
balance
confusion
beauty
profounding the simple
the minuscule made relevant
simplified immensity
a voice for the unaudible

Art.

I fall
 from my nightmare
 at the top
 of the sky
As I awake
 I begin to fly
 free from the snare
 of your liquid cool
I hear His call
 He catches me
 in
 the
 midst
 of
 my
 fall...

The smell of warm sage
Hangs heavily in the air.

My mother is cooking white-sauce again.

Across the room, I numbly sit,
Drifting in thought.

If today brought wisdom
Will it linger until tomorrow?

Wise is the fool who sees what he is,
But foolish is the wizened one who doesn't act.

If I spent three months filming every night
In orc prosthetics squishing from the rain
And armor (helmet narrowing my sight),
And Viggo kicked me in the ribs again—
Or if I slipped along the rocky stream
Still thawing from the winter, chasing fish
(Though non-existent, real within my dream),
And this cold pain fulfilled my deepest wish,
And if I squirmed in white wetsuits, my voice
Straining and hoarse—Or if I broke two toes
Kicking a helmet and still made the choice
To run the hero's chase so no one knows—
If I would strive for Christ as these have striven,
What power to His gospel would be given!

40ish.

Graying hair and
a green Suburban.

Paused at a red light
somewhere between
picking up the kids and
the groceries.

Head back,
radio blaring,

she shouts out the words
as the girl she used to be
catches up with the woman she has become
for the final chorus of
“Satisfaction.”

Your Fingers traced a flower,
the universal pattern for
ugly sofas.
Your voice shook
(just a little)
as you asked me why
we always hurt
those we love the most—
as if I would know
the answer.
But I was lost in my own thoughts
On my own flowered couch.

The sleeping guards ignore us as
blood...blood
 We crowd into a garden plot.
blood...blood
 Our prey cannot behold us, but
blood...blood
 He knows us and our presence well.
blood...blood

Now our united chanting brings
Blood. Blood.
 A cloak of weighted shadow down.
Blood. Blood.
 Decayed and outstretched wings unseen
Blood. Blood.
 Seal off the meager beams of hope.
Blood. Blood.

For we are many, ringed around
BLOOD! BLOOD!
 A failing form that falls upon
BLOOD! BLOOD!
 A rock while our immortal master
BLOOD! BLOOD!
 Comes to crush the Son of Man!
 WAIT!

Still He pleads with His God,
 And He speaks, "Abba, please."
 And His garments are stained
 With His anguish and blood

I saw a mallard the other day.
He mourned the death of his brother.
It was murder by car.
His brown mate comforted him with her wing.
He sat under that guardrail for two more days.
He refused to eat. He refused to swim.

Someone had sped by.
Someone had hit a tiny bump.
Just a moment of slowing down.
Just a quick glance in the mirror.
“Must have been nothing important.”
Not a very long thought about life.

gnarled fingers
clench
the cracked cliff
edge
bent and
twisted
limbs impossibly
ancient
brittle hair
suddenly
gilded by the prehistoric
glory
of a newborn
day

Impacted? No, I don't have that problem.
 What of it? *Do you live?* I am living.
Or partly living? Is it important?
 What I think? What I do? What I don't do?
 A drop in the ocean covered with scars.
Am I a brick for your church, son of man?
 My church is a hovel, lonely and weak.
 Will it fall? *It will without foundation.*
 Foundation? In this waste land? In this sea?
The Wind blows where it will. Build on the wind?
Will you drown and rise again, son of man?
 Build on Spirit and on Fire and on Truth?
 Fire burned this Church to the ground, ashes three
 Wind blew, seals snapped, the chief cornerstone caught
 Fire again and burns in the most Holy Place.
 This Fire, Your Brick, never falls, never breaks.
 Smashed, ground to powder your soul will be.
 In Eternal Fire, fallen upon Truth,
 Consuming the water on the altar.

so I run this road alone a lot
I like the sound of my feet
Pounding a few steps closer
And the whipping of my wild hair
Real and ready to be fixed

On this dirt, again I hear the poetry
My creativity, humble as it may be
Feels the breath of the Muse
Laboring like my own

Some days I pass through miles of countryside
Daises, willows, chestnuts, foxes, fog
Then...somehow, the sun bleeds through the hourglass
mountains
And an invisible dagger approaches to pierce my side

I glance around blindly only to hear my midnight steps
Thump thumping in the forest
Vulnerable to trip on these growing roots
And I wonder if this jog was all for naught

Then quietly I raise my head
And see your shimmering promise in the sky,
You had to remind me of the reasons
And I return once again to
Sand, dirt, pavement, rock
And You

Wispy song, fragile as a life,
cling to my thoughts a while longer.
Swell up a bit, proud that you are not
captured behind bars and measures.
Swoop down low, scale to soprano,
and enslave me with your theme,
so that all I am is all you beat
in steady rhythm, rhythm, rhyme.

Prose *n.* **1.** ordinary speech or writing, without meterical structure. **2.** commonplace expression or quality.

Es·say *n.* **1.** a short literary composition on a single subject, usu. presenting the personal view of the author. **2.** something resembling a composition.

Short Story *n.* a short piece of prose fiction, having few characters and aiming at unity of effect.

Europe would be a dominantly French-speaking continent today if only Napoleon could have found a way to instill in his army the fighting instinct instilled in women. No, this is not a feminist discourse, only a commentary on a savage streak I've noticed in females. Woman is all peace and grace until her hearth is threatened. And it doesn't take the threat of an armored division at the screen door to militarize a housewife; all it takes is a rodent.

There isn't much a female won't do in defense of her nest. Take, for instance, my friend Shelley, a petite music major with a pixie haircut and singsong voice. Last week she killed a mouse with Windex. I heard the story directly from Shelley. She was washing dishes in her pink and blue kitchen when a mouse ran across the linoleum. Her instinctive thought was, "I have to kill it." There was nothing nearby she could whack the mouse with or fling at it. The only object available was a bottle of Windex. So she grabbed the bottle, set the nozzle to "stream," squinted down the bright blue plastic barrel, and squeezed the trigger—repeatedly. That mouse suffered from the most atrocious chemical warfare known to vermin. Dripping with bluish chemicals, it could only squeak its last through clouds of toxins and perish. While wartime correspondent mice sent frantic communications to their headquarters announcing the latest terrorist attack, Shelley set the Windex down on the floral tablecloth and dusted off her hands. (Actually, Shell felt a little remorseful after this incident. When she took the mouse outside, it started shivering in the cold, so she poured warm water on it and tried feeding it crumbled up saltines. The mouse still died.) What moves a peace-loving female to such aggression, anyway? It is home defense.

Besides Shelley, one of the best examples I have found of this defensive instinct is my own mother. She is solely responsible for the low population of squirrels in the woods surrounding our house. I used to be embarrassed to admit it,

but my mom can pop off a squirrel at two hundred yards from our back porch door. She keeps a loaded shotgun beside the oven. Our family first acquired this weapon so she could shoot rats off of the compost pile. When my friends found out about the Annie Oakley in my mom, I was the brunt of every redneck joke invented. But now I realize my mom is defending her hearth, so I just sit back in my overalls and smile around my toothpick.

You may be skeptical as to the truth of these stories, but I promise that each one is real as the squirrel tails hanging in my woodshed. Some of you will still doubt the protective savagery of women. You are the ones who have been tainted by the enduring stereotype brought on by centuries of girls screaming on chairs at imaginary creepy-crawlies. I assure you it's all an act. Miss Muffet wasn't scared away; she was only running to the kitchen to get a fly swatter. ■

Teachers are gods. Surrounded by inferiors they have absolute control over their domain. They can contort souls into agony, or cradle gentle awakenings. A cruel taskmaster will harbor dishonesty and a fear of authority. A wise teacher will cultivate critical thinking and challenge the mind. With cognitive temples built on the backs of Plato and Rousseau, sacrifices of apples with scribbled homework, and the supreme power of the Red Pen, teachers are modern gods, thundering in the halls of school.

With this divinity comes responsibility. Teachers control the future. Through our lectures we guide learning. Through assignments we inoculate or arouse interest. To begin to understand our eternal influence every teacher must read *The Chocolate War* by Robert Cormier. In this story we witness the consequences as Beelzebub and Hades scorch the ethics of an entire school. We must learn from the sins of Trinity, the hellish school of Cormier, in order to become wise and rule as gods worthy of the title "Teacher."

The first vision of the high god of Trinity is a far cry from the romantic grandeur of Milton's fallen Satan. "On the surface he [Brother Leon] was one of those pale, ingratiating kind of men who tiptoed through life on small, quick feet." Brother Leon is a man who is always described as having "a mustache of moistness on his upper lip," bulgy, watery eyes, and a damp forehead (22). But what makes him an enemy to the student body is not the putrid perspiration but his pathetic personality. "Smirking, sarcastic. His thin, high voice venomous. Instead of fangs, he used his teacher's pointer, flicking out here, there, everywhere. He watched his class like a hawk, suspicious, searching out cheaters or daydreamers, probing for weaknesses...and then exploiting those weaknesses" (23). When a god rejects his mission, he mutates into a demon. Brother Leon is a warning to all teachers. He is a promise to those who forget their responsibility and turn their backs on divine duty.

This divine duty is to share. The more knowledge we sift, the more we realize the futility. From our thrones on Mt. Olympus we fathom the ocean of information and grasp the impossibility of drinking it all. We must use our wisdom to guide our flocks to the most important waters. The refreshing draughts of character must be discovered amidst the sludge of dishonor. Our goal is not only to give knowledge, but also to share how to apply that knowledge. Satan connived to exploit his angels for selfishness, and he lost heaven. Brother Leon enslaved his students for his private plans, and he plunged Trinity into turmoil. Every teacher has the power to surround students with light or darkness. There are two sides in every war. The prophecy of Cormier bears the everlasting aftermath.

With the thunder of Thor and the chariots of Surya, the gods of the classroom possess the supremacy to spawn warriors of light. The damp halls of Trinity reek with ineffective teachers who care nothing for their students. A generation of seekers discover only disdain and open rejection. The result is reminiscent to the Romantic Revolution, where Beauty discards and tramples its Maker. When the gods of learning thwart the pure search for light, darkness, bathed in the tempting tones of poison, offers the escape of false religion and rejection of truth.

When belief dies, do the gods perish? No, the gods live on as silent observers to a preventable catastrophe. The hero of *The Chocolate War*, Jerry Renault, lies bleeding, a victim of stepping out of line, of thinking outside the chocolate box, of not following the crowd. Brother Leon was at the fight that crushed this boy's spirit, but he did nothing. And by doing nothing Leon taught. This is the lesson Jerry learned: "They tell you to do your thing, but they don't mean it. They don't want you to do your thing, not unless it happens to be their thing, too. It's a laugh, a fake. Don't disturb the Universe..." (187). The cost of a god turned demon is the

soul of one boy, a soul who will always see the world in darkness.

Teachers are gods. ■

Works Cited

Cormier, Robert. The Chocolate War. New York: Dell, 1974.

Grant Graves

Raindrops pelted the windshield and the defrost blasted warm air into my pickup as I pulled into Fleming Plaza. The radio showed twenty-seven minutes until sundown. Leaving my truck running, I scurried into the post office. It was filled with Adventists frantically trying to finish last minute Friday afternoon errands. I reached into my post office box and pulled out a *Time* magazine and a crisp, white envelope.

As I pulled onto University Drive, I glanced curiously at the envelope. The upper-left corner revealed no return address.

I dashed through the rain and burst through the door of my apartment. Water pooled on the floor as I eagerly tore into the envelope. I slipped out the type-written note. It said simply, "there are more where these came from." "What is that supposed to mean?" I thought. "More white envelopes? More cryptic notes?" I gazed into the envelope, hoping for another clue. What I did find only added to my confusion. In the envelope were three perfectly clipped fingernails. But not just any fingernails. Sexy red fingernails. "Who could these possibly belong to?" I asked out loud while pacing the room. "What could this mean?" Maybe it was a threat on my life. Maybe someone wanted to be my wife. Eventually I grew tired of pacing and crouched down on the edge of the sofa, staring at the fingernails. I held them up to the light and turned them in my hand. Desperate for a clue, I smelled them. The scent immediately brought back memories from days gone by. A second sniff confirmed my suspicion. Sure enough, Special K loaf. The owner of the fingernails had clearly been fixing a casserole shortly before she sent them to me.

My mind raced as I assembled the story. "I'll bet these belong to a girl on campus who loves to cook Special K loaf. Apparently she knows I am a Theology major. And

I bet she has blonde hair and brown eyes. Best of all, she is stalking me. She wants to spend the rest of her life with me. But why the fingernails?"

That night I launched Operation Red Fingernails. I was determined to find a girl with three fingernails that were shorter than the rest. I wore a suit and an extra shot of cologne for vespers. At 7:45 I left, determined to arrive early. Remembering the story of Cinderella and the glass slipper, I slipped the fingernails into my shirt pocket. I didn't want just anyone to claim ownership of them. The true owner's fingers would be a perfect match of size, shape, and color.

The girl handing out worship cards caught my eye as I strolled into the lobby. A look at her hands revealed bright red fingernails. I sauntered over to her and asked for a card. As she handed it to me, I squinted for optimum viewing. She wasn't the one. All of her fingernails were the same length.

After sitting in a pew for several minutes, I began to feel overwhelmed by the enormity of my mission. Hundreds of girls were pouring through the door, and it seemed like all of them were wearing red nail polish. I stared at their fingers as they filed by. "This is ridiculous," I thought. "I'll never find her." Suddenly I had an idea. I went to the door and began playing the role of "greeter." Like a good politician, I shook the hand of every man, woman and child who walked through the door. I even kissed a few babies. And every time I greeted a girl with red fingernails, I extended the length of the handshake just long enough to get a close view of the length of her fingernails.

Soon the musicians took the stage, and vespers began. I flopped down into a pew. I had failed. I was too distracted to sing. Throughout the service, all I could think about was the owner of the red fingernails.

As the service closed, I searched the crowd once again. I wove between the little clumps of people who had gathered to chat. Then I spotted her. She was standing near the back like she was waiting for someone. I walked cautiously toward her. Sure enough, she had red fingernails that matched her dress perfectly. She was even more beautiful than I had imagined. As I approached her, she smiled. Somewhere above me I heard angels singing. Mental images danced through my mind: the two of us shopping for a minivan together; the two of us at Disneyland, with two kids hanging from each arm; the two of us sitting on the beach enjoying retirement together in the year 2046. "Did you get what I sent you?" she asked. Before I had a chance to reply, I heard a deep voice directly behind me. "Yes," he said. "Thanks for the email." She stepped past me and embraced him.

I ran outside into the darkness and didn't stop until I reached my apartment. I crawled into bed, but sleep would not come. I stared at the ceiling. How would I ever find her? I had been so close. What now? Maybe I could tack posters up all over campus. Or maybe I could systematically call every number in the joker, asking for the girl with red fingernails.

The telephone interrupted my thoughts. My mom's cheery voice greeted me. "Hi, Stephen." She was laughing into the telephone. "I have the funniest story to tell you. Your dad and I think it is just hilarious." I wasn't in the mood for a funny story, but I humored her.

"What happened?" I inquired.

"Well, I needed to mail two letters at the post office the other night. I was going to send you three twenty dollar bills with a note that said, 'there are more where these came from.'" Now I was listening.

She continued, "Then I was going to send the medical lab three of my fingernails, so they could test them for

calcium deficiency so would I know if I need to continue taking my calcium supplements.” She started laughing uncontrollably, barely able to continue her story. “The lab called this afternoon and asked my why I had sent them sixty dollars along with my medical information. Apparently in my rush to mail the letters before the post office closed I mixed up the envelopes, which means you will probably get my fingernails in the mail within the next few days. Isn’t that hilarious?” The phone trembled in my hand. “Stephen? Hello? Are you there?”

“Yeah mom,” I replied. “That is horribly funny. Great story.” ■

I'm frustrated. I can't write about it. Talk about it. Think about it. It's this annoying itch that surfaces when my day suddenly slows down; the reading of novels stops, the lectures cease, the conversations dwindle, and the rain is pounding outside our quaint English paned windows with the dusty red curtains. And I sit on my bed making faces from parts I cut out of magazines, pasting them into people that look strangely like me, with different noses, eyes, lips, cheeks, and sipping tea and feeling somewhat melancholy and content. Only then the itching begins.

It starts in my toes, working it's way up my well-bundled body (for our room is always cold—word is the mansion would burn to the ground in six minutes flat, and no one wants to take a chance) and finally emerging in crimson glory on my own face, flushed and red, the color of those ugly curtains I've been meaning to take down since we always leave them open anyway because they look out on a secluded meadow with green grass and trees and deer and sometimes when I can't sleep and it's 4 am I look out those paned windows and see six or seven of them in the early morning mist creeping ever so silently beneath me and I fall back asleep quite peacefully to know that there are deer awake while I sleep.

This itch though, it's an uncomfortable feeling, rather feverish and urgent and demanding that I jump in a cold shower, run and roll in cool gooey mud, do SOMETHING besides be here. So I turn up my music, take a journal out, stare at a blank page, and put it away. I pick up the phone to call someone, but can't think of whom, so I put the receiver back in its place. I get up and pad across the hall to a friend's room and get on the Internet. Only a message from my mom. I hit the "compose" button, but leave the "To" column empty and eventually delete the message. There is nothing to say, and the itch won't go away anyway.

Most days it's under control. I keep it wrapped up tightly in all those clothes of mine, bundled beneath scarves and wool sweaters and jackets and mittens. It comes out when my clothes come off, though. When I start my day off at the gym every morning, it's there; it burns inside as I sweat and run and lift and pull, anything to get it out. If I'm lucky enough, the shower water will be hot by the time I get back (the boiler isn't large enough to give 70 girls a hot shower every morning, something I despise). I go to assembly and vote for some action or another, make a keen comment, listen, sometimes get up front to announce some event or another.

Next is lunch. The social hour. And the itch is still there. I take my tray and begin the process of choosing a table. It feels like grade school all over again. I regard the "Intellectually Untouchable" table, with seniors discussing Milton, politics, Iraq, Buddhism. I don't feel like them today. There's the "Feminist" table (which I'm usually a part of), reciting episodes from the Vagina Monologues and criticizing the latest work of Feminist Literature or the way the gymnasium on campus doesn't cater to the women. No, it's too superficial for me today. I walk past the "Loud American" table, "Korean" table, "Yugoslav" table, "Artist's" table, the "We hate the world and everything in it" table, the "Atheist" table (yes, we do have those here, strange as it may seem), and I'm so not in the mood for any of these, because they won't or can't or I won't let them understand this itch, and I don't want to talk about politics or D. Rumsfeld or women's rights or religion or the club scene in London or the financial state of our Student Union or even how inedible the cafeteria food is today and everyday, so I walk right on past and dump my food into the recycle bin that I and the rest of the Green Team (our environmental group on campus) set up last semester and feel at least a little

better in some morbid way that I'm contributing to someone's compost pile.

And so I head to the lab and plan my next adventure while I wait for class. Where shall I go next? And there's so many places and so little time (only a lifetime?) to see so many things and be so many people that I start to panic, and I can't get rid of this itch, so I leave and go up those four flights of ornate wooden stairs to my room and pull out Yancy's "What's So Amazing About Grace?" and try to read and meditate and digest what's really important in my life for 20 minutes, and then I realize I'm late for class. And so I sit for the next 5 hours in lectures—sometimes the professor has a thick German accent, and I have to concentrate on every syllable he utters to understand what he's trying to tell me about the importance of Egyptian influence on Byzantine Art.

Now it's time for a meal again. I go to dinner. Sit with the Feminists and the gay guys who are sympathetic to the cause, or at least feel accepted, and play with my food and eat toast with butter and tea with honey and milk. Next it's choir. And I sing and lose myself and the itch goes away for a while. I feel Handel's concept of God when I sing his notes of Hallelujah for the Europe tour, and I think, "Well, at least I can see all those places before..." Before what? Before I leave England and go back to... Go back to what? Before I land a 9 to 5 job and can't afford to take off any time I want and go to Barcelona or Paris. Before I get married and start a family with a house and a neighborhood and a church and the responsibility to be an adult. Before I wake up and I'm 65 with grandchildren and wonder where all the time went. Before I die? And the itch starts again.

And choir is over and I've made the necessary rounds to rooms and friends and made small talk and intellectual talk and done more reading of novels, more writing of essays, more, more, more. And it's late and the moon is shining in

those paned windows with those cursed red curtains and I'm sitting on my bed with a book I can't seem to finish, the first book I haven't just devoured in a matter of days. The only book I feel incapable of understanding, of studying, of doing a presentation on, an essay on, a thesis on. The only book I've known about since childhood, and carried into adulthood, still not understanding its secrets. I open this book, and suddenly feel small and quiet and not at all like the 20-year-old college student I've become in the last year. I begin to read, with the rain beating outside and the wind making that strange noise through the large pine near my windows and the deer somewhere down below making me feel safe and I read and I read and suddenly realize, the itch is gone. ■

I noticed her long before she glanced in my direction. Every blond hair in place, clothes straight out of an Abercrombie catalogue. She asked for a salad and added a bottle of water to her tray. Turning from the cashier, she scanned the cafeteria while the seconds ticked by—longing for a wave, a smile, a friend in the crowd. I had always thought it strange that a girl so pretty should have so few friends.

Our eyes met, and though I immediately dropped mine to the book of poetry open on my lap, I knew it was too late. I could feel the relief washing across her face in that moment of recognition from across the room. I exhaled slowly and awaited her approach.

“Hey Liv,” she chirped, settling into the seat across from me, rolling her eyes and beginning to recount the horrors of *Chemistry For Everyday Living*. I wanted to ignore her, to continue with my reading until she fell victim to my accusing silence and quieted, left. But her swimming pool eyes and her voice—straining around the edges—pleaded for acknowledgement. And my heart, despite my desperate attempts to hold it back, went out to her.

“It’s been awhile Jaime.” I finally spoke, my words coming out harsher than I’d meant them. I smiled slightly to soften the blow and tried again. “How was your weekend?”

“It was great,” she exclaimed, clutching at this offer of conversation. “We went climbing. I actually pulled off a 5-10...with a little help. Seth says it’s cool that I like outdoors stuff—that it’s so much better than amateur plays and coffee houses...” she trailed off, the full weight of what she had said slamming her in the gut. She stared helplessly at me.

“So how is Seth these days? I mean, other than thrilled to be done with theater and lattes?” I regarded her coolly while fighting the urge to run before she told me innocently, tactfully, that Seth was better off without me.

“He’s good,” she began tentatively. “We’re taking things slow, but it’s good.” She glanced up at me, briefly meeting my eyes, gauging my reaction. And then she changed the subject, launching into an overly enthusiastic synopsis of the movie she (and I suppose Seth) had seen the night before.

While she rambled on about the film, my thoughts returned to Seth. Seth, who I had called my best friend for eight years but had not spoken to in three weeks, who was more comfortable in my house than I was, who knew my favorite songs, what stores I shopped at, and how I took my coffee. Seth, who had finally rejected me for adoring perfection.

Ironically, I had been the first to meet Jaime, a pretty wallflower in my public speaking class. Feeling benevolent, even motherly, I had adopted her, introducing her to my friends and inviting her along on the weekends. And I, caught up in my clouded view of my world and how it worked, hadn’t noticed the shy smiles, the brush of hand against hand, until Seth had already fallen. Until it was too late.

“Uh, Olivia.” The sound of my name jerked me back to the crowded cafeteria. Jaime stood awkwardly, unable to meet my eyes. “I, uh, just wanted to tell you that I’m sorry about what happened. Seth misses you, and,” her voice broke a little, “you were kinda all I had. Isn’t there anyway we could still be friends?”

I wanted to say yes. I wanted to be the bigger person—to tell her that in life you win some and you lose some and you make the best of it. I wanted to hug her and call Seth and find some way to make this mess our relationships had become work. But I couldn’t. And so I looked back down at my book and listened as she walked away. ■

I close my eyes, and my thoughts drift back in time. I suddenly find myself nine years old again, in the backyard of the old rusty, white trailer where we used to live in Churchill County, Nevada. The first thing I notice is the feeling of pure freedom and ignorant bliss that comes with childhood. I feel that, if I want to, I can just flap my arms and fly away. I can feel the soft afternoon breeze blowing my hair around my upturned face. I smile as I breathe in the pungency of the sagebrush growing all around me. Oh, what a wonderful smell!

I hear the annoying cry of magpies as they settle in the thorny Russian olive trees, shaking their long, black-and-white tail feathers. Elsie, our brown-and-black mutt dog, barks loudly in reply and jerks at her chain, wrapping it around a pole. Her father, Bear, just sits quietly in the shade of his doghouse and wags his tail at me. I hear a rustle in the bushes, and a dust-colored jackrabbit hops into view, where he stands for a moment looking at Elsie with disapproval, swiveling one of his long ears in our direction. Then he springs away on his huge hind feet, hopping two or three feet in the air over the sagebrush.

I glance up just in time to see a white pelican overhead. I notice a bold eagle soaring in the distance. I glance at the beckoning Sierra Nevada mountains on the horizon and notice that there is still snow atop their peaks.

I feel movement near my legs, and I look down to see my large brown, black, and white cat Freddie against my legs, meowing for my attention. I reach down to pet his long, fluffy fur and notice coyote tracks nearby. I shiver, thankful that Freddie has learned to jump up on top of the trailer when coyotes are near. I follow the tracks partway up the hill with Freddie lazily following. I'm startled by a rattling sound in a nearby clump of sagebrush. I turn, scoop up Freddie, and run down the hill. I remember all too well the time I had to kill a rattlesnake by dropping a large rock

on its head before it could strike my little sister. Freddie starts to squirm, so I set him down, and he immediately flops over and begins rolling in the dirt, then lies there to soak up the sun.

I wander over to the horse corral, and soon my favorite brown-with-the-one-white-spot-on-his-back quarter horse (whom I have fondly nicknamed Nibbles) trots over to have his ears scratched. I gaze wistfully into his eyes, wishing that he really was mine so I could ride off into the gorgeous Nevada sunset. Suddenly a whistle from my mother brings me back to earth, and I yell back, "What, Mom?"

"Don't forget to feed the sheep."

I reach up for one last pat on Nibble's velvety muzzle and head in the direction of the sheep pen. Today I am actually happy to feed the sheep because it gives me a chance to climb the tall Russian olive tree.

On my way to the sheep pen, I pass the hill with the tall grass, and I can't resist the urge to visit my grass "house." I enter the main room of the "house" and decide I need a new bedroom, so I plop down backwards against one of the "walls" and lie there, knowing that if I stand up now there will be a perfect imprint of my body where I crushed the grass. I roll around to create a "bedroom" of flat grass surrounded by tall grass. Then I jump up to continue my journey to the sheep pen.

I arrive at the sheep pen, and the black ram is there waiting for me. The cream-colored ewe and her lamb stand back to wait for him to eat first. I toss an armful of scratchy hay over the fence and watch him eat. Then, after tossing another armful in for the ewe and lamb, I make my way to the Russian olive behind the pen. I shimmy my way up the tree to my favorite limb, directly above the sheep. There, I pluck leaves from the tree and drop them, watching them float and flutter down like green butterflies, hoping one will land on one of the sheep. Soon I get bored and, noticing that

it is starting to get windy, scramble down the tree to head for the trailer.

The wind picks up, and soon dirt is blowing everywhere. I run down the road toward the trailer with my arms over my head to protect my face from the flying dirt. Soon, I am safely to the door of the trailer. I notice Freddie meowing at the front door and scoop him up on my way in the door. I let him in and just before entering, I brush dirt and hay from my clothing and pull the leaves from my hair. Once I am safely inside, I turn to the window to watch the dust devils form into funnels of dirt blowing tumbleweed all over the yard. The wind howls and shrieks and shakes the trailer.

I shake my head, refocus my eyes, and realize that I am not actually staring out the window but through the window of my memory. I sigh, look around my bedroom, and then glance out the rain-streaked window at the wet, dreary greenery of Tennessee. The lightning strikes and the thunder booms and I lie down and close my eyes to dream yet again of a distant desert afternoon in Nevada. ■

The young lady, head bent so low that the stringy blonde hair hangs in front of her face like limp spaghetti, bustles into the molded-plastic classroom. Realizing that she is several minutes late, she slinks to the back row as low and invisible as possible. Just as she steps past my row, the shabby filaments of hair swing out, and I am given a shocking, clear glimpse of her face. She is smiling. The kind of mischievous grin one would expect to find on a fox with an egg in its jaws.

After class I wander to nowhere, lost in my thoughts, until I stumble into the computer lab. It is completely dark; artists are deathly afraid of the ten a.m. sunlight. The darkness feels comfortable as I make my way through the maze of desks and chairs guided by the force and intimate knowledge of the room to a computer console in the corner. A bump into the table wakes the sleeping computer, which slowly hums to life with the attitude of a disturbed cat, yawning and stretching after its nap.

Once seated the layers of cloth armor fall off without the chilly enemy of winter weather present. I begin the all-important task which brought me here—checking my e-mail. I have none. Which is to say, nothing more than spam. All fluff, no substance. It feels like the description of my life. I suppose I could write to someone. They would probably write back, even happy to hear from me. Other than shedding that ray into their lives, I do not know what the point of writing would be. I am not sure what the point of anything is anymore.

The day continues. I nod off during the next class period. It seems that I only blink, and the clock jumps. As I pack up my virgin notepad I notice my fingernails. The shimmering blue has been slopped around the nail as much as on it. I wonder why I bother to paint my nails. What must people think when they see me?

At lunch I sit, alone as always, at a table by the window. Maybe people are scared to approach because of the blue nails. *More likely*, I think, *it's the perpetual gloomy pallor of my grim countenance*. It has been this way for the last four years...always alone. I have not done anything to change it. I'm ready to leave. I'm ready to leave this place. It doesn't seem like it would be different anywhere else though. I sit surrounded by the familiar faces of complete strangers. I feel like a ghost. All these thoughts flicker intermittently between forkfuls of today's variation of the super-special-soy-loaf that the cafeteria is serving. Just like yesterday. And the day before.

Three bites later the spongy square of the fourth bite slips off the tines of my fork and bounces across the floor, coming to rest under the chair across the table from mine. I bend over and reach under the table to pick it up and bump my head on the table as I jump in startled surprise because four tables away I see the fox-grin girl staring directly at me, still grinning. ■

Casting aside her dog-eared August 1999 issue of *Modern Bride*, Emily closed her eyes and pulled her Winnie the Pooh sheets up to her chin. It would be a good long while before she needed that. Twisting the same strand of bleached blonde hair the way she always did, Emily realized that she didn't actually remember the last time she had been on a date. She had already decided on an ivory-colored, strapless gown and a bouquet of cala lilies. Jackie, Rachel, and Allison had agreed that they would be quite pleased with the green satin dresses she had picked out. After all, it was the type of dress that they could wear again. She had decided that he could pick out the cake—whatever he wanted. Everything was in order, so where was he?

As if looking for an answer, Emily let her eyes wander around the room and out the window. She remembered the wisdom from her favorite movie, *Sleepless in Seattle*: “Your destiny can be your doom.” She figured that was probably true. Meeting the love of your life and finally finding true happiness probably wasn't everything it was cracked up to be. But just in case it was, she grabbed yesterday's newspaper from her nightstand and did something she never thought she'd do—flipped to the personals section. How embarrassing.

Tucking the strand of hair away, she began twisting the silver stud in her left ear as she scanned the columns of cryptic sentence fragments, looking for her dream man. Rolling her eyes at the seventh “sweet, sensitive, good sense of humor” combination, she determined to see what other women like her were looking for—maybe she would find a clue. Halfway down the next page, a banner caught her eye. It said simply, “Bring on the Clowns.”

She squinted her eyes to make sure she'd read it correctly. Yep, “Bring on the Clowns.” With an exaggerated role of her eyes, she calmly folded the paper and

returned it to the nightstand and began venting to Grace, her longsuffering tabby cat.

“Well, of course that’s what it says, Grace! Whoever said that there were still eligible men available was obviously married.” Grace began grooming herself.

“I mean, finally some poor, hapless bachelorette has realized that there is simply no use looking for people who don’t exist. Prince Charming is taken and has left Clowns in his stead. And really, Grace, if Clowns are who we have to choose from, then I guess I had better get used to it.”

“What I *really* wanted was sensitivity, chivalry, and romance, but along with the rest of the single girls in the world, I suppose I’ll have to settle for immaturity, chauvinism, and football. Where *have* all the cowboys gone? Oh well, I guess I’ve just been looking for the wrong thing. Silly me!” she yelled in exasperation. Startled, Grace leapt off of the bed and went to listen from the kitchen.

“Sorry, Grace,” Emily muttered.

Laying her head back on her pillow, she stared at the newspaper and began twisting her earring. Slowly she reached her free hand across the bed and retrieved the paper. Opening it again to the personals page, she ran her hot pink fingernails down the third column, looking for the Clown entry. Finding it, she grabbed the portable phone from the floor and pushed the talk button. “Grace, I’m just going to call the Clown Lady,” she yelled toward the kitchen. “You know, in case she needs to talk to someone. Seems like we could all use a little support, don’tcha think? I mean, I totally know exactly where she’s coming from.”

“Nine-zero-nine, seven-five-three...” With her finger on the Clown Lady’s number, Emily glanced several inches further up the page at a bold headline, “**PARTY PLANNING.**” Quickly pushing the talk button again, she looked around the room instinctively to see if anyone was watching. “She wasn’t home, Grace.”

Staring again at nothing, Emily suddenly let out a short, laughing snort. Several more followed until she could no longer control the belly laughs that rocked her body and sent tears streaming down her face. Sensing the safer atmosphere, Grace reappeared, hopping back on the bed and settling on Emily's lap. Stroking the cat with one hand and wiping her face with the other, Emily allowed herself one last chuckle. "Oh, Grace, what *are* you going to do with me?" she sighed.

Carefully sliding Grace off of her lap, Emily threw off her sheets, jumped out of bed, and walked toward her bedroom door. "You ready for some breakfast, Grace?" She asked cheerfully. On her way out, she bent down, picked up the *Modern Bride* and threw it resolutely into the bathroom trashcan. ■

Ed·i·tor *n.* 1. one who edits, esp. as an occupation 2. one who prepares for publication or presentation, as by correcting, revising, and adapting. 3. one who assembles components of.

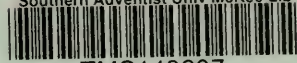
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