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Our Office:
downstairs in the Hewitt Union
Room 46

Meetings:
every Thursday at 6:00 p.m.

WE ARE NOW
ACCEPTING SUBMISSIONS FOR
--SPRING 1998--

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S'mores
by Holly Dilatush-Guthrie

you whisper...
    I pant.

marshmallow soft,
    I melt.

in the flickering licks
    of your tender fire...

...thou art a delicious torment.
Untitled #2
by Michelle Carini

hand waits, gears slowly turning
muscle meets nerve
air breathed out radiates
eyes shift, refocus - disturbed
sidetracked by fleeting fancy
looking up first generalized
memories linger midair
colors glow and fade
every turn a new sense opens
tactile sensations flow through hands
mind awakens suddenly; light opens up eyes
silence returns
brows furrow
things seem blurry below focal point
snap back from reverie
daydream ends abruptly
illusions drift down from ceiling
recognition of past experience
things replayed in rapid succession
empty feeling, mind racing
bury worries deep inside.

The Deathless Abazade
by Jack Pendelton

"Hello, Downing Flowers."
"Hello, I'm trying to get in touch with a Miss Jennifer Downing."
"Speaking."
"Ms. Downing, my name is James Abrams. I'm with Thane Publishing. Would you mind if I asked you a few questions?"

The shop was empty. Jennifer had even gone so far as to turn the open sign over, though it was only quarter to six. Ordinarily she didn't take surveys over the phone, but there was something about the voice at the other end that made her pause. The English was tinted with an odd accent. Something lyrical, but severe at the same time. She couldn't place it; usually she was good at that kind of thing. The mystery intrigued her.

"Is this about a subscription?" She asked with a half hearted tone so as to discourage the questioner if it was.

"Oh no Ms. Downing, I'm a writer researching a genealogy for my next book, and if you are the Jennifer Downing I am looking for, you may have information that can be useful to me." The deep voice floated into her ear at a rhythm unmistakably familiar.

"Really?" She asked with genuine curiosity, a curiosity aimed more toward the voice than the premise. She turned round and leaned against the cash register.

"If you can confirm that your grandmother's maiden name was Haywood, then you will be the Jennifer Downing I'm searching for."

"Yes, my grandmother was a Haywood. Is there more than one Jennifer Downing?" Reflexively, she started to flirt.

"There is definitely only one of you, Jennifer. Born
April 11, 1965, the only daughter of Marianne Downing. You are
the owner and proprietor of Downing Flowers. You have never
married and have no ...daughters.”

Jennifer stood up straight; her curiosity was replaced by
alarm. Instinctively she glanced past the sale signs posted on the
front windows out into the autumn twilight to see if someone was
watching her. She shook her head soon after, remembering how far
she lived from town.

“You seem to know an awful lot about me Mr... ?”

“Abrams.”

“You don’t sound like an Abrams to me.”

“To tell you the truth, Ms. Downing, that is the only the pen
name I use when I’m in the United States. It simplifies things. Ms.
Downing, I can tell you are alarmed, but I gained all that informa­
tion from public records. It is not my intent to harass you.

“Ms. Downing, it may interest you to learn that you are the
descendent of a very old royal family. Ancient, in fact. You are the
last in line because you have no heirs.” There was a hint of relief
and determination in his voice.

“Am I going to inherit something?” Jennifer asked, the
excitement starting to return as the apprehension faded away.

“Unfortunately no, Ms. Downing. But if I could be allowed
to interview you in person I would be glad to compensate you for
your time. Might we be able to arrange a meeting?”

“What do you want to interview me about?” The tides in
Jennifer shifted again.

“I’m not sure if you are familiar with my work, Ms. Down­
ing, but I am a fiction writer. I have learned that successful fiction,
that is, the most successful lie, is 80 percent truth. My next story
involves one of your distant ancestors, and since I am unable to
contact them, I thought I might learn something about them through
you. It would be a short interview. No trouble, I assure you.”

He was only a voice inviting Jennifer to meet him; a stranger-
an oddly well informed stranger, possibly a threat. Yet when she
opened her mouth to respond, she found herself unable to decline.

“If I did agree, Mr. Abrams, how would this work?”

“We would fit the interview into your schedule. The meeting
place would be of your choice, at your convenience. I would be glad
to visit you at home, if you would like.”

“No, we’ll meet someplace public. Wait, are you in
Denson?”

“I am staying at the Trevor Castle Bed and Breakfast about 12
miles out of Denson.”

“I know where Trevor is, Mr. Abrams. But if you’re just now
confirming that I am who you hoped I’d be, why are you here
already?”

“It was a risk I was willing to take.”

A chill ran down Jennifer’s spine. She began to second guess
her all-too hasty agreement to the meeting.

James Abrams sat at the bar nursing his ice water. The
precision timepiece on his wrist read half past seven. In all the time
he’d owned the watch it had never failed him. He assumed this
night would be no different. She wasn’t going to show, he was sure
of it. Sure of it until the brisk draft from the night danced around
his ankles.

The door to Skipper’s Cove had just opened, letting loose the
icy wind to have its way through the restaurant. James turned
toward the entrance and looked at Jennifer.

He’d seen her before, of course. His surveillance was meticu­
ulously complete. James had tracked her from her shop to her home,
followed her from her home to the grocery store and back. His
shadow fell in step behind hers when she walked to visit her neigh­
bors, the ridiculously loud Youngs. During these trips he’d taken
time to memorize how her brunette locks fell from the bobby pins to
spring around her ears with every step. The curves of her slender
figure were etched in his mind so clearly he could see them when he
closed his eyes. But it was her eyes that gave him the most pause.
James was careful never to make eye contact with her, should she
ever suddenly turn around to study a scrap of paper on the sidewalk
or glance at the passengers at a car going by. The cold blue brilliance of her eyes froze him to the core. Like two jewels placed between her thick eyelashes, surrounded by ivory skin. Jennifer Downing’s eyes haunted James Abrams; they reminded him too much of her... other.

Abrams stood and greeted his interviewee.

“Good evening, Ms. Downing. I was almost afraid you had forgotten.”

His accent, stronger now than it had been on the phone, was almost hypnotic in effect. Jennifer stood looking at him for a moment, surprised at his stature. He must have stood over six feet tall, wrapped in a heavy dark brown suit with a matching fedora. Jennifer thought that no one wore fedoras anymore, but here it was on James’ head, long ink-black hair flowing out from underneath, framing his face. His sunglasses were the old, large, mirrored style; Jennifer hated men who wore sunglasses indoors; she’d wanted to tell them to take them off, but she was afraid of why they wore them in the first place.

She looked down at the short, well-trimmed beard he wore and was mysteriously drawn to his cheek. There was something unnatural about the way it reflected the dim lights in the bar. She studied it closer and noticed a sharp edge just behind where the glasses ended, and another just above where his beard began.

“It’s a mask,” James affirmed. “I was disfigured some time ago. I wear it in public.”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Abrams,” Jennifer quickly turned several shades of red. “That was so rude of me.”

“Nonsense, I should have remarked about my appearance on the phone. I believe our table is waiting,” He gestured for her to step in front of him, and they both followed the hostess down the steps onto the enclosed porch that overlooked the bay.

The small talk before the meal was clumsy and forced. Thankfully, their plates came quickly. Both appreciated the blessing of not having to speak while their mouths were full. Jennifer decided to be the first to break the silence.

“What is your book about, Mr. Abrams? After all, it is what we came here for.”

“The plot is loosely based on my own life. The story begins several thousands of years before the rise of Christianity. A woman, an alchemistic sorceress, takes a young man to be her lover. Before he realizes what he is getting into, he agrees and gets more than he bargained for.

“In the temple where he goes to live with this woman, there are other females... servants. He falls in love with one, but is discovered by his new wife. Her retaliation is merciless. First, she kills the girl, but her punishment was humane. The sorceress’s judgment on her lover was far worse.

“She made sure that no other female would ever desire this man again. For days she took her time and carved her frustration out of his face. She concentrated her wrath around his eyes, because it was there that she had first seen the hint of her own desire for him. But even after making him endure that suffering, her appetite was not satiated.

“She used her black powers to turn the young man into an immortal. Impervious to all manner of harm, but sensitive to the pain of mortality nonetheless. Should she place his hand into a flame, he would feel the piercing pain and sense that his flesh was being torn away, though no actual damage was being done. It was the dark woman’s plan to spend her leisure torturing the man for his indiscretion.

“Fortunately, he escaped, bringing about the death of his cruel wife. However, he is horrified to discover that her spell of immortality is still in effect. He cannot die. He watches his contemporaries fall to the earth and cannot join them. After a time, he searches for the answer to his extinction and learns that only a weapon, a certain mystical blade, when wielded by the blood that cast the spell, would be capable of ending his existence.”

James paused to remove a shape from the interior of his jacket and placed it gently on the table. The long artifact was wrapped in a pristine white cloth. Carefully, James peeled back the
ivory linen to reveal a gleaming blade set in an intricately carved handle. Twin serpents coiled together beneath the cross guard until they terminated beneath an inverted skull at the handle's end. The antique red finish of the wood caused the weapon to stand out harshly against the cloth.

Jennifer stared warily at the blade before her. Guns were a complete abomination; their only function was to destroy. But this, this beautiful talisman was a work of art. She wanted to reach out and touch it. She wanted to run her soft fingers along the scales of the carved snakes. She wanted to feel the weight of the metal in her hand. Before she could realize any of these fantasies, James carefully rewrapped the knife and returned it to its hiding place inside his jacket.

"It was the knife that gave me the idea," James stated, once his prize was safely tucked away.

"You certainly have this well thought out," Jennifer said.

"I've had a long time to think about it," James paused to gaze into the eyes of his dinner companion. "Which brings me to you, Jennifer."

"Me? What do you mean?" Instinctively, Jennifer pulled away from the table.

"I need your help to finish the story. I've tracked you down. You are the descendent of the woman who first cast the spell. And here I am. Imagine me as the deathless nomad who has come and requested of you to end his suffering. What do you do, Jennifer?"

The silence became a tangible thing. For what seemed like an eternity, Jennifer and James were locked into a gaze that transcended their environment- the waitresses with their greasy aprons, the busboys rattling the clean glasses up the stairs to the bar and the dirty ones back down through the swinging doors to the kitchen. All of them disappeared, until Jennifer broke the silence with a nervous chuckle.

"Wow, it's like one of those questions that's so ridiculous it stumps you. Once a friend of mine asked me if I'd rather have a belly button that dispensed ketchup or a nostril that could sharpen
pencils. I don’t know... hmm. I mean, I would have to know for sure that he was telling the truth, right? If I knew that, I guess I would help him.

“No wait,” a light of inspiration flashed across Jennifer’s face. “If he needed me to, you know, end his suffering, I would ask him to do something for me. Something only he could do. I’d have him... I’d have him sabotage Enchanted Florist.” Satisfaction spread across her face.

“Enchanted Florist?” James echoed in confusion.

“It’s a chain. They just opened right on Main Street. I’ve only been in business for five years. People won’t come to my shop in the middle of nowhere when Enchanted Florist is right around the corner. I’ll be finished in a year.”

“So,” James tried to distract Jennifer from her daydreams of desolate futures by bringing her attention back to his story. “If he did this thing for you, you would... you would end his life?”

The question hung in the air, half as a challenge, half as a promise waiting to be fulfilled.

“A deal’s a deal,” Jennifer said.

The fire tore through the Enchanted Florist in less than an hour.

“The second explosion caused severe structural damage to the building. There was no way we could save it. We suspect it was arson.” Jennifer read aloud the newspaper article in the Wright County Star. “From eyewitness reports of the firebug, there was no way he could have survived. We’re still searching the debris for his remains. At least there were no other injuries.”

Jennifer put down the paper and sighed as she bit her lip. Should she call the police and tell them about Abrams? If she did, would they suspect her as being part of it? After all, someone must have seen her at the Skipper’s Cove with him. People would surely remember. Jennifer massaged her temples to help her relax.

The phone sat silent on the counter. The black reflections stared back at her, mocking her as she looked to the device for a solution. Slowly she wrapped her fingers around the receiver and raised it to her head. She dialed the number and took a deep breath.

“Trevor Castle Farm Bed and Breakfast, this is Eric speaking,” greeted the voice at the other end of the line.

“A good morning, sir. My name is Sarah, I’m with Thane Publishing. May I speak to James Abrams, please?”

“Who?”

“James Abrams, sir. He left this number in case we needed to contact him.”

“I’m sorry,” said Eric. “There is no James Abrams staying here. He’s not in the register.”

“I see. Thank you,” Jennifer said, hanging up abruptly.

The entrance bell of her shop jingled once as the door swung open, and again softly as the door slid shut. Jennifer looked up and saw James standing at the front of the shop. He was wearing a black suit.

“We need to talk,” James whispered in his alien English.

“You stay away from me!” Jennifer shouted. “I’ll call the police!” She raised the receiver and pointed it at him as though some authority figure might emerge from the mouthpiece and defend her.

“I’ve walked through the fire for you, Jennifer. It is time for you to fulfill your end of our agreement.” James took one step closer.

“You’re insane,” Jennifer said. “It’s only a story. I’m calling the police.”

“Didn’t you read the report?” James asked. “There was no way anyone could have survived the flames. Anyone but me. I have proven the truth of my account. Please, Jennifer... please.”

James removed his glasses and allowed Jennifer to peer into his eyes. She saw no menace, no aggression. Only a deep, pleading need. She slowly replaced the receiver.

“This can’t be,” she whispered.

James approached her. “My name is Abazade, and I have lived this nightmarish existence for 5,497 years. End it now.” Abazade fell to his knees and removed the dagger from his jacket.
Jennifer stayed behind the counter and shook her head nervously. James held the weapon out to her handle first.

Tentatively, Jennifer moved away from the counter and stood before the prone figure. She exhaled and reached forward, all the while shaking her head. Her eyes began to fill with tears.

The Borrowed Car
by Lisa Aliperti

The sticky scent of teen-aged whiskey hangs heavy in his father’s Suburban where they sit after leaving the movie theater at 11 p.m. on a Thursday. He kisses her, his body strange above hers; her blond head uncomfortably tilted against the window. He pulls his face back from hers; breathes softly.

(i want to have sex with you)

and something in his eyes changes. At sweet sixteen, her face is a sliver of frightened ivory in the half-darkness of the borrowed car.

Later, he sits up; starts the engine. The exhaust of February rises around them at way-too-late on a school night. Finally, he drives and she stares out the window at the iced houses of Long Island; her hand pressed to her mouth. She watches the wind move the trees in time with his breath; his fingers tapping the wheel, his eyes on the road.
Abstract Love  
by Leigh Laroussini

In the red religion  
of my stained glass heart  
is you,  
lying strong but faded—  
an iron blur  
a stone wave.

The glimmer  
of your geometric sunlight  
illuminates decay  
lurking in the softest corners  
of the temple here inside.  
You chase the heavy purple shadows  
so my heart can hammer strong.

And yet the rainbow smile you send  
can shatter me like a rose.  
I fly away in dust  
at the mere imagination  
of your liquid hands again  
upon my china skin.

So I keep you locked up,  
winter-safe  
granting sanctuary for which  
I know you never asked;  
holding memory close  
for fear  
of knowing you again.

Rain Delay  
by Andrew McSorley

Then there wasn’t anything they could do, so they waited. He saw them coming in from the rain, their tan coats spotted, newspapers rolled into wet, useless pulp tucked under their arms. They shouted and clapped each other on the back, somehow jubilant in their shared misfortune.

The long, wooden benches on opposite sides of the small room filled quickly. Most were left standing. Under the overhang on the track side of the station house, the remainder huddled together. The wash of rainwater fell from the eaves like a curtain that exploded as it hit the asphalt.

A gentleman with a cloud-gray trenchcoat and a bushy white moustache hunched to speak into the circular hole in the Plexiglas. He pushed a small pamphlet, a schedule or something, through the slot at the bottom.

"I need to travel into the downtown for the business meeting," he said very slowly, as if he had practiced.

"When will the next train be?" he said with a hopeful look. Although he looked somewhat anguished, he managed a smile and his eyes held a friendly twinkle.

From behind the bars, the attendant tried very hard to sympathize. He’d been back here a long time. He’d seen his share of lost commuters and impatient crowds. They all started humble and quiet, when they still had some notion he could actually do anything at all for them. But they didn’t understand, he wasn’t going anywhere, and they probably weren’t either, unless the lard-asses in line maintenance got out and fixed whatever the problem was this time. He tried to be polite. Professionals in the transportation business treated passengers like customers.

"I can’t say, sir," he said, "Central tells me there’s an electrical malfunction. Could be from the storm, I don’t know. No telling when the next train will come in." He pushed the
man's papers back into his hands.

There was a slow roll of thunder and the pounding on the roof intensified. Blue smoke was slowly filling the room, swirling up around the heavy wooden beams and striping in the overhanging fluorescent lights. He knew they were aware of the signs, but were taking liberties due to the unusual nature of the morning. He also knew not to challenge them just right now. He'd seen situations like this get out of hand. One minute they are refined businessmen waiting for a train, then suddenly they become a huddled mass of soggy commuters stranded in the middle of a torrent. Their good-natured patience in the novelty of the situation would quickly wear thin. There would be complaints, then demands, and worse. Violence was not completely out of the question.

Station Master Weismann leaned over and checked the lock, opened his small window a crack, and picked up the phone. Due to years of practice and the closet size of his office, he was able to accomplish all this without quite leaving his stool.

The gentleman was still standing at the window, a look of despair slowly filling into his craggy features. The attendant gave him a wink to show him he still was doing his best for him under the trying circumstances.

"Hello, Central Control? This is Weismann, out at Hall Brook, on the R3 line? You got any update for me? I've got a lot of anxious suits milling around the waiting room here."

He blinked his eyes at the gentleman with the pamphlet and nodded his head thoughtfully, drumming his fingers on the counter as he listened to the report. He tried to be upbeat and positive, a trait his Tony Robbins Personal Power Manual had heavily advised him to develop.

He started off with, "Well, sir, I think what we need now most is a little patience."

The gentleman shuffled his feet and gathered his coat around him as he fumbled for a pocket for his papers.

"They got the line crews out running it down, checking the problem out, but there's no telling... on account of the rain."

The gentleman leaned closer to the window. He left a cloud on the glass as he spoke.

"I must get into the city," he said, "It is most important." His eyes were widening, and his head was shaking somewhat as he repeated, "I must get into the city."

There was a line forming behind him, bobbing out at angles to peer over his shoulder into the office. They had the same look of accusatory impatience, some looking at their watched to drive home the non-verbal point.

It was time for an official announcement. The attendant leaned back from the window and waved his hand at the old man in an I'm-real-sorry-but-I've-got-this-important-business-right-now gesture. He keyed his microphone, sending a screech of feedback through the small waiting room.

"The R3 line is temporarily out of service, due to an electrical malfunction. There will be an indeterminate interruption of service to downtown."

He sat back, satisfied that he had captured the essence of the situation in the most straightforward way possible. He was communicating effectively and directly, not leaving the passenger out in the cold. He was their partner in transportation, a facilitator, a manager of their commuting needs.

The mass had now huddled into several small groups, discussing options. Two men in similar trenchcoats were standing on a bench, trying to pry open one of the small windows that ran along the top edge of the wall. He'd have put a stop to it if he felt they had even the minutest chance of succeeding. Those windows had been painted shut since before their upwardly mobile parents had fled the city in favor of a suburban lifestyle, back in the fifties.

But it was still an affront. He screeched the mike.

"Passengers are reminded to observe the no-smoking signs posted throughout the station. Those who desire to
smoke may do so on the platform.

Still, the old man, looking more bewildered and scared, stood in front of the window.

"I need to get into the city," he said loudly into the circle.

The attendant paused to count.

"I know that, sir. You’ve said that. And it’s not very likely you’d have come in here in the first place if you didn’t want to. Now would you? What do you want me to say? Should I just wave my wand and fix everything up for you? The trains are not running now and I don’t know when they’ll start up again. We are doing what we can. This is going on everywhere.”

"Not everywhere. Here,” the old man said.

A man with rain spotted wire frames and a huge gold ring with a blue stone elbowed his way to the window. The station master could see the old man’s eyes stayed on him as he was shunted off to the side.

"I want a refund,” his new adversary stated. He had a crumpled ticket in his hand and he was pushing it through the speaking circle.

The station master gave him his best You’ve-got-me-in-a-bind-pal shrug. He shook his head only slightly, but tempered it with an apologetic smile.

"The railroad does not guarantee conveyance on a specific train, sir. If you would just try to be a little patient, we will get a train in here before too long.”

"Look," the man said, "this is the third time this has happened this month. Now I’ll have to take a cab to the airport, and I’m still likely to miss my flight. My patience has been exhausted, sir, and I demand my fare back.”

The station master crossed his arms on the counter.

"You’ll have to take it up with downtown. I can’t help you here. Sorry.”

The telephone chirped, relieving the attendant of the
I listened as a panel of authors and poets read from their prose and poetry.
(it was April, they were women, the audience was small)

I listened as Melodee spoke of coffee cups, cats, fence posts, and housewifery.
(she’d spend years in Greenwich Village, she wore a cardigan)

I listened as Patricia mentioned shadows, camaraderie, earthworms, and habits.
(she’s a world traveler, with evident academic excellence)

I listened to Carla’s charismatic, dead-panned tale of eccentricity, attics, irrelevance.
(her hair was wild, her face bare, her costume black)

I listened to Elena’s poignant verse; it documented Harlem streets, hip-hop, worse.
(beautiful, poised, provocative, she made us laugh)

I listened to Yolanda recite in husky voice, of painful penetration, wild rabbits, incantations.
(she served me broccoli stir-fry, in the lunch line, last Thursday)

I listened and I heard an echo----submission, desolation, resurgence, emergence.
(pain-- perspective-- paradox-- passion--)

I listened and I heard.
(Will you?)
A Cup of Cappucino in Adams, NY
by Clifford J. Aliperti

9 & I
Cruisin’ 81,
Where a plastic bag flaps in the wind;
Construction prevents confirmation;
No,
Just the gas tank;
Gasoline trail lines the highway
looking like a skunk’s stripe;
My cigarette dies
Saving us from the same fate;
A state worker greets us,
"You’re lucky you’re not dead,” he said;
Just to positively keep it that way
I grind my shoe across the cigarette;
He waves his orange helmet
At the passing sheriff
Who passes out of sight;
Then Spill Response:
Their response--none;
Waiting on the cold island of the road
For the police
Flat bed tow comes first;
Chubby driver
With thick moustache,
Thick forearms;
He says nothing
But flashes the most charming of smiles;
I call him Big Ned;
"Fuck you, shit, mother fucker,”
Big Ned says,
"Do you have pliers?“
To the white picnic table
   Beside the big white house;
   A wreck is parked behind us
      For sale: $800: no keys;
Apple trees bear green and red fruit
   Dropping its bounty, unbruised,
Onto the purple trampoline,
Which could become our dinner table;
   The other way
Across 11, behind Citgo
   Another big white house
      For rent,
Which could become our shelter;
   Turn again
Past the trampoline
A General Lee truck is parked,
   It must be Ned's, I remark;
Or could the gray mini school bus be his?
   Speaking of schoolin'
      It's near five o'clock
Where the fuck is that school bus going?
   Speaking of traffic
      It's rush hour on 11
Cars racing both north and south
   To where I can't say
But not to Dobbin's;
      5 o'clock now
The old man with the poor colon
Crosses 11
   Another day done
Time to strip from his mechanic's suit and
   Shower;
   Just another day in Adams;
Our cappucino is gone
   And Dobbin's, apparently, has no trash;
   Just wrecks
That most would junk;
What traffic that does come
   Brings more
"We Buy Wrecks"
   Say the letters across
Big Ned's platform tow;
   He disappointed me
When he went to his vehicle,
   Not the General Lee,
   But a white Buick;
   After Ned leaves
A bearded man runs to his truck
   (The General Lee)
      Peels out
Revs in front of us
      Peels away;
He's followed by a brown Caddy
   That chases him south on 11;
Another Caddy castration?
An ambulance approaches
   Races next door to the
   Ford dealership;
   Death in Adams?
   Not ours.
Reflections From Room 719
By Michelle Carini

Drunken evening,
group of strangers
pretending to be friends

"Want to Come to my house
and Get Laid?"

Meaningless words
falling from mouths
abandoned like
empty beer cans
and cigarettes
slowly burning holes in the carpet.

The Window
by Leigh Laroussini

Unimaginably strange, and yet
More comfortable than home
My fingers tear absentmindedly at the paper cup,
Dregs of coffee, long cold,
Distorting the sky's blue reflection
In the glass table,
Cold beneath my pale, bare arms.

Your eyes match your shirt today,
And as we sit here discussing the world,
Our friends, our lives, our souls,
I am torn between losing myself
In their understanding depths
And chattering on,
Close, but safe; simply out to coffee
With a dear old friend.

Safety wins, of course, and easily,
As it always does;
Our friends, our lives, our souls
Would never permit the chaos
The unimaginably strange.
So we smile and skirt the issue,
In silent agreement once again
Vowing to "keep in touch," as we always do,
And, with a quiet goodbye,
Life resumes.
An Extreme Case of the Sunday Blues
By Kendra Castle

She was pretty well fed up with the undead shit by noon. If she hadn't been on a bender for the last three days running she might have noticed what was going on, but as it was she had a bitch of a hangover, her left contact was just about fused to her eyeball, and she hadn't been able to find any damn underpants that morning. Now, to top it all off, there were half-rotted corpses walking the street, and damn if that didn't piss her off.

Ashleigh James had awakened that morning with a biting headache and a vague memory of the night before at the Cracker where, if she recollected it right, she had spent most of the evening toppling off various and sundry barstools. The taste of cheap vodka was still heavy in her mouth, and she suspected (quite correctly) that she wasn't all the way sober yet. She might have gone back to bed if her annoying neighbor upstairs hadn't started screaming bloody murder.

"OH MY GAAAWWWD! NO, DON'T-" he had howled, followed by muffled crunching sounds. For some reason this had struck Ashleigh as funny, because after all, this is BOB we were talking about here. Bob who stomped on the floor when she played Mellon Collie too loud, Bob who played his tuba even louder than that but was apparently better at the skin flute. She hated Bob, but she felt like a bitch at giggling over his seemingly painful predicament. Then she thought maybe one his boyfriends had gobbled him up whole, and that set her off all over again.

She thought she'd better check on him, seeing as how maybe his tuba had fallen over on him again (after all, the LAST time that happened it had taken three construction workers and a really big pair of pliers to get him unstuck), so she threw on whatever clothes she had on hand to head upstairs in. Unfortunately, the only things "on hand" were what she had worn last night, so she stepped into her black flares, red sequined halter top and 5-inch platforms with a tremendous grimace on her face. They smelled like stale beer and crushed cigarettes, and she was planning on getting back out of them as soon as possible. If she didn't, she might make up for what she hadn't done last night and blow chunks all over poor Bobby. As a matter of fact, it might almost be worth it to see the look on his face. Now there was a pleasant thought!

"Gobble gobble gobble," she hummed sweetly as she tied her long red hair into a ponytail. On the way out the door, she surveyed the damage to the tiny apartment and sighed. Classy neighborhood or no, hurricane Hugo had nothing on this particular corner of the metropolis. Asleigh turned the key in the lock and sauntered off, the only clue that she was still not quite right in the fact that the walls would occasionally get in the way. And the doors. And her own two feet.

Now, in the grimy alley between Jimmy Chang's Chinese Buffet Bonanza and the U-Clean Laundromat, she wondered if she hadn't been a bit... rash in her handling of the situation when she got upstairs to Bob's apartment. At least her screeching had made the hulking, slimy corpse vacate the premises, although in retrospect she really wanted to know why it had been wearing Bob's fuschia running shorts and singing "Feelings" when she had burst in. She imagined it had run in embarrassment more than anything. Bob she found in the kitchen, out cold from shock. Ash thought she knew why... in his limp hand had been his prized possession, his "Richard Simmons 1997" calendar, and it had a big, fat bite out of it. She'd left him there in complete disgust. A Chippendale's calendar, now THAT was worth fainting over, but really. That was the point where she had decided that she just needed a donut more than anything and had merrily jaunted outside like a complete idiot. In retrospect, though, had Dunkin' Donuts actually been open, it might have been worth the trouble. After all, they made a damn good apple fritter.

So, for the last half hour Ash had been wedged between a smelly dumpster and a wall. She already discovered that the rest
of the things wandering around weren't quite so nice after she had the good sense (and she was still kicking herself for this one) to flip one off while strolling down the middle of Main Street. Fortunately for her, its leg had fallen off while it was chasing her and she had gotten herself in here. Rather unfortunately, though, this hiding-out thing had given ample time for her hotter-than-average Irish temper to kick in, and now she was steaming with indignation. She was hung over, damnit! She needed a nap! Where the hell was the rest of the world who was supposed to be taking care of this garbage before it started?

Indeed, the whole world seemed to have vanished into thin air. The sky had gone a deep blood red and the wind had picked up, giving the city a wholly unnatural appearance as the breeze wailed through the empty streets like a hungry mountain lion. Ash froze as something slimy settled on her thigh.

"Hey there, sweet thing," growled a voice that sounded like it had been used much in, oh, say, a couple hundred years. Ashleigh turned her head ever so slowly, only to come face to face with another one of those disgusting creatures. A matted toupee hung askew on its gnarled head, and it appeared to be wearing a three-piece suit. Its breath, naturally, was not the sweetest thing, considering it had likely been a good many years without a breath mint.

Ashleigh couldn't help herself. She gagged. The creature, in return, waggled its eyebrows at her.

"You've got to be kidding me," she groaned. As if that weren't bad enough, the creature started to do a rather obscene bump and grind routine with the dumpster, and the most offensive song Ashleigh could think of started coming out of Slimy's mouth.

"If you wanna be my lov-ah, first you gotta be my friend," he crooned, wiggling his big green backside at Ash, whose brows were slowly drawing together in a warning of the black rage that was coming on faster than she could control it. She slipped off her platform shoes and whacked it against her palm menacingly as she advanced upon the blissfully unaware demon undulating before her.

She cleared her throat loudly, and he turned to face her, still muttering, "Tell me whatcha want, whatcha really really want...". At that, she bashed him squarely in the skull.

"NOBODY SINGS THE SPICE GIRLS TO ME, DO YOU HEAR ME? NOBODY, DAMN YOU!" Ash screeched as she advanced upon the howling pile of slime. He started to muddle away, but she leapt on top of him and began bludgeoning him with her shoe as reason left her grasp completely. All she knew was this thing had given her a rough time, she was tired, and the whole world could kiss her ass.

When the whole thing was either dead or just plain unconscious, Ashleigh stood panting over him with a dazed look in her eyes. Then, slowly, a light began to dawn in them as she reviewed her day so far. Hmmm... hangover, half-eaten Richard Simmons calendars, a dead thing who sang Spice Girls... yep, it was definitely time to go.

"Lemme outta here!" she yelped, and took off running down the street. Unfortunately, it being rather hard to run in only one platform shoe, she only managed to hobble really fast. Now, bear in mind that Ashleigh wasn't in the best frame of mind to be running anywhere, much less around a zombie-inhabited city, because she wasn't looking where she was going at all. That said, as soon as she rounded the corner of 8th and Madison, she managed to run smack into the only person who seemed to be still in the mood for taking a leisurely stroll around the city. After barreling lopsidedly into him, Ashleigh went flying head first into a ripe-smelling garbage can while the guy landed smack on his keister on the sidewalk.

"UMPH!" he grunted.

"AWK!" she squawked. In a matter of moments, Ashleigh was covered in garbage. She sighed loudly. With the way this day was going, she hadn't really expected any less. If it got any worse, she was going to march straight back to her apartment and watch Saturday Night Fever until the whole ordeal was over with. As the unwitting victim of her spontaneous jog stood up, she gave him the
quick once-over with an eye well-trained from many nights at
cheesy pick-up bars.

He was actually kind of cute in a boy-next-door sort of way,
she decided. He had tousled black hair and light aqua eyes, and was
wearing a polo shirt with a pair of rumpled Dockers. He had risen to
dust himself off, and now walked over to extend his hand.

“Need help?” he asked politely. Ashleigh peeled a leaf of
rotted lettuce off her forehead and attempted to look civil.

It looked more like a grimace of pain, but at least she was trying. She let him
get her up, but not before she had removed her other shoe. If things
got back to normal, damned if she wouldn’t sue the company that
made these death-traps. She didn’t care if it was her fault for taking
off the other one, and...

“So, what happened to your other shoe?” asked the guy,
giving her tattered platform a quizzical look.

“It was, er, offending me.” Ashleigh then gave him a dazzling smile
to try to cover for the apparent stupidity of her remarks.

It seemed to be working, because the guy gave her a sweet
smile and let his hand linger on hers for longer than necessary.

“So, what’s your name, redhead?” he asked.


“What’s yours?”

“Well, technically it’s Lucifer Beelzebub Satan, but most
people just stick with Satan. Funny how nicknames stick, isn’t it?
Man, if I could have gotten my parents to pick something differ­
ent...” As he babbled on, Ashleigh reached her breaking point.

“WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH ALL YOU PEOPLE?
WHY DO I HAVE TO GET STUCK WITH AN ESCAPED MENTAL
PATIENT AS MY LAST RESORT FOR A SEXUAL PARTNER? DO
YOU HEAR ME, GOD? WHY DO YOU HATE ME? THIS PLACE
SUCKS! I HATE LIFE! JESUS!” She ranted and raved as she paced
rapidly back and forth until she heard a voice call out from the hot
dog stand across the street.

“What? What do you want now, Satan? I’m trying to eat
here,” she heard as a man appeared form behind it and walked over
to where they were standing. Ashleigh gawked openly as the second
man approached. He had long scruffy brown hair and a goatee, and
he was wearing what appeared to be a toga and an old pair of
Birkenstocks. He was smoking a stogie, and when he stopped he
blew the smoke directly into Satan’s face. “What goes on, my
friend?” he asked. Gagging, Satan replied,

“She hates me. She thinks I’m a loony. Nobody understands
how good the pay benefits are, man...”. He looked dejectedly at
Ashleigh. Ashleigh, in turn, looked at the newest member of their
little group.

“Jesus, right?” she asked skeptically. He nodded, taking a
drag off his cigar.

“The same. Water into wine and all that jazz. Man, those
were the good old days. Getting trashed and quenching the
munchies with manna from heaven. Today sucks; we’re bored, so
we’re ending civilization as you know it. Dad has been wanting to
turn this place into a parking lot for the new football stadium for a
long time anyhow. Want a beer?” He pulled a Guinness out of the
folds of his toga and offered it to Ashleigh, who took it numbly and
stared in disbelief at the pair before her. She was at a loss as to
whether to believe them at first, but then she thought about it and
decided it was probably true. Either that or somebody had slipped
something into her drink last night and she was hallucinating. Any
way she looked at it, even lunatics were better than no company at
all, so she decided to be nice.

“So, uh, you guys are friends?” she asked conversationally.

“Yeah, well, Dad had a hell of a time finding somebody to
watch over the place. Hell is really nothing more than a big field
with a bunch of cows in it, you know. The old hell got grazed to
make room for a shopping mall. Biggest fear there is stepping in a
cow pattie, as a matter of fact. You can’t send visions of stuff like
that, though... I mean, how scary is ‘Hell’s Cows?’ They might moo
at you, but that would be about the extent of it. Still scares most of
them, though. Sometimes we throw water balloons at them; you
should see them run THEN!” said Jesus. Satan chuckled along with
him. Ashleigh rolled her eyes, then winced as she got a whiff of her
clothes for the umpteenth time that day. You would think they
would be aired out by now.

“So, seeing as how you guys were going to blow this place
up anyways, you think you could hurry it up and get on with it?
Then we can get on to bigger and better things, like naps and aspi­

“We? I don’t remember inviting any humans to come home
with us. You should just probably stay here and be incinerated. It
wouldn’t be fair to the others.” Ashleigh glowered at him. Satan
gave him a beseeching look and Jesus sighed. “OK, lady, you can
come. But you better be a good sport and quit bitching about your
hangover. You don’t think we don’t have some rough nights in the
afterlife? It can get hairy when drinking yourself to death becomes
impossible.” He lit another stogie and folded his arms across his
chest.

“Yeah, well, OK, as long as I get some peace and
quiet,” muttered Ashleigh. Near them, a hulking green corpse was
attempting to breakdance to “Electric Avenue” while another eerily
familiar one went running by, carrying armloads of “Sweatin’ to the
Oldies” volumes one through twenty-seven. Satan shook his head at
the spectacle, and Jesus knowingly raised his arms to the heavens.

“Dad! Get us outta this joint! Pronto!” he cried. The heavens
opened with a resounding belch, and the three were whisked into
the next world, Satan staring adoringly at Ashleigh, Ashleigh
turning green and promising God she would never drink again, and
Jesus blowing smoke rings into the air. As the world exploded with
a resounding POP, Ash found herself standing barefoot in a pile of
cow dung out in the middle of a field somewhere. She gathered her
composure before she spoke.

“Revenge shall be mine,” she muttered, “and I will have my
NAP!” Although Jesus and Satan looked fearfully at her as though
her head might explode at any moment, she didn’t say another
word.
The Real Me
by Nina Denny

Sit alone, my child, in complete darkness.
Only a candle to light the page
on which your hand glides across.

The waft of incense tickles your nose
as shadows play hide and seek above you.

A single cigarette burns in an ashtray
just like you burn
alone.

Profound thoughts,
passion turns into words,
desires unleashed yet unseen.

Time sits still, and so do you,
careful not to awaken
your identity.

The First Warm Night
by Lisa Aliperti

Almost the end of May - flowers
ripening, stretching toward a relentless
sun; and I met you on a Monday.
You were at the tattoo shop, eating sushi
on your break. I sat on the couch and watched you
by yourself; I watched you make appointments,
I watched you (shyly) watch me. Later on
we sat alone in your car. In the silence
of the first warm weekend, I studied
your face against the ever-deepening
violet sky, your profile
strange and beautiful to me. It had been
so long. I recognized four colors in your eyes,
and in your voice I heard wind and fire,
rain and music. Changing the station,
your hand skimmed over mine; re-stimulating skin
left untouched for months.
When you (carefully) kissed me good night
hours later, I felt the first stirrings of spring
crackling gently. I stood under the dim porch light
alone and breathed for a moment,
watching your car until it disappeared
around the corner. Even after you were gone
I could still smell you.
This is Not My Beautiful Wife
by Walter Gwynn

He felt it sliding off, but just as the old man lifted his leg it fell into the water. He could watch it for the first few feet, its form blurring, until it disappeared into the blackness. The bare foot glowed sickly white in contrast to the rest of his brown leg, especially the knee, which was even darker than the circles under his eyes and the penny-sized spots on his back that were really nothing more than old freckles bloated with sun and time. The old man squinted into the hot sun, his eyes matching the rest of his cracked leather face as he tipped his head back for a sip of bourbon. The pits at the base of his corded neck behind the collarbone were shiny with sweat, and each carried a small puddle at the bottom, but could easily have held more. The one under his Adam’s apple was even bigger, but the angle was wrong and the sweat leaked down his chest until it was soaked up by the undershirt he wore on the hot days. His feet dangled off the end of the pier, just above the hundreds of dead jellyfish floating in the salty water of the bay.

He pulled off his other shoe, slowly twisted himself around, and tossed it a short distance up the pier. The dog went and laid down next to it and chewed it with his back teeth, showing his black lips and rounded yellow fangs. The old man came here almost every morning to smell the salt and listen to the eye-hooks clang against their masts as the sailboats rocked with what little current managed to squeeze its way past the breaker wall. It was almost noon now, and the slips were busy with people chattering and readying their boats for sail. The old man got up and slowly began walking up the pier. He was long and speckled white with gull droppings. The dog got up, left the shoe, trotted until it was a few steps ahead of the old man, and then slowed to his lethargic pace. It always walked a few steps ahead of the old man.

By the time he came to the end of the pier, the bourbon was gone and his mind was thinking of another fifth. He dropped the bottle in the sand and headed toward the liquor store.

Grand Avenue took the old man away from the bait shops and past the boating permit and registration office to where it met with Healy Boulevard. Tompkins Liquors stood at the corner. The dog laid on the sidewalk, and the little bells on the door rang when the old man went inside.

He lingered along the sagging shelves, eyeing the bottles until he came upon the bourbon and grabbed a fifth of the cheapest. He walked up front and placed the bottle on the counter. Tompkins was sipping scotch from a bottle and had a hard time reading the price tag. He was a short, fat man with glasses. The lenses were nearly as thick as a deck of cards, and his eyes looked swollen behind them. He picked up the bottle and held it close to his face, almost touching his nose. Sweat beaded on his puffy cheeks and on the bald crown of his head, despite the loud fan blowing in his direction. His ponytail fluttered slightly, and he stunk like chicken soup.

"Two and eighty-three," he said finally.

The old man handed him a five and realized that he needed to cash his check. Tompkins held the bill to his nose before putting it in the register and counting the change. He scraped the side of a nickel with his fingernail to make sure it wasn’t a quarter and dropped the coins into the old man’s crooked hand.

"Want a bag?" Tompkins asked. The old man had bought bottles there a thousand times and never once said yes, but Tompkins posed that same question every time. This annoyed him, but Tompkins had cheap prices on cheap liquor, and the store was only a few minutes’ walk from the water.

"No."

"Okay. Take ‘er easy, bub."

"Sure." The old man took the bottle and walked out the door, and the bells rang again. The dog picked itself up and took the lead as they walked around the corner and headed east on Healy. The old man walked for a long while in the cool dirt along the side of the road and sipped thoughtfully at his bottle, wondering if he would be turned away at the bank because he was shoeless. The buildings became taller as he went, and the sidewalks thickened with people.
scurrying like little mice to get back to the office after lunch. Eventually, the dirt became grass, then concrete; the old man dropped the empty bottle in a trash can that was bolted to the sidewalk.

When he arrived at the soaring white steps of the bank, the old man stared for a moment at the tall marble columns and watched three young men in suits exit through the glass doors. The one to the right had slicked back blond hair and was gesturing enthusiastically with one hand while he talked to his engrossed listeners. His other hand held an attache case, and all three men wore shiny black shoes. The threesome failed to notice the old man or the dog as they hurried past and merged into the clickety-clack of high heels and wingtips flowing along the sidewalk toward the business district. The old man decided that a bar might be more accommodating and moved into the traffic.

The swift current of business types, combined with the hot concrete on his bare feet quickened the old man’s pace from that of a trudge to a near-trot. Within minutes, he grew tired of such haste and turned down a side street. At the next corner was a bar with a sign that read simply “The Tavern.”

The dog laid down in the shade under the awning as the old man went inside. The cool tiles brought welcome relief to his sore feet, and he managed to plant himself on a stool at the end of the bar before the bartender had a chance to realize he wasn’t wearing any shoes. The bartender looked up from a newspaper and approached the old man. The place wasn’t fancy, and it was empty.

“What can I getcha, Pops?” He seemed happy to see a face.

“Do you cash Social Security checks?” the old man asked, placing the check on the bar.

“Got any ID?”

The old man showed the bartender his sheriff’s identification. They made all the men at the shipyard get one for legal reasons shortly before he was let go. At the time he thought it was senseless, contending that he had no reason to prove who he was. A year later, he found himself flashing it to a different someone, usually a bartender, every week in order to cash the little checks that became so vital so quickly. The card was more than a dozen years old, and its rounded edges framed the picture of a ruddy and spirited face, belonging to a complacent man in his late fifties.

“Okay, sign the back if you would, Pops.” The bartender took the signed check to the register and returned with the old man’s remuneration: ninety-one dollars. The old man laid a ten on the bar and put the rest in his side pocket.

“Whiskey and water, no rocks.”

The bartender nodded and patiently made the drink. He was a tall man who appeared to be approaching forty quite gracefully. His face was clean-shaven, and a lock of thick brown hair flopped over his forehead when he bent down to drown the old man’s drink from the little sink under the bar. Blue pinstripes started at his broad shoulders and ran down the length of his white shirt until they disappeared into the waist of his khakis. He set the drink in front of the old man and went back to his paper.

“The Sox won again,” the bartender said. “Vaughn hit a three-run digger in the eighth to win it. They’re only two under five hundred. Think they can make a run?”

The old man set his drink down and coughed. “I don’t really follow,” he replied.

“You don’t like baseball?” the bartender asked.

“I used to. When Williams gave it up, so did I.”

“He was a hell of a player. It’s a shame he never won.”

The old man emptied his glass. “How ‘bout another? Not so cold this time.”

The bartender strode over and took the empty glass. “You’re the boss, Pops.” He poured the drink, this time testing the water momentarily with his finger, and set the glass in front of the old man.

“How’s that?”

“It’s fine.”

The old man drank and the bartender poured, each time testing the water with his finger. Conversation became sparse; soon the old man was drunk and the streets outside were once again bustling with people. At around six o’clock, the first of the happy
hour crowd ambled in: two men and two women -kids, really. They were talking and laughing obnoxiously.

“He’s not dead.”

“I’ll bet he wishes he was. How many goddamn fleas-“ Their conversation was interrupted when they noticed the old man’s presence. He heard them, but didn’t say anything. They sat in a row at the bar, boy-girl-boy-girl, and giggled under their breath like kindergartners.

“I got the first one,” said the stockiest of the two boys, ordering the drinks. “Sea breezes all around.”

“Mmm! Good choice, Paul!” squeaked one of the girls. The rest agreed. They talked and laughed loudly, usually with Paul leading the conversation. A few minutes later, three more boys walked in, then two girls. The bar continued to fill steadily; the bartender became rather busy and had to give up his newspaper. The old man kept at his warm whiskey and water.

By seven, “The Tavern” was quite full. Earlier, the crowd avoided the old man’s end of the bar; now they had no choice but to be near him. A group of casually dressed boys were occupying the stools around him, boasting of their most recent sexual experiences. The old man thought they wore too much cologne and were lying. The jukebox in the corner flashed neon hues of yellow and red, and played music that matched its gaudy colors. “...Into the blue again, after the money’s gone...“ Several couples danced here and there. The old man sat stoically, gazing into his blurry drink and listening to the boys blab.

“You betcher ass I did. I’m goin’ over there again tonight, too!”

“Oh shit, man, you’ll get crabs from ‘er snatch and ringworm from ‘er mattress!“

“She ain’t that bad.”

“Your ass! Timmy Biafra banged ‘er!“

The music played, “...Under the rocks and stones... there is water underground...“ The boys laughed. “Hell, I bet this old man banged ‘er!“

“What?” said the old man. They stopped laughing and looked surprised when he turned his brown and beaten face towards them. “Why don’tcha buy me a drink?“ he said. There was only background noise for a moment, then one of them spoke.

“Why don’t I buy ya some shoes!“ The old man quaffed his drink, set the glass on the bar and said quietly, “I don’t need shoes, I need a drink.“

“Buy it yourself, ya dirty old drunk,” the kid said, “and go to hell.“ They all laughed in unison, creating a collective and dense guffaw as they walked away in a line like ducklings.

“Maybe,” uttered the old man. He looked at the clock on the wall behind the bar- a red Budweiser logo with hands and no numbers. When his eyes finally focused, it read nine-thirty. The bartender was opening two Coors bottles for a couple of boys, and the old man called him over.

“Another one, Pops?“

“What’s your cheapest whiskey?“ the old man asked.

“Parker’s Corners. Real rotgut.“

“How much is left in the bottle?“ The bartender retrieved the bottle and set it in front of the old man. It was just over half full.

“Take ten for it?“ the old man asked.

“Yeah, I guess. Nobody ever touches it,“ the bartender said. The old man handed him two fives, then another five.

“Thanks, Pops,“ the bartender replied. “Hey, ya want a bag or somethin’ for that, in case ya get hassled?“

“No. Have a good night.“ The old man slid off the stool and the tiles were sticky as he walked toward the door. Three girls parted out of his way; the old man thought they were too chubby for their outfits.

The night air was warm, with a slight ocean breeze, and cabs were darting up and down hauling barhoppers. The old man looked down at the dog. Its coat was dirty, and the fur on its flank was knotted into lumps.

“C’mon, boy.“
The dog's eyes remained closed. The old man nudged it with his foot; the tired eyes opened and the dog slowly erected itself. They walked up to Healy and headed west, with the old man holding his bottle by the neck at his side and occasionally taking a sip. He thought about the kids in the bar and how he was once the same. He also remembered how astounded he was when he first saw American girls: long, thin, light skinned with lively eyes. Some had dark, curly hair and some had long, straight blond hair like he had never seen in Tropea. He forgot about the ancient buildings, fishing for tuna in the skiff with his father and the other men, the statues of the saints, and gazing from the cliffs over the sea at the Lipari Islands sitting hundreds of miles away.

When he came to America, he had some experience with boats. When he was old enough, he took a job at the shipyard. He worked hard and learned a great deal in a very short time; eventually, he brought home enough to get his own place and drink with the men at countless bars in the clean part of the city after work. He was polite to the beautiful American girls and never drank too much, to be sure not to say anything offensive or reckless. He offered to buy them drinks, and they liked him. They liked his thick black hair, his brown complexion, his strong arms and chest, and his Italian accent. He was as beautiful to them as they were to him.

He brought one home with him almost every night, which made the older men jealous but happy for him at the same time. He liked to disrobe her and find out if she looked the way he thought she did when she was sitting at the bar. Eventually, he became adept at this, and could surmise what her navel looked like with considerable accuracy by simply noting the shape of her hips.

He thought of making love to them, especially when he lived in the second story flat on Case Street. He had it all when he lived there. On summer nights like this, he would take her up to the roof with an arm load of blankets and make love under the starless sky. He thought of soft, tender skin, smooth thighs and delicate breasts. He liked the ones that stood pointing at the night like little velvet cones when she arched her back in the blankets.

There was still a half pint or so of the Parker's left when he reached his place on the corner of Hunte Avenue and Jefferson. He stepped carefully through the weeds to the recessed entrance in the back of the building, descended the steps and unlocked the heavy door. The dog squeezed through as soon as the door began to swing in; the old man entered and shut it behind him. He pulled the chain to the light and sat on the mattress, rubbing his sore feet and listening to the triple loaders rumbling in the laundromat upstairs. There was always someone doing their wash, regardless of time or day. Sometimes the neighborhood punks put bricks, unopened cans of soda, or even dog shit in the dryers, and the old man had to take care of it. Once, he found a drowned kitten in one of the washers. It really wasn't worth the break on the rent that his landlord gave him for keeping the place clean.

The dog lay down near the door and seemed to fall asleep immediately. The old man used the bathroom, shut the light out and took one last swig of whiskey before setting the bottle on the floor and lying fully clothed on the mattress. Within moments, he was asleep, dreaming of nothing.

The morning sun glared in through the two large windows on either side of the door. They were yellowed with dirt; the sun took on a rust-colored tone and projected two large rectangles on the floor that inched steadily toward the windows. The one to the left of the door crept over the dog's front paws and its muzzle. When it reached its eyes the dog awoke. It lay still for some time, then finally got up and walked over to the old man on the mattress. He lay curled in a fetal position, and the bottoms of his feet were black. His hands and arms were pale, and his legs matched the top of his feet. His lips and fingernails were bluish-purple, and his face was the color of a resting television screen. The dog sniffed at the back of the old man's head, then began nosing around the apartment, looking for something to eat.
Employment
by Jennifer Eighmey

That day
I couldn't even roll my eyes
and I ran to a room that wasn't really mine.
Yes, I will look for a job
but I already have one.
I don't get paid a dime-
it's called living.
This useless effort
runs circles around my calendar;
there are whirlpools swirling
behind these glassy eyes
that calm as I wash these dishes.
Each dark circle
a page of scrawlings not even noted
by another unpublished
who is probably better off
staying that way.

I am a poet by my own definition.
In the dictionary I live by
my napkin manifestos make me something
more than merely the slacker
my mother declared me;
my eyes, my blood, my pencil
are one in the same,
so I allow myself the title
"poet"
and wait to greet another blank page.

Haiku: (untitled)
by Holly Dilatush - Guthrie

Clashing hues
Aftertaste of color
Favored sweater warms my elbows
Pizza Like Love
by Amie S. Arnold

Cars dart back and forth across lanes like metallic deer. When I’m coming over hills in Santa Fe evenings, I see oasises, pools of water swimming through tires like lethargic fish. One after another, car lights pop up, reflect like eyes that wink on the road.

I’ve worn this shirt for the last seven weeks. What’s time? There’s just purple skies. Looks like grapes that have been struck with the back of my hand and smeared by a five year old. Reminds me of grape jelly spread between stale white bread I used to take to school. Reminds me of the black-blue of her eye sockets, her tired, worn expression.

The thick night folds over me like death. I pull into a deserted rest area. In front of me is blackness, motionless. A thick forest out my front view, and the long, dead expanse of highway in my rearview. I pull back the brake like a wrench on an assembly line machine. The air is thin and sweet in early spring. A smell turns up my nose and reminds me of pigtails on girls. I let it take me away like an ejaculation. I think about bellies when a loud 14-wheeler truck pulls into the rest area. It crowds my red truck like a rain cloud. It’s just big enough for two of us, him squeezing in like a fat lady in a too-small dress.

I flick the passenger lock hole with my overgrown nail. I don’t care that he sees. When I’m driving in the city, driving along, and I stop at a red light that just happens to be near a corner store with thugs ready to blow a country boy’s head off, I got to be careful about them seeing me lock the doors. I think if they saw they’d come over, sense my ‘fraidness, couldn’t get in but break the window with their own damn forehead or a 40 ounce whirling through the air, smashing the only thing I have anymore. It’s me in the high seat, once shiny chrome flecked with tar and flesh. When I stop at a red city light, I make sure to do it right, like I’m reaching for something and I slap that black notch down, real casual like, but never look.

A man steps down from the 14-wheeler and jumps onto the road. He stares in my window. Real ugly son-of-a-bitch. Fell off the ugly tree and hit every branch. He’s tall and too skinny for a truck driver, even with a beer gut that fills out his blue shirt like an amputated arm. His face is bloated, a lopsided face with thick lips like a worm. Gotta respect the guy. I know what driving all the time is like.

After driving so long, I get these damn crazy thoughts. I drive endlessly, hold back, wait for the moment to come when I can’t hold on any longer. I think it’s purgatory—a driving hell for my sins, a loop I can’t get out of. I want to close my eyes, but there I am, so tense my fingers mesh into the steering wheel and I can never stop. I will close my eyes and slip into oncoming traffic like a dumb bird. When I hit, I will wrap around metal.

I think the guy has stopped to take a leak in the woods, but he goes to the passenger door and helps someone out. I can tell it’s a woman by his gestures, the way he painstakingly acts like a gentleman, holding out his big hand to wrap around tiny fingers. They walk to the front of the truck and she throws her arms around him. He backs away, nods to my truck. She draws away, looks to the ground. The woman’s legs are long and skinny, but lopsided like the man’s face. Her hair is long and brown. I want to pull away, but I can’t resist watching. Watching how nervous they are. I wonder how long they’ve been coming to this place and doing it on a fallen, rotted tree. Nervous of me, who just wants to watch no more telephone poles go by.

Her face is kind, and she lifts it from the ground back to the man. She grabs his hand and leads him to the woods, and it swallows them up. The pretty thing didn’t trip over a rock or get her long hair caught on thistle branches. Just yanked him into the brush. I love when they take control. Boss you around. You never want to tell them. They got to fight for it, dig for bone with their long fingernails. She’s probably got his pants round his ankles, his ass freezing.
in the wind.

You take the God-ugliest man in the world and they always got a beautiful woman at their side. You never see an ugly woman with a good-looking man. We won’t stand for that. Women always gotta settle.

She never goes away. She’s on the back of my eyelids. As soon as they were gone, I drove from the rest area. Wiped my face on my flannel and drove the whole day.

I had a beautiful woman. A beautiful woman for an ugly man. Not a movie star, penthouse, or airbrushed pretty. If I’m the only one to say it, I don’t care. She was the prettiest girl in the world. The kind who listened and really tried to understand without interrupting you and going into a story when I still got the words hanging on my lips like some women do. Or the kind who act -and I can see it in their eyes - how self-conscious they are. Moving around like they’re in front of a camera to say something cute. Waiting to say the perfect buzz-words that will explain in clarity exactly, exactly what they want to say.

This lady; Lord, she tried to piece me together for understanding. She’d listen and take the pieces and go to bed with them. They slept between us in bed at night, pile up in the blankets like a chill afraid of the dark room, until it hit the rusty ceiling and she pulled back, dropping the pieces as she walked out the door.

God, how I talked. My parents raised me on a farm; the hay smelled in the morning, a heifer’s udders felt slippery and warm to the touch as the milk spilled into the pan, making sounds like tin rain. School felt cluttered and hazy. All I could do was think of running through the field and wrapping my legs around tree trunks and descending upwards. I wanted to touch the sky, but every time I reached for it, it slipped through my hands.

The way a fishing pole feels, shaky and sturdy at the same time. How my chest leaps up when I catch something, arch my back in pride, bring it to the shore. In the woods I know the name of everything. Get on my knees to sip the water of a brook. A gun in my hands during hunting season. I love to be a predator. On all fours, like the rest of them. Under the domed earth, fighting everyone else like the earth was meant to be made. Nothing any worse or any better than it had been or will be.

I would stop at a wild flower patch and pick the white buds off at their green stems just for her. They looked beautiful on the table, in a shiny vase; woods always for me at home that I looked at when we ate dinner. Looking from them into her eyes and back to them as I spoke. The cool air from the woods blowing the white curtains in and out like lungs in the window sill.

Her eyes were brown and sad, like she needed to be protected. Watery, like she was crying hard when I wasn’t looking. She always looked like that.

She wanted to make something of the pieces that fell from me. She cleared them with dinner, like the long glasses we drank our milk out of. She checked them for spots. She scrubbed. There was nothing to inspect. They were what they were. She tried to put them in the basin with the cooking pots. Wash them clean. Whatever dirt she was looking for just wouldn’t come off.

I brought her wild flowers. I hugged her with my big arms. I told her I loved her.

I dreamt one night her hair fell out when I pushed it off her forehead. She grew old with me. I never came to asking. Pieces she couldn’t sweep into dusty corners just piled up. She had to leave. I drove. I drove and I didn’t stop.

I pull into a gas station. I need to take a leak bad. I get a cup of coffee and the key to the bathroom. My brain is whirling like a spinning top. Like atoms in a nuclear reactor, splitting, forming more thoughts. My body is sagging behind me like my head is a balloon and my body is a transparent string. The coffee collapsed inside my stomach like a whiskey shot. I put my trembling hands on the counter top until the burning passes. I pay. I go outside, hoping the air will stop the splitting atoms in their tracks.

I sit outside the bathroom, the key on a long block still in my hand. I stretch my legs off the curb for any asshole to run over. I pull my flesh until it bounces back, pull my head so far back I think
my flesh will break from my face. I see a white flash of stretch, tired, with bones that won’t fit under the dash anymore. This might be a good place to sleep. No one will catch me. It’s deserted enough. I have to return the key and no one will suspect. I’m out before the last thought touches down.

I wake when the next car pulls in for gas, probably ten minutes later. It’s a green pickup with “Jerry’s Pizza” painted on the side. I can smell the steamy sauce. Through the window, I see boxes piled high on the seat. A kid gets out, maybe 22, as pale white as an albino with the flu in west coast weather. Sticking out like a pistol. Looks like he’s never done a day’s work outside. His eyes are red pot-stained. He fills his tank, looking around, bored. He goes into the store to pay. I want to see this jackass drive back to where he came from. My eyes close against their will again.

“Excuse me, you have the key to the bathroom?” I’m tapped on the shoulder. I fly awake frantically, my arm ready to throw a punch.

“You Jerry?”

“Ha,” he laughs. “No, I’m not the owner. Look, I really gotta take a leak. Do you have the key or not?”

I stare at him blankly as I lift the wooden block, dangling the key. “What’ll ya give me for it?”

One long piss, sir. Now please.”

“How ’bout a pizza for it?”

“You’re nothing but an old bum.”

“That’s right, and hungry.”

He looks around. “You can pay for a pizza, sir.”

“Now why’d you call an old bum like me ‘sir’?”

“Fuck you,” he says and starts to walk back to the store.

“Wait up. Here’s the key.” I throw it to him. He fumbles and catches it.

“You’re going to sit there like some freak and listen to me piss?”

“You scared? I’m just an old bum stretching out where no one can see me.”

“Long drive?”

“Hell...”

He goes into the bathroom. A second later, he puts his head around the door. “Don’t come in. There’s no lock.”

“What the fuck would I go in there for? I ain’t no faggot. Now go. Let me be.”

“Fuck you,” he says quietly as the door creaks shut.

The minute it does, the smell of pizza hits my nose like a sledgehammer. I can see the cheese- big, greasy, fleshy pockets exploding and running down my face. I could eat two pizzas.

I run over to the green pickup. The passenger door slides open, warm to my touch. Four large pizzas. I lift the soggy boxes in my arms, flipping over the top lid with my teeth and chin. I take a bite out of the center. I shove a thick piece in my mouth, get it down without one chew. I’m a python devouring a rat. The middle of my throat feels like a bloated stomach. The kid comes out of the bathroom.

“What the fuck are you doing?” He runs toward me with the bathroom key. “Give me those pizzas!”

I run to my truck. I dodge his one punch and then kick him. Kick him. I don’t wait to see if he gets up. I tear away in my truck, four pizzas on my passenger seat. Four pizzas, all mine- like love.
More Pink
by Robert Donohue

Whenever Kelly puts on
The pink dress
She stops being a prude
And becomes a nympho instead.

Her delighted husband
Buys her an entire pink wardrobe.