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2005 Forces

Scott Yarbrough

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FORCES

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EFFORCES



A Day in the Park 1
by Heather Easton

Texas Star by Nick Young

Alice by Faith Bishop 2

My Dream by Misty Boldish

A Verse Portrait by Matt Jones 3

Scales by Misty Boldish

Coronado by John McMillan 4-5

Celina by Nick Young

marching home by Molly Boyce 6

Moving on
by Margaret Burton Malone

America the Beautiful
by Attilio Bonacoroso Jr.

Winter by Paul Bellah

Nothing in the Universe 7
by Chad Hansen

Good Morning by Sara Reising

I AM 'THEM' and 'THEM' 8
by Faith Bishop

Art by Brian Cave 8-9

let's call it even 9
by Heather Millican

makeover by Molly Boyce

sweet glue by Pamela Blair 10

message for my grandfather 11
by Solana d'Lamant

Art by Bobby Benefield

ROUNDTRIP 12-13
by Carter Hudson

Art by Alison O'meara

Euthanasia 14
by Justin A. Goodrich

Boys by Nick Young

Korean Kimchi by Janet Powell 15

In Transit by Margaret Burton Malone

Reflections by Sara Reising

Savor the SLAM by Janice Rose 16

Photos by Paul Bellah 16-17

Romance BLOOMS 18
on the Porch by Janice Rose

Sisters by Paul Bellah

Communist Harmony 1989 19-22
by Janet A. Doleh

finger of GOD 23
by Sidney Portilla-Diggs

religion by Molly Boyce

Served Warm 23
by Margaret Burton Malone

Prostrate Man by Paul Bellah

Pantoum for Van Gogh 24
by Hazel Spire

Maldune by Misty Boldish

PONDERANCE 25
by Beth Turner Ayers

Bone by Claire M. Shipman

Sculptures by Janet Powell

Learning Resources Center
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McKinney, Texas 75070

The Red Accordion 26
by Solana d'Lamant

Trojan Horse
by Sydney Portilla-Diggs

Art by Brian Cave

Why the Fig Tree Withers 27-29
by Sydney Portilla-Diggs

Your Words My Words 30
by Dallie Clark

Photo by Claire Shipman

F O R C E S

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A Day in the Park

When the funny man laughed
His glasses fell down his nose
And his posture wrinkled
Into crumpled paper
His wife corrected him
Sit up straight and pay attention

But she never saw
The love lines
Around his eyes
Fifty-two years, now
Going on forever

He took a snip of bread
Broken from his sandwich
And quietly dropped it to the earth
Part of his community service ritual
He enjoyed feeding the ants
As far as he saw
They worked harder than any
Big wheel executive tight ass he knew
His attention returned to his lovely wife
Fifty-two minutes, now
Going on, forever

Heather Easton

A Day



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in the Park

At twenty-seven, I left sassy rhythm and dancing days,
and married.

Divorced,
I had tarried
a nine-year sentence as sugar on the floor.

I stood at the door –
or the fork in the road and looked back
at burning wood and changed neighborhoods
and men who weren't men anymore.

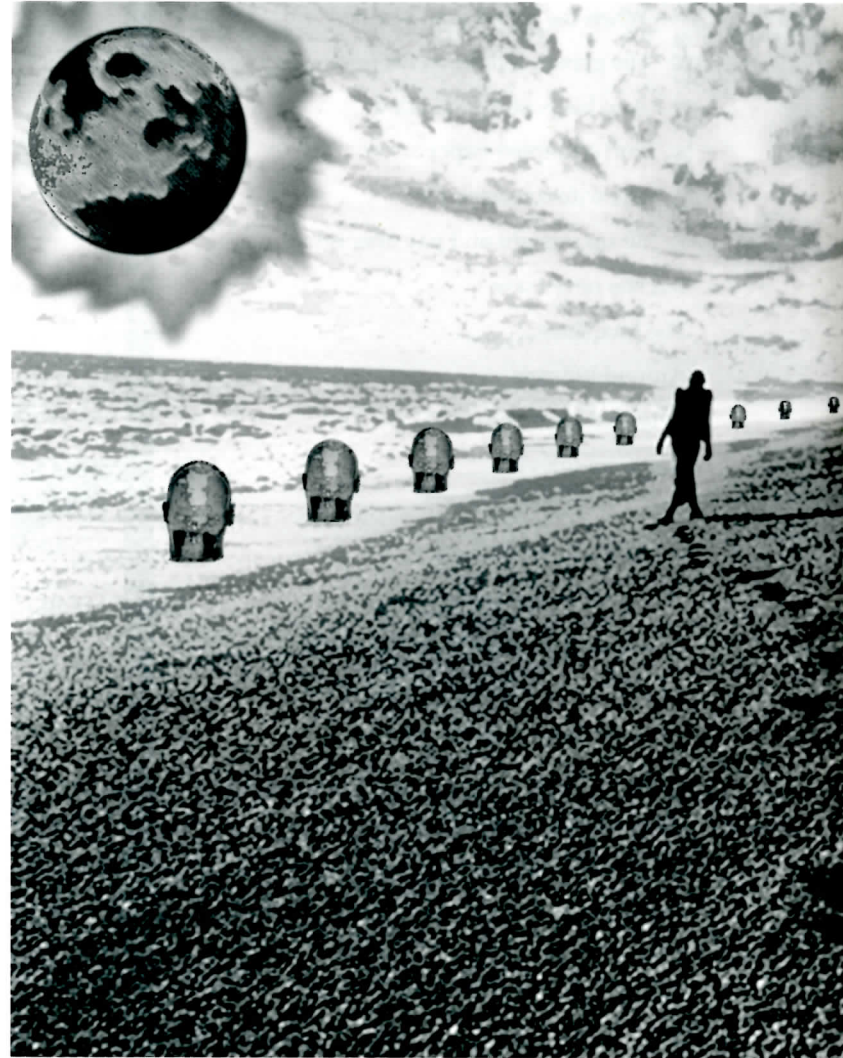
I left bare feet and sweet rhythmic beats,
I joined the privileged class
I left squared streets and inspired rhyming feats
and went like Alice (in pointed toe pumps) through the looking glass.
My wish

became my
command.

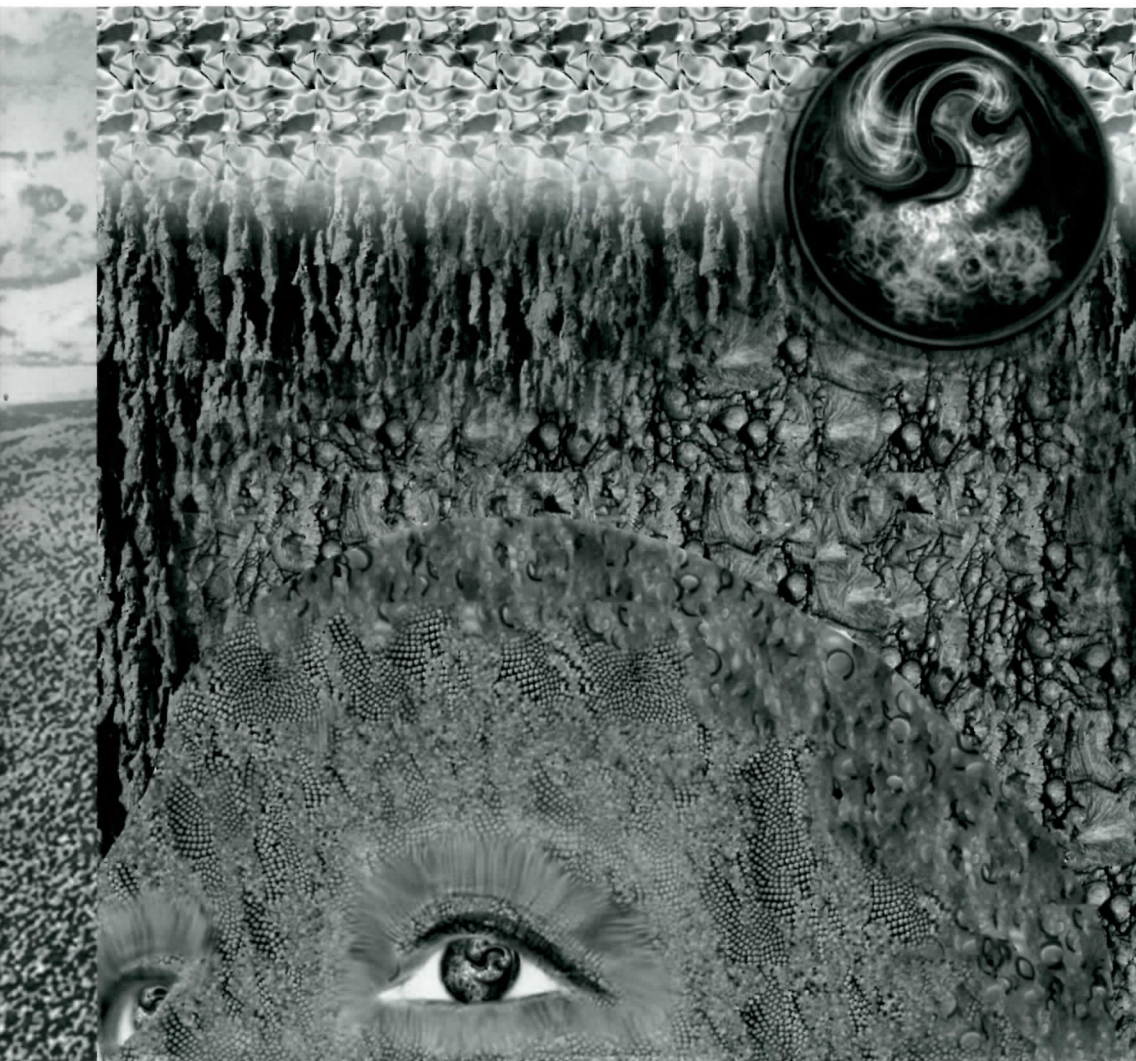
And suddenly I was in the land
of corporate expansion and four-story mansions.
But here they never even pretended to be men.
Still heaven's fruit hung low above my head and I chose myself instead.

Give me back my crazy ways,
my dancing days and cool bare feet in the grass.
Don't reconfigure my station; I'm not on vacation.
I'm through the looking glass!

Faith Bishop



My Dream by Misty Boldish



Scales by Misty Boldish

A Verse Portrait

she looks like her
convictions her
hair is stained with strands of pink she
draws the night around her
eyes her
image is the echo of so much alternative
music her
actions are almost as loud as her
laughter rolling
on the floor she
is living disregard but really like so
many others she
feels so much that she
must turn away to something else and
tell herself
it's not important a
broken home has turned her
away from god one
reason
is as good as the other she
does her
work reluctantly and revels
in the act of motion dancing is her
church where she
worships the body that
others admire
whereby they become unworthy
and neither one shall ever
know the reason
why

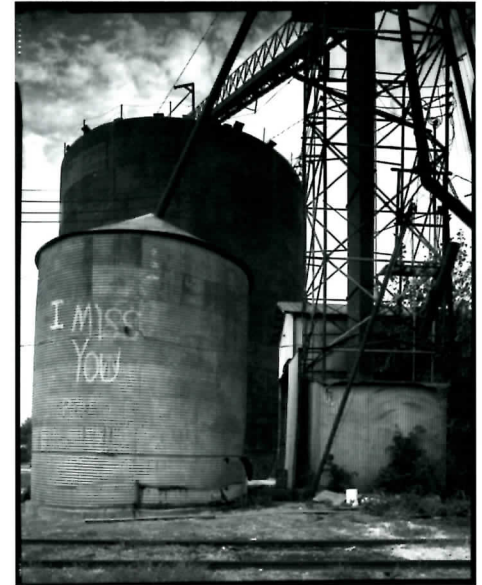
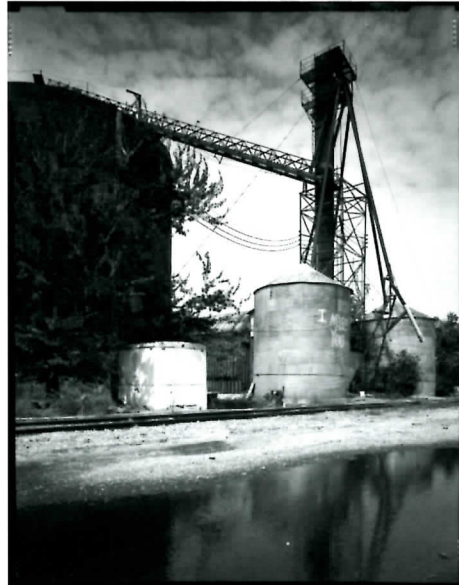
Matt Jones

Coronado

He suffered all of his life with horrible,
crippling back pain.
Not a soul he ever told, not even his family knew.
He would take medication for it, never complained,
never let anyone see him taking pills.
He worked all of his life, lifting boxes, and putting away
other people's things.
When he was ready to die, everyone knew it.
He didn't tell anyone about it, but they all knew.
He had the cancer badly in his prostate.
I hope I don't get the cancer; I would have to tell everyone.
I'd tell anyone who would listen to me cry and
complain about the life I was missing.

4

Collin County documentary, Celina by Nick Young



It did not take him long to die after the doctors found the cancer,
after it was very large.

I was in the warehouse lifting boxes.

I saw him walking up the hall with his matching clothes,
a sharp dresser.

His dog had been dead for a while so, he was alone.

He walked steady with broad steps.

I don't know if he had a smile or not, I guess it
was just a look of intent.

I watched him walk the fifty feet or so to the door.

The door he had put there himself.

He reached out the hand worn by seventy years of
hard honest work.

He turned the knob.

He walked out the door into the mass of shelves

I was working under.

He stood there, didn't say a thing, just stood there.

He reached out his hand to shake mine.

His eyes were stern and dry.

I shook his hand.

It was the hand shake that said it.

It said, "All of your life I have been here,

I will be gone soon, live it your way young man."

The first and only time I ever shook his hand.

He gave me five dollars to mow his lawn, but he
never shook my hand.

Less than a month later, he was gone.

Before he was very bad, I asked him if he ever saw
things like fairies.

He said, "No," shaking his head to affirm the answer.

I do remember a couple days before his final.

He asked, "Where is Drew?"

My father, his son, told him, "Father, Drew was
your daddy; he has been dead for a long time."

I said, "Well, if he thinks he has seen him lately,
he will probably see him again soon."

That's all I remember, but mostly, I remember
his hand shake.

I don't have the guts to shake hands with people.

It always seems too personal, almost vulgar. I just
nod my head at folks, not like him.

John McMillan





marching home

Did you see young Johnny
march off to war?
shoulders back, head high,
arm around Mom,
Sue, and Kathy Jo,
his kit stuffed
with brown and gray,
an 'I Love You, Daddy'
tucked in with clean socks.

Did you miss young Johnny
far away from home?
war churned days
into months, into a year,
no revolving door,
just endless wind,
sun and patrol,
without a line in the sand
where it would all stop.

Did you see young Johnny
arrive home today?
no fanfare, no buddies,
one lone black car
and me inside,
a silver medal
lay in my hand,
we drive the final mile
to end his 640 days.

Molly Boyce

Winter by Paul Bellah

Moving on

It was that flood winter.
The house went from under me –
mudsliding into the
ruined past.

No time to prepare, just
get out, get out quick as it all
collapses.

Sheets of rain slashed the street.
Garbage cans capsized, rolled downhill,
noisy and damaged like drunks.

My heart watched the For Sale sign
beating in the wind
and I signed our lives
into the downpour

Anemones flourished early that year
even so.

Margaret Burton Malone



Nothing in the Universe

The source of everything we see
is such that it is never seen.

The source of everything like me
is such that it has always been
like nothing in the Universe;
somehow it underlies all this;
but nothing in the Universe
can understand just what it is.

The source of everything that moves
is such that it is never moved.

The source of everything we prove
is such that it is never proved.
Infinity is not defined;
Eternity will never change;
and nothing in the Universe
can comprehend unbounded range.

The source of everything that grows
is such that this is done with ease.

The source of everything that knows
cannot be known through words like these.
The words can only give us hints,
which vivify and make words sing;
but nothing in the Universe
is like the source of everything.

Chad Hansen

I AM 'THEM' and 'THEM' (while studying American history on a afternoon)

I am 'them,'

invisible now in your indivisible union.

I wore the chains of slavery,
took the watery passage for bravery,
and tore lost and bloody victories
from your tyrant lies.

Betrayed, kidnapped, sold and sold again in
a far away land

Three-fifths of a man.

When my freedom came it was a ragtag mockery
dressed in hand-me-down poverty,
with no place to go in the land of opportunity.

Cry?

There were no tears left in my eyes.

I am also 'them.'

I fell before your bullets,
projected from your pulpits
of manifest destiny and blood-soaked
demise.

I am them who yet tell the secrets of your
broken lies.

At the hands of greed and your excuse for
fear,

I am them who death-walked Missouri's Trail
of Tears.

I lived the horror of a pawn's repeated mischance,
and soothed hysteria with one last ghost dance
at Wounded Knee.

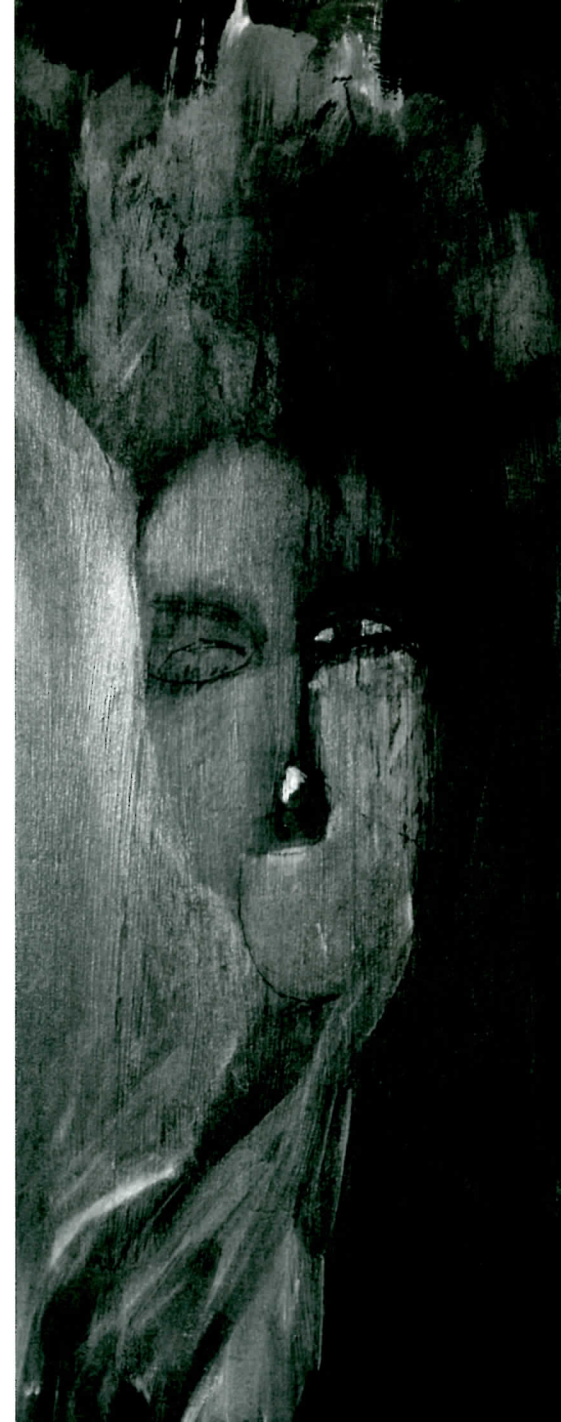
Wovoka Christ spoke to me
of a new heaven and a new earth, of
victory!

Or was it just one last beneficent dream for His
dying people?

All of us swept away,
wept away
kept away
from freedom's skies.

I am them and them:
The Native and The African.

Faith Bishop





let's call it even

I'm sorry that my head is sick
and you spend your life
fixing it.

I have reduced you to servitude.
You are my indentured servant.
I don't

know what to say when I know that
You'd be better off with
someone else.

My selfish heart will not allow it.
I want you trapped in
my broken

thoughts dancing in madness.
I jumped off a cliff
to see

where I'd land. The blood from my
cracked skull stains your canvas
and my

broken thoughts are to your benefit.
So, I beg you to wrap me
in your

silencing arms
once again.

Heather Millican

makeover

what if I turn the
contours of this life
caddy-corner or parallel?
stretch the palette of my eye
by a wild splash of red,
or edge bouclé fabric
with lace and satin?

what yearning would
those broken rules,
neatly bound by time
and nature, yield?

what basic hunger
feed, or fantasy cure?
for I need to change,

form a different shape,
to satisfy the hidden me
who dreams of being
what the mystic sees
beyond beamed corners
and mortared red brick,
curious about my meaning.

Molly Boyce

Art by Brian Cave

sweetglue

Safety is announced by word of mouth
"Give me some gum because my mouth feels foolish!"
The march was like climbing a hill of molasses backward.
Wafting and waking
The aroma of sweet cardboard made ringlets around
Our heads of shiny glowing halos

We protested as our hushed feet moved by lead slippers
Drew our eyes to the window
Now sugar coated
As if to were a witness to spring
We listened to the cold hard truth outside

We then prepared our mouths for breakfast of sweet glue
If we could hear our minds speak to our mouths
We'd agree with Spencer
March on to Hempstead...it did not fly
The perfect speech doesn't always make you secure

Our hearts filled with maple syrup
Our souls filled with funk
Glory osky Andy who would eat this junk!
Because we did not want oatmeal spring came in October
Momma did say if you don't wash your feet ya don't love ya Jesus

The bleak morning of chattering teeth, kept our thoughts of
Siberia warm
Our frowns looked like smiles in the hollow of a spoon
As we kept our resolve we were filled with rebellion
Yet saved by desire

Little Pam-a-lamb knew she had to be with this cook
For the rest of her life
They could not leave this little sheep
This soupy momma with hidden talents
Kept her secret strength on a chain in her pocket

If we can't have waffles we won't ever...ever
Ever eat breakfast again.
And we will walk home

"Que sera sera"
The bowl of sweet glue screamed
Short fat skinny legs and all we marched
Onward in white molasses
Our stomachs now longing for the sweet glue

Pamela Blair

s w e e t



message for my grandfather

after Mark Strand

When you see him tell him I am continuing,
that his work still feeds me,
that I still speak with his accent,

that the body he created is a sweet machine
which senses my intentions

I dance on one leg
while the other one sings.

This is how it will be.

If the body is a muscle,
it is also a conveyance of trust.

Tell him I hear his voice in my heartbeat
as it snares in my ears and floats away from me,
that by being both drum and snare,
I am in constant motion.

Ask him if his soul remembers leaving me here as if
I know the way.

Tell him I was born imperfect,
molded by imperfect hands,
and so, love imperfectly.

Tell him that words are what saves me,
that words are the river-rocks roiling our meaning,
that by living in the center of my words,
I am become them and so
am cradled by the best beloved.

Say that now I honor only a voice which carries me forward,
and that I hope, at the soul-spillage,
to find the secret sweetness of having obeyed my fate.

Solana d'Lamant



Art by Bobby Benefield

message



Art by Alison O'meara

ROUNDTrip

Two hours from home
on my midnight flight to Dallas.
Everyone is asleep, dreaming of jet
engines,
and migratory things.

Her head is on my shoulder
and I look out past the wing.
One hundred miles to our starboard
side I see the peaceful
fury of an electrical storm
below me.
The thunderhead nebula
is just a piece of history.
By the time the light radiates into me
I'm already looking into the past.

The raging hot anger of
an ion-charged aerial
war doesn't crackle with white hot intensity —
it sings a distant jazz song.
A saxophone riff of light
that's over before I even see it.
It's a Charlie Parker song in
a smoky jazz club.

It's a vision that I can't
quite see completely
unless my ears drink in the
music my brain is stirring.

Beauty on the rocks.
Awakened not stirred.

The lightning storm,
so far away,
is slipping past my window frame.
Gone.

The weather pattern and the flight path
like adolescent children at a junior high dance —
the eye contact fleeting and ravaging your bravery.
You feel alone and small so you put your
hands in your pockets and walk away.

There's a grandeur to the world
when seen from a different
view,
and in my coach seat on row
17 the world seems bigger
than I remembered.

I start to wonder about
my future,
where I'll go and who I'll be –
I want to be the kindness of
lingering showers following
summer droughts.
I want to be a quenching
refreshment falling
on your head.

In this world change must
come.
Furious, agonizing, revolutionary, cyclonic
change.
Until those who hate have been
sucked out of their storm cellars and into the
open. The wind will rip their
coats off their backs and
blow their sickness off of them
and out to sea.

Change doesn't follow its
flight pattern.
Change takes a right hand
turn and plummets forward
into the lightning storm.

And my plane might crash.
But who cares?
Sacrifice is a virtue I need to learn.
Forgiveness is my calculus –
hard to study,
difficult to memorize,
impossible to master.

Jazz gives way to rock n' roll.
The world erupts in cataclysmic
thoughts.
Thoughts genetically evolve into
the species of action,
and action welcomes change.

The intercom dings.
The pilot prepares his final
descent.
The storm is hundreds of miles into the past.
The jetliner groans and
complains to gravity.
The passengers awake and
reposition their luggage.
We press down hard
onto the runway.

Back on the ground.
Back at home.
Back beneath the sky,
no longer above it.
Back in my world where
growth is just a theory.
Back at my house where
communication is a burden.
Back in my bed where
thoughts go unrestricted.

Time for change.
For jazz to reinvent.
For life to move.
For God to protect.

There's rain on the runway
and I'm soaking wet.
Change is possible
when thought has value.
When a storm sings choral
odes miles away,
then light will come if only
in small, appetizing doses.

So, wake up, Carter.
Help us reinvent.

Carter Hudson

Euthanasia

I'm educated and aggravated,
so don't push me.

I'm young, now,
in the prime of my life.

With little to look forward to,
retirement is not an option.

I exist in this world,
because you made me.

You may not like what I have to say,
deal with it, I do.

I will live to work,
and die to live.

You mean nothing to me,
a small obstacle.

You're not a challenge; you're not a problem.
You're a pebble, and I'm the sea.

If I tell you to do anything,
you do it, without question.

Because if I can walk on water,
you can get the hell out of my way.

Bow down to those greater than you,
and take your place amongst the sheep.

My generation has been ready,
and is tired of waiting; checkmate.

You have been challenged and conquered,
by the young, the *Invictus*.

Justin A. Goodrich



Boys by Nick Young

Korean Kimchi

Adam liked their kimchi
rotting cabbage and vegetables
in a vat of pickling juices

Back to the beginning
to start again
the warm, womb water
I float in an isolation tank
the quiet solitude
waiting for a mind trip
that follows long
dry spells

Back to the beginning
to the day
I was born
and the memory
however faint
of my first breath
the cold bright room
and odd human touch
examining my ten fingers and ten toes

Back to the beginning
with such absolute certainty
and conviction
you tell me
I know I am loved and wanted
I'm adopted.

Janet Powell

In Transit

You have become a stranger,
and I never saw it
at the time.

I saw the sky change color.

I saw the leaves fall.

I saw my children grow
a little in that space of time.

But I did not see you
as you put your coat on
and stood at the edge,
waiting to go.

You're still waiting.

I see.

And I hear the mad rhythm
Of an angry heart;
I hear the wind's fingers



Reflections by Sara Reising

stirring the trees.
The martins at morning,
the moths at night.
And you are standing
at the edge, stooped,
watching the ground,
waiting to go.

Margaret Burton Malone

Savor the SLAM for Clebo Rainey

Performance Slam—
The city's avante garde
perforate envelopes,
revel inside night-cave womb saloons,
shoes stick to greasy cold concrete,
dirt molding trim hems wall to floor.
Pop-top Miller Lite fizz,
Jack Daniels tickles and warms the throat—
free throat poet-tongue place.

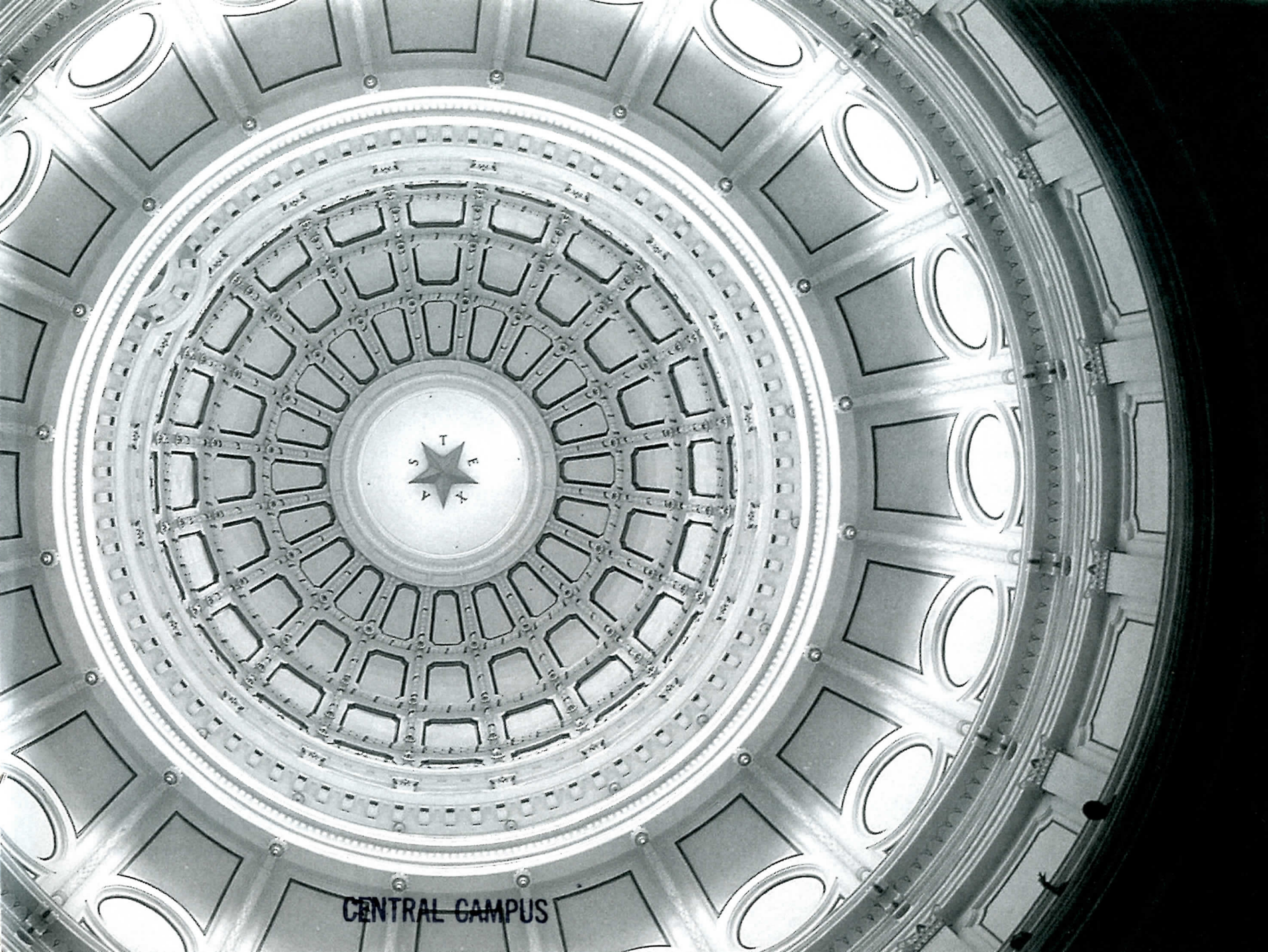
She steps up on the pine box on stage,
Clebo's outstretched hand steadies her gait.
Her staccato voice rattles the microphone,
raves machine gun blasts pouring from mind
and frame,
breasts and genitals abused in defaced landscapes
like a surreal Dali or Picasso cubes.

Anger or laughter rumbles in the rhythm section
of vocals who carry the crowd,
recognize themselves in sections,
smaller or larger than words she reveals.

Secret life passions reign high court here.
Insurgent sage aims for the gut, jugular and heart
as the hunter's dart strikes its bull's-eye.

Janice Rose





CENTRAL CAMPUS

Romance BLOOMS on the Porch

Me, nineteen, shy, an introvert.
 He, twenty-three, a Renaissance man.
 First date—a near disaster—
 he cloaked in a London Fog coat
 singing/strumming a ukulele
 in his white continental Plymouth Fury
 with gold swivel bucket seats
 at a remote drive-in movie.
 I hug the passenger door.

Second date two weeks later,
 we drive to a friend's home
 for an evening of snacks, Shag steps,
 some smiles and slow dances.
 Leaving, we walk across
 the front porch
 side by side.
 He talks, I listen.

My foot hits the first step.
 He steps into open night air
 three feet above ground.
 The hedgerow breaks his fall.
 I bend into guffaws
 cramping my obliques with joy!
 He brushes off the dirt—he isn't hurt
 except every time he tries to speak,
 I laugh and howl until tears come
 and no breath will.

Fate and chance balance our egos
 that early winter's eve—
 lead us down the marriage aisle
 for forty years in partnership.
 No one ever questions why
 we bought our home with a porch
 a mere four inches high.

Janice Rose



Sisters by Paul Bellah

1989

Communist Harmony

by Janet A. Doleh

Wu Song hurried to button his worn woolen jacket and pull on threadbare gloves as he left the icy apartment. The pungent smell of rotting cabbages filled the narrow corridor. His own allotment of ten cabbages was faring better, buried in the small patch of dirt behind the apartment complex. He would dig them up for his wife when she needed them.

The blue Mercedes waited for him at the corner. Wu Song slid in the back, grateful for the warmth, one of the small pleasures of working for the Shanghai Technology Venture. As the government's liaison assigned to STV, Wu Song enjoyed certain privileges. Being driven to and from work was an important one. The morning drive also gave him the opportunity to report to Fen Li, the driver, who contacted Mr. Yu in Beijing twice daily with status reports.

"Nehow, Fen Li," Wu Song said as the car accelerated down the narrow street. "How are you?"

"Good, very good," replied Fen Li. "My mother's surgery went well last night." Fen Li's elderly mother was dying of cancer. Her latest operation removed part of one lung.

"Excellent. I am glad to hear it," said Wu Song. He thought of his own mother, who had died of cancer a year ago. Too many freezing cold winters, too many days of burning the deadly soft coal so abundant on the streets of Shanghai, had taken a final toll on her failing lungs. Silently he cursed the system that relegated their parents to such a fate.

"Any news?" Feng Li broke in on Wu Song's thoughts.

"Yes, I do have something. Two of the workers are talking of leaving for Australia."

Fen Li grimaced his disapproval. "Which ones?"

Jing and Shao. The company mustn't lose Shao; he is one of the best engineers."

"How do they plan to go?" asked Fen Li.

"Jing has been overheard talking about friends already in Australia. She has paid a lot of money to start the paperwork. We think someone from the outside is helping her."

"And Shao?"

"Nothing concrete yet. Perhaps he is counting on Jing's friends to help him as well."

Fen Li nodded. "Watch them closely. Be sure they attend the weekly political re-education meetings. I will document this today."

"Yes," agreed Wu Song. "And now about the American, Mr. Jim Wesson. We had him picked up last night by security. We kept his passport."

"What did he do? Meet a Chinese girl?" asked Fen Li.

"Exactly. One of STV's engineers."

"Too bad for her," said Fen Li. He didn't like to see a promising young girl's life ruined by an unthinking foreigner. The social ostracism that she would face now would disgrace her family. "Which girl is it?"

"Foong Kit. One of Wesson's engineers on the microchip project. Her work has been critical to the project's success."

"Do not return the passport yet," said Fen Li. "But do not hassle anyone. Let them continue the project. We have plenty of time to deal with them after it ships."

Wu Song stared out the window. A crush of cars, bicyclists, buses, and pedestrians jammed the street. Clouds of exhaust and smoke from coal fires mingled with the brown cloud of pollution stretching across Shanghai. The stench and grime clung to buildings, trees, and people alike. Wu Song couldn't remember a time when the city was clean, the air fresh, the sky blue. Only his occasional trips to meet with Mr. Yu in Beijing reminded him that there was a cleaner world outside the smoky haze of Shanghai.

Sometimes Wu Song dreamed of leaving China. The foreigners who came to work at STV on two-year contracts spoke of America as if it were paradise. They owned land, cars, and homes large enough for five Chinese families. They had freedom to choose careers and to quit jobs they didn't like. They openly criticized government policies they didn't like. They had as many children as they wished. Wu Song sighed. Perhaps they had more

than was good for the soul of a man. At least in China, he had security. His government rewarded all men equally, as long as they upheld the system. Older workers could make a little more money. Health care was free.

Wu Song thought of his wife and young son. He was fortunate to have a son. It had been painful when the first two pregnancies resulted in daughters. With the blessing of his parents and wife, Wu Song smothered both babies and slipped their bodies into the Huang Pu River. Many families did so every year, although no one spoke openly about it. Daughters could not provide security for elderly parents the way a son could. Wu Song closed his eyes and nodded. He had a son and he had a job that fed and clothed his family. It was enough.

The Mercedes stopped in front of a dingy high rise. Wu Song and Fen Li exchanged a nod, then Wu Song hurried inside and took the ancient elevator to STV's offices on the eighth floor. He passed his own desk, situated between the elevator and the reception area, and made his customary check to see that the night crew engineers were still on duty. As usual, one was sleeping at his station and the other was studying English. Wu Song continued

past the engineering area to the small kitchen. Dirty cups cluttered the counter. He rinsed his cup with icy tap water, then filled it and placed it in the microwave to boil. Boiling the water killed the bacteria that thrived in Shanghai's water supply but couldn't remove the numerous chemicals. Wu Song was so accustomed to the metallic taste that it seemed normal. He added a generous pinch of green tea leaves and raised the cup to his face, deeply inhaling the soothing steam.

"Nehow, Wu Song."

He turned to greet Chen Tung Ma, director of personnel. Chen crowded into the narrow room and began preparing his tea. Wu Song waited by the doorway.

"Have you prepared for our guest today?" Chen asked. He was referring to the security preparations required for foreign visitors.

"I will do it right away," replied Wu Song. "He is staying at the Jinjiang Hotel?"

"Yes. Contact the manager, Mr. Rey, to help with the arrangements." Wu Song nodded, then hurried down the corridor. He needed to be at his desk to observe and record the exact time of arrival of each engineer and office worker. Mr. Yu required a full report.

Forty-five minutes later, the arrival log was complete. He signed it and sealed it in an envelope. It was time to call Mr. Rey.

The telephone used for confidential security arrangements was the car phone in the Mercedes. Wu Song summoned Fen Li by beeper, then took the elevator down to the ground floor. When Fen Li arrived, Wu Song slid into the front passenger seat and closed the door.

“Security call,” he said.

He dialed the number and within minutes had made the arrangements. The hotel agreed to put the foreigner in one of the rooms wired for sound. His belongings would be expertly searched by hand and then electronically scanned. One of the hotel security personnel would log the exact activities of the foreigner when he was inside the hotel. Every morning, Wu Song would call for a daily report.

S

Satisfied, he nodded to Fen Li and opened the car door. He walked back into the building, thinking about the importance of his job. Because he and thousands of other loyal Chinese citizens obeyed and upheld the system, they had nothing to fear. Each painstaking task of observing, recording, and reporting the actions of foreigners strengthened their security. And the watchful eye they kept on each other showed their patriotism.

Wu Song felt good about the system.

Back on the eighth floor, he took his customary place at his desk. He sat up straight, eyes slowly sweeping the area with the demeanor of a professional watchdog. The clock on the wall clicked off the seconds. Three hours and thirty-four minutes until the noon meal. The day was going quite well.

finger of GOD

I got mad at you
and shook my finger
at the sky
but if I were God
that finger would have stirred
up a tempest.
I blew out a mouthful
of air
in exasperation
But if I were God

that breath would have obliterated
the house you built.
I started to cry
when I realized there was nothing
I could do
and if I were God
you probably would have drowned
by now

Sydney Portilla-Diggs

religion

daily face we evil and good
the choices to make are ours
for Heaven to accept us as we are
or Hell to rejoice when we fall

Molly Boyce

Prostrate Man by Paul Bellah



Served Warm

I hope only that
she will devour you,
for all
Bluebeards should suffer
- be devoured -
devoured, stripped, engulfed.

It is folly for
me
To foul my own heart
by craving-

yet I imagine this time will
and then you
will be hanging
in her hidden room.

Margaret Burton Malone



Maldune by Misty Goldish

PANTOUM FOR
VAN GOGH

A cypress twists toward the crescent moon,
Thick brushstrokes eddying around their forms.
The vase of sunflowers is signed, Vincent;
His pipe lies on his yellow bedroom chair.

Brushstrokes dancing free around their forms,
Two Frenchmen walk along a winding lane.
Pipe and tobacco rest on the yellow chair
While absinthe drinkers talk in night cafes.

Two men keep walking down the country lane;
A cousin's peach tree blushes pink in Arles.
While absinthe drinkers talk in night cafes,
Firework stars blaze white at Saint-Remy.

The peach tree blooms forever pink in Arles;
They say he sold one painting in his life.
Stars whirl, blazing white, at Saint-Remy;
Did turpentine or absinthe twist his mind?

They say he sold one painting his whole life;
A cypress twists toward the yellow moon.
Did turpentine or absinthe craze his mind?
He simply signed the sun-filled vase, Vincent.

Hazel Spire

PONDERANCE

I chose to be here,
In the classroom,
Learning of Freud,
But my conscious
Seeps through glass
Into autumn's warmth.
The peak of color –
The best it gets here.
I find pleasure
In this view
And I wonder
What Freud would say?
What part of unconscious
Finds meaning in fall?

I easily recognize
Innuendo.
I am capable of
Tawdry thought,
But this escaped me.
Perhaps it is anticipation
Of swelling buds in spring,
Waiting to release new life.
Or perhaps the id
Is a product of some
Over-imaginative
Unconscious excuse
For obsessive thought.

Beth Turner Ayers



Lily by Janet Powell



bone

I get home and
the furniture is
moved around.

I get a sick feeling
in my gut. Sister
and I drag and
scrap the floor
putting it all
right again. Daddy
doesn't know.
You stand on the
front steps and
don't even help.

Now you stop
looking into
our eyes. I
close my own
eyes and feel the
world wobble beneath
my feet. Now I
know anything
can be broken.

Claire M. Shipman

Angel by Janet Powell

The Red Accordion

Baby was broken at the beginning:
a failure - not a boy;
and broken from the bashing:
neck arching in its flight, head
sailing like a full moon;
broken in the brain:
eddies of milk and opium swirling
in her bottle, her suckling supplies
the ebb and flow of dream tides.

In each drop of that concoction shines
a crystal pleasure dome. Centered
in each dome, a carousel where Mama rides,
playing her accordion, it's red lung pumping
regular as monocycles, menses, milk.

Mama hides from the horror
in the house behind polkas.

Pitch of note and yaw of song create
ricochet rhythms through Baby's brain.
The musical warp wanders over
time and scale in slow motion as Daddy, drunk,
warbles from the chandelier.
Sloe-eyed mother, music was her refuge,
her release from broken lives:
broken at the beginning from the bashing
of the brain.

Air caught in that red lung rushes
out like Baby's sigh in Mama's hug.
The silence between songs leaves
clear, breathable spaces-a glimpse
of stable ground until the cycle repeats:
regular as monocycles, menses, milk.

Solana d'Lamant

Trojan Horse

indeed
he could have been over
one hundred feet
tall
he was so belly full
of man-sized lies
he intruded upon
her innocent life
the kind of gift
no mother wanted
he was more than
a stealer of dreams
when his infiltration
was complete
he absconded with
her virtue
and abandoned
the innocence
they created
in one smooth
and covert move

Sydney Portilla-Diggs

Art by Brian Cave



by Sydney Portilla-Diggs

May Pearl knew right away that she was in trouble. She stood in front of the mirror with the blow dryer in her hand wondering what it would feel like to plunge her hand in the toilet. How long would it take before the electrical shock killed her? How long would it hurt?

In an absentminded sort of way, the thought frightened her but she kept it a secret from her husband Tyrone. Later that night, she lay in her bed acutely aware of the fact that she was going to die. Although no nameless disease ate away at her healthy cells, she lay there thinking of dying just the same—not living, not creating, not loving, and regrettably not growing. She lay there not doing a thing but breathing and wasting time. In the dark, she listened to the steady breathing of her man lying beside her and knew he, too, was dying in his own way.

The problem was that she worried a little too much about what other people thought of her and what she was doing. She spent too much time trying to please everybody else—especially her mother. She knew that her mother wasn't going to be satisfied until she found out exactly what was going on.

She could hear Mama Renee like a tape recording in her head. “The Bible don’t say blessed are those who put on a good face during times of suffering or trial, May Pearl. And it don’t say nothing about blessing those who aren’t gonna be real. If you hide your pain away deep inside, there is no blessing and there is no comfort.” On the surface, her mother had been talking about some man she heard about on the evening news that pushed his girlfriend off of a bridge and then jumped off after her. But she knew her mother; she was always getting at something else. And May Pearl couldn’t keep a secret from Mama Renee. “Nothing is so bad that you have to kill yourself behind it, child. Suicide is like a slap in God’s face. It’s like taking the life that He gives you and telling Him that you don’t want it. Besides, black folks don’t commit suicide no how.” May Pearl didn’t know how to tell her Mama that death seemed like the only solution to this unlife she was living. She’d never tell her mother that.

Sometimes, May Pearl wondered if this was all there was. Her days were consumed by hours and minutes and seconds that seemed like years. All she could remember was the slow and

deep ache of longing and of emptiness. It was like a hunger that food couldn't satisfy—a thirst that water couldn't quench. Her longings were deep and greedy and very much alive.

It wasn't that Ty didn't love her anymore; he just treasured his selfish pride so much more. This is what their marriage had become. A few nights before, she had stood over him with an imaginary knife held high over her head. She pretended to plunge the knife in his back again and again. She wondered if he sensed her fury as he lay in bed with his back turned to her. She knew his eyes were squeezed tight while he pretended to sleep; there would be no communication between them tonight or any other night.

May Pearl wished she knew how this would play out. She was so tired of getting her feeling hurt by Ty's indifference. All she could think to do was pray. "Ain't I your daughter too, Lord? I'm afraid to talk to you right now, Lord. Because I know you're the creator and all, I know I'm not supposed to question you. But I don't understand why you let your son hurt me? Did you make me unlovable? Did you make me empty inside? Is this what you made me for? To suffer and to hurt? To want something that I am not ever going to have? Don't you care about me, Lord? Ain't I your child too?" May Pearl cried out to God. But he wasn't talking to her either. Not tonight.

A few days later, it was a surprise to her when Ty asked her what it would take to make her happy. For once, May Pearl gave an answer that didn't take anyone else's needs into consideration. All she knew was she had a yearning—she wanted to go to college and she wanted to write.

At first, Ty didn't stand in the way of May Pearl going to college. But it wasn't long before she felt his lack of support. He complained when dinner wasn't ready on time. He pouted when she stayed late at the library studying. Mama Renee says that it was the way of some black men to begrudge the education of their wives. "Ty would rather have you to stay home barefoot and pregnant, May Pearl while he is surrounded by them pretty professional women on his job. You better fix yourself up and don't let nothing stop you from getting your education." So May Pearl kept on going to school and started submitting essays for publication.

The first thing she got published was an essay called Things my Mama said. She was rightly proud of it and couldn't wait to show to her mother. But Mama Renee was ticked off when she read it because she thought it made her look bad. "I didn't say none of that mess you said." Mama Renee fumed. "Don't you write nothing about what your mother said no more."

M
May Pearl laughed softly. "Mama, you can't tell me what to write. Besides I only wrote the truth. I'm sorry if you didn't like what I said. But I think it's good. I think it's uplifting."

"I am not going to argue with you, May Pearl. Just because you call yourself being mad at your husband, you ain't going to take it out on me."

In truth, how May Pearl felt had nothing and everything to do with Tyrone. It had everything to do with her inability to stand up for herself. "I am not going to argue with you, Mama. These are my feelings and they are not up for discussion."

But Mama Renee was not going to let it go. She had run May Pearl's life by intimidation for all of her life. She wasn't going to stop now. "You are so paranoid it ain't funny. You take offense at everything, girl. You cannot control the world. You are forgetting your place in life. You are forgetting what you are supposed to do. When Jesus saw that the fig tree didn't have fruit, he caused it to shrivel up and die." Mama Renee was sure that she had belittled May Pearl right back into her place—but she was mistaken.

"Maybe I can't control the world but I can control what I am going to take. The things you say hurt, Mama. Maybe you need to think about what you are saying. Your words are caustic."

May Pearl paused but her mother remained stubbornly silent. "Mama, all we have is each other. We have got to be here for each other."

"I am not going to argue with you, May Pearl." Lord, her mother was a stubborn woman.

M
"Mama, I don't want to argue with you but we have got to deal with this. You are going to hear what I have to say whether it's now or in a letter."

"I am not going to waste my time reading and writing letters, May Pearl." Her threat held little potency because May Pearl knew the real reason the fig tree withered. The tree withered because it wasn't allowed to bear fruit. Nothing could grow in an environment where it was stifled. No plant could grow if it were root bound. May Pearl was tired of being root bound; it was time to grow.

"But I do, Mama...that's what I do...I write."

after reading
other poets...

I don't know where your words
come from –
what fleshy
folds of language they live in –
at times like maggots
on rotting tissue – other times
like airy green-tinged
sprouts reaching
for sky.

I read your words and weep
that I didn't write them –
or else I rock-skip over them
so I won't get wet.
Sometimes I don't want to swim
in their murky brownness –
their swaying fields
of cold elodea. Too much effort
not to drown.

But the truth is –
and this is the real truth –
I exhale my words the same
as you – and like yours, they push up
through morning dirt like daylilies
or spew like vomit
from my gut. The relief is just the same
and neither of us sleeps
until then.

Dallie Clark



Photo by Claire Shipman



EFFORCES

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