



Wiregrass

2018 LITERARY AND ARTS JOURNAL



Cover art: **My Dog "Stacey"** - *Terrie Daniel*

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2018 LITERARY AND ARTS JOURNAL



East Georgia State College, University System of Georgia, Swainsboro, Georgia 30401
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Wiregrass 2018 Literary and Arts Journal

Featuring the writing and artwork of East Georgia State College students, staff, and faculty.



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Thanks to Val Czerny, Desmal Purcell, & Alan Brasher

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Dream

Do you still dream?
Do you dream of a lover's touch?
Do you dream of miracles in the cracks of the road?
Do you dream of monsters in the shadows,
The ones you can expose with just a little light?
Or do you dream of the monsters not so easily exposed?
The monsters that don't allow the light to uncover them.

There's a monster inside your head.
Do you dream of him?
Do you know he's there?
Have you heard his voice
Echoing into the empty spots of your mind?
Can you feel him
Wrapped around your brain,
Seeping into your every thought,
Your every action?

Do you dream of the monster inside your head?
Do you even dream at all?

— *Joshua Henshall*

An Ode, on Valentine's Day

A prudent wife is from the Lord, and is not oft mistaken;
She feeds the hungry of her house, adorned with steward's apron.

Rising early every day, she labors with her fingers,
Molding dough and bank account to yield its richest treasure;
She toils for order, in and out, its peace her home to render,
And goes most freely to the aid of those the Lord does send her.

She counsels with her angry child and soothes the temper in him;
Her husband trusts her kind remark, and friends her admonition.
Her daily labors bring her joy, not from their own dispatch,
But from the knowledge that her Lord has called her to the task.

Though richest beauty falls in vain, charm's faithfulness is crueler,
The prudent wife, in helping one, worships Heaven's ruler.

Her Husband

— *Reid Derr*



Netflix Got It Right

Mass Incarnation
Classroom to Prison Pipeline
_____ Lives Matter
Racial Profiling

All buzz words which, ironically,
are nothing more than white noise in the eardrum of society
They allow us to feel a part of the conversation
without doing anything to improve the situation

If I remain silent
then my hands become calloused from the hanging rope and the beating whip
If I remain silent
then it is my hands which carry the stench of gunpowder from the countless police pistols
If I remain silent
then the busted knuckles caused from punching another's face are my own

How do I know this with such great confidence?
Because I remained silent during the Primary Election
Now we have a Grand Dragon taking the podium on a presidential campaign
spewing racism under the easily decoded phrases
"law and order", "stop and frisk", "stand your ground"

If we allow such a human embodiment
of everything evil and destructive and demeaning in our society
to take the role of America's leader
then I will pray a fire is birthed from our cities that burns this country to the ground
Though I greatly believe in the ideals and the man who was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
there is a time for the spirit of Malcom X to rise up
This is less a season for doves and more of upheld fists and feet marching

I have engaged and discussed the issues of
homelessness
and poverty
and juvenile imprisonment
and ex cons
and the welfare system
and profiling

But I will say it again,
it all comes down to racism

It will not simply “go away”
or heal itself over time
and most definitely will not be fixed
by white-washing history books

And so empathy must begin with education
Whether it is a recent novel or a one published in 1952
An online discussion or town hall conversation
We, starting with me, must learn to understand more clearly
But I must say
this time, Netflix got it right

— *James Aaron Snow*



St. Anthony - *David Carroll*



St. Anthony's Struggle and Mine - David Carroll



Strings of Doubt - Kimberly Page

A Satin Ribbon of Blue

I lay my cupid's wings aside,
my foolish pride to blame.
My bow and arrow, now broken,
our love won't be the same.
A friendship once spoken,
a love felt so true.
Memories...a small token,
of my time spent with you.
The hurt binds so tightly,
around my wounded heart.
Forever is always, my love...will never part.
May I dare say to you, fair February,
I hold you ever so true...
...to dress me in a pale shade of pink,
with a satin ribbon of blue.

— *Terrie Daniel*

A Letter from the Prison of My Heart

I wish I could say I know how you feel,
But to be honest, your silence, it kills.
Wish I could go back, reverse, and start over
There's a lot I would change, different things I would have chosen,
But I can't.... I can't change the clock.
I can't turn back time, all I can do is watch.
I promise, if I knew a way out I'd take it,
But I don't. I feel so useless. I hate it.
You say that you're mad, and quite honestly, I can't blame you.
I made a bad choice, I'll admit I know it's true,
But you knew going in that this is how it would be,
Yet you failed to speak up; now you don't speak to me.
Everyone says soon it will be over.
Yeah, like they really care; I feel my heart growing colder.
I feel shut off from the world, and now you're turning away too?
You used to be the one place I knew I could run to.
You say that you're hurt, and I'm sorry I did.
That was not my intention, this was never my plan,
But don't you think this affects me too?
I care and I love and I really miss you,
but what do I do? Yes that is the question.
You do a lot of complaining, but I hear no suggestions.
You tell me where I'm wrong, well I think I've figured that,
But what I really need to hear is how to fix where I lack.
Sometimes I hope this is fake, but it's real,
And I'm writing this down so that you know how I feel.
Let's please be calm and let's settle down.
Let's just talk it over; we can work this thing out.
I can't blame you if you never speak to me again.
I just hope you are happy, whoever you're with,
But I wish you would just talk to me please
Because no one can ever love you more than me.

— *Blake McBride*



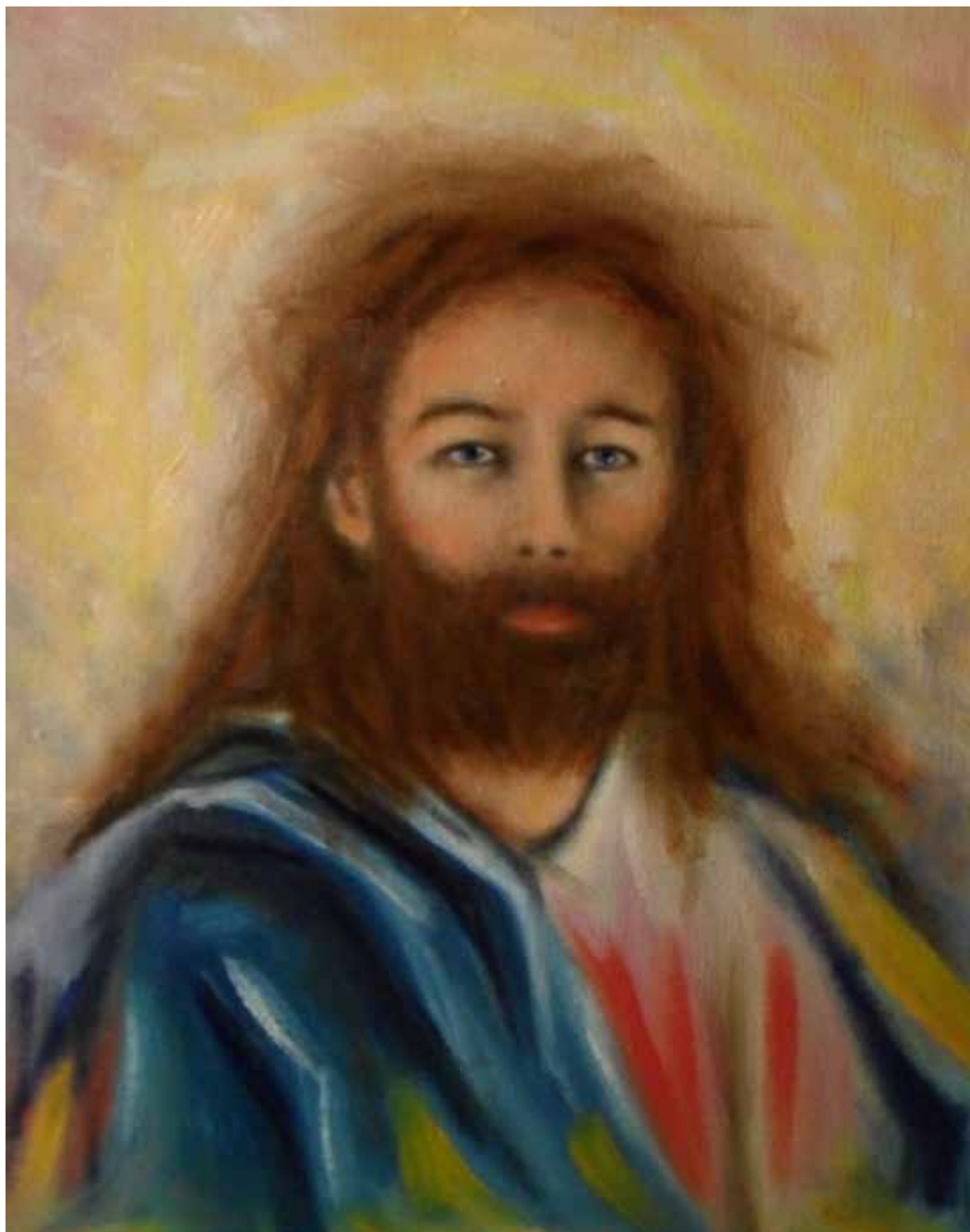
**We found him beneath the bones of the home
with letters from him and his brother saved by his mother.
A month later I came across a rattler here too - *Desmal Purcell***

The Precious Blood of Jesus

When I'm tempted with life's sin,
Darkness tries to move within,
Demons crowd around my mind,
Try to make me deaf and blind.
But no, they cannot hurt me,
Because greater power I can see.
When things get where they aren't nice,
I plead the blood of Jesus Christ.
When Jesus died on the cross that day,
The day when the temple's veil was twain,
God's Son, whose blood on the ground did run,
God looked down and said, "It is done."
Now I am free from all life's sin,
Free to be washed and cleansed within.
Now I am God's for His greatest price,
The precious blood of Jesus Christ.

Amen

— *Denton Roscoe Parker III*



Sweet Jesus - *Terrie Daniel*

Advent In America

Advent: the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event

Here we are,

post presidential election America,

Both sides finally losing their voice from yelling the advent of their demi-god
(or maybe just choking on the harshness of their own words)

Here we are,

post Thanksgiving America,

Both sides of the family finally growing silent while making “those members” eat crow
(or maybe just realizing how the choice of democracy made them choose a stranger
over relatives)

And yes here we are,

post Christian America,

Both sides of the sanctuary far from lowering their voice from yelling at each other
over candidates and sexual preferences and beer on Saturday and allowable profanity.

It is saddening that in a year when

Anticipation was focused on November 8th instead of December 25th,

Hope was placed in a handful of fallible humans,

Joy was in who ranted the loudest on the Internet and

Purity was tarnished with extramarital affairs and Playboy centerfolds
that we do not turn our attention now upon the very core of Advent.

After the hellacious last 11 months,

we still cannot take the time to celebrate the halting of a pipeline

because we are too busy finding the shortest checkout line;

we soon forget the children of Syria and numerous global civil wars

because we are consumed with opening night tickets for Star Wars;

we banter at the water cooler over CNN, HLN, and TMZ

because we have allowed our minds to grow deaf to Good News.

In a time when police officers mistake empowerment with entitlement
we must remember a King Who found birth in the feeding trough of farm animals;
In a time when people parade around with a donkey on their collar or just act like one,
we must remember a Messiah Who entered the city upon an ass.
In a time when mass incarceration is just slavery in orange jumpsuits,
we must sheepishly remember the One Who was in prison and we visited Him.
In a time when faith is placed in a wall or a petition or a protest,
we must remember the Savior Who choose death as His winning move.
In at time when promises are hinged on "Making America Again"
we must remember the Prophet Who took down a empire with love.

America,

Hope is not dressed in a pants suit or adorned with a glob of blond comb-over hair.
It is not holding court at conventions or restaurants serving young garlic soup
and frog legs.
It will never hand you a pin or a hat or a racially-charged lie.
No, because Hope is here
He is in us, around us, and covering us.
He is capable of bringing healing to our hearts, our families, our land

But know this, He is jealous...and has been known to flip a few tables

— *James Aaron Snow*



Ribbon of Despair - *Kimberly Page*

Teenage Screaming (rap/poem)

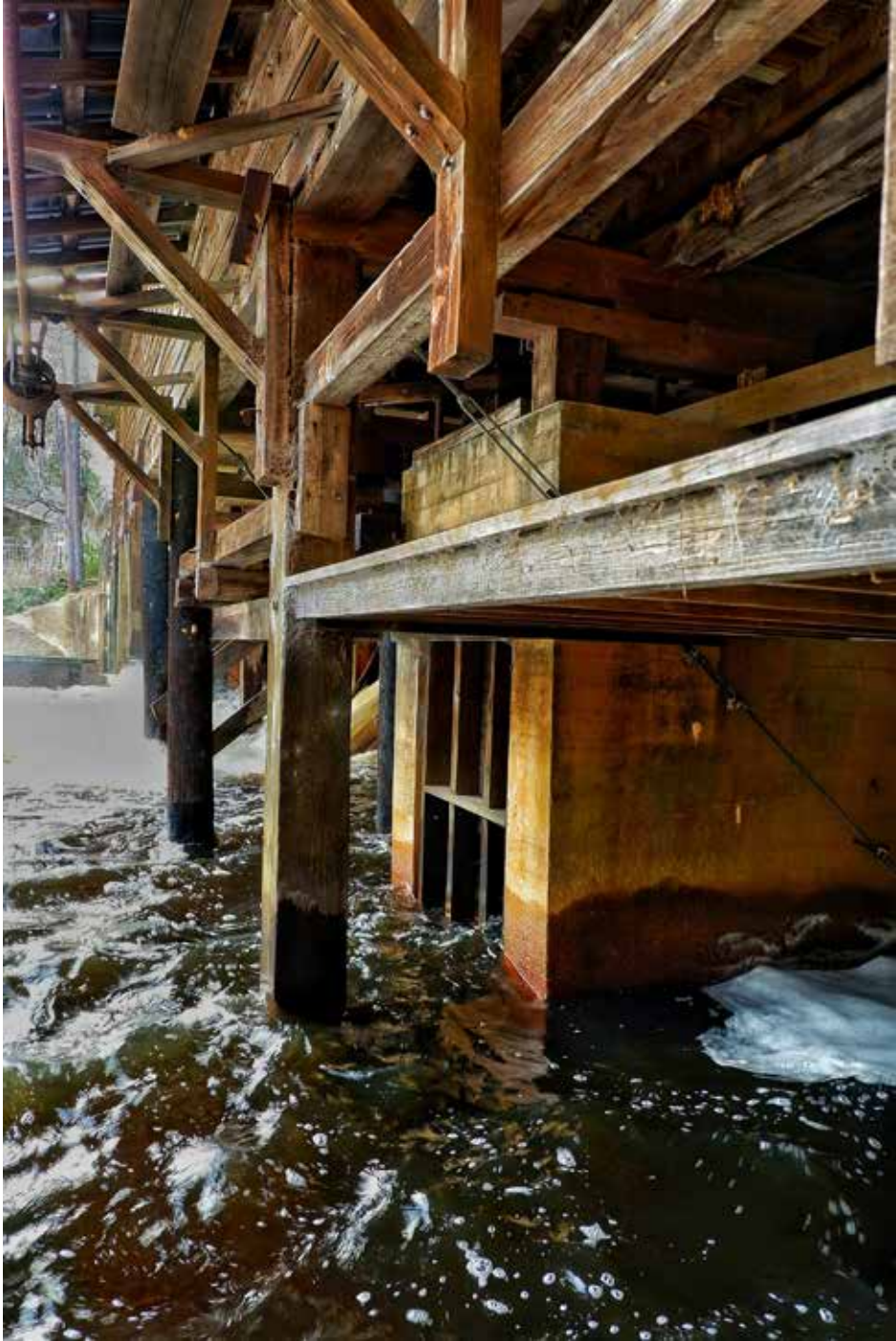
Yesterday was garbage
every day's lethargic
meditate on everything this day in May has started
fade away into the darkness
this depression hits the hardest
this impression of your hand right where my heart /is/ where it started
This love is tainted by my false hope
painted memories remind me of what was almost
I lost hope
Every night was a struggle
I tried to fight but I stumbled
wish I could fly away
but I'm high and my mind's astray
I'm guessing this is my fate
my lesson must be to take this aggression
display a positive message
but the only lesson I learned
is that love is a blessing
and it's gotta be earned
now it's your turn
live or let burn

— *Brandyn Bradford*

The Ship Poem

I feel like a ship that is sinking.
Please tell me you do too
Because I don't think you loved me
Half as much as I did you.
One day we were sailing,
And everything was fine.
Then it was like our sail broke
And we ran out of time.
Now we are just drifting,
Not holding the same log.
I was trying to keep up with you,
But you left me in the fog.
Now everything has changed,
And I'm reaching out to you.
Are you going to help me?
Please tell me what to do.
Will you ever comfort me,
And tell me it's alright?
Will you put your arms around me,
And hold me really tight?
I wish we could make everything
The way it used to be.
I wish we could fix our sails
And get back to the sea.

— Jennifer Coleman



Untitled - Janet Sanchez

Villanelle for Sitting Bull

Son of Jumping Bull and Her Holy Door,
Brave heart and warrior of wind swept plains,
Sitting Bull would lead his people to war.

Ta Tanka Yutan bought a hat from a store.
He pinned a butterfly to the crown and remained
Son of Jumping Bull and Her Holy Door.

Forged by events history would deplore,
Annealed by hardships and inured to pain,
Sitting Bull would lead his people to war.

He cursed rubes while on the circus floor
And sold his vision and his name,
Son of Jumping Bull and her Holy Door.

A proud, strong father could not ask for more.
Strong in battle and gaining fame,
Sitting Bull would lead his people to war.

Cruel warrior who none could ignore
Found beauty in a fragile butterfly.
Son of Jumping Bull and Her Holy Door,
Sitting Bull would lead his people to war.

— *Kenneth Homer*

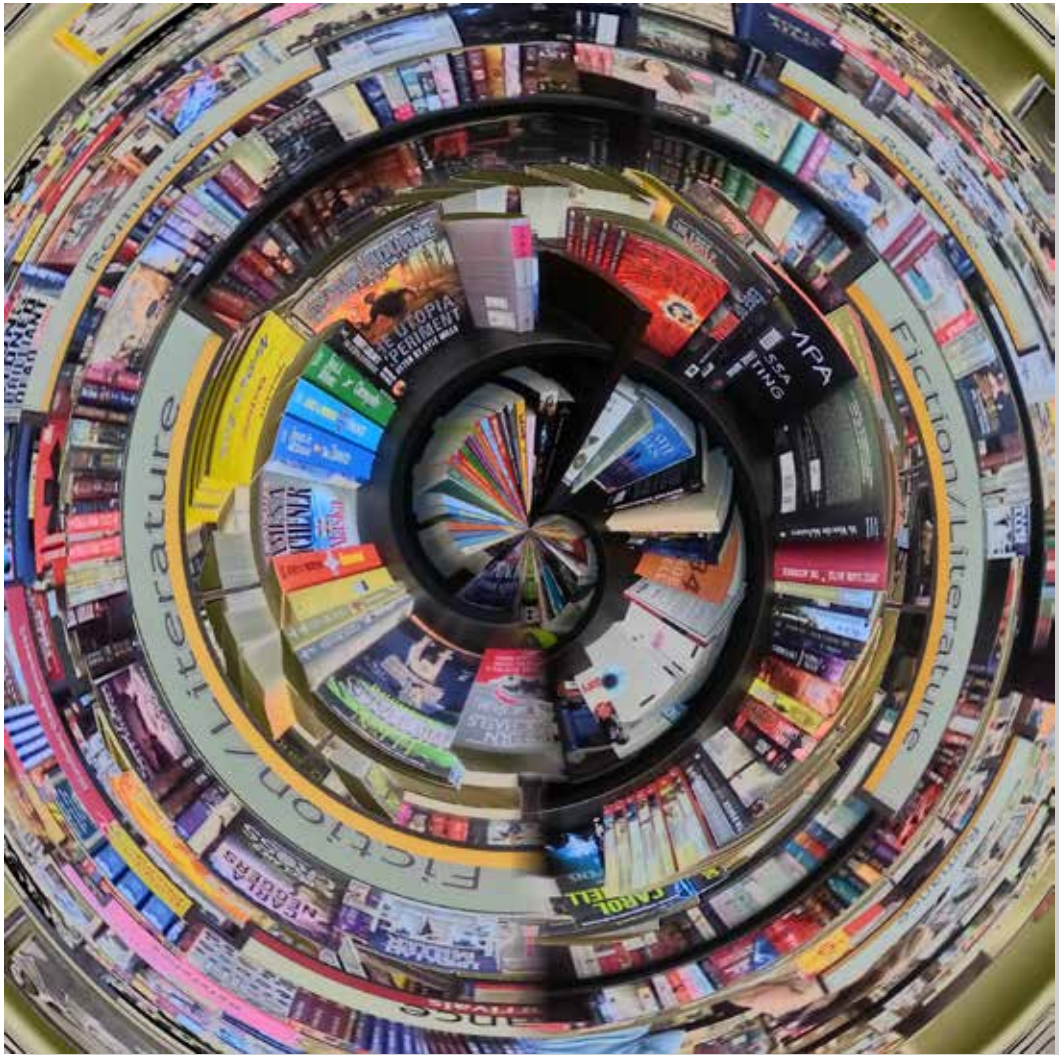
Go to Hell

Shadows hang in midnight black
Drape you dead by heart attack
Death informs your trial played
Judgment on your soul is made
Hark the herald angels gone
Seep you center earth by dawn
Tunnel myth that flickered light
Truth be told it was the sight
Ember spitting Gates of Hell
Sinner souls aflame as well
Evil laughs the guardian fool
Comes there next his syrup drool
Face on face he licks your wound
Outcome being your mind is ruined
Crushed against the searing Gate
Burned there in your face your fate
Heathen heap in crying pile
Puddle pool of piss and bile
Were you once of what could be
Lost now in Eternity

— *Eric Wruck*



Untitled - *Jaelynn Gillis*



Bookstore - *Mark Hovind*

Cosmic Lodger

Dense but light
Unspied, while in
sight
Sifted wide, yet
Tethered up tight

:

I embroider space
Clothe air ducts,
House a mite

!

— *Val Czerny*

Battleground

The greatest wars are not fought on battlefields,
rather from behind our eyes;

Inside the brain is where the most destructive battles lie.

Fighting yourself until one is completely extirpated;

The internal despair is something your own thoughts have created.

The battle is exhausting, the white flag is thrown;

Self-destruction is activated, killing yourself mentally, all on your own.

— *Hope McCullough*

Queens

What happened?
We fell from our throne.
We've no longer become our own.
We've become too grown.
We've forgot our purpose of being seen and not heard,
And our bodies not giving,
Letting anyone and everyone
In our zone.

It's no wonder why so many of us feel alone
Because the exposure of every body part we seem to dis-
own.
Obviously, we don't care we've outgrown
Our jewels, so we give them away.
They've left our royal throne.
We give it to some "man"
We thought was our "hip bone,"
And he got what he needed
And left us at the nearest
Drop zone.

And instead of learning from
Our lesson, we get us a clone
Because we thought he was different.
He called me "gorgeous" this time instead of "beautiful."
He says I'm the one, and he wants to be with me.

We better stop relying on
These guys for our beauty,
For our love; they'll say
Anything to just get you alone.
Especially when we perceive
our innocence as already being blown.

Let me tell you what makes us beautiful
Because society has taught us otherwise.
See, society has taught us fake is beautiful:
Fake nails, fake eyelashes, blush, foundation, eyeshadow
Shouldn't be your beauty but your
Intelligence!
See, if everyone is thinking alike,
Then somebody isn't thinking because
"Beauty lasts nothing but a moment,
Here today and gone tomorrow, and fades away."
QUEENS it's time!
For us to let that intelligence to be known.

And for us to be well known
Past a physical appearance,
Your nasty past,
show us something we haven't seen; let this be your
Stepping stone.

Queens, I am a Queen, you are a Queen.
Let's not be dethroned,
And let's continue to take our throne!

— *Kaylah Christian*



Pond on EGSC Statesboro - *Mark Hovind*



S&S Greenway - *Mark Hovind*

I Love You, Farewell

I'm lying here in this hospital bed, barely breathing, hardly alive, yet still searching for the words I could never say to you. You're at home lying in your bed, tears streaming down your face as you go through pictures of "us" and everything that we once were. I could paint the magnificent beauty of your face as if you were standing right here in front of me, but you're not, and I'm alone in the dark, wanting you in my arms one last time. I love you, as I always have. My time with you hasn't always been the best, and I know I've caused you pain, but seeing your smile makes it feel like everything has been washed away. My eyes are open, staring at the blank, white ceiling tiles, counting all the holes in them as the oxygen in my tank slowly depletes into my lifeless body. You don't deserve to be put through this, and I don't know why you haven't shown up beside my bed yet. I miss you, and I want you, but you'll never come. You don't want to see me like this-- with IVs protruding from every part of my body, the oxygen mask covering my face, and all the machines surrounding me. You'd wish me dead right now, so we both wouldn't have to suffer. I'm fighting this battle for you so we can be together again. I'm too young to die. Not before telling you how I really feel. You are the sunshine that comes and clears away the rain and clouds that falter my ability to be happy. You are the moonlight that casts its beautifully solemn arrays that gently caress my body and pull me close to you. You are the rainbow that fills my life with color that could reach even the darkest of places in my heart. You are the everlasting happiness that could never be swept away by the soft, wintery breeze. The truth is that I love you. I always have, and I always will. I'll never be able to tell you how I really feel. My life support has finally failed, and I slowly close my eyes and I take my last breath, whispering out your name. Jessica. I love you.

I know it's hard, seeing me lying here in this coffin. How I lie motionless, non-reactant to your caress, your touch, the sound of your voice. I hate the sight of glistening tears running down your face, over your lips, and crashing to the floor. You hate me for that exact reason. You hate me because all I've ever done is cause you heartbreak and woeful tears. Yet, you still love me, you still pour your emotions into me, my soul, my heart. You love me when all I've ever done is hurt you. I love you, though all I've ever done is bring pain and suffering into your life. Two years. It took two years for you to finally be freed, but still end in regret. Heh. From where I am I can see you lean in to kiss me. I wish I could feel, I could experience the taste of your lips one last time, to tell you I'm sorry, to make up for my mistake, and why I ended up in the hospital. It must've been hard walking into my room and finding me on the floor. The blood spilling out of my chest, the pistol wedged in my hands. You were able to get me to safety in time for me to be put on life support, but that doesn't change what I had done. You meant the world to me, and I threw it all away. I grew weary of all the pain I caused you,

and the mess we made of ourselves. The connection between us severed long before this. I'll never get to call your name again. Your sweet, beautiful name. I'll never again be able to tell you I love you. Instead, I leave you my farewell. Goodbye my love, Jessica. May we meet again someday.

— *Alex Smith*



South Georgia Sunset - *Ciara Goodmanson*

A Child's Price

The close of a door,
The turn of a key, a final lock.
The house was silent, no sounds to mock.
My little feet were cold as I hurried to hide myself from this man of lies.
Upon his coming down the hall,
the air felt colder, his silhouette grew tall.
Darkness -- a secret world where I live in fear.
My tiny body he takes, along with my tears.
Consistent footsteps, rhythm of breath,
Thoughts of his closeness frightens me to death.
Oh, for a moment, a moment of time...
to stall this man and still my mind.
We finally meet at the end of the hall.
Weakened to the floor, I heard him call,
"Do not be afraid, I love you, my dear."
"Let me hold you and care for you, I want to always be near."
Silk blanket secure, my teddy held tight,
I know not to resist, or there would be a fight.
His hands are large, his voice is strong.
I was overcome with fear, knowing all this was wrong.
He picked me up, my tiny tears fell.
I thought to myself, "Where is my mommy in the midst of this hell?"
Into my bedroom, we so cautiously glide.
I heard the door shut, latched lock--he knows to hide.
I don't understand. I stay so confused.
Every child needs a daddy, not a man who will abuse.
There is a lot to tell, my heart is broken--
Life is disillusionment; the rest remains unspoken--forever.

— *Terrie Daniel*

The Heart of the Magician

Do not be fooled by the Magician's smoke and mirrors,
For behind the cloak of the ever fake smile lies only the threat of terror,
Terrors the reaper himself can't even imagine,
Something that's hard for me to even fathom,
For what if this smile wasn't even real?
What if what I think is not really what I feel?
These are thoughts that always flew in my head,
As I thought what else could be there instead,
But then I met you and my doubt went away.
You took all the words that my mouth had to say.
You took my heart and I don't want it back,
And I can't think of a thing that you seem to lack.
Your smile, your touch: they send me away
As I fly like a kite on a warm summer day,
Warm like your smile that shines like the sun,
Yet gentle as the moon when the day becomes done.
When the stars come out, they are scared to show their face,
For they know that they pale next to your eyes full of grace.
Though once I was scared, I need to fear no more.
I can send shouts of praise to my Savior and Lord,
For HE has sent me an angel from above
And my heart will be forever filled with your love.

— *Blake McBride*

Revive

A comatose heart,
Exhausted, asleep.
A heart so sick
It refused to beat.

A heart that was once
Overflowing with love
Was now weakened, withered,
Ready to give up.

Giving, giving, giving gone.
A heart depleted; a love long gone.
Then you showed up--
And sang a song.

Like dopamine pouring
Into my IV
Like electricity powering
The life-support machine

Your voice entered my body.
The sound flowed through my veins.
Quickly it raced to my heart
To help ease all my pain.

Injected with your song,
My blood serenaded.
It didn't take long.
Doped up, I faded.

My helpless heart
Couldn't help but let you in.
Your rejuvenating voice
Worked like medicine.

Blood pumping, heart thumping,
Alive it seems!
A miracle! Could it really be?
Are you the remedy?

How many doses do I take?
For my heart to heal
And feel
And stay awake?

A delightful voice,
Sang from your heart to mine,
A healing sound prescribed
In the nick of time!

Senses heightened,
Alive! Awake! I'm sure!
Your song, your sound,
A miraculous cure!

My heart was in a coma,
Now reborn & renewed,
Revived & rested,
Ready to beat for you.

– J. Rhiannon Stafford



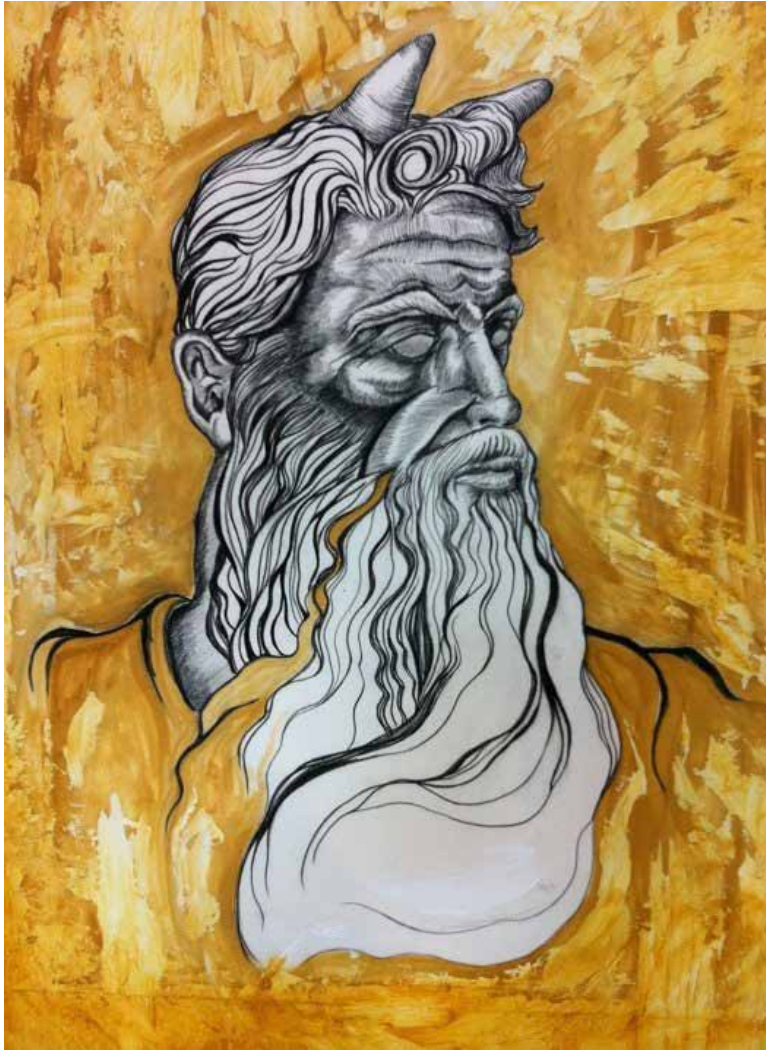
Busy Bee - *Karly McDonald*

Reversed

Wars and petty conflicts
No one sees
Happy days and smiling children
Reality shows us
Those are things of the past,
Not like hate and destruction
They are growing stronger
Love and peace among humankind
Is forgotten
Every difference and defect
Will divide our Earth apart
We seemed to have forgotten things that
Make people come together as a whole
Families and friends
Have never crossed our minds
Hate and fear of differences
This is our world today

(Now read from bottom to top)

— *Esmeralda Hernandez*



Moses - *David Carroll*

The Sixteenth Annual Emily Pestana-Mason Memorial Poetry Contest



Our poetry judge, *Chris Mattingly*, holds an M.F.A. in Poetry from Spalding University. He teaches writing, literature, and interdisciplinary courses at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky. His book of poems, *Scuffletown*, is available for checkout from the East Georgia State College Library. From 2012-2014, Chris served as a Humanities faculty member at EGSC.

The First Place Poem... A quick Google search revealed to me that the phrase "ardens sed" is a Latin motto meaning "burning but flourishing" and that it has roots in the image of the biblical description of the burning bush. But I must say, that when I first read the title, I did not consider its Latin root. In fact, I first interpreted the title by its sound, which I first thought to be a type of rendered dialect rooted in the soil of the rural Deep South. In a sense, that is not too far off because so much of this poem's meaning is rooted in sound. I love the way the title bleeds rhythmically into the first line and gives the impression (when heard not seen) of someone being spoken to. When I read the opening out loud I hear: "Arden said / when i was 8." Notice the light half-rhyme of "ardens" and "when" and the way the sound blends into the "s" sound buzzing down deep into the first stanza. Of course, the dominant comes from the heavier, truer rhymes of "up" and "plucked" and "8" and "complacency." But this little bit of music sets us up for the surprise in the second stanza: the deep imagery laden with Biblical allusion, family stories, and sorrow. I love how the ordinary is transformed gloriously in this stanza, or, rather how the glorious is transformed from a Biblical metaphor into a household plant inserted literally into the poem by the speaker, which then turns again into the "drowning eyes" of the speaker's daddy. There is so much anguish in this moment because we somehow feel the speaker implicated in the father's suffering because his eyes are equated with the bush that she herself has planted. Wow. But then, of course, there is that final stanza where, like the burning bush, the eyes begin to speak: "learn / how a / man expired, but / never died." And these are the lines that made this reader stop everything he was doing, fold up the poem, and put it in my pocket so that I could read it again and again and again.

FIRST PLACE POEM

ardens sed..

when i was 8,
i was up and
plucked
from my complacency,
dropped into a burning

bush
i planted in the
front yard.
hydrangeas, blue like
daddy's drowning

eyes
saying, moses, listen, learn
how a
man expired, but
never died

— *Emily Thompson*

The Second Place Poem... I like these kinds of poems, which are poems where the speaker attempts to define their place of origin. Especially when a poet—like the one behind “Where I’m From”—uses imagery to do the work of evoking that place. The images here are clear, rich, and complicated. And they come to us like cards laid down on a table, one after another. This poem gives us dogs, rabbits, magnolias, sand, clay, mountains, and marsh and blends them with the almost forbidden hints of closer, more personal stories, ones rooted in vandalism, of anxiety, and fleeing. I think this mix of pretty images and darker stories insinuated gives us an overall picture that is poignant, authentic, and deeply relatable. This poem acknowledges the beauty alongside the anguish of hardship and tough decision. This poet knows that where they are from is not just a place on a map. They, like all of us, are from a geography made of experiences and memories, which are rendered with great power throughout the four stanzas of this poem.

SECOND PLACE POEM

Where I'm From

I am from the marsh,
From the cul-de-sac we vandalized,
To where the sea breeze blows,
On the great magnolia tree.

I am from the deep south,
Where dogs chase rabbits,
The earthworms crawl in rain,
Where my ballet shoes stay,
From where I had to leave.

I am from the mountains,
Where the sand is clay,
Where cats run away,
And gemstones stow away,
From where my anxiety welled inside.

Back in the sand,
Not far from the sea,
In a closet up high,
These faded memories remain.

— *Elizabeth Wilkie*

This powerful poem is a memorable recognition of the speaker's mother. That said, the poem carries with it a religious tone that I believe is initially hinted at through the title, "Inexplicable Paradise." Carrying forward this tone are the words: "womb," "vain," "Universe," "knee," "paradise," "invocation," "truth," and "nun." Some of these words, I would argue, seem more religious in the context of the title, and I think this is a lesson in the power of a good title: it teaches us how to read and think about the world of the poem. And because we have such a powerful title, we know that the poet is not fooling around when they jump into that first line: "She is, who I whelped from." That line alone arrests with its colloquial "whelped" in place of "birthed." But, most importantly, I think this a poem about the speaker's realization, or epiphany, that the mother's love is perhaps the only place they'll find repose in the agony of this garden.

THIRD PLACE POEM

Inexplicable Paradise

She is who I whelped from
And got a life from her womb.
With more than a normal human can bear a pain,
She took that happiness and not in vain.
The only Universe for her was me,
Beside I was in her, she was in me.

Crawling creeps with knee,
when I stood up on my feet?
Under her affection's shadow frig,
when have I grown up so big?

She is a flower of the paradise,
With my achievements she used to rise.
She is, who taught me to express,
Seeing me sad she gets distress.
Every invocation of her is worthful,
Love of the world is dreadful.

Make her feel irate,
It was my mistake.
My pain liberated in sap,
As I put my head on her lap.
If you ask me truth,
Her love is super natural's gift,
Paradise can be found under her feet.

I asked to the nun,
What who does not have one,
They said,
She never disappeared with her presence,
But they feel very often her absence.

Dedicated to Naomi Mason

— *Mohmedyamin Chhipa*

Fender

Once there was a bitter ant who peered into a microscope to see if there was molecular evidence that his disdain was justified, but all he could see was $A+B=CD$. He went home and ate some donut icing. His little sister was practicing her dance, which consisted of curvy, curvy, curve, square-up, square-down, horseshoe, horseshoe, horseshoe. You could hear the whir and purr of computers downtown as zero-zero-one and one-one-zero-skip-blank-zero-one whizzed through the line into the air. That was the reason the delivery man brought a box with new music inside five days later.

From within the heart of the new music, light and magic radiated everywhere, and Bitter was enticed from his cross mood. He danced so fast with his sister that they swirled the air into a tornado, which travelled very fast all the way into another town and spun the house of Win-Win and Lose-Lose into a very tall tree. A tree house seemed better to them anyway.

The music couldn't be silent, and it floated away in every direction. When it came along like aroma to the village of Bimbos and Billy-Bobs, they threw a net around it and caught some of it, but they quickly changed the major intervals to diminished and darkened its light. The music became sad and gloomy, and it depressed the Barbithas and Bully-Bubbas until they fought one another in a civil brawl which killed everyone there, except the ants.

No longer Angry-Ant went downtown on the underside of a cab fender to find out who had sent the whir and purr of zeros and ones that brought the music of light. He discovered that No-One sent them. Now realizing he'd have to be Forward-Thinking-Ant, he paused to shudder, imagining that one day ants could be forced to stand against the walls inside metal boxes and bear zeros and ones to be stored inside their helmet-heads. But now, the music had never sounded so sweet with excitement. As of this moment, he had a lot of dancing to do!

— *Ronald S. Ellison*



Walking Tall - *Karly McDonald*

Evergreen

I was happy and secure—
Nestled in the branches of my tree.
I had not thought of falling,
For I was warm and all was well.
In autumn I flourished;
Love changed my colors to my brightest hues.
I felt exhilarated in the thrills of love.
My beloved would never let me go.

But a cold winter breeze blew;
I felt a chill in my bones.
My bright colors darkened,
And soon my radiant pigment was gone.
I began to crumble.
I began to break.
The branches of his love began wavering in the wind;
The stem was shriveling, dying,
And parts of me were blown away.
My thoughts soon reflected my appearance.
Who would love me now?
I was too ugly, too broken, too dirty;
I'd soon be trampled on the ground,
Crumpled and crushed underneath the feet of children.

The wind blew harder,
And the rest of me was ripped from my frame.
Divorced from my tree, my love,

I began the long fall down,
And drifted into my new reality.
So, away I spiraled—lost.

But in the chaos I heard a strange sound,
A loving voice.
He said He had watched me fall apart,
And had waited for His opportune time
To run and save me; He caught me in midair.
“Quite a catch,” He said.
He told me I was beautiful,
Too beautiful to fall,
Too worthy to be trampled,
A soul still deserving of love.
He took me in and patched up my broken pieces.
He mended my heart and restored my love with His own.
This time, I was His beloved.

The breeze could no longer sway or tear me;
My new Love was unwavering, unchanging—everlasting.
I was not the same as I was before,
But better, and evergreen.
I had new roots
On a more stable and satisfying ground.
I was secure in Him,
Safe from the frenzied dance of leaves in the wind.

— *Karly McDonald*

Dig It?

I close my eyes

And . . .

Into the dirt I sink my hands

Fingers break through

The crust and heat

Give way

To rough, damp, cool

Black and red

Gritty and grey

Working its way

Under nails and into cracks

In my skin

Pa-Pa and Daddy

Pause

Look down

Hands on post and packer

Look at each other

And smile

And return to packing

Taking turns

One holds the post

The other packs

The loose dirt

Down

Hard

Tight

Around the post so

It stands up

Straight

Tall

Firm

In the ground

“More dirt,” Pa-Pa says.

I push more

Dirt into the hole

Around the post

While they pack

Pounding the powdery earth

Solid

“Perfect.”

— *Christian Kraus*



Untitled - Sierra Cray

For BD

He'd shot himself already—though accidentally, and in the foot, and with the cartridge rim rather than the lead bullet. That was shocking news for

me, then a fourth grader. Apparently he and a cousin had tried to free a bullet from its cartridge with a hammer and pliers, a recklessness hardly surprising

in a boy famous for doing belly busters off the high dive, whose quickness to fight contradicted his physical awkwardness. Ten years of acquaintance couldn't protect

him from the rumors that spread occasionally in the years since, some fairly substantial—too easy to believe challenges to the sexuality of a gawky male. Maybe that willingness

to accept sordid offerings expressed itself in the ease with which I took the news of his suicide. Or maybe I recognized he'd finally achieved the obliteration he'd always aspired to.

— *Alan Brasher*



Flea Market in Savannah - Janet Sanchez



New Chapter - Makayla Wilder

Bitter Almonds

Brent Lawlor, attorney
Paul Bryan, bailiff
Marcia, Annette's daughter
Carrie Jackson, cook
Anjanette, restaurant owner

NARRATOR

The setting is a popular but nondescript restaurant called Anjanette's in downtown Macon the summer of 1958. The story is largely true.

BRENT

What looks good to you today, Paul?

PAUL

I think I'll go with the meatloaf and top it off with some of Anjanette's coconut cream pie.

BRENT

You're just a little predictable there, bud. You always order meatloaf and coconut cream pie. Couldn't you branch out a little? It would probably do your soul some good.

PAUL

You're an attorney and worried about souls? Anyway, I like what I like, and her chili gives me gas.

BRENT

Well, the food's not that good here, and the décor won't win any awards either. I bet if you asked most of the people in this crowded restaurant that they would say the same thing. How about you?

PAUL

I'm not a betting man and certainly no gourmet, but I think you're right. Most people come here to see Anjanette. She treats everyone as a boon companion. And I don't think I've ever seen her have a bad day. That's the draw — Anjanette. It doesn't hurt that she's built for speed either.

BRENT

You don't miss much. I don't know how she does it. Her personal life has been nothing but a series of tragedies. First, her husband, Mr. Lyle dies — nobody really knew why. Then she met Joe Gabbert and fell for him. I hear he's not doing too well by the way. Then Julia Lyles, the mother-in-law for husband number one dies from what they thought was cancer. Then to top it off, Marcia her daughter was hospitalized with a respiratory infection — lingered for a while and then died.

PAUL

Man, some people are just born under a dark star. I knew she had gone through a few rough patches — I just didn't know how rough It had been. If you saw the way she talks to her customers, you'd think she never had a dark day. Makes me feel weak when I start complaining about my troubles.

BRENT

You are weak. Here comes Anjanette.

ANJANETTE

What's your poison, boys?

BRENT

I'll have the chicken croquettes, some sweet tea, and a piece of lemon pie and Tonto here will have — drum roll please — the meatloaf plate. Guess what else he's having.

ANJANETTE

Oh, you go on. You're too hard on him, Brent. Some people are nonconformists and others are traditionalists. Paul is a traditionalist. You could probably set your watch by his daily routine. But it's the traditionalists who make the world go round. The rest of us are so bogged down by the whys, the whatifs, and wherefores, choosing this or that, deciding to be different just to be different, that we never get anything done. And by the way, Paul, I'll bring you some coffee — black and an extra big slice of coconut cream pie. Is that right?

PAUL

Sure is, darlin'. You've got a memory like an elephant.

ANJANETTE

It's no trouble trying to please people I like. And, Brent, you be nice.

PAUL

See what I mean. She knows the name of everybody in this place. And think of all the orders she has to keep straight. I don't know how she does it.

BRENT

How have the Dawgs been doing?

PAUL

The Dawgs have gone to the dogs this year, so I've given up on them. Looks like some of them could hurt themselves just walking onto the field.

CARRIE

I'm the cook here. Most people never even see me, but the cook is the heart of any restaurant. If you want to know about a restaurant, look at the kitchen. I spend my days in the kitchen, and I can tell you all about some of the things I've seen. And I'm not talking about what the health department sees or the custodian sees. I'm talking about what the cook sees. That Anjanette — everybody thinks she's just so nice. She's nice to the customers all right, but she's not nice to everybody. I don't like the way she talks to her daughter. She treats the customers like kings and queens, but she treats her daughter like dirt. I even saw her yell at her daughter in front of the customers one day. But they're all on her side. They probably thought the poor kid was being naughty. And then there's all that stuff about going to the root doctor. That woman is superstitious. One day I spilled some salt and she had some kind of fit. If she stepped on a crack, there's no telling what she'd do.

BRENT

I saw you the other day outside courtroom 6. It looked like you were reading a book.

PAUL

Is that so surprising? Why didn't you stop and say hello?

BRENT

You were at the far end of the corridor, and I was late to a hearing with Judge Abrams. And it's not a good idea to be late to a hearing with judge Abrams. Was it a good book?

PAUL

I haven't decided. It's about a sweet old lady who may not be all that sweet. So far people are dropping like flies all around her and nobody seems to know why.

BRENT

What's it called?

PAUL

Bitter Almonds. Don't ask me why. I haven't gotten that far.

ANJANETTE

Here you are, boys. You two get better looking every day.

BRENT

Tell that to my wife.

ANJANETTE

If she comes in here I will. Do you need anything else?

PAUL

I'll have some of that battery acid that you call coffee.

ANJANETTE

Sure thing. And how did you know?

PAUL

How did I know what?

ANJANETTE

How did you know that I put battery acid in the coffee? I thought that was a trade secret. Gives it that special bite — you know?

BRENT

You needle her quite a bit.

PAUL

She got off easy this time. And I think she likes it.

CARRIE

Just look at the way Anjanette is carrying on with those two. You'd think she was eighteen years old. I don't like her, and it's not just because she calls me lazy. I am lazy — I admit it. But she's not knocking herself out for me either. I think something is not just quite right about that woman. I don't like her, but it's something more than that. She tried to pretend that she was this loving mother, bringing lemonade and treats to her child while she was in the hospital. But she didn't love that child, and once I saw her do something funny with the lemonade. She's not what she seems to so many people. I wish I could catch her red-handed.

MARCIA

It was dark and cold. And then I just seemed to know that I was dead. That was after the long silence. But the dead do live on in a way. The dead remember. Sometimes I felt that my mother didn't really love me. But other times she could be so nice. Like all those times she brought me lemonade when I was so sick. Towards the end when I wasn't eating or drinking much of anything she made take a sip of that lemonade. I think she was trying to comfort me the only way she knew. I probably imagined this, but the lemonade had a funny taste. I didn't like the taste. But when you're sick nothing really tastes good. Lemonade is lemonade after all. But I remember that taste — like bitter almonds.

ANJANETTE

Carrie is a good cook, but if she keeps on acting like she's been acting, I'm going to have to do something about it. She's lazy, and she knows it, so I called her on it. What else was I supposed to do? All I know is that I'm getting tired of being watched every minute. And I know she talks about me to everybody that will listen. She's a good cook, but I'm going to have to find a way of getting rid of her. I've got a good thing going on here, and I can't afford to let her ruin my reputation.

PAUL

Did you hear about Errol Flynn? He just beat that charge about having an affair with an underage girl.

BRENT

If anyone could win a case like that, Flynn could. He's skated through life and beats charge after charge because he's got an affable personality and a stage presence that works for him in real life. He probably should have done some serious time long ago. His raffish charm gives him carte blanche to act as he does.

PAUL

Well, he had a high- priced attorney, and then most people don't get beyond the surface of things.

BRENT

Do you think it's possible to die from heartburn?

PAUL

I don't think so. Maybe it's the ghost of chicken croquettes past.

BRENT

Very funny. Did you steal that one from Berle?

PAUL

No, Berle is known as the Thief of Gagdad, and I think one thief of Gagdad is quite enough. See you here next week?

BRENT

Yeah—if I survive.

MARCIA

Did my mother love me? She said she did. She could be so nice. She seemed happy, but sometimes she could be so mean. Did she love me?

CARRIE

Well, husband number two just died — same mysterious symptoms as husband number one. You'd think all the attorneys, and cops, and court officials in this crowded place could put two and two together. But I guess somebody is starting to get it. I hear that doctor that treated him is asking for an autopsy.

NARRATOR

After the autopsy was completed, a criminal investigation began. And the truth, which escaped notice for so many years, was revealed. What should have been obvious was not obvious because people prefer to believe what they want to believe. The investigation and the verdict sent ripples throughout the small community that was Anjanette's restaurant.

BRENT

I have seen human nature at its worst and should have wondered about the strange

coincidences, the mysterious deaths. I guess this one was just too close to home. It also makes me wonder if she committed even more crimes that haven't come to light.

PAUL

How could I be so wrong? I was shocked when Brent told me about Anjanette. He told me that Anjanette was being indicted for murder. He says that Anjanette was responsible for the deaths of her husband, the mother-law, her second husband, her daughter. She poisoned them all. The police were able to make the arrest not long after Brent and I had lunch at her restaurant. Brent didn't feel well that day. And that coconut cream pie I ordered tasted funny — a funny bitter almond taste.

NARRATOR

In spite of her impassioned statement to the jury, Anjanette Lyles was convicted of four counts of murder. She poisoned her victims with Terro, an ant poison, essentially arsenic, which she kept on hand at the restaurant, a poison that can be detected by its bitter almond smell and taste. Anjanette was judged insane and ended her days at the state mental hospital in Milledgeville.

— *Kenneth Homer*



Solitude - *Terrie Daniel*



Mother Nature - *Eric Wruck*



Belle - *Terrie Daniel*

Soon Enough and For a Long, Long, Time

Jimmy could almost hear his dad's voice: *Other people might like you, but family's the only ones you can count on* as he and his brother Del headed toward the Oasis tavern to find Ed Mahoney, their brother-in-law, and give him the beating of his life. Ed had been warned: hit their sister one more time and he'd wish he'd never been born. But he'd gone and got liquored up and done it again. They watched the sidewalks; Ed was on foot because Vera wouldn't tell him where she hid the car keys and that's why he slugged her. At least that's what she said. She had driven over to Mom's and Mom had called Del at work and when he got off he came by and got the details from Vera, who had a black eye, but was otherwise calm by that point, sitting at the kitchen table, smoking and drinking coffee.

When Jimmy hopped in Del's '40 Nash Sedan American, he saw a .22 rifle laying across the back seat.

"We're not going to need that are we?"

"Better to have it and not need it than need it and not have it. He might have that Kraut pistol on him." Jimmy didn't think it was going to be much of a fight. Ed was scrappy, but he was only Jimmy's size, about five ten, and Del was six seven. And besides, there were two of them.

"What if he's not at the Oasis?"

Del took a while to answer, "Mom said he might have a girlfriend. We find out who she is, we'll go over there."

"A girlfriend?"

Del nodded and flicked the ash from his Pall Mall in the tray. "That's what Mom heard."

"We should whip his ass just for that. Jeez, what did Vera ever see in that guy?"

"I guess we all looked mighty appealing in our uniforms. Besides, like Dad always said, 'When he's sober, Ed's the nicest guy in the world, but when he's drunk he's mean as a snake.'"

"Well this snake is gonna get stomped."

Del blew out a long stream of smoke, and then rolled down the window to let in some of crisp October air. Jimmy wanted to ask Del for a cigarette, but he knew what Del would say. *Hell no, you're just a kid. You still got some growing to do. Coach would probably bench you for the whole season if he saw you smoking.* Del was always looking out for him, even more so now that their dad was gone.

It was good to have a big brother as big as Del. Any time punks were giving Jimmy and his friends trouble and then saw Del coming, they'd take off like cartoon mice.

They passed the white walls of the cemetery. Jimmy used to climb those walls, and it was always obvious he had done it by the chalk on his pants.

“I don’t know why you like that place so much,” Mom once said. “We’ll all be in there soon enough-- and for a long, long time.” But he liked looking at the goldfish ponds and the angel statues. He liked to read the headstones. There was one he had memorized:

Remember friend, when passing by,

As you are now, so once was I.

As I am now, so you shall be,

So be prepared to follow me.

He’d visit his dad and tell him how well he was pitching and how the Cardinals were doing. He’d tell him how much he missed going hunting and fishing with him. How much they all missed him playing “You Are My Sunshine” on the piano. Sometimes Jimmy would stop by the markers of long dead relatives he’d never known and remember the stories told about them: his great grandfather, who had to flee Kentucky for shooting a revenuer — would he make the final cut when everybody gets up out of their graves and stands in judgment? — an aunt who had died from the Spanish Influenza in 1918; a cousin whose ship had been torpedoed by the Japs. Surely they would make the final cut. All Jimmy knew for sure was how grateful he was that Del wasn’t there. After Del got called up and went overseas, Jimmy had prayed to God every night: *Please, God, protect Del, and keep him safe. He’s all we got now that Dad’s gone.*

The Oasis Tavern was an olive green cinder block building with a neon sign over the doorway. Horseshoes rang out from the pits in back, and Patsy Cline sang out on the juke box inside. It was darker and smokier than Jimmy remembered. He hadn’t been there since his dad died. He searched one of the walls for the little riser where western swing groups could play, but it was gone. His dad had sat in on piano now and then. Vera had come to see him and that’s when she first met Ed in his MP uniform, acting the fool, trying to sing “Don’t Fence Me In.”

The bartender, a beefy redhead, raised an inquiring chin.

“What can I get you?”

“We’re looking for Ed Mahoney?” said Del. “Has he been in tonight?”

The bartender shook his head. “He’s eighty-sixed.”

“Hey, Delbert,” said a blonde woman at the end of the bar sitting next to a man in a zoot suit. “Remember me?”

Del moved down the bar, looking her over.

“Barb Corrigan,” she said when it was obvious Del didn’t remember her. “Wilder High.”

“Oh yeah. Hi there.”

“What are you up to these days?”

“Well, right now I’m looking for Ed Mahoney. You seen him?”

“Naw. He got in a fight last time he was in here,” she said. “Shooting his mouth off as usual. That guy don’t like nobody.”

The man sitting with her squinted up at Del. “How tall are you?”

“Five-nineteen,” said Del.

Barb laughed and smiled at Jimmy. “Hiya kid. I heard about you. Jimmy, right? You’re a regular Dizzy Dean.”

Jimmy shrugged. He had heard about her too--*Backseat Barb*.

“You got any idea where he might be?” said Del.

“No, and I don’t care,” said Barb. “What you fellas want with him anyway? Oh, that’s right — you’re kin now, ain’t you?”

“Is there a gal he’s been seeing?”

The smile left her face. “How the hell should I know?”

“I heard things.”

“Well bully for you.”

“Hey, Slim,” said the man, turning a little on his stool. “The lady said she didn’t know nothing.”

Del eased back--relaxed, but ready, “Nice suit you got there.”

Barb stroked the wide lapels. “It *is* nice, ain’t it?”

“Yeah, it is,” said Del. “First time I seen one on a white man, though.”

“Hey Marvin,” the man called out the side of his mouth. “This guy don’t like my suit.”

The bartender bellied over, one of his hands sliding under the bar, and faced Del. “Leave my customers alone, OK?”

There was a pay phone on the wall near the entrance. Del went over to it and Jimmy followed. Del fished a dime out of his pants pocket and dropped it in the slot.

“Who you calling?”

“Vera. See if the dog came crawling back.”

He dialed and waited. There was no answer.

As Del and Jimmy headed out, Barb shouted at them, “You find him, you tell him to get lost.”

Del looked around the parking lot and up and down the street.

“Did you have supper?” he asked.

“No. Are you hungry?”

“I could use some coffee.”

They drove a mile or so to a diner. A couple came out, leaving the place empty. Del and Jimmy took a booth, and the waitress, a plump, farm girl type, came over to take their order.

“Just coffee,” said Del.

“I’ll have French fries and a chocolate shake,” said Jimmy.

“Comin’ right up.”

Del lit a cigarette and seemed deep in thought for a minute and then said, “Listen, it’s getting late. After we’re done here, I’m going to take you home.”

“It ain’t that late.”

“I shouldn’t have let you come anyway. Last thing you need is to bust your hand or get your arm broke.”

“I can take care of myself.”

“I know you can, but — I don’t think Dad would have liked it. You don’t need to worry about nothing but baseball. He wanted to see you on the mound at Sportsman’s Park, wanted that more than anything in the world. He was real proud of you. We’re all real proud of you.

“He was proud of you, too.”

Del shrugged. “Yeah. Maybe.”

“He was and you know it. That medal you got.”

“Getting shot ain’t that hard. Anyway, I’m taking you back. I’ll probably turn in myself. I don’t think we’re going to find him tonight. I sure am glad they don’t have any kids. Been married almost three years and ain’t got no kids. That tells you something right there.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know. Something ain’t right. Man drinks like he does. Hits his wife. Runs around with other women. Can’t hold a job for more than a month. Who’d want somebody like that for a father anyway?”

“Maybe he wouldn’t be like that if they had a kid.”

“Maybe.”

Jimmy got up. “Got to use the can.”

He swung into the men’s room and over to the urinal. The place smelled of piss and puke. Somebody was in the stall, coughing and spitting. The toilet flushed and the stall door opened and out came Ed, red eyed and wobbly, his bowling shirt untucked. When he saw Jimmy he stopped, his mouth hanging open.

“Hey Jimmy.”

Jimmy quickly zipped up and turned to face him. Del was a handsome man. Jimmy always thought he looked a little like Dana Andrews, and he was as fit as he’d been as an MP.

Ed coughed and shook his head. “Listen, I —”

“I don’t want to hear it, you sorry son of a bitch.”

Ed raised his hands, palms out. “I don’t know what to say. “

“Nothing you *can* say. Del’s out there and he’s mad as hell. We all are.”

“You know she’s got a mouth on her. A man can only take so much of that.”

“She’s a woman.”

“You’re just a kid. You still think all women are good. Well, believe me, they ain’t.”

“She’s my sister.”

Ed nodded. “Don’t matter what I say, does it?”

He went to the sink, turned on the faucet, cupped some water into his hands, splashed his face, and looked at himself in the mirror.

“Lordy,” he said. “Don’t I look like hell.”

“You’re going to look a lot worse when Del’s gets through with you.”

Ed grinned and shook his head. “Thing is Jimmy, I’ve had a rough night.”

“That’s too bad,” said Jimmy, and as he said this, Ed reached one hand behind his back and pulled a German Luger out of his waistband and wagged it at the ceiling.

“I took this off a dead kraut. *I* didn’t shoot him, but whoever did didn’t take his gun, so I took it. I told my daddy I shot him though, you know, to make him think better of me. And he did, for a little while anyway. You boys had a good daddy, didn’t you?”

“Don’t you talk about him. You just thank your lucky stars it’s me standing here and not him.”

“Took you fishing and hunting. Taught you all kinds of things. My old man was a drunk and not much good, but I’ll tell you one thing — he would never lay with his own daughter.”

A cold hand seized Jimmy’s heart.

“That’s right,” said Ed, stuffing the Luger back into his pants. “Vera told me all about it. How your old man used to sneak in at night and —”

Jimmy swung, but Ed blocked the punch and spun him around and got him in a choke hold. Jimmy struggled, but couldn’t escape. He gasped for air, feeling his head grow light and tingly.

“I got nothing against you boys. It ain’t your fault, but I’ll be damned if I’m going to take

a beating tonight. Not from the likes of you.”

When he saw the fight had gone out of the boy, Ed loosened his hold and pushed him against the wall.

“Now you go back out there and don’t say nothing, and I’ll just stay in here until you’re gone. Then I’ll get out of town. I’ve been thinking about it for a long time. Be the best thing for everybody. You just wait here until you get your mind right.”

Jimmy hung his head, holding back tears, trying to block out the dark pictures swirling in his brain. Finally, he took a deep breath, slipped out of the door and walked back to the table where Del was drinking coffee and Jimmy’s milk shake and fries were waiting.

“What’d you do, fall in?” asked Del.

Jimmy sat down and stared at the fries.

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing. I ain’t as hungry as I thought.”

Del took a last sip of coffee. “Yeah. I guess we’ll get you on home.”

He grabbed the check and walked up to the counter. The waitress smiled and rang up the cash register. Then she looked at Jimmy and whispered. “Is that guy all right in there?”

“What?” said Jimmy.

“The guy that was sitting over there. He’s been in there for a long time.”

On the table she was looking at was a cup of coffee, an empty plate, crumpled up napkins. Del tried to read Jimmy’s face, but Jimmy turned to get a toothpick out of the dispenser.

“Who’s in there?”

Jimmy shrugged. “Some old drunk.”

Del studied the men’s room door for a few moments, as if deciding what to do, and then handed the waitress a couple of bills. “Keep the change.”

“Thanks, Honey,” she chirped. “You boys have a nice night now.”

Del walked out and Jimmy trailed behind.

Del opened the Nash’s back door. “Did he have his gun on him?”

Jimmy said, “What? Who?”

“Is that why you lied to me?” He pulled out the .22 rifle and cradled it in his arms and leaned his back against the car. “We’ll talk about that later.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to ask him to give up his gun and take his beating like a man. If he pulls on

me, that's on him."

"But he's family," said Jimmy.

"Not really."

They waited about fifteen minutes, and finally Ed stuck his head out the door and said, "Hey Del."

"Come on out here, Ed. Put your hands up in the air and turn around and walk backwards."

"Hold on now," said Ed, forcing a chuckle. "I'm the one with the po-lice training."

"Just do it," said Del. And then to Jimmy he said, "Go on and take his gun."

Ed turned around and backed up, and when he was close enough, Jimmy went up and pulled the Luger from his waistband.

"Bring it here," said Del. When Jimmy handed it to him he looked at it then handed both it and the rifle to Jimmy. Then he rushed up and grabbed Ed and began pummeling him. Ed swung out wildly, but only caught Del on the arms. Finally, he covered his head with his hands and fell and Del kicked him over and over.

"All right!" shouted Jimmy, "That's enough! You got him."

Del stopped, barely winded. Ed lay like a fetus on the asphalt.

The waitress stuck her head out of the door. "I called the police, so you boys best get on out of here."

Del bent down and spoke calmly to Ed. "We're going to get Vera away from you. You hear me? You stay away from her or I swear to God I'll kill you."

"That's a good idea," Ed gasped. "That's a real good idea."

Del turned and took the guns from Jimmy and put them in the Nash's trunk. Then he went around to the driver's side and was about to get in when he saw Jimmy wasn't following.

"Come on; let's go."

"I better stay here a while," said Jimmy. "Make sure he's ok."

"He'll be all right."

"You just go on. I'll be there directly."

"You heard her. The cops are coming."

When he saw Jimmy wasn't going to comply, Del said, "All, right, let's get him in the car. We'll drop him off St. Luke's."

They put Ed in the back seat, and on the way to the hospital no one spoke for a while until Del finally asked, "What are you going to say, Ed?"

“Don’t worry brother-in-law. I’ll just say I got jumped by assailants unknown. I think you busted my ribs. In fact, I know it.”

“Don’t feel good does it?”

“Hey, kid,” Ed whispered to Jimmy. “Forget about what I said back there. Probably nothing to it.”

“What’s that?” asked Del.

“I don’t know,” said Jimmy. “Just drunk talk.”

When they passed the cemetery, a fog had descended over its white walls and Jimmy felt the urge to tell his brother to stop the car so that he could run past the silent angel statues to the grave of his father and somehow know the truth, but he didn’t, and instead watched Del’s profile, illuminated one moment, submerged in shadows the next.

— *S. D. Lavender*



The Pitcher - *Terrie Daniel*



It Did Not Break Me - Kimberly Page



Untitled - *Janet Sanchez*

There's Always More

A local breakfast shop in the small town of Lenox, Massachusetts, holds the secret recipe for the perfect cup of coffee. At least that is what Rob Sway would tell you if asked. Brewed just right so your tongue is not burned, but to a temperature that ensured a hot cup by the time he got to his office. Without it, Rob's day would feel hours longer, as if the minutes on the clock needed an invitation to turn. Today, Rob joins a team of investors interested in, well--making money, just like every investor. Last Monday was Rob's 49th birthday, and he has adapted to the investor lifestyle over the years, although it was not an easy start. He was described by his peers in junior high as a prodigy. Rob started working at the age of fourteen, even though his parents were wealthy and always supplied him with the necessities. However, from an early age he was fascinated with making money. Not having money--making it.

Being handed a paycheck has proven to be one of the best feelings in Rob's life. As a busboy at a neighborhood pizza joint, Rob never received the compensation he desired. From an early age, his need for more came apparent. He rose from bus boy to cashier, and eventually to an internship with his uncle's investment firm. When Rob graduated high school he knew his future relied on numbers. He was quick with them; his teachers had not adequately challenged him after he had become bored with trigonometry. His bank account grew. His secret to success came in the form of stocks. Being able to own a share of a company turned everything into a game. The more he earned, the more he turned right around and invested.

College was high Rob's priority list. He knew if he wanted to be successful in the field of finance, a degree was necessary, but to be his own boss? That does not require a piece of paper. Rob believed that following his heart would prove to be more valuable than some piece of paper with an official stamp on it. Dartmouth was the destination for Rob, but soon after his sophomore year, on course to getting all A's, Rob dropped out and returned home to Lenox. He did not want to waste time; time was always working against him.

Fast-forward to the present day, where a forty-nine-year-old Rob Sway sits at his desk, palms pressed against his forehead. He is not yet his own boss, and quite frankly, Rob has not thought of being of a "self-made millionaire" since his twenty-fifth birthday. He raises his head and stares at the clock, wishing he could stop the hands from moving. Rob works as a stockbroker at a prestigious firm: Clydesdale's in New York. His firm is on the verge of a merger, wanting to combine efforts with a business entrepreneur in Hong Kong. The investor's name is Doji Urehara, who specializes in architecture, and has created a company that will build faster and

cheaper than any American supplier. Rob was put on a team that has been assigned to attract and deal with other companies wishing to invest in Doji Designs.

Rob just got off the phone with an old friend whom he had contacted about a potential investment; unfortunately, he was not given good news. His friend's company fell through on their initial investment, putting Rob below the quota of capital. He's worried that if he doesn't meet the deadline, he won't be invited to join the company after merging. Rob curses under his breath. It has been the third cancellation this quarter, and Rob considers the problem to be the stabilization of the companies he deals with. *There's nothing I can do*, Rob thinks as he realizes how late he has stayed at the office. In fact, as he stands up, Rob realizes he is the only one in the office. *So much for a self-made millionaire.*

Rob clicks the down button on the elevator panel. He is on the sixteenth floor. When the door opens, on his phone trying to order his favorite takeout, he bumps into a cart and slams his shin into the metal guard around the wheels. Before he can shout out in pain, he realizes the face behind the cart is staring. Composing himself, Rob apologizes to the man and says he needs to be more careful.

"No, no, my friend," says the man. "That was my fault; I should be more careful." Rob peers at the name tag in the left corner of the man's polo shirt. "Christian" is stitched in red.

"Long day at the office, huh?" asks Christian, checking his wristwatch.

Rob recognizes the watch. His father used to have one just like it, a Rolex. He's a little caught off guard at a janitor wearing a Rolex. "Yeah I lost track of time; I like your watch."

"Oh thank you, one of the very first things I saved up for when I was younger. Have not regretted the purchase since."

How long it would take to save up for a Rolex on a janitor's salary? As the two men switch places and Rob pushes the button to take him to ground floor, the man says, "If you lose time, it loses you."

Loses me?

The next day is a nightmare for Rob. Not only does he miss his alarm, the local coffee shop with the world's second best cup of coffee has been closed for renovations. As he rolls into the elevator and presses the button for the sixteenth floor, he notices one of the CEOs of the company on ground floor speaking to another man. They have their heads together, studying a book. As the doors close, he recognizes the man as the one who had hit him with a cart the night before.

Christian? Why would Burke, the CEO, be talking to Christian the janitor?" As Rob finds his way to his desk the question lingers. Maybe he spilled his coffee and was thanking him for cleaning it up. No. They were looking into one of Burke's secret black books, rumored in the office to contain the secrets to stocks. Surely, though that was not going on. Burke wouldn't share his secrets with one of his top clients, much less a janitor.

Being deep in thought, Rob barely hears the thud on the other end of his desk. Looking up, he sees his boss, Jed, one of his finance advisors from Dartmouth, who helped bring Rob along to the company.

"Clients are dropping like flies," says Jed, "and you show up an hour and a half late during a merger? Are you serious man? You know how things work around here. You have more experience at this company than half of this office combined."

Rob doesn't know whether to take that as a compliment or not. In the middle of Jed's rant, Christian appears in the cubicles located directly behind Rob without either of the men knowing. Rob replies to Jed, blaming traffic and the closed coffee shop.

"Stop with that talk, Rob. I need you here to own up to mistakes, not make excuses. What about the two clients we just lost on your side of this merger. What happened?"

"The companies fell through," says Rob. "Jimmy called yesterday and told me they were out because of external forces changing their approach to the merger."

"Robby, that is the nice way guys like us tell each other they decided to go with another investment firm. Man, come on you should know that!" Jed turns around and puts his hand on his forehead, and then without word, returns to his office.

What do you want me to do, Jed? I've done everything I can.

Christian coughs and comes over. "It looks like you could use a bit of advice. So far it appears as though you have not listened to what I told you previously. Time seems to be in control here. Did I overhear Jed say an hour and half late? Not to mention, you already let time keep you here long last night. And with those clients? All the time you spent attempting to reel them in the investment cycle was wasted when they called; am I wrong?"

"I did everything I could do," replies Rob.

Christian the janitor, turning his cart towards the door, says, "Do you really believe that?"

Now it is near the end of the week, meaning the end of the merger. Luckily, Rob had some luck yesterday and found a list of twenty potential new clients interested in Doji Designs. The list was found under the trashcan of his office; Rob had never

seen the list before, but thought that maybe his team was able to send him some clients because they had already met their quota. Rob had risen early, feeling a bit of motivation after his words with Christian the day before, and made his own coffee. The first two names on the list were home runs for Rob. Both companies accepting the sales pitch and investing capital into Doji Designs made this day a hot start. The third number looks just like any number; however, after dialing it, Rob hears a ringing coming from right behind him. Looking around curiously, Rob hangs up. He tries the number again, and once more, a phone rings behind him. It gets louder and clearer. Just as Rob is about to stand up, he is surprised to see a familiar face.

“I see you found my list.”

“Christian? Was that your phone ringing?”

“It was; I knew it would not be wise to include it as the first number, so I thought I would get you started with two of my peers whom I knew would invest, getting your day off to the right start.” He chuckles, seeing the confused look on Rob’s face. “I see time is not controlling you today, how does that feel?”

Rob shakes off his confusion just enough to answer Christian. “Today has been better than most of my previous days; but seriously, what is this list?”

“Friends, associates, some family of mine, but I cannot say who, that would ruin your golden sales pitch.”

“Sales pitch? Christian who are you? Are you some kind of undercover boss?”

Christian slides over a chair and sits down across from Rob. “I have worked at this company for four years, at the same position I am in now, and watched you dominate sales calls year in and year out, until last year. Last year, you gave up, lost motivation. You lost sight of your path and let time control you. Just like I did when I started my own firm.”

He brushes some lint off his shoulder. “At one point in my life, I dominated the northern hemisphere in sales as far as the stock market is concerned.”

“Wait just a minute,” says Rob. “I mean no disrespect, Christian, but currently you work as a janitor, and now you’re telling me you might be the most important stockbroker I have ever known?”

“You see me in my janitor suit, doing low level but high quality work, because I finally stopped letting time get the best of me.” Christian then explains his whole life to Rob.

He tells him about the path of instant success he was put on, sounding similar to Rob's career. A college dropout, Christian was the first stockbroker in the early 1980s to introduce penny stocks that cost less to a consumer with a better return of success. When he had his client hooked on the game of stocks, that's when success came. Soon his ability to win people over with a smile and a handshake became nationally known. Christian built a company from scratch and ran Wall Street for over fifteen years.

So, Rob thinks to himself, if this guy is telling the truth, why is he a janitor?

"I know what you are thinking," Christian says, smiling. "Why did I trade in my thousand dollar suits for greasy coveralls? Well, it's quite simple really. You might understand it well, Rob. I had let time control me."

"What you told me in the elevator."

"That is exactly it. The reason I decided to walk away from the business was because I kept letting time consume my happiness, and the most important thing to a man is happiness."

"So your conversation with Burke earlier on the ground floor —"

"Oh, Ed? He's an old friend; we actually met each other in high school. He is the first person I shared my black book with."

Now Rob is skeptical. Is Christian claiming credit for Burke's black book of secrets? This cannot be true. This was an infamous guide to making money. Just as Rob is going to call Christian a liar, Edward Burke, CEO, peers around the corner to greet both Rob and Christian.

"Afternoon gentleman. Chris, I thought about what you said about the merger; I really like your approach. Thanks for saving my ass yet again."

Rob stares into the floor in disbelief.

Christian touches his shoulder. "Do you believe me now, Rob?"

Christian then explains how lately he has noticed Rob's struggle to make his quota. He repeats how important it is to control what can be controlled because added stress takes away from personal happiness.

"What others do should not concern you. Sadly, it's human nature to be selfish; therefore, control what you can control."

It all makes sense to Rob now; for the past four years he only paid attention to himself; he didn't think about the clients or his colleagues. He had been selfish and Christian made him realize that he has to get back to the times where time itself was on his hands.

“So,” asks Rob, “what was your advice to Burke earlier today?”

“I told him to keep his team come merger time. The people here are the people who have made him money for years; now, why would he want to change that? I told him not to worry; just keep those who are reliable close, especially the ones who have been here for fifteen years.”

— *Kohlton Hamann*

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