Forté

Fall 1992

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Many thanks to:
-----the artists who contributed to this issue.
-----G.W. Van Alstine for coming to my rescue and salvaging my scrambled disk.
-----Carrie, Chris, Trish, and Evan for their support.
CARETAKER

Basking in the wishes of others is my profession. I am the caretaker of hidden secrets and future evolutions. The purpose is not an easy one to understand, but a necessity for those around me. My niche is simple and discreet and yet it voices itself like a choir.

I never asked for the branches to reach down to me or the birds to thirst my name in their song, but I see down the horizon line, the colors and clouds, and others are born and must be nurtured. With these in mind, I milk the past to feed the present, for tomorrow must be brighter.

They are mine to mold and guide around what prevents them, for they are what prevents me from being a simple spring to sooth and glorify. However, have not the leaves that have fallen been replaced with richer ones? Have not the flowers bloomed their recycled beauty to luxuriate the surroundings?

I have yet to fail, and for that reason alone, my occupation is secure. One that can only be passed on through the wind. The ripples are my legacy, each circle growing wider and more complete, extending further than the eye can see until the pond is calm.

THE TALENTED ONE

play upon your sand pile
build your castles of pain
look into the window
what do you see?
is it what you wanted?
do you no longer believe?
well here comes your reprieve
deadly moats of choking emotion
filled with beasts of your sin,
what's this, aren't you the Talented One?
your moats get bigger,
the Gothic spires grow taller
your hair is not long enough
to reach him.
don't you see?
bash down your towers
wash away the sand.
believe once more in
your castle of beauty
you can still build it with those hands.
you are The Talented One.
FOOTSTEPS

Only the sea and the swipe of my hand
Can remove the Sculptures from the face of the earth
As if only existing
To leave no presence. Sitting in the middle of hours
Equivalent to thousands of lifetimes. An impression
Becomes embedded into its surface, one after another,
So diagonally the pattern, direction its theme.
Looking For that message in the bottle.
Waiting for the words to Unearth themselves,
But the tide carries them to a far Off stranger’s ear.
Taking a handful of this Ancient Clock,
It all trickles through my fingers, as it does everyone’s,
While the water smooths the outer layers
Taking away little by little what’s left of any
Configurations until there is nothing but the simple
Motion of its rise.
Looking out toward what appears to
Be the world’s limit I follow the footsteps before they
Too are taken away.

FREEDOM

The sun rising in the east
Brings a golden cover to the world
And gives life to all things.
Around the meadow there are
Tender flowers from so long ago.
The sun envelops their tiny petals
Like a mother would a child.
Oh, how the sun warms the grass
So green and alive!
The animals are so shiny,
As the sun grooms their glorious fur
To a shimmering, warm mass.
The cool water, tingling water
Reflects the golden rays which shine into
All the eyes around this world.
The trees, oh those tall, tall tress,
So beautifully silhouetted against the
Large golden ball of liquid sun.
The animals bound and jump
Under the big blue sky.
Without a care in the world, they play,
They are so dry and happy.
Suddenly it begins to rain
While the sun continues to glow,
A freak of nature, it is,
A light spring rain
That gently smooths the
Roughness of the bad things.
The wind blows gently,
Smoothly brushing cares away
To make all free.
**THE SUN**

The grass, last year's old carpet, claws its way through the soft mud
Reaching, straining every fiber for sunlight.
The sun--the sun will give it a whole new life,
It will warm each and every tiny green blade.

And the sun--the sun will host an awesome display of the spectrum each morning as the precious dewdrops rest silently on the waking greenery.

The sun--the sun, praised by farmers;
and scorned too
Helping crops grow--but--killing them as well--a drought.

It is the snow's enemy--melting it all away into huge, rapidly-flowing rivers.

The sun--the sun as a creation of God.
A golden timekeeper watching over the earth
with each passing day.
A creator, a creator of marvelous, spectacular sunsets.

The sun--a reflection of life.

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**DAWN**

Hazy morning sun, alone and paley shining,
whispers to my heart.

**NOON**

Bold orb of deep gold grins, ablaze with youthful fire,
daring me to shine.

**SUNSET**

Somber sinking sun sings a silent lullaby,
fading into night.

**NIGHT**

Silver disc of light pledges with painted moonbeams
to yield to the day.
LONELY CLOUD

It is one, still, pale, lonely cloud
All full and puffy as can be.
Its brightness blinds you when each tiny, golden
droplet of the daystar makes it glow.

And when the gentle zephyrs push the still and
pale cloud along the flashy, blue heavens
It begins to rotate, whirl, spin—but ever so
slowly and so softly...quietly.

A snowman appears, so round, chunky
fluffy—and pure white...gleaming.
He's smiling, dancing around high above,
putting on a show for the sun.

The heavens are all his—not another cloud
is present.
The soft breeze has abruptly changed direction
and a new set of images unfold against
the dazzling, bright, blue heavens.

A single, tremendous, brimming tree--
a soft, tender, smooth kitten, a tiny patch
of marigolds, all--

All from one, still, pale, lonely cloud.

THE DARKLING

I am a child of shadows.
One who loves the semi-night of stormy days;
Hiding from the spotlight of the sun...
The penetrating beam that stabs
Through the holes of my skull,
Showing me all that I'm not...
Every scar and blemish of my flesh
And the perfection of non-human things.
Sunny days are loud and busy,
A cacophony of bright emotion...hot...
Coiling and tensing with a sense of urgency.

I'm hurled to the outer edges,
Unable to contend, melted into obscurity.
Always longing for the nurturing refuge
Of darkness, a coming-home time,
A time for rest, for moving slowly;
A time of dim and silent streets
Stretching out for no one.
The unimagined majesty of trees
Whispering with the wind...loudly, then softly
On a warm summer evening,
As treetops brush against the sable dome of sky.
Scratching tiny holes where spots of day
Leak into night.

Dim winter is a time of cold, filtered days
That compel us to reach out for human warmth.
A time of early dusk and
Fire burning in the hearth;
A clock slowly measuring out time:
Time to touch, grow close, cling together.
Time to discover a warmth deeper than sunshine
Concealed in the cold of a winter evening.

Walking in shadows, I have discovered
That the sweetest things lie hidden in twilight.
Away from unaccustomed eyes
And quick, carefree paces...
In quiet, shaded places
Where dreams hover and wait.

DARKNESS
staying up late
with a candle by my side
the flame gives me comfort
flame red sunset
and the pull of the tide
the wax drips slowly
it’s got time to waste
making mini monuments
beauty needs no haste
and the candle grows small
leaving me with a memory
of what its hues have been
so I light another candle
and it begins again.

AFTER

After water falls from a torn sky,
Evening sings again.
Windy tree spires calm to listen
To the leaves whisper of the rain.
Above us, the distant shuttered windows open
One by one, spilling light
And drawing up the soft aroma of fresh-washed earth.
Once again, fireflies signal with captured moonglow
As the fallen join and flow in drowsy softness,
Slipping weblike through grass-shadows
In search of the sea.
Earth-captured tatters of unseasoned ocean
Hold white petals of moon
That toss on indigo wavelets.
Survivors of the torrent
And new-made things, born of the storm,
Are all soothed by the stirring hand of night.
MOTHER NATURE IS MY FRIEND?

Kablaang!!! (rattle, rattle.)

The yard was lit up as bright as day for an instant, then covered in a blanket of blackness again. That display was followed by a loud crack of thunder that ripped across the yard, rattling the windows and tinkling the dishes set exquisitely on the table.

The storm had been raging all afternoon, but was just now beginning to reach a climax. The lightning danced across the sky mischievously and the thunder rolled along the earth mercilessly.

I stood safe and secure in the kitchen, warmed by the soft yellow of the dimmed over head light and the aroma of the roasting chicken. I was flitting about the room, picking up this and putting away that, preparing for a romantic dinner for two.

My excitement was rising. The evening was going to be perfect. I went over everything in my head; I had been planning for this night for weeks. I planned everything from the candles on the table for mood down to the color of the napkins set on the table.

I finally finished getting everything, with the exception of myself, ready. I started down the steps to my room downstairs, when with a rush of anger from the storm, everything went black and I went tumbling down the stairs. After yelping several times in pain, I sat in the darkness waiting for the power to come back on. The anticipated salvation never came.

Somehow I managed to grope my way back upstairs to the kitchen. I began feeling my way around, blindly searching for some matches to light the candles I had set on the table for mood. The occasional flash of lightning mocked my blindness as I banged my hands and fingers in the drawers while searching for matches.

Eventually, I found the matches and, after a few moments of fumbling with the individual matches and the striking area, I managed to light one up. As the storm grew wild outside, I was saved for the moment by the weak glow of a candle.

At this point I had not lost all hope in the evening. The loss of power gave it a bit of excitement. So I took my trusty candle and went to my room and dressed quickly, hoping that the clothes I put on in the near darkness matched. I started over to my vanity but stopped short remembering no power meant no curling iron.

Oh well, he won’t be able to see me very good anyway. I thought to myself as the rain spattered against the window.

I went upstairs again, stumbling each step of the way, to check on my roasting chicken. As I opened the oven door, I felt the barely warm air flow out against my face. I realized then that we had an electric stove. My beautiful chicken would never be cooked.

Unless I use the candles, I thought. The thunder chuckled from outside.

I went to the cupboard. I would make a meal if it killed me. Soup would work. I knew using the modern technology of a match I could manually light the range top burner.

I grabbed a can of chicken noodle and went to the can opener. I stood, staring at it, dumbfounded. It wouldn’t work...it was electric.

As the wind shook the house, I thought, I could rip it open with my teeth if I’m lucky.

I gave up hope of making dinner. I decided to call my faithful man and tell him we were going out for dinner. I picked up the phone and heard nothing but an occasional click when lightning dashed from cloud to cloud.

I slammed down the phone as a knock came at the front door. I looked to the clock to see if it was time for my date to arrive. Of course, it too had fallen victim to the storm.

I grabbed my candle and made my way, banging my
shins, twisting my ankles, and running my body into unseen objects, to the door. There stood my knight in soggy clothes, coming to rescue me from this darkness. I flung open the door and before I could speak he dashed in and said:

"The roads are flooded. I hope you've got enough food to last a couple days because we're going nowhere soon!"

Just before the door closed behind him, a devilish gust of wind pushed its way into the house and destroyed the light of my candle.
REMEMBRANCE

So long it's been since last we met,
So long, and yet I can't forget
Your simple words, your gentle touch.
The shining of your eyes told much
Of what was never brought to light
Till last we met that summer night.

POETRY OF AN ADDICT

I drink you like coffee
On August afternoons.
My sweat drowns my back
And neck and senses.
You burn my tongue,
And cause my hands to tremble.
I drink you like coffee.
Your aroma fills my bedroom,
Not sweet, not delicate,
But strong and warm and abusive.
You stimulate me,
And I pour another cup.
I drink you like coffee.
You stain my teeth.
I sip you until I cannot deny
Your persuasion,
And I gulp you savagely.
Even when my fingers fry on your cup,
Condensation on the perking pot,
Deep and brown and you saturate
Every iota of my being.
You stay in my belly
And keep me warm till winter.
Words Spoken Now

I awoke with a strange disquiet. I had had that dream again, the one where I was with JoAnne. I noticed that I couldn’t remember the details of our relationship. Those memories were all that I had of her and they were fading. I tired to think of the time we first met and couldn’t decide exactly where it was. I couldn’t remember the circumstances very clearly. How could I forget something like that? Suddenly, something inside of me roared defiantly. I wasn’t going to let her just dissolve away from me so that I had nothing left and it would be as if our relationship never existed. It DID exist. I didn’t want to think it was all meaningless and could be simply forgotten, even if we were no longer together.

I went up to the attic to find the box with papers from my past. I dug through it but there were no photographs of her, no letters from her, nothing to indicate we were ever together. She was to fade and it was to be—nothing I could do about it. I continued to look through the box and came upon a bundle of receipts tied together with a hair band. This little triumph brought a smile. The hair band was one of hers. I looked through the receipts and found a phone bill with a call to our hometown from St. Louis charged to my old number. Yes, I’d gone to St. Louis with some friends to see the Cardinals play. I must have called JoAnne while I was there and charged it to my number. So this number, 558-7822, would have been her number at her apartment near the campus. Was that right? 558-7822, 558-7822, Yes! Yes, that was it! I must have called it a thousand times.

Immediately an idea swept across me. Why not call it again, just to see if I can remember what it was like then? I went downstairs to the phone. Of course this was a foolish thing to do, maybe even a little unbalanced, but I was determined to do it. I picked up the receiver. Now, do I dial the area code—hey, what does it matter now? I dialed 558-7822 and closed my eyes and tried to see those times. What was it like? What could I remember? I heard the line ringing—that was a little strange since there was no 588 exchange in the area. I’d probably get a recording telling me I can’t there from here. The line clicked—here comes the recording.

“Hello?” Someone was on the line. The voice sounded so familiar. Could it be? No, impossible!

“Hello?” I stammered.

“Oh, hi darling, it’s so good to hear your voice,”

I was shocked, dumbfounded. I wondered what could be happening. I must have finally gone over the edge. Yet I had to go along now. I had to know.

“JoAnne? Is that really you?"

“Of course it is, silly. Who did you think you were calling?"

There was a way to know if it was her, “JoAnne, let me ask you something. It’s a test. Who is the president of the United States?”

“That’s tough. Let me see...David Letterman?”

“No, I’m serious, who is it?”

“Sure you’re serious. It’s that S.O.B. Bush.”

“So you think he’ll be re-elected?”

“Who cares? It doesn’t matter who’s president anyway.”

This is exactly what she would say. It must be her. I was once again conversing with my dear JoAnne.

“You’re right, it doesn’t matter. What matters is that I’m talking to you and it feels wonderful.”

“Yes, I think so too. When are you coming over tonight?”

“Oh, how I wish I could.”

“You mean you’re not?”

“No, not at all. If I said I was coming over, then I’ll be coming over. It’s just that I don’t remember this particular time. What were we going to do?”

“You’re asking the strangest questions. Don’t tell me you don’t remember that we were going to see that Woody Allen movie?”
"Let me think...yes, I remember now. We saw "Annie Hall" at the student center. It was wonderful being with you that night. You wore blue-jeans and a red velvet blouse and your hair was a shimmering golden, very soft and beautiful. You were stunning to behold. I enjoyed being with you so much. Yes, I remember now."

"You’re sweet, and that’s a funny way of asking, but I’ll wear my red blouse tonight if you’d like. What time will you be here?"

"I wish I could be there now."

"You stick with your job where you belong. Although I know you get bored sometimes, it’s important that you do well. Can you come at 6:30?"

"Sure."

"So I’ll see you then. Behave yourself, honey."

"No!! Wait, wait! There’s something really important I’ve got to ask you. Do you really love me?"

"You know I do with all my heart."

"Please, please do this for me. Get a piece of paper and pen. OK?"

"All right, just a minute."

"Write down May 18, 1999, 10:00 am and this phone number: 886-8434, OK?"

"That’s almost exactly ten years from now. So?"

"Do you think you’ll still love me then?"

"Since love is forever, I suppose I will."

"Do you really think you will?"

"Yes, I really do. Now what is this all about?"

"I’ll love you forever as well, even if that means ten years from now. Do you see what I mean?"

"Sort of. You want love to be more than just words spoken now. But you know it’s not just words. I don’t know how you can think that it is."

"I hope that it’s not. Would you want to talk to me ten years from now? Would you call me if you could?"

"Of course."

"That’s what I’m asking you to do. Keep that telephone number and call me at 10:00 am on May 18, 1999."

"That’s really bizarre, but it’s kind of romantic. You want me to keep a date with you ten years from now?"

"Yes, that’s it. You’ll have to keep that number and remember years from now, even though the whole world could be turned upside down by then. Will you try?"

"Yes, I’ll try. It’s silly. I love you and I think we’ll be together even ten years from now. What’s this phone number anyway?"

"Think of it as the number you’ll need to reach me in the future, at a time when things will be completely different than they are now. To reach me you’ll need to keep that number. Will you?"

"This is another one of your romantic notions and if by keeping this number, it shows you that I love you, then I’ll keep it."

"It does mean more to me than you know. Please try and call me."

"Sure. So I’ll see you tonight?"

"Yes, that will happen. I must say goodbye."

"Bye, my darling."

I put the receiver back on the hook and looked at the clock. It was two minutes until 10:00. This was very strange. I couldn’t have really been talking to her. I must have fallen asleep and been dreaming. Yet I was sitting by the phone and the old phone bill sat there in front of me. It was one minute until 10:00. I closed my eyes and thought of her with her eyes as blue as the prairie sky. It was 10:00 am, May 18, 1999. The phone rang. Maybe love was more than just words spoken now.
SLASHED TIRES

Pity me
His face attempted
To conceal his tears.
I am reborn.
Exquisite vandalism
Personified.
Unable to promote further crimes
Moving violations
My civil duty.
My face relaxed
Inner laughter
Two swift waves of a knife
Revenge.
Callous virgin feet
As he did my virgin heart
The perfect ending.
He slowly walked out of my life
Instead of driving off
In a blue Camaro.

YOUTH

rows of deep set
eyes, garish
figures reveling
in their pain
fingers weakly
clutching at
smoking salvation
tattered flannels
hanging limply
off their frames
i see them
as if from afar
even though i
am they
we are all
gathered here
the knights
about the table
praying for some
quest to suggest
itself to our
tired minds
Mr. Rockwell’s Nightmare

My grandfather wasn’t in this life very long by today’s standards. He was a strong willed man who lived his life with the same ideals that became his legacy. One of my earliest memories was of him and myself walking through a park in his homeland. He bought me the closest thing to ice cream they had in his country as we walked to a water fountain that whispered all the wishes it had accumulated throughout the day. We sat on a nearby bench where a flock of birds suddenly appeared at our feet. The wind had a slight chill but it wasn’t uncomfortable.

My grandfather’s face became very sad and he seemed somewhat disturbed. He told me that where we sat was a very special place to him. He had been gone for so long that he forgot how special it was. He said that at one time there stood houses with families instead of the park we were sitting in. He told me a story of how his country took away people’s homes during the war to provide soldiers with shelter.

“It was a state of emergency,” he said. However, after the war, the government never gave the homes back to the families that owned them. They confiscated their property and put entire families out on the street.

He said, “We should feel fortunate to be living in America because they wouldn’t do that to their people.”

After a minute or so I realized by his glistening eyes that one of the homes that was taken was his mother’s and father’s. I looked around and thought to myself that I could be sitting in my great grandfather’s living room or den or kitchen. I could have been looking at family pictures on the hallway wall. When his childhood home was taken from him, he found his way to America.

To America where just the other Sunday I took my son to get some ice cream. It was a beautiful day. The type of day that Mr. Rockwell would have made a masterpiece.

The sky was blue, the birds were singing, and the sound of destruction was in the air. My son pulled on my pant leg and pointed at the bulldozers down the block turning memories into rubble. He asked me what they were doing. I told him they were making room for some trees and grass. It was hard to explain to someone his age that this was to bring more money to our city. It was hard for me to understand as I stood and watched pieces of a family’s history being dragged and loaded onto a dump truck.

My son asked, “Why are they doing that?” I didn’t have an answer. All I could think about was what my Grandfather said:

“We should feel fortunate to be living in America because they wouldn’t do that to their people.”

We the People of the United States in Order to form a more perfect Union, to establish Justice, have secured domestic Inequality. Failing to provide for the common man, we’ll promote the Corporate welfare to insure the Blessings of their Prosperity for themselves and the Political Economy, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America.

What have we become?
1:30
in the morning
i sit alone
in a dimly lit
truckstop
somewhere in
mid-america
my life is tired
and my god is stale
but drinking a good cup
of java always
seems to help
looking to my left
i see a man that seems
oddly familiar
yes....
no.....
his name whispers
like some bashful child
never quite heard
at the back of my mind
nevertheless
memories charge forth
disengaging themselves
from the
gooey mass
of biscuit dough
i have for a brain
at this unholy
hour
when i was
16 my first
real job
was at a sleazy
restaurant / coffee-house
he was a cook there
already in his late
YOU AND ME

sitting lonely
in the cold
surrounded by
reality
all confusion
touch my heart
it cries
OUT
out of here
take me to
that place
where is it?
so far from
here
how i wish
it could change
instead i lose
my faith
lost inside
a mile of rain
drops caressing
my face
blind hands
reaching for
safety
matted hair
hangs about
my eyes
i'm so
afraid
of what
i do not
know
no idols to
look to
they all
tumble down
leaving only
the name brands on
the posters
like father
hitting his
son
the realization
death
will not come

Sylvia

She was young,
Yet death danced for her...
Ever beckoned her.
Her soul strained
Against its bonds
Beyond all reason;
Wings beating against
The dirty glass.
But when the jar was shattered
She flew, not looking back--
Not caring what was left discarded.

Among jagged shards lie
Shadows of life and silent songs
Haunted with whispering echoes
Of frantic wings.
FRUSTRATION

here we sit together
you and i
you
on your stool
and i
upon my bench
we look toward each other
questions in our eyes
i mutter
something heartfelt,
meaningful
you
you look so
understanding
your mind hears
my muddled words
yet
your heart never reads
their message
to you
i am
a lost soul sailing in
the ungracious night
desperately seeking
that hope
or light
YES
i am that sailing soul
dark in the night
you were
my one hope

my only light
i yearn for
your tender touch
cool caress
ecstatic embrace
a look
of longing from
eager eyes
yet these are gone
all i have is
the memory of what has
died

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DAWN

Awaken
With the slap of a mother's hand.
Dawn has come.
Light paralyzes the little girl.
She has become nocturnal.
Bartering her life for the dream.
Unreliable, irresponsible,
She begs the mirror
Sees nothing
Nothing at all.
Love songs torture her
Hears nothing
Nothing at all.
What she was given she tossed away.
What she craved she kept reaching for
And fell
Awake.
Awaken and between her arms is
Nothing
Nothing at all.

MASQUERADE
IN THE DARKNESS

Just leave me here
In this dark womb of night...
The sweet sanctuary where no shadow falls,
Where I can feel unborn again...
Suspended between life and death.
Here I am needed by no one, slave to no master,
Unknown.
Here I am empty as this black vault of sky,
Lost far beyond the forge of civilization,
Awash in the peace of dreamless sleep
Before my time.
Let me pretend it is over.

ELAENORA CREE

Where are you tonight?
a cold wind blows on broken doors
sitting in a cluttered corner
battered and bruised
i remember what i've done
looking for you
killed all my friends
torn down my walls
brick by brick
no one's seen you
where are you at?
never to be found
always in my mind

Two lovers swing
from a tree
of self-doubt and jealousy
but who sees
not me i'm looking
no lights in the sky
when did they leave?
when did you?
it was so quietly
my room has grown
and now the sky
seems so eternally
empty

On the curb i sit
waiting for that car
the one that carries you
no mother can heal
no father protect
no priest can forgive
the child within
sleeps not until dawn
then i awake
to see the sun
and cry once more
for you

Slowly i will come
back to this street
some day long away
and stand on those
steps
where we sat
see the tears stained
with memories stars
that no longer shine
smell of your body hanging
in the air
feeling you beneath
where are you tonight?
Kiss me under the faucet
let the candles burn
long into the dark
the glow on our bodies
making your eyes shine
as we talk to the music
lay with me on the floor
i’ll hold you tight

The pot roast is burning
on christmas day
i’ll make you cry
under the tree
presents for our
child all alone
rock the bassinet
slowly for her
forever for her
e-la-en-ora cree

WISHING I NEVER LEFT YOU

You encapsulate
My stream of unconsciousness
Into a single drop
Of enriching agony,
As I lie in the taunting
Waste of sheets and mattress.
You entangle yourself
In the webs of light
Painted on my dorm room walls.
All bow to your presence in my dreams.
Suddenly chastity is obscene,
In realms I cannot touch
But have,
It haunts me to every iota of my destiny
That when I awake
Your breath will not be on my cheek
But in my memory
Enraptured in vital hell
Encompassed in a crystal tear.
AFTERNOON LUNCH

“I can’t say my day has been any better. Coffee, please, regular. Thank you. Now that I think about it, today started like every other day. When I woke up, I reached over to the other side of the bed. I don’t know what I expected to find. There was no one there. Maybe it was wishful thinking or maybe my dreams and reality are trading places. In either case, the lack of an occupied pillow next to me is what made me think of her, but it didn’t end there. Today she wouldn’t leave me alone. Everywhere I went, she was there. Every sound I heard, she made. It was as if she planned my whole day and stuck every minute into me as if they were needles and I was her doll.

“My clock radio was on. Naturally, I like to wake up to my favorite station. Coincidentally, it plays her favorite music. I actually found myself reaching for the tuning knob, thinking to myself, it’s time for a change! But I huh…

“Well, let’s just say today was not a day for changes.

“Excuse me? No, I think we’re going to need a few more minutes.

“Where was I? So on my way to the office I decided to drive by the park. It was filled with the morning joggers and people exercising their best friends, but all I could see were long walks and Sunday picnics. There was also this one night we decided to skinny-dip in the grass. Oh, I don’t know. I guess I would have ended up at the park some time today. It’s just the way the day has been going. It got better for a while when this guy driving next to me decided to concentrate on climbing the corporate ladder from his car instead of trying to stay in his lane. So most of my morning journey was spent on the shoulder of the highway. I couldn’t believe I was happy to be going to work.

“As soon as I got behind my desk things went from bad to worse. I’ve spent the last three and a half hours replaying five years. I couldn’t even tell you if I got anything accomplished as far as work goes, but somehow I don’t think so. She has turned me inside out today. I don’t know why it was so important today to remember the first time we met, or the good times, or even the last time we were together. Days like today aren’t supposed to be important to men. She would always get mad because before I couldn’t remember days like today. I was always too busy. There were always too many things going on. Now I can’t forget. This way of haunting me is her way of revenge. It’s a vendetta she inherited so many years ago and now it’s time for her to collect.

“After all, it’s been almost two years and I’m still wearing clothes she gave me. I pick up the phone to call her realizing halfway through dialing that I’m only calling to hear her say anything. But it’s over for her. She said it was over for her long before she made the formal announcement. Why can’t she make it over for me? Why is it so damn important for me to remember? If it’s so important, why isn’t she here to remember too, instead of being somewhere else filling herself with my inability to forget? Then again, if I could have made her stay, I wouldn’t be remembering alone. What I could and should have done to make her stay is irrelevant now. Maybe that’s my crime and this is my punishment. Why couldn’t I think about her more before than I do now?

“Oh, yes, I think that we’re ready now. What’s the soup of the day? I think I’ll have..."
RENDEZVOUS

Mournful, distasteful light
Shining through the window,
Leave me, my friend alone—
I need some time to rest.

Tell me, sinful Sun,
Why must you shine in,
Warm this very room
This bed we slept on?

Go, leave me to think.
I need time to reconsider.
The alarm sounds, and I
Still lie here next to her.

Hide, fall to the West;
At least behind a cloud.
If she can't see you,
She'll think it's night.

Why not be like the rain,
Cooling the grass and
Trees outside this motel,
While we lay in slumber.

Sun, go, if you will.
So I may leave here,
My wife is expecting;
I'm expected myself.

Fade, let me sleep;
Hide behind the clouds.
I'll leave quietly,
She'll not suspect it.

If it be too late,
I'll close the shades,
Turn that Sun out;
I need some time to rest!
A TWO NIGHT STAND

Death taunts
My every daydream.
He dances in the eyes of women
Who hold nothing on bloodstained floors
Slipping into an everlasting hell of ignorance
He entraps me at night.
Pulls me towards him in sheets
Of tomorrow and forever,
Tastes all of me I've yet to know,
Then spits me into the pain
Of strangers and beasts,
Devouring every bit of decency
I used to call mine.
He has ravaged my soul,
Then left the world to loot and torture
My sanity, my beauty, my existence.
I never embraced one of them
For I could not find them through tear filled eyes.
And I was disgusted by their mortality.
He glorifies me on sacred evenings
With kaleidoscope heaven
And lifts me away
From paper friendships,
Kissing my marrow,
Drinking the sap of my heart,
Then dispels me into darkness.
He wears on me.
Confuses my assurance
Till I bleed my morals on floors of past fantasies,
And I beg him to lure another
In his bed of Satan's salvation.

Finally at two in the morning,
the door slams shut one last time,
the uproar subsides into a low rumble
--she weeps miserably.

I crouch upon the stairway,
blending with the shadows on the wall.
She does not know I hear her cries.
She does not feel my pity.
She only chooses her ensuing
nights of heartache,
than spend an abandoned night alone.
SILENCE

driving, i rode in fear
he would be there
desperate thoughts charged
forward into the lights of the motorway
the tires grinding harshly
toward my fated home
everything was lost in the rush
i could feel my heart slipping
away slowly away...
he will be there
darkness lay all around
my life churning
amongst the raging sea
floating on waves of apathy
my fingers close about the door
into the nightmare i leap
there he sits
his ghoulish form dominating...
the dream
i step before him
awaiting his holy judgement
he is there
i pray for pity
another fallen from his grace
as he rears his head, i know,
the sentence:
Silence

standing, legs apart
muscles taut
fists clenched
nails digging into palms
head thrown back
mouth open, emitting
a silent scream
that only i can hear
for that person
is me

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I am a captive
Trapped not by tangible bonds.
But those I put on myself
Made by my conscience.
They alone keep me in a place
Where there is no escape
Unless I sacrifice part of myself.
And if I do leave,
How can I survive if I am not whole?

SLENDER BONDS OF SOCIETY
MUCH ADO...

Maryanne Moore
lost her mind on the page
finding it, lifting it--
ever sweeping up behind it.
in stringlike Wenicke's aphasia
patterns floating down
randomly like cosmic confetti
in a manic parade.

Cummings, the veteran,
rides aloft grasping her sobcr
the melancholy standard.
t.o.s.e.s.
words and Brokenpunctuation to the clamoring
of headwound language learned
in an ambulance in france
during the first World war.
He spreads, he sPreAds, he spreads theanarchy helping her
proMote versehell and,..., nonchalance is good
(in this age of trying)

Wake Up!
"The Emperor is naked."
cried the child.

The Artist

The authorities found her about a week after it happened. Little Jimmy Smith told his mother that it was sure strange that she hadn't come out to the front porch to pick up any of her newspapers. Jimmy always stood a few feet back from the rusty iron fence surrounding her property and hurled the rolled up paper with all the force a sixth grader could muster. Never too close. He never dared to step on the fringe of her weedy, overgrown yard where the dandelions grew wildly.

He had actually only seen her once in the two years he had delivered her paper. One chilly November day his toss had been more off than usual, and the paper landed next to a cracked flower pot near the side of the porch. She had pushed open the screen door slowly, and the rusty hinges moaned and eerie creaking sound that cut through Jimmy worse than the sharp winter wind. He only caught a glimpse of her. He could see her gray hair and the shawl she held wrapped around her bony shoulders. There had been no chance to see her face, because Jimmy had turned and scamped down the sidewalk. After this incident he was always fearful of seeing her again. Yet he didn't move so quickly past her house that he didn't notice the papers scattered about her paint-chipped porch. Kind of strange, he thought to himself, that she hadn't come out to pick any of those papers. He certainly couldn't see her going on a vacation. After all, he had only seen her come out of her house one time.

So little Jimmy Smith mentioned those papers on the porch to his mom, and she looked in the phone book
for her number. There was only one Parks listed: Parks, Marjorie 631 Grayson Lane 693-8876. Her fingers were trembling slightly as she dialed the number. She drove down Grayson Lane every day on her way to work, and Old Widow Parks’ rickety house, with the knee high weeds surrounding it, always gave her an eerie feeling. Mrs. Smith let the phone ring several times. She could imagine the shrill ring piercing through the darkness and stillness of her living room. No answer. She tired again an hour later. Still no answer.

The authorities pulled up in front of the Widow’s house almost 20 minutes after receiving Mrs. Smith’s phone call. She had emphasized over and over that she was probably making a big deal out of nothing, but that her son would probably feel a lot better if someone checked it out. After all, he would have to continue delivering her paper. The deputy who took the call thought to himself that it was Mrs. Smith who was going to feel a lot better after someone checked this out.

It was near dusk when the two officers walked up to her screen door. One of them, a seasoned veteran with a rounded stomach and a wrinkled uniform, the other a clean cut young man with creases where his partner had wrinkles. The chipped porch was covered with leaves, and it sounded hollow as the officers stepped around the scattered newspapers with their heavy, black boots. They stood there for almost five minutes, rapping on the wooden frame of the screen door. No answer. They looked into the front windows. It was too dark to make out anything but the looming shapes of furniture.

"Mrs. Parks, it’s the police department. If you can hear us, could you please come to the door?"

"Mrs. Parks, there’s no problem. We’re just here to make sure everything is all right."

Still no answer.

One of the officers pulled on the screen door and it popped open with little effort.

"Hey, do you think we should just go on in?"

"I don’t see what the big deal is. Something could be wrong."

"Yeah, but, what if...?"

"What’s wrong, Tom? Are you scared? Maybe Old Widow Parks is hiding with a big kitchen knife just waiting for us!"

"Oh, ain’t you just a riot! You have to admit that it’s known around town that this lady is a strange old bird. Haven’t you ever heard about that ruckus she caused back in the late 60’s?"

"My grandpa said something about it. He was always so full of stories, so I didn’t pay much attention, I guess."

"Well, let me tell you somethin’ about it then, Mr. Smarty Pants. She moved here in the early 60’s and at first folks thought she was real nice. She was always paintin’ those fancy pictures. Everybody says they were real good—ya know, professional-like and everything. She’d let people browse in her front room to look at her work, and at the spring festival she’d set up some real nice displays."

"This is pretty creepy so far, Tom. I don’t know if I can handle much more!"

"You just listen here, young man. I ain’t finished with this here story yet. Well, when Rotary Club held their annual fall banquet—ya know, when they all bring their wives and have a potluck with entertainment afterwards—some of the ladies arranged for Mrs. Parks to open up her little gallery. Those upper-crust ladies really go for that stuff, ya know. Well, as the story goes, a group of the women were asking Mrs. Parks..."
about some particular paintin', and a couple of the men folk wandered from the front room. Bein' of the curious sort, one of them opened a side door just down the hallway. They found more of good Old Widow Parks’ pictures. Yes sir, they found paintin’s that sure as heck hadn’t been seen by anybody in town.”

“Well, what were the paintings of?”

“They were twisted pictures, son. Images that could only have some from a woman with a sick mind. They were all pictures of death. They showed people dying—not just by natural causes, but from accidents. They say some were even pictures of murders takin’ place. But, you see, the worst part of it all is that them people in the paintin’s...”

“What, what! What about the people in the paintings?”

“Well, there was only a few of the men that actually got in there to get a good look, ’cause Old Mrs. Parks come a flyin’ down the hallway just a screamin’ in the most awfulest voice for them to get away.”

“Tom, what about in the people in the pictures?”

“The people in the paintin’s were familiar faces. They were all town folk, Mike. They were our relatives, the people we passed every day on the street, the people we had grown up with. And what’s creepy is that some of those pictures were showin’ things that hadn’t happened yet. I reckon one couldn’t be for sure, but one of those men swore up and down that he saw a painting of a burning house; a house that looked just like the Milton’s place that burned down a few months later. He says there was a figure in one of the second story windows, and he says it was a young girl. Her face was contorted in the most terrible way, and the flames were takin’ her in.”

“Oh God, Tom, little Sally Milton was killed in that fire. She was one of my classmates. The stairway collapsed, and they didn’t have time to reach her at the window.”

Both men stood silently as the wind chased the crisp autumn leaves around the paint-chipped porch. They just stood there motionless, their feet surrounded by the scattered newspapers that little Jimmy Smith had hurled at the house.

“But, Tom, I don’t understand all this. Why wasn’t anything done about all this? How come it’s been kept so quiet for all these years?”

“Well, there was quite a fuss made for a few days. Some of ’em went back to check out those paintin’s, but they found nothin’. My guess is that she must’ve destroyed everything. She wouldn’t talk to no one. There was no proof—only what a few people said they seen. Stories started gettin’ mixed up, and before long, nobody knew what to believe. The whole affair would come up again with somethin’ like the Milton fire. One of them men would swear they’d seen that same picture of what happened in Mrs. Parks’ secret room. It could only be speculation, though, ’cause there was no proof. Some people started sayin’ that it was all a big hoax, just made to scare people and give a nice lady a bad name.”

“Well, what do you believe, Tom?”

“Well, son, all I know is those men that went in that room that evenin’ were friends of mine. I had lots a respect for each and every one of ’em. I think there’s gotta be some truth in what they said. This town don’t talk about this no more. It’s best that way. Only a handful of us remember all that trouble, and all of us would just as soon be able to forget it. Most people just think she’s a creepy old lady ‘cause she lives in a run-
down, scary lookin’ house and never ever comes out.”

“Well, I can see why people would feel that way. This place is starting to get to me.”

The young officer was holding the rusty screen door open about an inch, and he peered into the dark corridor that followed the entryway. The sun had almost completely set, leaving only a faint light for them to see by. It was supper time, and Tom’s rounded stomach made a low grumbling noise.

“What do ya think, Mike? Let’s check this out so we can get on home.”

Mike pushed the screen open the rest of the way. He stepped aside for Tom to enter first. The house was cool and musty, and in the darkness, it was hard to make out the objects from across the room. Both officers searched the wall for a light switch. They continued walking slowly down the hallway. Near the end of the long corridor a large door was open to one of the rooms. Tom entered the doorway, and his hand located a light switch on the wall. The window at the back of the room must have been open because the curtains were dancing in the evening breeze. Tom flicked the switch. There in the center of the room, on a faded oriental rug, stood a mounted painting.

“Holy Jesus, Tom!”

The two officers were looking at a portrait of themselves. A picture of the two of them standing in that very room. Old Widow Parks was hanging from a noose of rough twine rope just to the right of them. She was hanging just where the painting showed her to be, with the two stunned officers staring at her in horror and disbelief.

UNDER LOCK AND KEY

Sunlight drifts through the dawn blinds.
A cat licks up some spilled milk, just as
There’s a rap on the apartment’s heavy door.
The sky turns clear blue, a car skids
Around the corner, but doesn’t stop.
A picture by Monet hangs above her bed;
The bed covered with dried, red sheets.
An empty pill bottle stands on the nightstand.
Where the cat licks up the milk and blood,
His paws white, but spotted dark red.

Once again a knock, still no answer; no sound.
Gun, on the floor beside empty shells.
Next to a Jesus necklace is covered in blood.
Skylight window shows the clouds roll by,
A piercing sound of a dog barking echoes about.
Landlord still standing, sweating in the hallway,
Knocks, hollers again; no heed to his call.
He prepares to unlock the door to investigate,
Preparing for what lies on the other side.
Yet, the key will not fit in this strange lock.

He takes a few paces backwards, makes his decision.
Lunges forward into the heavy, metal door.
The cat yelps; the clouds still rolling on by.
The man swallows, not wanting to open his eyes,
But it’s too late, he’s already standing inside.
**IF ONLY IT MATTERED**

The extended, gold-bronze bier  
Was slowly maneuvered out of the coal-black  
Hearse.

Many faces showed a deep sadness,  
The weak clutched one another for support,  
The strong stood stoic, braving their own  
Waves of grief from behind expressionless  
Faces.

Teardrops, tiny teardrops, streamed endlessly down  
Frozen cheeks  
For it was cold that day.  
An icy chill had surrounded all on that October morn.

An eerie silence shifted among the bereaved,  
Seeking comfort only in tangency--Words  
Unable to make a difference--Impossible  
To be uttered.

The churchyard is vacant now,  
Except for the soft, constant pitter-patter of  
Raindrops  
On the fallen leaves--colors dulled, no longer vibrant  
They too, seem touched by grief.

All that remains is a lone funeral spray.  
It stands tall, a majestic symbol of what once was,  
Braving the eerie silence--and the icy chill....

If only it mattered.

**THE ENCOUNTER**

There she stood dressed in winter white,  
With streaks of smoky gray where shadows fall;  
Glowing like the moon beyond a floating mist.  
And she was beautiful as she walked.  
In her glow I saw  
She never stirred a leaf,  
And never stepped beyond the copse of trees,  
As if imprisoned there.

And I, grown still with penetrating cold,  
Remembered when I saw her last,  
A moment hidden deep within the past.  
Owned by a child...  
A memory, faded like a Bible-rose  
Until it seemed a dream.

But I stood silent by the frozen stream,  
Entranced as one who stares into a flame;  
When, looking up, she met my eye and paused,  
Then faded gray and black among the trees.  
Yet long I stood engulfed in mystery  
And shades of night--relieved, yet feeling loss--  
And wondered what had brought her back to me.
QUENCHING AN ABSTRACT THIRST

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