



SNOW ISLAND REVIEW

The Literary and Art Journal of Francis Marion University

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More information regarding our submission policies and procedures may be found on a bulletin board located outside the Francis Marion University Writing Center, or in the Writing Center located in Founder's Hall room 114-C. Please contact SnowIslandReview@gmail.com with questions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Andi : Meredith Fields	Front Cover
Carmax : Leah Kunz	Inside Cover
Katrina : Emily de Montluzin	1
White: Morgan Kinnett	2
Light and Shadow : Cyndal Mosley	2
I Died Today : Michael Coward	3
Distant Musician : Zandra Kolwolski	4
The Two Memories of Henry Johnson : Sidney Kidd	5
Reflections : Jackie Snook	8
Blogged : Michelle Scott	9
Sun Entrance : Hilary Greenwell	9
Davis Moseleum : Hilary Greenwell	10
Found Poem : Tim Busscher	11
Writer's Death: Whitney Miles	12
Mask Removed : Joseph Richards	13
The Executive Spirit Part 1: The Call to Duty: John Sweeney	14
The Executive Spirit Part 2: The Defense of a Nation : John Swe	ENEY 15
No : Michelle Scott	17
Looky - Dresden : Shaun Durant	17
Been Here Before : Meredith Fields	18
The Skinny Liddle Needle and a Fat Ass Camel: Sidney Kidd	19
Shady Day : Jackie Snook	24
Distance : Morgan Kinnett	25
Teaching High 5 : Shaun Durant	26
Leaves in the Summer Breeze : Joseph Richards	27
P.S. Wish You Were Here : Michelle Scott	28
Convinced : Natalie Mahaffey	29
Sabattier VW: Hilary Greenwell	30
Hastening to Exile : Michael Coward	31
Action Verb - Release : Tim Busscher	34
Life's Lemonade: Mary Beth Asaro	35
Flash Fiction : Michael Coward	36
Elephant Ears over Waterfall : Joseph Richards	37
Connection: Ashley Rivers	38
Together : Nancy Devon Coward	39
Inside Out : Michelle Scott	40
The Path : Cyndal Mosley	44
Norman's Road to Damascus : Sidney Kidd	45
Initially : Tim Busscher	49
Meet Me in Montauk : Natalie Mahaffey	50
Paint and Poker Chips : Joseph Richards	Inside Cover
Sun Columns : Hilary Greenwell	BACK COVER

Katrina Emily de Montluzin

A nameless breeze was I born. So slight, so small, So far away I seemed that no one guessed My dark, destructive side nor dreamed of all The anger seething deep within my breast. And so I grew apace and fanned the coast Of every island in my path until At last the world awoke to fear and, most Of all, to helplessness. Inert and still It waited, and on the day I slammed ashore The whole world trembled, grieved, heartsick to see What I had wrought. All that was there before, I utterly destroyed. "Remember me!" I screamed, berserk. And now they know my name! I am appeased. I have enduring fame.

White Morgan Kinnett

Plantations blind me. A porch swing creaks slowly like A hanged man swaying



LIGHT AND SHADOW CYNDAL MOSLEY

I Died Today Michael Coward

I thought you should know... I died today. 7:08 pm.
The corner of fifth and main.
It didn't hurt.
I just felt
kind of... numb.
Disconnected maybe.

I watched you through the glass. Holding hands, Smiling that smile, Like a lamp turned towards the wall.

Your voice spoke. You laughed. It sounded like, Afternoon traffic, Feet on a sidewalk.

The sky cries
Because I won't.
Too many words.
Words I can't say,
But I just thought you should know...
I died today.



Distant Musician Zandra Kolwolski

The Two Memories of Henry Johnson Sidney Kidd

Henry had only two memories. Hell, it was all he could afford. One was good and the other bad. But still, Henry felt blessed to know that his memories were bought and paid for. He could have scrimped and sacrificed for more but it made no sense—they too would either be bad or good and he didn't see the point in such a frivolous waste of sentiment. Henry was extremely level headed that way. He liked to keep his recollections very close within the bosom of his nostalgia. As the old saying goes, "Keep your friends close and your enemies even closer."

One thing was for certain, Henry maintained immaculate sentimental hygiene. Each stood patiently in line like well mannered school children, never pushing, never shoving, never demanding, each waiting its turn to play across the cinema screen of his mind—to frolic in the convoluted grey matter upon the cool crisp grass of winter's first thaw where Henry pastured his thoughts. That was it, a nice simple package always ready for a late night sleep-over. Everything else was a blur as if he purposely fast forwarded through every other event in his life to constantly relive the two events that bookended his shelved existence. He viewed the outside world, was painfully aware of its drama and politics, but to him everything and everyone were like stand-ins before the cheap backdrop of a Bogart movie—they were there but he could describe neither scene nor person. He was only aware of Bogart's crooked smirk and hard, winced lines.

Henry's first memory was of his wedding day. His "blushing young bride" sculpted from soft translucent shades of pearlescent alabaster, beautiful and innocent, the purest of God's race, the proverbial forbidden fruit down to each ripened little plum—her gown, tailored to enhance her effeminate form, flowing with her hourglass grace while building to the climax of virgin sacrifice upon the altar of "forever do us part".

Henry felt the tightness in his chest as he attempted to regulate his breathing and suppress his anxiety even as he clinched his fists to subdue his trembling hands. Like a child anticipating Christmas, Henry could barely wait to unwrap his present. The monotone monologue rumbled in the background, the recitation of a simple oath—a few harmless words strung together with the appropriate amenities, she'd be his to honor and obey from this day forth, to love and cherish, have and to hold, and his favorite...to cling only unto him until the whole death do us part gig. Henry knew there'd be a hell of a lot of clinging tonight. He watched her firm mounds rise and fall with her breath as she took genteel steps upon her firm rounded thighs—thighs that ended in a well manicured bush that pointed the way to a soft shaven puss that could only be described as God's gift to man. Henry speculated that it was repayment for the whole rib borrowing saga. Of course all this was only available to his "Fundamentalist" imagination, Henry's corporal reality was physically, a tad more restraining.

Henry felt the thick leather straps ratcheting down about his wrists, his

ankles, his thighs and his chest. The black constrictor patiently waited, biding its time until Henry relaxed to exhale, then tightened its coils ever so slightly, just another notch restricting his breathing as well as his hope.

The stainless steel table radiated a numbing chill through his thin tangerine jumpsuit. His nostrils flared as the sterile stench of bleach and Lysol crept slowly into his psyche, forming a whitish blue haze that seemed to crawl upon the taxpayers' institutionalized air. Like the delicate blue fingers of his blushing young bride, she teased Henry, encouraging him to surrender his will as he clawed upon the precipice to last just a while longer. He fought back the urge to sneeze in climax as his eyes watered and he wiggled his nose like Samantha on Bewitched.

The needles burned as they raped his forearms. Having her way with him was a manly looking nurse wearing a white dress and a halo. Henry assumed from her attire she was female, although who could say for sure? Regardless of her sex, the smirk that pushed aside her chubby cheeks assured Henry that she took great pleasure in her work.

Henry traced the cold rush of saline into his arms and closed his eyes as it mingled with his blood, slowly diluting the life giving elixir that had coursed through his soul all these years. Oddly, he smiled with the sensation and shivered with the cold chills that chased up and down his spine. His muscles contracted pushing his shoulders upward as his restraints tightened and held him in an arched state of contraction. Henry smiled from genuine amusement as the burly nurse asked if he were alright while slapping savagely at his forearm to make sure the needle wasn't occluded. She was not so unlike his third grade school teacher, Mrs. Caldwell. Only she used a metal ruler.

"Don't want you to be in any discomfort, now do we?" Somehow Henry felt her concern wasn't exactly genuine. She was the type angel who would draw out a fellow's climax as long as possible, making sure he held on to his two memories till the bitter end. Yeah, slow and painful was her sexually deviant little forte, he'd bet his fucking soul that she wore tanned black leather teddies held together with logging chains and the very buckles that cinched and positioned him to her deviant will even now. Fuck, even her glowing halo resembled a ball gag floating six above her Lady Clairol locks. Henry slowly allowed his back to flatten once again upon the cold hard table that somehow reminded him of an embalming slab. Perhaps society had adopted Henry's principles of efficiency. Seriously, why waste the trip?

The curtains squawked like an old crow as they were drawn back upon the plate glass display of his final ceremony. On the other side were the hungry eyes that lusted for his fear. Henry was never known to be an obliging sort of fellow. Consecrated before the vengeful altar, Henry concentrated on the hum of the fluorescent lights as he focused on the wavelength of the gas's ionization. He became in tune with the period of the flickers as he heard the dull monologue rumble to life in the background...

"Henry Johnson, for your crime against society, you've be sentenced to die by a jury of your peers...blah, blah, blah, Another, "forever do us part" "pledge of allegiance".

Henry smiled with the sensation as his hands formed about her sculpted throat. He recalled how each digit knew its purpose and worked individually while silently co-ordinating with the other nine pack members for the common good. They encircled her, leaving no avenue of escape and simply wore her down, constricting slowly, closing ranks, forming to her alabaster neck like a fine choker of pearls. It was her expression that Henry remembered so vividly, the way her eyes widened and her eyebrows lifted,

"Henry Johnson, do you have a last statement?"

Upon the periphery of Henry's vision, the nurse thumped the hypodermics and lined them up in perfect order upon a white terry cloth towel, crisply folded upon a common plastic chow hall tray. How perfect Henry thought, feed the masses with the fish and loaves.

Henry smiled and embraced his memories as he closed his eyes and felt the burn enter his arms. For the second time in his life, Henry's articulate fingers formed tightened fists as he subdued his trembling hands. He traced the cold fingers of Death coursing upward and outward as he heard his voice emanating from the fluorescent fixture above.

"What God has joined together, let no man put asunder." Henry laughed out loud at his timing and wit as he shattered the solemn ambiance of an "eye for an eye"...

Henry never saw the bright white light he was promised. Only blackness filled the void of his mind as the hum of the fluorescent ballast took on the familiar screech of his blushing young bride. Fuck, it was then that Henry realized—one's memories live on even after death.

"Well, I'll be damned"...Henry chuckled his last breath with the irony of it all—she'd been murdering him for years now. What better reward? What better punishment? It was everything she so deserved.



REFLECTIONS Jackie Snook

Blogged Michelle Scott

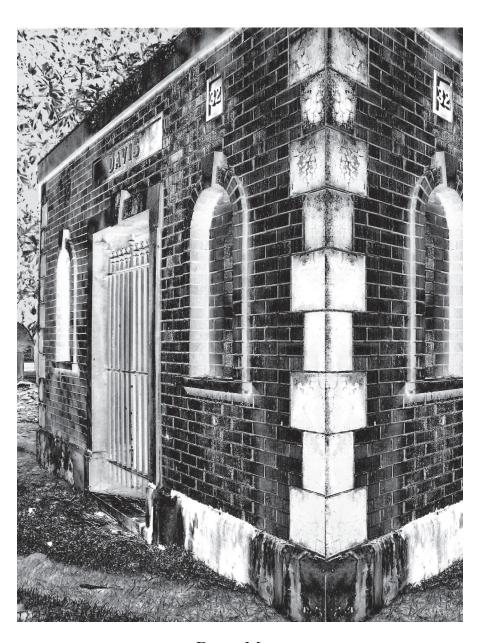
I'll use a quirky song lyric to make you look my way, "'Cause my bright is too slight to hold back all my dark." Completely irrelevant but oh-so-cool, distinguishing myself with pre-formatted text.

I'll display the current mood I'm in, with my jaundiced smiling friend. All smiles and googly eyes, breaking up the blinking cursor monotony.

I'll post line after line of carefully revised text, raw honesty: edit, submit, post.
You'll misinterpret and pretend you can relate, and I'll pretend to let your LOL's fill the empty spaces.



SUN ENTRANCE HILARY GREENWELL



Davis Moseleum HILARY GREENWELL

Found Poem Tim Busscher

Tossing my closet I found a poem under mounds of paper and revised it with CPR. It sat up coughing.

Writer's Death Whiney Miles

My pen won't scribble, it won't write the words, so filled with tears that fall like a heavy rain from the place in my eyes, their home. I am a vampire in a dungeon allowing no light. The pain is like the clothes that cleave

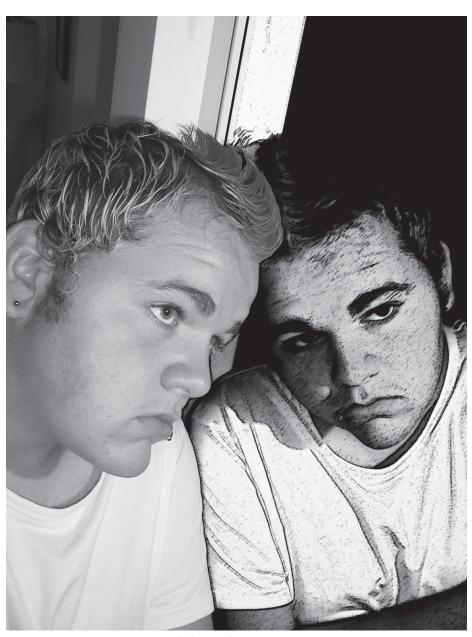
to the hangers in my wooden box. Cleaving thoughts of a knife stabs on the left and right, filling the floor with my burnt crimson fluid, lightly decorating my scene. Every stab tears into striated muscle holding blood to house the life I say I live. Held by its reins,

this box hides my truth; like a king reigns over a kingdom, secrets of mine cleave to the power they have over this house, my body, a temple made to stay in the right. Expressions are here too, smiles hiding tear drops from peering judges who lightly

scratch their scores as experiences. Light never enters here, a place it can't rain; my eyes do that as filtered water falls as tears. As if I can't face the sun, my nails cleave to the walls digging, scratching, drawing, writing the way, I remember, that once led me home.

The thoughts stop my day and lead to the house of misled hopes of smiles. I am innocuous, lite, or insipid to you, wanting only to feel that I wrote the ending of my own novel. Warped from rain, it storms inside me. The butcher uses his cleaver to open my empty shell; he pulls back my skin, tears

it from the hole it once covered. Out fall my tears, hidden in a closest called a body, the only home I stood straight in. Authentic me cleaved to the most inward entrails. My body was light as they lifted me to the furnace, my ashes to rain on places I'd wished to leave. It wasn't right to leave me here with my tears, never to write of the closet I called home. It desperately rained my ruins cleaving to the warmth of the light.



Mask Removed JOSEPH RICHARDS

The Executive Spirit
Part I:
The Call to Duty: An Inauguration Prayer
John Sweeney

IN compliance with a custom as old as the Government itself, I appear before you to address you briefly.

I am certain that on this day my fellow Americans expect that I will address them with a candor and a decision which the present situation of our people impels. No event could have filled me with greater anxieties than that of the notification transmitted by your order. The people of the United States have asked for discipline and direction under leadership. They have made me the instrument of their wishes. In the spirit of the gift I take it.

We observe today not a victory of party, but a celebration of freedom -- For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the solemn oath prescribed by the Constitution of the United States to be taken by the President "before he enters on the execution of this office". It would be peculiarly improper to omit my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, that His benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States. We are a nation under God, and I believe God intended for us to be free. The business of our nation goes forward. It is time for us to realize that we are too great a nation to limit ourselves to small dreams. Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself -- nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance. We're not, as some would have us believe, doomed to an inevitable decline. I do not believe in a fate that will fall on us no matter what we do. In every dark hour of our national life, a leadership of frankness and of vigor has met with that understanding and support of the people themselves which is essential to victory.

And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country. My fellow citizens of the world, ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man. It does require, however, our best effort, our willingness to believe in ourselves and to believe in our capacity to perform great deeds; Having thus imparted to you my sentiments as they have been awakened by the occasion which brings us together, I shall take my present leave. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love. In this dedication of a Nation, we humbly ask the blessing of God, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own. May He protect each and every one of us.

May He guide me in the days to come.

Together with God's help we can and will resolve the problems which now confront us. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union...

And after all, why shouldn't we believe that? We are Americans.

From the Inauguration Addresses of:

President George Washington- April 30, 1789 President Abraham Lincoln- March 4, 1861 President Franklin Delano Roosevelt- March 4, 1933 President John Fitzgerald Kennedy- January 20, 1961 President Ronald Wilson Reagan- January 20, 1981

The Executive Spirit Part II: The Defense of a Nation: Remembrance and Resolve John Sweeney

TODAY, The United States of America, our fellow citizens, our way of life, our very freedom came under attack.

I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost. The victims were businessmen and women, military and federal workers; moms and dads, friends and neighbors. We mourn their loss as a nation together.

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. I ask for your prayers for all those who grieve, for the children whose worlds have been shattered, for all whose sense of safety and security has been threatened. I pray they will be comforted by a power greater than any of us, spoken through the ages in Psalm 23: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me."

We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain -- We will never forget them, nor the last time we saw them, as they waved goodbye and "slipped the surly bonds of earth" to "touch the face of God."

The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well

understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation. Nothing ends here; Attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. They have failed; America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. No one will keep that light from shining.

This nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom -- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

As commander in chief of the Army and Navy, I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense. This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace. A great people have been moved to defend a great nation. But always will our whole nation remember the character of the onslaught against us.

The future doesn't belong to the fainthearted; it belongs to the brave.

America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time. We go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world. These acts shattered steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve. No matter how long it may take us to overcome, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.

With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph -- so help us God.

From the Speeches of:

President Abraham Lincoln- "The Gettysburg Address"- November 19,

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt- "Pearl Harbor Address"- December 8. 1941

President Ronald Reagan- "Shuttle 'Challenger' Disaster Address"-January 28, 1986

President George Walker Bush- "9/11 Address to the Nation"- September 11, 2001

No Michelle Scott

The cold, scathing concrete of this picnic table, feels just like a coffin, if I want it bad enough.

Fumbling, aggressive fingers, feel just like violence, if I want it bad enough.

The chorus of one syllable words lodged in my throat, feel just like murder, if I want it bad enough.

The unrelenting, sharp explosions that enrapture my entire self, feel just like the degradation of time, if I want it bad enough.

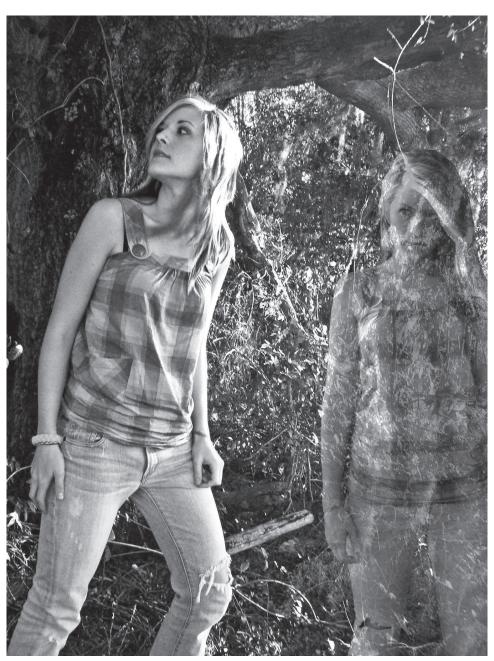
The stifling breeze cooing and soothing my prepubescent skin, feels just like home, if I want it bad enough.

Every word you spawn to quiet my inaudible cries, feel just like coarse sandpaper, if I want it bad enough.

I never wanted this.



LOOKY- DRESDEN snow island review | 17 Shaun Durant



BEEN HERE BEFORE MEREDITH FIELDS

The Skinny Liddle Needle and a Fat Ass Camel The Parable of Plain'n'fuckin'simple Sidney Kidd

"Why do you drag that retard with you everywhere you go? And tonight, of all nights—you know I've invited a very distinguished speaker. How could you do this to me? If he does anything to embarrass me, I swear I'll..."

"Ike's not retarded, Mama."

"Well, he's not like you and me. What would you call him?"

"Smart."

"Smart? Well, if that ain't about the dumbest fucking thing that ever fell out of a white man's mouth—calling that smart."

Ike and Johnny had been friends since they met, so long ago, in a rundown school that warehoused the poor white trash of America's multi-rung caste system. Ike was shelved there to pretend he didn't exist and Johnny was sentenced to protect the town's voluptuous virtues. Now in their early thirties, each felt blessed to call the other his friend.

Ike's brain function could best be described as a cocklebur nougat embedded in his gray matter. Words and ideas stuck to its prickly surface where they poked and irritated him until he managed to encapsulate them with scar tissue. His words came out as a staccato syncopation, accented on the off beats with a rich Southern drawl. Ike's physical and mental presence could be likened to a mammoth live oak, all knotted and misshapen, his muscled boughs offering the proper environment for small feathered families to thrive and liddle biddie yung'uns to hang their tire swings.

Johnny, on the other hand, possessed a manly cuteness that was only outshone by the sparkling mischief from his sky blue eyes. The Righteous society that kept his IQ scores an embarrassing secret was hell-bent to ensure the town's favored sons remained just that. His great potential was limited however, by his great cynicism of humanity. His outlook wasn't unjustified as he had experienced the full brunt of society's "equal opportunity" practices his "whole fucking" life. In the middle of his soul was a festering pus pocket of resentment for the "Plantation Mentality" that had treated him "just like he was somebody." In Wayside, South Carolina good church going folks put a lot of stock in who one's daddy was. What's in a family name? Apparently, everything.

"Let's just see how smart he is. Tell us something you know, Einstein."

"I cain't say I know nothing for shore Miss Nellie. I jest know what folks say and I repeats what I hear. Da preacher says I'm bliss dat'a way."

"Bliss? That's not even in context."

"Yes ma'am, I'm sorry 'bout dem big soundin' words. I jest know what he done said and I ain't 'bout to argue with no preacher. He talks with God and I reckon dat be a might more'n me."

"Good Lord, Ike, the crazy things you say."

"No ma'am, the preacher said it right out yonder in the church yard, right next to that light up church sign. Said ignore'ance was bliss, and I was the most ignore'ant son of a bitch he ever done come across. So I reckon God done told him what I was. It don't really matter no how—being ignore'ant just means you don't know no better. I ain't been exposed to the same learning as him, but I try real hard to learn new thangs—it just takes me a might longer."

"Ike, shut your foul mouth. You're not about to slander the preacher in front of me. He's a God-fearin' Christian who preaches what's in his heart."

"Yes, ma'am—that's for shore."

Ike stood patiently in a humbled position, his head hanging upon his despondent shoulders, his chin resting upon his chest, his eyes studying the holes in the toes of his Salvation Army hand me downs. Upon his head sat his crown of thorns—a dirty Prowl Herbicide baseball cap adorned with the same prickly cockleburs that secured his thoughts. He was too polite to argue—besides, he could never win any debate with righteous church going folks like Miss Nellie and the preacher.

"I have a feeling this is going to be good." Johnny smiled, blatantly ignoring his mama's damnable scowl. Johnny hated preachers—especially this one, who baptized the "Church Sisters" in the missionary position. After all, it brought them closer to the mercy of God. Having the congregation on their knees and flat on their backs held a whole new meaning for the righteous Reverend Vainglory. As the preacher was so fond of saying, "If it ain't the will of God, may he turn my peter to saltpeter...

To add insult to misery, Johnny had begun to recognize how much he resembled the preacher. The little old church ladies' snide remarks were coming home to roost.

"You can listen to this damned fool if you want, but I have more important things to do."

"Go ahead, Ike—this is gonna be good—I can feel it."

"I was standin' out there in the church yard, a studyin' that new light up sign. The preacher had just finished spellin' out one of them inspirational messages. Folks around town likes to read dem sayin's when they is going to the Chicken Shack for hot wings and such. But I don't care nothin' 'bout dem hot wings—they taste too much like Texas Pete and I likes Tabasco. It's got more of a vinegar taste and I likes vinegar. Ain't it funny how different kinds of peppers, just taste different? Folks think that hot is the only taste but they's a heap more to it than that. You got to know what you doing when you make hot sauce, otherwise you might just as well eat them peppers right off'n the bush..."

"Ike, that's fascinating. What happened with the preacher."

Ike's mouth snapped shut like an alligator snapper on a young naïve brim. It seemed, Johnny wasn't interested in peppers. He cut his eyes, studying Johnny's face for any clue as to why. Maybe, Johnny knows everything there is to know about peppers and hot sauce. He always was real smart about

knowing stuff. Slowly, he got back on track and began his monotone recollections of his conversation with the preacher.

"Well, that sign said, God multiplies but people divide. I was standin' there thinkin' real hard on what that meant, when the preacher come up. He said, "What you doing Ike?" And I said, "Figurin' out this here sign." He said, "Well, it takes a fuckin' retard not to understand somethin' so plain'n' fuckin' simple." Said, "God multiplies the riches of his chosen flock, while man always tries to steal ever' thang a feller's got."

You know, folks think I ain't got no feelings—probably, 'cause I don't never cry or git mad, but he hurt my feelins. He said it real smug—looked just like Barney on the Andy Griffith Show when he is a braggin' on his self.

He said God had streets full of gold waiting for 'him' up in heaven. He had his thumbs stuck down in the waist of his britches like Alfalfa on them Little Rascals and he kept rocking back on his heels while he was a grinnin real big like Algebra the mule a'eatin' briars."

"Then what happened?"

"I just told him what was in the Bible. I figure God don't want a whole lot of temptation up in heaven, and that's why he uses that skinny liddle needle to figure out who is a 'gettin' in."

"A needle?"

Ike did a quick nod to affirm Johnny's hearing. "Says right in the Good Book, that it's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven. And I reckon it's pretty hard to get a fat ass camel though a skinny liddle needle. Not only is they big but they is a might stubborn too—a whole lot worse than any mule you ever done plowed with. Them thangs is got humps on their back, just so you ain't got no flat space to set down...

"Yeah, camels are stubborn. What happened with the preacher?" Ike might be slow but he picked up on the fact that Johnny didn't care much about camels and mules, or even peppers. He took a deep breath and went back to talking about the preacher.

"When that rich fellow was a asking Jesus for a job, Jesus told him to give away everything he had and to come to him just like he was, with empty pockets and no suit case or nothing. But that feller just hung his head and shuffled his fancy shoes 'cause he had a lot of things that he thought he owned. Really, them things owned himmm, and I reckon that's what Jesus was a trying to tell him. So I figure God ain't got much use for money and he gives you a uniform like the Kotex factory where I work, just so folks won't go to fightin' over who spent more money for what they is a'wearin'. Don't need it no how—what's God gonna buy? I reckon a lot of loose change would cause a lot of problems—even up in heaven.

He got real mad when I told him what Jesus told Luke—I mean the one in the Bible, not Luke that live down to the railroad tracks. He ain't never talked to God—least ways he ain't never told me if he did."

"Yeah, I know which Luke you mean. What happened next?"

"Jesus told Luke that he didn't come here to make peace but to divide everything up. Said kin folks would be against one another and people would be fightin' and arguin' over who he was and what he told everybody to do. It's kind of like that Cat on a Hot Tin Roof movie, with everybody yellin' and a fightin' over who was gonna git what, when Big Daddy passed on. God probably seen that movie some time or another--it's got that real perty woman that's old now and sells perfume on the teller-vision. She's got them real funny eyes that makes a'feller forget what he was a'thinkin' 'bout."

"Elizabeth Taylor. What happened next?"

"Well, the preacher took real offense when I told him that Jesus multiplied the fish and bread so the hungry people would listen to what he was talking about and not be thinking about their empty stomachs. I told him, that's probably how he got confused about multiplying. I told him they wouldn't nothing wrong with dividing. After Jesus multiplied them fish, he turned right around and divided them all up with the hungry folks. Dividing is the Christian thing to do. How you gonna share, if you don't divide? Wouldn't we be in a mess if God didn't divide?"

"You've got a good point there, Ike."

"He's probably thinking about money and that's why he thinks multiplying is a good thing and dividing is a bad thing. Folks just naturally like them numbers to get bigger and not littler. It's like Mr. Sam when he is a figurin' in his book on who is and ain't paid him. When he has to divide that money up and pay folks he owes, he goes to cussing and throwing things 'cause he ain't read Luke with a open mind. If you ain't got a open mind when you read, you just make them words mean what you want. Don't you reckon that's how the preacher looks at them liddle red words in the Good Book?"

"Yeah, I'd imagine he does, just like your analogy. So the preacher got mad with you about dividing? What did he say to you?"

Ike thought for a spell with his head turned to the left and his chin uplifted as he pondered on the new word that Johnny saw fit to grace him with. His eyes squinted as he studied Johnny's face for any sign of revelation. "Nalogy...I don't know a whole lot about that word—but gittin' back to the preacher...

He ask me who I thought I was, telling himmm, only he said meee, and he drug it out like that, what was in the Bible. Said, he ought to know what's in there 'cause he's the preacher. I seen he was mad so I complimented him on his spellin'. He didn't spell one word wrong on that whole sign like he done last time. Remember when he left that nu out of annual revival? It's kind of like that sticker asking folks what's missing from c h _ _ c h.

Folks laughed for a long time about that, but the preacher didn't think it was funny at all. Most folks likes to laugh at other folks but not at their self. You know why that is, Johnny?"

Ike smiled as he waited for Johnny to inquire about his theory of human nature. It always made him proud when Johnny asked him his opinion. Johnny's words had value, unlike most of them other words that the people around Wayside, South Carolina use.

"Why don't people like to laugh at themselves, Ike?"

"It's because we see our self like the folks on that margarine commercial—the one that used to be on the teller-vision. When folks ate that margarine, a crown came up on top of their head because they thought they was eatin' fancy honey butter. It made them feel all stoic, like that Queen of England that talks down to everybody. When you feel stoic, you have to let that vivid image that's on the inside come right out and sit on your face. Folks feel important when them stoic folks is sitting on their faces. I tried being stoic one time but I didn't like it. It made my mouth feel funny."

Ike finished, then waited patiently for his compliment on that new word, stoic. Stoic took a lot of effort to fit into a normal conversation. This time Ike wasn't budging and refused to continue without recognition of his broadened vocabulary. His jaws clenched like a pit bull, refusing to loosen until Johnny doled out a comment. As was their custom, Johnny primed the well to get him to continue.

"I like that new word...stoic. It's a good fit for the image you created of people's vanity and all those stoic folks sitting on other's faces."

Ike nodded his head in affirmation and began where he felt he had left off.

"When I conjured up them memories of folks laughing at him, he told me I was a smart ass and to get the fuck out of his church yard. He mumbled them other things about bliss and ignorant SOB too. I ain't no smarter than him just 'cause I'm careful about where I put them liddle letters. He probably don't think much about words like I do. Mama says it's because I'm a slow thinker and I have to think a whole lot harder than most folks. I reckon fast thinking is like them fast shiny cars—they sound good but get you in a heap of trouble.

I didn't know what he meant about the fuck in the yard so I just walked away feelin' real proud that he thought I was smart. Then he changed his mind 'cause I heard him say I was a dumb ass when I was walkin' off. Probably, 'cause I couldn't find that fuck in the church's yard. You know, folks ought to be real careful when they go to droppin' them kinds of words. Never can tell when some liddle biddie young'uns could come walkin' by, pick them words up and go to preachin' all foul mouthed, jest like da Preacher Vainglory."



Shady Day Jackie Snook

Distance Morgan Kinnett

Taking a wide ferry under the glinting stars which are falling softly, effortlessly some where far, an old, tired war, a lost white beach, the bright, white flesh of a new baby.

Here, all the cars look the same in the darkness, an audience for the lapping navy water, all look grey lined up under the spot light, the moon's kiss, all is silent and free from daily slaughters

of jobs and honks, of the filthy prostitutes and holes in our stockings; the small undoings that ruin the day resist. There is nothing to control here, to hold in place, the ferry supports, the night air sways

across my powdery face and chapped, stinging lips. It feels like the top of the Ferris wheel in November, the wind that rocked the basket, my body un-gripped, the colored lights-jet eye green- the blur

of dirty carnie fingers on buttons and bundled babies. The rivets both are cold and smooth, they make a clanking noise, the dirty ferry, the watching tower, both save me from mothers and blank pages and rock hard boys

with secrets between their legs. The Mississippi moves underneath. It is muddy stuff, this rot, and dirt, and blood the river carries. It's rocks click silently, knock and roll back and forth like the drunks in the city beyond; unwary.

Dirty pigeons wobble, greasy like stuffed elephants at the fair and the city is old and ragged too, smoke rises, the ground rumbles, windows glare, statues are silhouetted by shinning white-blue.

Across this space is a different scent
Fingernail-polish remover, jalapeños, bourbon, funnel cake,
(another kind of beignet) and I only smell a hint
of it, reaching out, trying to break through the boundary, and it drowns.
I sit lightly in the metal transport,
hair flapping against a raw cheek with sounds
of cold breezes in my ear, while all others contort

through the night air, muffled and far away, like I am slipping down, down into the river, ears fillng up, yellow skin, and open eyes, noises at bay fingers floating, hair swirling; from outside my body a shining sliver.

snow island review | 2



TEACHING HIGH FIVE SHAUN DURANT



Leaves in the Summer Breeze

Joseph Richards
snow island review | 27

P.S. Wish You Were Here Michelle Scott

Each strand of blond groomed into place, framing the alabaster shell of a former object of my adoration. Eyes bathed in a light blue tinted handling glaze, veiled to put us at ease, to curtain the window without a view.

I can almost hear it nvow, "Chop Suey" blaring from some kid's aftermarket car stereo. The violent rage of guitars protesting our moment of silence, your face engraved on a cement block and branded in my mind.

The grass still hasn't grown over your grave, they tell me it's because you weren't ready to leave. The tears still haven't stopped falling, I tell them it's because I didn't want you to leave.

I can still hear it, "I cry when angels deserve to die". Convinced Natalie Mahaffey

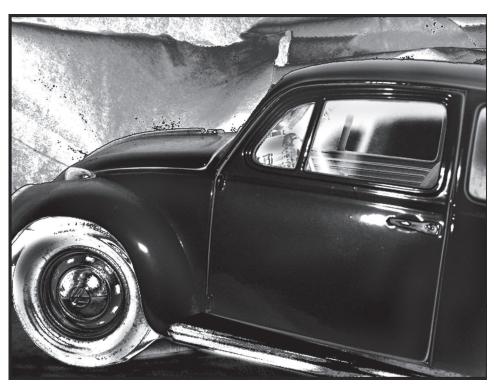
If I could grind you out of my brain, I would. Tear the matter with my teeth and chew it rapidly before I could taste it. I'd swallow you and let the acid of my stomach burn the skin back from your bones and listen to you whimper, enjoying every fraction of pain I'm causing.

I'd like to scream until you go deaf, watch your face as you realize the sense you've lost. Claw your eyes with my red polished nails, feel the jelly burst and drip between my fingers.

I want to slice
your tongue
with my teeth,
bite down until
I taste the metal
pulsing from your veins.
Watch the pool
of red drip
from your lips
and ooze down
your chest.

And after I'm done? I'd sit back with a smoke and let you-Mr. Deaf, Dumb, and Blindinhale the stink of Camels.

snow island review | 29



SABATTIER VW HILARY GREENWELL

Hastening To Exile Michael Coward

Adam didn't want to leave. Had been avoiding it for some time now in fact but it was becoming pointless. It was inevitable after all. Everybody went sooner or later, some more than once. Still, now that his time had come he found himself devising ever more creative ways to get out of it.

They had given him a garden to care for. Not a large one mind you, like some he had known, but a nice one nonetheless. He liked his garden, spent most of his days in it in fact. He enjoyed pruning the plants so they could grow better, digging the dead leaves from under their roots and showering them with water in the late summer afternoon.

In return they granted him peace and serenity, and the occasional display of flowers. They had become like his children and he cared for them as any father would, with all of his heart and soul. They were in fact, the main excuse for his not leaving. He just couldn't conceive of a life without his garden, they had been together too long.

He had just finished drafting a letter of protest when the knock came on the door. He started not to answer it, he knew who it was. Maybe if I'm quiet he thought, they'll think no one is home.

The knock came again, louder this time and a little insistent. Adam just sat there, fists clenched, a small bead of sweat rolling down his forehead. When the third knock came he almost jumped out of his seat. It had been a loud one.

There was no fourth knock, just a lingering silence. The silence was worse than the knocking. It seemed to fill the room making it hard to breathe. He strained against the silence, listening for a sound, any sound that might tell him they were still out there. But there was nothing.

He could imagine them out there, faces stern and unmoving as they waited for him to answer the door. They would listen to his pleas politely of course but it would be no use. When he was done they would gently take him by the arm and escort him away, never to return.

Finally he could stand it no longer. He stood up and crept to the door. He paused for a moment with his hand on the knob, staring in apprehension at the smooth surface of the door. He could almost hear the wood age, feel the breath of the men on the other side drifting through its trembling grain.

Still the silence stared back at him, daring him to move, to breathe. He stood that way for what seemed an eternity, him and the door, locked in an endless struggle. Time ticked slowly by, stars being born, growing old, and dying, just to be reborn again. The light decided the issue finally, a soft gloom folding itself around him on gossamer wings.

He took a deep breath and turned the knob. The door opened without a sound, a yawning portal of emptiness that seemed to scream voicelessly. There was no one there, no one at all. He was alone.

He paused for a minute confused. Where could they be? Gingerly he stepped outside and looked all around but there was no one there. That was

strange; he had never known them to give up before.

Outside the air was quiet and still, a cool breeze flowing down from the hills behind his house. He walked over to his neighbor's house but stopped just before reaching it. He could see the darkness behind the windows, feel the emptiness radiating outward.

Behind him the breeze picked up, it's cold breath tickling the hairs on the back of his neck. He shivered at its delicate touch, tiny moth feet making a path up and down his spine. He hurried on to the next house, and the next, each one as empty as the one before.

Off in the distance he heard a train whistle, the sound wandering lost and forlorn in the empty streets. He began to run now, empty houses slipping past like ghosts in the gathering gloom. As he approached the station he could see the last car of the train rounding a curve in the distance, the conductors lantern glowing like a red eye against the orange glow of the dying sun.

"Wait!" he called, "wait" but the train did not hear him; it's pace quickening as it continued on its way toward the distant horizon. He stood there for a time, hands hanging limply at his side while the sky slowly turned to purple above him. A great big sigh welled up in his throat finally, the sound seeming strangely out of place in the quiet stillness.

Turning he put his hands in his pockets and headed home, eyes downcast. Above him the stars began to punch holes in the sky, their unblinking gaze scarce aware of this lone traveler on the road.

It was dark when he reached the house. He walked through the still open door and wandered through the empty rooms, searching. Something was missing, he couldn't quite put his finger on it but he knew it was gone. He realized then that it had been missing for some time. Reaching the garden finally he stood for a moment in the open doorway and took a deep breath. The air was cool and fresh, the lingering smell of hyacinth and jasmine like a benediction in the air.

As he looked out over his small garden he realized that he had perhaps spent too much time in the garden and not enough time with his neighbors. They were all gone now though, and he was alone, for perhaps the first time in his life. Suddenly he froze in surprise. There was a man in his garden, wandering through the rows of columbine and cornflower as if he belonged there.

The man wandered aimlessly for a minute before sitting down on a small wooden bench and closing his eyes. He sat there quietly for a moment and then, as if just noticing that he was being watched, the man opened his eyes and looked straight at Adam. He smiled warmly and motioned Adam over, patting the seat beside him. Not knowing what else to do Adam walked over and sat down beside him.

The man was old. How old Adam wasn't sure, he had an ageless quality about him but Adam was sure he was pretty old. His hair was gray and silver but thick with the vitality of youth and his eyes were the azure color of the sky after a storm. He smiled at Adam and patted him on his leg. His hands were gnarled and wrinkled but surprisingly strong and there was a just hint of dirt to be seen under the fingernails.

spring 2008 | 32

He didn't speak, merely squeezed Adam's leg and turned his attention to the garden. He took a long deep breath as though by breathing he could experience the garden with all of his senses and then just sat there taking it all in. Adam tried to see what the man was looking at but he wasn't quite sure. There were rows of phlox and staplewort beside hedges of aromatic cinnabar. Tall pines stood in the four corners of the garden, silent sentinels surrounding the ancient oak that graced its center.

They sat there side by side for what seemed like years, neither one speaking. Before long a strange sense of calm began to come over Adam. He looked over at the old man that shared his garden with him and smiled; "I'm glad you're here."

The old man smiled back. "So am I," he said and patted Adam's hand. Time seemed to stretch out between them. It was as if the world had suspended all motion until all that existed was this moment, this place.

"I had a garden once," the old man sighed, his voice sounding tired and careworn.

"Really?" said Adam.

"Yes" the old man replied. "I tried to keep it pristine and beautiful by keeping people out but you know... a garden only exists to be appreciated." Adam thought about this. It occurred to him finally that this was exactly what was missing from his life, friends. He frowned then as he realized that everyone he knew was gone, probably for good. A small tear began to work its way down his face.

The old man looked over at Adam and smiled. "Perhaps you'd like to come and help me with my new garden?" he asked.

Adam looked up and smiled through his tears. "You have a new garden?"

"Why yes," said the old man. "But it's overrun with people now and I need a good gardener to help me tend it."

Adam looked around at his garden. It was a good garden, quiet and peaceful, but there was no one left to see it. He looked back at the old man and smiled. "I'd be glad to help he said," standing up and extending his hand. The old man took his hand and stood up. "Thank you," he said.

As they walked out of the garden and headed off toward the horizon Adam glanced back at his house. It seemed small and alone in the dimness. "Did you know I had the first house ever built here?" he asked.

The old man smiled and put his arm around Adam's shoulders. "Yes," he replied squeezing them gently. "I know."

Adam turned back to the path ahead. The burden of his life felt lighter now that he had a purpose and a goal. He looked over at the old man and smiled broadly. Thank goodness he had come along when he did.

"Is it far to your garden?" Adam asked happily.

"No," said the old man, "You've come half way already."



ACTION VERB - RELEASE TIM BUSSCHER

Life's Lemonade Mary Beth Asaro

Bug crawls on needle legs through stampeding feet to taste small pavement crumbs.

Flash Fiction Michael Coward

Dead Heat

She is unearthly now, where before she had been only beautiful. Her skin alabaster, smooth as a newborn, shines in the soft glow of the moon. Her hair is longer now, as are her nails.

Desire drives him on, overriding reason. Just one last kiss.

Pale violet lips part for his need, as do her legs.

Urgent strokes seek to fill the echoing void of silence. She heeds him not, cool antipathy to quench the white-hot fire of his need.

He falls back into the mud a single tear staining a ruddy cheek. A splash of wasted life glimmering silvery in the moonlight.

Singled Out

She watched him from across the room. He felt the heat of her gaze, desire strung tight as piano-wire. She smiled hesitantly as he approached, her shyness the lure. A few simple words, it was easy enough.

Outside it was cold. He placed one arm around her shoulders. She stiffened, then leaned in. Desire overrode caution as he pulled her up

against the building.

She was bolder now, sliding his coat down over his shoulders; pinning his arms. He leaned his head back as her mouth worked ever lower.

The click of the cuffs brought him back. Damn bounty hunters.



ELEPHANT EARS OVER WATERFALL

JOSEPH RICHARDS

snow island review | 37

Connection Ashley Rivers

You have stopped the car on some back road, where only the humidity suppresses us.

My hands press the inside of my thighs.

Sweat drips from August exasperations. My red ribbon

grazes your check. Our mouths linger in front of one another.

Waiting with words that bounce off our faces,

light off aluminum foil. Our chatter ceases. The only noise

is of the tree limbs gentle thumping. You ease forward and kiss me

You search to find the winding path that our kisses once took.

You press your hand into my shirt and against my breast.

Your cold hand immediately hardens my nipples. I blush.

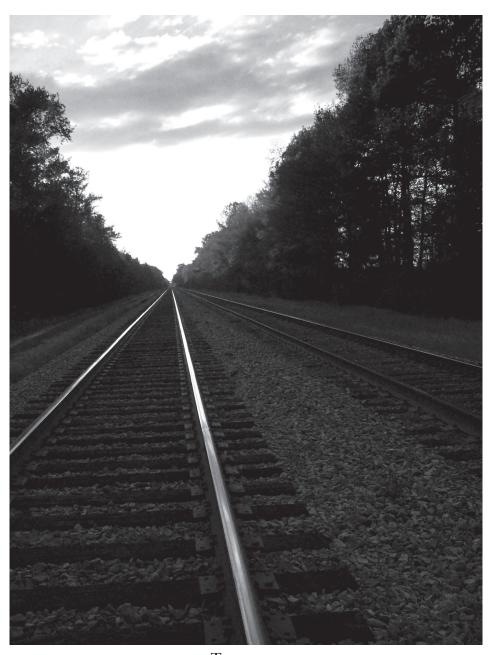
Your hand wanders out and down my stomach.

Then back up to my face to tuck the straggling hair behind my ear.

Your cell phone buzzes to life. I jump, as if the ringing gave the caller power to see us. Its her. You say, "I'm sorry" I say, "We'll go" At least, you don't promise

to show me how forever feels. You hand me our Coke.

It's half empty. I take a sip.



Together Nancy Devon Coward

My stomach was in knots. The butterflies are violently rioting against any sort of calm. I know Leslie is as anxious as I am as we lay next to each other, our silence a façade for sleeping innocence to her naïve parents. Underneath the cotton sheets we're decked out in the trendiest short-shorts, the tiniest tops, the coolest of the cool for teenagers and completely rebellious for a couple of prepubescent 12-year-old girls.

I had never snuck out of my own house, let alone anyone else's. Leslie had encouraged me to try a lot of new things in the short time that had passed since my mom had sent me to live with Leslie's family. She shared her Marlboro Red's with me, we sampled her parent's liquor cabinet, and I'd French-kissed my first boy at the skating rink – although I'd lied and claimed that like her, I was no longer a virgin. I was developing a bad reputation of my own at school, but at that time it was exciting and seemed like a good thing to at least be popular for something, albeit the wrong reasons.

So many girls wish they could live with their best friend and I was living that dream, courtesy of the nightmarish off-again, on-again marriage my parents were so preoccupied with. Living with Leslie had been so much better than staying at the Safe House with my mom where we had forged a superficial bond over donated boxes of Grits, pints of Hagen Daz, and spoonfed fabrications of abuse at the hands of my father. My mom wasn't even being abused, but she was an expert in the art of gaining sympathy. You had to give her credit, with one broad stroke of her imagination she was able to break the bond between my father and me while simultaneously garnering a place to sleep at night for herself and for her daughter after a day interwoven with infidelity and child neglect.

The pager clipped to Leslie's side vibrated between us. Neither of us even had to look at it to know that that was our cue from Leslie's boyfriend, Lee, to meet him at the end of her road. The alarm clock on the nightstand blared 1:04 in bright red LED.

"Ready?" Leslie turned towards me, searching my eyes for the slightest hesitation. I nodded that I was. I was nervous as hell and had never been so scared in my life but wouldn't dare let that show.

Leslie threw back the blankets, slipped on her shoes, and grabbed a pack of cigarettes from the desk drawer. Her movements were pre-meditated and graceful; the lack of light did nothing to faze her. I took a deep breath, climbed out of bed, and slid on my sandals as Leslie unlatched her bedroom window. She slowly slid it open, making as little noise as possible. When it was open just enough for us to squeeze through, she motioned for me to do just that. I swung my legs over the window sill first and pushed myself out. Leslie slid out a moment later. We walked quickly around her house and out to the road that wound through her neighborhood. I followed behind Leslie, obediently. We headed towards the corner where the allotment's road intersected the main highway, occasionally ducking into the ditch when it looked

as though headlights might turn in our direction.

Lee was supposed to walk from his house to the gas station at the intersection, page Leslie, and then wait for us at the corner. Lee was older, would've been in 10th grade had he not dropped out, and ran with a group of thugs who said they were in some gang. I'd met him a couple of other brief times. We'd never really spoken but he'd pinched my ass once, I was too intimidated to have ever told Leslie about it. Even if I knew I hadn't done anything to provoke Lee, I didn't want to risk Leslie getting mad at me. I felt like if I didn't have her, I'd be just another shadow on the wall.

As we neared the intersection I could see a low-rider truck idling alongside of the road with the headlights off. The passenger window rolled down and out popped Lee's head amidst a cloud of thick smoke. Lee let out a whistle and gave a crooked grin. Leslie giggled and practically ran the rest of the way to the truck. Lee climbed out, smoothed his wrinkled white polo shirt, and flicked the remnants of a lit cigarette into the grassy ditch before wrapping his arms around Leslie. As I neared he winked at me from over her shoulder. I blushed and looked away.

"Who's this?" Leslie asked, motioning towards the driver. I peered through the open passenger door at the guy she was referring to. The boy looked a lot older. He was shirtless, tan and slightly muscular, with the edges of a black tattoo peeking out from the bandages covering his upper right arm. I could see his boxers hanging out over the top of his baggy jeans. He wore his baseball cap low so I couldn't make out much of his face, until he looked right at me with dark green eyes. He nodded at me, as if to acknowledge me. I was relieved he didn't try to make conversation; the growing lump in my throat would've made any attempt to sound mature and sexy squeak to a halt.

"I hitched a ride at the BP by my house. This is Shane," Lee turned towards Shane and pointed back at me and Leslie, "and these two fine ladies are Leslie and Jen. Leslie's mine but I think Jen's single, aren't ya Jen?" Lee again winked at me. Nervous laughter escaped me and I looked down, kicking at the dirt, trying to do anything but blush.

"Are we still going to Lake Bowen or what?" Leslie smirked, grinning stupidly at Lee. He wrapped his arms around her waist and nodded, pulling her in for a kiss. She pulled way a minute later and motioned for me to get in the truck. I hesitated but didn't want to look scared so I proceeded to crawl in next to the silent stranger. I could smell strong, cheap cologne on him intertwined with beer and stale cigarettes. Lee climbed in on the other side of me, pulling Leslie onto his lap and shutting the door.

Shane turned on his headlights, shifted into gear, and took off down the highway. He reached between my legs to flip on the radio and as his hand grazed my skin, sending shockwaves up my inner thigh. I gasped. Luckily, the thumping bass had kicked in too quick for anyone to have heard me. The speakers were vibrating against my back and inside I was a shaking, quivering mess. My head was spinning as I struggled to catch my breath. I needed to get a grip but the fear and excitement were overwhelming.

We eventually pulled into the parking lot for the Lake Bowen boat

docks. Shane parked and climbed out, holding out his hand to help me out. I prayed he wouldn't feel the clamminess that seemed to have overtaken my entire body. Lee and Leslie climbed out and we all headed over to the picnic tables in front of the lake. I sat down on the bench of the picnic table, facing the lake. A slight breeze tinged with the faint faraway smell of an expired bonfire made the summer humidity a little more bearable. Shane sat down next to me.

"Who wants to go skinny dipping?" Leslie smiled mischievously.

"I think I'm going to sit this one out." I gave a small smile to veil my self-consciousness and Leslie sighed.

"Well you know you can count me in, baby." Lee grinned. Leslie giggled and took off running down towards the water with Lee in hot pursuit. It was now just me and Shane. I felt like I was going to throw up from nervousness.

"So how old are you?" He moved closer to me. I cleared my throat. "Twelve. H-how old are you?" I barely avoided a mouth full of stutters.

"You're just a baby. I'm twenty-two." I nodded and could barely catch my breath as he leaned in closer.

"Don't be so shy, girl. Why don't we lay back and look at the stars?" It seemed harmless so we both climbed up on the concrete picnic table and laid down, side-by-side. The sky was clear, each star fighting to shine a little brighter than the next. After a few minutes of awkward silence, Shane rolled onto his side, leaned up on his elbow, and faced me. With his other hand he used his fingers to trace a path along my cheekbone, down my neck, along my arm, and when he reached my stomach he circled around, finding his way under my shirt and to my bare skin. I lay perfectly still, unsure of what the hell I was supposed to do or say. I knew Leslie would have gone for it so I did my best to grin and bare it, minus an actual grin. This was what the cool girls were supposed to do and I so desperately wanted to be known as one of the cool girls.

"You okay?" Shane whispered as he leaned in towards my neck. I slowly nodded and immediately froze as he started kissing my neck. He maneuvered himself on top of me and ran his hand down to my shorts. He had them unbuttoned and unzipped before I could even attempt a breath. He pushed them halfway down my thighs and shoved his hand down my underwear. I gasped as he forced a finger inside, it hurt but I wanted to understand the things that Leslie always told me about. I assured myself that this would be as far as it would go; he wouldn't dare try anything else – would he? I wanted to cry but I didn't want him to think I was immature.

He unbuttoned his pants and pushed them down. He grabbed my hand and led my hand inside of his boxers, holding my hand there so I couldn't let go.

"You're a fucking virgin aren't you?" He almost snarled. He made it sound like such an awful thing. I felt a tear slide down my cheek.

"N-n-no. But please don't..." My voice trailed off as he let go of my

hand and covered my mouth in the same instant.

All of a sudden I felt the worst pain I'd ever felt in my life. I wanted to cry, to scream, but nothing came out except a quiet, muffled "please don't". He pulled up my shirt with his other hand and kissed my still budding breasts gently, as he stabbed me violently from the inside out, over and over again. I could hear Leslie's laughter in the distance, the water splashing. I could hear the crickets calling out in the warm, night air. I stared at the moon and bit my lip until I tasted blood.

Years had passed in the span of 20 minutes. He uncovered my mouth and rolled off of me. He pulled up his pants and threw an unlit cigarette at me. I flinched as it landed on my bare stomach. I slowly sat up and tried to climb off the table without causing more immense pain. In the moonlight I could see a small trickle of blood on the table. I fixed my shirt and buttoned my shorts, trying to make myself presentable as I could hear Lee and Leslie's voices fast approaching. I began to walk towards Leslie, I didn't want her to see the table and the mess I'd caused. I could feel Shane behind me so I quickened my pace; wincing with each step I took. I tried my best not to walk funny; I didn't want them to know how much of a baby I truly was.

"So what'd ya'll do?" Lee smirked, looking from me to Shane.

"Do you even have to ask?" Leslie laughed, grinning at me in what felt like approval, acceptance, love. I forced a meager smile and shrugged my shoulders. Shane chuckled.

"Oh you know, we were doing what wild and crazy teens these days do best." He winked with sarcasm.

Had he forgotten? I wasn't yet a teenager. He'd aged me far beyond my years.



THE PATH Cyndal Mosely

Norman's Road to Damascus (A Long Row to Hoe) Sidney Kidd

Having little to his name when he died, the reading of Norman Harry's will went quickly—almost as quickly as the humanistic pretense evaporated upon the formaldehyde laden air. His extended family, adorned in blackest nightshade, soaked the well dressed corpse with genuine tears—not for Norman's death but for the answer to everyone's question, "Where had Norman's fortune gone?"

So, why was Norman worthless? In this "day and age" people have retirement portfolios and life insurance policies, the sort of things that ensure we obtain the worth in death that we failed to attain in life. So, where was Norman's? Had he somehow managed to cheat fate and departed this world with their inheritance crammed into the black hole of his money grubbing soul? As the sad mood music failed in its respects, his extended kin began to look upon the rouged and made up corpse in a much different light.

Memories are usually self-serving and rather fickle but always spiced with a flavor enhancing pinch of truth. Consequently, one should ask, "Just how was Norman remembered?" As Bennie Franklin was all too aware, "To discover the true virtues of a woman, one needs only compliment her to her girlfriends."

Without being complimented, Norman was remembered as a hell-bent rabble-rouser, a prolific womanizer, a chronic liar, a good-for-nothing som'bitch with not one socially redeeming quality. He was the proverbial muhtha fuckah that we hear so much about. Einstein based his most famous theory upon Norman's very human peculiarity—reality is relative to the observer...thus giving us the multi-dimensional cop-out, "it's all relative, puff daddy."

You see, in another relative reality, Norman was the poster child of conservative morals and values, a tax-exempt captain of industry, a card toting member of the Morally Right. He once smiled warmly in family photos and was a supportive father and loving husband that shown down from roadside billboards. He rose quickly through the ranks to become the Grand Dragon for the local chapter of the Texas Taliban. He charitably donated the kerosene for the monthly book burnings while penciling in another deduction for moral fortitude.

But wait a minute—how is it possible for one man to exist simultaneously at opposite ends of the social spectrum? Why did he never venture into the myriad shades of melancholic grays in between? Why did he feel so at home upon the black and white squares of his checkered neuroses? And just as important, was one social extreme so completely different from the other? Perhaps like most of humanity, he'd learned to extend the truth so far upon the straight and narrow that it had bent back upon itself to form the circular reasoning that "begs the question".

But to answer such open-ended questions one needs to understand Norman and his circumstances, but we also need to ponder our fascination with worth...

He was born poor, what folks in the South label as "dirt poor". His mama never knew his daddy and consequently neither did Norman. Ravenous hunger filled his days and nights leaving a cancerous hole right in the middle of his psychological well-being. As a child Norman felt worthless. The main reason being...people came right out and tattooed him with his value. Usually, they spoke it out-right but sometimes, when they were filled with "The Holy Spirit", the good citizens of Wayside, South Carolina were more subtle with their condemnation and simply spat his value through clinched, better-than-thou, tobacco stained teeth.

But I'm not here to depress you or make you feel sorry for Norman. Very seldom are things black and white, right and wrong, left and right or other such extremes on the scale of political correctness. However, it is important to understand how the Plantation Mentality influenced his extreme views of the world and consequently the extreme oscillation of his social bi-polar value.

Norman bought into the American Dream and became a factory bat working nights at Buck Creek Textiles, while spending his days attending classes at the local community college. With a degree in business, he worked his way up the ladder. Well, as far as the Southern caste system would allow. He lived the meager existence to which he was accustomed to in order to save money. He used his savings to invest in real estate while building his independent insurance agency into a pay by the week, check cashing and title loan emporium. As his monetary worth increased, people began to smile to his face but remembered where he "came from" as he walked away.

Eventually, a sweet young beauty sashayed into his life. They married, had children, joined the Wayside Baptist Church and daydreamed of fried chicken dinners while the red faced preacher ranted and raved about the damning effects of alcohol, drugs, homersexuals, Dimmercrats, lesbian libbers and pinko Commies. You see, the preacher plotted a person's values upon the supply and demand curves of Capitalistic Christianity. He shuddered and cried foul to what he saw as Jesus' Socialist monopoly of just judgment. Norman recognized the church for what it was worth and teamed up with the opportunistic preacher to lead his fear laden flock in the front door of Norman's Insurance Emporium.

Norman was "real good" about selling people things they didn't need. He filled their minds with visions of death, then played on their fears to pry open their wallets. His methods weren't so different from the preacher's. Upon exiting the backdoor, his customers could purchase their epitaph for eternity, as Norman was also in the monument business.

As he grew older Norman's emotional swings increased in frequency. He oscillated between the extremes of eternal damnation depression and walking on the water, Sweet Jesus mania. His doctor labeled him a bi-polar manic depressive. But to Norman, the diagnosis seemed expedient and rehearsed. After that he had little use for his psychiatrist or his snake oil cure-alls. Norman's little pills stuck in his craw and consequently he spit them out.

People began to avoid Norman, crossing to the other side of the street, not sure which Norman they were about to meet. His emotional hunger worsened as nothing could satisfy his appetite. He felt he was eating little wiener smokies at a wedding rehearsal when what his soul cried for was devouring a thick bloody steak with the promiscuous matron of honor.

Norman was trapped, locked into a decaying orbit about his black soul nothingness. The inward pull of depression ripped at his being, devouring his hopes to feed the mass gobbling center of his low self-esteem. He began to spend his money on loose women and to drink in excess with the effect that he became isolated from his family. He rationalized his actions by pretending it made him feel better about himself and was therefore in everyone's best interest.

In reality, the depressive effect of alcohol and guilt put him on the back of an earth pawing, spit slobbering, two thousand pound behemoth of damnable fury. The ride was ecstatic but the dismount always ended with his face in the dirt and a set of horns up his ass.

Paranoia set in as his wife fell under the influence of an opportunistic bastard called a divorce lawyer. He began to realize that his humanistic worth was directly related to his material worth and began thinking of a way to cheat the devil. Norman wasn't above drilling Satin Satan right up his red hot ass with his cold hard poker.

Norman fashioned himself a thinker and pondered into the wee hours of the morning. He read the Bible and wondered why no one seemed to follow its left-leaning doctrine. One night during a summer thunderstorm an epiphany fell from the old Magnolia tree and hit him right in the head. In his semi-conscious state he saw the divine vision. Only two things in life are fair—death and sin, each is shared among the masses without regard to race, creed or color. Norman realized that folks seemed to always lose their way on the yellow brick road to Heaven but never needed to ask a munchkin which bricks lead straight to Hell. He found the concept fascinating as he contrasted the sexual preferences of the shapely Good Witch in a frilly pink teddy with the craggy Wicked Witch in a studded black leather corset. Somewhere in the deviant imagery was a message that related to eternity. He wondered if fate was as fickle as which witch our houses fall upon.

He read Paul's laments in the New Testament that no matter how much he wanted to do what was right, he invariably did what was wrong. Like Paul, there was something in his lower nature that always won the fight. The gist of the matter being—we sin in abundance, our only escape is to constantly ask for forgiveness. So Norman asked for forgiveness and was sincere in his request.

When Norman began to feel better about himself, he wondered why everyone feared death. He thought long and hard on the matter and finally decided that our fears lie with human nature and the hypocrisy of equality. Death places everyone upon a level playing field, but no one dreams of being equal to his neighbor. No, we covet a bigger house, a more expensive car, greener grass, a sexier wife and to literally sit on the right hand of God while squirming about. Only the downtrodden dregs of society harp on equality and level playing fields. However, once our flat, hairy feet touch that first rung of the ladder, we all lust for superiority. Since Adam and Eve it's been that way and it probably ain't gonna eva' change. Human nature seems to be a powerful attraction to resist.

Norman pondered upon the afore mentioned opportunistic bastard affectionately known as a divorce attorney. He winced at the cruel irony in divorce, everything Norman worked so hard to achieve would be passed on to his family. They in turn would use it to purchase a new husband and father, who would enjoy the forbidden fruits of his labor. In Norman's mind, the redistribution of his wealth would only bring damnation and sorrow to his loved ones. He saw his wife's attorney for what he was, a devil disguised as a snake in the grass. The whole Garden of Eden and the forbidden fruit gig was about to be played out all over again.

Norman read in Luke about the eye of the needle and the chances of the fat ass camel passing through it. Then he remembered his own impoverished youth and how he felt less guilt when he had nothing. Like a Holiness preacher shouting about the damning effects of not tithing, Norman realized what he needed to do. No, he didn't send his money to Oral Roberts' Tower of Prayer to be blessed. Norman sold everything of value, cashed in his retirement and life insurance policies and gave the swollen sack of cash to the toothless hooker on the corner of King and Franklin.

Norman felt light-hearted as he smiled upon her fair visage. He knew she would never keep the money long enough for it to do any real damage to her soul. As he turned and stepped into the street, Jack Rabbit the crack dealer ran over him with his 76 Coupe de Ville—killed him, dead as hell. His timing was perfect as his death occurred at the opportune instant of forgiveness, equality and justice for all.

His epitaph scratched into his tombstone serves as testament to his humanity. Here lies Norman Harry. He departed this world the way he came into it—the accident of a drunken backseat driver and without a penny to his worthless, fucking name.



Initially TIM BUSSCHER

Meet Me in Montauk Natalie Mahaffey

"Look at it out here; it's all falling apart. I'm erasing you and I'm happy!"

-Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Montauk is pinned on the map with a clear blue thumbtack. The route had been penciled in from here to there with pit stops along the way. I trace the lines with my fingers so often that the lead is beginning to smudge and fade.

You told me to meet you there, then slid away into the back of my mind. You sat in a fold with your brilliant blue hair and tangerine jacket casting a contrast to all the grey matter mashed around.

Sometimes you shoot light behind my eyes, fizzing sparks of color to jolt my mind. I run from corner to corner, trying to catch you, hold you in place just to make the memory last. But soon tomorrow is yesterday and you lose your color, sinking into all the grey.



