

PORTALS



Spring 2010

PORTALS

Literary and Arts Magazine

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Spring 2010

Volume 1, Issue 8

Portals Literary and Arts Magazine

sincerely thanks and extends appreciation to the CFCC Student Government Association, the CFCC Foundation, and the CFCC Arts and Sciences Division for their support in making this project a reality.

A special thank you to Action Printing for donating the binding of our 2010 *Portals*.

The 2010 *Portals* awards were given by
Philip Jacobs,
Humanities and Fine Arts Instructor, CFCC,
in memory of his father, Professor Paul H. Jacobs
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1964-1984

Portals is a publication of
Cape Fear Community College
student, faculty, and staff writers and artists,
published by
Cape Fear Community College
411 North Front Street
Wilmington, NC 28401

**Cover photo by
Amanda Utsman**

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Oatmeal and Vodka, a Traditional Sestina/Envoi

James Ebersole

Up till now I had been texting you on the train,
phone's dead now and needs a charge.
Stomach's dead too from this morning's oatmeal,
and last night's vodka,
my pants still covered in sand,
and more bruises with no story than I can count.



(Always on you I can count.)

The woman next to me on the train,
covered behind a snuggie the color of sand,
looks cozy, I would've bought one by now if my credit could
afford the charge,
but hell, wouldn't even be able to afford my ticket if you hadn't
paid for vodka,
a sweater, toothpaste, bagel bites, a new pair of yellow shoes, and
oatmeal.

All worthwhile purchases except the oatmeal.
Sugary cereal would've gone down easier, like the one with the
chocolate count.
Headache, burning eyes, sunlight after four days of rain, vodka.
Feel like I've been ran over by a train,
tied down to the track, with it coming at me full speed's charge,
upon impact blasting me to particles smaller than sand.

And that's exactly how my throat feels. Like sand,
and sand don't turn to silk with oatmeal.
So thirsty, but on this train not even water comes free of charge,
and on the charity of other passengers I dare not count,
for me there will be no visits to the food cart of this train.
I knew if I rose too soon from my seat so too rises the vodka.

I miss you like I miss the taste of anything but vodka.
Our love's a promise of a garden of eden forced to spend its
sapling days in sand.

I don't want to travel another mile on this train,
instead of being with you I'm sitting next to a woman as bland as
oatmeal,
nothing out the window to occupy but trees and weathered shacks
to count,
my life needs a fresh air and a new charge.

Into a new day with vigor I would charge,
My heart and mind burning like a shot of vodka,
accomplishments more than anyone could keep up with or count,
and children centuries from now will write my legend in the sand.
But my days offer nothing but lukewarm oatmeal,
Sad goodbyes, loneliness, and vacant thoughts on a train.

(envoi)

I pray for the train to pull a U-turn and a double speed charge,
back to your small beach town of oatmeal and vodka,
with sand to sit on and stars to count.



Cathleen Fisk

the secrets that coffee tells

Melina Reed



It's not the kind of silence you expect

At 6 AM.

First, it's a boy and his father

Who is still a boy himself.

Double espresso today.

Must've been up all night with the newborn.

He's happy to leave her slumbering with mom

While he and the boy

Feed their addictions.

He, the coffee,

The boy, the affections of the barista.

He plops the boy on the counter and

Digs for his wallet while

The boy picks a faded sticker off

The sleeve of his shirt.

it's one of those shirts you wish you'd kept.

one you come across while looking at

faded pictures of yourself

in your mother's attic on some lonely Sunday.

A man somewhere between 42 and 60

Enters behind the man and the boy.

His yellow jacket

Accented with dirt

Accents his yellow teeth and

Yellow nails and

Yellow hair.

He'll ask for a medium coffee,

But not until he counts out pennies to pay.

Always counts it wrong.

The town knows his look, his smell.

she knows him as Clark.

The filled cup waits as his orange-stained fingers
Push the final penny towards the girl.
Still 19 cents short.

9:15.

A shadow: the empty cup-in-hand is
Clipped down in confidence
On the counter.

She peers into it to see a glossy blackened ring
Around the bottom of the cup.

he's no regular.

she's never seen him before.

She, a reluctant helper, and

He, a wise mathematician.

He's learned their "refill policy."

Two dusty quarters lay, no... lie,

On the counter,

Boasting his discovery of the litter

Of some frantic student

Discarding his cup road-side

As he rushes toward

Fifty minutes of text messaging.

Sociology, maybe.

The lawyer from 307

Comes in

And back in

In the span of 21 minutes.

Barista smiles

And hurries to fill his cup.

The rim is bent and caved around the edges.

Teeth marks.

must be a murder case.

or rape.

something heavy.

His eyes give way to nothing.
He pulls his hand back deliberately,
“Coffee’s hot,” he mutters.
 he could use the warmth.

Ronnie’s coffee’s on the counter
Before he’s even at the door.
Half flavor, half decaf.
A recent switch from full-leaded caffeine.
 barista’s concerns for his health
 halt behind a hollow smile,
The cup sits before him.
“Half flavor, half...”
She inches the cup into his hands, he’s silenced.
His eyes thank her expedience as
She searches them for pain, fatigue, weakness...
Nothing. she sighs relief.
They exchange ‘take care.’
She means it.
In comes “blue-eyes-French-vanilla-latte,”
She’s late. 11:15.
She’ll be late for class as well.
Barista hurries to pour her shots
And is halted
“Decaf”, blue-eyes says.
The bluest blue they’d ever been
As they drop to a growing belly.
she’s late.
she’d get decaf for another 9 months.

She calls him “Bowtie”
Because it’s his only remarkable trait.
The staunch old man from across the street
Flings a dollar thirteen on the counter.
Law Man,
Penny Pincher,
Comes for the southern staple:
Diet Coke.

He fumbles his complimentary cup of ice
On the way out the door.
it scatters away from him
in shattered bits
 like joy had done to him decades ago.
He stands stiffly waiting for servant girl
To clean it up.
He stares for power.
She stares for respect.
Neither win.

The ice melts into a
Reflecting pool in the doorway.
Those who look into it
See whatever image of themselves
They've crafted.
 in this place, all are storytellers.
 in this place, the crafted fades.
 all are transparent,
 all exposed
By the secrets that coffee tells.



Stephen Eaddy



Wind Currents to the East

Amanda Smith

Let the colors breathe surface,
as red wraps itself in the covers of untaught love.
The sweetest blood rush to the head.
Despite the puzzle bound to your tongue,
let it carry you.
Silently speaking, whisper sweet nothings,
as I watch the words fall from your lips.
Ears feeding off the innocence,
they shall be harvested in my core.
As fingers scarcely collide,
the passing of time brings music to my lungs.
We'll watch with unkept eyes,
while the stars align with the freckles upon your nose.
And in the night's embraces,
my heart will smile.
You are not who I thought you were,
carry me.

Reciprocity

Jason Rinka

There was a point--at 5:23 a.m., specifically--when I opened my eyes and grunted and wanted to forget that I was a father. Or wished I wasn't one. Or some equally lousy, half-dreamt variant on that theme. It's awful, I know. I realized that immediately after the thought stumbled noisy and angry through my head. So I rolled on my back and blinked at the ceiling and wiped the sweat off my forehead.



I quickly went back to sleep and woke up with the alarm an hour and a half later. In the kitchen I made a cup of instant coffee with water I'd microwaved to within an inch of its life and sat there staring at the steamlessly boiling brown. I thought again, briefly, about the dread I'd woken up with earlier, but I didn't really beat myself up over it. I'm sure everyone has these thoughts from time to time, parents wishing they could go back to life without their kids (young or grown) when everything they did wasn't "important", a "moment"--some integral action that would spur in their offspring either undying respect and affection or expensive and largely fruitless therapy. Fortunately it wasn't something I had to spend a lot of time thinking about; it had been years since I played a role resembling pivotal in the boy's life, which removed me from both credit and blame as far as I was concerned.

At any rate, I had to be on the road. It was Friday, and I'd gotten Charlie to fill in for me today so I could drive three hours to the University and pick up Paul. Paul was done with school. Or, more accurately, school was done with him, and their parting of ways entailed me packing up all the shit from his dorm room into the Cherokee and driving it, and him, to his mother's house in Whiteville. They'd work it out. I hadn't spoken to Karen about it at all. Paul had called, explained in his way what had happened (which is to say, not explained it at all) and could I come and gather everything up. He said he'd called her and that she couldn't get away from work. That sounded likely enough. I saw no reason to get into it with her on the phone and get an earful of blame for

Paul getting kicked out of school. I couldn't think how it had been my fault, but I'm sure she had put together some theories.

I noticed on the way out that the lawn looked like shit. The gray sky made it look all the more shit, patches of grass and patches of sandy earth and weeds here and there. I frowned and took out a cigarette and stood on the front porch. The Cherokee was in the driveway, paint peeling and tires balding and leaves collected in the crevice between the windshield and the hood. Should be on the road. Should just go now, it's not like I can't smoke in my own car. It's not like the drive was going to get longer. It's not like it mattered. Everything seemed to be barely held together at the seams under the drab December clouds. The neighborhood, the house, the lawn. A collection of premature fossils. Failures of nature.

Randy next door was fiddling under the hood of a truck that hadn't run since the Carter administration and, despite his continual efforts and attention, probably never would. Which was fine--I suspect he'd be crushed if it ever did, since that would be that. He saw me, waved, and I waved back and padded over to him. A minute or two hardly mattered.

"How's she lookin'?" I asked, nodding towards the gaping maw of the F150. Randy sighed and rubbed his grease-stained hands together. He spit off to the side and shook his head.

"Can't seem to fix one thing without bustin' a dozen others."

"Yeah, she's old. That's how old things go. My granddad was similar." Following that pearl of mechanical wisdom, I put my cigarette out and stuck my hands in my coat pockets.

"Ain't that the truth. You off today?"

"Well, yeah, I gotta go pick up my boy from college. Take him to his mom's house."

"Didn't know you had a kid," Randy said, sticking the upper half of his body into rusted guts. His feet lifted a couple inches off the ground. From my angle it looked like the truck had opened up and started eating him.

"Ask his mother, you'd hear I didn't."

Randy and I had been neighbors for about three years. He'd worked the same place I had for a couple of those, before a

trick knee put him on disability and set him on the Sisyphean path of personal automotive repair. It kept him out of the house, which was Susie's main concern since she was a woman who valued her "personal spaces," as Randy put it. In all this time I'd only met her a couple times. Enough to understand Randy's truck fixation- I have to say I'd find the company of this stack of bolts and sheet metal vastly preferable to the bleached whale that occupied a permanent spot in the living room of that house.

We agreed to meet over a couple beers to listen to the game on Sunday and parted ways. Thirty minutes later I was on the highway. Three hours of Classic Rock Greats and numbing scenery later I took the city exit to the college. I stopped at a Citgo for a pack of cigarettes and some gum. I bought a SunDrop for Paul--the few times he'd been to the house he'd complained about the lack of it in my fridge. I made small talk with the cashier, a genial black kid with too-big-to-be-real diamond studs in each ear. Got directions to the college, even though I could have just as easily followed the signs. Having nothing else to do there, I got back in the car and drove to the school.

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Paul's dorms were on the east end of the campus. I had to drive through the whole place to get there, at a steady five miles an hour. I was coming here for the first time; I'd been working when Paul started here in the fall, and besides, Karen and Frank seemed to appreciate sharing that momentous nest-clearing event sans yours truly. Just as well. They'd handle the promising start, I'd come in for the ignominious finish. It irritated me, her reservation of triumph and abdication of disappointment. She should be the one here picking him up. I sighed and peered out the window, checking the signs until finally I saw the one for Simmons Residence Hall. I parked half on the curb on the circle in front of the building.

I stepped out into the dry cool air and called Paul on his cell, but after two rings I saw him standing at the front door, waving at me. I put the phone away, forced a smile, and waved back. He looked good, if a bit rough around the edges, with his newly shaggy hair and wrinkled clothes. I held my hand out and he took it. An awkward half-hug followed and I quickly shoved my hands into my pockets. He looked at me with something approaching a guarded...

appreciation? Or was it just contempt? Or affection, or repulsion, or I don't know. Everybody was a stranger. Karen always said I was "emotionally illiterate." At which point I'd roll my eyes, confirming her glib diagnosis.

"Good to see you, buddy," I said.

"Hey, dad. How have you been?"

"Oh, same as ever, I guess." I gestured to the building behind him. "You got everything ready to go?"

"Yeah. It's not that much. Couple boxes. Couple bags."

I nodded. "Well, let's get it loaded up and we'll get on the road. I'm sure your mom's excited to see you." The second that left my mouth I realized how utterly oblivious it sounded. "In spite of, um, you know, recent events."

"Sure."

Paul's room was indeed packed up. Kind of a downer, almost, the contrast; half the room bare with unmarked boxes stacked in a corner and the other half, that of his absent roommate, still decorated with the messy trappings of the first real freedom you get to experience. It took us about fifteen minutes to clear everything out.

The last box went in the back, Paul shut the door, and we stood there while I lit a cigarette. He stuffed his hands into his pockets and looked around.

"Anyone you want to say goodbye to?" I asked. I wasn't sure he heard me; he just kept looking out at the campus.

"I mean, you probably have everyone's number, or email, or whatever..." I continued as he finally turned around and gave a half-smile, shaking his head.

"It's fine. I wasn't here that long, anyway."

"You eaten lunch yet?"

"I'm not hungry."

"Sure. We can get something on the road. If you change your mind."

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For about an hour we just rode along in silence, the low din of the radio the only sound over the light rumble of the ancient engine. I smoked my cigarettes, and Paul looked out the window. It wasn't until we started to see signs for Whiteville that he spoke,

startling me.

“Thanks for coming up to get me.”

I nodded.

“So you never told me what happened,” I said. I figured maybe he wanted to talk about it. Or at least, I wanted to know why I’d taken a sick day to drive all over the state.

He shifted in his seat and bit a thumbnail. No answer.

“School not for you?” No answer. “Look, I get that. It’s not always a good fit for everyone. Sometimes it---“

“I cheated,” he said. I glanced over at him but he looked down into his lap, examining his chewed up thumbnail.

“Hm,” I mused, hoping to sound thoughtful. “And you got caught. Well, obviously you got caught.”

He nodded. I pictured the look on Karen’s face when she heard that. God, and Frank, especially--that guy was the straight and narrow, a walking, shambling motivational poster. So here it was, the sum total of their combined efforts. The thought of them stewing in it; that almost made the drive worthwhile in itself.

“It didn’t matter. I was failing everything. I would have gotten kicked out anyway.”

“I somehow doubt your mom and Frank found that acceptable,” I said, chuckling.

“They didn’t find it anything. I haven’t told them. I’ll call them from your house.”

He dropped that on me just as the Whiteville exit appeared. He gets his sense of timing from his mother; that was my initial reaction. My follow-up entailed me pulling off the highway onto the shoulder and throwing the Cherokee into park. I turned and looked at him, expecting a return look of surprise and embarrassment that didn’t materialize.

“You’re kidding. Right?”

“I’m sorry I lied to you. I didn’t think you’d come otherwise.”

“You’re damn right I wouldn’t have. How . . . what were you thinking?” I was irritated beyond belief. I ’m not even sure why, outside of the inconvenience of the drive and the day. I felt myself shaking slightly, and my mouth was dry. My reaction caught him--and me--off guard. I realized I’d been yelling.

“Listen, hear me out, okay? Hear me out,” he said, gesturing with his hands. I fumbled with my pack of cigarettes, rolled down the window and felt a cold blast of winter air slap me in my cheek. I didn’t say anything. He continued.

“I can come live with you for a while. I won’t get in the way, I promise, and I can get a job and help with the bills and whatever; I just don’t want to go home, I don’t want to hear about all this and I don’t want to go through it again. Alright? I just want to be left alone.”

“Well, what the hell do you think I want?” I exclaimed, finding my voice again.

He started to answer, then stopped. He just sat there, looked at me, looked down at his lap again, until finally: “I have absolutely no idea, dad.” Then he started back in on it: “I don’t understand the big deal. You wouldn’t have to do anything. I can take care of myself fine.”

An 18-wheeler roared past, sending a gust of air into the car. I threw out the cigarette onto the asphalt, rolled up the window, and sat there, drumming my fingers on the steering wheel. He couldn’t stay with me, that was out of the question. That was the bottom line. There wasn’t anything for him there, at least as far as jobs or friends or whatever; the place wasn’t big enough, not really, not for something longer than a weekend or a holiday or a game on TV. There wasn’t much space, the kitchen was small, the living room . . . not enough for someone to have their stuff there. And besides--BESIDES, I thought with a burst of relief when the thought belatedly hit me--there’s no way Frank and Karen wouldn’t hit the damn ceiling the second they found out. They were his legal guardians, not me. Hell, I could get charged with kidnapping or something insane like that. Of course, I thought now, dreadfully, he was eighteen, technically an adult. Wasn’t he? He was just being a kid, talking like a kid, scared to tell his parents how badly he’d screwed up. Sure. That’s all this was.

“Okay. Okay. Here’s the bottom line, Paul. First off, we’re going to your mother’s place. Second, you’re going to tell them what happened. Not me. This is your mess, you can explain it to them. I’m not gonna stand around and get harangued by Karen for

playing a part in some kind of conspiracy. And third . . . well, third is whatever they decide to do. I can't imagine Frank's gonna let you just coast around, since I'm sure it's his dime you're on, but that's your problem."

I felt satisfied with that. I'd put my foot down. I put the car back into drive and pulled back onto the highway.

"It's not like I'm asking you to be a parent," he spat, red in the face. Christ, let it go already.

"Hey, don't turn this on me. This is your deal." The matter was settled, so I decided to weigh in with something resembling advice. "So this college wasn't for you. Big deal. There's other colleges. There's other things you can do. You know..." I was feeling it now, "you shouldn't give up on your parents, and you shouldn't give up on yourself." I was proud of that last bit.

"Save it. You're gonna take me home, fine. Whatever. But don't make it sound like you give a shit, like it's for my own good. You just don't want to have to do anything. You didn't care what I did there, you don't care about anything I do, as long as you don't have to lift a finger. So just do what you do. Nothing."

I sighed and shook my head. There was no talking to him. Let him work it out, and he'll work it out. He's not getting disowned, he's not getting kicked out of his house. I didn't like Frank, sure, and Karen is Karen, but they wouldn't let him go. Not that easily. I was doing the right thing, and soon enough this day would just be over.

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The rest of the trip, twenty minutes, passed in silence. I pulled into the driveway of their house, and Paul and I wordlessly emptied the back and walked it into the open garage. Karen came out, gave me a withering look, asked what the hell I was doing. I told her to talk to her son about it. I was just doing them a favor. Running an errand. I would have appreciated a "thanks", but that sure as hell wasn't forthcoming. I wasn't there long. Paul didn't look at me again. When I was leaving I saw him and Karen and Frank at the kitchen table. I wouldn't have been in that room for anything, that's for sure.

On the way home I was flipping through the radio stations and came upon some reverend--one of those fire-baked backwoods

brimstone boy--holding forth. He quoted someone or other in a trembling baritone: "The road to hell, you better believe, is paved with good intentions," he quaked. There's an idea, I thought as I turned the dial. Let's assume whoever said that was right. I figure it follows that for a thing to be true, it's opposite had to be true. And the opposite of that statement certainly bode well for most everyone.

The sun was almost gone now, with me still a half-hour away from home and enjoying some peace and quiet. I had my cell phone turned off from the second I left their house; there wasn't anything anyone who had that number could say that I wanted to hear right now. I was going to be left alone. That was what I wanted; that was enough and all of it and what was meant to be.



Megan Massengil

The Last of the Beans

Betty Mize

We were in the garden behind the house picking butterbeans and my back was aching from the bending, but then Mama told me I was too young to have a back, so I stopped complaining.. The butterbean rows were fifty yards long and five across and Florine was on the third row, mama on the second and I was on the first. Some people like to start at either end and meet in the middle, but we always liked to stay together so we could talk to mama. Not that mama had a lot to say in return. She never talked much but she listened.



Mama's fingers glided over the butterbean bush, snapping the pods off until she filled her fist then she'd toss them in the paper sack we drug along beside us. Me and Florine picked as slow as molasses on a cold December day. Each one of us stopping after every two or three bushes to straighten our backs.

"Mama, how do you know if they're ready to come off?" I asked.

"Just feel of them, honey."

I slung a handful of beans toward the bag and missed.

"Be careful, Son. These are the last beans we'll get this year, so let's not waste a one." Mama's voice was scolding, not soft like usual.

Florine screamed because she dragged her arm through a spider web that stretched across the row, then she fell right back into her usual monologue.

"When I saw that dress, I knew it was just like that one Kim Novak wears in Vertigo."

Mama didn't take her eyes off the butterbeans. "Who is Kim Novak?"

"Mama, she's the beautiful, mysterious blond Jimmy Stewart falls desperately in love with in the movie."

"Oh, I see. And how would you know anything about that?" Mama asked.

"I seen it, I mean, I saw it in a Photo Play magazine at the drug store. Can I buy it? It was only ten dollars."

“The magazine or the dress?” I asked even though I knew the answer.

“The dress, stupid,” Florine snarled.

Mama still didn’t look up. She was so used to these conversations with Florine that she could conduct them in her sleep.

“Well, I know your daddy would never agree to spending that kind of money on a dress. You best go to Roses and pick out some fabric. If you get me a picture, I can make the dress.”

This mildly satisfied Florine even though she would rather have a store bought dress to show off at church on Sunday. Mama didn’t understand that kind of showiness.

Out there in the garden, Mama was wearing her faded, blue cotton house dress and her straw hat which was ripped slightly at the crown. It was an old Sunday hat from her youth, but now it was worn and over worked and not any good for church anymore. I know from looking at old pictures that Mama used to be prettier but her figure had taken on that round, tubular quality that most of the older women around home acquired. When I was a young boy, I liked to fall asleep squishing the soft folds of her fleshy arms. Mama only dressed up on Sunday and that still was nothing fancy. She made all her clothes out of fabric she found on sale at Roses or the fabric shop downtown. Given her shape, all her dresses were made from the same pattern. A straight shift with a V neck line, the tip of which she would pin a brooch. She had long sleeve versions in navy blue and dark purple with tiny lavender flowers. The short sleeve duo was navy and royal blue.

Mama was who she was and she didn’t seem to long for, wish for or even dream of anything besides what was right there before her. She was content in her world and I thrived in her contentment. Florine and Daddy were different. They were restless and fidgety. Daddy could hardly sit down to supper with us without acting like he was going to bust wide open and spill his insides across the kitchen table. I don’t remember him ever saying a kind or gentle word to any one of us. He’d sit there eating in silence as if speaking a word would cause his tongue to fall out and flap around on his plate. When Florine and me talked about our day, he kinda looked like he smelled something foul. After he

ate, he'd get up and go outside on the porch. You could see the orange fire glow and fade with each draw he took off his cigarette. I wondered what he was thinking about out there all alone. When the smoke was done, he'd head out across the yard to check on the cows or the tobacco barns or whatever would keep him out of the house and away from us.

On this day in August, I was content with the feel of the sun hot on my back and the cool garden dirt resting on my buried bare feet. Not that the hot, gray soil on top would have burned my feet anyway. I had already toughened them up by going barefoot since Memorial Day. A cluster of gnats was congregating around a fresh elbow scab and I was swatting madly at them when Mama straightened up and stood a moment looking right at me. I stopped swatting and looked back at her. She acted like she wanted to say something but no words would come out of her mouth. Then she grasped at the empty space in front of her, looking like she was floating in jar of apple jelly, struggling to get out. It seemed like she fell for several minutes even though my attempts to stop her left me grabbing a handful of warm summer air. Florine was still yakking as Mama lay spread across the butterbean plants.

"Mama!" I yelled but I stood rooted in that cool garden soil. Florine finally shut up and turned around. She screamed, "Mama!" and ran to her. I finally willed my feet to move and I threw myself down beside Mama. I looked at her chest to see if it was rising and falling and there was no movement.

"Florine, go get Daddy," I said. She got up and kinda stumbled backwards still staring at Mama.

"Run!" I yelled at her. She turned then and ran towards the barn. I could hear her hollering for Daddy all the way.

I gathered Mama's head up in my lap so that her pinned up auburn hair wouldn't be resting in the dirt. I knew she was gone cause no living human is ever that still. I had watched for Mama's breathing before at night when I'd wake up scared in the dark. On a moonless night, my room was dark as pitch and I couldn't even see my hand waving in front of my face. When I'd wake up in the dark like that, I wasn't sure if I was still alive or not. I'd wonder if being dead was being fully aware yet submerged in a blackness that no sound nor light could penetrate. I'd snap my fingers to test

my hearing, then, I'd feel in the dark for the flashlight I had saved my money to buy. I'd shine the light on the familiar objects around me to assure that I was alive in my room and not waking up six feet under the red clay in a satin lined box. I knew I could never go back to sleep without checking to see if Mama was still breathing, so I would creep in Mama and Daddy's room just to make sure. I had to be real quiet cause Daddy would have a hissy fit if he knew I was roaming around in his room in the middle of the night. I'd shine that flashlight, shaded by my hand, onto Mama's chest until I saw the gentle rise and fall. Then I'd go back to my room and climb in bed satisfied that all was right in my world.

I heard the tractor motor struggling and coughing but finally roll over into a steady puttering.

"Mama, can you hear me?" I pleaded, "Please don't leave us now." I started to cry. I couldn't help it.

I saw the Farmall with Daddy astride bouncing down the path pulling a rattling flat bed trailer behind. Florine was running ahead. Her face was red from a combination of crying and running. Daddy's leather face looked calm. I quickly wiped my tears so Daddy wouldn't see me crying.

"What's the matter, boy?" Daddy shouted over the roar of the tractor.

"Mama is dead!" I shouted back and the spring of tears burst into a river despite my efforts to hold back the flood.

"Stop your blubbering, boy. Surely your mama's not dead. She's just got too hot." Daddy climbed down from the tractor and casually walked down the butterbean row. He stood over Mama a minute, then he bent down and listened to her chest.

I dried my face with my grimy hands leaving streaks of black across my cheeks.

You look a fine sight for folks to see when they come up to the house. Dry it up and be a man, boy. Help me get her up on that trailer." He barked as he took hold of her feet. I had hold of her head so I maneuvered up on my knees and rose holding her under her arms with her head resting on my chest.

Florine jumped on the trailer and positioned herself to receive mama's head in her lap.

"So Daddy you think she's not dead, just too hot? Is that

what you think?" Florine sounded hopeful.

"No, Florine. I believe the boy is right. Your mama is dead." Daddy said this just like he was telling us what the weather was outside.

Florine started wailing and hollering and calling, "Mama!" After I placed Mama in Florine's lap, I stepped back and stared silently at the pair on the trailer.

"Ain't you coming?" Daddy shouted at me as he climbed on the tractor.

"No sir, I'll walk," I yelled back as he put the tractor in gear and bounced towards the house.

I walked back down the butterbean row and looked down at Mama's imprint in the soil and the crushed butterbean bush that was full of ripe beans because mama hadn't stripped it yet. I stood in her place and I fell backwards into that spot where she drew her last breath just to try to feel what she might have felt. I lay there staring up at the clearest blue sky I can ever remember seeing before or since. I don't know how long I lay there with no sound except the buzz of the bees pollinating the garden. I finally rolled over and grabbed mama's hat and the half full sack of butterbeans and started walking, kicking the dirt with the ball of my foot as I headed up the path to our old, white farmhouse. I sometimes intentionally stepped on a sharp stone just to test the toughness of my calloused feet.

By suppertime, the kitchen table would be crowded with fried chicken, biscuits, sliced tomatoes and all grades of other vegetables. But nobody would be cooking this sackful of butterbeans I clutched in my hand. These were Mama's butterbeans and I didn't want anybody else to have them. I reached into the sack and started slinging butterbeans skyward. Then, I ran in circles scattering the pods like they were the ashes of mama. When the bag was empty, a trail of slim, green pods lay broiling in the sun.

I knew I was due a whipping now, but I wasn't afraid. I would be a man from here on out. A man who wouldn't need a flashlight in the dark because my worst fear had come true, yet I was still alive. Tomorrow morning Daddy would call us before dawn because there were cows to milk, eggs to gather and the last of the season's beans to pick before they withered in the August sun.



Ann Wall

Cell City
Patti May Parsons



A cosmic drama

CHARACTERS

Sonya and Matilda,	two somatic body cells from the “single parent” community
<i>Señor Esperma,</i>	Male gamete (the protagonist)
<i>Señor Hermano,</i>	Male gamete brother (the ally)
<i>The guys,</i>	sum total of haploid gametes present
<i>Elegant Eliana Egg,</i>	female gamete starlette
<i>Señorita Huevo,</i>	female gamete, (the antagonist)
<i>Old Boot,</i>	retired Drill Sergeant gamete (the mentor)
<i>Carlos and wife,</i>	supporting characters
<i>Jen and Rebel,</i>	two laboratory scientists

SCENE. *The action takes place in Cell City. Population: 60 trillion. The single parent population is engaged in the work of mitosis.*

ACT I

Enter: two somatic cells, Sonya and Matilda

Sonya: Hey, Matilda! Did you see that ad in the university newspaper offering \$50,000 for an egg?

Matilda: Yea. I don't know why those gametes have to be so complicated. Why don't they just divide themselves into two daughter cells like we do, and be happy?

Sonya: I think they're *half-wits* -- they only have one member of each *homologous chromosome pair*!

Matilda: They're just an "n." We're better. We're "2ns."

Sonya: I mean, what's so difficult? *Simple cell division – simple mitosis*. You spend 90% of the time in a nice *Interphase* doing all your normal stuff while everything doubles automatically in your cytoplasm.

Matilda: And then our *mitotic phase* happens in *a tenth* of the time -- and you're done! No one minds it a bit when the cytoplasm divides into two daughter cells. Look, my *cleavage furrow* is already showing.

Matilda: I'm glad we just operate asexually. We just keep growing and replacing lost or damaged cells. We're much more important than those gametes, right Sonya?

Sonya: For sure.

Act II

SCENE I: [A HUGE THEATRE]. *Tens of millions of chairs face a mammoth screen. Every seat is taken. Señor Esperma is in one of them. He feels like he is coming out of a deep sleep of some kind. Old Boot walks out and yells: “Listen up!” The newly seated haploid gametes, sit up straight and alert. Just moments earlier they had experienced the final phase of Meiosis II, and now attentively line the seats in precise groups of four brothers each.*

Sr. Esperma: Where am I? What is this place? What’s going on?

Sr. Hermano: I don’t know, but I’m right here with you, my brother.

A film begins: Las Muchachas, starring Elegant Eliana Egg. A picture of a female haploid gamete flashes across the screen.

Sr. Esperma: My, brother, I think I’m in love!

Sr. Hermano: Yea, she’s cute, but is she nice?

The female haploid disappears and a diploid parent cell fills the screen.

Sr. Esperma: Whoa! What’s that? It’s huge!

Old Boot: This *diploid parent cell* has 2 sets of 23 chromosomes. [He picks up a pointer] -- *This* is the nucleus.

The guys: Nooo – cle –us (they chant slowly with wide eyes, half mesmerized)

Old Boot: In the nucleus is the DNA, the blueprint of our identity.

Popcorn is being passed down the rows and the guys are mindlessly devouring it –eyes transfixed on the screen. Meiosis, Part One, it says.

Old Boot: In *Meiosis*, *haploid gametes* are created with just one set of chromosomes --23 -- like all of you – only these are “*las muchachas*” – the girls.

The guys are on the edges of their chairs in focused

attention

Old Boot: Your mission is to *fertilize* one of these *muchachas* (eggs or female gametes) and produce a *diploid zygote*. In other words, you'll be together forever. Now watch. This is "*Interphase*" of *Meiosis I*. See how the *chromosomes* and *organelles* are duplicated? After this four things happen: *Prophase I*, (*homologous chromosomes* pair up); *Metaphase I* (*microtubules* attach to the *chromosomes*); *Anaphase I* (*pairs of homologous chromosomes* split up); and finally *Telophase I* and *Cytokinesis*, where two *haploid cells* form -- but the *chromosomes* are still double.

There's an Intermission -- the guys exit and buy lots of chocolate, chips and salsa, to ease the mounting tension

SCENE 2: [BACK IN THE THEATRE]. *The film resumes. Las Muchachas, Meiosis II, it reads.*

Old Boot: Part One started with a *diploid parent cell*, but now we begin with the two *haploid cells* that you saw before the intermission. Are we clear on this?

The guys: Yes, drill sergeant, sir -- yes!

Old Boot: In *Meiosis II*, the *sister chromatids* separate and **four** *haploid daughter cells* result, containing **single** *chromosomes*. We want our 'girls' to be single, right?

The guys: Yes, sir, yes.

Old Boot: In *Prophase II*, *spindles* form and move the chromosomes toward the middle. In *Metaphase II* they align down the center. Then, there's *Anaphase II*. Watch as the *sister chromatids* are pulled apart and move toward opposite poles of the cell.

The guys: (gasping)

Old Boot: It's okay, it's okay. Watch. This is *Telophase II*, aka *cytokinesis*. See the *nuclei* forming at each end of each cell? Now there are four *daughter cells*, *haploids* – *huevos*, *eggs* – ready to meet YOU!

Here is Eliana Egg again. See her green eye gene? Many genes live on our chromosomes.

Sr. Esperma: Now I know I am in love.

Old Boot: According to mathematic probabilities, Eliana Egg is one is eight million. Her individualism was determined by both independent assortment as well as crossing over where she exchanged parts with a homologous chromosome at the tip – an exchange of genetic information. This recombinant element is part of what makes her so unique.

Sr. Esperma: My brother, I am smitten. I shall die if I do not get to hold her in my arms.

Sr. Hermano: My brother, I'm sorry, but she is so perfect, and you – you have that crooked toe gene, and you're not all that tall.

Sr. Esperma: Yes, but I have the roll your tongue gene, and musical ability -- and I'm smart. I will sing to her and she will be mine.

Sr. Hermano: You're such a silly romantic.

The screen fills with the words: Random fertilization

Old Boot: Remember, fertilization is your goal.

Senor Esperma mutters something about not being "random."

Old Boot dismisses the guys and they all rush for the gym. Señor Esperma grabs his guitar and composes a love song. He dreams of living forever with Eliana Egg.

Act III

SCENE 1: [OLD BOOT'S OFFICE]. *Señor Esperma requests a private visit with Old Boot. As he enters his office, he nervously plays with the guitar picks in his pocket.*

Sr. Esperma: I want to meet Eliana Egg.

Old Boot: Ha! You and a hundred million other guys!

Sr. Esperma: No. I'm serious. If I don't get to be with her, I'll just die.

Old Boot: There's only one way. An ad.

Sr. Esperma: An ad?

Old Boot: Yea. We'll put an ad in the college newspaper. "Egg needed. \$50,000 paid. Must be young, romantic, healthy, and very intelligent." Eliana Egg is the only one to fit that description.

Sr. Esperma: *O, por favor!* You will do this?

Old Boot: Sure, but you have to sign this consent form to go to the Sperm Bank and wait in a freezer.

Sr. Esperma: What? I'll be frozen? No!

Old Boot: It's the only hope.

Sr. Esperma: Okay, but can I have my brother go with me. I don't want to go alone.

Old Boot: I'll call him in so you can talk.

Señor Hermano meets them in the office and reluctantly signs himself over to the Sperm Ban, to help his brother, and for his own protection. Old Boot explains that most the guys in the Sperm Bank will fertilize an egg, but normally only one in many million will -- everybody else just dies.

Sr. Hermano: You didn't tell us that when we watched the film.

Old Boot: No need to.

Sr. Hermano: What else did you not tell us?

Old Boot: Well, the weird thing is that you are actually just a tiny particle in a huge *multi-cellular organism* named Carlos, and he's about to take a drug that will *help him*, but *hurt us*. So we have to get out of here soon. In the *Sperm Bank* you will be safe, even if frozen for awhile, and you'll get to completion with an egg at some point.

Sr. Esperma: And can it be Eliana Egg?

Old Boot: I'll do everything I can.

They sign the contract. Señor Hermano is taken immediately. Señor Esperma waits and practices his love song one more time with his guitar. Suddenly he is propelled away with millions of other guys while screaming in protest, "No, no, no!" Señor Esperma is in despair. He will never meet Eliana Egg now. His despair turns to rage and he swims violently.

Señorita Huevo: Ouch! *Stupido! Mire por dónde camina! (Watch where you're going!)*

Señor Esperma turns and sees a fiery, strikingly beautiful female haploid and falls instantly and madly in love, forgetting all about Eliana Egg. He pulls out his guitar quickly and begins to sing an apology and then his love song.

Señorita Huevo: Oh, Señor. Me estás cantando. (You're singing to me!) That is very sweet. Will you sing to me forever?

Sr. Esperma: Para siempre. Forever.

Off they go as a newly formed zygote to live happily ever after. Meanwhile ...

SCENE 2: [SEÑOR HERMANO AT THE SPERM BANK]. *Señor Hermano opens his eyes and sees a sign: "Cryopreservation." He feels like he has entered a horror movie. He listens to Jen and Rebel, the laboratory scientists, discussing him.*

Jen: This sample looks very good and we received it less than an hour ago.

Rebel: Yes, and there's more than 40 million *spermatozoa*.

Old Boot had forced them all to sign up to try to save them

Rebel: Has it been maintained at the correct body temperature?

Jen: Perfectly. And, look, way over 75% of them are alive.

*Señor Hermano was scared. Old Boot had not told them that a quarter of them would **die** on the way to the Sperm Bank*

Jen: More than 30% are of normal shape and form. Especially *this* one [pointing out Señor Hermano who was very relieved]. Look at the strong and rapid movement!

[Señor Hermano was actually just darting around in fright]

Jen: I'm so glad we could do this for Carlos before they started radiation on him.

Rebel: Me too. Good thing for *The Fertility Counseling and Gamete Cryopreservation Program* here at the University of Michigan. It's so great that these men can have healthy children in the future.

Jen: Yea, even that 14 year old that was here last week. He could have a baby 12 years from now. He'd be 26.

Rebel: Right, but Carlos and his wife want a baby *now*.

Jen: Then let's not *freeze* this sample. Let's use it right away.

Señor Hermano did not like being called a "sample" but he did like the fact that he was not going to be frozen!

Rebel: Do you know we've had 85 successful deliveries out of the 96 pregnancies from our *sperm injections*? This *intracytoplasmic method* is really good. It's much more successful than just placing everything in the *petri dish* and hoping for the best. I don't think the male gametes mind us doing all the work for them. They don't have to worry about penetrating the egg's outer shell this way - I just inject one in *tail first*, and it's done. .

Señor Hermano silently prays: Oh, please, please, please, let them inject ME! (He can't believe he's saying that).

Señor Hermano finds himself in the petri dish. He knows he must

swim as fast and strong as he can so that he will be chosen. He keeps looking up at Jen and smiling as big as he can, even though he is petrified. Most of the other guys were moving in lazy circles, stunned.

Jen: Get this one, Rebel (pointing at Señor Hermano). I think he's smiling at me! And, hey, let's use that new egg that was donated – or rather, purchased - - you know, the one that responded to Carlos' ad in the university newspaper?

SCENE 3: [NINE MONTHS LATER]. *Carlos and wife are cooing at their new beautiful baby who is smiling back as big as she can!*

Carlos: Let's name her, um ... what do you think of ... Eliana?



Elizabeth Uhlman

A Tale of Two Twenties

Thomas B. Lewis



Can anything look better to a thirteen year old boy in 1977 Brooklyn than an unclaimed twenty dollar bill lying on the ground? I, for one, didn't think so. The one I happened to be staring at, on the floor of my favorite magazine store, sure was looking good. Strategically placing my foot over it so no one else could claim it, I started to consider the great weekend I was going to have with this serendipitous reward. I could buy a bunch of comics and sports magazines with it. I could go to the Mets game and even treat a friend. Maybe I could go to the mall and spend several blissful, frivolous hours playing mindless arcade games. The possibilities were endless. All was looking pretty good in the world, but before I could enjoy my 'ill gotten gains,' I was going to be tested. Wouldn't you know it, my conscience was to be challenged with an all too familiar scenario. As Yogi Berra would say, "It was Déjà vu all over again." The voice I had heard didn't sound at all like mine, nor did it use the same words as I did, but it was certainly an echo from my past. I was beginning to realize that I was indeed being tested. I was also about to learn what the word conscience really meant, and how consequence, a word I was familiarized with about four years earlier, helped me better understand that definition.

Long before ATM's, one way to attain some cash in the early 70s without having to trek to the bank was to write an 'over' check from your personal checking account. Back in the day of the neighborhood grocer, it was not unheard of to allow regular customers, who are in good standing, to write one of these 'over' checks. This was actually a regular routine for my dad on Saturdays. He would send either my sister or me to McManus's Deli with a check for twenty five dollars and have us to buy less than five dollars worth of merchandise (quite often his cigarettes or beer would be on his list as the early 70's in Brooklyn would not find a nine year old buying such products as scandalous as society would today). The change from this purchase would leave my father with a twenty dollar bill for the weekend. This was a great responsibility for me; one that I took great pride from. My dad trusted me to go to the store for him and to come back with his hard earned money. The fact that I usually was rewarded with

a candy bar or comic book didn't hurt either, but it was the trust he put in me that was most rewarding. It was during one of these errands that I got a lesson in just how easily someone can lose his trust in you. While rushing home to catch the rest of my Saturday morning cartoons, I lost my dad's twenty dollar bill.

I'll never forget the mixed look of anger and disappointment. He told me to run back to the store and see if I'd left the money there. Big Jim at the counter said he didn't see the lost bill, nor did any of his customers. I left the store for the long block and a half walk home, scanning the sidewalk and gutter for the lost money. I asked each passerby that I encountered if they'd seen a twenty dollar bill fly by, although I did not find much hope in really finding it on such a windy fall day. As I rounded the last corner on my long walk home, I was resigned to the fact that the money was gone and I was going to be punished. The punishment itself did not bother me as much as the thought that I'd let my father down. It was then that I heard a woman calling out to me. To this day, I wonder if it was my Guardian Angel, as I could never recall seeing her before or after this single defining moment of my young life. "You look upset; is it because you lost this?" she asked me while extending her hand, which had a crisp twenty dollar bill in it. I wonder who had a bigger smile; was it hers or mine? She was quite happy seeing the relief on my face as I repeatedly thanked her before racing home.

My father was merciful with me. He was pleased that I found the money, but was still upset with my carelessness. It cost me some extra chores around the house, as well as the Snickers bar I'd bought for myself. What I found I was most grateful for was that he soon gave me a second chance in letting cash his checks at the deli. Before this day, I always measured a consequence as something carried out with a loss of privilege or in the form of corporal punishment. It took a twenty dollar bill blowing in the wind to show me that consequence can go much deeper. It can involve things like perception, trust, and character. These are things that, when lost or effected, can hurt exceedingly more than any extra chore or tanned backside.

So now here I am, four years later, a thirteen year old in 1977, with my foot on a twenty dollar bill that I have already mentally spent and I am hearing a familiar voice. The voice I was hearing

was my own panicked voice; only this time it was coming from the lips of a distraught young Puerto Rican girl who was about ten or eleven years old.

She was telling the Middle Eastern counter man that she'd lost twenty dollars. With their language barriers, I believe that he thought she was accusing him of taking her twenty dollars. Despite their misunderstanding of one another, it was quite clear to me that she was telling him that she had lost twenty dollars. I found myself rationalizing many different excuses in my head as my foot remained firmly on top of my treasure. Excuses for keeping my foot there such as: "Maybe it's a different twenty she's looking for..." or "Well, she was careless anyway..." (the nerve I had to even think that one), and "Oh, she's probably lying about losing it anyway..." (now that was going a little too far, Tommy-boy). Enough was enough. "Is this your money?" I finally asked her. The words alone coming from my mouth brought immediate relief. Then the look of thanks in the girl's face when I handed the money over to her made it all come together. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed." For me to fully appreciate this definition, I needed to see the consequence of my actions to fully understand what conscience meant. Four years earlier, I received a clear picture of what it would mean to a young child to lose what to him is a large sum of money. For all I knew, this girl had the same concerns and fears for losing this twenty dollar bill that I had when I had lost my father's money. Quite possibly, she had even more. Conscience is most effective when there is a face placed along side of it. It is even more effective when it is a face that we have worn ourselves.



Amber Morris

Alligator Mountain

Patti May Parsons



I arrived in northern Michigan to give a Bible seminar, having just left West Palm Beach; the chill hit immediately. I could see my breath. At least I had brought my light jacket, but by nightfall I wished for my heavy coat. The rental car was waiting and I went straight to my hotel. Settling in to the room, the thought came that a friend I had not seen for a few years lived nearby. Delighted to find her number, I called.

“I was just getting ready to go for a hike,” she said. “You should come with me. Lake Michigan is so beautiful right now.” But I only had heels and a dress, I explained, and therefore could not join her, and besides that, I was not a hiker. “What size shoe do you wear?” she asked, not to be put off. Pressing me with much excitement and enthusiasm, she was convinced I would do just fine in her old hiking shoes which were only a half size too small, and surely it would be no problem to borrow her hiking clothes that were two sizes too big. “It’s just down the street,” she continued with great exuberance and joy. “Meet me in the parking lot in 30 minutes. It’s a very short hike. We’ll just go straight up this easy trail, look at the lake, and come right back down. The whole thing will take about an hour.” I consented.

My toes hurt a bit as they scrunched into the borrowed shoe, like Cinderella’s step-sisters determined to get the glass slipper to fit. The big jacket and pants posed no problem other than making me look fifty pounds heavier than normal. So off we went. “We’ll just stay a few minutes at the landing up there to see the water, then we’ll come right back down,” she reassured me. I collected leaves along the way, and enjoyed our random rambling conversation. A sudden gunshot in the distance caused me to shoot my friend a frightened look. “It’s okay, it’s deer hunting season. There are mountain lions and bear up here, too,” she added. “But don’t worry, we’re almost there, and the lake is spectacular.” All I wanted at that moment was to be back at my hotel. I put the leaves in my pocket and walked a little faster.

The lake reflected the golden rays of the setting sun, and exuded peace. For five minutes bliss rested upon us in that one with nature

feeling. “We’d better go,” my friend said. “Let’s take this other trail down so you can see some more of the pretty scenery.”

Following without question, relieved to be heading for my car and the hotel, I walked along just slightly apprehensive about the wildlife. We rounded a bend where my friend expected the trail to go straight down to the parking lot. Instead, we were greeted by a big warning sign informing us that the continuing upward trail was reserved only for more experienced hikers. My feet hurt.

“We have to go back,” my friend said excitedly. I began to retrace my steps feeling a bit begrudging about it, when I heard, “You’d better run.” What did she mean, run? Was it a bear, a mountain lion? “No! It’s just that it’s starting to get dark,” she explained. “We don’t have much time.” Fear set in. I ran. When we arrived at the landing where we gazed at the lake a bit earlier, the darkness was thickening. “Where’s the trail we came up?” my friend asked. Stunned, I watched her running in a circle searching the ground as the blackness came in like a blanket upon us. My circulation all but stopped with an onset of silent panic. I had no idea what trail we came up. I had paid no attention. This was to be a simple straight up and back down hike. I was horrified with fear, and freezing in the cold air. “Let’s try this one,” she decided, and began to run down a trail. I followed. Within minutes, the trail became very steep and we skidded and slid down a portion of it. It was so dark I could not see my scratched up, dirt-clawed hand in front of my face. The moon was a sliver. My knee hurt; my feet hurt.

Every tiny noise in that forest accentuated, and multiplied my fearful imaginings. We walked a bit further, and then the trail turned upward. My friend was out of ideas. We stopped and held each other. Soon she began to tell me about an article she had read that morning. It said that even if you were lost at sea, stranded in the middle of an ocean, there was a Law of the Universe that could save you. I couldn’t believe I was in a situation where that was relevant to that scenario. Reflecting back on the morning when taking my seat on the jet, it seemed ludicrous to have even imagined that by evening I’d be in a predicament where this rescuing Law would have to be enforced or activated to save my life.

We decided to listen for cars and watch for headlights to get some

idea of our location and discern which way was down. After a long time we heard something. Far down the mountain a faint sound of a car and twinkling headlights. We watched it moving from the right slowly to the left, and then it disappeared. “Well, we know where the road is,” my friend said hopefully. “Why don’t we just go straight down in that direction?” Was she serious? “Right, who needs a trail?” I thought to myself. But given the alternative of just standing there listening to the noises that at any moment might turn into a mountain lion, bear, or rattlesnake, I agreed. Every step was accompanied by a positive statement or some verse from the Bible, as we leaned hard on that Law of the Universe to protect us.

When my feet touched the road I was ecstatic! We were still in the forest, but the road gave me comfort. We could walk down the road – down, not up – and we could see it well enough even in the dense darkness of that moonless night. Suddenly a car came along. Although nervous about dealing with a stranger, I flagged it down. An incredulous young man opened his window and said, “What are you doing out here?” I began to explain that I was visiting from Florida. “Florida!” he exclaimed, astonished and amused. Get in. I’ll take you to your car.” My friend was most reluctant to do so, but I feared a bear more than a man, so in we jumped. “Just because this is called Alligator Mountain, does not mean you should be out here hiking it, even if you are from Florida,” the young man said, laughing at me and at his own pun. “Thanks, you can be sure I’ll never do it again,” I laughed. The shoes came off.

At the parking lot we thanked our hero profusely. Then we hugged each other goodbye, my friend pleading that I call her again next time. “Only if we go to dinner downtown, and you bring pictures of the lake,” I replied. “It’s a deal,” she said, smiling and beaming as if nothing had happened. Driving my car down the lighted main street toward the hotel, I found myself saying, “Thank You, thank You, thank You.” I couldn’t stop. “Thank You” came out of my mouth about two hundred times, continuing involuntarily from relief and sheer joy. Cushy slippers went on; flannel pajamas followed. Head on the pillow. “Thank You, thank You,” I said over and over again, and finally fell asleep.

He Was Safe
Tiffany Renea West



The paranormal world contains many mysteries. When I was fifteen I had a crisis of faith when confronted with the existence of this world. My grandparents were strict Southern Baptists and always told me the paranormal world did not exist. For years I believed them never having any reason not to. However, the story my father told me and my own personal experience later in life made me sure of what to believe.

Dreams, I have been told, always mean something. As a child my dad had a reoccurring dream, or I should say a nightmare, for he often woke his mother with screams of terror, cold with sweat from the things he had seen. He dreamed he was walking along a road and had come across a terrible accident. He could see the shape of a body on the ground, covered in a white sheet, a shroud of death. The smell of blood was thick in the air. The dream carried such strong emotion for him. Even as a child he pondered the meaning.

When he was in his twenties he played in a band. This was before I was born, even before my dad met my mom. At the time he was married to a woman named Harriet. On a Saturday night in the middle of December he packed up his guitar and headed to the bar he played at regularly. Mostly friends would be there. At the end of the night they wanted him to play a few more songs. A few more songs turned into a couple of hours of music and conversation. Before long my dad had completely lost track of the time. They quickly packed their gear, tired from a night of playing Cash, Nelson, and Daniels songs, and headed home.

As they got closer to my dad's house he became more and more unsettled. Unable to put his mind at ease, he let his mind wonder, like a child lost in a maze. Bright lights in the distance caught his eyes and stirred him from his drifted state. The lights had the effect of an electric shock on him. He knew at once what had happened. His body went cold, numb, and his dream, like an unwelcome visitor, came back to haunt him. The road, the one from his dream, was the one he traveled now, and even at this

distance he could see the white sheet lying on the ground. The mangled car that had been pushed in the ditch became visible, and any doubt my dad had at that time diminished. Harriet was the lifeless body covered in that sheet. She must have become worried that my dad was not home and had decided to go out and look for him. The drunk driver that hit her car was sitting on the ground next to the police car. His body swayed back and forth and occasionally jerked uncontrollably as if he was trying to shake away the event that had just occurred. Now my dad understood the meaning of his dream.

No one will ever know what that kind of loss feels like unless they experience that loss first-hand. Although my dad had lost her in this world, she still remained in another. Harriet could not have children, something they both accepted in their ten years of marriage. They instead had several dogs, pure-bred show dogs. This was Harriet's passion. My dad kept those dogs, and I remember some of them. He had three German Sheppard's, a collie named Lassie, and a Siberian husky named Dusty. As a child I would ride Dusty like he was a horse. No one could separate us; he was my protector.

Dusty always lifted himself on to his hind legs and licked the air, like the air contained some long lost friend he had not seen in years. My Dusty, and all the other dogs would do this, and I thought this was a clever trick they had been taught. They would often bark at things that only their eyes could see. I never took notice to his strange behavior. I was a child then and thought his actions were normal. If I had not seen the reaction of others I probably would not have noticed at all. I read once that animals are more sensitive to the supernatural world than we are. After this experience I believe that to be true. I am sure that this was Harriet. After all, she was like a mother to them.

Harriet made herself known in many other ways. Some of my parent's friends refused to come over because of her presence. She frightened them. The ones that knew her in life never seemed to mind. They, like my dad, were comforted by her presence. None the less the things that happened would raise the hair on the back of even their necks. Rooms in the house would instantly become cold. The air would be warm one minute and the next minute would drop twenty degrees. You could see your breath with each

exhale. The smell of Harriet's perfume would permeate the air. The sweet smell of freshly cut flowers mixed with the earthy smell of an early morning rain. Perhaps the eeriest thing of all was that sometimes when driving past the scene of her accident the entire car, even with windows up, would fill with that smell. I was driving a friend home one night a few years ago when this happened to me. I remember asking her if she sprayed perfume and her response to me was, "No, I thought that was you." Immediately I had goose bumps all down my arms and shivered as the chill ran down my spine. From that point on I never questioned the existence of ghosts.

I found some old slide photographs of my dad and Harriet. They were in Alaska, a place I had heard my dad talk about frequently, but never knew he had been to. The photographs were from their honeymoon. They were so happy then. I felt the tears forming in the corners of my eyes as I looked at them and realized the loss my dad had experienced. Not only had he lost his wife, he had unknowingly seen her death played out in his dream over and over again, and in a morbid sense he had no control over this. She stopped coming around when I was about five years old. Dusty died around that time too. We found his body in the same spot where he would lick the air. I did not cry. I knew he would be safe with her. When I was older I realized that Harriet stopped coming around for a similar reason. She knew my dad was going to be alright. He was safe.



Amanda Smith

American Girl in Lima

Patti May Parsons

It started at lunch in the quaint little café in the historic inn of the mountain town of Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. It was my daughter, Sherry's, eighteenth birthday, and we were out together celebrating. She said, "Oh mom, I'm so excited. I know what I want to do now. I want to be a travel photographer. I read Jane Seymour's biography, and she says you have to dream big or you'll just have a boring life. I want to travel to exotic places all over the world, and I want to be perfectly fluent in at least two other languages!" The world rarely allows for simple exotic wishes without exacting a toll.

Being a supportive mom I answered encouragingly, "Good for you, honey." Neither of us had an inkling as to where this would lead. Several years later, following her dream, she attended the Art Institute of Ft. Lauderdale where she took classes in photography, and where she met José. They fell in love. Suave, handsome, and romantic, he quickly won her heart. Although he could barely speak English, and Sherry had not yet embarked on her quest to be trilingual, somehow over the course of that year, they managed to communicate well enough to set a wedding date and plan a future.

My first worry about the two of them came on the subject of children. "How many children would you like to have, Jose?" I asked. "Oh, nine or ten would be great," he replied with his deep, charming voice. We laughed, but I think he was really serious. My daughter wanted between zero and one at the most.

They married and after just several months moved to Lima, Peru. Far from the exotic adventure Sherry had been dreaming of, she moved into an old house, rather large, but inhabited by seventeen people, several dogs, and a cat or two that lived on the roof. There were Jose's grandparents, his mother and father, his brothers, sisters, their spouses, a few children, and two Incan maids, all of whom were extremely unhappy with Jose's choice of wife. It was so uncomfortable enduring each greeting which came

replete with a kiss on the cheek, and then standing in such close proximity as to prompt a natural reaction of backing away. Such body language was an insult, so Sherry stood her ground close. She tried to fit in, but they found everything wrong with her they could, and talked about her disparagingly in front of her face, but in Spanish. As my daughter began to learn the language, she was horrified by their remarks.

One of the first words she understood that they were saying while laughing was *gorda*. This means “fat.” My daughter weighed perhaps 110 pounds, but she is short and curvy, whereas the Peruvian sisters were tall and skinny. She starved herself down to about 98 pounds, which was not difficult for a vegetarian confronted with victuals meant only for the carnivorous and unidentifiable vegetables that were strange. Even the drinks were peculiar. Instead of Coca-cola, they drank Inca-cola, a beverage best described as liquid bubble gum. Tiny as she was, they still called her *gorda*. José tried to reassure her.

Sherry’s first letter from Peru sounded pathetic, but her humor had survived. The letter started: “Mom, CHICKENS walk around in the airport. On my second day here, an explosion rocked the house. Jose’s mom said not to worry; it was only a *bombito* (a small bomb several miles away in the city). No one seems to notice, *bombitos* happen all the time. Jose’s family hates me, and I’m not allowed in the kitchen. People stare at me in the streets. They’re not used to the blond hair and light skin. I can’t talk to anyone. I was in a room full of people speaking Spanish; they suddenly got up and left. José told me that everyone was going to the movies. Therefore, I’ve enrolled in a Spanish class at college for self-defense.” Shining through these dark remarks, Sherry, still energetic and daring to dream big, embraced plans for a happy and good future with José, looking forward to being on their own. However, plans for independence were delayed when the first baby was on its way.

We can only be grateful she gave birth to a boy who had dark hair and skin. The woman in the hospital bed next to Sherry in the maternity ward had the misfortune of producing a female

baby as her firstborn. Friends and relatives came to console her. The woman's husband all but forgave her. In Peruvian culture, the firstborn just has to be a son.

On Thanksgiving, Sherry wanted to make a traditional American meal for the family. They let her in the kitchen. The oven had been outside in the back yard for years. Although the mice and dirt were removed, it was still missing a burner and two knobs. Moreover, a mild electrical shock warned any cook to beware touching it, even if just holding the handle of a pan. Sherry endured all of that and finally called the family of seventeen to the table. They hated it. "What is this?" they asked about everything, making faces. "We don't like it," they said. The maids did not like their kitchen invaded either, and they were really mean to her from then on.

Several years later, still in that house, Sherry and Jose's second baby, Kelsey, still a toddler, emerged from the kitchen sucking on a chicken foot as a pacifier, a gift from one of the Incan maids. Sherry tried to take it from Kelsey, but she screamed and kept it firmly in her mouth. "Leave her alone," José's sisters said, "she likes it." There was no fitting into this household.

In a letter, I once asked which side of the road one drives on in Peru. The answer came back, "Both. You can't really tell. People drive all over the place wherever they can. No one observes lights at intersections and there are no posted speed limits. And Mom," Sherry added, "this is where all those 1960's Volkswagen Bugs ended up." There is really little order in Lima. In fact, if stopped in the car by the police, one is expected to bribe the officer. It is customary to offer a pack of cigarettes or a sandwich. When police stopped Jose's dad, he asked what the officer needed. "We are out of paper at the station," he replied. The officer followed Jose's dad to the advertising agency he owned; several reams of paper forestalled the driving ticket.

Nine years later, an opportunity came for my daughter, José, and their three children to move to the United States. A letter arrived asking me for some financial help for the move. I

went to my bank to make a wire transfer of funds directly into to their account. “You don’t want to do that,” the bank manager responded. “Mexico and Peru are the two places in the world where we cannot guarantee the funds will arrive.” He explained that the bank officials there are so corrupt that wired funds are often stolen. I sent it anyway, and did so with a prayer. It arrived.

At the airport, an official checked Sherry’s papers. He insisted that they were not in proper order. He excused himself and got up to leave, saying he would be back in a few minutes. A few minutes in Peruvian time might be hours. Sherry quickly pulled out \$100 and handed it to him. He sat back down, put the money in his pocket, stamped her ticket, and she got on the plane. José signed papers giving his permission for Sherry and the three children to leave the country with him. They flew to Boston where they had jobs waiting, and a nice apartment of their own. For Sherry, it felt like heaven. She had no further desire to travel to exotic places. She was home. The food tasted right and people spoke English. Everyone commented that she was skinny.

Sherry and José now have their own printing and visual merchandising business. Some of her earlier desires have been realized. She got to see Cuzco and take some fabulous photos of Incan ruins. She does speak fluent Spanish, and is now working on Gaelic, the language of Ireland, the land of her roots, and the one place she still desires to see. The only thing *Jane Seymour-like* about her now is her hair, long, dark, and beautiful, and of course, an energy and spirit that cannot be worn down. Embracing hopes and dreams is the fuel of human experience. When some are lost, new ones are found. Courage and humor are usually the key.

Passing Time

Natalie Merck

Time allows for so much and not enough.

Allowing the bad...the hard to see...the tough to know... to take
over my world

Drawing onto the shores of my words that I lay down on this
earth...

I know how you began to see me...not as the strong person I try to
be

but as the one with more vices and fears than the sky has stars.
those stars that shine so bright in your sky are so dimly hidden
behind my moon....

But my sun doesn't rise,
No eclipse to light my sky.
No tide to change my mind.

Sitting in this forever night,
Seeing my reflection in the water of these passing dreams and
fantasies

Floating and crashing into the caps of these waves of hope.
Searching for some kind of support, someone who can make sense
And break them back on the shore with answers.

I walk on that shore of perfection
and stare out at its beauty as it shines on the horizon.
The perfection that allows for cleansing...for success...for
happiness...

I lie on those shores and wish the current to take me to sea...

So that I may see the peace that could be,

If only the undertow I wait for would take me to a higher place...
a place of belonging and that no one thing can break me down...
for there ... I am strong.

Walking the Shell Bed

Ann Parks McCray

Storms stir rich shell beds,
sharp shards that tease and slice
even the most calloused feet used
to pebbles, puddles, and
murky life ponds—feet willing
to travel the rutted row anyway.

I walk shell beds regularly
reminding myself that the richest
treasures rarely lie casually
in soft sand. Instead, those
rarified sought-after gifts hide
in razored edges of difficult
by-ways.

There, only there, is the golden hue,
hard-won self-discovery that pains
tender soles, exhilarates Spirit,
(the other soul) the place of
two-inch shark's teeth and
perfect pearls, multi-colored
sea glass, especially aqua tones
of sea and heart.

I leave satin-soft tidal foam
with its bubbly reflections,
imaginary rainbows, translucent,
fleeting, natural oil spills
transmuted inexplicably by a
divine hand, leave that easy
paradise for raw edges of
shattered smithereens, shell bits
to make you wince-limp
and cry: "OUCH!"—Such a
wounded wondrous child.

In the midst of beach whining,
self-induced, somewhat ridiculous,
totally self-indulgent, I locate
a sand-dollar, whole, white,
perfectly formed, and glimpse
the center star.



Neil Peede



Jon Hess

Love Thy Enemy

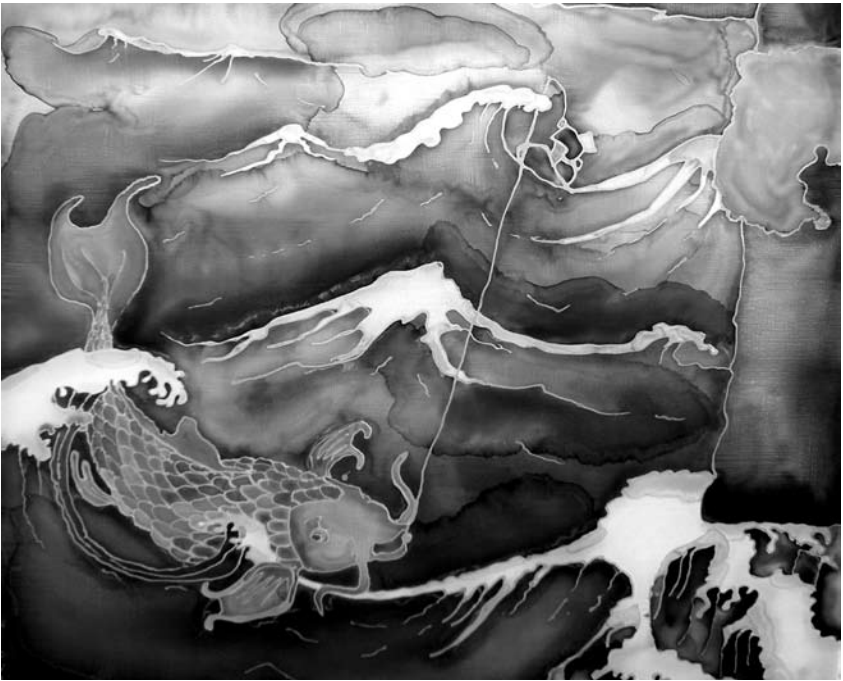
Mandy Hughes

Breathing in ashes
Of yesterday's burnt memories
Engulfed in misery
My heart perpetuates malevolence
And remains shaded
Only to factor the tormented times
I long to love and forgive my traitors
With this sinking conviction
In dead air, I breathe life
And show my face
Despite foreign company
Only to catch a glimpse
Of my utter failure
Truth to the innocent, my enemy loves me more

Bat

Courtney Lane Richardson

Paper-thin Chinese fan,
Two little black coals,
Demon predator of man,
Lurks in black holes.



Samuel Pickett

Real Women
Evelyn Chagarov

Real women aren't built like sticks and stones,
We have curves and flaws, we aren't just skin and bones.
Real women don't walk down catwalks and count their ribs.
We eat Twinkies, watch chick flicks, and sometimes tell fibs.

Hey! Look at my Thunder Thighs,
Look at my crooked eyes.
I'm not afraid to be real,
I'm not afraid to eat a meal!

If you judge me for not belonging on a magazine page,
Look in the mirror and try to see yourself through your cage.
I'm happy with who I am, not who you're trying to be.
It's cliché, but live your life. Let me be me.

Hey! Look at my Love Handles,
And yes, my feet are a bit too ugly to wear sandals.
Sometimes I worry that my teeth aren't straight,
But I more than make up for it with my awesome personality traits!

I'm real, and I'm beautiful.
Although it's not by your standards, and I'll never be a model.
I'm not worried about your standards and restrictions,
Honey, I don't fall under your jurisdiction.

The Red Road

Courtney Lane Richardson

Walking the red road
Is a dangerous road to travel;
Yet many souls take it
Proudly, boldly, daringly.
The red road ensures men will
Climb ravines,
Squat in ditches,
Shelter inside bunkers,
Fly in black flack,
Trample through jungles,
Wade in mud,
Run across smoky fields.
The red road
Smells of burning flesh,
Feels like slippery oil,
Looks ghastly horror,
Sounds like screaming cries,
Tastes of rotten earth.
Victory is achieved at the
End of red road.
Men are tired from their journey's
End on red road.
What you find at the
End of red road
Are soft green beds.
"Sleep eternally men"
The white cross whispers.
Resting in an orderly fashion,
The men finally shut their eyes,
Never again to see the dangers
That they daringly, boldly, proudly
Walked on from
The red road.



Laura Richardson

Butterfly Kites
Courtney Lane Richardson

The clear sky was dotted with butterfly kites.
Children swayed their arms to and fro,
fluttering the wings to reach top heights.

Dads teach how to fly them just right,
running down hill, gaining speed, then throw
the paper thin butterfly kite.

Slowly climbing the wind, butterflies just might
make it to the top, some falter and let go
missing the mark and fall from height.

Broken wings are a tattered sight.
Pilots pick up the pieces to mend and sew
the dainty butterfly kite.

Children and butterflies rest for the night,
making parents keep their promises so
that tomorrow they will try again to achieve great heights.

Morning dawns for butterflies to take flight.
Children stand all in a row;
run down the hill and release the kites.
All the butterflies soar up to sky heights.

Voices from the Grave

Yvonne Smith

mindless, wordless, soulless.
Nothing within this empty shell that is my body.
I am nothing more than dust upon this shallow grave.
The last remnants of a forgotten generation.
Someone who long ago lost all meaning.

I have no words anymore,
I am an empty epitaph,
battered and bruised by the elements of nature,
scorned by the graves around me.

Reaching out to the sky and stars above,
the ashes of my tiny fingers blow into the breeze,
Nothing.
I am nothing.

Silent screams in the night,
heard only by those who think to listen,
I cannot speak, I cannot scream,
no words for me. I cannot speak.

My bloodless heart now melts away,
joining the worms in their decay,
That heart which once felt so much,
that heart which now ceases to mean a thing.

Voices from the grave now rise,
a chorus of the lonely, forgotten, battered and abused,
She was murdered, he was trampled,
a child who died far too young,
and the mother who died with him.

I try to cry out with them,
to make us mean something, this forgotten people,
but our voices only make a sound...like the silent breeze of winter.
Mindless, wordless, soulless. Nothing.



Chancy Reese

The October Lights
David Andrew English

No one remembers the October lights
That grand fireworks show
The splash of brilliance,
the commanding bang
that followed the setting sun

No one remembers the cities
or the people that lived within them
No one sees the ruins either,
or the dust where the bones were scattered

In autumn, like trees, we lost our leaves,
yet ours cannot be restored
No one remembers the lights of October
Or anything, anymore



Rachard McIntyre

South America

Brian Morris

I was in a small rowboat on a river somewhere south of Colombia, possibly somewhere along the border of Peru and Bolivia. We had started at Puerto Maldonado on Rio Madre de Dios, headed east, and took a turn to the south along a smaller course, the name of which escapes me at the moment. The end of this smaller, muddy river was where I needed to be, but I wasn't sure if my Peruvian guide could get me there and I couldn't remember why I was going.

Our boat was barely more than a skiff, but it held the two of us and all our gear. The boat was old, perhaps older than me and my guide put together, and had a peculiar odor emanating from it, as though it had accommodated one too many drunken fishermen, and it displayed the multicolored evidence of many coats of paint that had been hurriedly applied over the years. I would say it had an almost mystical quality about it, that kept it afloat more than air tightness did. It was packed fore and aft with all sorts of camping gear and supplies - our two tents, gas stoves, sleeping bags, trail supplies, several types of dried meat, and glass jars with various types of curiously seasoned vegetables in them that I had never seen before but provided excellent subsistence for the aboriginal inhabitants of the area. These latter supplies had been bestowed on us by local folks who had a dark and hidden look in their eye, as if they wished to accompany us on our journey despite their knowledge of what lay at the end of it.

Along the river were thousands of these tribal locals. It was the time of a certain festival, a celebration of some local hero long since departed, and his heroic acts. Many boats were stashed in the mud on either side, and people, families, young ones and old ones alike, splashing and bathing in the moiling light brown water. Each group of family and friends had set up a brilliant display of colorful bits of cloth, strung along a line between two poles, like a clothesline with the most dazzling autumn leaves hung out to dry. The sky was clear, vibrant blue, with the yellow light of the sun casting a perfect light on the celebrators. Our modest craft silently drifted by all of this, drawing the gaze of the people and silencing them from their merrymaking as we passed. Each man, woman and child stopped what he or she was doing and looked in our direction with an expression of regret that an outsider would dare to drift down their Rio, to disturb their everyday life with alien curiosity.

Hours later, we had traveled many miles and left the revelers long behind. We came to a narrow spot, where the water became shallower and much much faster. The mountains on either side closed in tight on this spot, looming up above us to the port and starboard with unscalable sheer rock faces that seemed to peer into our very being and warn of the danger that presented itself here. This was when I realized that my friend the oak tree, whom I'd known since an acorn, would not be able to continue along with us. The oak tree was a very different sort of timber from what I'm sure most are familiar with, as he had playing cards growing at the end of his branches rather than acorns. Long ago I had watched an old man plant the very acorn that this tree had grown from, and perform some sort of noisy and animated ritual over it that gave it a very divergent life from all its arboreal cousins.

I held on to my friend's branches, and as we squeezed through the narrows, I slowly began to lose my grip. The rapids grew and applied more and more pressure on our tiny vessel, and in the end I lost my friend. As the branches slid out of my grasp though, forty playing cards were plucked and left in my hand. We hurtled over the last bit of white water, which was more of a waterfall, a straight drop of almost thirty feet, during which we lost most of our gear and the boat sustained some slight damage to the bow, which didn't seem to make much difference in its float-worthiness.

But the playing cards remained in my hand; forty of them. An Italian deck. I wrapped them up in a piece of paper that had miraculously remained dry through the recent ordeal, intent that there was a special purpose for them in the near future.

We picked up the boat to carry it over a stony, shallow area where the water was abnormally clear and slow moving, as though it had lost its energy and needed to rest before continuing. When we set the boat down for a bit to rest, I noticed that my guide had walked a few yards into the woods and was reciting some sort of lilting, repetitive poetry. I followed him over into a clearing and was immediately struck by the serene beauty of this particular location. Perhaps this was the spot that we had come to find? Maybe this was the end of our journey and I would finally accomplish my objective.

I came to realize that he was summoning small colorful birds and other animals that I couldn't quite recognize, and each of these was made of thin tissue paper. The tissue creatures descended slowly

and quietly, in the manner of snowflakes; there was a strange light through the tops of the trees, rays of arcane luminosity that highlighted the dust particles that danced and capered in the air, as well as the vivid, almost over saturated autumn colors of the leaves on the ground and still on the trees. There was no sound whatsoever, and for a moment I wondered if I had actually suffered damage to the delicate inner workings of my ears during our trials on the waterfall. But soon I realized that it was a deathly silence that I was experiencing, one like I had experienced never before, and not since.

I remembered my pack of playing cards and removed them from the paper wrapper. As each amalgamate of plant and animal descended, I laid a card by its resting place in the leaves. As I was doing this, I noticed a small white and black striped spider on my right hand. It was a singular specimen of arachnid, with noticeable tufts of dark hair or fur along the end of each of its front legs. It was extremely fast, dodging my attempts to brush it off, and tenacious as well for neither could I shake it off. It bit me, very like a mosquito, and as I tried to brush it off, another appeared further up my arm. And then another, and another, now three more, then ten, until there were thousands of them covering me, biting, filling me with horror, dread and venom. I screamed at my guide, but he was nowhere to be found.

Now how I got out of that predicament, little ones, I'll have to leave to your imagination. For now it is time for me to return to my native land and discuss the strange noises that have been coming from the great stone giant...

Birds
Michelle Pepin

Trapped behind corroded metal bars
In the barracks so secluded
Pacing back and forth
Yearning for peace of mind.

Rattling fingers grasp
Something concealed in the soot:
An iridescent broken crystal bead
Forgotten here by someone else so desperate
To be free.

I pocket it,
Praying for a release.



Melissa Wilgis

Beautiful By Default

Tina Edwards

Amongst a field of decay
Where the dead lay
in front of us
Rotting piles of flesh and blood
There is no love
left here
No trust
I want to avert my eyes
and let my mind
obey the picture perfect
World
I've grown comfortable with
the idea of imperfection
There is war and hate and greed
The sewers overflow into the streets
And I walk through this
This hell that bruises me
It hardens me
As buildings fall and
people use pain and sympathy
to make money
I stare I marvel
at the madness
of economy and reality TV and
the news anchors with their false sympathy
This is nothing really
This is normal
It is all just another lock and chain
on the cage
Where all our hopes and dreams
are caught
and amongst all of this
I am Beautiful
by default



Tina Edwards

Gloria
Michelle Pepin

The eyes try to hide all the years of sex and crime;
her body has aged so much.
She wears a shiny silk shirt that hides only some of the tracks.
Vivid vicious visions toxify her mind
As she's gone on a trip that will eventually end her life.

Not even eighteen years old and she's already been through more
 than most:
Her parents kicked her out
The streets didn't want her
There is nowhere for her to feel comfortable except for her
Sinking
Down, down
Deep inside her psyche.

The high that she wishes would last a lifetime,
The synthetic substance swirling through her lush skin.
She stumbles through a convenience store,
Trying to find the bathroom to stay the night.

Her life hasn't gotten much better since then:
She still sells her body for a quick fix.
Shaking and convulsing when there is nothing in sight.
When she was five years old, this is not how she planned on living
 her life.

Fingertips
Yvonne Smith

there is ink on my fingertips,
my soul on this fragile paper,
I'm scratching my thoughts into the concrete,
and screaming my heart into this hollow world.

I'm falling/falling, deep into this liquid earthquake,
the parchment absorbing my fingertips,
the strangest feelings I can feel,
the biggest dreams I can dream.

Let my heart flow through this pen,
and smear the ink across this world,
my blood is black and my soul is red,
my words mean nothing unless.

I can
make them
last.

Forget what I said before,
let me sink through the earth and into the core,
there's no feeling like the last thing you see,
underneath this frozen wasteland

Scream with me now, feel the passion inside,
set your words in stone, forgetting all these tears,
remember what we have, if you understand.
feel all that you can feel,

even
if it
hurts.

My words may mean nothing to you,
but I know that we are the same,
music or art, one in the same,
souls flowing through our fingers, there is no shame.



Julianna Moore

Guidelines for Submission

Writer Guidelines

1. Writing entries must be electronically submitted as .doc, .rtf, or .txt files.
2. The title of each work and author's name, address, telephone number, and email address must be completed on the online submission form and labeled as fiction, non-fiction, or poetry.
3. The author's name must not appear anywhere on the work.
4. Fiction and non-fiction should not exceed 3, 000 words. Poetry should not exceed 50 lines.
5. All entries must be technically proficient.
6. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable, but no more than a total of three pieces per category of writing may be submitted.

Artist Guidelines

Prints, Photographs, Computer Art, Drawings, Paintings

1. All art entries must be submitted electronically as .jpg, .jpeg, .gif, .tiff, or .psd files with a target dpi of 300 and a minimum image width of 4 inches.
2. All entries should be submitted in black and white.
3. The title of each work and author's name, address, telephone number, and email address must be completed on the online submission form and labeled as 2-D Art or Photography.
4. The author's name must not appear anywhere on the work.
6. All entries must be technically proficient.
7. Simultaneous submissions are acceptable, but no more than a total of three pieces per category of art may be submitted.

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Portals Literary and Arts Magazine

Cape Fear Community College

English Department

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