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I’ve been the Editor-in-Chief of Seaswells for two years now, and I am again surprised by the talent displayed in the work that gets brought into the publications room. This year is much like last year in that regard. There are so many talented students at the College of Coastal Georgia, and I like to think of Seaswells as a publication that allows the beautiful art and literary work of the school to be exhibited throughout the entire community.

Seaswells was born 46 years ago in 1966. It’s an interesting feeling to think that somebody was doing the same thing over 40 years ago that we at Seaswells are doing now. Today, as it was then, the literary/art magazine of the College of Coastal Georgia is designed to showcase all graphically reproducible forms of artwork. All present and former students, alumni, faculty, staff, and administrators at the College of Coastal Georgia may submit their work for possible inclusion in the magazine. While it is our goal to select the highest quality work submitted, we also try to include the work of as many different students as possible.

The Seaswells staff offer prize money to the winners of four contests: Barr Poetry, Seaswells Art, Austin/Garner Prose, and Seaswells Photography. Only current students are allowed to enter the contests, and all works are judged anonymously. The top three winners in each genre are awarded prizes of $50 to $100.

This year, we have focused on the notion of 2012 being the beginning of a “Brave New World” rather than the end of the world as we know it. We have tried to use new, avant garde ideas throughout the magazine, and we hope they are as inspiring for you as they have been for us.

Seaswells has been an exciting and interesting experience for me. I speak for the whole staff when I say that we are pleased and honored to have been able to take the works of art you have given us and create the wonderful magazine you now hold in your hands. I would like to thank Emily Axelson, Jake Lemings, Patrick Thigpen, Brandon West, and Layne Williams for all the work they have done and their fantastic publicity ideas. Jennifer Anderson and Jami Carmine have also contributed many good ideas. But I especially want to thank Karen Price, Shawntay Rivers, and, of course, Sharon Bartkovich, for the all the work they continue to do. It is my sincerest hope that you, the reader, can see the love we have put into this publication and that you genuinely enjoy it.

Shandy Stubbs
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Seaswells Photography Contest

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Blues in Black & White
Shawntay Rivers

18 BEST BLACK & WHITE
If
Justin Gines

25 BEST COLOR
Station Falls
Larry Carter

28 BEST COMPUTER-ENHANCED
Come Over to My Pad
Pamela Westcott

7 Low Tide at 3:10
Justin Gines

9 We All Fall Down
Megan Nash

9 That's Mr. Squirrel to You!
Sidonia Serafini

10 Coming Up for Air
Justin Gines

13 Party Glasses
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13 Psychedlic DJ (Computer-enhanced)
Justin Gines

15 A Lost Era
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16 Beached Treasure (Computer-enhanced)
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16 Hallowed Ground
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19 Earth’s Edge (Computer-enhanced)
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22 Rest for the Weary
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26 Young Thinking
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27 Mud, Glorious Mud
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27 Sweet Dreams
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31 Step by Step
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33 Big Swell
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35 Miracle of Flight
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36 Incoming
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Austin/Garner Prose Contest

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ART

Seaswells Art Contest

12  FIRST PLACE  Rope on Fire, Colored pencil - - - - - - Shandy Stubbs
29  SECOND PLACE  Summer’s Last Gasp, Watercolor - - - - - - Jamie Hardy
34  THIRD PLACE  Meditation on Water, Ink - - - - - - David Zalian

23  The Player, Charcoal and chalk on red-toned paper - - - - - - David Zalian
32  Shrimper at Sunrise, Watercolor - - - - - - - - - - - - Jamie Hardy
32  Imagining Pink, Charcoal and acrylic - - - - - - - - - - - - Lindsey Cirmotich
38  Between the Lines, Cardboard print - - - - - - - - - - - - Lindsey Cirmotich
42  The Hafiz Tree, Ink - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Lexi Holloway
44  Lovebirds, Diptych, music sheets with mod podge and ink - - Lexi Holloway
55  Mr. Free-man, India ink - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Gabbi Judy
56  Finds in the Attic, Oil paint - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Lindsey Cirmotich
64  Tranquility Delivers Transcendence, Brush pen, bamboo brush, and acrylic ink on cardstock - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Kaci Coleman
66  When the Canary Sings, Acrylic on canvas - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - David Frey
67  The GOP, Digital art - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - Jason Oglesby

ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST

The x-ray of a starfish chosen for the cover of Seaswells 2012 was taken by Justin Gines, who graduates from CCGA this May with an Associate of Science Degree in Radiologic Science. Gines, who also took the best black and white photo in this year’s contest, has been a regular contributor to the magazine, this being the fourth issue of Seaswells to include his work.

Although the idea of imaging sea life with x-rays is far from original, Gines says he was drawn to it because we rarely see objects from this prospective. “It can be all too easy,” he says, “to take the abundance of beauty that comes with coastal living for granted.” He hopes this unique outlook on a familiar object might inspire us to look more deeply into our wondrous surroundings.

Gines received his first camera in 2006 as a Christmas gift. Initially, he was drawn to photographing architecture and landscapes—“probably because they tend to stay still for the camera,” he says jokingly. More recently, he has begun to focus on wildlife and on abstract textures.

Is there a connection between his skills as a hobbyist and his choice of a field of study? Gines sees the parallels between photography and diagnostic imaging, but also adds, “using radiation to visualize internal structures certainly takes a little more finesse, and a lot more training!”
SEASWELLS

Sea sounds — surf — gull cries and sandpipers
Ever near us here — if we but seek
And let the sound and sight inspire.
Sun and shadow, song and sorrow
Wander in the heart — awaiting utterance.
Eagerly the wind supplies the melody
Lest the song be lost, — and we,
Longing for a fragment of the universe,
Sing, — before our voice is swallowed by the wind.

Phyllis Barr

Seaswells Revisited

Sun, sand, and salt spray,
ebb and flow each night and day
as children run, laugh and play
sounds of surf enslave
wet and warm are the waves
ever so inviting; we crave
full natives and tourists to sleep
lowly and slowly the waters creep
stopping briefly at the shoreline only to retreat

Kristee Glace

SEASWELLS

The rays of Sunlight kiss the mist
With Ebb and flow waves spin and twist
And grains of sand too great to list
Lie on the changing Shore
Upon the Wind birds take to flight
Their tandem dance an Epic sight
They dive to depths beyond the Light
I Linger wanting more
For Surely life’s too short

Joann Wagner
Several hundred years ago in a place not far away, the animals gathered in the midst of the forest, holding a single acorn. Agreement was made that this acorn would be the perfect seed to plant. The animals envisioned that they would help the seed to become a mighty oak and in return, the oak would remember all the animals that planted and cherished it.

The birds wanted the tree to grow straight and strong so they could rest in his branches and build homes for their babes and have the tree sway them all to sleep. The squirrels wanted the tree to grow straight, springy branches with colorful leaves. They wanted a place to store their food, to teach their children to run and jump, and a place to play ‘hide-and-seek.’ The animals that would gather at the base of its trunk wanted a shady place to rest and a place to escape from the hot sun, the harsh winds, or the storms of life. Making their home at the base of the great tree, they surrounded him with pleasant play.

The mighty oak grew and grew. He played with the animals that helped him to grow and he became very old. He played with children of children and told them his ancient stories of long ago. He was cozy and comfortable, nestled between the friendly pines, and he gladly gave his mossy hair to the birds to build their nests and swayed them gently in the breeze to rock them to sleep. Through the storms, the animals gathered beneath and against his trunk. The mighty oak powerfully held back the rushing winds and powerful storms. Beneath his branches, they rested, knowing that the ancient oak would protect them all. He became strong and his strength and his wisdom never failed; he remembered the birds, the animals, and the pines; even the buzzing insects were his constant friends.

He loved the nights of the harvest moon when the animals stayed up to play. They danced in the moonlight and tickled him with their scampering feet. The twinkling fireflies would play in his beard and the insects would buzz and sing happy songs. The happy pines would lift their boughs and sway in the breeze. The tender vines wrapped their tendrils around him and opened with flowers to greet him every morning—and the ancient oak was very happy.

Many years went by until the ‘peace of the forest’ was abruptly broken by foreign sounds, cracking noises, grinding screeches, and blasting booms. The ancient oak was fearful of the strange invaders and had no way to comfort his forest friends who fled with terror at the bitter invasion of their tranquil existence. The birds flew away and the squirrels and animals ran from the forest. His pine tree friends were also unable to flee the onslaught of noise and in terror stood with him to take the brunt of the noise and eventual violence. Feeling the orange tape being wrapped around his body, he heard the word “protected” before closing himself into his trunk to await his fate and for the axe to fall across his body.

Many days passed and the angry clamor continued to replace the solace of the forest until one day the noises ceased, the rumbling ground no longer shook, and the dust settled back to the land. Rising cautiously out of his trunk, he cautiously asked, “Where are you, brother pines? Where are you, friendly birds? Where are you, gentle animals?” The scarred earth, the stakes in the ground, and the scattered decay of the plants were more than the ancient tree could weather. He understood that his friends were forced to leave and he was overcome for once in his old age with something unfamiliar to him . . . loneliness.

continued
Though he was protected, the ancient one had no one left to tell his stories to or to rock in his leafy boughs. No one was left to braid his lifeless locks or swing from his drooping branches. No one was left to sing in the moonlight. Now the ancient oak endures exposure to the ravages inflicted onto the forest. The owl, another ancient creature, is left to sit among his branches, trying to rouse the soul that was lost. Bewail the oaks with their mossy long hair!
Will he vanish as the great chestnuts or become gnarled in eerie silence and solitude?
The ancient oak slips back into his trunk, never to return again.

*We All Fall Down*

*by Megan Nash*
My Rock

Like a new cherry moon
Your arrival makes my heart dance
Inner peace washes over me
And I feel my sorrow drain from my veins

I stand upon your wings with pride
Refusing to hide in the shadows
Never apologizing for how you made me
Carrying my cross with conviction and understanding

Your grace is apparent in my prosperity
As only you could craft coal into a diamond
And should I be chastised for who I am
I will walk through the fire protected by your love

Your marvels extend to the end of creation
Sparkling effortlessly like rainbows in July
Allowing transgressions to unfold without incident
I am complete because of your patience

You use the wind to paint my life
The scenery only visible to the deserving
Hidden in the depths of the soul
Providing answers without questions

I feel the compassion in your embrace
Forcing seas to part and hearts to open
Fighting away the nagging emptiness
Gratefully engulfed in your unconditional love

The complacency engrained in the masses
Everyone kept snugly in their place
Too uncertain to deviate from their journey
Because they might stumble onto their destiny

Cheralin Smith

Coming Up for Air

by Justin Gines
The Lamp

by Bennett Rainey

Once, in need of shelter,
   Weary from the rain;
I ventured deep into the cave,
   Seeking solace from the pain.

I came to know its secrets;
   Water dripping to the floor.
Cool, dark places hidden;
   I thought to leave no more.

Cold rock against my face,
   Cheek caressed by the stone,
Soothing my fevered brow.
   Anonymous here and alone.

Occasionally would come,
   Upon rustling paper wings,
Fleeting black ghost of form;
   Transient, shadowy things.

To ignore or overcome them,
   A simple task for me.
The cave was my refuge
   Where safe I could be.

I thought I needed not
   Light that burned above.
There lived heartache and sorrow;
   The tragedies of love.

That light had burned my skin.
   My eyes ached in its glare.
Torment it had caused me;
   Only hurt lived out there.

Now wandering in my cave,
   Treasure I had found,
Among the old and odd debris,
   Strewn upon the ground.

A dull and tarnished oil lamp,
   Relic from the past.
I lit its worn and tattered wick
   And found true comfort at last.

Its glow reminded me of
   What power shines most bright
And reignited in me
   A yearning for the light.

Then came a whirlwind of sound;
   Dervishes, foul demons of air,
Rushing torrent of leathery wings,
   Swarms of sorrow everywhere.

Blinded by the blind,
   Shrill cries fill the room.
Suffocating, burdened, drowning,
   Now my fortress is my tomb.

No clear path before me
   To guide me safely through.
No friends there to comfort me,
   Or keep my footing true.

As I fought against the tide,
   I remembered what was found:
That small and battered lamp that lay
   At my feet upon the ground.

Tightly I gripped my lamp
   And, against my nature, trusted
In the weak and gentle beam
   From relic worn and rusted.

I prayed that God would let it
   Burn long and bright.
Then I gave myself to it,
   Followed its beacon light.

It led me safely out
   Past the troubles and foes.
In it I found solace,
   Comfort in spite of woes.

Then I came into the light
   That so long I had denied.
Warmth I had forgotten,
   Beauty and peace sublime.

Now I live in the splendor,
   Just the occasional cloud,
But I always have my sweet lamp
   For whenever there is doubt.
Rope on Fire
Colored pencil (19” x 24”)

by Shandy Stubbs
Party Glasses

by Shawntay Rivers

Psychedelic DJ

Computer-enhanced

by Justin Gines
Blues in Black & White

by Shawntay Rivers
City ‘Scape

Rolling cage of freedom and dusty melody
grant me your voyage
Bare feet pressed against the steel belly
The windows are fantastic picture shows
flashing visions
mesmerizing in its absurdity
The highway spills neon
stretches out to touch the dying orange sun
Cars glide alongside
racing like wild animals in a mechanical jungle
Long faced driver
glued to umbilical electronic loneliness
bathed in blue glow
clever facial hair
smell of cheap cigarettes
The sun’s last attempt of glowing warmth
intercepted by large billboards
Limited time only
Night becomes a cool blanket over the highway
And daylight gently surrenders

Brandon Herron

Drive

Feelin’ unsure; Unconsciously wanderin’ . . . searchin’ for somethin’.
Searchin’ for inspiration, motivation.
Ambition’s there. Got the drive, just ain’t got the keys.
Feelin’ lost in a place where déjá vu occasionally reoccurs.
Not feelin’ down, but not feelin’ up either.
Stuck somewhere in between with no immediate exit.
Can’t just leave, but can’t stay forever. . . .
Friends are more distant than ever, even though they’re only a phone call away.
School’s the place to be, but not for me. Doesn’t feel like I belong.
Always surrounded by people, but continue to feel lonely, invisible, forgotten . . .
Just the way I’d prefer; makes for a better comeback.
But unanswered questions could drive a man mad if he let them. . . .
Finally . . . found the keys.

James Coleman
Hallowed Ground
by Justin Gines
A Wandering Man

I wander the streets, and I live like the dead.
In the cold I am a sinner, for I have nothing to cover my head.
During the night I scream in fear of the monsters beneath my chest.
They growl and scream for their hunger refuses to rest.
“Stay away!” they told me. “We don’t want you here.”
Each time I go to apply for a job, that line is what I hear.
At the construction site, I had everything they had.
Their tools, their uniforms, even those crazy looking hats.
Sure I stole it from the site the day before.
The application said to have all necessary equipment before walking through the doors.
The restaurant was no better, and I dressed up too.
I had a striped tie and a collared sweater.
Covered in leftover food and filth, they were. Yet all clothes brought from the dump were made that way.
I would try the Police Academy the next day.
This time I received a new line said to me.
They did not send me away, but welcomed me.
In a dark room; with the doors locked.
The monsters began growling, beneath my chest.
However there was no food to give them rest.
I screamed, I turned, and turned again.
Until my screams put me to sleep.
Much time went by and they finally allowed me a day off work.
I did not like my job at the jail anymore, so never went back.
I wander the streets, and I live like the dead.
My job came back for me; they must be running low on help.
Again to the dark room, with locked doors, I knew the drill.
This time was different though. They helped change my life.
They sat me in a chair.
They threw away my clothes and combed my hair.
I was given a book, and guided through great teachings of how to live life.
So I got a day off, but they never called me back in.
So I went to apply to another job, this time they took me in.
I tried it a different way, as that book told me so.
It said, “Never settle to struggle. When you fail, pick yourself up and grow.”
I wander the streets, and I live like the dead—no more.

Olivia Morton
Find Me

I want you to be like a . . . firefighter reaching for a hand, doctor testing for a cure, cop hunting for justice, or sailor peering for the shore; soldier fighting for freedom, writer pondering for insight, scientist needing life’s answers, or engineer finding the light; hero striving for a cause, actor searching for the perfect role, lawyer scrounging for clues, or player going for the goal; singer seeking the right tune, painter discovering his art, technician scouring for the fix, or tin man wanting of a heart.

I want you to be out there somewhere to have been waiting so long, to be wishing upon the same stars, and trying, effortlessly, to be strong.

I want you to draw out a map and make the details leap so you can find me when you wake and not just when you sleep.

Becki Cowatch

If

by Justin Gines
Dawn drags its feet like a coffee drinker
in need of a caffeine fix.
It can’t come fast enough for me.
I’ve wrestled
with the sandman
all through the raven night.

He was stingy
with his dust of slumber
and so I
held his breath as collateral.
When he finally turned blue
in the face,
he blew me gossamer veils
w/o dreams to take the place of you.

Now the dew torments me,
dampens my skin with loneliness
and I can’t even use an electric blanket
to stay warm for
this chill runs straight through my bones.

But,
Dawn brings the promise
of a new day,
another chance to capture the high of your existence,
another chance for you to reach out your hand and finger the ten digits
that will bring me closer to you.

My ears awaken
with the sunrise
to bask in the tenor of your voice.
Hi Y’all! My name is Olivia Grace Morton, formerly Simpson. I am a good ole G.R.I.T.S., you know a Girl Raised In The South. I’ve got Southern values with Southern charm. I am as sweet as cornbread, and I’ve got a bite as sharp as White Lightning.

I graduated from the local high school (Go ’Cats!) and four years later I married my high school sweetheart. We moved to North Georgia where I had hoped to find my own little piece of “Tara.” My hubby and I were going to work our dreams jobs; have our dream house; and little ones running about the yard with the family dog. But it seems that life never pans out the way you quite want it to. Those things were just what I said: DREAMS.

Here I am almost thirty, my dream job failed with the recession; my little piece of “Tara” was taken by the bank; and my little ones are just a figment of my imagination. There are no buns in this oven! God has made other plans.

I am back in this Podunk coastal town. I know home is supposed to be where your roots are, but I told myself I would leave this town and never move back to it. But I’m starting to think this place is cursed; it always brings people back. I don’t know how or why. I hate all the bugs here—all this is the “Sand Gnat Capital of the World.” I despise the flat land. Where are the hills and mountains? There are so-o-o many pine trees. Where is the change of seasons? It feels like summer all year long, like beach weather. And I’ve never been much of a beach person. I prefer the cool babbling brooks and the shady trees that change from greens to golds, reds, and brown during the season some call autumn. Can’t you tell I’m so glad to be back?

You know, I figured by moving away that when I came back this place would somehow be different . . . changed . . . and by that I don’t mean the new Longhorn’s down the street. This place is still the same as when I left it. The same boring traffic lights, the same slow Sunday drivers, and the same old gossip. (Guess who Carolyn Hardee is having an affair with!?)

I guess while I am here though, I should look on the brighter side of things. If I wasn’t back here, I wouldn’t be able to see my wonderful little red headed niece and nephew grow up. Lord knows they got that hair from their daddy! Their mama (my sister) her hair is as dark as the Columbian roasted coffee I like to drink. Ahh, those two children are just the apple of my eye. They are just so precious, even if that hair makes them mean as fire sometimes.

You know what else? If I wasn’t here, I wouldn’t be able to go back to school. I’ve got a new job in mind: Elementary school teacher. Of course, I’m not in it for the money! I just want to give those babies a proper education, plus it’s birth control considering my “situation.” Oh, but I haven’t talked to you about my “situation” have I? Well that’s just a doozy all on its own! That’s why my ‘little figment of my imagination children’ are on the back burner.

Let’s see . . . about four years ago I was diagnosed with an anomaly in my heart. So I had to have heart surgery—it was a sophisticated state of the art kind of surgery—they used a robot. It was so sophisticated that I, Olivia Grace Morton (formerly Simpson), am going to be in a medical journal! I just can’t wait to see it!! ME . . . published. I can picture the article now. It’ll probably say: “Patient A was diagnosed with partial anomalous pulmonary . . . blah, blah, blah . . . .” Frankly, I’ve always found it a mouthful to say, but I do hope that my doctor gives me an autographed copy!

Well my heart, it was just not normal. One of my pulmonary veins it connected to the wrong end of my heart, so all the blood in my heart was not circulating throughout my body. I just had a little ole recyclin’ factory in the right side of my heart. I was tired all the time and come to find out the right side of my heart was TWICE the normal size that it should’ve been because of all that extra blood it was pumping. So to compensate for the room it needed, my heart caused my right lung to get smaller. That accounts for the reason I always had trouble blowing out my birthday candles!

Here’s another kicker: before my surgery, my doctor told me that if I had gotten pregnant or by the time I had hit 40, I would’ve been as dead as a doornail! Can you believe that?? Now he’s got me on something called Coo-me-dun or something (I have trouble saying
it, too). But I’m an experiment, there’s really no record on how long I should be on this stuff. I can’t get preggers, at least not right now. It’s IMPERATIVE!

So that’s why I would rather immerse myself with little children and teach them. I would not only be able to help them, but they would help me as well. They would be my reminder as to why I’ve waited so long, while all my friends have jumped the baby train with at least two kids on board and their sanity out the window. TOOT! TOOT!

Well, you know what? Since I’ve been thinking about all this (and I’ve condensed it for you), I guess my life ain’t so bad after all! I’m still married to my high school sweetheart, we’re still going strong. I’ve also got the love of my family and my friends. Everyone that I truly do love and care about is right here: right around the corner or probably at the Super Wal-Mart. Plus, I’ve got my health even if I do take medication. And I guess I’ll admit I’ve got happiness too! Even if I don’t like this flat, marshy, pine tree-infested land; the sand gnats; or the beach there are good things that have come from all of this.

Now I realize that God does things for a reason. Even though at times we may feel like he makes our lives seem like a big ole pile of doggy doo that he’s decided to throw at the fan. He’s got plans for me and I’ve just got to find the courage and perseverance to trudge my way along the path to reach that salvation. One day. One day, my day will come when I can say that I was happy with the way my life turned out. And that I, Olivia Grace Morton (formerly Simpson), had no regrets! ONWARD!!

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Medley

Whispering medley moving slowly and intently
Edging ever toward the precipice of outright and utter convergence.
I am made one, a fractal image of a person desperate
Formerly formed of brains and dust and wind
Ground talcum-like,
Inhaled by the nostril of the Divine
And given new life as a thought,
A dream,
An idea,
A vesper,
A dawn,
A whispering medley moving slowly and intently
Towards a reimagining of a life that I’ve lived.
A place than I’ve been.
Where two worlds coalesce and form
Not a world, not a galaxy of stars,
But burgeon into the void as a universe newborn.

Ben Harrell
Every Mother’s Worry

This has been something I’ve wanted since we met
I planned our lives, but paradise wasn’t something I was going to get
There we were early in the morning before school
He was the love of my life but I was the fool
To give him the one thing I can’t get back
And I was going to give it to him in something called “The Sack”
I was the fool because I wasn’t the only one
My love had two other girls who he called hon
They hated me because they thought I knew
I was messin’ with a taken man of two
By that time I gave him the thing I couldn’t get back
This would forever and always be something I lack
But the story of my love and me doesn’t end there
I basically gave him my life and all I could spare

Samone Alexa McCarter

A Pillow

It will not deny me comfort when
I need it, or ignore me when
I feel alone.
It will not downsize me when I’m afraid, and it won’t complain about staying home.
It will let me hold it as tight as I want, whenever I’m in need.
It will not make me feel stupid when I’m ecstatic with glee.
A pillow will not hold grudges or cover me with guilt.
It won’t put anything above me, or make my tiny beeper wilt.
Although a pillow will never love me, one can plainly see—A pillow is the safest place that a broken heart can be.

Harvest Hale

Rest for the Weary

by Leslie Jeter
Woodland Heart

Moss drips from spidery limbs of oak,
Old chocolate, graying at the edges, dresses the pines.
The sweet smell of earth envelopes and surrounds,
Adrift and dreamy,
The sentimental heart shines.

Left-over raindrops hang like silvery leaves,
Magic twigs suspend themselves in the breeze.
Doves coo to quiet the barking squirrel,
  Floating on the purest breath,
The humble heart flutters to a calm.

Burnt orange straw carpets the floor,
Lively green vines sprout from the rotting log.
The buzzing mosquito looks for a place to light,
  Meandering through its child-like song,
The grateful heart beats simply on.

Karen Price

Heart of Nature

by Pamela Westcott

Winding Down

by Holli Perry
Passionate Embrace

My body arched to receive my husband’s passionate embrace — as his love entered my soul I found myself aroused by the sound of a heart beating beneath the chest that I had so often sought refuge in — — the smell of his skin titillated my senses — — as my heartbeat quickened and began to beat as one with his my soul poured out upon his love and I realized the brilliance of his creation — — the feeling of pure ecstasy was unparalleled by anything I had ever felt and for a moment I longed to forever be wrapped in his love as our flesh wraps around the vital structure that is “us.”

Shawntay Rivers
The Sparkling Stream

Dreams are true and everything
There is fresh air and happiness in the spring.
Walk with me to the stream
While there is a purple bream;
Enjoy the pleasure and sweet
While the waves from the stream hit your feet:
I see the person all alone
There is a midstream on a slippery stone,
On a old Log,
There is a water frog.
See the sun shine
The pebbles are smooth and fine,
The turtles swim
In the afternoon cool and dim!
The cat birds has a song,
As the cat bird trails along,
While there is a creased vireo,
The Robin squeals
While the crow goes down the airy hills:
Bubbles are flowing in the stream,
As if it was in a dream,

Coolness of the stream is creeping,
The senses are steeping,
The terrible smells
Are from the Nature’s secret wells.
Dogwood and Ash are there
The snow is gleam and has a flash
Out of a big tree
A beautiful blossom falls on me,
It is like a falling star.
A big bird is flying by
Stares at me with a mean eye.
I see a squirrel shoot
Into a root;
A bumble bee has a color of rust,
And thighs come out with a dust,
Lazy singing one sharp note
From the shining throat
Catching a shrinking Bloom about,
And this brings her sweetness out.
Bubble bubble down the stream,
Like music in a dream.

Teresa Savage

Young Thinking

by Jayme Williams
Mud, Glorious Mud

by Karen Price

Jensen

Jensen is a sleepy boy
Had to put away his toys
Curled up in his Grandma’s lap
Now he’s ready for his nap

Kitty Webb
The Circle

Two times the time
Two times the trouble
Days go far
And her problems only double
Told the world was hers
It would be given into her hands
But the empty promises given wouldn’t ever last
Too old to cry, too young to leave
She could never do a thing to make the people see
Who she had become
Who she wanted to be
All she wanted to do
All she wanted to see

Our world was never explained to her
Only left up to chance
That she might find her way through the forest
With just a glance
This story never ceases
This story never ends
It’s only a big circle
At the beginning again
Because at length we only look
At the time and trouble it took
To find two times the time
Two times the trouble
And how as days go far her problems only double

Samone Alexa McCarter
A Chill in the Air

There’s a chill in the air
and I know the death season approaches
the greens will fade to tattered brown
the tourists leave my silenced town,
and ghosts ring through the coaches.

I see my breath for the very first time
on winds that carry tight embraces
life is seeping into hallowed ground
life is ebbing without a sound,
and mourns in stoic faces.

The sun’s warm rays seem memory
as my arms are pricked relentlessly
stabbing my flesh with icy tendrils
stabbed with lover’s remorse,
and tears become frozen sweetly.

There’s a chill in the air,
summer breathes its last warm breaths
as winter lurks behind the corner.

Cathern Suffecool
I sat in a chair in the middle of our back patio. My mom and I were actually rather proud of it. Just a 6 X 6 concrete slab, two privacy fences, and the air conditioning unit were what we had started with. We added a small brick extension of the concrete with a pleasant fountain surrounded by tiers of aloes, ferns, monkey grass, hanging ivy, and a large potted bamboo plant. Several other plants, including a few orchids and many plants I couldn't begin to identify, but a few of which I knew to be herbs, were scattered elsewhere at the edges of the patio serving to flesh out the atmosphere.

In my hand, I held a small cell phone, its touch screen glowing softly in the gathering dusk. I lightly ran my finger across the numbers displayed across its tiny screen, checking each one against the numbers scribbled on the tiny crumpled piece of paper I held in my other hand. A sigh escaped my lips as I assured myself that they matched perfectly. This was the fifth time I had done this and yet I still couldn’t bring myself to push the green call button.

I got up and paced around the patio looking for something else to distract me. All I found was a flowerpot that had fallen over—which I picked up and put back in its proper place.

I sat back down in my chair and reached into my pocket for the phone. Its screen was black now, so I tapped the unlock key to revive it. The numbers from before popped back onto its screen, and I stared again, trying to dredge up the sheer willpower to move my finger three centimeters and actually press the call button.

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I sat back down in my chair and reached into my pocket for the phone. Its screen was black now, so I tapped the unlock key to revive it. The numbers from before popped back onto its screen, and I stared again, trying to dredge up the sheer willpower to move my finger three centimeters and actually press the call button. After several long minutes, however, I still hadn’t found enough to get even halfway there. In frustration, I jammed my finger down on the cancel key, dispelling the numbers from the screen. I got up and walked through the sliding glass door, tugging it closed behind me and flipping the lock closed.

Inside—my mom sat on the floor in front of a flat, glowing screen. A romantic comedy was playing on our family computer. Most evenings we would end up eating dinner on the floor and watching something on Netflix. When it’s just you and another person—even when that person is your mom—you don’t really bother with tables so much.

I got myself a glass of water and sat down in my favorite chair to watch the movie. I stayed long enough to learn the names of the main characters before I lost interest and got up. “I’m going to go for a swim. The water should still be warm enough.”

“Okay.” Mom nodded. “Just don’t stay out too long.”

“Okay, I’ll be back later, then.” Before going outside, I ran upstairs to change into my swim trunks and grab a towel. Then, I ran back downstairs and out into the warm, deepening gloom of twilight.

Outside, I walked leisurely across the pavement, letting my bare feet soak up the residual heat the black asphalt had absorbed earlier that day. I had taken the phone with me, dropping it in one of the low pockets of my trunks. It banged against my thigh with every step. I had this fantasy in my head of taking the phone out and calling the number . . . But it’s already really late; I’ll just make the call tomorrow; it’s just not the right time right now. Not that it’s really a big deal, right? I thought.

I took off my shirt and stepped into the warm, still pool water. I took a deep breath and bent forward bit by bit till I plunged under the water. For a moment there was complete and utter silence as the water closed around my body, wrapping me in a warm flowing embrace. I let myself drift down to the bottom of the pool, trailing little silver bubbles behind me.

I curled up into a ball and fell through the water. I imagined those little silver bubbles of air

continued
slowly trailing behind me up to the surface—to light and air and freedom. Then I hit the bottom of the pool—my shins scraping against the rough concrete. I grimaced in momentary pain and just lay there, making myself as small and still as possible. I prayed. I prayed, not like a young, conservative, white, Christian male that wanted a world of peace and prosperity. Nor did I pray like a sinner begging forgiveness. I didn’t rattle off a list of needs and desires or the troubles of my heart. I just prayed with silence, it was the kind of prayer that comes when you no longer have the words to say what you feel. In the silence the water flowed around me, tugging at my hair and the edges of my swimming trunks.

I kicked off from the bottom and broke the surface of the water, gasping in the cool night air; the sun was completely set now. I looked up at the sky. I was hoping to see some stars, but a streetlamp blocked my view. I swam for a little while; mostly I let myself drift on my back. I drank in the cool night air and began to feel less heavy—the water carried me easily. I drifted on my back for a while.

Then I got out of the pool and vigorously dried myself off with my towel. I pulled my shirt on and picked up the phone I had left beside it. I clicked the unlock key once more—there were no new messages, and no missed calls. I had to suppress the urge to chuck the phone into the pool. I thought, If only I never had this thing, then so many things in my life would be so much simpler. I grinned wryly as I stuck the phone back in my pocket. Then again, a simple life might’ve been too boring.

Back I go to an empty bed, to a too-small apartment in a too-crowded town. Back to the routines that are so impossible to break out of, not because you can’t, but because you don’t want to! Back to nothing to do and no one to do it with.

... I thought as I walked back to the apartment over the still warm asphalt.

I tried to shake off the grim thoughts in my mind as I opened the door. I could hear my mom’s movie still playing in the living room. Everything was as I’d left it.

I’ll call her tomorrow for sure.
Shrimper at Sunrise  |  Watercolor (13½” X 10½”)
by Jamie Hardy

Imagining Pink  |  Charcoal and acrylic (24” X 18”)
by Lindsey Cirmotich
Big Swell  

by Sidonia Serafini

Irie

You had me at “Hey Mon, way ya goin’,”
as I passed you by.  
 Didn’t need to turn around  
to see your smile,  
I could feel it in the sunshine of your tenor  
blazing through the dark of night.

I found the Caribbean sea within your eyes and  
the sandy beaches in your wayward grin.  
Wanted to braid a hammock  
with the locks of your dreds  
and set up a picnic there,  
let the coolness of your  
laidback, reggae style  
wash Marley all over me,  
bathe me in the wisdom  
of each gray hair.

You lured me in,  
cooked a concoction of  
sweet potato fries and  
sautéed plantain  
had me wonderin’

what kinda hoo~doo  
do you do  
between sheets of satin  
and red, black and green.

Beneath street lights  
you kissed me a new nation,  
had me tastin’  
Jamaican rum, black forest cake  
and sugar cane.  
Trippin’ over the beats of ska  
and tiny~windin’  
down low  
against the heat of your  
breath,  
I found a woman’s love  
between your own redemption song  
and the silver of the moon.

Now the patois of your lilting tongue  
brands my Gee~chee heart,  
and the Lion of Judah, beckons, turns around,  
rests in the bosom of my den.

Jeri L.M.S. Guyette
Meditation on Water

Ink (13” x 18”)

by David Zalian
On the Edge . . .

Standing on the brink of death, overlooking a cliff,
My soul begins to wonder . . . Is there more to life than this?

The jagged rocks point upwards towards a painted sky.
Smeared beauty leaves her fiery trail. In Whose hand does the paintbrush lie?

Then darkness quenches the fiery trail with water from the deep
Where Bubbles dance towards the surface and Silence likes to sleep.

Who holds this big ocean inside a little cup?
And tells it “You can come this far, but right there is enough”?

An eagle soars above me on nothing but the Wind
Which we cannot touch or cannot see, but can lift a house or man.

And what’s so wrong with believing in things we cannot feel?
There are plenty of things we cannot see, and what if God is real?

I have to believe that if I threw myself off of this cliff,
I would not stop existing, and that wouldn’t be just it.

This earth is way too beautiful, the animals so complex!
There MUST be a Designer, and I’m not here just by chance . . .

Cristen L. Roberson

Miracle of Flight
by Larry Carter
Savage Sea

I cry with sweet abandon
While lightning enraptures me.
My soul is pleading, scorned —
For my love fell to the sea.

While lightning enraptures me,
The rain, continuing, trickling,
My love into the sea . . .
My tethered heart comes unbound.

The rain, continuing, trickling,
falling — Drowning in the ocean deep,
And my tethered heart comes unbound.
Roaring thunder — frightful leap . . .

Falling, drowning in the ocean deep.
Again — that flash! Eternity!
Roaring thunder, frightful leap.
Oh loathsome ocean — Swallow Me . . .

Karen Price

Hurricane by any other name

I was let loose
Not by love
But myself
I found my feelings
Although not lost
But wondering
In my heart
I can now love
And laugh
Be bold yet careful
The world is my museum
To explore
My souvenir
My freedom

Samone Alexa McCarter

Incoming

by Justin Gines
Dreams of the Princess
by Pamela Westcott

Bwk, Ga

Sun is warm, sand is gritty
Thank God I live by the shore, not the inner city
Woe to those; I do pity,
For they will never know the land I love is so damn pretty.

Kristee Glace

Wake, A Wake
by Becca Bartkovich
Between the Lines
Cardboard print (9” X 16”)
by Lindsey Cirmotich
In My Next Life

by Becki Cowatch

I will be thin —
seen as healthy and fit,
wonderfully shaped and womanly —
but still remember what it was like
to be heavy, boxy, and undefined.
I will be pretty —
enough that others see it,
enough that I see it —
but still remember what it was like
to be an alien in a world focused on beauty.
I will be touchable —
smooth and soft,
flawless and feminine —
but still remember what it was like
to be embarrassed of my imperfections.
I will be popular —
the girl everyone wants to be around,
the woman everyone likes —
but still remember what it was like
to be disregarded because I didn’t fit a mold.

I will be doted upon —
sought after by boys and men,
flirted with and wanted —
but still remember what it was like
to be considered last if even on the list.
I will be ready —
for adventure and fun,
without questions or fear —
but still remember what it was like
to be scared of the public’s opinions.
I will be unforgettable —
remembered fondly,
missed tremendously —
but still remember what it was like
to be forgotten, neglected, and left behind.

Tomorrow,
Tomorrow

by Leslie Jeter
Reduced

I fear something’s wrong with me my mind stays on you
And I feel like something might be missing
All I can find is your smile within my heart
And my broken body it can last no longer
I can’t stop these curious desires
Sending my every molecule into insanity
Why am I putting myself through this, today?
Am I doing something bad is this any good?
My blood is boiling through my body
This is taking the best of my strength
But I cannot help myself this infatuation grows
And I reduce
Is it so wrong, so wrong that I want you?
Why am I putting myself through this today?

Danielle Martin

A Whole Heap

It wasn’t a large thing
That rose up a mile —
Just thousands of small ones
In one big ol’ pile.

Dixie Dean

Porch

You flit back and forth between the lights,
both of them burn, but you think they’re oh, so pretty.

I sit on my front porch and watch you pop and die.

No more flies on my front porch,
all of them burnt, but you’d think they still think of me.

I looked out the screen door and saw you piled so high.

They said I must have did it, you know,
My porch, your smallness to me.

They made me look out a different window, and there were a thousand flies.

You viewed me as a consumable,
so I had to install these . . .

Jason Dean Oglesby
Window on the World

I’ve Got My Eye on You!

by Pamela Westcott

by Justin Gines
Until the end of time

They hold hands
Forever bound
Not by love but passion
This seals their fate
Love has not yet come
It is in the midst of the ocean
They wait

Samone Alexa McCarter

The Hafiz Tree | Ink (11” X 13”)
by Lexi Holloway
Your Gentle Slope (a sonnet)

Your gentle slope maddens and twists my mind.
Your whispering curve from jaw to shoulder
Wars these cold lips with honey and with wine
Whose vintner rests in your eyes, your smolder.
The supple, yet subtle rise of your hip,
The teasing retort and line of its bone.
It wails zephyr-like, a fall and a slip
Desperate, I find your mouth tastes like home.
Who could compose this figure exquisite
With beauty so intense it burns to fear?
With a look, my defeat is implicit
From unworthy mouth to amorous ears.
Oh, how I love you, you whom I've not met.
How quickly you fade, how soon I forget.

Ben Harrell

His Name

His name brings forth an
indescribable sensation within me,
my lips tremble, my insides quiver.
. . . His name moves me.

I can see every curve of every
letter of his name as they pass
between my lips, I taste them and I
realize his name is the sweetest.
. . . His name satisfies me.

My heartbeat quickens, butterflies
race around my belly and love
flows around me at the sound of it.
. . . His name excites me.

The sequence of letters in his name
brings me such joy that I smile from
the inside out at the sound of it.
. . . His name delights me.

Just the thought of it embraces me
when I'm sad, it encourages me
when I am weak, and it straightens
me up when I go astray.
. . . His name empowers me.

I will always love his name.

Shawntay Rivers

If You Only

How do I love you? Let me count the ways
There's not enough hours I don't think there's enough days
There's something about the way your smile lights up my world
If only, if only I could be your girl
How do I tell you just how much you fill my soul?
There are not enough words in this whole wide world to tell it all
I think I love you and I don't think you understand
If you only, if you would only be my man
And I know there's a girl who is out there dreaming about you
But I just don't see how she could love you quite the way I do
It's written in my eyes, it's no secret or surprise
I need you sure as the sun will rise
If you only, if you would only be my guy
When I met you it was such a change of luck
Like a “Hungry Hungry Hippo,” I could just gobble you up
You make my heart go “dun dun dun dun” just like a great white
Oh baby it was love at first bite. If you only, if you were only mine
And I know she is out there somewhere wishing to be by your side
But I'm here before you and I adore you, won't you realize?
Better get me while I'm here, one day I could disappear
But right now, I just want you near If you only, if you would only let me near.
How do I love you? Let me count the ways . . .

Danielle Martin
A Kiss on the Red Carpet  |  Computer-enhanced
by Shawntay Rivers

Lovebirds  |  Diptych of music sheets with mod podge and ink (16” X 20” each)
by Lexi Holloway
Suncatcher
by Monica Stubbs

Belle on the Beach  |  Computer-enhanced
by Haustin Lee
I listened to birds for the chocolate queen.  
Heard lusting and longing for sugar and cream.  
Isabel Marseille had bones made of chalk.  
She uncovered a number and lusted to talk.  
We spoke of pralines and dark caramels.  
And turned to the way our lives paralleled.  
With silence and a sigh, a tear formed in her eye.  
The monitor glared, “Tell her goodbye.”  
But I ignored his eyes and focused on hers.  
Imagined the tears like chocolate liqueurs.  
“I have no friend or lover, my family’s run dry.  
My days are now numbered, and beauty must die.”  
Hospital beds and runaway hair.  
Locked in a labyrinth of everyday care.  
I once had a youth and a soul that went free.  
My fingers turned down gallants with gallons of rings.  
Boxes of candies were left at my door.  
My sashes would melt onto their floors.  
Sweet cinnamon smoke rings, I held their hearts.  
Tasted like sugar and twisted like tarts.  
Oh, the years for me were sweet chocolate ganache.  
But now I only dance when it’s time to be washed.  
Please, boy, tell me you love me. I’ll believe the lie.  
I need to remember how it is to be alive.  
Send a box of truffles to my dimly lit room.  
Sealed with a note from a slimly fit groom.  
He’s dashing and handsome and believes I’m still young.  
He holds onto every word from my semi-sweet tongue.  
It may be a disguise for my lonely demise.  
It may be a surprise for cataracted eyes.  
Send me a lie, boy, send me a lie.  
Love me with chocolates, I love you, goodbye.”

Ashley Ember
What has become of me? How does one describe the conversion of the soul — a revolution of one’s heart? The very core of me is supple and fluid, with an indefinable, desperate inferno of energy emanating like that never known before. The immaculate, astounding birth of a star — a consequence of your love and unwavering fidelity — has occurred.

There was once a very dark energy in me, consuming my every fiber; luminous, cloudy, turbulent. This lifeless force burned, constantly drawing in on itself, clawing and gripping at me. The immense power of the black heaviness so overwhelming and inescapable became suffocating, forcing breath from a human form unable to contain it. The more matter it gained, the more unbearable it became. The more blistering and scorching it smoldered. Shrapnel in me left over from the molestation of my young heart and the icy, rigid anger that stimulated me was violently forced to coexist with a material world, condensing from the gravitation of mere existence.

You consumed me. You absorbed all of my dangerous, unharnessed energy with a graceful and silent beauty. I imploded in on myself, and then burst into a cosmic presentation of sparkling, visible radiation — an aurora, the dawning and birth of someone new. Lovely, hushed, soundless — full of adoration and vibrancy and color. How bright and beautiful the colors! So overwhelming — blinding — to human sense I am unable to put their brilliance into expression. You have left a devastating outward flux of change in your wake that has disturbed every particle of substance in my life.

I am your Sirius, your Svana: the brightest, twinkling rainbow glistening sweeter than any before or after. I will remain with you to infinity. If at the gates of eternity I am denied, I will linger for my alpha, my omega. I am your beloved Norse queen and Frejeroek, the celestial equator upon which all embodied forces honor the perfection of my love for you.

So, I ask once again, what has become of me? There is nothing left of the comfortable resentment and black fierceness my essence once held. Here I sit, raging with an invariable purpose to love you. I am a silent, constant glow in Northern lightlessness, full of regret and wisdom of the immense totality around me — such a glorious sadness in the sky.

---

He loves me . . .

*by Jessica Ahl*
A Passion for Purple
by Justin Gines

Down on Her Luck
Computer-enhanced
by Haustin Lee
Danger Zone
by Sidonia Serafini

Smoke Rings and Cigarette Burns

I need to quit drinking alone.
I’m killing myself.
Filling my lungs with black and destroying my home.
I look at your picture every night so you’ll be the girl of my dreams,
But all I have are nightmares.
I know I said you were an angel,
But angel, go back to heaven and leave me the hell alone!

It’s nothing personal,
I just can’t take the fear of letting you down.
You’re such a liar; I was always honest with you.
But this is my problem.
I’m living the life that’s killing me.
You don’t make me drink the bottle.
Just bottle it up inside.
Put it down.

Thank god that you weren’t there.
See what I do to myself?
Painting my lungs black and destroyed by all this fear.
Maybe the distance between us will take the haunting from my dreams.
My life won’t be a nightmare.
I won’t miss you angel.
Angel, go back to heaven and leave me the hell alone.

Bonnie M. Tobias

Ashley Ember
Stained Wood and Glass

by Larry Carter

Appalachian Heritage

(In memory of Sam, Christopher, and Allen—my mountain fathers)

My mind takes flight like migratory birds —
Directed north-northwest toward rolling hills,
The Appalachian homeland of my sires.
I soar above my burnished legacy
Enlaced with crimson, gold and orange sparks —
Achievement of the Ancient Artist’s brush.

A moonshine still, worked by the father of
A railroad engineer whose train was wrecked —
The romance of his son with a guitar —
A still, a fatal crash, a folk guitar!
That strange composite now inflames my cells
With something that I cannot quite recall —
I cannot quite forget. My roots are there,
My harvest south-southeast, transplanted by
The balladeer who thumbed away — escaped
His wagonload of apples — firm, ripe, wild —
That traversed rutted roads to Elijay.
Except a poet, what else could I be?

My turn has come, so mournfully I sing
The homesick-mountain blues that stir my blood —
Ignite my heart with longing to be there;
To breathe the pristine air and wade the streams
That please my senses, cool my soul — it flares
With embers of a smoldering memory.
My spirit burns and yearns for beauty’s height
That peaks in Murray County every autumn.

Jan Osborne
The Scent of My Georgia Home

by Kimberly Helms

As the earth is calling us back to the dust that we were made from, the rich red earth calls me back to my Georgia Mountain home. The South is a land of many smells and Georgia has the richest and most diverse. When we return to the mountains, we recognize home by the scents that rise from the ground. Moving from the cool northern hills to the sparkling sunny coast, I never noticed how much I missed the smell of the mountains and home.

Returning back to the land of my youth, the road is dark but the scents along the way guide me back. Home is the smell of freshly cut grass and hay standing in the fields. It is the smell of livestock and farms and the peaceful existence of country life. It is the smell of fruit trees, orchards, and gardens. It is the smell of the lowly skunk or the night creatures that pass along the same roadway, and it is the smell of the freshly turned earth waiting for the next planting.

The richness of the red earth and the sparkles of mica covering the ground, bring forth the scent of the minerals and animals that live right beneath the surface. Sweet Georgia clay! I smell the earthiness of your rich, dark mud. Even the smoky fireplace, the burning of brush, or the fallen leaves from a sudden storm brings with it the scent of home.

Sweet and fresh as grass, I smell the coolness and the smell is cool as rain. Smell the water that falls from the tallest mountain brooks into country lakes. It carries with it the scent of the oaks, the maples, and the ash. The pines infuse their own evergreen scent into the water and into the air making a walk through the forest feel like a path through a green labyrinth of variegated quietness, coolness and leaves. Even fresh laundry swaying on a clothesline brings with it the scent of home.

As I pause before turning into my homestead, the place of my youth, I fill my lungs with the sweet breath of my mountain home and remember the smell of my new coastal home and remember the distinct scent of saltiness in the ocean and the smell of the sea creatures who live there. They are warm smells of beach and driftwood, suntan lotion, and sweat. It is the new comforting smell of warm winds and calm winters and the tranquility of marshes and moss-covered oaks.

Diversity is my past and present and they combine within the single state of Georgia and realization is that no matter whether the earth beneath us is sandy or earthy, the scent of Georgia is a powerful reminder of my past and present, familiar and future, and the longing for the familiar scents that make us long to return home or give us longing to try something new.
Like You

There she sits twirling her hair,
She is happy of this feeling we both now share.
Nervously I twitch not knowing what to do,
I hope she does not hurt me just like you.
Despite her great qualities I am satisfied just with her smile,
Showing needed affection all the while,
Her beauty like yours constantly shines through,
Is this piece of heaven really so much like you?
Still her class is evident like the warmth of the morning sun,
Grateful for her attention at last I have won.
We seem to be attached as if held together by some glue,
God knows I do not need another one like you.
However, she will not quit when the journey becomes tough,
Nor will her love fade when smooth sailing turns to rough.
Freely she accepts all my imperfections as I do for her too,
Holding her close I let go of the notion that she is anything like you.

Jody Carter
As I Lay

I had a dream . . . Last night
That you mysteriously showed up at my doorstep
And your spirit was crying for help
I grabbed you by the hand and
We went far away far away from here
With each mile traveled our hearts drew near
Is this love that I’m feeling, if that’s the case
My broken heart needs your love and healing
I had a dream . . . Last night
I tried to hold back the tears with all my might
Just breathing you, holding you, and seeing you
Made the future seem bright
When you need me but don’t want me
I must go
When you want me but don’t need me
I’m just a daydream away

So I say to you my sleeping beauty, if a dream is the only place, where we can be
Dream on and I hope we slumber in your world forever

Darnell Samples

Hand in Hand | Computer-enhanced

by Holli Perry
These eyes of forty years have seen too much. I am tired, so very tired. At night, I can scarcely raise my voice to sing the songs of my homeland. We have started doing that regularly here; on the plantation (the white men call this place Carolina). All we know is that this is not our homeland, and after all these years, I don’t believe I’ll see home again. Most folks my age are dead already, unless they get moved up north, where the tobacco isn’t as unforgiving as the rice swamp.

There are dozens of us here, all from differing parts of the mother land; but we have learned to get along. By the light of the evening fires, we teach one another the traditional songs and prayers from our villages. Obeah heals me under the serenity of the stars, but that sun-god will surely cook our flesh one day.

It seems as though it has been a hundred years since I last heard my mother’s voice. “Don’t leave the sight of your home, my baby! Surely, those heathens from the next village blame us for the curse of drought upon their land, and they will see us wiped out, preferably for a profit!” she warned. I did not heed my mother’s words.

On I ran, playing and singing, until I saw him — the gray man who threw the heavy blankets on me, and held me down to ring my neck in iron ropes, and drag me far away. I never saw my mother again.

One year was the time I sat in the dungeons. The dungeon was part of what they called the slave factory. Those funny little men they called Portuguese had traded the gray man, food and rum, for me. I sat in the dungeon for so long that even the stories of the white people no longer made me afraid. “Let them eat my bones,” I thought. It was better than this.

Finally, the day arrived, when I was dragged out of the dungeon, and put in front of the whitest man I ever saw. He flipped his hand, and I was sent to a line with a lot of others to board that white man’s ship. No more dungeons! I did not know there were worse things than that dungeon. I had never heard the term, Middle Passage.

We slaves did not ride on the top of that big boat, in the sunshine. We were put in the bottom of the boat, hundreds of us, in the darkest, smelliest place one could ever imagine. They just kept on pushing us in! We were chained together, and kept falling, and some tried to jump over, and that just dragged us down more. The men with the cactus chains (cat-o-nines) would hit the would-be jumpers, and drag them back over the nets. Finally, we were on our way. Each of us had sixteen inches width to stand in, and about two inches headroom. There were big wooden racks above us where we could sleep. At least the racks got us off the filthy floors that were soon covered in the excrement of hundreds. There were no room for buckets, not that there were any offered. The smells alone were making people sick. The diseases were killing them.

After what must have been fifty moons, we arrived in this land. Many were dead and tossed away. Of us that survived, we were sick, and afraid, but so very grateful to have the water that was offered to us at this thing they call the rice plantation.

The masters here are harsh, especially on the men; but after the journey across the mother land, being dragged by the gray man, the dungeons, and the ship where even Obeah’s healing could not help us, this plantation will do just fine. I’ll just do as the master tells me, get my food, and raise my babies; and I will live to see another moonlit night.

There are many mixed feelings amongst our bonfire families. Some feel hatred for the men like the gray man that took me. Others feel like he was only doing what the Portuguese man made him do. Still others blame the white man for keeping us here, working us so hard.

I don’t know who to blame. I know I would like to hurt the man that dragged me away as a child (Obeah curse him). I know too, that I would suffer no remorse for the death of the Portuguese man that locked me in the dungeon. The men on the ship, well, those sailors appeared to be captives too, and lived in conditions as bad as ours. Only the high

continued
captains with the big hats and cactus chains were considered bad men on the boat.

These days, the young ones want us to hate the master. They say it is all his fault; but for an old one like me, it is hard to hate the only man who ever fed me right, or gave me a home since I was dragged from my father’s home — even if he would beat me bloody before he would see me not go to work tomorrow. I will just have to think on that more tomorrow, while I’m hulling the master’s rice.

Mr. Free-man   |  India Ink (18” x 24”)
by Gabbi Judy
What we really want to say, but can’t . . .

Speak your mind
I can feel what you want to say
You look at me
I feel it
Say it
Can it hurt me?
Oh, but I already know
The way you look at me tells all
It hurts doesn’t it?
I know
So say it

Samone Alexa McCarter

Finds in the Attic | Oil paint (16” X 20”)
by Lindsey Cirmotich

Drum Major

Some things are untouchable:
    Gardenias that turn brown when stroked —
    Seductive embers in a dying fire —
    An eagle’s nest
    The Dead Sea scrolls —
    The animated leader of the band —

We’re blessed to catch a glimpse of excellence, and know it by a knowing in our bones.
Well, dancing spirit, we were blessed indeed.
We saw a lovely thing and called it that.

Are praises wrung from time; has air-brushed memory kept you as you were?
Was your chromatic armor more than cloth?
Ahh — tableau of majestic pageantry —
    paradigm of unspoiled confidence —
    suggested stuff-of-legends attitude —
    high-born-to-a-kingdom countenance —
Return and entertain us once again!

The years permit the risk of honesty where ours is not a question nor a quest, and once upon a time there was a beating (like a drum) of roaring, rousing rhythm in our wrists — and not for music’s sake.
We saw a lovely thing and called it that.

Jan Osborne

What we really want to say, but can’t . . .

Speak your mind
I can feel what you want to say
You look at me
I feel it
Say it
Can it hurt me?
Oh, but I already know
The way you look at me tells all
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Jan Osborne
It Never Matters

It never matters what others call you. It matters what you call yourself. It doesn’t matter what others think you look like. It matters how you know you look. Beauty isn’t defined by others. Beauty is defined by you.

Felisha Baggs

Fantasy Man

Steal me away to a child-like morning where warm winds feel like songs and rain like a soft shower of fine wine that brings about blooms of storybook flowers where light and color flood around us so there are no shadows to fear, where comfort is forever in your arms and home is wherever we are.

Becki Cowatch

Bathing Beauty

by Pamela Westcott

Pansy Polka

by Larry Carter

Poetry

A little something more than what is visible is called poetry.

April Rose
Reading has always been one of my greatest passions. My mother forewent the usual childhood texts and, instead, began reading works of literature to me when I was an infant. There was no Dr. Seuss or Curious George for me. From birth I was immersed in the works of Mark Twain, Rudyard Kipling, Homer, and others. By the age of three, I was reading on my own, and I too ignored the standards of toddler literature. My imagination soared with every word, and I was filled with wonder and amazement. I was also filled with curiosity and longing. I wanted to ride the Black Stallion, search for buried treasure, fight dragons and Cyclops, and raft the wild rivers. This last reading-inspired endeavor and its consequences are the subject of this story.

Mark Twain is one of the greatest literary minds to put pen to paper in the history of American literature. He left a legacy of American literature that should be required for anyone who wants to truly experience reading. His stories are a fascinating mix of humor, drama, action, and suspense. These traits are coupled with a fluid writing style and a true sense of Americana, so it is no wonder that Twain mesmerized me with his adventures.

I was enthralled with the adventures of Huck Finn and his private island on the Mississippi. The thought of floating the mighty river on a simple raft and exploring new lands evoked a tremendous and visceral response in me. Even at seven years of age, I considered myself ready to become the next renowned explorer of the untamed wilderness. Glynn County in the seventies was a very different place than it is now. Downtown Brunswick was the only urban area; the rest of Glynn County was still heavily wooded with virgin forests and pristine marshland. It was in this lush woodland setting that I spent much of my young life. The forest, swamps, and marsh behind our secluded home were the playgrounds of my youth. Even as a preschooler, I roamed these wilds without fear. The outdoors and reading were my passions.

The marshes of Glynn are beautiful vistas of green and brown through which small tributaries twist before emptying into greater bodies of water such as the South Brunswick River. One of these small tributaries ran near our house at the marsh’s edge. The rafting trip that Huckleberry Finn had undertaken inspired me to plan my own excursion. From the marsh’s verge I could see small hammocks interspersed in the open plains of the wetlands. I imagined myself as a conqueror of these small islands, a bold adventurer daring to explore exotic new lands. I began to search for an appropriate vessel for my journey, and finally came upon an old gate of rough-hewn logs that seemed a perfect craft. I worked hard to drag the heavy, makeshift raft to an appropriate launching place on a small tidal slough. With my corsair now chosen, I laid in supplies for my journey: Hi-C fruit drinks and Little Debbie snack cakes. Finally I chose a first mate for my intrepid schooner. Lobo was a coy-dog that had wandered up one day as a puppy and proceeded to insinuate himself into our family. He soon became my stalwart companion. Accompanied by my fearless canine cohort, I readied for departure.

The morning sun lolled brightly overhead, casting sharp shadows on the ground. Two of these shadows preceded us into the open areas of the marsh. It was a warm, brilliant day, a day perfect for discovery and rife with the promise of adventure. The moist, peaty smell of the marsh permeated the gentle breeze that rustled the marsh grass. A stunning blue sky stretched overhead, punctuated with gossamer wisps of vivid white clouds. Contrails from a lone jet aircraft sketched twin lines across the azure canvas. The surface of the water in the small tributary was perfectly still, reflecting the beauty above. Occasionally, a small, concentric ring would form as some small fish breached the surface. The sound of the wind in the long grasses was joined by the calls of various birds as they rode the thermals. I sat at the tree line nearby and read while I waited for the tide to begin its meandering passage back out. This movement would provide the propulsion for my vessel. Soon, the tide had turned and it was time to embark on my voyage.

continued
The raft lay positioned at the water's edge, ready for its maiden cruise. With my small bag of provisions in hand, I boarded the vessel and called Lobo to join me. He jumped onto the raft without hesitation. I used my makeshift oar consisting of a palm tree frond to push us out into the current. Apparently using some canine sense of premonition, Lobo immediately abandoned ship and swam the few feet to shore. He emerged onto dry land, his pelt glistening with water, and regarded me with mournful eyes. I laughed at his sudden lack of confidence in this undertaking. He would be sorry when only my name was preserved for posterity.

The current moved me steadily along at first, and I was thrilled with the prospect of discovery. As the small craft picked up speed, I felt the first twinges of apprehension. As the tributary emptied, the marsh grass began to move past me quite a bit faster than I had anticipated. I attempted to steer the raft towards the bank, but was thwarted by the fast current and my poor choice in oars. I was at the mercy of the tide. The rustling of the marsh grass, once a comforting background sound, now became a cacophony of laughter. The swift current propelled me ever forward, towards the open water of the South Brunswick River. Anxiety began to grow within me. I knew that even a mild chop on the open river could easily capsize my raft. I would be thrown from it and, for the first time, I realized that I was bereft of a life jacket. Even a greater concern was that Mom was certainly going to be mad. I found salvation approaching in the form of the small, marsh-bound hammock that had been my destination. I was certain that I could beach the raft on its shore and remain there, awaiting the incoming tide. I prepared to dock my boat at the earliest chance, only to discover that the creek I was currently in did not actually lie on the perimeter of the tiny isle. Instead, the only access to the hammock was a small game trail cut through the marsh. Hope was quickly replaced with fear and desperation.

The flowing current was now a bitter enemy, bent on my destruction. All thoughts of adventure and discovery vanished. My heart was racing as I struggled to think rationally and find a solution to my plight. I decided to use a strategy employed by all great explorers from Columbus to Lewis and Clark, from Cook to Lindbergh: I screamed for help. My cries sent marsh hens scattering and a large white egret took flight. They did nothing, however, to slow my inevitable arrival at the mouth of the creek. The vast expanse of the river approached as fear took a stranglehold on my heart and I could only watch as my fate unfolded before me.

Suddenly, my fortunes changed. A boat moved into the mouth of the creek on an intercept course. Two men had been fishing the outlet of the creek and had heard my distressed calls for help. They motored into the estuary to see a small boy perched precariously on a wooden contraption. They came alongside and plucked me from my sodden transport. I realized that these two intrepid anglers were, in fact, members of my father’s church. Their faces showed first shock then bemusement at hearing my story. We returned to the boat ramp where they had put their boat in, and began the journey home. A brief stop was made to telephone my mother and let her know my whereabouts. I later found out that, after Lobo uncharacteristically returned home without me, my mother had set out to look for me. After finding my tracks by the marsh along with the drag marks from my raft, she had rushed home to contact the authorities only to find the phone ringing. I was shortly deposited at home where my poor mother alternated between relief at my safe return, and near-apoplexy at my foolish endeavor. I regained my composure with a stiff drink — hot chocolate — and afternoon cartoons.

A few years later I would return to that tiny hammock in a small rowboat and explore it to my satisfaction. But, for a time, I left exploration to others and contented myself with reading their exploits. Throughout the years since, I have had many more adventures and a great number of exploits, but I will always remember that literacy-inspired voyage of my youth.
Folle Blanche
by Jamie Hardy
No Tomorrow

There can be no tomorrow
That does not begin in your arms.
There can be no tomorrow
Without the dawn upon your face.
There can be no tomorrow
Absent the brush of your kiss.
There can be no tomorrow
Without the warmth of your skin.
There can be no tomorrow
That your smile does not announce.
There can be no tomorrow
If your whisper is not heard.
There can be no tomorrow
Without you in my life.
God could not allow tomorrow
To herald another day;
The earth would stop and the heavens halt,
Were a love like this to fade.

Bennett Rainey

And the Fire Did
Not Consume

by Shawntay Rivers

Latté

by Justin Gines
Renaissance Sleeping

There is a place of promised restoration, enhanced by leaves of many autumns and bones of golden harvests —
Where fragrances are carried on the winds of breathed anticipation.
And as I tread this dormant earth let me not overly assess.
I bring no scales nor yardsticks.
I cancel all experience that leaks into blind judgment like plasma from a healing wound.
I simply close my eyes and wait.

Comes a haunting, a silent emanation, a subtle recognition as elusive as the ghost of hide-and-seek.
Phantom aromas slip softly past in colorless, intangible parade, stirring in my spirit a February feeling that something’s coming soon.

I see nothing — but who can see a fragrance or describe it?
No adjectives reveal the names of floating apparitions that conjure up sensory recall — but remembered scents pervade, stir up the secret soul more vividly than either sight or sound.


Alive! I’m so alive in beatific joy — just breathing — in the middle of a fallow field of renaissance sleeping.

Jan Osborne

Ruins in Time | Computer-enhanced

by Jayme Williams
The Daily Struggle

It’s like,
Watching someone die
Over a span of
Twenty, thirty, forty years.
It’s like,
One day they recognize you,
And then the next,
You’re a kind stranger
Paying them a visit.
Sitting. Waiting. Watching.
For some spark,
Some memory.
Some recognition.
Something, anything.
It’s like,
A struggle.
An effort,
To perform simple tasks.
It’s like,
Looking through glass.
Distorted, dusty, dirty glass.
Seeing flashes
Of tidbits
Of memories,
Long gone into the unknown.
It’s like,
Trying to lift weights without your arms,
Or trying to breathe without lungs,
Or going to church with no pants on,
It just doesn’t make very much sense.
It’s like,
The ocean.
Swells of memories
Storms of emotions
Swirl through your mind like a hurricane.
Then,
Just like that,
Disappearing,
Into the dark abyss.
Never to be found again.

Victoria Ayres

End of the Road
by Sidonia Serafini

Jigsaw

A thousand me-shaped
pieces struggle to reform
a fractured picture.

April Rose
Away from the City

by Sidonia Serafini

Tranquility Delivers Transcendence

Brush pen, bamboo brush, and acrylic ink on cardstock (12” X 12”)

by Kaci Coleman
In the Fall of My Years

The fall leaves are turning,
Bright orange and golden hue.
The breeze is gently cooling,
Morning sheen of autumn dew.

White clouds stand out boldly
Against skies of brightest blue.
The night stars shine intensely,
As I gaze on God's celestial view.

Am I in the fall of my years
And fleeting moments to pursue?
Or do I have time aplenty
To walk this earth’s purview?

Can I enjoy each and every moment
And not worry they are too few?
Ignore swift fleeting time;
Relax casually as though I knew,

That Dark Slumber does not brew
Its dire potion for me yet.
That I would make it through
The long, cold winter ahead.

But no guarantees I see,
No predictions certain and true.
So I will revel in each precious moment,
And my lease on life renew.

Bennett Rainey

Rise & Overcome

I feel darkness all around me
I feel as if every other step I take is into a cloud of negativity
Wishing it could get me and take me down with it, as if it were suicidal
Idly waiting for me to slip or trip into its dimensions
And give in to its many forms and overwhelming power

But still I rise and overcome . . . .
The manifestations of frustration trying to hold me back
While contemplating but not mistaking the good for bad, or bad for good
Because the world is a cruel place sometimes,
But one way or another you gotta learn to take it
Just pace yourself and I promise that you can make it

I feel overtaken with Claustrophobia
I feel as if I am being overpowered by pressure
The pressure of a struggling family who need an exit, a way out, or a retreat
And the weight of circumstance is bearing down, like a boulder on both shoulders
Constantly trying to push me closer and closer towards the edge
Attempting at every waking moment, to cast me over into the deep canyon
Filled with might-have-beens and misery

But still I rise and overcome . . . .
The manifestations of frustration trying to hold me back
While contemplating but not mistaking the good for bad, or bad for good
Because the world is a cruel place sometimes,
But one way or another you gotta learn to take it
Just pace yourself and I promise that you can make it . . . I promise.

James Coleman

Leftovers

March and April dust gather in the corners of my November soul.

April Rose
**When the Canary Sings**  |  Acrylic on canvas (16" X 20")
*by David Frey*

**The Fall of Democracy**

Ahead of me, A river of red
curdles into a pool of black.
All the while, purple majesties
are flailing at my back!
A soaring eagle yanks a bone from the river —
A sickly, meatless snack.
Another feather falls in America . . .

*Karen Price*

**Happy Birthday**

You called yourselves street spirits,
but you were just pictures of an age
and the book was not great
and nobody
you could relate with read a page.
and they all laughed as the library burned
cold holes for eyes and your sore gut it churned
the ash on our faces
never a trace of
the acrylic that faded with yesterday’s turn

*Jason Dean Oglesby*
The Muse Is Sound Asleep

The muse has left the Building.
The muse is sound asleep.
The news gives much to write about, but
The muse has promises to keep.
There’s a tea party with invitations.
Those signs must be painted.
We must find a federal building
to stand in front of so television cameras can make
us sainted.
Occupiers are rampaging.
Wannabees are campaigning; from Wall Street to Kansas Streets; to Iowa Streets; to Cali Streets,
are they doing this in Bali Streets too?

Would you care for some tea while you occupy?

The muse is waking up.
There are promises to keep
The tea is brewing;
The wannabees are stewing;
The signs are painted;
The occupiers are sainted . . .
The muse is sound awake and there are
promises to keep!

Hattie Mc Coleman
In the middle of the block in a downtown neighborhood sat a two-story blue house with yellow trim. On the second floor of this house in a small bathroom with tan colored walls and a black and white tiled floor was a girl. The girl was 15 years old; she had a small frame, skin as dark as chocolate, and hair that stopped at her shoulders. The bathroom was filled with so much steam you could barely see five inches in front of you. The girl sat on the floor of the shower in a trance. She was wearing a watch, some dirty white sneakers, and eyeglasses that could not be seen out of because of all the steam. The girl was all alone in the big house but she was screaming and sobbing as if there were someone there to answer the questions she kept repeating. “Why! Why me? Why do bad things always happen to me? What did I do to deserve this?” The girl knew that nobody could hear or answer her, but she could not control her tears or the words that were coming out of her mouth. After about twenty minutes the girl had stopped screaming but she was still crying and sobbing as if there were someone there to answer the questions she kept repeating. “Why! Why me? Why do bad things always happen to me? What did I do to deserve this?” The girl felt dirty and sick to her stomach. She felt as if she had just been raped all over again. She began to scrub her skin, hard, just as she had done when she got home the night she had been attacked. She scrubbed and scrubbed, but that dirty feeling didn’t go away and she began to scream out again.

Two months passed and the girl was finally able to tell her mother what had happened. Her mother didn’t believe her of course. The girl’s mother was almost three times her size, she had a few missing teeth, and her curly hair fell about an inch below her shoulders. The mother always smelled of marijuana and beer whenever she would finally decide to come home. The girl hated to hear her mother open the front door and would avoid her as much as possible because whenever her mother laid eyes on her she immediately began to curse at and hit the girl.

The girl and her mother had never really been close. The mother was too busy attending parties and entertaining male guests to pay any attention to the girl. The mother raised the girl to always be silent when she was outside of her bedroom: she told the girl, “You are to be seen and not heard.” She obliged her mother’s instruction because she feared getting beaten. The girl had spent most of her life in her room all alone except on the few occasions when she would venture out with her mother and two younger brothers to visit a relative. Now that she was pregnant she spent all of her time in her room intentionally isolating herself from the world and especially from her two brothers (who made her skin crawl if they tried to hug her or if they so much as brushed against her while passing in the hallway). The girl was slipping into a deep depression and did not know it.

One afternoon after her fifth shower of the day, the girl stood in front of the bathroom mirror looking herself up and down. She was disgusted with herself and her life. She told herself over and over that nobody loved her, nobody respected her, and the world would be a better place without one more ugly little black girl and her bastard child. The girl began to sob so profusely that the tears blinded her, but she still managed to reach out and open up the medicine cabinet and take out several bottles of pain relievers. She wiped her tears, put on a dingy white bathrobe, and walked slowly to her room with what she thought was the solution to all her problems in her hands. When the girl got to her bedroom door, she stopped and looked toward her brothers’ bedroom; she wanted to tell them goodbye but decided against it because they didn’t love her either. As the girl closed her bedroom door, it was as if her baby was yelling out from the womb, “Stop! Please don’t do this!” but she ignored that little voice. The girl sat down on her bed, crossed her legs and cried silently as she began chewing up the pills one by one until they were all gone. Sometime later the girl felt nauseous and sleepy, so she laid her head down on a pillow that was wet with tears and she drifted off into a deep sleep.

continued
When the girl woke up, she felt horrible. She was dizzy, her head hurt, and everything was blurry. There was a tube in her nose, an IV in her right arm, and a blood pressure cuff on her left. She looked around, squinting her eyes while tugging at the blood pressure cuff. "No, honey, don’t do that," said a strange but comforting voice. Just when the girl felt relaxed and realized she was in the hospital, she heard her mother’s voice from across the room. "Why did you have to do this now? Why couldn’t you wait till I got off work? Now that I know you ain’t dead, I’m going back to my job, ‘cause I’m not going to lose my job because of you!" The nurse handed the girl her eyeglasses and she put them on just in time to see her mother storming out of the hospital room. The nurse shook her head sadly and said, "You okay, honey? Is there anything I can get for you?" Tears streamed down the girl’s face as she shook her head no and drifted back off to sleep.

A week later, the girl sat in the lobby of a mental health center and was all alone yet again. The girl was now even more depressed because not only had she failed to earn her mother’s love, she failed to protect herself from being raped, and now she had failed to kill herself. Just when the girl had decided to leave, an obviously pregnant white woman with curly brown hair that fell in the center of her back, wearing a dark floral print dress and gold sandals, came up to her extended her hand and said, "I’m sorry it took me so long; come on back!" The woman’s voice was so cheerful, and she looked so funny waddling down the hallway to her office that the girl smiled her first smile in several weeks. As the girl sat in the small, pale pink office that smelled like cotton candy and was decorated with plants and family portraits, she felt a sense of peace and happiness. The girl noticed that the woman’s voice was gentle and soothing, unlike her mother’s. The girl could entrust to this strange woman her deepest darkest secrets, or so she thought, because the moment the woman inquired about the rape and the girl’s unborn child, the girl could only sob. The woman sat down beside the girl, stroked her back, and told her that no matter what anyone said (to include the rapist), what happened was not her fault. The woman then prayed with the girl, which comforted her even more. The woman told the girl that whenever she was feeling a certain way, or thinking a certain thought and she had no one to share it with, to write it down, and she handed the girl a journal.

With each sentence the girl wrote in the journal, she shed another tear, but her heart felt lighter. The more she wrote, the more she wanted to live, and when she stopped writing, she looked down and realized that she had written a very meaningful poem about a very horrible experience. Even though she had been given the power to express herself in a way she never thought possible, deep down inside she was still the girl whose mother thought she should be seen and not heard. So to this day, the girl writes because writing is where she is strong and fearless.

A Circle of Sassafras

I found a naked, dry-boned, leafless laurel
God gave to me a long, long time ago —
A packed-away almost forgotten garland
That hid beneath the attic’s overflow.

The leaves long since had withered, gone to powder —
But still it kept a sweet and spicy smell.
Now, I recall the time (almost a lifetime)
It coaxed a chambered poet from a shell.

I drifted in and out — I was a stranger
(More to myself than to vague poetry).
I lost myself and found myself bare-headed
In a wilderness of what I’m born to be.

In time long past I stowed away the laurel —
For sure I didn’t wear the thing for years —
But yesterday, I sniffed the ragged trophy
And breathed away old tragedies and fears.

Today, I see green buds on that old circle;
Like Aaron’s rod, God-given life is there —
And leaves of sassafras will sprout tomorrow.
Yes! Even if a busy world won’t care.

Jan Osborne
Grass, just simple green grass — it always makes me smile . . .

While on our annual Mommy and Me vacation, my daughter and I decided to have a picnic. Somewhere between the river’s edge and the golf course, we found the most perfect, oak-canopied, grass-carpeted spot between here and heaven. As I began to lay out our feast, my little girl (all grown up now), rifled through the bags in search of a pre-lunch snack.

Paying homage to my nickname, Grace, I knocked the paper towels to the ground. My daughter shook her head and laughed as she bent to pick them up for me. “Way to go, Grace.” As any vigilant mother would, I noticed the blade of grass stuck to my daughter’s rear-end just where her bathing suit had ridden up. I reached to brush it away, but the grass would not budge. I tried again; the grass adamantly remained in place.

“What are you doing, Mom?” As I started to explain that she had grass stuck to her butt, realization dawned as a red glow on her face. “It won’t come off, Mom,” she mumbled. As it turns out, when she was a kid, “. . . like last year, when I was only eighteen . . . ,” she went on a trip with her best friend from college. She tried drinking. Then, she tried getting a tattoo. The “grass” on her behind was the single green line the tattoo artist completed before my daughter, crying, begged him to stop.

This is the part where I should have gotten angry, right? No, not a chance. As I thought of a long-ago trip to the beach with my little brother, I ran a hand across a small tattoo on my right shoulder, and I smiled. No, this was the part when I looked at my child, my little girl, and announced, “Let’s eat!”
Winged Warrior

The great winged warriors with red helmets and glossy black coats, are invited to the field of death and destruction. Who are these Guardians, sentinels of the carrion and choicest spoils?

Be he knave or knight, jack or joker, the winged warrior waits patiently for the right time to strike. The great leader leaves his shelter and seeks the slain.

Patiently he waits, sensing the oncoming battle and the inevitable rush of blood. Winged warrior, are you an angel of death or just victor of the spoils? From great heights they wait and soar above all . . . graceful, beautiful, keenly waiting to attack.

The scavenger cocks his head contemplating his next meal. Sharply, talons tear the flesh; they feast and feed on blood. Bones are left to dry in the sun.

What knave, what Jack, shall cross the path to tear the flesh from greater foe? Is this the warrior Hector, the Prince of the Trojans? Is this Lancelot, the fabled knight of Olde? or merely a murder of rooks, ravens and crows?

The great warrior holds his black mantle out proudly, keeping all on-lookers away from his prize. Seizing the prized eye, the rooks and ravens screech in disappointment, ever lingering on the sidelines of the battlefield.

Vigilantly, the great soldier searches for the next battle, the next meal, the next vulnerable soul to cross his path. Is he a cruel warrior thirsting for death or just looking for the opportunities that must surely come?

Kimberly Helms
I Felt Myself Pour Out Today

I felt myself pour out today,
like a sticky, messy, honeyed mass of feeling.
I was encapsulated with magic and frankness and fear.
And I defied the flies.
I felt myself drain completely
for once in my life, like an empty plastic cup
glittering red Dixie in the blazing heat of the June summertime sun.
It was pure, it was hopeful, and it was total.
I felt, for one blinking second, as if I were an angel
made of amorphous, gooey, blinding, brilliant light.
I felt hope.
I felt peace.
Then I felt nothing
except the whispering memory of clarity,
a brief, searing, and violently incandescant moment
filled with the desire to be the man that I am in my dreams.

Ben Harrell

Random Curiosity

Suspend my mail above a steaming kettle,
Then rifle through my trash receptacle —
And open wide the closet in my bathroom —
Look underneath my bed . . . a spectacle!

Feel on the highest shelf. No bodice-rippers?
There’s much to learn about me from my books.
Do not neglect to peek inside the pantry
To know my tastes, or if I even cook.

Check out my music . . . that should tell you volumes —
There’s Kris Kristofferson — Chris Martin, too.
Who’s Boston Pops, and who’s John Philip Sousa?
Give up on that; you haven’t got a clue!

Now, in the drawer that holds the frilly undies,
Take all the time you need to gasp and gape.
Stomp through my life, my litter — but take warning!
Don’t wear my shoes! You’ll stretch them out of shape.

Dixie Dean

Odds and Ends

by Emily Axelson
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