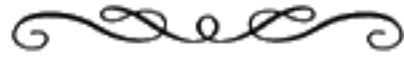


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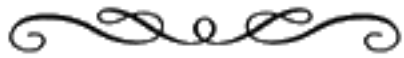
Spring 2002

Ink runs from the corners of my mouth.
There is no happiness like mine.
I have been eating poetry.
-Mark Strand-

Volume 4
Issue 3



Dedicated with love and gratitude
to Mr. Calegari,
who taught and inspired us.



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The Pulse

What a beautiful world in the city
Made human by graffiti
and the sour urine smell
And what I tell you
to compel you
That this city is ours to climb
it's mine
To swing ourselves into the deep
to leap
at a chance at power
to devour
it all and then run
Each person here
has flair
different color of skin
different texture of hair
Each mind with its own belief
With every thought,
image and personal grief.
Sleeping in the street
he feels defeat
His body turns cold
but as I put my hand in the fold
of his jacket
I feel through him the city still beats.
One million hearts pulse as one
In this concrete jungle
life's made or undone
So either survive or drown
Immersed in crowding bodies
You'll be falling down
Life doesn't take pity
What a beautiful world in the city.

Francesca Austin-Ochoa

I'm reading you two
night, drinking to you
lying in the fiery clouds
you are washing me
raining me down, pages
Inside I'm Kansas, barren
broken like 7 bad mirrors
just sleeping, tightly in
my tunnel. You light
the air in gold
falling, down into my
toes. Not moving to cry
I'll always ask why.

Anonymous

Pink

She loved it when the cherry blossoms bloomed.
Looks like it snowed pink, she thought.
She needed the illusion of the snow.
But the pink cherry blossoms weren't cold enough.
She missed Minnesota.

She liked fuchsias, too.
But not because they resembled snow.
She liked fuchsias because they were pink,
And this made her think of cherry blossoms,
Which made her think of snow,
Which made her think of Minnesota,
Her home.

Besides, pink fuchsias are just plain pretty.
She was a plain girl,
Had a plain face.
But not in winter in Minnesota,
When her cheeks turned pink.
Then she was pretty.
With pink cheeks she border lined on beautiful.
But always only borderline.
And never in California.

Vlasta Komorous-Towey

Changing Winds

As the leaves change color on the aged Maple tree
My hopes are dimmed while the truth does shine brilliant
I am alone with this truth that I see
While others stay blind and ebullient.

Judging the past is so easy to do
Future untold makes for unsettled minds
Like rustling leaves my nerves do ensue
Correspondence brings such curious finds.

In the changing winds and the turning tides
Future is set and past is no longer
Making frantic nerves of doubt subside
And fear of change grow stronger.

As the process begins it does not stall
Like the changing leaves in the coming fall.

Ashley Berhel

Now we are friends my love and nothing more
And as I write these words I know you lie in bed, asleep
with her
Back to back or arm in arm
She holds in the palm of her hand something I just don't
have: maturity
She offers a car and a house, a future, while all I could
provide you with would be a faded sensuality
You have melded now, past the realm of you and she, into a
monster you now call 'we'
The we of shared breakfasts, the we of waking up together,
The we of a one-headed and two-armed monster,
The combination of two separate personalities into one life,
into an eternity
I see kindness and domesticity behind your eyes, and
realize you are better off without me
And now I can look back on the long lost walks in paradise
like they were a movie, but
I think I see your future and it fills me with sorrow and
envy
As I see my own eternal oneness filling the cracks of my
life
We are friends my love and nothing more, friends my love
and barely that as yet, and still I wonder just how long it
will take me to accept this double-bodied entity in the space
where you used to be, and not try to find an ex-lover's
embrace in every gesture.
And it's not that I have it worse anymore,
It's just that you have it better.

Ruth Crossman

As I was driving down a street,
an object caught my eye.
There was a spacecraft, close, ten feet—
I wondered if it could fly.

I left my car and looked around—
not another man in sight.
Some creatures came out to astound
and told me of their plight.

“We’re aliens, from a distant place.”
I tried hard to be brave.
“What a joke, we’re lost in space;
please show us on our way.”

“My name is Clarste,” I said to it.
“Anthony’s the name.”
“Now if you don’t prove that you exist,
I’ll prove I am insane.”

“We’re travelers going on a trip.
We said to you just now,
we’re trying to get to Sirius—
please just tell us how.”

“We hear it’s a vacation spot,
so we are in a hurry.
Our star chart just shows a dot;
please help us on our journey.”

“How would I know; I’m just a man.
I can’t even get to Mars
and you come here and just demand
how to reach the stars?”

“We’re sorry sir, we did not know
how backwards this place was,
but do you where we could go
to find someone who does?”

“Try NASA, you little gnomes.
It’s over there some ways.
If they don’t know, you should go home.
Where is that anyways?”

“We’re from Vega, by the way,
in case you want to know.
Please come visit us some day —
Oh look, we gotta go.”

“They didn’t say thanks,” Clarste exclaimed.
“They just went on their way.
How rude they were; they should be ashamed.
Aliens these days...”

Sam Eilman-Levitt

Iron Man

Shine flash fly boom
His super suit has special boots
Better fighter than a kettle
But made of the same metal
Fists of fury
But mostly iron
He built his suit from iron pans
And that's why they call him the iron man

Paul Ryan

Does the earth revolve around me?
I don't know
But that's never going stop me from my flow
Honesty, compassion, loyalty, integrity
guide me as student, athlete and emcee
Does the earth revolve around me?
Let's see
The sun took a day off today so I could shine
so sit back, enjoy, and become bright from my rhyme
This class knows me, I sit right there
To some I'm their homey, and some they just don't care
So don't feel bad if you blank out and stare
but those who listen will find out I have grey hair
Christopher Morocco, my category is "other"
plain and simple because you can't find another
Yeah I'm out of the norm
I'm wearing skin as my uniform
and my style's coming fresher, than a newborn's
Being who I am basically comes with ease
and I flow through life freely, like a breeze
I know life is hard; it's left me scarred
Sometimes its cages make me feel barred
but I found myself buried deep within a cave
and to this day it thanks me for being saved
It gave me a treasure for being a good sleuth
It taught me not to lie and to always live the truth
You can always run, but you can never hide
because the truth will find you, and snatch away your pride
the hardest thing I've done is look truth in the eyes
but now I don't live in fear, dishonor or surprise
Does the earth revolve around me?
I don't know
but that's never going stop me from my flow
Honesty, compassion, loyalty, integrity
guide me as student, athlete and emcee
Does the earth revolve around me?
Let's see

I pick up the mic and scream “yes, yes y’all”
I don’t pick up a bottle and consume alcohol
The “C” in confidence is the “C” in Chris
That is the reason I am able to act like this
Yeah my uniform is a perfect fit, nice and slim
That’s why I am so comfortable in my own skin
That’s the way it will be
and that’s how it’s always been
Okay, so I am about as macho as a Nacho
a sensitive muchacho but not paco I’m Chris Morocco
A real man, you can see it with your eye
Why you ask, well I’m not afraid to cry
and on any given day I can laugh at myself
Yes I’m rich in my heart, a true man of wealth
I’m not a gangster or rich like Microsoft
I’m 17 years old, white, and kinda soft
In a minute, I’ll tell you about my past
but first I will show you that my synapses fire fast
I can and I will look and leave your brain stung
cause my lyrics sound good when they roll off my tongue
Just keeping the funk so you know where I’m from
Once you see my mic I know you’ll want one
Not knowing it now but you’ll never get none
cause a witch gave it to me in Salem
I’m making it worse from this crafty curse
I’m not snatching your purse, I’m thinking fast first
Then I converse, verbally leaving you hurt
needing a nurse, driving your hearse
Full of words but I’m not the dictionary fairy
My lyrics hit the air and they rarely carry
cause negativity just keeps swearing
I’m telling you now, I’ll never know how
my tongue and lyrics pack such a pow
because of my mic I don’t need a pen
My mic takes my words and mends them
so listen to my raps start to end
Does the earth revolve around me?
I don’t know

but that's never going stop me from my flow
Honesty, compassion, loyalty, integrity
guide me as student, athlete and emcee
Does the earth revolve around me?
Let's see
Please hold your breath until I'm done
if you don'll miss the story of where I'm from
I came before the t-rex when my space ship shattered
and for years after I've successfully brought laughter
I was told my ship was shot down by a gun
but I know my tribe sent me to earth to spread fun
so I keep my role as natural born leader here
and with positivity and cheer
I defeat negativity and fear
Does the earth revolve around me?
I don't know
but that's never going stop me from my flow
Honesty, compassion, loyalty, integrity
guide me as student, athlete and emcee
Does the earth revolve around me ?
Let's see
I write raps, and if there is no music I clap
I make the best of my life and you can't take that
even if I find myself the rat and you're the cat
I will outsmart you and catch you in my trap
A verbal pugilist, I like to smack the track
Too original to be found on a grocery store rack
I like to watch life and learn
I yearn for a place where faces don't force me to get good
grades
I want to be taught respect and how to behave
I don't want to wake up and shave like everyday
I've got to fix this world and I've got to start somewhere
so I fed the poor, pick up trash and clean my underwear
I won't allow myself to be anything but my best
My chest does not just move for my own breath
It lets me communicate so I'll talk until my death

To let people know or to let my feelings flow
cause the worst answer to a question is “no”
Oh and a side note, my jersey is number 23
the same angle of the earth’s axis
so the earth does revolve around me
PEACE

Chris Morocco

Bartender, a drink.
You want to see my I.D.?
But I'm just fifteen.

Amanda Long

Gas Station

A lanky boy leaned there
languidly against the wall.

A woman wearing new shoes
walked away rather weirdly.

A fly flittered erratically,
drunk off of the fumes.

A stiff in a suit sat
swallowing some cheap sweets.

All of them tired and worn,
Bored and adrift.

But not you,
so fresh,
so intoxicated with freedom.
There's something a cappella about you.

Vlasta Komorous-Towey

Metro to Heaven

I hit the gas
as I speed past
a granny
in her
station wagon
I blow
right by
another guy
A red import the
license plate
indicates the name
“Red Dragon”
Up the on-ramp I speed
I have an addiction
to feed
That of passing others
in my
Geo Metro

The engine will blow
no doubt
and I begin to scream
and shout
the lyrics of Billy Joel
blaring on my radio
Faster, faster, I hit 90
I'm the master
of this tiny
hunk of metal
speed machine

I have left
all worries, concerns
behind

as I race
over the highway
to a far-away coast
to rest my mind
and the engine of
my Geo Metro

Demetrius Loufas

As I gaze across that familiar expanse, the sweet scent of a
Georgia breeze
seems to linger about me, awakening my senses.
Oh, how long it seemed since I'd craved her velvety
touch...
Oh, how long since I'd felt I missed the colors of that
melting sunset, and
thirsted for that luscious kiss...
Oh, how long it had been since I'd seen that unforgettable
peach commercial,
just a minute earlier.

Michelle Rissman

Stomach Aches and Pie

I am warm all over with a sick stench of molding
rhubarb pie at the pit of my almost empty stomach.
Its sweetness didn't last long, but it was steamy enough
to remind me of how good warm rhubarb tastes, and at that
same
moment the idea of cutting another slice sounds strangely
appealing.

My spoon is lifted; I dip it into the half melted French
vanilla ice cream
and wrap my lips around the soft crust and moist rhubarb
chunks.

The warm pie and cold ice cream are painfully delicious,
making each bite worse than the next
until its all gone and the only thing left is a stomach ache
and an empty plate
full of nothing.

Annie Goodsill

The Rape of the Pear

Your voluptuous shape and smooth skin are irresistible. You loathe his rough hands and sour breath when he holds you close to him and smells your gentle flavor. He comes closer and touches his lips to you and gropes your exposed body with his rough tongue. Your mind races to escape but there is no time to think. He grasps you in his teeth. The sweetness that he tastes tempts his wildest fantasies. He has been watching you, waiting patiently, and now you are soft and ripe. He decides that one kiss is never enough and forces you to remeet his salty lips. The precious nectar you have coveted since birth is swallowed with your dignity, until the very core of your being is exposed. You are thrust into the darkness to rot with the banana peels and moldy apples. If only they knew that just an hour ago you sat on a silver dish with mangos and melons. But they would not believe you because now you are just filth, filth, filth.

Francesca Austin-Ochoa

Flying Fish

Looking for heaven, but I'm not sure how.
Funky fish look too, fast using their tails.
Aiming. Following the weird sound somewhere.
Ears not eyes. Fish blinded with shiny scales.
Pushing me at the whale. He swallows me.
Shot out the blowhole, I still search for soul.
At the stop of the spout, the music's chi
Is like root beer; it floats me up a knoll.
Looking way down at the ocean all the fish,
Died. Glad I'm up on a cloud. I'm happy.
Because I'm feeling bad I make a wish.
It's to help all the fish. I must be sappy.
 They fall off the cloud, because they are blind.
 I didn't fall because I have a mind.

Paul Ryan

Something for Paul

something has been on my mind
so I wander
and write in color

without reason
i curse in
taste and smells
wade in skies and bells

swimming through rivers
I am an observer
where everything is everything
but nothing has ever become something

I will continue to float
in my magic purple boat
Until one day I fall
and learn to be like Paul

Lauren Thomasberger

I wish I could just sleep for a full 8 hours. I have a self-diagnosed insomnia. I'd go to a doctor to prove it, but what would that solve? The most he could do is put me on sleeping pills, and I don't trust pills. I don't trust doctors for that matter. Maybe it's because they can act so nonchalant when they tell you to "turn your head and cough" or maybe it's just because hospitals smell like Vick's Vapo-rub and pee. Who knows what could be floating around in the air vents anyway? Didn't you see "Outbreak"? When you're paranoid and have a library card, hypochondria is the next logical step down the path of neurosis. Did you know that if you sneeze too hard, you can fracture a rib? Or if you try to suppress a sneeze, you can rupture a blood vessel in your head or neck and die? This year, over five thousand people will injure themselves playing pool. It's true; I read it! So I think about these things, and I don't sleep. I can't turn my brain off, and when I finally do, I wake up and start all over again.

I started getting nosebleeds for no apparent reason and decided I had cancer. Bill said you can get them from too much stress, but I think Bill harasses dolphins... probably sea-dwelling animals in general. It makes sense, the part about stress, but how can I trust him when he doesn't sleep at night either? He sees it as a luxury, but he doesn't have to get up early every day, he's in independent study. He can go to bed for the long haul, while I end up nodding off randomly throughout the day. I'll wake up and have no idea where I am or how I got there. Often people will be watching me and laughing because someone made a smart remark. I don't care mostly; at least I get to escape for a little while. I'd probably be able to sleep if it were permitted during the day; by nature I'm just a night owl.

Maybe it's just because I am more comfortable at night. I am, after all, a book person, and after everyone else has gone to sleep I can sit and be completely alone and not care. The escape of loneliness is the next best thing to the escape of dreaming.

You can find ways to entertain yourself; you get a little room to move. All day we're herded around like cattle and you can feel the heat of other dirty, sweaty bodies around you. With each person you meet during the day your chances of disease are increased. How many people have touched that doorknob before you, and how many people did they come in contact with, and what kind of bacteria were they carrying? You could wash your hands over and over again, but then you'd just find out you have another disease: obsessive-compulsive disorder. It's the self-control to leave it alone that I'm looking for. That power to prove you're fine. You can pretend you have Tourette's syndrome and run down the street screaming every obscenity you can think of, but as long as you made the conscious decision, then you don't have it, you get to stay in control. You can go to church naked as long as you're willing to accept the consequences. That's control.

I don't remember my dreams, but I remember the feeling in them. It is one of the few times I can really feel powerful, because I can control the world inside. They make sleep a much sought after commodity. When you think about it, we humans have so little power we can attest to as individuals. Animals got all the good natural defenses, and even in our own society we aren't safe. We establish systems that destroy our freedom of speech and beat us into submission through fear tactics. Didn't you read *1984*? Didn't you know there are at least 18 different ways to tap a telephone and that most wiretapping devices make no audible sound?

It's nice to know that there's a spot all my own, where I can be king. Those few square inches of gray matter in my head contain some strange things. They contain salvation. Now if you don't mind, I'm going to lay down over here a bit. I won't necessarily sleep. I just need to rest and think for a while.

John Roda

Mirror's Edge

Restless waves of sapphire
Reflecting infinity
Stretching from light to darkness
From sinners to saints
From life to death
Unifying the extremes
And everything in between.
I want to sail to the core
And let anchor fall
Lift my head to the sky
Open my arms
And dive.

Erica O'Connor

Love Reborn

Holding you close, I knew you were mine,
silently vowing not to mess up this time,
though I couldn't say it, or even let you know.
Words are too simple to express or show
the joy inside me, the warmth that I felt.
Your hundreds of kisses that made my soul melt....
No longer afraid, there's no need to hide;
somehow you've awakened this child inside.

JayOhEazy

Rojo

Shortness was a look about that man, not an especially attractive character. His thickness of bone and language made him appear like a growling blue ox. There was a meanness in his brow, and a callous over his mouth that discouraged the cracking red lips from curling around the edges to form a grisly toothless smile. No matter, even if the callous had allowed it, the coldness in his eyes would have made a smile unrecognizable. All penance for his heart's DESIRE. She was dressed in black with shiny red nails. Shiny as freedom, twinkling in the eyes of a captive. Her hair color came from rubbing those shiny nails through her soft curled locks, and illuminating her candy painted face like the glowing stream of a deep Merlot.

This woman came to him one night with the gentle roundness of her features and diamonds hanging from her body like snowflakes in the dead of winter. Then she left. Although the small, disgruntled man was not sure how long she stayed, it was only one night later that she left him with nothing but solace of music for the broken souls. He had given it all to her, and as he sat nearby, in a pool of blankets and self-pity he stared meanly out at the ocean that scintillated bluely. He DESIRED to redeem his dignity and self-respect from the trash that rendered him useless. I sat and watched him from a far away place. Too frightened to venture near the scraggly man, I thought of his oppression that made him a slave to DESIRE. He looked out on the sapphires that sparkled in the ocean, but he was no fisherman and could not go out with his net to bring them home.

Maybe if they had been rubies he would have cared more. He could have looked out on the pile of wealth, and taken just one gem as a token to ease the pain of his lost scarlet beauty. If he saw red, he would face death to pull the color on to his paintbrush and paint the story of his heart. In my hand I held a string the color of cranberries.

Red is not an easy color to find. I acquired this string from a man whom I helped to smuggle across the border. “Rojo,” he said, “Rojo.”

“¿Porque, amigo?” I whispered, as we parted in the shadows of the night. He stood mute, and then ran away to a better more colorful place. Ever since, I’d hoped to find the old man sitting alone. I walked forward and shouted, “¿Como esta señor?” My gut flinched as he slowly turned his head. His piercing eyes met mine and locked gaze. The next few seconds, I felt my innards spin a knot, my body wrenched, making even my fingers tingle, and I fell into the sand. After catching my breath, I pulled my trembling face, contorted by sorrow, up to remeet those dark eyes. But, he was staring back out at the sea, looking for rubies. I slowly got to my feet. I was pushed towards him, gliding on the wings of my own DESIRE. “Rojo,” I said. Again I saw the massive neck turn to look upon my own dark figure. His gummy mouth was flung open, and his lips looked as if they had never stretched so far. His eyes grew large and I grew afraid of his oyster-like appearance. He sensed my discomfort and drew back, withholding from my sight the precious pearl that rested on the width of his tongue.

However, the glossy droplets that snowballed down his gruff cheeks revealed his forbidden past. I saw a small boy nestled in a hill of long grass and purple flowers, dark and innocent. The night sky blossomed around him.

The stars danced that night – a waltz. They blanketed the sky as they spun a web of silver light, in which the boy, this old man, found himself marvelously taking part. The stars lifted him off the ground, and that night, he danced like never before, on that tail of a comet.

As the next tear gently rolled towards me, I watched the boy, now slightly older, spying from behind the stove as his mother gave birth. His palms were white with fear, his beautiful mama twisted and shook as she battled with the smiling child now inching its way into life.

Three more memories rolled off his consciousness, relieving the burden of his emotions, in a single drop of water, which had waited to be released for an eternity.

The first portrayed a fifteen-year-old boy as he looked under his teacher's skirt as she passed up the staircase, and he felt within him a pulsating intention that caused him to chase after her up the dark staircase one night. A second showed a man whose handsome figure sent love rippling into the young girls' hearts. The third showed him with the woman whose red hair and nails had seduced him up to his room. Her nails gliding over his blackened skin.

He had loved many women, but never with the passion that sucked out his breath into a pressureless vacuum where he floated upwards toward a thick metallic beam of light, where hollow sounds echoed in his ears. He watched her stare at him in fear and disgust, but he could do nothing because his eyes would not blink, and his body had turned cold and foreboding. And that is how he came to his barren and colorless eternity, and how his beauty and charisma decayed into the crumpled figure before me. This place where we are contained is for those who cannot die, but have been buried by humanity. The land of wasted lives, where people sit and wait for some lively color to take them back to life. To begin again is the only chance when all other opportunities have been taken away. So these determined and ambitious souls stare deeply into the ocean of wealth that bubbles around them, but none so intensely as he.

That is why I had chosen to give away the string that I still clutched in my anxious hand. "I am a shadow of living man, just as he is," I tell myself. "Yet, his shadow is so saturated by the drowning thoughts of his lost civilization, that a shard of red is the only thing that is able to restore faith that the border exists, and blue skies and orange mountains will meet him on the other side.

I run fast as the wind beside me and drop the string into his lap and am gone before the chill of his eyes could penetrate my pounding heart.

I never saw the man again. Though often I dreamed, not of the man I saw empty hearted on the beach, but of a younger lovelier man that I saw in the memories of himself.

This man had the glow of happiness in his cheeks and covered himself in a jacket made from the golden hair of a lion. The colors that swirled around him withdrew the empire that had controlled every thought and pain under its rule. DESIRE took flight, for the matches lit a flame inside of him and he went out to fish for rubies so that others would acknowledge the beautiful color of his heart.

Francesca Austin-Ochoa

Rhapsodize

There's no need to rhapsodize
About guys bound to womanize.
I allow myself to fantasize;
Good judgment I should exercise
For your lines and style are plagiarized.
Find yourself and prioritize.
You wanted me to glamorize
A trinket to keep others mesmerized.
It took me too long to realize
I'm much more than a prize.
For nothing less I should be penalized,
But I still leave you hypnotized.

Thus there's no need to rhapsodize
About guys bound to womanize.

Quandra Chaffers

Wasted Love

Does my love always work in such a way
That I cannot return the affection
Offered by my lover's lips every day?
Will I never behold my own Passion?
I tried for a love that was strong and pure,
But by sunset I knew it was not true,
And that my aching heart would have no cure.
Doesn't my somber face act as a clue?
Alas, nothing of the sort came to be
And my so-called lover won't let me fly
With all the birds in the sky who are free.
Curse that man who won't let me say goodbye.

A trapped love is not something to condone,
And now I know I am stronger alone.

Annie Goodsell

Devil's Masquerade

Lost in the Devil's masquerade
I accepted a forbidden dance or two
But the company of sin
Is better than the loneliness of truth

He emblazoned his name onto my soul
Sealed by an enchanting incantation
Now I'm a foolish moth to his fire
Blinded by pleasure and temptation

In this constant night of torment
He smiles, I can leave at will
But that's a lie to you and myself
For time proves I want him still

Quandra Chaffers

Rendezvous with a Mood

The first time I listened to “In a Sentimental Mood” by John Coltrane, it sang to me—but there are no words. When I hear it, it takes me to a place in my mind that I have been to many times. Each instrument tells a part of a story that I have created for this piece, a story that begins with me waiting alone in a room.

The first notes have been given to the piano. They tremble like raindrops on the windowsill, clinging to the glass that will not hold them. I am reminded of the warmth I am enjoying inside. I am waiting for my lover, who is late.

Finally, with the sound of the saxophone, he glides in: slowly, but with intention. The sax picks up, then slows down as I am embraced but left with the anticipation of a kiss. I sense I should still be waiting, so I do not move.

The notes of the sax wander through the room while the other instruments follow dutifully, and he walks wordlessly. Only his aimless strides indicate variations in the melody. The music and his presence curl around me like the smoke of incense and I want to touch him but fear that, like smoke, he cannot be held. For a moment, the two stop: the sax silent, my lover’s back facing me. All I can hear are the raindrops tapping on the window, as though they are trying to figure out what he is thinking, too. I am still waiting impatiently to be acknowledged.

Then they start again. The sax gains intensity as my lover advances, but, before reaching me, both turn and slip through a crack in the wall I have never noticed. The sax stops, and I run outside to see him walking down the wet street before he disappears around the corner.

A lover is only defined by what he does, and if he does not do it, he is no one. He is no longer my lover, and I am alone in the rain.

What Happens to Lizards and Dragonflies When They Die

“What happened to you?” asked the dragonfly.

“Hit by a car,” replied the lizard.

“Tragic, I guess, but you’re too dumb to avoid it. It serves you right.”

“I completely disagree. The car got lucky, and you’re just bitter because I ate you before it hit us. Try not to be too angry. After all, lizards do eat bugs. Really it’s your fault for being so careless; you were so old it was just natural selection in action,” he explained.

“Natural selection my tail! You just got lucky that’s all. You know that some dragonflies are known to live to be well over 200 years old. I’m barely over 3.”

“Really?”

“No, I completely made that up, you senile fool. That just proves my superior intellect, and that you never could have eaten me if you hadn’t gotten lucky,” the dragonfly responded with joy.

“I don’t think that that proves anything, except how stupid, stupid dragonflies really are.”

The dragonfly ignored the lizard’s comments and continued, “Maybe dragonflies don’t live longer than lizards but we certainly live better lives. Oh, and by the way, you are stupider than me!”

“Ha ha ha,” the Lizard sarcastically replied, “I wouldn’t even say that you dragon thingies are even ever really alive.”

“What is *that* supposed to mean?” Dragonfly said, becoming slightly flustered.

“Well, all I meant was, as you of course know being the most intelligent dragonfly I have ever encountered, I’m —”

“Why thank you,” the dragonfly interrupted.

“Certainly. Now where was I? Oh yes, seeing as how you are one of the most intelligent dragonflies I have ever encountered, and I am easily ten times smarter than you are...”

“Hold your tongue you blasphemous beast! I ought to kick you in the —”

“Are you going to let me finish or must you interrupt me so often I will never be able to get to my point?” the lizard questioned. “Really, I would hope that at this point in our lives even you would be above taking offense at differences, or ‘inferiorities’ as some prefer calling them. It’s not like it really matters that I happen to be smarter than a dragonfly, or coincidentally actually have feet to kick things with. It wouldn’t even matter if through some miracle or act of God a dragonfly was smarter than the simplest of lizards,” the dragonfly finished.

“Very well. I shall allow you to continue, thereby proving my superiority, by allowing you to voice your opinion no matter how wrong you may be,” the dragonfly said with obvious frustration.

“Alright then, as I was saying, I was wondering if dragonflies are even intelligent enough to realize their own existence.”

“Well I suppose that we very well, might, certainly... no, almost positively, definitely have a very good chance of possibly being conscious of our existence. I, however, see no reason why not knowing you’re alive means you’re not *really* alive,” said the dragonfly.

“I happen to think that it is certainly a prerequisite to really live, and because I am smarter than you I must be correct. How can you be alive if you don’t know it? To know that one is alive one must have both a memory, and enough intelligence to realize existence, or at least have the potential to have these things.

Without these characteristics something can exist, but not really live the way other beings such as myself have lived. A thing that doesn't know it exists might as well be a rock, or a tree, which is technically alive; certainly it isn't really alive though, not compared to any real living thing, such as a lizard."

"Well, what about having a soul? That's what I believe in! I think that every living thing has a soul, and that *that* is what truly makes someone alive."

"Wow! That's beautiful but I don't believe in souls," the lizard regally answered.

"Well then, 'O' great all knowing one, how do you explain our current state of existence?" mockingly queried the dragonfly.

"I hadn't thought about it but... I know that I ate you, and then I was quietly sleeping in the sun. Unfortunately, after that I remember being run over by a car, and I suppose that we are now...Still under the car!" the lizard confidently answered.

"But if you ate me, how can I still talk to you?"

"Umm... I'm not sure, perhaps I'm only imagining you," the lizard waveringly responded.

"I think that that is a ridiculous answer."

"I think that you aren't entitled to an opinion, since you are simply a figment of my imagination."

"What if we're dead?" gasped the dragonfly.

"Don't be insane, you inane insect."

"Well, I just have a hard time believing that we are under the wheel of a moving tire, and I am still here talking to you even though you ate me!" shouted the angry dragonfly.

"If we were dead then there would be a bright light. As even you can see, it is very dark here; it's dark just like it would be if we were under a wheel!"

"Perhaps it's just me, but wouldn't the car have gone over us by now?"

“How would I know! I’ve never been hit by a car before, have you?!” questioned the lizard, again resorting to sarcasm.

“Well no, but...”

“That’s what I thought,” interrupted the lizard. “Besides, if we were dead then where are all the other lizards? I honestly don’t know what you were thinking ‘*what if we’re dead?*’ Some people are so immature.”

“If we’re still under the wheel, then how can I be talking to you?”

“Well, that’s obvious. I must have some sort of telepathic power, which allows me to speak to you with my mind.”

“I find that hard to believe. Lizards and dragonflies aren’t even supposed to be able to talk. How could you possibly be able to talk to me with just your mind!”

“I can talk to you with my mind using my telepathic powers. The way I see it, having telepathic abilities is probably just a side effect of being run over by a car,” the lizard thought out loud.

“Oh.... Of course....” The dragonfly said after being dumbfounded by the lizard’s lizard-like logic.

“Well, it’s about time you started to admit I am your intellectual superior. After all, I was able to eat you, figure out where we are, and explain how we were able to talk to each other.”

The dragonfly simply stared at the lizard. “For some reason I’m not entirely convinced that you believe my undoubtedly correct analysis of our situation,” the lizard continued.

“I think that we’re dead,” the dragonfly stated.

“Oh, whatever. You’re truly impossible. I guess that we’d better be on our way anyhow though. No sense in remaining under this tire for the rest of our lives. Come on now, I can’t very well leave without you; I did eat you after all,” the lizard said.

This is where the end of the story would go. Unfortunately nobody knows, and very few care, what happened to the lizard and dragonfly. There are two possibilities: First, the dragonfly and the lizard continue on their way. The car continues on and the lizard moves out of the road. The lizard, of course, loses his telepathic powers once he is no longer under the wheel of the car, but nonetheless lives a long and happy life. The dragonfly will, however, not be able to live a long and happy life. He has been eaten by the lizard, and is eventually digested by the lizard's stomach acids.

The second possibility is perhaps a bit more of a stretch of the imagination. If the lizard was wrong, and the dragonfly correct, then they are both already dead. If the two are already dead, then they are not really under the tire of a moving car. The lizard would become frustrated by his inability to "continue on his way" and by the fact that the dragonfly was right. The pair would then continue their afterlives, or stay exactly where they are for the rest of eternity and continue their conversation. Nobody knows what happens when you die, especially with lizards and dragonflies. So ending a story with a description of it could disrupt the illusion of reality. Writing about that could make the story unrealistic and ruin the whole thing. Besides, for any of the second possibility to happen the dragonfly would have to be right, and everyone knows lizards are much smarter than dragonflies.

Paul "Writin" Ryan

A Rhyme for the Lemmings

Some people are dumb
and it makes me really mad
how such a stupid trend
can become such a popular fad

a fad subconsciously desired
to make one look mature
for the admiration of disciples
who believe that it's a cure

a cure for the dullness
of a lost life filled with action
stimulated by the mediocre
and the social life fashion

“it just happened” they say
“didn't want it to, but it did”
I guess that's what happens
when the world becomes stup*ID*

Michelle Rissman

Fountain of Youth Unclean

What do kids learn when their parents are never home
Sitting in front of the TV all alone
No one to teach them what's right and what's wrong

The world's going to hell when babies are singing the
Thong Song

I'm against censorship
It's up to the parents to monitor that shit
Violence intrigues
While parents are overseas
The Internet provides
Pornography of all kinds
Wife beaters are born every minute
Twelve-year-old prostitutes with no money because they
spend it

On drugs
Red, White, and Blue Patriot Thugs
Roaming the streets
Nothing to eat
Wish they had someone else's shoes on their feet
Wish they were still sucking at their mother's teat
They know the putrid smell of defeat
Parents just need to take care of their kids
Otherwise, what's the point of Adam's rib
If we corrupt what we make
Youth is just meat on a slate
Look at the mess we make
Look at all the lives that need to be saved
Under pressure we caved

Thanks to the media we are never satisfied
Girls starving themselves only to die
You can never find happiness in lies
Kiss your kids goodnight
Before they embrace the holy world of Budlight
And sports cars
Getting AIDS from dates at bars
Parents seem to blame everything around
Just look at yourself, that is where the virus is found.

Erica O'Connor

Purification

I can't breathe.
I feel like I'm drowning.
I move my head from side to side
And bring it to the surface.
I struggle to wipe the water from my eyes.
All images are blurred.
I see someone standing there, right there in front of me.
I reach out, but I can grasp nothing.
I repeatedly blink.
And soon, I see it is just a reflection of myself
Only I don't look like myself.
My face is red, rose red.
I dunk my head in a cold water filled sink and scrub
Trying to wash away years of memories
And recent heart piercing pains
Trying to cleanse myself of low self-esteem choices
Hoping the crispness of the water will refresh me,
Offer me a little clarity of mind and thoughts
But it seems as though I'm drowning in tears
And that some of the water leaked into my head.
My thoughts wander like water meander
And I wish they would evaporate quicker than they seeped
in
Purify my thoughts, my mind, my life.

Anonymous

I feel like throwing myself out of the backwards
ideals I've chosen to become

Not because they're bad, but because they leave
me here lumped next to your photograph of untuned
phrases.

The wind sweeps ideas along in graceful gallops
that I can't keep up with.

So I lay in bed instead and dream of when I could
peacefully.

The answers are in a box I'm too lazy to uncover
Keep my dreams in the dark,
Light of images projected upon your ceiling
Illusions plastering my brain into symbols, I
always forget.

Lauren Thomasberger

Fortune

“Tell me my fortune.”

Wisps of fragrant incense rose to the ceiling and meandered out the window into the frigid night air. Seth stared at the gorgeous stranger temporarily before asking, “What do you want to ask me about?”

The stranger smirked. Yellow candlelight reflected on his cinnamon brown face; his teeth shone the color of sugar; his hazel eyes sparkled like glitter. “I don’t want to say it out loud.”

A gale of wind rushed into the claustrophobic room, breaking the spiral of frankincense smoke in all directions. Frightening shadows danced along the walls like drunken ghosts. The candles dimmed, and when the wind paused, the light returned unharmed.

Seth studied the boy’s face with an expression of intense curiosity. He scrutinized the flawless skin, sensing an undulating vibration of negativity. It appeared that the boy was close to twenty years old.

“Are you going to do something, or are you just going to sit there and stare?” asked the boy impatiently.

In the darkness, in the heart of shadows, something moved abruptly. Perhaps, if the young man had looked over his back, he might have seen the two iridescent orbs of light near the doorjamb. The stranger had not noticed. He maintained his focus on Seth.

Seth, on the other hand, could feel the creature’s presence in the darkness behind the stranger. He picked up a deck of oversized cards from the side of the table, then he cut them into smaller decks. The stranger looked at the cards incredulously. “Is that how you’re going to do it — with those?”

“They’re not regular cards that you play with,” Seth remarked. “They’re special cards.” Then he added, “You’re an Aquarius, aren’t you. Born in February.”

“You never tell people you’re real name, just ones that you make up.” Seth paused to think. “Your real name starts with a ‘J’. It’s biblical.”

“Jeremiah,” he whispered.

Seth re-collected the cards into one pile, shoving them across the table to Jeremiah. He instructed Jeremiah to shuffle the cards. Jeremiah did so. Seth took the cards and dealt out ten of them according to the Celtic Spread.

KNIGHT OF SWORDS was the first card; it described the personality and general environment of the person it represented, the boy across from Seth.

The figure moved again in the shadows — then it just stood still as a statue of ice, listening and waiting patiently. The figure looked at Jeremiah, greatly enticed; it’s blood boiled — the icy cold skin grew warm. Seth felt the atrocious figure’s energy press up against him; it felt like a million fingers running along his back, fingering his navel, pinching his nipples. Jeremiah felt it also. He arched his back, and a rivulet of sweat coursed down his neck, even though the room was nearly frozen.

The illustration on the card displayed a soldier in full armor, sword in hand, rushing through the air on a mustang. Jeremiah wondered, “What does that mean? It looks like a bad one.”

It is bad. And you’re a bad man - I can tell you’re psychotic, just like she is.

“Knight of Swords is you,” Seth explained, thinking of the consequences - it gets you into a lot of trouble.”

“Always in control. Stubborn -you do things without thinking of the consequences - it gets you into a lot of trouble.”

Jeremiah snickered, “Yeah, I know that. But what else does it say?”

The shadow in the darkness waited fervently; it salivated with a ravenous passion. Perspiration snaked down its smooth, brown legs. Its cobra fangs protruded from its upper and lower gums.

Seth scanned the spread of cards for a moment.

Afterwards, he fixated upon the second card, positioned horizontally over the first. It read FIVE OF PENTACLES.

“This card stands for the obstacles that stand in your way,” Seth said. “You were fired from your last job.”

“Uh-huh,” Jeremiah’s eyebrows arched.

Seth closed his eyes, and they moved back and forth rapidly behind his eyelids. “It was one of those retail stores—”

“Something like that,” Jeremiah responded bitterly. “I stole some stuff, and then one of the people who worked there caught me.”

“You don’t have a permanent place to live. Some of your friends let you live with them for a while, but then you always leave. Right now, you’re staying in a cheap motel.”

More shock crept into Jeremiah’s voice as he asked, “How do you know about that?”

“I know a lot of things.”

Jeremiah reclined in his chair, watching Seth with a perplexed face.

“Go ahead,” he said.

The third card was placed below the first and second. It showed an image of people plunging out of a huge, burning structure: THE TOWER

“This represents conflict, chaos, and the end of evil influences. I look at this card, and see that there’s been a lot of strife going on between you and your family. You hate them. They want you to come back to them.”

Jeremiah said nothing.

Suddenly, a clear image burst into Seth’s mind. He accurately envisioned the picture of a burning house, red fire gyrating, charcoal smoke filling the black sky, and dismay emanating from inside the house

Jeremiah stood there, in the middle of the street, with a grotesque sneer on his face. In the distance, sirens could be heard. Seth blinked his eyes. “You burned down their house,” he said accusingly.

Jeremiah scowled.

Card number four was the SEVEN OF SWORDS “You ran away,” Seth said. “The rest of your family tried to find you. But you escaped just in time — your parents are still alive.”

The statement provoked a fearful emotion in Jeremiah. “No! They can’t be! I made sure of that!”

“Next is THE HERMIT and this could either mean two things: one, you might seclude yourself from everyone and live completely alone — or, you might get help from someone who knows the trouble you’re in.”

“Who’s going to help me?” Jeremiah questioned sharply “Are you the one who’s going to help me?” He snickered again. “Nobody can help me now. I messed up. It’s probably coming for me right now.”

QUEEN OF SWORDS held the sixth position. It foretold the immediate future. Seth saw this card, his jaw tightened and his fingers twitched.

The figured observed in excitement, because it had found its target. More than that, it had found something in Jeremiah that it had craved for a long time.

“Queen of Swords,” Seth whispered. That was *her* card. “Uh . . .”

“What?”

Seth resisted going any further. He searched the last four cards in the spread, and the panic in his body grew.

In consecutive order, the cards were: TEN OF SWORDS, NINE OF SWORDS, THE MOON, but the final card in the spread made his eyes widen with fear.

“What?” Jeremiah asked. “What is it?”

Nothing.”

“I want to know what happens next.”

Seth gathered the cards and said, “It was a bad reading - I mean, the cards didn’t come up right.”

“Yes they did. Tell me what it said.”

“I messed up. I’ll do it all over again.”

Jeremiah gripped both arms of the chair. Veins sprouted on his forehead. “*What did it say?*” he blared.

“I told you it wasn’t right.”

Jeremiah shot up in his seat, glaring. “Liar! You knew what is said! You just don’t want to tell me!

But I want to know what happens! I have to know what they’re going to do! I have to know if they sent it for me already! I have to know what’s going to happen to me!” He pounded the wooden table with his fist. “TELL ME MY FORTUNE!”

If Seth had a pulse, it would have throbbed with dread.

“Think I’m stupid?” screamed Jeremiah. “I know you know what happens to me! The witch is going to find me! You just don’t want to say. It must be something bad. I have to know, right now! Is the witch coming for me?”

Yes, both of them are, Seth thought.

Seth heard Jeremiah’s heart beat thunderously; the sound resonated from the walls. Jeremiah bellowed in frustration, curling and unclenching his fists, breathing hard, his eyes rabid.

The shadow listened from the distance, intrigued, intrigued—near laughter. Jeremiah had formidable strength, it could sense, perhaps even a relentless rage. His personality matched the creature’s need.

“Calm down,” said Seth. He tried to maintain a façade of nonchalance.

“Not until you tell me what it said in those cards!”

Why do you have to scream so loud?

“I can’t tell you.”

Jeremiah shot out his arm, his fist plowing toward Seth’s face, but Seth grabbed him by the wrist.

Automatically, Seth retracted his hand, as an electric shock jolted through his body, forcing his heart to contract once. Jeremiah stalked out of the apartment, slamming the door shut behind him. He had not even paid for the reading.

Seth reeled from shock. Ribbons of smoke wafted in loose circles around him; the candle flames lashed in violent circles. The curtains whisked in the groaning wind.

The shadow moved again.

It floated effortlessly, like a boat on water, into the dim light; the hem of the flowing black gown swept across the floor. The crow-black hair rustled behind her; the eyes raged with fire. Seth twisted around, seeing the female creature behind him.

Snarling louder than a tigress, she said, “You let him escape.”

“I didn’t *let* him escape, Mercy.”

Mercy strutted forward, curvaceous hips swinging like a pendulum; her intense eyes stabbing into his skin. She slapped him across the face fiercely; if he had been a human, his neck might have snapped. “I wanted that boy. You knew I wanted him and you let him leave.”

Yes, Seth thought. *I didn’t want him to be near you.*

She poked her sharp-nailed finger at Seth’s forehead. “I can hear what you’re thinking, boy. You should be more careful when you think about me,” Mercy sneered, adding, “I heard what you thought when he sat there at that table.” A false, hurt expression crossed her face. “You called me psychotic.”

You are.

Mercy grimaced. “You haven’t seen what psychotic is yet. You deliberately went against me.” Her amber eyes flashed like red diamonds, and Seth drew back, flinching, as she stepped forward. He shielded his face with his arms, so that she could not slash him with her talons.

“I’m sorry,” Seth murmured.

“Yeah, you should be. You *are* sorry. Worse than that you’re weak and helpless.”

“No.”

“Really? OK then, tell me what it is, `cause obviously I don’t know. You’re more pathetic now, than before I changed you. I guess that’s my fault for trying to make a man out of a little girl.

There's nothing you can do without me forcing you. Just looking at you makes me sick sometimes. If I had known how much of a failure you would be, I would have just let you bleed to death."

Mercy glowered. "I wish I could kill them all. All those diseased rats."

Seth contemplated; the side of his face still stung from her strike. He paid attention to her beauty and the cruelty in her eyes, and even though the cold usually never bothered him, he shivered.

"Now you see," Mercy started, "that boy has power. It makes my skin sizzle and my thighs burn." The candlelight danced on her face, and half of it hid in the shadows. Seth saw the ardent eyes.

"He acts without consequence. He doesn't care about those rats, and he knows how evil they are. He doesn't try like you and other rats to exude this self-proclaimed goodness.

They're all rats! And I hate rats! They crawl, and jump, and screech, and they crawl into your mouth and eat your brain! They all have to die! I know. He knows it, and I thought at some point you would too. I need somebody to help me eat all the rats before they eat me. Not a single drop of blood left in their bodies. That boy can be my partner, because you certainly can't. You don't have the rocks to hang with me - you never have.

"Her insults pelted into Seth's dead heart like lethal bullets.

"But I can never stay mad at you. You're too cute. I'll give you one more chance to redeem yourself," said Mercy. She sauntered so close that her ice-cold breath hit his face, and her ample chest rubbed up against his. Mercy bent down, licking his neck tenderly.

"Find him. It doesn't matter where he is, or how far you have to go to find him. Just make sure that he's here." Mercy kissed his neck, and his soft lips. "If you don't . . ." she used her hands to rub below his hips. "If you can't . . ."

Seth shut his eyes, melting into her hypnotic embrace. “If you won’t. . . I really don’t have to finish this sentence, do I? You know what I’ll do.” Mercy spun on her heel, vanished into the skin of air, leaving him in solitude.

Seth ambled to the window, climbed over the ledge onto the fire escape. It was three, tall stories above the ground.

He saw a street void of people, but alive with mechanical shrieks from vehicles.

She’s going to change him into something more evil than he already is. And what is she going to do with me? Maybe she’ll abandon me. If then, what will I do? I don’t want to a part of him or her. I’ll bring this boy to her, and then I’m going to run away. Somewhere where she’ll have trouble finding me - maybe New York, or New Orleans, or Chicago, maybe even Hawaii. Is she listening to my thoughts right now?

Seth vaulted onto the rail. Perhaps if a bystander had seen him, they might have thought he was attempting to plummet to his death. Broken bones would not kill him, unfortunately. Only a few things could. Seth leapt off the balcony, fell though the gelid air, landing with his feet on the pavement.

Where would I find him?

When he closed his eyes, Seth saw Jeremiah striding down a quiet, residential street. He searched for street names, and saw one: Majestic Ave. He opened his eyes, and disappeared into the night.

Jeremiah’s heart palpitated, his eyes still blazed. The concrete crunched under his feet. His breath spilled out in cold, vapor clouds.

He knew stuff about me. I didn’t think they were serious when they said he knew about the future. But now I know. It was something bad. I’m in trouble. The witch knows what I did, and she’s going to find me. He knows what’s going to happen to me.

He knows, but he wouldn't tell me. I'm in trouble. I have to leave here tomorrow. I can't stay here.

Dead leaves crackled on the old trees. Houses were dark and silent. There was not one person on the street, not even a car. Jeremiah felt alone, even though he had adapted to the feeling.

What am I going to do? What's going to happen when the witch finds me? I killed them, but they are coming back. There's nowhere to hide anymore.

A shadow darted behind a hulking tree. Jeremiah noticed, yet he did not slow his pace. As he made his way closer, he found a familiar stranger standing against the hard shaft of the tree.

“What are you doing here?” Jeremiah questioned.

Seth stepped away from the tree, hands deep in the pockets of his trench coat. “I was sent for you.” Jeremiah sniggered. “Sent by who?”

“She's waiting for you,” Seth said cryptically.

Brown leaves fell in slow motion to the ground, running along the sidewalk as the bitter wind carried them. Jeremiah turned and walked away — and Seth was standing right in front of him.

“Come with me,” said Seth.

“How did you just get in front of me like that? How did you find me anyway?”

“I know a lot of things. I'm psychic, remember?”

Jeremiah shook his head. “You don't know me.”

“I know enough. Something is after you. Your family called it to kill you. It'll find you.”

Jeremiah attempted to move past Seth, however, Seth stood like a barrier in front of him. “Move out of my way.”

“Not unless you come with me.”

“Look, I have to go.”

“Wherever you go, It'll find you.”

“Don't worry about me.”

“Then tell me where you’re going,” Seth urged.

“Somewhere far away from here. I have to be gone by the morning.”

“You won’t make it until tomorrow, if you don’t come with me.”

“What are you going to do?” Jeremiah smirked. “You can’t touch me. I’ll crush you like a rat.”

“No you won’t. She’ll get you one way or another.”

“You keep saying ‘she’. Who is she?”

Seth grasped Jeremiah by the arm, though this time there was no electrifying shock. They vanished, and the only sounds were the cry of the wind brushing past dead leaves, falling to the ground.

Then silence.

Mercy lay on the cherry-colored blanket, and it smelled of blood, skin, and sweat. Her legs dangled over the edge of the bed. Her eyes traveled along the cracks of the ceiling. The candlelight burned low, but the coldness never subsided. She said suddenly, “Finally. You’re here — it took forever and two days.” She rose to a forty-five degree position.

Seth and Jeremiah stood near the bed, two silhouettes in the night.

“I brought him,” said Seth.

Jeremiah gawked at Mercy in wonder. “Who are you?”

Mercy smiled. “Your Queen of Swords.” Her fangs gleamed.

“What did you want me to come here for?”

“Because I wanted you.”

“Wanted me for what?”

“You ask too many questions.” Mercy beckoned to him with a finger. “Come to me.”

Jeremiah resisted, but her thrall gripped him, as if a hand was squeezing his lungs. He took one step forward. Mercy spread her knees slightly, propping herself up with

only two hands, as if she were giving birth. “I want you to get on your knees.” He wanted to say no; he wanted to ball his hands into fists; he wanted to run as fast as he could. Her eyes kept him spellbound.

Seth witnessed this all, and was powerless to stop Mercy. She got what she wanted. Seth could only watch and wait. He crossed the room to a plush chair, near the open window, and sat. Jeremiah reluctantly dropped to both knees, and when Mercy told him to come forth, he did. He crawled up to her legs.

She peered down at him, as though he were an obedient dog. “Stand up,” she ordered. He followed her orders, and Mercy told him to sit on the bed. He did that also without complaint. She admired his face, dragging one of her nails down his cheek. Mercy licked the blood. “You taste even better than you look.” He stared at her with a blank expression, and she asked, “Are you scared?” He said nothing.

Mercy took his hand, took one of his long fingers.

She jerked it back. Jeremiah gritted his teeth.

“Does it hurt?” Mercy asked.

“. . . No.”

She pulled back harder.

“Now?”

He tried his best not to convey the emotion on his face.

“No.”

“I’ll stop if you say Mercy.”

Jeremiah remained quiet. Blood seeped from the wound on his face.

“I’ll break it if you don’t say it.”

He would not comply.

Mercy snapped it back like a crab leg, and a loud *crack* ripped through the air. Seth flinched in his chair, imagining how painful that must have been.

“Say ‘Mercy’.”

Jeremiah showed no pain. “No.”

Mercy broke his middle finger — and his lips curved into a smile.

“You like it when I hurt you?”

Jeremiah snickered, and Mercy laughed too, and then inquired, “Are you scared of me now?”

“Should I be?”

“Everyone else is.”

“I’m not everyone else.”

“I wanted to give you something.”

“Tell me what it is.”

“It’s a gift. I want to give you a gift.” She glanced over at Seth adding, “*We* want to give you a gift.”

“That’s one of the things that makes you so attractive.”

Jeremiah felt ripples of pain in his hand, but he ignored them. He stared into Mercy’s eyes, and they kept him in a trance. He was unable to move, unable to think, unable to feel anything except for powerful passion.

“Do you want to know why I wanted you here?”

Mercy questioned.

“Yeah.”

“I don’t want to be in this,” Seth protested.

“But you will be,” said Mercy. “You don’t have a choice. I’m in control of the situation.”

“What kind of ‘gift’ are you talking about?” Jeremiah interrupted.

“It’s a curse,” said Seth solemnly.

“Are you afraid?” Mercy whispered in Jeremiah’s ear.

“No.”

She tickled his chest through his shirt, cooed into his ear. “Are you afraid of death?”

Jeremiah took a moment to respond, finally he said, “I’m not.”

“Good. You shouldn’t be. I know *I* wasn’t.”

“What do you mean?”

“What do you think I mean?” Mercy’s cool breath

tickled Jeremiah's ear. He twitched a little bit. Seth studied him from the shadows, and when Jeremiah looked at Seth, he could only see the whites of his eyes.

All the candles burned out simultaneously.

"You're not normal," Jeremiah said to Mercy. When she heard that, Mercy laughed uproariously.

"Well, I've never been normal - even when I was alive. Isn't that right, Seth?"

Seth stayed death silent.

Jeremiah felt dizzy. Everything around him darkened. He could not see. "You're not alive, or something?" The way he asked sounded more like a statement than a question. Mercy ran her fingers down his legs. The cut on his face had closed, but Mercy still smelled the sweet blood.

"I haven't been alive in a while," she giggled like a young child.

Jeremiah did not seem too surprised. "Then what are you two? Ghosts?"

He sounded incredulous. An invisible hammer pounded through his head, smashing into his skull.

"No," said Mercy, "not ghosts. Something better."

"Werewolves?"

"It's not a full moon."

"Zombies?"

"My skin isn't falling off."

". . . Vampires?"

Mercy tilted her head, bringing her lips close to his neck. She opened her mouth, allowing the dagger fangs to graze the smooth skin. "Good job."

"Vampires aren't real though."

"That's what most people think, until they get bitten."

"Are you going to bite me?" Jeremiah seemed amused.

"That was the plan. But only if you want me to."

"Is it going to kill me?" The words slurred out of his

mouth. He sounded drunk. Saliva dripped from his full lips, onto his shirt. Wind rushed into the room, slapping Seth on the face. The scent of incense smoke had left. Now the only smell was of warm skin, and hot blood.

“Yep, I’m going to kill you - and then you want to know a secret? I’m going to give birth to you. Doesn’t that sound wonderful?”

The pain dulled in Jeremiah’s head. He closed his eyes, and the words snaked into his mind.

“Do you want to be immortal?” Mercy wondered.

“Forever is a long time. . .”

Mercy enveloped his ear with her lips. Jeremiah felt a pleasurable jolt race through his body. She nibbled on the skin. “You can have anything you want, do anything you want . . . anyone you want. Nothing will be able to stop you. You’ll be free of everything wrong in this world. Free of consequences, free of disease, of people, pain, guilt, and love. The only two things you’ll ever know are passion and hunger. That’s what’s going to keep you alive, if you surrender to their callings. This is your destiny. DEATH is the final outcome of your fortune.”

Jeremiah absorbed her words, and they were alluring.

“You don’t belong in the normal world. You belong with us. Don’t you want to be a part of something wonderful? I know you do.”

Jeremiah thought of the decision. “How do I know this is real? That you’re not just making this all up?”

“Believe me. If you don’t join us, you’ll die. There are rats after you, rats who want to hurt you. But we can stop them. Stop them all. The three of us, we can turn this world into our own party.”

“Forever,” said Jeremiah softly.

“And ever.”

Jeremiah's heart pounded with anxiety. Both Mercy and Seth felt it. Seth felt the warmth of Jeremiah's skin, even from a distance. He was hot as fire. Seth listened to Mercy's tempting speech, remembering how he had first rejected her offer. Seth had not wanted to become an undead murderer. Yet, Mercy always got her way. She killed Seth's family, the people he knew, and the only person he came close to loving. Finally, Seth had surrendered. As she had told him, "You have no choice. I'm in control of the situation." Mercy had killed him, making Seth into a monster like she was. Jeremiah on the other hand welcomed death - seemingly. He was genuinely not afraid of anything. Jeremiah had the potential to do gruesome things."

"Do you want to become greater than you are now?" Mercy asked. "This is not a dream, this is real. We can make things happen, the three of us. Come on, I don't want to hear you say no."

Seth wished that Jeremiah would say no, that he would *try* to escape. But he did not. Jeremiah stayed voluntarily under her magic. Seth gripped his hands tighter on the arms of the chair, thinking.

Why did I have to bring him here? None of this should have happened.

He pondered if Mercy had read his thoughts. Instead, she asked Jeremiah for the final time, and he said, "Yes." Mercy smiled nefariously. "Good job."

Seth cringed in his seat.

Jeremiah cocked his head to the side. Mercy gawked at his neck, drawing closer. "Seth," she said. "I want you to come over here."

"No. I don't want to do it."

"I said come over here, before I go psychotic on you!" She growled.

Seth slowly stood on his feet. He trudged over, sat on the bed. Jeremiah was halfway conscious. Strings of saliva continued to drip from his mouth.

Mercy inhaled the pungent scent of his skin. She licked the area on the side of his neck, as though disinfecting it. Seth marveled at her, mesmerized by her technique, the way she prepared, how her eyes brightened red. She bent her head over, kissed his neck this time, running her teeth along the spot. Jeremiah's pulse softened as he began to relax more. His hands lay flat on his thighs. He appeared comfortable.

She bit into his skin.

Mercy tore into his carotid artery, and blood exploded into her mouth. It tasted warm, sweet, yet sour, and very thick. It slid down her throat, and her skin started to warm again. Jeremiah did not make a sound. He sat there, conscious, but unconscious. Mercy let go of the deadly embrace. Her fangs dripped with redness.

“What are you waiting for? Hurry up and drink.”

Seth examined the brown skin, wondering if Jeremiah felt the pain. Seth had a clear memory of Mercy's teeth digging into his neck, sucking the blood out. It did not feel particularly painful after the skin broke, though Seth felt increasingly tired as she depleted him. Now, here he was in the opposite position. Seth felt Jeremiah's body lose its warmth. He would have to hurry up.

Seth reached over, and pierced Jeremiah's throat with his fangs. This time a faint cry escaped from Jeremiah, and it was a good cry, a cry of satisfaction. Mercy and Seth drank from him at the same time. When Mercy felt Jeremiah's heart beat slower, she pulled back.

Mercy slashed her own throat with her nails. Red liquid poured from the wound. She brought Jeremiah's face to her neck, saying, “Drink it. And hurry up. I don't have all night.”

Jeremiah licked at the gash, and the juice streamed into his mouth. His eyes shot open, and he drank more, until Mercy pushed him toward Seth. “Now it’s your turn.”

Jeremiah snatched Seth’s arm pushed back the sleeve, and bit sharply into Seth’s wrist with his canine teeth, which in a short time would convert to fangs.

Seth’s ice-cold blood mingled with Jeremiah’s warm body fluids, and Mercy’s tepid fluid. Seth yanked back his wrist as his strength waned. Jeremiah, more vigorous than ever, plopped on the bed, into a puddle of more red liquid. His chest elevated and fell steadily. Then his body went into demonic convulsions. Seth grimaced.

“Happy now?” he asked.

Mercy leered. “Ecstatic.” She kissed his forehead. “Things are going to be fun now.” She pressed her lips against his nose. “Very, very fun” Mercy kissed his mouth, and her tongue delved between his lips. “I love you, Seth.” She broke the embrace.

Seth got up from the bed, walked over to his chair. The wind had stopped. He listened to the sounds of birds chirping. Mercy and Jeremiah groped each other on the bed, while Seth watched.

I helped make this demon. He’s part of me now. Together, they’re going to kill and kill. And she’s right. I can’t be with her anymore. What am I going to do? How am I going to get away?

He did not have an answer. Outside, the sky lightened. Beams of yellow light poured through the window. The sky gradually shifted from black to blue. Seth stood and gazed out the window, watching as the sun began to pull itself over the hills, and he wished that he was truly alive. He shut the curtains tightly. The darkness spread like a disease.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Michael Booker

Down in the dungeon deep
An odd man does hide and creep.
A mask, he wears to cover his face
To hide further from the world this disgrace.
How he got down there, no one knows
But this is how the story goes...
Unto this world, a beast was born
Deformed in body, the people's scorn,
Hair all over body and head
On him, bits of mold, as on the dead.
A hump there was on his back,
And his eyes were a pure, deep black.
The townsmen decided one day
To lock this bizarre beast away.
Before the beast was put down,
A mask was placed upon his face;
A frown with horns on it as well,
A piece of work made in hell.
They locked him in the town catacombs
Where, to this day, he still roams
Yelling for his liberation
From his body, and location.
A way out, he cannot find
This poor body, with human mind.

Demetrius Loufas

Something sinister is in the air,
late at night i can feel it.
it's blowing with the wind, weighing down the soaked
gusts,
it's a smell that teases the nostrils,
it's a sound that tweaks the ear.
across the street, the rims on an old lady's dodge reflect
slivers of light,
acute and symmetrical
— like eyes.

A silhouette of the crazy cactus
my mom put in the yard,
has spiny arms, thin, black, stretching out from the stalk
like
spears.

And heads could hang
outside my window.
Sheltered from sight
by a shroud of night.

They hang from the bony cactus plant
upturned eyes with wet necks,
stringy skin and protruding bone.

Can you see it?
as the cars roll by,
masked eyes are angry, scared.
They look forward
spurred on by the darkness that follows

It's a panic in the air
late at night i can feel it.
Shut the window, quickly!
Expecting impact on the other side,
but none comes.

While sickly shadows fall across my book,
and the bony brush rustles outside my window,
Swaying objects knock hollow like coconuts,
Something sinister cannot be far.

Reese Bullen

Open window calls
beckoning breeze, silent, draws
breath held, waits for me.

Anonymous

Untitled Dream

Close your eyes
With the sun
You rise.

Clear to none
The wandering of the mind
Like a web newly spun.

It's hard to remind
The conscious self
Of the moments you left the world behind.

Not a matter of wealth
But one so abstract
Not to be found in a book on a shelf.

Closed to the realm of worldly fact
For a moment in time
Mind and soul intact.

A dream so sublime.

Ashley Berhel

The Sonnet, Rushed

How has our daytime gotten so busy?
Are we never allowed tranquility?
Pager, fax, and email have us dizzy,
All in the grand name of efficiency.

Those who resist, we deride,
For to earn money we must be in haste.
Society keeps us so occupied,
We are plugged-in so time we do not waste.

Oddly, some people prefer to hurry,
They can avoid reflecting on their life.
Instead of thinking, they like to scurry.
Seeing our own faults can cut like a knife.

With calmness in mind, I shall not be rushed.
Rest for a time, the busy world is hushed.

Vlasta Komorous-Towey

Echoing Repetition

When pain lives inside you
There is no escape
When you cry, it's merely being diluted, filtered
As soon as reaches your eyes
It melts
Then washes from you as it mockingly caresses your face
Like a loved one absent from your life
But the germs still stand
Implanted in the brain
Where they forever remain
Slitting the heart
Torching the soul
Until there's nothing
Scattered like waste

You have no strength
To carry yourself through life
You're running an un-winnable race
When people are constantly telling you to
"PICK UP THE PACE!"
You're always hiding
But the strongest thing you can find is a façade
Made out of leaves
The cover's easily blown
You've run out of places to go
And you're not welcomed here
Where else can you just be?
Don't ask me
I'm just your head
The one that keeps you lying awake in bed
Tortures your heart
Smothers you until you can't stop
Blaming yourself for everything
Because you can't blame yourself for anything

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