

Helicon



The Helicon is a collection of poetry and fiction by members of the
Milligan community. Contributors retain sole rights and respon-

sibility for their work.

Thousands of words,

Written in thousands of forms,

Helicon



1986

From some other part to mine
Are far more attractive
Because I am a part of them

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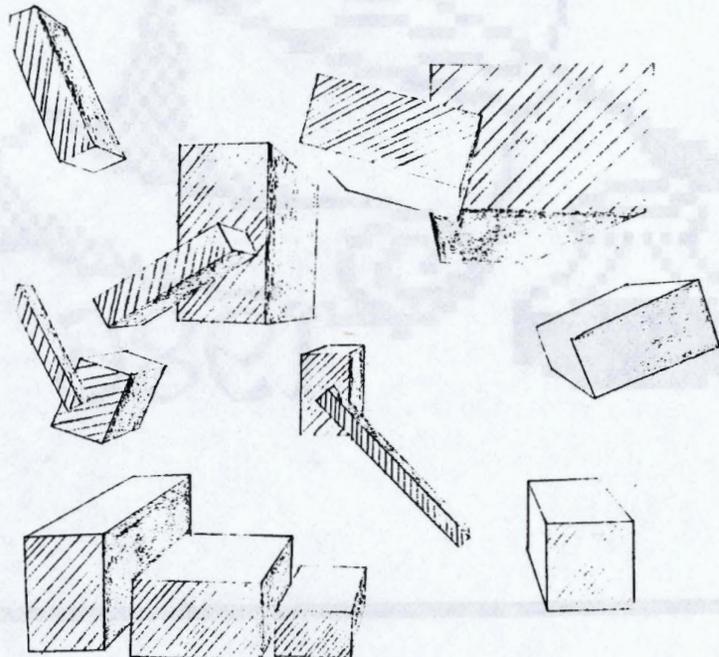
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Thousands of words
Written in thousands of forms.
Unspeakable tongues
Longing to be absorbed
By my eyes.
Words far more powerful on paper
Too awesome to be shouted—
Too fragile to be whispered. . .

They hold in them life—
Breathing, moving,
Beckoning for some enhanced mind
To gently, secretly caress them with silent lips
And let them grow.

But others' words, however magnificent,
Can cling—stale, flat, dead—to the page.
Far more animated are the words
In my own handwriting:
Surprising, refreshing.
For though mighty minds first uttered them,
I have captured them, tamed them, molded them, nurtured them,
savored them.

This is the marvel:
Others' words, however powerful,
Are but mute catchings
Until I take them,
Season them with my soul and mind,
Savor them,
And share my own revelation with my paper.
And the fascinating creatures that evolve

From some other pen to mine
Are far more alive to me,
Because I am a part of them.

—Jamie Smith

Of Reading Poetry

Words combine into musical phrases
Seen in the poetry, in these golden lines
Of Shakespeare, Keats, and the rest.
Ah! How they blossom forth and shine,
Enlarge our experience.
Make us cry out as we understand.
They move us to higher realms and visions;
Each word glows into a new meaning;
Each line grows into a new thought:
A new twist, never seen before.
And the sounds blend melodious, yet simple
Into expression far above
What we daily speak and hear.
Gorgeous notes of music,
A symphony of colors blended
Into textures of rarest silk
Or elements hotly smelted
Into a rare and precious metal
Naturally contrived.
These delight the hungering senses,
Longing for that ethereal. . .
Something that burns from afar
As the brightest, most bewitching, transcendent
Star.

—Jim Potter



People

People are pieces
Pieces of each other
Picked up here and there
In the paths of our lives.

Pieces of people
I see in myself
Are those who have cared
Who shared and gave to me.

I thank you for giving
For being part of me.
The times we have shared
Are a part of me.

People are pieces
Pieces of each other
Picked up here and there
In the paths of our lives.

—Kim King

Someone Died Tonight

"Someone died tonight,"
A faceless voice cut thru the misty air,
"Yes, someone died tonight,"
Laughed the youth without a thought or care.
It must have improved his day, I thought
As I passed through the wet evening.
His laughing joy seemed to cloy
My senses with its ringing.
Someone died tonight,
And yet this voice was singing,
A party to go to in evening
Of some light entertainment, no worry,
But somewhere in the moist darkness
Sorrow and Death lurk in the quiet
Wringing human hearts and building human coffins.

A life challenged the awful odds
Raging against an overwhelming force,
Suffering bolder the sea of fiery pain
And knowing of its malicious source,
Silently, slowly altering the inward forms
To malignant evil shadows
That spread their sinister favor,
And a darkened veil is drawn.
The candle goes dim. . . then out.
And the smoke rises curling.
Shades are drawn over the empty hollows.
Hands relax and fold as in reverent awe.
A silent cry, a prayer ascend
With the soundless whisper of a soul.

Someone died tonight.
The empty rage is gone and quiet enters.
A void of calm dispels the heavy gray mists
And silently opens up to a single ray
Of golden light that shines from the heavens
And grows into the musical strains
Of joy and life returning.

—Jim Potter

On to Rome

I rose out of subconsciousness as the train jerked into the Gare du Nord, Paris—another station on my way. I had forty minutes to kill before the train moved. Hunger had struck, so I reached down into my pack and grabbed a rather worn hundred franc note.

The air bit me as I stepped down off the train. I thought that it would surely be warmer in the south. I bought some pastries and Coke, returned to my compartment and had breakfast.

She was one of the first to get on the train. She spied my empty compartment and entered my space. She struggled to get her bag up on the rack and sat in the one seat that wasn't covered with my stuff. She surveyed me, pulled out a writing pad and pen and started writing a letter. She was dressed in wool and silk and sixty years that intimidated my atmosphere.

I graduated last year with a degree that was to have set me for life. Left in the void of graduation, I didn't ever get around to applying for a job. In September, my mind was ready to go back to school, but I was finished there. I found myself in Europe with a backpack, railpass and a fist full of traveler's cheques.

As the train began to move, I wiped the remains of breakfast from my mouth and started to pick up my stuff. This hing of cleanliness earned me a smile from the lady. I found nothing on the radio so I got a Paris manual out of my pack to find out what I had not bothered to see at the last stop. The fields of central France passed on behind and yet nothing changed.

An hour later she spoke. "Was I a student or just on vacation?" I said that I didn't know and stared out the window to see what had gone by. She looked forward and saw the engine dividing the lush fields ready for harvest. I dug out a Coke and walked down to the end of the train to get a better view of where we had been. I threw out my Coke can and watched it fall and bounce out of sight behind. I made my way back to my compartment to find her gone. I read more about what had been in Paris.

She returned from the front of the train, briskly opened the door and bounced down into her seat. This carefree action provoked me to smile in her direction and she spoke. This time I answered. I told her that I was no longer a student and in fact I didn't know what I was. My answer wasn't what she had expected but she went on to tell me that she was familiar with my situation. Somehow, I doubted her.

I was again watching the fields go by as she watched the mountains coming.

She began to tell me about what she was writing. It was a letter to her sister who had worked her entire life with one goal in mind which was to educate an entire literate generation in her village. She had succeeded. I passed this human interest story off as an attempt for conversation and turned to think about my old school.

The train moved up a river valley and I wondered where the river had originated. She got up and walked forward as the train climbed up into the mountains. We were on our way to Rome—she to talk to a publisher, for she was an author, and I to be going somewhere. I, also, headed up the train in search of adventure and found my compartment companion in the dining car ordering lunch. She asked me to join her so I ordered a hamburger and sat down.

We talked about her books, biographies. She wrote about Joan of Arc, Abraham Lincoln type people. You wouldn't find her books in a family room but probably in any public library. She wasn't hurting at all.

I asked her why she wrote. She guessed that it had come naturally to her but, of course, she had had to work at it a bit. She then asked me what I intended to do in Rome. I supposed that I would look at all the things that one is to look at, but I didn't really know. "Who knows, I might just camp out in a hotel room for a week or two or go find a beach and watch the girls go by."

We finished lunch and returned to our compartment. She started writing as I read about the coming attractions of Rome. Every now and then she would check some notes and continue writing; I would lean out of the window and check our progress. At some point, our passports were stamped for another stage of our journey. She was getting quite a bit of writing done and I decided to take a nap so I would be ready for Rome that night. I woke up as she returned from dinner. Since my meal companion had already eaten, I again reached into my pack to find what I had to eat.

She wondered how long I would be in Europe. I told her that I wasn't sure but that I was going to try to stay another month. She began to put two and two together and found out what I was learning. I had no immediate desire to make something of my life. She told me this and suggested, like a mother would, that I start planning. I took it like a son.

She told me of her start after the war. Alone in London, she had little but her ability to write and had monopolized upon this one ability and so she appeared as one of her own deserving characters. She had won.

I didn't reply but looked with her towards the south and our destination. I was looking forward to Rome and its opportunities. Soon she began to talk more about her books and what she had accomplished. I was happy for her, but soon grew tired of her attempt to make any kind of prodigy out of me. I picked up my guide book and tuned her out.

It was late when we jerked into the Rome central. It was cold outside and lonely. She pulled her bag off the rack, wished me luck and headed off into the maze of venders. I continued to sit in the compartment and in a few minutes, watched the lights of Rome slowly fall behind.

—Scott Hobson



September

September's skin is not wrinkled,
But her soul is.
Her features have hardened—
Weatherbeaten.
Her shoulders are bowed by
The weight of bad decisions.
(How long does one pay for
One's choice?)
Her strength is gone—
Sucked from her so that
She cannot even raise her head
To cry out.

But the chamber echoes with our
Whispered pleas for catharsis.

—Theresa Culbertson

Homecoming

She walked down the hall, her steps punctuating the hollow corridor. Pausing, she traced gently a faded outline on the wall. Faded, like the memory of it all. Suddenly, as though her touch had awakened them, the walls around her rang with voices. Faces smiled to her, laughter scampered around her ears. Memories crowded in on her; vivid flashes of pain and ecstasy. She was carried away on the flashflood of the past, and she knew that suddenly a door would open and that a lovely face would appear.

A door opened.

She wheeled around, and was stunned into reality. A child, so far from where she had been, walked down the hall and slipped a key into the door. She closed her eyes—it wasn't right. That young face, that cropped hair and dangly earring—no, it didn't fit. This wasn't real—that disinterested and suspicious, curious look that was in the child's eyes as if, as if. . .

As if she didn't belong here.

No! She screamed inside, yelling, "I am a part of this place! This place is a part of me!"

She noticed she was leaning against the wall then. She drew back, and shakily pulled her hand up to the faint outline, carefully touching it. Cold stone. And new paint.

New paint, so carelessly and thoughtlessly slapped over the old. New faces, parading in and out like ducks on a target board. And the child never knew what happened before, when the days were so short and the sun was so hot. The child never knew.

Oh, but she would soon.

Compassion welled up inside her. And she mused, "This isn't what I thought it would be. I shouldn't have come."

And she wondered why suddenly she felt so empty inside.

She slowly walked down the hallway, her steps echoing the empty corridor. She would leave now. But this place—no, it would never leave her. The sights and sounds would color her memories with joy.

But now, it stunk of new paint.

As long as she could still trace the outline, she would be all right.

—Jamie Smith

Mary's Memory

February, 1986

They say she went in peace,
I was told on the phone.
On life we but only have a lease,
I guess it isn't ours to own.

She was so kind and caring,
I wish she could still be here.
Her friendship toward no one sparing,
we all held her as dear.

She looked to the Lord for strength,
and I wanted the disease to leave.
Her life she trusted wouldn't be cut in length,
I even began to believe.

Her final day came quick, unexpected,
I wanted her to live longer.
The disease's progress was not undetected,
I realize that she would have never been stronger.

Now she is in a better place,
and we are left to cope.
Never again on earth will we see her face,
but in my Lord I have hope.

—Deborah Turton

Amazing Grace

Sarah decisively clicked off the blaring radio. The happy tunes just didn't fit her mood. As she drove the miles seemed to loom ahead of her. Had it been just a few hours ago that the call had come? It seemed like days. She had packed so quickly and made a few phone calls then started her journey home. Home. . . what really was home? Was it the place where she had grown up, her friends. . . her mother?

Sarah pushed a strand of her brownish gray hair back into place and glanced into the rear view mirror. Time goes so fast yet so slow. Yes, her mother was dead. It still seemed like a dream that really hadn't happened.

"You know dear, it's been so long since I've seen you," the woman paused, "Just an afternoon would be nice." Sarah could feel the soft imploring of her mother's voice over the telephone.

"Mom, how can I?" Sarah knew her mother didn't understand. "I've got to go back to New York for more meetings and the office has been a wreck." She wetted her lips and continued, "I really wish I could, Mom, I really do! I'll try to work out a weekend in the spring, OK?"

Two blaring lights shown in front of the car and Sarah jerked her thoughts back to the road. Only two more hours and she would be back in Cannon City. Pretty soon she would see her childhood home.

"You know, I have a lot of memories in that old house." The old woman stared out of the car up towards the gray brick house. "I know Mother," Sarah said feeling a little like a mean landlord throwing someone out.

"I just can't work six hours away and be here if you would happen to need anything." Sarah shifted uncomfortably in the car seat. "Sunny Acres is a very nice place and there are a lot of wonderful people there." She said convincingly but with little effect. "Oh, Mom! I know this is very hard for you, but it's just got to be done."

Sarah turned on her blinker and went down the off ramp of the interstate. She would be there very soon. She wondered if she had brought anything to work on in the evenings when she wasn't needed. Her career was certainly a very demanding one.

"Sarah, you are almost thirty years old, haven't you thought about a husband and a family?" Sarah's mom glanced up from the green beans she had been picking.

"Oh Mom!" Sarah moaned, "I want a career more than anything! A husband just wouldn't understand and I don't really want children." Sarah thought of her best friend who had three kids and talked endlessly of diapers and the best type of formula to use.

"Well," her mother went back to her work with a sigh, "I guess that's what make you happy." Her voice changed slightly in tone and pitch, "When I was your age it was home and family first, none of this career talk!"

Sarah jerked her head back from the window as Mr. Thomas, the funeral director, asked her yet another question. "I know this is a hard time for you, Ms. Klein," Mr. Thomas shifted slightly folding his arms on his desk, "but we want your mother's funeral to be a time of reflection." He paused looking over Sarah's face for a sign of emotion. "Do you recall if your mother had any favorite hymn we might use in the ceremony?"

Sarah bounded in from the outside, waving to friends as she came. As she passed the parlor door, she heard the strains of music from the piano. She opened the door softly and saw her mother at the piano. The light was shining in from the window and it gave a pleasant color to the room.

"What're ya playing, Mom?" Sarah asked as she sat cross-legged on the floor. "Oh," her mother replied softly still involved in the music, "it's one of my favorite hymns, 'Amazing Grace.'"

"Really," Sarah said with not much enthusiasm.

"You know, Sarah," her mother glanced over to where she was, "This hymn has meant a lot to me throughout the years, it reminds me how God is always there for me."

"Well," Sarah went on in a cold tone, "I really don't think God wants to waste his time worrying about me." Sarah left the room missing the tear that crept down the woman's face.

Sarah slowly rocked in the rocking chair as her mother's friend talked on. This had been a visit that Sarah had not been looking forward to. Her sentences began to fuse together in a monotonous continuation as Sarah tried to concentrate on them.

"You know, Sarah dear, your mother always spent so much time making your clothes."

"But Mom," Sarah cried, "Everyone else got a new boughten dress for the Easter play."

"Sarah," her mother returned patiently, "You know we just don't have the money now for a store boughten dress! This dress looks very becoming on you."

Her mother glided forward to Sarah and placed a couple more pins in the waist of the dress. "Let me take just a little tuck in right here."

The room had a dark depressing air to it. At the focal point was a wooden coffin with scores of flowers lined up next to it. The perfume of the marigolds and carnations was a little sickening to Sarah who walked aimlessly about.

As she walked up to the coffin the sight of the empty body of her mother took her breath away. She noticed many of the same features she herself had. The small nose and larger lips closed in an unnatural line. The face was powder white and even the cosmetics could not take away the almost grayish olive hue. As Sarah stood there the familiar hymn started playing in the background. A tear, the first tear that had escaped the cold eyes began to fall as Sarah remembered the words... "Amazing Grace! how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see."

—Becky Sweitzer

Me. . .

young and naive,
energetic and foolish.
just beginning to dream my broken dreams
just starting to grow and heal fresh scabs.
just now realizing my inexperience,
just recently seeing how childish I am.
Romantic and sentimental,
blowing bubbles in the wind and trying to catch them before
to catch them before they break—
in my hands.

You. . .

older and wiser,
learned and insightful.
in the midst of realizing your dreams
recovering and going on with deep scars on tattered hopes.
experienced in things I have only glimpsed,
being adult, yet loving youthful joy
delighting in childlike discoveries,
knowing so much, doing so much, being so much.
Romantic and sentimental,
remembering bubbles blown and never caught.

Together, we cry over broken toys.
Together, we give and grow—together.
Separated by so much,
United by something bigger.
We laugh, We love, We live.

—Jamie Smith

The Gift and the Giver

Discovering faded memories one rainy Saturday, I came across an old photograph of a cherubic, solemn two year old boy with a fat baby girl overflowing from his lap onto the seat cushion. The picture, silently capturing the protective love of a big brother, is my earliest impression of Jay.

I can still hear my mother telling me the story: When I was born, my fifteen year old brother asked, "Mom? Is Grandma leaving soon? When do I get to hold Jamie?"

. . . A teenage boy, proudly, strongly holding a wispy girl in a red velvet dress. Standing in the pungent Sunday sunshine, his face is familiarly smileless to conceal the hateful braces.

I remember running, with salty tears tickling my cheeks, downstairs to the musty basement that smelled of wet flannel and old blankets. Holding the broken purse up with a trembling hand to a tired-looking teen with long dark hair and heavy eyebrows that were planted over sensitive gray-blue eyes, I trustingly offered the wounded toy to him. With agile hands accustomed to tinkering, he took the wretched, precious thing and mended it gently.

. . . Painful remembrances of a heavy, dark night where I recall stumbling into my black room, slamming the door to hide my tears and crumbling to the floor. Falling on the toybox for strength, I sobbed, struggling to keep silent while releasing all my hurts. "How could he?? He doesn't even care about us!" my pre-school mind flung out. "How can he not come home for Christmas?!" I somehow felt a sense of achievement and release as I cried myself into exhaustion for him. . .

A homesick college student rubs the sleep from his eyes as he helps his fifth-grade sister clean the cluttered kitchen. Then I'm outside in the misty warmth of a wet Oregon summer, laughing at the ducks as they honk and bicker over the pieces of bread that we fling. Jay laughed, too, when we played frisbee in the park. He leapt and sprinted with all the energy of a high-school quarterback. . .

He plays games often—nonchalantly intense. I recall a house, ominously and frightened. Two actors, hiding behind shadowy corners, warily slithering under chairs, holding their breath until the final climactic CRACK—I fall backwards, reeling with fright. Then we both jump up laughing and trade places—he comes hunting me with the new cap guns.

. . . A bearded man, handsome and strong, picks up his giggley toddler and bounces her in his arms with happy hilarity. They plunge to the floor and he buries his furry face in her stomach, laughing as she squeals and wiggles, loving every minute that her daddy tickles her. . .

I peer around the corner, smelling ink and crumpled paper and cold coffee. Jay sits hunched at his desk like an ancient tree sagging under the weight of its weary branches after a downpour. He supports his head with his hand as he reads another report. His desk is littered with computer readouts and coffee cups, accounts and pictures of his daughters. I slip out quietly, leaving him as he is: silent, tired, heavy with responsibility.

. . . Mom says he always asks about me, and that he was the one who kept in touch with everyone else when we were all in different places. He never volunteers anything: his highest compliment is "not too bad." You'd never know that he had emotions unless you knew him well enough to see in his eyes what he never said. I've always wanted to hug him, to tell him, "I love you, too." But I'm always stopped by his silent, impenetrable barrier.

Last Tuesday, my big brother turned thirty-three. I finally gave him the birthday present that had been withheld for so long. When he held the door open for me, I paused for a moment in the cluttered, homey back porch that smelled of home-made applesauce and dusty moth-balls. There, I hugged him with the intensity of eighteen years of suppressed love and said, "I love you, Jay!"

On his thirty-third birthday, my big brother gave me the most valuable gift. For the first time in nearly eighteen years, My Big Brother said quietly in a choked voice, "I love you, too."

—Jamie Smith

There comes a time in everyone's life when . . .
Treasurers must be thrown out and dusty old attics cleaned
There comes a time, a beautiful time, more like dawn than
anything else.

It's then that we realize, Man must move on. . .

Life has so much in store, one need only pack up and move on,
away from the shore. . .

Clean out the attics of your mind, make space, move on.

—Tanya C. Mullings

I love you;
The words are simple,
Yet true.

Why? you ask.
Because with you
I don't need a mask.

I can be free
With you, only you,
I can be me.

—C.M. Brown

Till I Met You

Till I met you,
Everything was blue.
I was by myself,
Like sitting on a shelf.
Everything was just so new.

When a farmer from the mountain,
Met a girl from the plains;
Love flowed like a fountain,
And caused no pains.

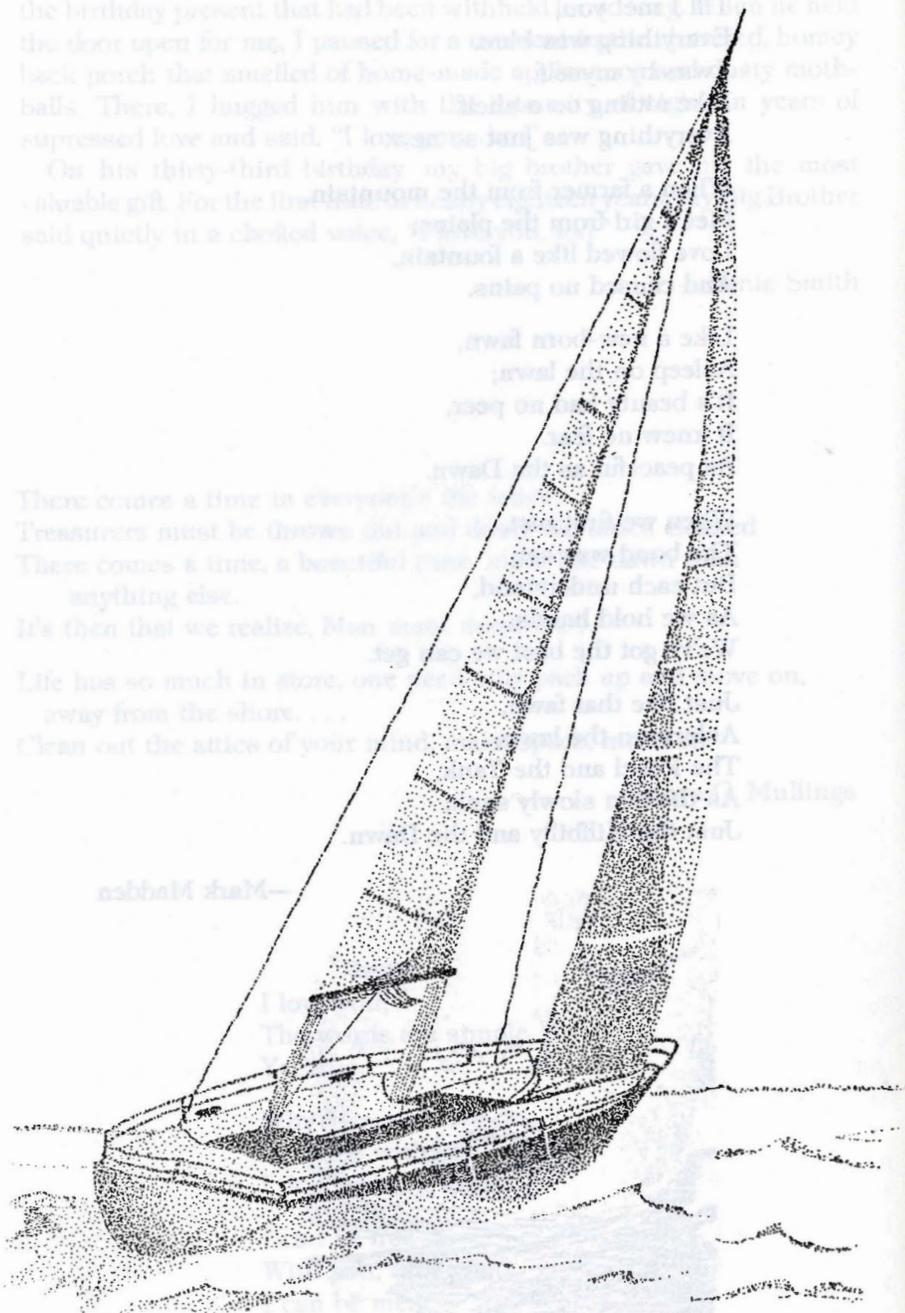
Like a new-born fawn,
Asleep on the lawn;
It's beauty had no peer,
It knew no fear.
As peaceful as the Dawn.

When we first met,
The bond was set;
But each understand,
As we hold hands;
We've got the best we can get.

Just like that fawn,
Asleep on the lawn;
The Rebel and the Yank,
As the sun slowly sank;
Just the Hillbilly and the Dawn.

—Mark Madden





Upbeat

The sky rejoices in its being
Water dances and chatters
Or relaxes in a languid resort.
The grass whispers with Brother Breeze;
Trees waltz with the wind,
And the cows have been seen
Romping on yonder hill.

My friend is coming home again.
I throw back my head and laugh
With the Man in the Moon,
Because she is as precious
As a gentle moon ray,
Shining light into my mind.
A drop of relief comes to my eye as I
Step off my island in the Midwest /
—if only for a while.

—Lisa Pryor

Night Music

Cynthia! Goddess of the Moon,
Thy sweet night air wafts in the room
And calls me softly to come and rise
Into the night of thy gracious skies.

The stars glisten silently in the night;
The trees all watch quietly for the sight
That moves and sways in a mysterious dance.
Ah! What a scene for love and romance.

I come softly from my dusty tomb
Open into the sweet night gloom
And search for the scent that calls from afar
And brought me where the living are.

My eyes are opened to the scents and sound;
My arms are open to the music just come down
From the heavenly spheres so far away.
I'm here to watch for the break of day.

—Jim Potter

I wept for you today.
Alone
I sank to the floor
And I cried.

I cried for the gaping emptiness you'll leave.
I cried for the ears that will never hear,
For the eyes that will never comfort,
For the arms that will never embrace.
I cried for the ties broken
Unmended, unmendable.
I wept for you, and for what you remind me of . . .
A lost sea of friendly faces,
The one I loved and lost.

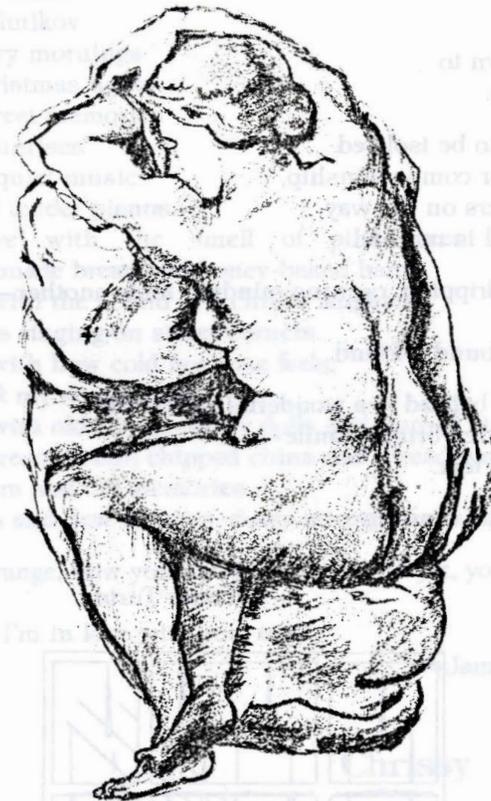
How many times? How many will I lose? How many,
never held,
never told
never known?

I never knew you until;
Now it's too late.
"All leave-taking is a permanence"
And leaves, falling, tear away at me.

So my tears fall.
Falling, melting the bitter-I-won't-say-goodbye.

Salt stings open wounds.
Yet still, I wept for you.
Or, perhaps, for me.

—Jamie Smith



A song comes and strikes my ear,
A song only the beloved can hear.
The music, which from heart to heart,
Continues though we are apart.
This melody is my delight,
And my solace day and night.

—C.M. Brown

Rain Drops

Slow,
now faster
dripping down to
another drop.

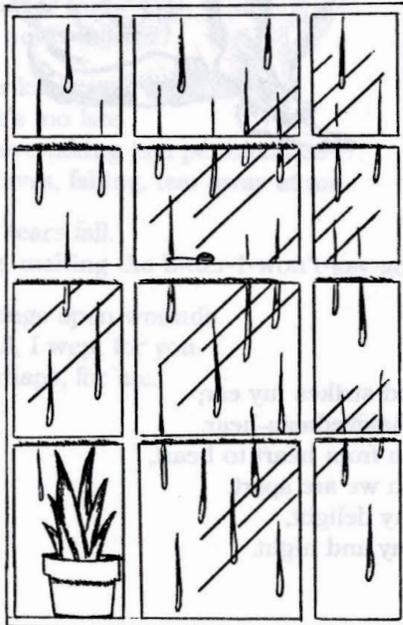
How lonely to be isolated.
Stretching for companionship,
meeting others on the way
until the goal is reached.

Just as the dripping, running raindrop finds another—
then joins
I have now found a friend.

The trail left behind is a wonderful collection.
Some memories bring a smile—
some leave a tear.

Two raindrops running
faster now
to another.

—Deborah Turton



I'm in love.
I'm in love, I'm in love, I'm in love!

In love with ballet
and Baryshnikov
and snowy mornings
and Christmas lights
and sweet memories
and sunrises
and quiet music
and tender pianos.

I'm in love with the smell of pine trees and perfume,
of homemade bread and honey-baked ham.

I'm in love with the sound of a child's laughter
and bells ringing on street corners.

I'm in love with how cold my nose feels,
how soft my slippers are.

I'm in love with old things—baby dolls and warped chairs and
warped records and chipped china and thread-bare animals
old letters and old memories.

And old toys and new makeup, dusty mirrors and shiny earrings...

And you. Strange, how you come to mind...and yet, you fit in so
well.

Could it be...I'm in love with you, too?

—Jamie Smith

Chrissy

A dream come True?
Never, say I
Never to be realized

So I played along
alone in the midst of the throng
In the end you get burned
This the rule I learned
Soon the dream is over

Another one of those dreams
A never ending battle it seems
This one too good to be true
One that seems never to be through

Maybe, say I
Maybe to be realized
Wake up, this is only a dream. . .

The battle over, the race is run
There still stands the one
The beauty of that princess
Makes no small chivalry an excess

Wake up, this is a dream
Wake up, this is real.

—Jason Dotting

My love for you is like the air, constant unchanging,
It is like the wind, unmarred by time, like the sky,
Unmatched by space. Like light, limitless.
It is as unending as a circle, always and forever
Till death.

—Tanya C. Mullings

The day draws to a close in a blazing splendor,
And I, alone, think thoughts so tender
Of the person that I love
Sent down to me from above.
My simple mind cannot conceive,
Nor my human heart believe
The grace that has been shown me
When the Father gave thee.
Thou art a friend for all my years,
Be they filled with smiles or tears.
And when an end to time has come,
And our earthly work is done,
We will spend eternity together,
Singing to our Lord forever.

—C.M. Brown

The frigid wind cut
icily through the trees, sending
Leaves scattering and scurrying for warmth.
That same wind
blew against my face, sending
chills racing down my spine.

So cold. . .
And yet I didn't resent it.

A windless wasteland pitiously whimpered,
"alone. . ."
Indisputable, unjustifiable emotion.
The wind blow,
I am empty.

So empty. . .
And yet I didn't resent it.

Void space—and then,
a comfort.
The wind subtly reminds that
A breath, a living breath,
However remote,
Blows in me.

Cacophony of color and sound and motion and living beauty
Assaults my soul—companionship!
The wateland is warmed by beaming ray
And gently rain. . .
"Never alone."

—Jamie Smith

Sleeping Place?

Kiss it goodbye, that sleep you've dreamed of
No matter that you've bashed your brain on the books
And can't think straight for thinking all day
One more trial comes your way
The Dorm awaits your arrival.

Stereos blaring, people swearing
Doors slamming, guitars jamming
The hall echoes, echoes. . .

You try anyway to put up a fight
"I shall sleep!" screams the mind
As you fall beneath the pillow
covering but a fraction of the commotion
Is it worth getting up
To say "Shut up!"

Floor shaking earth quaking
The Dorm laughs.

sleep during class and convo
Make up time lost at night
Told to get enough sleep
Your attention the speakers can't keep

Back across campus to the monster again
He never has his fill
Once more to try
The game of hide and sleep.

—Jason Doting

Star-hike

When the night was especially dark,
The moon no longer marring the deep black with
its glaring light,
That's when we would go seeking the stars.

We would look for a point, a hill or plain, where
the skies spanned 180 degrees.
A point far away from the street and porch lights
Which tried to steal the precious light from us.

When we finally found this place
Where all that existed was a huge expanse of black
speckled with tiny bits of light, and two viewing,
Then you could begin the instruction.

You would kneel behind me to put your head beside mine
And point and explain 'til I too could see the
"W" which was a queen
And the teapot which shot arrows.

Sometimes we would just stand there silently,
Each observing and seeking on his own,
Wondering at the Milky Way.

Now I enjoy going out on my own to marvel at
skies,
And I delight in finding figures in the stars.
For it's as if one day in a package tied with
yellow ribbon,
You had given me a gift of the stars.

—Tammy Laidlaw

A Question

Where has the wind gone?
It was here just a little while ago.
I could feel it.
I could smell it.
I could grasp on to the feeling that it was with me.

Why did the wind leave?
I am so lost without it near me.
I can't touch it.
I can't see it.
I can't find it anymore and don't know where to look.

—Sarah Beth Simmons



The Grey and the Green

The newborn leaves are most clearly seen
When the glare of light is tempered
Through the tiny liquid grey drops,
The varying shades of immature green
Are intensified in the silver moisture,
the beginning grass richer
When saturated with the wet light,
Surrounded by the soft, even grey,
The very air dripping color.

—Tammy Laidlaw

Morning Star

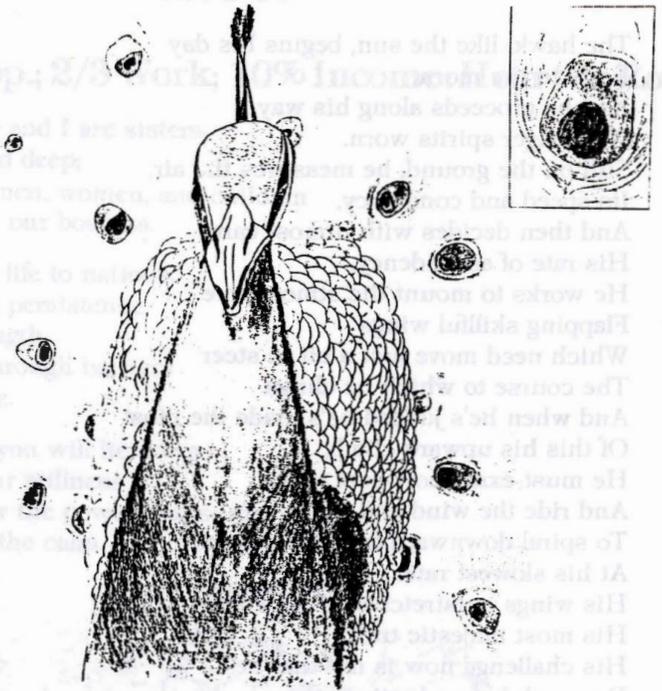
Purple, dripping down the wall running into blue.
It becomes darker—everything is black.

There is a light that appears in the center.

The purple rolls upward towards the light.

Now it is pink.

—Sarah Beth Simmons



In Pompeii

“Storm’s comin’ in.”
“I know. . .”

Some call it the destruction of a life;
And others understand

But the wind roars in my ears
And the voices continue, oblivious
As the white-robed prophetess
Wanders down the city streets
That are now ruins.

Some say it was the wrath of the gods;
And others understand.

“The glory that once was.”

In the shadow of my own

Mount Vesuvius.

—Theresa Culbertson

To Soar

The hawk, like the sun, begins his day
Early in the morn,
And he proceeds along his way
With eager spirits worn.
Still on the ground, he measures the air,
Its speed and constancy,
And then decides with utmost care
His rate of ascendancy.
He works to mount the atmosphere
Flapping skillful wings
Which need move just a bit to steer
The course to which he clings.
And when he's judged he's made the most
Of this his upward climb,
He must exact how best to pot
And ride the wind and time
To spiral downward from his height
At his slowest rate,
His wings outstretched as he coasts in flight
His most majestic trait.
His challenge now is not that he
Do much before he tire
But to make sure his energy
Efficiently expires,
Just like a poor man's bank is for
Money to save, not lose
So is the hawk's great strength in store
Meant sparingly to use.
He skillfully floats on the air
Which does the work for him,
Harnessing its force with care,
Directing it to his whim.
Thus he flies for hour on hour
Seeming not to drop at all
but knowing how to stretch his power
And so prolong his fall.
He constantly adjusts the bend
Of his wings to every change,
Keeping his speed as he descends
In a carefully set range.
This is how he spends his day
On the sky's spacious shore,
The hawk who makes a lofty way,
Whose business it is to soar.

—Tammy Laidlaw

1/2 Pop.; 2/3 Work; 10% Income: Hear the Roar

The river and I are sisters,
Broad and deep;
We hold men, women, and children
Gently in our bosoms.

We bring life to nations.
And with persistence
And strength
We cut through barriers
of stone.

In peace you will lie down
Beside our stillness
And know the power that surges
within the calm.

—Lisa Pryor



What Is Home

What is home to you?
A place to go when depressed?
Mothers always seem to cook the best.
Will your home always be there?
Will mother always dry your tears?
It's time to cut that final string
Make that final move.

For mother's love can never replace the chance
Of looking at your lover's face.

I wish for a place with green grass, blue skies and white
sandy beaches,
To wish and to dream is not what it seems, for dreams come true
If you dream long enough, and wishes, if hard enough you wish
Dreams exist not only in a lonely homesick hear,
If you wish too, who knows, it may even come true,

The distinguished American statesman, the late Adlai Stevenson,
visited Jamaica in 1955 to launch the "Be Jamaican, buy
Jamaican" industrial development drive.

Here's what some locals had to say . . .

Distinguished American come to open industries fair,
Parade turn into a theater with platform an mike an speaker.

From street an lane an avenue, from gullypen and walk
Jamacain people gather up, to hear American talk.

When the speaker start him speech, Amy asks whats that?
Mary says, "Words, words, them is words.
Words? What kind of words? Grand words, my dear,
Words cant express the words that come out of 'Merican mouth

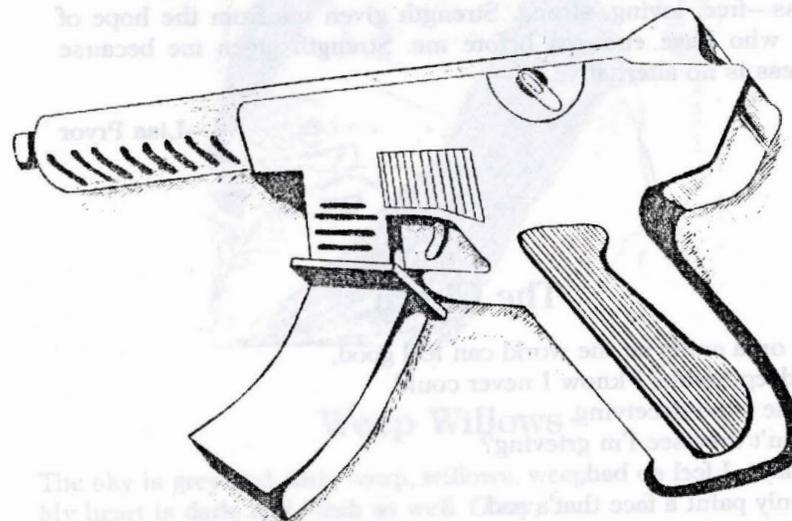
—Louise Bennet, D.D.

translated and paraphrased by Tanya C. Mullings

Past, Present, Future

All around you could smell death and fear,
And see grown men wiping their tears.
Blood covered the ground as far as the eye could see,
Nothing was left standing, not even a tree.
A few short hours determined the fate of the land,
Now every man, woman, and child had to make a stand.
Most wouldn't understand the fighting,
And some would have to go into hiding.
But all were looking forward to the day,
When they could build their homes and finally stay.

—Bill Webb



Last Moments

As the men headed for the last hill
Each one wasn't sure how to feel
Months had been spent preparing for this battle
And now men would be slaughtered just like cattle
Softly someone started to sing "Rock of Ages"
And each man briefly recalled some of the Lord's pages
Some recited to themselves the Lord's Paryer
While others kept marching, their eyes fixed in a stare
But deep down each man knew that he was right
To be in this army and to be ready to fight.

—Bill Webb

Reflections on a Nuclear War

Reality finally hit home the other day. The Caissons came rolling down my way. No longer do children die on M*A*S*H where their passing is smoothed over by a joke. My beautiful Ben is as fair game as Pa Chang.

Nowhere. Not a place. No location anywhere is safe. There is no shelter in Grandma's house. Mom and Dad, well they may be gone tomorrow. A shopping trip to the mall seems almost lewd in the face of the carnage.

Terror plays a big part in my emotions today. I can't live with this fear. Somehow I must be stronger than it. From deep down inside me I will draw strength. Strength given me by a God who created me in his likeness—free, loving, strong. Strength given me from the hope of people who have endured before me. Strength given me because weakness is no alternative.

—Lisa Pryor

The Clown

I paint on a smile so the world can feel good,
While deep inside, I know I never could.
My smile is so deceiving,
Why don't they see I'm grieving?
Some days, I feel so bad,
I can only paint a face that's sad.
And yet they laugh on,
Not caring that one day I may be gone.

We are all players in this endless play.
Some are made to be the comedy
relief along the way.
They are forever playing the character
without a name,
Never getting to be the star, who has
a chance at fame.

—Andrea L. Hodges



Weep Willows

The sky is grey and dark; weep, willows, weep.
My heart is dark, and bleak as well. O cry,
For melancholy's in my heart fair deep;
Too deep, I fear, for Love his trade to ply.
It seems to me the hour draweth nigh
When I with truest love was set to meet.
Indeed, the time, it seems, has pass'd me by
That love should enter life and make complete.
But soft, what hope doth heart of sudden greet?
Thought't not be truest love but dearest friend,
E'er shall it hold, save one, my heart's high-seat,
For friends, not like frail loves which break, do bend
Deep bonds which jealousy may try to end.
Weep, willows, for joy through heart now doth wend.

—Betty Jayne Harding

Distance

In the middle of a great dusty span of nothingness
Stand one small brown door,
And at that door, a young woman.
Neatly clad in a skirt and blouse.
Her stance wears fear,
Her eyes bear hope.
She raises her hand.
She knocks;

And the wood reverberates back
Echoed in the distance
Moving off in the grey surrounding.

She listens.

She listens.

She hears only the hush of the great quantity of
indistinct air drifting.

She knocks again.
Low she hears the rippling, rippling, rippling. . .

Again she knocks, again
The thud—Wooden Loud Strong.
She cries, "Hello? Hello?"
"Hello? Hello?"

She bangs and knocks on the wooden door
And offers to someone, "I'm here! Please answer!"
She knocks! she knocks!

Into toneless space
The sound's heard going
Ever-fading
Out, Away
Still she listens.
Still she listens.

For while she's waiting she almost hears a shuffle,
the shadow of sounds perhaps
Just out of range of her feeble ears.
She hears the answer that an answer might come.

And so the woman stands,
At the door,
And knocks.
Wanting no hoping,
Needing so hearing,
Desperately knocking
At the wooden door,
Offering to someone.

—Tammy Laidlaw

The Cloud

I'm free to be whatever I want to be;
I'm a fish, a bird, or even a tree.
People try and guess what I am;
Some say a pillow, others a man.
Somedays, when I feel frustrated and angry,
I roar and scream and be as loud as I can be.
While other days I'm lonely and cry
stream of tears.
I'm not afraid to show my hidden fears.
I'm free without a care.
I love to watch all the people gaze and stare.
I'll be here forever floating by,
While all those lonely people long to fly.
Envy me my friend,
You know you want to be here in the end.

—Andrea L. Hodges



Y?

Life, it's an all out DRAG
I really don't think it's my bag
For some reason I don't want to live
But while I do I'll give
Laughter to everyone I know
Oh their face a smile will show
But when I die I don't want them to cry
I don't want to see a tear from one eye
In my grave they'll look down on me
That another thing I don't want to see
I want to see my friends having fun
Whether I'm there or not, What's done is done
They lived without me before
I will see them again, I'll greet 'em at the door
I'll try to live as long as I can
But I don't know how much I can stand
I want to hang like a drape
I really want to escape
I try to have fun in life
But it seems like someone has a knife
And cuts me down
Makes me look like a clown
Why are we so cruel
Why must we always duel
Why do we have to be better than anyone else
We should live for ourselves
Who cares if you're poor or rich
Own a company or dig a ditch
I don't, I like people for what's on the inside, not out
I wonder why other people can't do this, why do they doubt
Think about this hard
From our life some people are barred
'Cause we don't give them a chance to know us
Hey maybe they can show us
Something new, well these are from a screwed mind
So this poem will remain unsigned.



State of Mind

He had been gone for days that slowly passed into weeks. She could not be certain how long it had been since he walked out the door. She still did not understand why he had to leave her in the apartment alone. She knew what he had said, and his precise words were permanently fixed into her mind. She would not and could not forget them. "I'm going to leave for a while," he had told her. "We need money to live on. We can't live like this forever. I'll bring back some money, and everything will be just fine again," he promised.

He said he would call to tell her when he would be coming back home. He left her with the assurance that he would make it back without getting caught. He had flashed that cute grin that she loved so much and said, "Besides, I've never been caught before. I won't slip up—I'm too slick."

She trusted him just as she always had, but it didn't mean that she wouldn't worry. When she agreed to marry him two years ago, she understood the risks involved. But this time was different. He had been gone for so long. What happened to him? Maybe he wasn't slick enough this time and his luck ran out! She was getting extremely anxious for his call.

Slowly she walked across the room to her rocking chair. From this chair she could gaze at the door as she wished that he was walking through it now. Unconsciously biting her nails she chipped the polish she had put on the previous evening. The clock in the kitchen ticked in time with the rocking of her chair. As she sighed and stopped biting her nails she allowed her hand to fall from her mouth and rest on the chair. The rocking of the chair continued.

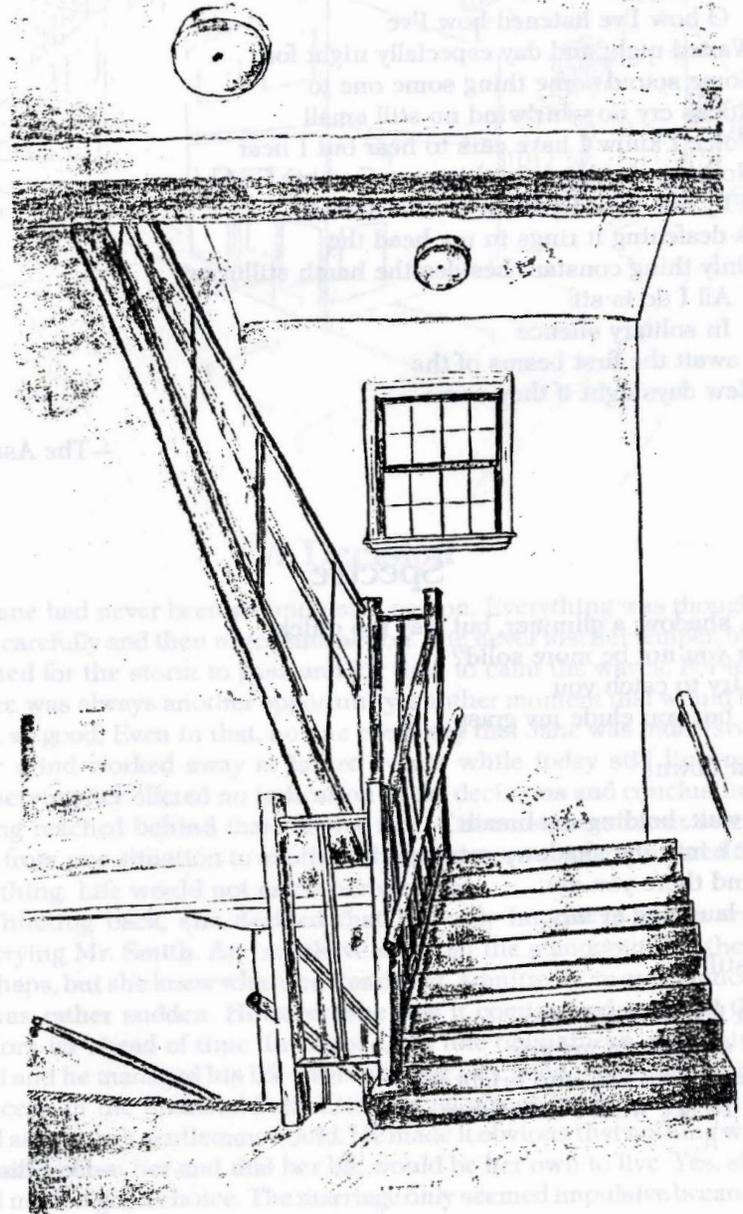
A faint knock at the door was heard. She fought to rise from the chair, but she felt almost as if each step was a strained effort. No one should

be visiting her. Who could it be? She continued to cautiously approach the door. What seemed to be minutes later, she finally reached the door. She peered through the peep hole, but her vision seemed blurred. The hallway outside was dark. "The light in the hall must have burnt out again," she thought. She hesitated momentarily, drew a deep breath and slowly turned the cold metallic door knob. Its coldness seemed to chill her entire body as she attempted to anticipate who was standing on the opposite side of the door. Now the door was cracked open slightly, but all she could see was the dark greyness that seemed to stifle any attempt of light shining in the passage. In order to see more she slowly opened the door until it stood open wide.

She heard his faint breathing, and as her eyes became completely accustomed to the darkness she perceived an outline of a man slightly taller than herself. He only appeared to her as a shadow. She stared at him for a moment and then mechanically took a step backward to allow him to enter the apartment. As he crossed through the doorway and entered the room, more of his features were discernable. Somehow, he seemed unmistakably familiar to her, but he still maintained a shadow-like appearance. Try as she might she found herself unable to call him by name, although she was certain she knew him. He crossed the room quietly and sat down lightly in a chair that faced her rocking chair. She sat down and looked at this shadowy figure intently waiting for him to speak. He did not speak verbally, but instead he gazed directly at her and as he did memories from her past swamped her mind. She leaned back in her seat and recalled the young man she had dated before her husband. All of the memories were happy ones, but yet they distressed her. As she looked back to the shadow he was standing in front of his chair and slowly backing in the direction of the still open door, bidding her to follow. She strained to speak but could not. She felt as if her soul was being torn into two pieces as he neared the door. As he reached the door he stopped and bid her to come to him. Her entire body was shaking now, and she broke out in a cold sweat. She was silently sobbing but she could not move.

The shrill ring of the phone startled her and caused her to jump. She sat still as she could hear the pounding of her heart. At the moment of the phone's ringing she looked to the door that was now closed. No one was standing there. She was brought to her feet by yet another ring of the phone. She crossed the room to answer.

—Deborah Turton



It is night and a quiet one at that
I listen but hear nothing not the
Slightest sound no crickets chirp
No owls hoot no leaves rustle in a
Wind that refuses to blow

O how I've listened how I've
Waited night and day especially night for
Some sound some thing some one to
Rocks cry no whirlwind no still small
Voice I know I have ears to hear but I hear
Nothing absolutely nothing my God my God
Why has thou forsaken me the silence
is deafening it rings in my head the
Only thing constant besides the harsh stillness

All I do is sit
In solitary silence
I await the first beams of the
New days light if they come

—The Ascetic

Spectre

A shadow, a glimmer, but way too quick
Can you not be more solid?
I try to catch you
but you elude my grasp.

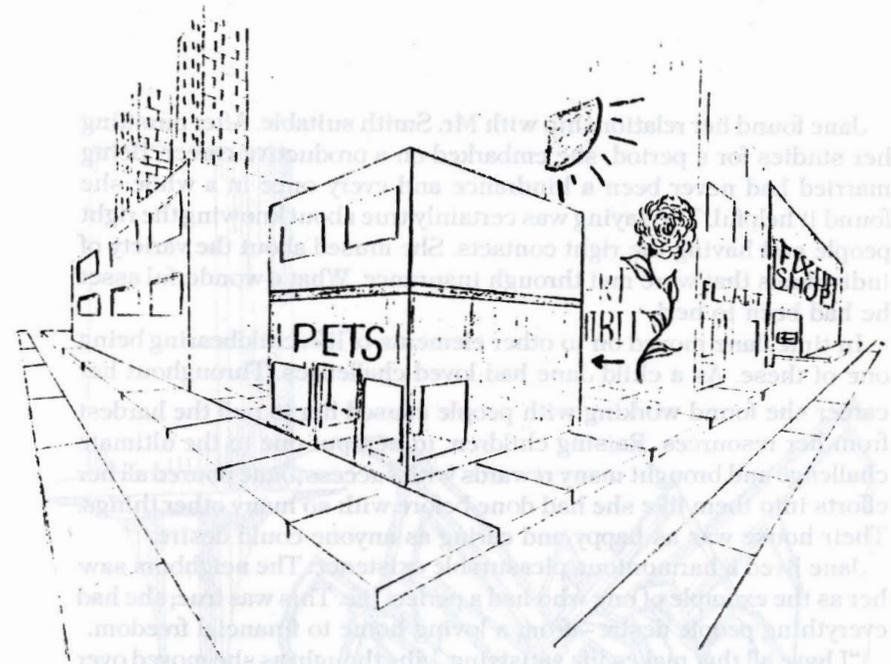
Slow down!

I wait, holding my breath
I look into the shadowy recesses,
And there you are,
laughing at me.

Be still!

At last—I have you
You struggle in my grip
But I drag you into bright light
To see what I remember.

—De Elliott



A Decision

Jane had never been an impulsive person. Everything was thought out carefully and then urged into action. She never lost her temper, but waited for the storm to pass and for time to calm the waves. For her there was always another opportunity, another moment that would be just as good. Even in that, no one could say that Jane was indecisive. Her mind worked away at future events while today still lingered. Observing her offered no indication of the decisions and conclusions being reached behind that passive face. Circumstances never swept her from one situation to another; she was in control and prepared for anything. Life would not catch her unaware.

Thinking back, she decided that her only impulsive action was marrying Mr. Smith. An impulsive act from the standpoint of others perhaps, but she knew what she was doing. Admittedly, in appearances it was rather sudden. However, she saw it coming and weighed the factors far ahead of time. Insurance, his line of business, was doing well and he managed his life with the same precision that brought him success in the financial field. Little social graces he extended nobly and as any true gentleman would. He made it obvious that nothing was expected from her and that her life would be her own to live. Yes, she had made a good choice. The marriage only seemed impulsive because the decision had been so easy to make.

Jane found her relationship with Mr. Smith suitable. After pursuing her studies for a period, she embarked on a productive career. Being married had never been a hindrance and every once in a while she found it helpful. The saying was certainly true about knowing the right people and having the right contacts. She mused about the variety of individuals that were met through insurance. What a wonderful asset he had been to her!

In time Jane moved on to other elements of life, childbearing being one of these. As a child Jane had loved challenges. Throughout her career she found working with people caused her to pull the hardest from her resources. Raising children, to her, put one to the ultimate challenge and brought many rewards with success. Jane poured all her efforts into them like she had done before with so many other things. Their house was as happy and caring as anyone could desire.

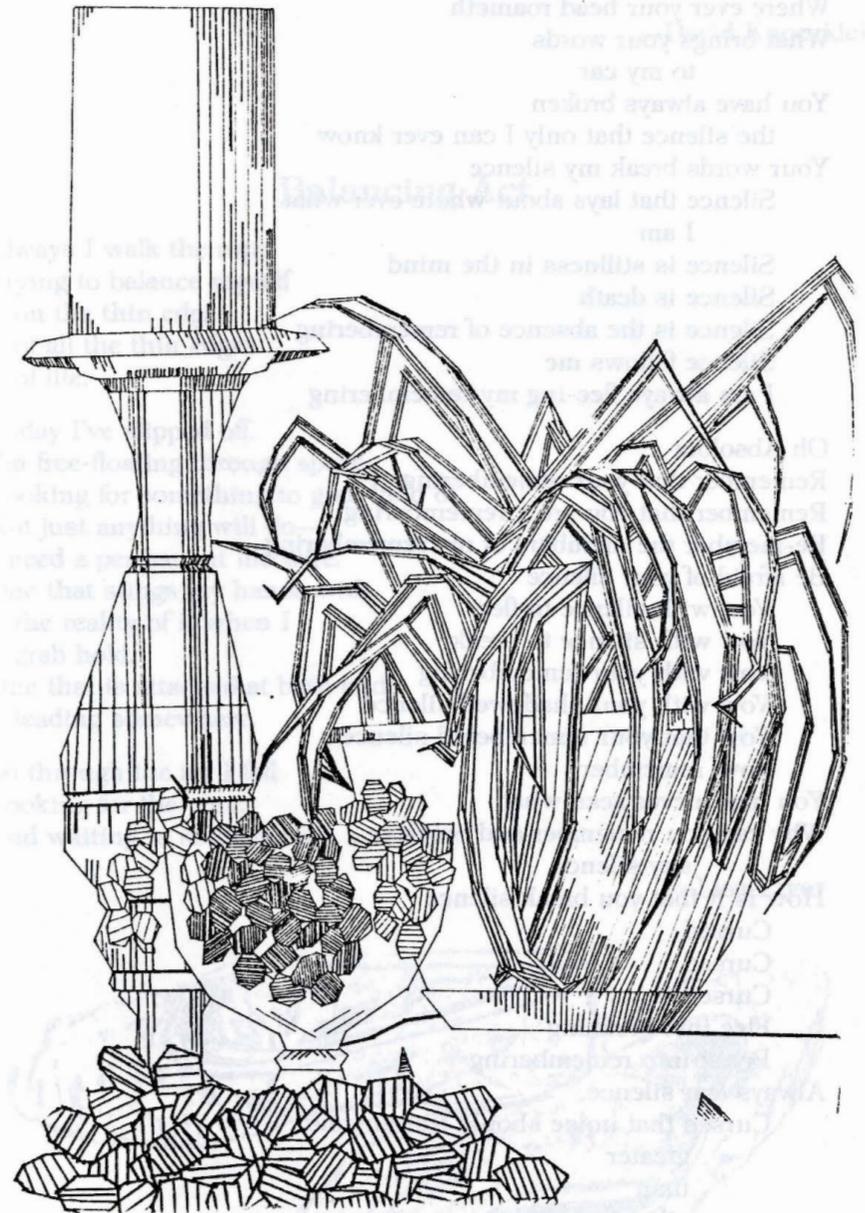
Jane lived a harmonious pleasurable existence. The neighbors saw her as the example of one who had a perfect life. This was true; she had everything people desire—from a loving home to financial freedom.

"I have all that makes life satisfying," she thought as she moved over to the window. The children were playing in the autumn leaves they had piled high only to destroy. Grandmother was expected and they anxiously waited for the car to pull in the drive. They would have barbecue and play some croquet when supper time came around. Mr. Smith could be seen in the distance returning from his afternoon jog. She saw the children yell and run to the fence as they saw the long awaited car arrive.

Like always everything was proceeding exactly on schedule. In her mind she pictured the ritual giving of gifts and conversation around the trunk. After that, Mr. Smith would show with pride the new swimming pool to the side of the house. Jane saw it all with acute precision, one step following the next. There was no reason for her to open her eyes to look out the window to observe what was happening; she already knew. The pill and glass of water were in her hand and needed no visual direction. A decision had been made and the next step followed smoothly.

Murmurs ran like a steady vibration in the neighborhood—"Fortunately the Grandmother was there to tend to the children", "She seemed so stable and satisfied", "I wonder how they kept their problems so secret, everything appeared to be going perfectly." The stories and questions haunted the neighborhood for a long time afterwards. No one had ever expected it. Nothing could have come as more of a surprise, for Jane had never been impulsive.

—Harold



Brown

Chains more real than any I
Have ever seen
Wrap their iron claws around
My heart and mind

Life is too much with me for
Me to live accepting
Commitments without
Question

Never stopping to ponder their meaning

Or worse—realizing and ignoring
In the name of motivation
And self worth without
The courage to painfully pry
Each piece of metal from
My being.

O Lord, raise me from my
Existence and teach me to
Live.

—Lisa Pryor

Bridges of Growth

There are times in every life when we feel hurt or alone. But I believe that these times when we feel lost and all around us seems to be falling apart are really bridges of growth. We struggle and try to recapture the security of what was, but almost in spite of ourselves, we emerge on the other side with a new understanding, a new awareness, a new strength. It is almost as though we must go through the pain and the struggle in order to grow and reach new heights.

—Carol Peterson

Commitment

My dirge fills your ear,
As sadness fills my heart.
For many times I realize,
I fail to do my part.

You sacrificed for me;
Once and for all.
Yet I refuse your will;
Every time I fall.

You are a jealous God,
Demanding the best from me.
Though I'm often number one,
So blind I cannot see.

You're supposed to be the Potter,
I'm supposed to be the clay.
Though many times I realize,
I do things my own way.

Oh Lord when will I learn,
To surrender all to you;
To make you number one,
And my commitment true.

—Ronald E. Kastens

Tomorrow

If today I knew, tomorrow I would be blind, today my little world would look like paradise—your face more dear. If today I knew, tomorrow I would be deaf, today the birds would spill their songs like liquid gold—your words would ring clear. If today I knew, tomorrow I would be mute, today I would speak loud of love and my heart's thoughts for you to hear. Today I could have been quite blind and mute and deaf for all to which I put your precious gifts. I am glad tomorrow is near.

—Carol Peterson

Oh God, My God

Oh God, My God
What shall I do?
I'm forever in Pain
and never with You

Why am I here?
and why must I stay?
You've a purpose for me?
If so, in what way?

For I cannot preach
and I cannot save
There isn't much I can do.
I cannot teach
and I am not brave
Am I truly worthy of You?

How much longer must I stay?
How long shall I be?
I am really a coward, I must say
Of the suffering which I see

Oh Father, I pray, please give strength
to carry out Your will
Please give me purpose to help all others
and to keep an even keel. Thank you.
In Christ's name, Amen.

—De Elliott

Change of Heart?

Slowly we walked down the streets of time
With our hearts and minds intertwined.
You look at me with a faint smile
That lets me know you'll be with me every mile.
My heart is filled with amazement and praise when I
see your mighty hand at work
Sometimes I wonder how I could have been
such a jerk.

The closer I allow myself to draw near,
The less I feel myself starting to fear.
I'm learning how much my love can really grow
From a love I thought I would never know.
Everyday that we meet in your beautiful sunsets
and forests of green
I've come to realize it's always been your love for
me that I've seen.
And even though there will be times I will still
try and pull away
Teach me to learn how to listen to what you say
Until I stop tearing myself from within,
Please remain patient, and keep me from giving in.

—Andrea L. Hodges

Snow Silence

With the blanket of snow comes silence.
All sounds in the white wonder-world are muffled.
The footsteps of the lone traveler seem loud
as they break through the crust of snow,
but they are immediately lost in the stillness.
For the lonely person, the silence is ominous,
brooding, eerie,
But for the one filled with love, the quiet
is filled with electricity.
Memories of time spent with that certain someone
fill the mind and make the silence joyous,
exultant.
And the stillness brings with it a nearness
to the one who made it all, a feeling
of being surrounded by Him.
When the destination is finally reached,
you hesitate, not quite ready to end the
communion.
Finally, the cold begins to creep through you,
and you go in.
But a smile lights up your face with the
memory of the silence.

—C.M. Brown

A Day Like Any Other

The small church worships with pews they're
barely able to fill;
Children fussing and fidgeting against their
parent's will;
Infants squealing in their mothers arms,
Never intending to do any harm;
The gossip of the week flows amongst
the members,
Adding their voices to those of the past
in the aging beams of amber;
Some elderly people come regularly full
of faith,
Having, since their childhood, worshipped
in this place;
Over all of the twitching, sniffing and
coughing,
The preacher preaches without balking;
He preaches with good intent,
Some of the members think he's Heaven
sent;
When the sermon ends, the people file out,
So busy hurrying to leave, they forget
what the sermon was about.

When we gather together, one with another,
Do we rejoice in worshipping the Lord, or
consider it a bother?
Now that the church doors have been
closed and everyone has gone home,
Is God left alone?

—Andrea L. Hodges

My Prayer

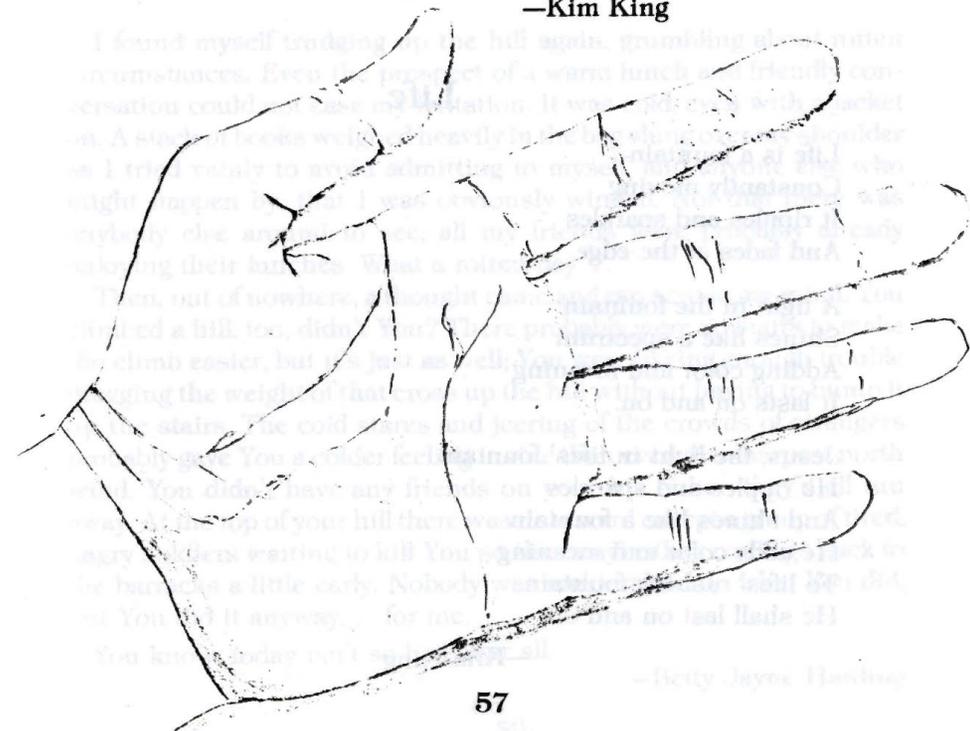
There've been times in my life
I've walked all alone
Knowing I've had Your love
But feeling all alone.

Silently You wait—
For me to raise my hand
To turn and see Your face
Please, take me as I am.

Oh, how hard it is for me
To let You have control.
The more that I try
The more I withhold.

Patience I ask from you
To help me be strong
I want to be Your child
To be one of Your own.

—Kim King



Questions

Why do so many see life as so dim?
Have they forgotten our gift of Him?
Many do not enjoy their life.
They see it as filled with sorrow, gloom, and strife.
But there is happiness to be found.
Lying quietly on the ground,
Watching the clouds go by
In the sedate blue sky,
Knowing that God is up there,
And that His children are under His care.
Knowing that acceptance will save us,
Why all the fuss
Over what is truth, and beauty, and light?
Will we ever learn what is right?
Be still and know that He is God,
And that on this earth He trod.
He came to save us from ourselves
And all of our personal private hells.
So why so sad and glum?
Jesus has come;
Now we are His sons.

Life

Life is a fountain
Constantly moving
It ripples and sparkles
And fades at the edge.

A light in the fountain
Shines like a spectrum
Adding color and meaning
It lasts on and on.

Jesus, the light in lifes' fountain
He ripples and sparkles
And shines like a fountain
He adds color and meaning
To lifes' rushing fountain
He shall last on and on.

—Kim King

Whisper Louder than the Howling Winds

The world begins to spin—
a whirlpool ever spinning faster. . .
“Peace, be still.”
Drawing all things into itself—
a ravenous, all-consuming blackhole;
“Let not your heart be troubled.”
Nothing is left untouched, alive—
a ravaging army, continually lays waste. . .
“I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”
Tearing all away from seemingly safe moors—
a wild wind billowing the sea;
“Be still, and know that I am God.”
Where, in all this, can man find peace—
a gentle haven safe from all dangers?
“In me you may have peace.”

—Betty Jayne Harding

Two Hills

I found myself trudging up the hill again, grumbling about rotten circumstances. Even the prospect of a warm lunch and friendly conversation could not ease my irritation. It was cold, even with a jacket on. A stack of books weighed heavily in the bag slung over my shoulder as I tried vainly to avoid admitting to myself, and anyone else who might happen by, that I was obviously winded. Not that there was anybody else around to see; all my friends were probably already enjoying their lunches. What a rotten day. . .

Then, out of nowhere, a thought came and ran across my mind. You climbed a hill, too, didn't You? There probably were no stairs to make the climb easier, but it's just as well; You were having enough trouble dragging the weight of that cross up the hill without having to bump it up the stairs. The cold stares and jeering of the crowds of strangers probably gave You a colder feeling inside than even the sharpest north wind. You didn't have any friends on your hill either; they'd all run away. At the top of your hill there was no reward except a group of tired, angry soldiers waiting to kill You so that maybe they could go back to the barracks a little early. Nobody was making You do what You did, but You did it anyway. . . for me.

You know, today isn't so bad after all.

—Betty Jayne Harding

Resurrection

From the gray gloom of machine madness
We look back to the death and birth of love,
The planting of eternity's seed
Whose blooms have filled our lives
With the warm April scent of compassion—
A scent that saves our soul for splendor beyond the great gulf.

—Jack Knowles

Two Reigns—An Easter Meditation

Once, in a dusty country there was a man who would be king. He was not a particularly likeable fellow, but he wanted to be king—no more, no less.

The country which he would rule was not a very significant one in the world of his day. Its people had a long history which was steeped in religious tradition. Not very long ago they had lost their independence to an emerging world power which was in the midst of a titanic power struggle over who should lead the nascent empire. These overlords sought to install someone over them whom they could trust to keep the peace and to pay taxes. As luck would have it, the family of this would-be king was chosen for the honor. His predecessors and he were a thieving, conniving lot, and he epitomized their worst characteristics.

He had played up to the new masters of his country; he was a master of political intrigue. He did not hesitate to take strong actions to preserve their good faith and to uphold the security of his own rule.

There was one thing which the king would not countenance, and that was any challenge to his throne. While he may be credited with having brought about a reasonably peaceful time for his country, he was at the same time, an incredibly jealous despot. He faced such challenges stolidly; even those which arose from within his own family were met with sure retribution. Once, when he was convinced that his wife's brother was about to usurp his throne, he invited him to a swimming party. A most unfortunate incident took place—it seems that he drowned in mysterious circumstances. True, the king had been "playfully ducking" his wife's brother, but surely. . .

One day he was visited by strangers who were bearing news of a new king who had just been born. As experienced astronomers, these "wise men" had come searching for this child to pay him homage. The king knew enough about the religion of his subjects to understand the significance of this birth. He could have dismissed this latest challenge as laughable, but he retained enough superstition and lust for power that he formulated a plan to thwart what could very well be the workings of his subjects' God. After consulting his religious advisors, he resolved to use the "wise men" as spies in order to be sure of where the child had been born. He too, he told them, would like to find the child so that he could pay him homage also. But the homage he had in mind was a song of death, not long life.

However, the visitors never returned. The "great" king had been affronted. This child king threatening his throne so enraged him that he lost all reason and took draconian measures. Every male child was to be killed in cold blood. And his orders were carried out. The children were slaughtered and the mothers wept. He too died soon after, but no one wept.

In history, "the Great" is often suffixed to his name. Herod the Great. The Great Murderer of Children. The Great Power-Hungry Despot. His reign ended in death—the deaths of the innocents and the death of the Great Victim and Culprit himself.

The child-king whom Herod was so intent on killing escaped. he grew up and became a man. He spoke of "loving your enemies"; his life was an example of his teaching. He spoke too of a kingdom. His kingdom was "not of this world," but it was a dominion over men's hearts and souls. Many misunderstood him, thinking he had come to overturn the vile, corrupt regime of Herod's descendants and their Roman overlords. When they realized that this was not his intention, they turned on him and executed him.

But this was only the beginning. The reign of Jesus Christ began with his death and his triumphant resurrection from the grave. In the ultimate act of selflessness, he brought life to all, for he is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life." His thirty-three years of life were well-spent, for he came "to serve, not to be served and it give his life." There is no question that he was the son of God and that he had the power to be a king the likes of which Herod only dreamed of. But he didn't use it that way. He refused to fall down at the feet of that all-consuming idol called Self. He established a kingdom which consists of willing servants whose desire is to daily take up their crosses and follow him.

One reign ended in death and sorrow.
One reign began with death, but brings life to all.
One man sought to be king by making all be his servants.
One man is king because he chose to be the servant of all.
He is the Son of God.

The reign of Herod—the reign of malice, greed
selfishness, envy,
conflict—continuous, seemingly unabated.

In this, however, we have hope:

“The kingdom of the world has become
the kingdom of our Lord and of
his Christ,
and he will reign for ever and ever.” (Rev. 11:15, NIV)
Amen. Come Lord Jesus.

—David Sienbenaler

