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The Legacy

2012

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The Dreamer's Fate

Paige Burnett

Curse me among the dreamers.
Burn their mark onto my chest,
Bind me up in their calamity
For I do not fear their fate.

You try to beguile me with safety
In a world that is never safe.
You guarantee me contentment
In an ever restless state.

I will not be lured to mediocrity,
but be bold in this insanity.
I will not hold back possibility
In a suffocating crate.

I was not meant to simply survive,
But for more. I was born to thrive,
To challenge, to inspire, to dare,
To wish, to scheme, and create.

I will walk the paths of deep despair,
That no heart knows but those who care
To conquer dragons that will, each day,
Haunt the path and close the gate.

You can have food and still be starved.
There's more in life than what you are.
It is the plight of the wearied mind
To be fed with more than what you ate.

You assume that I may never fly,
But I never will if I don't try,
So give me wings to attempt it
Without doubt's crushing weight.

I know the risk, I'll take the fall
To say that I tried to stand at all.
And if I rise, you will sing to me
How my journey was so great.

Sink or swim, win or lose,
This is the journey that I will choose,
For such is living, to fight each day.
This life is short, why do you wait?
Condemn me, then, to touching stars.
Riddle me with every battle scar,
For I will walk among the titans.
That is the dreamer's fate.

Heartstrings

Cherise Cross

I smile when I meet his eyes. He smiles back, and my heart skips a beat. His chocolate-brown eyes are warm, kind, and filled with a strange wisdom that belies his age.

I am magnetized.

I can feel a strong tugging on my heart—he's pulling me—pulling me in. I am closer now. So close, I can see tiny emerald specks in his eyes. He looks at me through long dark lashes.

I am hypnotized.

I see a hand inching toward his face, and in an odd moment of clarity I recognize my chipped, ruby red nail polish. Oh, his hair is so soft—so silky smooth, and so very, very soft. From deep within his powerful chest, I hear a low, rumbling sigh. It sounds so—primal.

I am entranced.

My hand is moving of its own accord now—I am powerless to stop it as it runs fingers through his long, jet-black mane. I gaze dreamily into his soulful eyes, and everything else fades away. It's just the two of us—alone in a world where nothing else matters. I lower my head until my face is inches from his. I can feel his warm breath on my cheek as I rest it atop his head.

I am convinced.

It's you, I whisper softly. And his ear twitches ever so slightly. It's you that I've been searching for all this time. I giggle delightedly as his long, pink tongue tickles my ear. He likes me too!

I stand shakily to my feet; my legs responding to the fact that I've been kneeling down for some time. I reach a hand into the pocket of my faded blue jeans and withdraw the symbol of our newfound relationship. Reaching down, I snap the leash firmly onto his faded collar. He too stands, his heavy tail thumping rhythmically against my leg. Together, we walk out of that dreadful place that he's called home for much too long. In my hand I clutch the slightly wrinkled paper that legalizes our bond. Together—the way it's meant to be.

I am complete.

from Impressions upon an
Afternoon Visit to
Callaway Gardens

Caroline Ellis

A lonesome crane stands.
Whitish blue, brackish waters,
Steps as silkily as the oily tide beneath.

Soft, softly.
The grindings of Time beneath my feet.
Mustn't shake him, or he'll

Fly
Billowing cloth loosed from some great Lord's shoulders
Melts into the great Open Space of his birth
In marvelous silence.

Esa Nohecita (That Little Night)

Natalia Mendez

I went out to my neighbor's house that evening. The moon was full and the grasshoppers were screaming into the night. In my worn flip-flops, I carefully stepped onto the grass as I took the shortcut, feeling my way along the rugged wall that connected our houses. Beads of sweat glistened on my face and neck. At this particular time of the year, even the nights were heavy with heat from the summer. Most of the people on the block had their garage doors open with the hope of catching a tiny breeze. From its opened garage, a nearby house blared out the evening news. It was the same evening news my grandma was probably listening to back at our house. Finally, I stopped at my neighbor's house. The garage door was closed, but an opened side door let yellow light escape, cut only by the rhythmic shadow of a ceiling fan. The quick shadow matched my heartbeat perfectly—Bam! Bam! Bam!

I stood in the open doorway, watching him putter around in his “shop.” The naked light bulbs caused the angles of his face to stand out. Suddenly, he paused and caught my eye. For a quick second, my heart slammed still, and I was almost afraid this handsome Adonis would scold me for spying on him. Instead, his jaw softened, and he motioned me into the garage. Perhaps it was because we were neighbors or because his dad, Don Humberto, was friendly with my grandma, but in any case, Berto, Jr. put down his rag and flashed me a cocky smile.

“How's it going, Natalita?” he asked, easily.

“Just fine,” I said, rapidly, a hotness burning my cheeks and inching its way to my scalp. Taking a short, quick breath, I uttered the rest of my sentence.

“Um, my grandma would like to buy a vase.”

“Okay, let's see now, does she want a short, medium, or tall one?” There was a confident smirk in his voice.

“Err... tall.” Embarrassed by my own voice, I lowered my eyes.

Briskly, Berto, Jr. walked to an old wooden shelf supported by rusted metal poles and efficiently lowered one of the 30-pound vases. When I noticed the muscles rippling under his white wife-beater, my stomach did a funny, little flip. I had to consciously shut my mouth and wipe the sweat from my face again.

“Eh?” He used his chin to proudly point at the large vase with swirling, reddish colors. “What do you think of this one? It's a real beauty. I hand painted it myself.”

He squatted on his haunches, energy pouring out from his happiness. Resting his forearms on his knees, he looked up at me, fully prepared to have a girl fawn over him. I wondered what sort of mischievous little boy he must have been back in Cuba. I wondered if his late mother used to fawn over him too.

“This one might do, but my grandma has to come approve it first,” I said, quietly.

I couldn’t quite meet his eyes, but a quick flash showed his cocky smile once more, almost as if he knew girls found him irresistible. Yet, I was Doña Angie’s granddaughter, and he knew my grandmother did not let me run around. A possibly sour conquest, so close to his living quarters, would not do.

“Okay Natalita, tell Doña Angie, and then we will take it from there.”

“Sure... you, uh, have a good night, Berto.”

“Buenas noches, Natalita.” He tipped his head in a smiling nod.

And that was it. I walked back to my grandmother’s house with a happy smile on my face. I kept remembering Berto’s smoot muscles, his reddish hands, the veins running down the length of his arms. I would dream of Berto that night, of a chance encounter where we would have to be together for a long time, when circumstances would force us to be together, where he would slowly begin to fall in love with me and decide to never let me go. A situation where—

“Good evening, señorita.”

“Don Humberto, buenas noches!” I gave Berto’s dad a sheepish smile. He was standing on my patio, right under the neon blue mosquito zapper. Quickly, I stepped up the stoop and hurried through the front door. In one quick motion, I snapped shut the screen door, talking to Don Humberto through it.

“Are you here for my grandma?”

“Yes, I am. Is she available?”

“Yes. I will tell her you are here.”

I closed our weak, wooden door and firmly turned the lock. I didn’t like the idea of gentlemen callers there at that time in the evening. In fact, the idea of any man coming to our house had always made me nervous.

A familiar living room awaited me as I crossed it to get to the stairs. Our living room had been decorated by my grandma. The walls are painted a soft blue with chippings at the top corners. Pastel pink, fabric sofas surrounded a glass table that had gold edges. On the surface of the table, three shiny, porcelain statues of ballerina dolls stood. Their mouths were painted a coral red. A picture of the Virgin Mary hung on one wall, framed in dark gold, with a rosary hanging off one side. A fan cut a rhythmic shadow over the living room. In that

environment, it felt safe—familiar. The view of the living room got smaller and smaller as I ran up the carpeted stairs to my grandma’s master bedroom. She was sitting on her bed, watching a soap opera. Her curlers from the day were still sitting on her head, and she was painting her nails.

“Grandma, Don Humberto wants to see you.”

“What?! Why didn’t you let him in?! When visitors come, you are supposed to have them wait in the living room!” She leapt off the bed and into the tiny bathroom in her bedroom where she began to quickly peel off her rollers. Through the reflection of the mirror, I saw her curling her lashes and swiftly adding mascara.

“Ay!” she exclaimed. “How long have you been out there?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, hand me my white pants—over there by the chair! HURRY!”

I quickly grabbed my grandma’s pants and helped her get into her body shaper—it was a bit of a struggle. After putting on her blouse and a few squirts of Estée Lauder perfume, my lovely grandma was ready to meet Don Humberto. All she needed was to put on her jewelry.

“Natalita, go downstairs and put on a record—quick!”

I left the perfume-engulfed bathroom and found a record labeled *Boleros*, an old album my grandma and grandpa used to listen to. I wiped the dust from the cover and tried not to inhale. After putting on the record to play, I tiptoed silently to the door. Through a tiny crack in our wooden door, I could still see the shadow of Don Humberto standing under the bug zapper. Standing there, peeking through the crack, I felt like I was standing on the fence between two very different worlds. On one side, there was a safe, colorful world in the living room with soft pink couches, my grandma, and the Virgin Mary looking over us. The other was heart-beating, dark, and scary, with a strange man standing outside our weak, wooden door.

“Ya?!” I heard my grandma calling me to see if I had put the record on already.

She came down the stairs looking wonderful, completely breathtaking in the beautiful, full-mooned evening. She headed to our door, but I ran up the stairs very quickly to avoid Don Humberto seeing me. Once upstairs, I flopped on my grandmother’s bed, enjoying the soft feel of the comforter. I turned the channel to watch *Saturday Night Live* to distract myself for a little while. Soon, the sounds from the record player and the laughter got louder. I tiptoed out of the bedroom and sneaked a view from the top of the stairs. Cigarette smoke wafted up to where I was, and I pulled my shirt over my nose to block it. Don Humberto’s

high-pitched, jittery voice was a strain on my ears. How could my grandma bear to listen to him? He clumsily clinked my grandma's glass as he served her a drink.

Doña Angie, if you will permit me, I can come by tomorrow morning and fix the tiles damaged from the hurricane. I am used to doing those types of repairs; it won't take more than three hours!"

"Don Humberto, I greatly appreciate your help. However, I couldn't possibly ask that much of you."

Yet he persisted, "It is no bother for me at all. I am happy to help my neighbor. It is settled—tomorrow I come!"

"I thank you very much, Don Humberto. May God bless you! Would you care for something to eat?"

"Don't mind if I do..."

I was amazed at my grandmother. She was so confident, so smooth around men. Don Humberto was practically eating out of her hand. I also wondered how short, stocky Don Humberto could be the father to such a gorgeous son with blonde hair. Berto, Jr. must have gotten his good looks from his mother, a tall, no-nonsense woman who had blue eyes and short blonde hair.

I sat on the stairs until my back was sore from leaning on my knees. Don Humberto and my grandma talked about everything under the sun, taking breaks to dance to songs from the record and laugh at things that didn't make sense to me. My grandma kept refilling Don Humberto's glass with liquor, although I noticed that she only filled hers once. What could she be trying to do?

I didn't have too much time to think because Don Humberto made his way up the stairs. I ran back up to the bedroom, stumbling on my foot along the way. I ran to the tiny bathroom in my grandmother's room and locked the door. The small space made me feel claustrophobic. From where I was sitting on top of the toilet, I could touch the sink. The walls seemed to get smaller and darker and my heart beat erratically and practically slammed itself against my chest when I saw the footsteps of Don Humberto reflect off the light from under the bathroom door.

The knob turned swiftly before halting on the latch. Then it started shaking violently as Don Humberto jiggled the knob. Afraid that Don Humberto would hear my raspy breathing, I focused on the Estée Lauder perfume to remain calm. The incessant rattling pounded in my ears. Whatever happens, I must not make a sound! I wanted to breathe so badly, to relieve my panic, but I was afraid Don Humberto would know I was there.

More footsteps. Two knocks.

“Natalita?” my grandmother called out to me. Yet I couldn’t answer—he was still out there.

“Natalita, open the door right now!”

Her impatience made my cheeks hot, and I felt a wave of nausea coming over me. I had to fight it. If I got sick, they would hear me. The smell of Estée Lauder perfume was everywhere in the bathroom, and it was suffocating me.

For the longest time, I sat on top of the toilet with my knees drawn to my chest, my head resting on the edge of the sink. My legs slowly regained feelings as I stretched to stand on the cold bathroom tiles. Opening the door a crack, I checked every area within my line of vision for any sign of grandma and Don Humberto. I could no longer hear the sounds from the record player, and I started to miss the world outside the tiny bathroom. Feeling exhausted, I collapsed on top of my grandma’s yellow comforter, ready to sleep.

A cool breeze ruffled the white lace curtains, and I remembered little Berto. With a sinking heart, I wondered if Don Humberto would tell Berto, Jr. that I locked myself in the bathroom. What will he think of me? For some reason, I was too sleepy to agonize and found it comforting to instead dream about Berto, Jr. while watching the star-studded night sky. The mingled voices of Don Humberto and my grandma carried through the opened window.

“Well, Don Humberto, it’s been a pleasure seeing you.”

“Same here, Doña Angie. You know we are here to help you. You are a very special woman.”

“Thank you. You have a good night, now.”

“And one for you, as well. Have a great night. Take good care of yourself.”

The screen door slammed, and the retreating footsteps of Don Humberto echoed on the pavement. After the door shut, I heard my grandma coming up the stairs. She smiled at me when she saw me lying on the bed.

“Bueno, Natalita,” she said as she began to take off her jewelry and gently massage her hair, “our roof tiles are finally going to get fixed tomorrow. Rah! Rah! Rah!”

I joined in cheering for her, just then realizing that the roof tiles must have been a source of worry for her for several weeks. My grandmother almost never told me about her worries until after she got the problem fixed. She didn’t like to burden me, she said.

“And by the way,” she continued, “why did you lock yourself in the bathroom? I know you heard me calling you.”

I covered my face with the comforter, wanting to forget the embarrassing incident. Luckily, my grandma understood me and didn't push for an explanation. She went on to chatter about our schedule for the next day, our doctor appointments and the supper she would cook.

"Grandma, are you in love with a man?" The question had been burning inside me, and I had to ask it, regardless of whether it was appropriate or not.

"No, my dear! Not in the slightest. You know I will always love my Manuelito!"

"Then why do you care so much when Don Humberto comes to visit?"

Her eyes turned to the lace curtains on the side, then to the night sky. A soft glow from the lamp bathed her face, and she took a deep breath.

"Well, Natalita, you know, ever since your grandfather died... well..." Her voice lost its spirit. "Well, it provides someone to at least dress up for."

Despite her fancy white pants and the makeup on her face, I'd never seen my strong, gregarious grandma look so quiet and vulnerable. She needed my grandpa. She missed his love, dressing up for him, and cooking his meals. And yet, she could never get him back.

Esa nohecita, in my heart, I felt I wanted to take good care of my lovely grandma in any way a 13-year-old could.

"Come on, Grandma, come lie down. It's time to get some sleep."

The Mimic

Rhya Moffitt

Should I die before I wake,¹
 My head not bloody, nor unbowed²
 No kingdom by the sea will I find myself³
 And remember how life was a mere paragraph,⁴
 With death now an exclamation.⁴
 I once said I had time for nothing,⁵
 But the endeavor of balancing myself upon a broken world⁵
 Maybe I should have just balanced myself⁶
 Through the days where there was water, water every where⁶
 And all of my boards did shrink.⁶
 And no verse of mine did stand⁷
 There was no kingdom by the sea³
 And I ponder yet weak and weary⁸
 Still I have no more fight
 To rage against the dying of the light.⁹

1. *Children's bedtime prayer*

2. *William Henley—Invictus*

3. *Edgar Allen Poe—Annabelle Lee*

4. *e. e. cummings—since feeling is first*

5. *Amy Lowell—September, 1918*

6. *Samuel Coleridge—Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

7. *William Shakespeare—Sonnet 60*

8. *Edgar Allen Poe—The Raven*

9. *Dylan Thomas—Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night*

The Remaining Quartet

Deanna Moore

The strings mesh
Creating more than sound
Feeling.

She sits
Softly poised
The cello soothes her
With a low melodic tranquility.

Two, now three more join
Adding to the flow
The current
The family.

The lead drops out
The cello remains
Haunting she stays
Forcing the song to continue
Entranced by the deep melody
Incapable of abandoning
What she has now created.

Giving
Moving
Loving
The ever-resonating force,
My mother.

Dragons

Olivia Nieb

You say that you'd slay each dragon you found.
You'd walk through a fire or coals on the ground.
You'd travel the world and search every small nook.
You'd chase me and find me whatever it took.

You'd give your last breath or you'd give me the world.
You'd take all the bullets or darts that were hurled.
You'd hold me forever and never let go.
You'd face anything—rain or sleet, ice or snow.

You'd spurn any trial you happened to meet,
So why can't you find time to walk down our street?

To Pack a Box

Olivia Nieb

You can pack up a box when it's time to move on,
Fill it with items you'll want when you're gone.
You can pack and keep packing 'til every room clears,
But you can't pack a box to hold fifteen years.

You can pack up a box full of markers and crayons,
Stick-people drawings and traced-around hands.
You can pack stacks of paper with scribbles and smears,
But you can't pack a box to hold fifteen years.

You can pack up a box full of Legos and dolls,
Barbies and Slinkies and old Wiffle balls.
You can pack up some pictures and small souvenirs,
But you can't pack a box to hold fifteen years.

You can pack up a box full of glasses and plates,
Dishes that held all the suppers you ate.
You can pack recipes that you made for your dears,
But you can't pack a box to hold fifteen years.

You can pack up a box full of hand-quilted crafts,
Blankets and afghans that stifled your laughs.
You can pack all the quilts that you cuddled in tears,
But you can't pack a box to hold fifteen years.

You can pack up a box full of everyday things
And remember the joys and the sorrows life brings.
You can pack until all you've once known disappears,
But you can't pack a box to hold fifteen years.

Social Anxiety

Nathan Plank

She was smiling before, but she's not now. Come to think of it, she hasn't smiled at me very much this past week. She'll smile at him all the time. Oh yes, when he's around it's all smiles and laughter and playful teasing. With me, nothing. Straight face, bored expression. She says she still loves me, but I'm beginning to have my doubts. She just doesn't sound sincere anymore—I can tell.

When she smiles at me, it's forced. She used to light up in my presence. She used to always sit next to me. She still does sit next to me, but it's just not the same. The magic is just gone. She's not sitting next to him with any regularity, so I guess that's a good sign. I can tell that he annoys her with his cocky attitude and smarmy words. I just can't shake the feeling that there's something he has that I lack. It's some sort of intangible something that I can't comprehend.

Here she comes. She's smiling now. Maybe this time will be different. Maybe we can go back to where we were. I guess not. He's trailing on her heels, mocking something she's said. It's funny; I smile. And, just like that, the moment is gone. She hates me again—I can tell. I have nothing to lose. I try to engage in the same type of banter that he always employs to so much effect. Nothing. He smiles, but I get a glare. What is it that I'm doing wrong?

I go over the conversation in my head again and again. Where was the exact moment that I lost it? What was the precise word that I shouldn't have said. I don't know. I'm clueless in the face of this something that I can never discover. What is it? I say the same things he does, I try to act and flirt and be him, but I fail. I'm hopeless. I'm sure that I've lost her... forever. There's no way this is going to work out—I can tell.

She's smiling at me now. We're alone. She tells me that she dislikes him, feels that he is nothing more than a nuisance. How can that be? She smiles at him, laughs at him. He seems to light up her life. What do I do? Not much, apparently. She tells me how glad she is that I'm so dependable, reliable, boring. I'm a "great guy." Not as great as him, apparently. Why doesn't she grace me with a smile? Not one of those shy, hesitant smiles, but a truly heartfelt one. The kind she always gives him. The smiles he gets are so open, so honest. She looks like she's really happy when she smiles at him. When she smiles at me, she's holding something back—I can tell.

She meets a new person, and the smile is there. It's like the sun coming from behind a cloud. She never smiles that smile at me. Not often, anyway. How is it that she gives such a gift so easily to a stranger, but withholds it from me?

Every time we meet, I get more and more dissatisfied. She's keeping something from me. It's that same something that I can't get because I don't know what it is. He has it. In fact, I think everyone has it but me. Is that why she doesn't love me anymore? Because there is something that I can't give her? She won't give it to me—I can tell.

Why does she keep it from me? This something that is so vital to our relationship. I was right. She hates me. She can't wait to get out of this relationship. I need to break it off before it goes any further. She's probably dying to get with him. He has the something that they both share. They'd probably be happy together. I don't think I can keep this up. She still hangs out with me, goes on dates with me, tells me that she loves me, but her heart's not in it—I can tell. She's longing for something that I can't give her. Every time we're together I can feel her silently judging me. She's not enjoying herself; I certainly don't enjoy myself. She doesn't care about me, she only cares about that something that I don't have. There's no reason to continue this charade.

I tell her that I don't think the relationship is working. She looks shocked. Tears begin to form in her eyes. Could it be that she does actually care? No. She has no interest in me. She's sad because she's supposed to be. In a few days she'll forget about me and be happy with him. Doesn't matter to me. I'm doing what's best for both of us. She already knows I'm defective—I can tell. I lack something. I look down. I can't watch her cry. I say something stupid and leave.

I go back over the conversation in my head. I analyze every nuance, trying to figure out what I've done. I've done what's best for us. Why is she so upset with me? Did my parting comment make her that angry? I thought maybe we could still be friends. I was wrong. She won't talk to me, neither will any of her friends. I'm sure he could have managed to break up without alienating everyone. But, of course, he has something that I will never have. I'll never have it because I don't know what it is. If I don't know what it is, how can I get it? I'm never going to find a girl without it—I can tell.

This girl seems nice. Her smile is broad and inviting. He doesn't know her. Maybe she won't catch on that I'm missing something. Maybe we can have a good relationship. She smiles at me a lot. Her smile is radiant. She's perfect—I can tell.

Expertise

Curtis Prevo

“They’ve never even been to Cambodia!”

“Who’s to say that’s an entirely negative thing?”

“They can’t be authorities on a subject if they haven’t even seen it.”

“So you’re saying that blind people can’t ever be authoritative figures.”

“No, I’m saying that to be an authority on issues of Cambodian lifestyles, you have to at least visit there.”

“Okay. Basically, nobody really knows anything about the stars, then.”

“Seriously? We can all see the stars. People with giant telescopes have become experts...”

“You really hate blind people, don’t you?”

“I see where you’re going with this, but that won’t work with me.”

“You keep changing your story. Is it seeing, or is it visiting that determines a level of expertise?”

“It depends on the situation.”

“Are you the decider of situational expertise?”

“Sure. Whatever.”

“Okay, so how come Stephen Hawking is considered an expert on black holes?”

“He’s a leading theorist...”

“...that has never been to, nor seen—by definition—a black hole.”

“I give up!”

“Does that make me an expert at arguing?”

If I were a poet...

Curtis Prevo

If I were a poet, I'd write more poetry.
Well, I'm not, and I'd hate to
write verse with symmetry,
as the distant cousin of prose was made to
be simply confounding
and utterly meaningless,
with few words resounding,
leaving mess
after mess of wordy disasters
made sappy and long-winded
by teens, tweens, and other poetry "masters".
I will not rescind it,
my unbiased opinion of that horrid thing
deemed poetry by some, and by others, trash.
Of complainers, I'm king,
for which I am proud and others call me brash.
My reasons are as follows,
in no particular order,
for why poetry should be sent to the gallows,
or, if preferred, drawn and quartered:
For years since the invention of paper,
as the Chinese evidently pioneered,
we've seen acceptable rhyming taper
into something that has veered? been feared? at which people have jeered?
Anyway, something that allows rhyming "to" with "to"
as I did in the first four lines of this poem.
And, as most people would do,
poets in modern times have taken it upon themselves to completely abandon
rhyming, rhythm, and symmetry altogether, opting instead for long bits of prose,
falsely presented to the public as poetry. Unfortunately for those of us that

occasionally enjoy a good read, such “poetry” is not. Although that sort has been rid of the extra baggage that rhyming, rhythm, and symmetry have added to poetry, it still carries the weight of a feather floating on the breezes of time, with an orange jacket tucked into the corner of the universe itself, like the gentle kiss of morning’s dew on the earth in the autumn leaves.

Zombie

Curtis Prevo

Whether you're listening to The Cranberries or playing the latest co-op FPS (first person shooter), you need to be prepared to handle a zombie. When the real apocalypse comes, you need to know where to find a crowbar. In fact, I've compiled a good list of advice we should all take for the impending terror.

Gun rights are rubbish. I'm not saying that we need to ban guns. Quite the contrary! I'm saying that we need to start tracking where all the guns are. Let's face it: a crowbar will only get you so far. It lets you get too close to the zombies. You need something that can spray lead at a rate of very fast. The bigger the gun, the better. Shotguns are great, assault weapons are great, sniper rifles allow you to lazily pick zombies off from a distance... But we need a national inventory of weapons so that we can resupply more easily. I would also suggest moving farther south. Even if we don't ever have a national index of guns, every other house in the deep south is a veiled armory, so that's a good place to be.

If you are white, you need a black friend. If you are black, you need a white friend. If you are neither of those, all I can say is that you should get a white friend and a black friend. There isn't enough documented evidence to provide adequate direction for you. Have you ever seen a zombie film or game? From the information I've gathered, it is nearly impossible to survive in a mono-racial society when the zombies come. I should also mention that you need someone of the opposite gender on your team. This is essential for survival. It's also essential for the other obvious thing.

Get a catchphrase. Don't get a lame one. If you don't survive, you don't want to be remembered by saying, "Whoa, you're going to kill me, you undead zombie... NOT!!!" Also, wear glasses. Then you can remove them dramatically while saying your catchphrase.

Stay calm. Screaming will get you nowhere. Actually, screaming will just draw zombies to you. Keeping calm will allow you to think more clearly. It will make your shot steadier. If you can remain extremely calm, you may actually be able to trick the zombies. This is completely unproven, though. Don't quote me on that.

Use a bicycle. I know they never use them in the movies, but it should be obvious. Cars run out of gas. Running is no good because the zombies can also do that. I'm fairly certain that zombies do not retain the ability to pedal a bike. It's the perfect getaway vehicle.

If you do eventually turn into a zombie, try and become one of those giant ones. You don't want to be part of the main swarm. That's just boring. Some hot-shot sniper will pick you off and make some snide remark about how you are such an idiot for letting yourself become a zombie (and a lame one) in the first place. If you are going to be a zombie, be the biggest zombie ever. If you figure out what exactly it is that accomplishes that, please let me know. Currently, no human has found the formula.

One last piece of advice: dress nicely and practice good hygiene, especially if you turn into a zombie. If you're human and look gross, you will be mistaken for a zombie. If you are a zombie that looks nice, it's a lot easier to sneak up on unsuspecting humans. Being overdressed is underrated.

Love Cuts Ropes

Lauren Swafford

Her day begins when light casts shadows on
The wall—forming charming characters of fantasy.
Once, her mind dreamed of whimsical sea,
Visions lost by way of waking decision.
She knew it was right before they had begun,
Love trumps all if the cards are played correctly.
She glides out of bed, wearing joy indiscreetly.
Today, she'll find her love far beyond
The shallow pool of thought she's dipping in.
Mirrors tell lies of who she used to be,
Suspiciously fearful of all she once knew—Then
Love cuts ropes, and like a bird set free,
She soars through unobstructed skies of passion,
Hoping this is not another dream.

Too Much Fun

Lauren Swafford

“Mom! It’s three o’clock! Our stories are on!” strained a scratchy voice from the back room. The small cedar home no longer smelled of the distinct trees from which it came, but captured a prominent musk of dishes left in the sink and old dusty carpet.

“Martha! I just lay down to rest my eyes for a minute. Why don’t you come in here and lie down with me? We’ll watch our stories in my room today.”

Thump!

Martha’s feet slowly hit the floor. She could feel her bones creak as she lifted herself from the edge of the bed, every joint popping as she stood to her feet. Huffing and sighing, Martha gradually untangled herself from the mile long tube that connected her to the oxygen she had learned to depend on these last few months. She stopped, catching a glimpse of a figure in the mirror on her dressing table. After a moment’s observation, her eyes recognized that the figure was a woman. Gray-haired, with a skeletal appearance, skin the texture of her father’s old leather boots, Martha couldn’t bear the weight the figure pressed upon her. Feeling thoughts of shame and anxiety rise inside of her, she resumed the journey to join her mother while leaving the ghostly reflection behind.

In the hallway, Martha caught a glimpse of the summer sun shining through the window. This was the time of year she used to spend out on the lake, enjoying the cool breeze, sunbathing, and fishing. Many years had gone by since she had chosen to do the things that people do.

But, she used to.

“Martha, are you coming? I bet it takes you an hour to walk through this ‘ol house! It’s a good thing we don’t live in a mansion or nothin’!”

Grabbing the bookshelf for support, she ignored her mother’s voice. Besides, the bookshelf was Martha’s favorite part of the little house. It was stored with figurines and memories, photographs of a life she once had.

From a dated, golden frame, a dark-haired, green-eyed little girl looked up at Martha, smiling a crooked-tooth grin from behind an oversized, polka-dotted bow. The thin back frame next to it housed two skinny young boys, one with a chili bowl, the other a vibrant red head. Their arms were wrapped around each other as if they didn’t care for anyone else in the world. The floral frame, the biggest frame on the bookshelf, kept the picture that brightened Martha the most.

Everyone was bundled up in coats and scarves, huddled close together and smiling. She picked it up, thumbing over each family member one by one.

“Christmas, 1993,” she whispered.

Martha remembered that Christmas well. She had worn her favorite Christmas sweater: green with tiny fishhook ornaments attached, dangling in a rainbow of colors. She had made her favorite chocolate oatmeal cookies and eaten a truckload of deviled eggs. Her family was jolly and loud, full of jokes and surprises. They really loved her then.

“You remember that Martha? You were what? ‘Bout thirty-somethin’? That was the last Christmas you decided to show up in your right mind. And do you remember what we talked about that night? All of us... what we offered?”

Martha turned to look at her mother to see her eyes filled with the pain of rejection. Taking a deep breath, she wheezed through the question she’d nearly made herself sick over, “do you think they still love me, Momma?”

“Of course they do, baby. Those people are your family, and your family will always love you, no matter what choices you make.”

Martha carefully sat the frame back on the shelf. Feeling a little faint, she knew she had been on her feet too long. Her lungs felt heavy and tired, a burning sensation rising with every breath. She turned slowly, shuffled a little farther down the hall, and crawled into her mother’s bed.

Her whole body worked overtime—heart racing, veins pulsing, joints aching—as if at any moment she would fall apart. She lifted her scarred and calloused hands to her face, wiping the tears that had come years too late.

Her mother came in the room and sat on the edge of the bed. Running her hands through Martha’s hair, she observed her waif-like daughter, wondering how it was possible for a 53-year-old to appear her same age of 75.

“I just wanted to have fun, Momma,” she said as she laid her head in her mother’s lap.

“I know, Martha. Guess you just went out and had too much fun.”

untitled

Krista Turner

He sat on the mountainside
Ranting and raving
Pouting and doubting
When the question came.

“What are you doing here
Sitting and quitting
Not really committing
When you should be glorifying my name!”

He said, “They want me dead
Pursuing and subduing
Queuing for my undoing
My future and death one in the same.”

“How can I go on
Proclaiming and exclaiming
Inflaming and reclaiming
Souls for You when it’s You I want to blame!”

“I’m alone down here!
Hiding and chiding
Deriding and deciding
If I want to go on with this game.”

Then the storm came
Quaking and shaking
Booming and consuming
Yet his life it did not claim.

Then in a whisper
Soothing and smoothing
Alluring and reassuring
“Thousands of others fight for my name!”

untitled*

Krista Turner

Many people seem to take it upon themselves to
Correct me if I am wrong
About something in my way of thinking about life and love.

They tell me to have a clean break, or to put myself out there,
I can't help but believe
That maybe they themselves don't know what they are talking about.

I personally like to believe that one day I will enter into a permanent relationship
That God ordained
Through obvious signs and His perfect timing.

I will admit that I don't really know what I am looking for, just that I don't want
to enter different
Relationships of all sorts
For no purpose other than that I prefer to not be alone.

But sometimes I like being alone; it can clear my head and allow my thoughts
To be uplifting
To both myself and others, rather than focusing on how to snag a man.

It's good to spend time on friendships first, working on the foundation of a
relationship so that it's
Not a big game
Of who should call whom, or playing hard to get.

If my intentions are godly and pure, then there is no need to think
Of craftiness and control
But rather how I can love this person better than myself.

Chalk

Robby Van Arsdale

He was trying to be friends. Really he was. He hadn't screwed everything up beyond repair. He knew that. How else could she have smiled at him so genuinely? Unless she was a psychopath. He hoped she wasn't a psychopath. All he wanted to be was friends. But not with a psychopath.

He took his chalk set and wrote on her sidewalk. Big, round letters of neon, yellow, and red.

Vikki
sometimes
it is good
to hold on
to happiness
and
it is better
to allow the
rain
to wash
away
your hurt

Take my chalk
use it please
make sure
you write
the good things
under awnings
and underneath
roofs
but
the bad things
in the open
on sidewalks
and streets

He left his chalk, then, in a square he drew for it right next to her door. Then he knocked on the door and ran away. She saw his back as he ran, so she left to throw the dishes and hope for them to break. She would have loved his message, if she had known. But it rained.

Vikki
 sometimes
 it is good
 to hold on
 to happiness
 and
 it is better
 to allow the
 rain
 to smudge
 smudge
 smudge blotch

blotch smudge chalk
 streak smudge smudge
 smudge streak
 smudge smudge
 streak streak blotch
 smudge streak
 smudge smudge
 streak
 smudge
 smudge smudge streak
 streak blotch smudge
 smudge smudge
 smudge streak

She didn't know what he'd said. She wanted to be angry, but found herself sad. Her hot, bold tears flew to obliterate what was left.

First Kisses

Robby Van Arsdale

I laughed, and tipped the canoe into the water. We both fell in.
Everybody in the party began swarming the craft, trying to get it upright.

We surfaced underneath the overturned hull—alone in a crowd. I
grabbed a gunnel. She grabbed a thwart. We floated for a second.

Our legs twisted together, underwater.

It was our first kiss, under that canoe. I've never beaten it. I wonder if
she has.

Music, Words, and Pictures

Be Free

Joel Westburg

A picture is worth a thousand words,
Or so it has been said,
But wouldn't they be worth much more
If they were notes instead?

Yes, I say! Let it be known!
For if I say, so it shall be,
A picture's worth a thousand words,
And a thousand pictures, a symphony.

Let the music reign free, so say I.
Let the peals ring throughout the halls,
For all know that a single chord
Can make an empire fall.

A single beat can change a life
From saddened grey to color galore,
For a single note can take a day
To reach excitement from a bore.

From subtle delicacy to pompous grandeur,
Music flows supreme.
And all who listen know quite well
That music makes the scene.

So don't diminish your grand crescendo,
Let your fermata hold,
For hidden in those magic marks
There's a story to be told.

A simple tune, to grow and soar,
A story to be, a melody to live.
And that's what makes it all important—
Those stories that music happily gives.

And may that story reach us all,
From the old to the young, you see.
For a picture's worth a thousand words,
And a thousand pictures a symphony.