

The phoenix

Literary Journal of Milligan College

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the phoenix

Literary Journal of
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The Phoenix is a mythological bird of fire that only once in a very great while will be resurrected from ashes. Like the Phoenix, life is born from death, our true spirituality is born from suffering, and ultimately, artistic creation is born from the angst the artist experiences as he or she tries to make sense of the paradox of the beauty of life and the isolation from it. Everything we have in life that we consider good or true or beautiful must be constantly resurrected from and is only possible because of the ashes of suffering, isolation, and death.

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* Featured Story

Innuendo*

Stephen T. Harvey

If you were to ask, "Oedipal?"
I would say "Yes, but more."
Let not Freud catch such a fragile
butterfly with his clumsy net. "Tempress,
then?" "Of course, but much too subtle."
Let us say that because
she sighs in constant metaphor,
and only the moon whispers truths less
known.

She moves with all the connotations
of a falling leaf. For a command, a hint
intangible—a wrinkle, perhaps? A suggestion
of a prolonged breath? —is merely an afterthought
you do not question. And if some notion
falls too gently on your dull brain, blame fate
as she casually rages in silence. Innocent
is her evil. And you must love her heart of delicate
stone.

*Featured Poem

windchimes

hannah

through the window
I see the children speaking,
 running to the grocery on the corner
to pick up some coca-cola—
the dogs,
 multicolored
 linger behind,
giving way to the juice of
the crushed flowers
 underfeet
the drops of dandelion wine—
the mothers watch the small bodies
shrink
and disappear around the corner;
continue to wash dishes
oblivious to the
 sticky,
 stale dish water—
gingham curtains unfurl and
blow in the summer breeze:
crickets stop on
 the swings
I sit and watch.

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Few and Far In-between

Matt Good

Of all the times
I've spoken
Few are the moments
When my words are remembered
But when life speaks Truth
Words are heard and become real
For words once spoken are dead
Weight unless they become thoughts
 in the mind of another

So speak of the days gone by if you
wish
But I want to hear the matters of soul
or your words drop on the ground dead to
 the world

Open your eyes to speak to me

Poetry

Cold

Chris Curtis

One walks in fear on the icy lake
Don't slip, don't run, don't hop, don't cry
Do not, no, don't make a mistake

All hell awaits you if you fracture its face
You'll be damned by the damned
Although you shout it's unfair; your disgrace

Run but don't slip, if you do, if you dare
Hop around like a fool in your life and you will cry
That's life and that's fair

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13:13 Matthew

Sutherland Jacob

rock of a splitter
face the in splat
away playfully twitter
true be could
not can you
wind the to say
depends all love on that
decided have you
gave
sacrifice the for yourself
away far away
beyond and death to
pay to price terrible a
by stands that God
but obedience expects who
know he did
push to not
control not can it because love
you?

My View

Amy Wicks

O. House on the hill.
Beacon of Light.
Spread out thy glimmering
Beams to the Night.
Love housed within.
Send forth to the Wild.
Cast out the fears
Of Thy wandering Child.
Pray, Open the Door!
(The Dawn cometh fast.)
I can't make it alone
Midst this maddening blast!
I seek Peace like the Sailor
Who longs for a shore.
Where his Anchor might hold
Ever-fast, ever-more.
I rap at the Window—
The Door swingeth wide!
I find solace within
With my comforting Guide.

Nickel Box Theatre

Scott Rice

To know which is real, to know which is straight
It's an angle of sorts, it's a battle of words
It's a working machine without power chords

Tonight I'm a star, today I'm a fake
It's a meaning you know, it's a go-one man show
It's a working machine that has no place to go.

Before it's too long
Before it's too late to be
It all settles in
A nickel box picture for me

To know where to go, to know where to be
It's a smell, it's a night, it's the dark and the light
It's a working machine that still has the right

To know how it went, and how it will be
It's a feeling of fade, it's another one's way
It's a working machine that just might have it made

I am the it, yes I am the he
It's a promising sun, it's a pain holy one
It's a working machine that can get nothing done

To know how to pray, to know something new
It's a repeating sound about quiet and loud
It's a working machine that has nothing it found

Before it's too long
Before it's too late to be
It all settles in
A nickel box picture for me

"Tonight, it rained,"

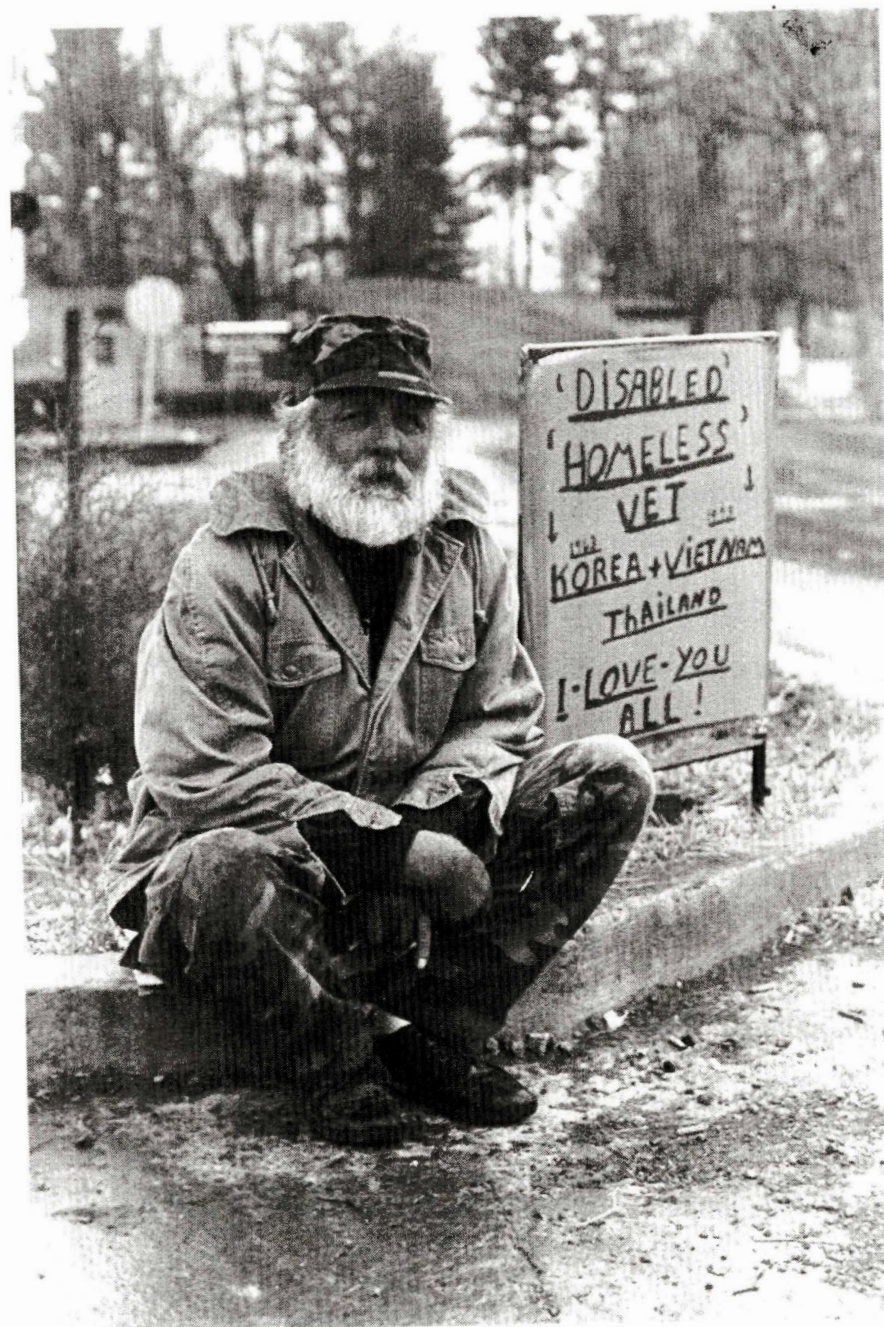
Sarah Farnsworth

Tonight, it rained,
And the soft pellets slid between my fingertips
And the misty fog veiled my breath —
And tiny droplets saturated my soul —
The constancy revealing my mortality.

Tonight, it rained
crystal clear droplets potent with life
pure upon descension — metamorphosize to
muddy pools of oily rainbows and black sand
cleansed only by evaporative ascension.

Tonight, it rained.
The sordid creek chants a raven ploy
beneath eluding stars and dark dark skies.
Clutching excavated breath in midst of saturated
life.
Barefoot across chasms of broken glass and tin.
Tonight, it rained. And the world is wet.

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Patriotism

The Lamenting Soul of John Hancock

O say can you see
Through the eyes of the late-twentieth-century-self-
made-God
Who can—have pity on your souls
Who see truth—see Kurtz's horror on a cosmic
scale.

My country tis of thee
That countless drops of blood fall on my head
As the sins of my fathers are visited upon me.

America-God. who dropped hell on that eastern
Satan
And tormented the countless bodies and souls.
As an angel
Not Michael
But Enola Gay
Inflicted your judgment.

Who caused the rivers of blood to flow
Through the streets among small grass houses
And over the heads of children,

Who stormed the desert
And counted the price of red liquid
As less important than the price of black
(Blessed is he who comes in the name of greed and
lust)

America-false-god I pen this song to you
O blasphemous, for blood stained years. God shed
his wrath on thee.

The River

Devon

A wet and half-drowned child clutches his father's strong
arm
As he is led out of the raging river
Bruised and cut, but already he forgets the fear—
The fear of being swept away, rolled over in the flood.
Battered and crushed against cold unfeeling stones
Like a meteor smashing into some distant planet.
He lets go and the strong supporting arm sadly watches
As fear becomes a purposefully forgotten memory
And he tries once again to wade in the torrent.

And as he is carried away, he screams in blasphemous
anger against his god who failed.

"Accessibility to things of need."

Artemis

Accessibility to things of need.
Giving into our desires and falling fast
and sound asleep.
Space enough to reach out into an armspread dance
embracing the wind. Cleanliness and order for some.
Bundled up in warmth.
Coffee in hand, indulging in good conversation.
Being understood without fighting for it.
Loved wholly, honestly, purely and solely for
who I really am. Walking through the dark
and holding onto the light
knowing . . .
laughing without reservation.



Bugs: A Fable*Greg Hartley*

Oh woe is me, said the Fly to the Flea,
 I'll tell you what went wrong:
 While flying around, I didn't look down,
 And a spider's web caught me headlong!

No fear, said Flea, I'll rescue thee
 And here's why it'll be a cinch:
 The spider is dead from a blow to the head
 Now from that old web you I'll pinch.

Hooray, said the Fly, but I'll probably die
 And the reason for that is quite easy:
 From this high in the air, I'm really quite scared
 For the ground far below's made me queasy.

Said the Flea now, What rot, you'll likely as not
 Survive the transition with vigor
 'Cause I'm strong to the end, and with help from my friend
 We'll get you down, just me n' Chigger.

But Chigger, you see, said Fly to Flea
 Is a terribly tiny companion
 If he drops my weight, and I fall to my fate,
 I'll splat on the floor of this canyon!

Why Chigger, said Flea, is as strong as can be,
 For his size, now, he can lift plenty.
 We don't even blink where others would shrink
 From a job that would need ten or twenty.

Said Fly, Now wait, let's all hesitate,
 But not from small faith in your Chigger
 I'm sure he's quite passed the rest of his class,
 But could he be just a bit bigger?

Now Chigger piped up from an old coffee cup
 That he had purloined down in Brussels.
 "I'll have you know, now, you whining old cow,
 That I'm practically bulging with muscles!"

Yet the Fly took offense at Chigger's pretense
 That he was a coward complainer.
 So he fluttered his wings like jet-powered things
 To escape and prove Chigger the tamer.

The force of his thrust to make the web bust
 Merely caused him a further entangle
 And firm in the trap Fly finally spat,
 I'm prepared to examine your angle.

So Chigger jumped down and continued to frown,
 But was willing to do Fly a favor
 He Climbed up the web to the top of Fly's head,
 Looked down and started to waver.

Look here, my dear Flea, come up and help me,
 This height's caused my head to go swimmin'
 Good gracious, said Flea, when I get there, you'll see,
 You both sound like frightened old women.

And Flea took a hop, and leaped to the top
 To Chigger and Fly he yelled down,
 I'll give you your hope and cut this here rope,
 Then I'll race you both back into town.

But when Flea had ascended he slowly amended
 His boast as he saw the web towered
 He cringed and he shivered while the deadly web quivered,
 So it turned out that all three were cowards.

Here they would have stayed till came judgment day
 (Poor Chigger had started to cry),
 If no help there was that came with a buzz
 The savior soared in: Dragonfly!

Dragonfly bared his chest as his wings did the rest
And he hoisted the shivering bunch.
They clung to his back in a panic attack,
With each jolt nearly losing their lunch.

On approach to the ground Dragonfly spun around
And let the fools fall for a while
Just before they collided, to Flea Fly confided
That at least they were dying in style.

"In and Out"

Richard W. Cummings

In and Out
go shift after shift of workers;
"Hello Jim, Marty;"
Hollow faces garnish hollow lives,
and trucks with gun-racks pour
In and Out

In and Out
slips the slide of a blues trombone;
There is a muted buzz at lonely hour;
"What will ya' have?" groans the barkeep
and Miss "What was her name?" enters or exits
In and Out

In and Out
'sheaths that make light love safe;
"Miss 'what was her name?' looked differently in the
morning;"
(A few minutes unlonely)
"Into my life he passed
In . . . and Out."

In and Out
rushes indifferent time;
Nana hair on chin and Grandpa so and so wonder.
"Where did my life go?"
The buzzards circle as primogeniture sets
In, and life ebbs Out.

"Twas but only an hour ago,"

Mac McKinney

Twas but only an hour ago,
and the storm did flash and sound in the night,
All afraid were the reapers of the norm,
but the Ben Franklins of curiosity flew kites.

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Three paintings

B. James

My winged friend perhaps
things would have been sewn
with surer hands had I known
then what I know now.

Midnight phoenix you rose
again in Degas' dancers.
just when I thought you
were gone.

Now the arms of Atlas
hold us far too close.
Your garments drape
from you, unfurled to eternity.

I wonder how wide they gape.
I'm pinned to you in all of
your incarnations. Every life
you take a deeper bite.

Had I known that the search for
knowledge and truth, would
end with me still waiting
for your painted words.

Had I known that my dreams
would always be only half
granted. I would have never
faced your riddle, you Sphinx.

I am Prometheus. I am
Judas. I am the husk
of the fruit you once
tasted. My raven.

Poetry

Savory

Brian Landrum

That life is gone
untouchable shadows

Amidst these shells
that life tears open
by the strands of your heart

It doesn't fit anymore
It can't

You are worthless, and they
pretend you're not

—How they despise your life!
this life, your life, your sacred life

Now you're stolen.
that life carved.
quartered by rancid affection
Your soul grinds into tears—
In them they see
a rotting reflection.
The masks fade away
and empty hearts follow.

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Silence

Sebastian

What is in a word that makes it stay home
What is in a heart that keeps it there
Why does man's mind cage them in
like so many prisoners in black despair

Why does one wait
for confusion's agile grasp
Why does one let his thoughts grow grayer

Speak! If I am loved let me rejoice. If I am damned let it
be so. Just release me from these chains of fear and
turmoil.

Pain and joy wait eagerly at the door of my mind, sword
in one hand, a spear in the other. The Confusion, in full view
of the other guests, arrogantly gorge themselves at my table
leaving only scraps for us to eat. Contentment sits sullen
and quiet holding his empty plate to the pot. Fear selfishly
spares none. With each morsel consumed they bear more
of their kind: Anger, Resentment, Loneliness. The food
grows scarcer, the hearth grows darker.

In this immediate detriment one simple truth rings out.
The door is locked and the key, a word, lies only in her
heart.

One Starry Night

Brenda Michelle Troyer

I make a wish on a starry night
that a star would explode in rays
of pink and purple and green and
streak the sky like a radiant rainbow.

Then, as from a salt shaker, emeralds,
diamonds and rubies would drift
to the earth and cover the mountain tops
with their glistening hues.

The valleys would swell with mounds
of jewels and sparkle when the dawn breaks.
I'd awake with a dewy yawn after blissful slumber
and gasp in awe, "Is this heaven?"

I gaze into the universe and stretch out
my arms in loving gratitude as
the final beam of starlight smiles down on me
and twinkles stardust upon my hair.

Villanelle Lucifer

JLS

Something in your cool dark eyes burns like fire
as your words come so calmly and coolly,
but only I know you are a liar.

You used your smooth charm to arouse desire
in sweet and mild young girls, but secretly
something in your cool dark eyes burns like fire.

You come dressed to kill; soft words your attire.
You make promises so casually,
but only I know you are a liar.

Your elegance and grace they all admire
so blindly. If they'd just look, they could see
something in your cool dark eyes burns like fire.

And as your seductions always require
some lies, you tell them so convincingly,
but only I know you are a liar.

One by one they are thrown onto the pyre,
following lies into eternity.
Something in your cool dark eyes burns like fire
but only I know you are a liar.

An' the World Looked Bigger to Me

Nick Blosser

C G
She sat and stared at my knees.

C
an' I did the same for a minute or three.

F
She said you look troubled tonight.

D G
my knees started shakin I said yes you're right.

C
And then I proceeded to say

C G
I'm waitin' for somethin' you see.

C
The right things just don't seem ta happen for me

F
I work hard with nothin' to show.

D G
more often than not I feel kinda low.

G
I'm waitin' for somethin' you see.

Chorus

F D7 C
Aw, don't take yourself so seriously.

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D G
an' the temperature rose to a hundred degrees.

F
Don't dwell on emptiness.

C D G
fill up the night with everything good and right.

C
An' the world looked bigger to me.

We talked for an hour or three, an' drank cup after cup of strong coffee and tea.

The kitchen floor gathered with light, the sun had arisen and redeemed the night.

And then I proceeded to say

There's a change in my heart now you see, I don't feel the world can suffocate me.

I'm living a dream now again, an' it ain't about tearing my heart out for me.

But lettin' it show for others to see.

Chorus

Aw, don't take yourself so seriously,
an' the temperature dropped about 20 degrees.

Don't dwell on the emptiness,
fill up the night with everything good and right.

And the world looked bigger to me.

Poetry

Free-me Faith

Lee Magness

Free me from a three-
 fleece faith.
 a Yes-to-my-ques-
 tions, know-no-No faith.
 a cer / tain-an / swer,
 no-doubt-about-it faith.
 a right-as-red-sky-at-night,
 sign-from-heaven faith.
 a true/false-and-matching,
 no-multiple-choice faith.

for a faith
 that listens loud
 to your si(gh)lence.
 and hears your answer
 in our questions.

The Student

Stephen Glass

He is a student
 Reads Whitman and smiles amiably at the inanimate page
 His God is threadbare and gauzy
 A bunch of dead trees, words and phrases
 Stitched, double-stitched with lunacy and strange
 indulgence
 And I,
 I envision Emerson, Thoreau and Mr. Walt Whitman
 A convivial Arbor Day extravaganza
 Auschwitz or Dachau
 How each might react if he found himself smearing a Ritz
 into the same cheeseball as Josef Mengele.



**Elvis and the Demise of the Human Race
Or a Story for Kurt Vonnegut, Who Will Probably Never
Read It ***

Stephen Glass

May 2033 A.D.

Something happened. Which is almost always the case. Exactly what happened, on the other hand, no one is quite certain. Which is, also, almost always the case. We— “we” in this case meaning simply Homo Sapiens— are only aware of the superficial repercussions of this happening.

The human race is no longer capable of procreation. Our little sperm cells are all grossly defunct. Chromosomes got scrambled.

This, in some respects, is a real pity. But no one really seems to care anymore. It has been nearly four decades since the initial discovery of this little upset. In that time, Earth’s scientists have exhausted themselves and abandoned the search for a cure. They’ve all gone on vacation, so to speak. The rest of us have been big about the matter and rather gracefully accepted the fact that the species is about to be discontinued. Most of us have decided to go on vacation as well.

I, myself, am penning these few pages on Holiday Inn stationary. I believe this particular batch came from half-Way, Kansas, just off of Interstate 40, which runs all the way out near Flagstaff, Arizona and beyond. My friend Wallace and I are going to see the Grand Canyon.

Tonight we are sleeping in a Motel 6. Unfortunately, no one left the light on for us. There is no electricity now that everyone has gone on vacation. There is also no checking in or checking out to be done. Money is absolutely worthless stuff. The government and the banks have all closed their doors. It’s like Columbus Day every day.

There are other people camping out in this particular Motel 6. They are migrating east, towards Memphis,

*Featured story

Tennessee. They are going to Graceland. Graceland was the home of the late pelvis-gyrating rock 'n' roll star, Elvis Presley. He sang really stupid songs; regardless of this, people worship him, even now, in the twilight of humanity. People will worship just about anybody, I guess.

Earlier tonight, Wallace and I ate dinner with some of these pilgrims in the lobby. They talked about Elvis' death, and some of them started to cry. One woman from Gallup, New Mexico, between snuffles and great cathartic wailings, said that she missed Elvis even more than she missed television. The others assented that the death of Elvis and the death of television have been the two greatest tragedies to rock the world since the eviction at Eden. This proved, to Wallace and I, that they were all idiots.

I haven't seen anybody shoot anybody else in over fifteen years. It has been that long since there was a functional television on planet Earth. I haven't heard any stupid Elvis songs in a really long time, either. All of this is perfectly fine with me.

9 May 2033 A.D.

Today there was the most beautiful sunset. It was very yellow and red. I wrote a poem about it. I am a poet now. Before, back when people were still breeding like jack rabbits, I was a chiropractor. I find that being a poet is much more gratifying.

The poem went this way:

It is a beautiful sunset

I am happy to be outside

And I was happy to be outside. That's the nice thing about the imminent extinction of humanity. People have decided to come outside and play.

21 May 2033 A.D.

My friend Wallace believes he is on the verge of some sort of epiphany. He is drafting the blueprint for a small time machine. It will work, he says, according to the principles of a fourth-dimensional time warp theory he read about in some science fiction novel.

I am beginning to think Wallace may be a bit

wompus.

23 May 2033 A.D.

Today we passed a car rusting beside the road. Cars are pretty much just worthless configurations of metal these days. The gas people are all on vacation too.

The car was a Cadillac Eldorado. I thought that was something nice to think about—Eldorado. The world is a bit more like that now. It has slowed down considerably since people have quit begetting gizmos and what-nots.

28 May 2033 A.D.

This morning, Wallace and I breakfasted with a Dr. and Mrs. Bruce Hastings from Clairmonte, California. They were, and still are, I suppose, on their way to Niagara Falls, Canada, where they honeymooned nearly forty years ago. It was a very pleasant morning. We all sat around the Hastings' little folding card table in the middle of the Texas panhandle. There was a lovely breeze wafting from the northwest as Mrs. Hastings, in her light-blue sun bonnet, poured us each a second cup of coffee. Somewhere nearby, the Hastings' donkey brayed and snorted and did donkey things. Somewhere far away, birds were singing birdy songs.

After breakfast, Dr. Hastings offered Wallace and I cigarettes. Wallace doesn't smoke, so I got two. We smoked and chatted there until noon. No one was in a hurry. We were all on vacation. Still are.

Dr. Hastings told Wallace and me that he had acquired his Ph. D. in history from Oxford College, in England. He is writing a history of the final century of humans on Earth, in case aliens someday decide to visit the planet. He says the book is coming along nicely. I asked if he had considered writing a chapter on the late rock 'n' roll star, Elvis Presley. He said he was certain that little more than a paragraph would be devoted to the subject. I was beginning to think Bruce quite the sensible human being when he mentioned that the real problem with the end of the world was that there weren't any wars to document. He probably misses television.

3 June 2033 A.D.

Wallace and I have a new traveling companion. he is a golden retriever. He isn't very smart—doesn't know a single trick. Wallace tried to get him to shake hands. The dog just sort of curled his lip and wriggled his hindquarters. We decided to call him Elvis.

15 June 2033 A.D.

Today was a glorious day. I walked fifteen miles, barefoot in the rain. The rain was very cool. I walked beside the highway. Mud feels nice when it squishes between one's toes. If anyone is reading this, they should try it sometime.

22 June 2033 A.D.

Wallace has begun construction of the time machine. He says it will have to be very small, just large enough to transport excerpts from this journal through the fourth dimension. He works on the machine every night before we go to sleep.

We have been in the state of New Mexico for several days now. The sky is beautiful here at night. I wrote a poem about it. It goes like this:

The sky is beautiful at night
I am happy to be outside

Wallace says that he is glad to be outside as well. Everything is quite enchanting, except that Elvis eats too much and passes gas in his sleep.

4 July 2033 A.D.

There will be no fireworks or reveling in insensate nationalism and the glories of wars gone by for Wallace and me today. We have declared that today should be Be Nice To Everybody Day instead. Wallace and I have a go at a hug. Hugging is nice. We both scrub Elvis behind the ears. Elvis yawns.

20 July 2033 A.D.

We should be seeing the Grand Canyon within a

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week or so. Yeah!

Wallace says that I should condense my journal and otherwise prepare it for time travel. The device is nearing completion.

I have decided this; that whoever receives these notes should by no means attempt to alter history. The end of the world as we know it has been just fine. Wallace and Elvis and I have had a hoot.

28 July 2033 A.D.

The Grand Canyon! Excitement! Wallace and I throw stones over the edge all day. They skitter and bounce, skitter and bounce. Elvis basks in the sun like a king and flatulates leisurely every now and again. It is a marvelous day.

I wrote a poem about it. Here goes:

The Grand Canyon is really big
I am happy to be outside

1 August 2033 A.D.

The time machine is complete. We have translated portions of this manuscript into Hebrew and Aramaic, which Wallace learned in seminary school.

We have decided to write an epitaph for the human race. Here it is:

"We were all a little wompus anyway."

I hope that translates well.

Shalom.

The Conductor*Carrie Theobald*

The wind moans hoarsely as it moves with vigor through the old firm steeple. Energy from the wind causes the colonial steeple to raise its arms and conduct the classic melody for which it stands erect. The nature symphony performs the Appalachian melody of Christianity. Around the conductor plucks the mahogany bass trees, strums the amber harp limbs, and pipes the somber ebony sky. Each instrument follows the conductor's every move, while the noisy bird soars above.

A hill lies beneath this grand steeple. Even the numb leaves hum the soothing classical melody. The murmur of the deadened leaves echoes into the harmonious night. Some leaves dance as the harsh wind pushes them up against the olive hillside. Suddenly silence shatters the music, and the bird spirals down and stirs the leaves back up into the brisk air. The bird then glides to the crown of the steeple and settles. Together, the peaceful bird, the seasoned steeple and the rhythmic wind conduct the earth. The bird gracefully brings his wings above his head and soars until he disappears into the ebony sky.

The Leprechaun*Devon*

I saw her walking one day, dancing in and out between the music of the falling rain. I watched as the gold of her hair and the blue of her eyes dimmed the colors of the rainbow made by the sun breaking through the dismal clouds that have so often pervaded my life. It suddenly occurred to me that possibly, at last, I had found her, the one who is more elusive than the leprechaun. And I had.

I still remember those words— "I do." And that night, two years after I first had laid eyes on her supernatural beauty, we made love, and again, between the red silk sheets. As I gazed at her, I drowned in the depths of the two blue oceans that stared back at me. Every evening after that, I came home to nothing less than the embrace of perfection. And at nights, the flames of love continued to burn in intense reds and oranges. But then one February morning, I awoke to nothing, nothing but the dismal gray and the Requiem played by the falling raindrops.

In the room, I placed all the burning candles I could find. A flash of lightning flickered as the thin edge bit deep. The light of a thousand miniature suns flared through the slowly falling crimson raindrops to form in my mind the most intense rainbow I had ever seen. And as wave after wave of green, yellow, blue, orange, and purple engulfed me and the red slowly filtered from my existence, my only lucid thought was "Everybody knows leprechauns aren't real."

"Dragons, contrary to popular beliefs,"*Jeremy High*

Dragons, contrary to popular beliefs, do not fly like jet planes, speeding to swoop upon the enemy with fury and full fire-power. Nor do they fly like huge birds of prey, loping along in the air, circling and then plunging down at incredible rates of speed to gobble up their prey. Dragons aren't ugly, Godzilla-like bipeds that trample down cities and fight huge killer moths, or cockroaches, or whatever happens to be radioactive at the time. On the contrary, dragons are the epitome of beauty and grace. Dragons do not fly like clumsy birds, or planes, always in a rush to their next victim or enemy. Instead, dragons flight resembles more along the lines of a mix between a kite and a butterfly. They appear to not have a care in the world as they flutter through the air, enjoying the breeze that has lifted them undulating countryside. The grass, wet with dew between my toes; birds chirping away, emphatically trying to get me to listen to their songs, which I did not understand. As I scanned the horizon, trying to take in the beauty of the earth all in one gulp something caught my eye. The majesty of the trees, the delicacy of the flowers, the bubbling serenity of the creek, nothing on this earth, compared to the vision that filled my gaze. As I was lazily scanning the carnival cotton candy clouds the Dragon entered my line of vision. I was awestruck. It was terrible and beautiful all at the same time. It was almost ethereal in its form. Its long twisting body was an iridescent rainbow, constantly shifting its colors and hues. Its wings looked as if they were made of lavender tissue paper, yet they were able to take the creature aloft. Its head was covered in thin, feather-like folds of skin that shifted with the breeze. They were swept up off the serpentine face to give it the majestic look of a king. When it flew it didn't beat the air into submission. It flowed with the air, dipping and diving and spinning with the greatest of ease. It

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was almost as if it were a dolphin of the air. It would occasionally swift its wings and shoot up into the air and into the clouds, where it would let out a burst of fire, painting the sky with shades of pink and orange. Its translucent luminescence would then plummet out of the sky and just as quick catch an updraft and do a trick. It was all breathtaking to behold. I was transfixed. And to my astonishment, it seemed to have noticed me and was coming nearer. I felt no fear. As a matter of fact, I was feeling pretty serene and calm. An aura of peace seemed to pervade the whole valley. It was as if every molecule of air breathed trust. I was at ease with my place in the world. Content. And still at awe. This being that exuded hope and love out of every pore was flying toward me. It settled beside me with hardly a stir. Its eyes seemed to look into my very soul. I could not move, nor would I want to. There didn't seem to be any greater pleasure in the world than to be visited with this great benefactor. I felt as be visited with this great benefactor. I felt as if I were lucky. Picked especially to behold this presence. The eyes that were looking into my soul sensed this, for the creature smiled. It then opened its mouth and bathed my body in fire. I guess it has to eat somehow.

Sadie

Heather Armstrong

"Thank you, honey." Sadie loved that little girl who brought her water. . . oh what was her name? She reminded Sadie so much of her own daughter. Hard to believe—it seemed like a dream. Even though yesterday remained a fog, May 29 of 1952 was as clear as a bell. In labor for 13 hours, and Jim never left her side. Speaking of Jim, where was he now? It hurt to try and remember. She would be sure to look for him when she went for her walk.

That little girl was back. "What's your name, honey?"; Sadie questioned her. "My name is Ellen, Mrs. Gray. You remember me, don't you? It's time for lunch. . . you ready to go?"

"Of course. Now where are you from, honey? I'm from right here in Danville. My husband is too. He should be back any minute—he just went to the store to get some formula for our baby girl. She's sweet, isn't she?"

"Sure is Mrs. Gray. You eat your lunch, and I'll be back to take you to your room in a little while."

Sadie sat down at the table. She knew these people, but dammit—what were their names? Silently she cursed God. At least she still remembered Him—despite the fact that He seemed to have forgotten her. She told God how she hated this place, how she despised this meager existence. She knew that somewhere, buried deep in her memory was a woman with a life, with experiences, with love left to give—but it just hurt so badly to remember. She wished death would come. She wished it would just sweep over her and take her from this misery of pitiful glances, condescending voices, and the hell of being weak.

She continued to play with her jello. Jello. She remembered jello. Her daughter loved the green kind. Sadie remembered slicing pears and floating them in the top of the bowl. There were no pears in her jello today.

The little girl returned. "Now Mrs. Gray, you didn't finish! What will I do with you?"

"What's your name, honey?"

"My name is Ellen, you remember me, I brought you down here. . ."

No. Sadie did not remember. She began to cry. Where was Jim when she needed him? She longed to tell him how she hated what was happening to her. Sadie wished the little girl would hurry. She had ironing to finish. What would Jim say when he returned from the store to find that his shirts were neither pressed nor starched?

"Where are you from, honey? I'm from right here in Danville. My husband is as well—he's at the store right now, but he'll be back in time for dinner."

"Is that so. . . Well, Mrs. Gray, do you need anything else right now, because I need to check on Dorothy."

"No honey. Don't need anything." Who was Dorothy? More importantly, where was the iron? She needed to get busy.

Sadie settled back against her pillows. Graciously, sleep overwhelmed her weary mind. It seemed to Sadie as if sleep was the only escape from herself. Someone was speaking. . . saying her name. Sadie's eyes fluttered open. A young woman was standing over her, and gently rubbing her hand. "Momma. . . Momma. It's me, Jessie."

Sadie willed herself to think. Jessie. Momma. This was her baby! Her heart leapt with unanticipated joy. Sadie began to tell her about how Jim had gone to the store, but would be returning soon. She didn't even notice the almost anguished look that flashed across her daughter's face.

Sadie was so angry. Jessie hadn't even waited to see her father. That child was always flitting off to be somewhere else. Sadie would give her a "talking to" when Jessie came home tonight.

Where was that little girl? Sadie needed some water. Oh, maybe she would just get it for herself. Sadie took her glass and went looking for the water.

"Sadie, what are you doing here? This is the nurses station—now let's go back to your room."

"Who are you, honey?"

"My name is Ellen, you remember me, now don't you?"

The tears came again. What was wrong with her? Why didn't she know this sweet little girl? Damn this haze that clouded her thoughts. Where was Jim—Oh how she needed him!

The little girl said she was taking her to her room. Sadie decided to humor her, but she knew that Jim would come get her and that they would go home soon. Sadie settled back against the pillows, muttering to the little girl.

"My Jimmy will be here soon, so I shouldn't take off my shoes." Ellen obliged her, and Sadie rewarded her with a dull smile. The little girl left and Sadie was alone. Alone with her past. Alone with her maddening, confusing thoughts. . .not knowing how to live and not knowing how to die, caught in a web spun by her own mind.



The Windward Side of Old Hickory

Anonymous

The urge upon me, I seated the gnarled bowl in my palm. From the pungent leather pouch I drew a generous, three-fingered ball of blended Burleigh and Cavendish. Patiently and ever so slowly I began the process of tenderly working the shreds down deeply into the reservoir, tamping the tobacco at the bottom firmly -- that at the top, slightly less.

So busy with the preparation I hardly noticed that I had moved from my seat on the porch swing. I went out to gaze at the chapel in the near foreground, back-lit by the sharp, crisp rays of the late October sun falling rapidly through the late afternoon light. My goodness it was gorgeous -- so much so that my chest heaved, aching at the joy so palpable, so fleeting.

So alive in the fall, I am susceptible to every manifestation of love, in this moment embodied in the small brown canister suspended by its stem from my teeth. I lit the first match and drew the orange heat down through my packing job. With strong, steady strokes, I pulled the sharp, clear air through my favorite pipe, thanking God for such small pleasures as perfect afternoons, the sweet aroma of the Cavendish, the tart taste of the Burleigh. At peace, trailing wisps of immortality, I wandered rather aimlessly about the yard, pausing to trace a leaf of the ginko, paying homage to an old friend who loves China more than I, stopping at the pin-oak tethered ten feet up to a tulip poplar to keep it straight, checking the various walnuts, the white and red oak saplings -- the grandchildren of the old giants that had once rang the property only to be cut, their dense wood bartered for food during the Great Depression.

I stooped to stroke the fur of Mel Magness, the ten year old tom-cat who owns me, facing the huge old hickory tree that buckles my land to Milligan College property. Curious about a strange mark on the trunk, I stepped forward.

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Seeing and feeling no damage I sat, my back against the tree to clean the pipe, now filled only with ash, saliva, and the memory of joy only too soon passed.

Then as if by some sorcerer's magic, the wood exploded in sound and fury. Flashlights blinded me, uniformed guards threw me to the ground, cuffed me, smashing my pipe, sending matches, pipe tool, and fresh tobacco flying down the slope. Only as they stuffed me into a security car and sped off to the detention cell did I realize my error. I had come to rest on Milligan soil, violating the sacred ground -- smoking on school premises. Thankfully Mel followed, dragging my checkbook. Only after paying the fine did I find myself free to go, to make my way home, but alas not free to enjoy my pipe on the windward side of old hickory.

The Death of Two Sonny's*Josh Mugele*

i first began singin the blues with a fella by the name of sonny sonny ray sonny ray would play the electric guitar and i would sing and play the harmonica and we sang the blues when we were first gettin started we would stay up all night in the garage of my mammas house and we would make some music and wail and stomp our feet and sweat and after awhile me and sonny ray we got a gig with the local radio station wxxe that was on august the seventeenth nineteen and seventy three me and sonny ray hooked up that night in my mammas garage and we played a song we were gonna do for the radio station wxxe and i sang about marlene and how she just wasnt no good for me and i sang marle e e ene and sonny sonny ray played harder and faster than i ever saw him play and i said damn sonny you on fire tonight and sonny ray said yeah and i sang wah wah wah wuh ayeah yah oh oh marle e e ene and sonny ray smiled and i sang about ol marlene and about how she said she loved me and then left in the morning with a note that said baby oh baby haw haw haw haw you been real good to me but now i gotta go i gotta see the world your love for ever and ever marle e e ene and she took all the money i had in my wallet thirty two dollars and forty seven cents ahaw haw wah ha aw and all sonny ray said was yeah the next mornin i got up real early and waited for sonny ray so we could go play our gig at the radio station wxxe which was at ten o clock a m and it was nine thirty four when i looked at the clock in my mammas kitchen and sonny ray still hadnt shown so i took a cab a yellow cab down to the radio station wxxe to see if sonny ray was there and i told the cabbie to wait a minute for me and i went inside to look for him but sonny wasnt there so i decided to

go get him at his apartment and i gave the disc jockey a few albums to play in case we didnt get back in time for our gig and i took the yellow cab from the yellow cab company to sonny rays apartment and i told the cabbie to wait a minute for me and that id be right back he said ok i went inside of the old apartment building where sonny ray lived and i climbed up three flights of stairs because the elevator wasnt working today it said so on a piece of paper that was taped to the grating so i knocked on sonny rays door and said sonny come on man get up were late for our gig and then i opened the door and went in there was this whore sittin there on the yellow couch and i said whats your name girl and she said amber and i said amber put some clothes on and get outta here i walked past her and pushed aside the old sheet that was hanging up and went into the back room and sonny ray was layin there with his arm across his chest and his mouth open but he wasnt breathing i stood there a minute and then i went back out and the girl was gone so i went downstairs to the landlord he was white and a pimp too i think and i asked him what did he think we should do and he said well wed better call the coroner so we waited til the coroner arrived and i showed him up to where sonny ray was and he looked at sonny and said hes been dead for about an hour about six or six and a half hours which means he died around four or four thirty last night and after he left i went outside and the cabbie was still there and he said youre up to fifty three bucks . . .

* * *

. . . where i was out back taking the clothes down from the line and i couldnt hear her because of the sheets blowing so she called again ellie go get the boys tell them that suppers ready so i went round to the barn where they were working on the roof and said daddy guys its time to eat i waited for them to come down and we all went into the kitchen and we washed up and pappa was

telling a joke that ryan and donny laughed at and he put his arm around my shoulders and he winked and when we were all sitting around the table pappa returned thanks and said dear heavenly father we thank you for blessing us with our health and our strength and we thank you for giving us everything we need we thank you now especially for the food and the hands that prepared it for us and we ask that you use it to the nourishment of our bodies amen and we answered a men and he took the ham and passed it to ryan and asked me how was school today and was i going to the dance on friday i said fine and yes i was going with bobby carter who was in one of my classes and he took the potatoes and passed them over to donny who works on the farm and usually eats with us and mamma asked if they had patched the roof all up and if i would pass the green beans and ryan said well have to finish it up tomorrow if it isnt raining and pappa said yep and we still have to get that stump up tomorrow or maybe the day after and donny could you send those biscuits over this way and then mamma said oh do you remember that preacher from marshall county the reverend gatz gast ellie didnt his son go to pierce with you a couple of years ago no didnt you know him somehow what was his boys name sonny i said i met him at the revival two years back thats right the reverend had pitched that circus tent over on the lettners farm donny said his sermon was about gods sense of justice and mercy most folks around here liked him well about a week ago i guess have some more beans donny about a week ago his boy sonny killed himself the poor reverend could you pass some more potatoes please pappa said its a shame life is a trial how did he do it i heard he shot himself in the stomach with a shotgun the reverend found him when he came home from a service oh lord whyd he do something like that especially to the reverend and mamma said i dont know but missus lettner said he hadnt been to church for months here donny you need to finish off this ham and pappa said what time will you be here tomorrow

donny so we can work on the fence ill be here at six and pappa said could you bring the truck yes can i get anyone some more milk while im up arent you hungry ellie you havent eaten hardly anything and i said no im just a little bit tired and could i be excused arent you feeling well ellie mamma asked and put her hand on my forehead no mamma im just a little bit tired i think ill go upstairs now and pappa said ok and i lay down on my bed because i couldnt stand up anymore and my head hurt i closed my eyes and remembered meeting sonny his dad had been preaching and was yelling and it was so so hot inside that tent and i could see the sweat on the reverends face and i turned my head and sonny was two rows back and a little ways over and he was lookin at me his eyes were black and deep and the next night while his daddy was preaching me and sonny walked out in the field behind the tent and i could feel the wind blowing the cotton of my dress against my naked skin . . .

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