

MediaNews Group

& YOUR STORY



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SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL WHO CONTRIBUTED!

Jeanette Gronda

Jeanette Gronda of Grosse Ile took
this photo of the Douro River,
under the Eiffel Bridge in Porto,
Portugal.



Kyle Fiff

Kyle Fiff of Southgate
builds these rocking
choppers from a variety of
wood types.

Ada Ehlert

Ada Ehlert captured this
photo of her sister, June,
when the family was Up
North. Ada is a 13-year-
old from Rochester with
Down syndrome. "She
has an eye with the
camera," said her mother,
Ann Ehlert, who shared
the photo because "I
think it would be great
to spread awareness
that people with Down
syndrome have talent."



Deborah Mitsch

Deborah Mitsch of
Wyandotte did this oil
painting she entitled
"Mama's Teapot."



Carol Alaniz

Carol Alaniz of Lincoln Park completed this cross-stitched sampler, designed by Lindy Stitches Co. of Indiana. "I stitched it because of the verse, which is from Ernest's Hemingway's memoir 'A Moveable Feast,'" she said.



These are original acrylic
paintings on wood cradle boards
of varying sizes.



CLAUDIA ST. PETER

Royal Oak

**Mt.
Pleasant**

CHERYL MEYER

Lullaby

Crickets duel in warm metallic
chirrs.
One keeps time with my garden
chimes,
while the other keeps low,
slow
chorus.

A rolling gust of wind draws at
oak leaves, dried
from blight
and paper-rustles them.

A heavy glass bell sighs twice.

Wind rests.
Crickets trill near unison:
north window cricket is a breath
off
from south window cricket. Imperfect
harmony.

Cicadas buzz.

Solo goldfinch chitters
from south to north, offering
crickets a music lesson.

An old black cat sleeps on the windowsill, his purrs
connect the crickets, cicada,
chimes and finch into one.

Melody.

I am still
inside.

Not sleeping.





Schoolyard Folklore

Joanne was running fast as she could into the forest with her brother, Mark. They were on the hunt for wild animals. Since they live so close to the forest, they had fascination with animals since they were babies. Mark loved deer, while Joanne was obsessed with foxes.

They were going so fast that they almost missed the flash of red, white, and black. Mark stopped short, which caused Joanne to barrel into him. He didn't need to tell her that there was a fox; she was already running after it. Now normally, they wouldn't have chased after a wild animal. That would have been bad for the animal and them, but something about this fox ... mesmerized her. They followed it to a tree stump, where it disappeared. They searched for it for a while, but eventually returned to the tree stump.

It was there that Joanne remembered a game called "What Time is it Mr. Fox?". She explained it to Mark and, on the surface, it seemed pretty simple. One of them, the "fox" would stand at the tree stump, and the other would stand at the edge of a clearing, call out a time, and step that many steps forward. When the fox thought that the person was close enough to them, they would scream "LUNCHTIME!" and chase the other to the edge of the clearing. If they got tagged before they got to the edge of the clearing, then they were out. But if they made it to the edge of the clearing they won.

Mark let Joanne go first, since he knew foxes were her favorite animal. She gladly took the position. After, he just let her be the fox every time they played. And they played until sundown. This was how Mark was 24-7. Always the cool, calm, collected older brother. Nice to his sister and willing to sacrifice anything for her. He could have been her parent if they weren't the same age.

By the time they had finished their 41st game, A young woman walked into the clearing, wearing a light blue dress, and whose baby blue eyes told them it was time to go for supper. When they got snuggled into bed, Joanne said they should go back tomorrow. He excitedly agreed and then born was the tradition.

Every day they would go to the tree stump. After a while, Mark started to get bored with the game. But not Joanne. Every day she excitedly ran to the tree stump to play her game.

It was all fun and games until one morning, he was awoken by a sharp scream of his sister. He rushed to her side in front of the bathroom mirror. Her usual brown hair was completely auburn. It didn't look bad, but it was shocking to see. She had tears in her eyes.

She tugged on her new-colored hair. After her parents found out, they told her she just had to keep the orange fur for now. Even they were bewildered at how it got there.

Then the wake-ups started. Her shuffling around in the darkness. Every. Single. Night. But this night was different. There was no noise. Just suffocating silence. Mark didn't want her to get in trouble, so he didn't wake their parents. Instead, he got dressed in an old t-shirt and shorts. He went looking for her in the forest. When he got to the clearing, he almost walked past it when he heard a little voice whisper.

"3 o'clock"

Against his better judgment, he walked three steps towards the tree stump. They played the game for a while. When he got almost a few steps away from the stump, he called out.

"Who's there?"

He heard shuffling behind the tree stump. He assumed that she was gathering some things that she brought, and relaxed. Suddenly a roar passed through the forest.

"LUNCHTIME!"

A giant fox flew at his face. He got up and ran faster than he had ever ran before. His heart was pounding in his chest, and his legs were tired from searching for his sister. He felt paws on the back of his back, knocking him to the ground. He twisted to face this beast. Then he saw it. The familiar glimmer in the fox's eyes. His sister was there.

He could let her take him. Then he'd be a fox with her. They'd be together again. He kicked her so hard in the stomach that she got thrown into a tree. He ran out of that forest faster than he thought he could. He jumped into his bed. After a long time, he finally dozed off.

When he awoke again, he looked over to Joanne's bed. Only it wasn't there. It had vanished without a trace. He went down to breakfast. His mom noticed him first.

"Sweetie, why are you so dirty?"

He started with his story

"I went to find Joanne. But —"

His parents interrupted with one word that shattered his entire world.

"Who!?"

***** The End *****

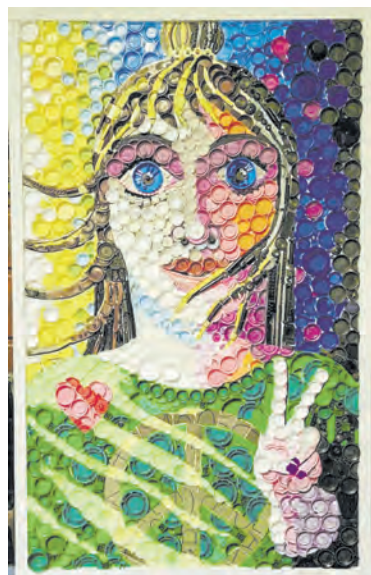
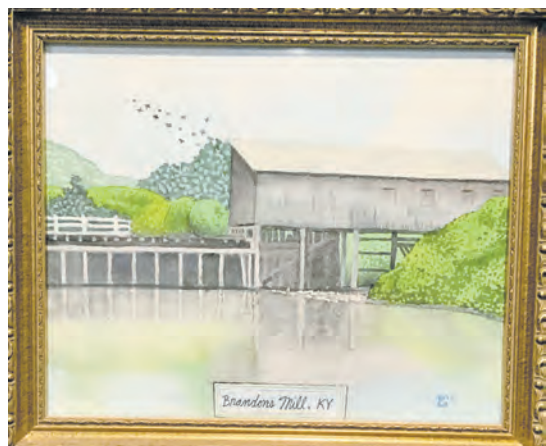
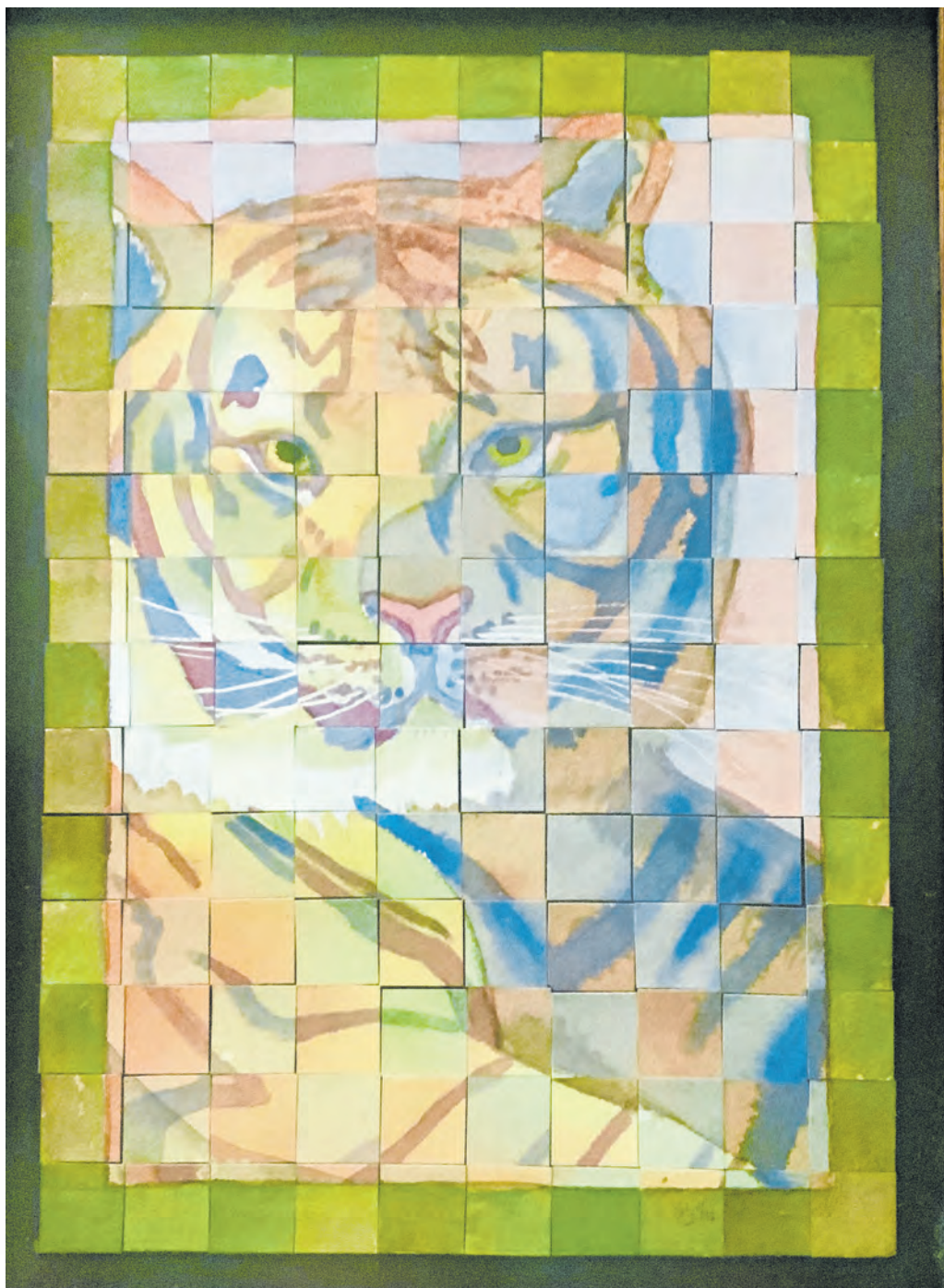


SUBTLE PETTINGREW

Wyandotte

Rochester Hills

DARYL GARRISON



These are various pieces
of artwork I've done
over the years.



These are some of the many
ceramic objects I've made and
paintings I've done.



DAN MARVIN

Mt.
Pleasant

Waterford

AMY'S. PARENT



One Hit Wonder

It was nine when I met Arnie. I almost missed that moment, though. I'd planned to cut school early — there were too many questions from teachers about my long-sleeved shirts on hot May days. But I heard about a Special Music Assembly scheduled that afternoon. Something told me I wanted to hear Special Music. So, I went.

I remember the sparkling, cherry-red drum set. I remember piano keys popping up and down, mastered by long, nimble fingers. And I can still feel in my bloodstream the moment Arnie put that horn to his lips. Summoning me to the rest of my life.

And Arnie, man, he must've seen me at some point. Jesus recognizing a disciple. He called me up onstage, and handed me another trumpet, showed me how to hold it, how to place my fingers, how to purse my lips. Told me to try.

And out came a sound like a small cow in labor. The class laughed. I laughed too. Because I had fallen in love.

Arnie had winked. "That's beauteous."

Arnie with his corny sayings. "Beauteous."

I wonder what happened to his trumpets? Or the living-room piano his wild daughter Rachel used to play so perfectly? And where's his oldest kid, curly-haired, bass-playing Sandford? Last I heard, he was gigging in Europe. But that was fifteen years ago. Sandy could be dead too, all I know.

How easy it is to slip all the ties that bound us. We let our friends flash away from us like a great riff you improvise at 1 a.m., and then forget in the smoke and booze of 3 a.m. And for that sin, I'm standing here doing my penance, in the Genesee County cold, facing Arnie's old house. I better not stay too long, or the current owner might come asking me a question with a gun. It's nineteen degrees Fahrenheit. My feet are ice bricks. But just one more minute.

Why are the houses of your childhood always smaller? Arnie's old bungalow is still a warm red-gold brick, though. The color of fires. The color of a pretty model's hair. To this day, when I see that color, something warms inside my shattered heart. It takes me back to the only home I knew.

I don't have all the details, how the hell Arnie convinced my parents to let me take lessons. Maybe they were both plastered the day he called.

At first, Ma would drive me to Arnie's. Told Dad she was making sure Arnie "wasn't some creeper." But she didn't stick around for the lessons. I knew she was going to see a guy. Grab a quickie while I played scales. Arnie no doubt knew. He and his wife Rita let me stay extra-long after my lessons. Feeding me decent warm meals, or homemade cookies, asking about school.

Arnie made the dumbest jokes. One time as I was reluctantly putting on my coat, he hummed a little tune, and asked, "What key is that?" I don't have perfect pitch, so I guessed. "D?" He grinned and said, "It's the Key of SEE ya later." The kind of hokey adult stuff that lucky kids roll their eyes at. But I loved it.

Flash forward a few years. Arnie introduced me to piano and guitar. By fourteen, I was playing in bands with him. We're at bars, and I'm not supposed to be there without a parent. My father died after a bar fight. You think bars would be a bad memory for me? Huh. God bless bars.

Mom missed the beatings, I guess, or it's no fun to cheat on a man who's dead. Or she got so sorry she didn't kill him herself, she was depressed. But sometimes she came to the bar we were playing and had "a few." And when she

wasn't there, Arnie told the bar owners, "This is my kid." And he was my father.

Then I was nineteen, and kind of directionless. Knowing I should get the hell out of that town. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life gigging some dive in Flint, or some honky-tonk Up North.

Arnie and I, or sometimes other friends and me, we'd go down I-75 and play in Detroit. I was shy. It was not a girl's world. But people remembered my fingers on that keyboard. And they hired the fingers. Next thing I knew, I was living in a Ferndale flat, with screaming brats next door, and a couple hippies downstairs who collected reptiles. I kept hoping a python would eat the kids.

But I thought I was in The Big City, and that was OK, for then.

That's when I started writing too. Wanted to say my say, not recycle someone else's tunes. I stuffed the sheet music for a pile of new songs into an envelope and sent it away for copyright (yeah, this was that long ago). I certain I'd be living off royalties by year's end. Every song was junk.

Redoing pop and jazz covers was still paying the bills. But when I was twenty-three, a friend of a friend hit the Top Ten on the R & B charts, and I got in her tour band. (Maybe this is where you start knowing my story. Or maybe you're one of those avid collectors of obscure musicians who even knew about the Flint days.)

That tour. Well, that was an eye opener. Even an introvert like me was not immune to not-so-guilty pleasures of the road. Blow as deep as the snow I'm standing in. Acid. Enough alcohol to rot through a foot-thick board. (How am I still alive?)

Sexual adventures of various kinds, when I finally admitted I liked both the A and B sides of a record. (What happened to Arnie's old 45's?) Yeah, I sampled the sopranos and the baritones, and everything in between.

Anyway, one tour led to a different one, and another, and at the end, nowhere was home. Not Detroit. Not Flint, for sure. I don't know how long since I'd talked to Arnie. Or the woman who gave birth to me.

I was scared. I tried L.A., I tried New York. I finally got some regular gigs on the East Coast. I was a wanted session musician.

You know the story now, cos we've arrived at the legendary part. Three a.m. at a label party where I could barely stand, I met that chick from Flint who was getting very famous. Singer, actress, voracious consumer of attractive men. Matthew was with her that night. Pre-fame Matthew.

He always said there was nothing sexual with her. Yeah right, Matthew.

I didn't pay attention to him at first. She sucked all the oxygen out of the place, you couldn't breathe for being in her presence. And she was briefly blessing me with whatever passes for attention from a narcissist. We were both from the same hometown, so in a way, it was still about her.

An hour or two later, I'd fled to the fire escape. New York at 4 a.m. is the closest introverts get to having alone time, especially at some too-long party. In fact, when Matthew extended his long legs through the open window, sat on the sill and grinned at me, I was almost pissed. But then my sleep-deprived eyes took a closer look. Matthew was a sight.

He wasn't just some pretty-boy entourage specialist. I mean, you know this now. But I could see it then. He was smart. Funny. I told him I refused to believe his real name was Matthew Bliss. He smiled that smile, and I wanted to copyright those lips for myself.

We talked about our favorite people. Matthew's was his mom. Mine was Arnie. Until then, I'd never told anyone about silly stuff like The Key of See ya later. Matthew dug it. "I'd like to meet that guy." (I made a mental note to write

to Arnie. How long since I'd done that, or called?)

At some point, Matthew slipped back inside, and returned with an acoustic guitar. He caressed the strings. And then he sang.

It was a jolt just like I'd felt that sizzling spring day when I first heard Arnie play. One of those moments when — a mountain of evidence to the contrary — an inner voice whispers, "Maybe there is a god. Where else could this beauty come from?"

His voice was better than sex, better than X. Well, sort of. But listening to him, I felt like I was living in a cloud. It was like flying up to the stars. I could've spent the rest of my life on that fire escape. I can only imagine what it felt like to be him, when he sang.

He sang everything. Hank Williams. Richard Rodgers. Motown. As the sky turned pink, he sang "Since I Don't Have You," and my world broke open. You've heard his cover of it. When he got to that last "I don't have anything," I would've done anything, been anything for him. I tried. It wasn't enough, was it? How could it be?

After that, I began following Matthew around, faithful-puppy-like, though Friend-Zoned. I didn't care that my career was bigger than his then. I didn't care about the other women. Yes, I did. But I don't think he ever sang for them like he sang for me. And I still kid myself that later, when he sang for all of you, when he sang at Wembley or MSG or Joe Louis Arena, it was hung over me on a balcony in Alphabet City that he was always singing to and for.

I pushed Matthew's name to everyone, carried his demo tapes with me all the time. And Matthew got his record contract, maybe thanks to me, maybe thanks to Famous Female Singer. Anyway, he brought me on to play and arrange.

One night at the studio, I was so tired, I just wanted to finish the last song and go crash. Between takes, I sprawled in a chair behind the engineers, sucking down coffee like it was mother's milk. Well, not my bitch of a mother. Some good mom. (With Matthew's help, I was trying to quit anything stronger than caffeine.)

Matthew was at the piano. Chords and rhythms and his soulful tenor punched through my fatigue. I hadn't heard this combination of sounds before. New lyrics popped into my head, big as Times Square billboards, and a B section of melody snaked its way through my mind.

I stumbled to his side, voiced some chords, and rasped the words that were flooding my brain. He picked up on my lyrics and tune, then rounded it off with a fantastic coda. We replayed the entire song. Ninety minutes later, we recorded "You Are Always There." Later that morning we had sex for the first time. You've maybe made love, even made a baby to that song. We did it with the song new in our heads, only in our heads.

I haven't been able to listen to Matthew in all the years since he left. Especially not "You Are Always There." But it's in my mind,

always. I hear the exquisite foreplay of our intro that went on forever. You want to get past the extended opening to the lyrics, to the song song. But you're also hypnotized by the rhythm, the guitar riffs, Matthew's wordless humming, his occasional groans and yelps and yowls.

And then, the main course arrives. Matthew begins to sing.

It's a strange thing to have made this piece of art, so personal, and then it's in the world, and others take it. It's like you've seen me naked a thousand times. It's like you've been there when I've mourned at a funeral or lay in bed with someone.

Sure, the song is yours. But it's mine. Always first. Mine and Matthew's.

After the album "You Are Always There" had been number one on multiple charts for months, and the second had just been released, I got a letter from Arnie. (I hadn't even remembered to send him tickets when our tour played Detroit. What the hell, me?)

Arnie's letter didn't show the hurt he must've felt. He said he was proud. That I was wonderful. He hoped I was happy, that Matthew made me happy. He missed me, and hoped I would call him, maybe even run up to Flint next time I was in Michigan.

But I never did. The bottom dropped out too quickly.

I don't want to think about the rest. I'm mostly sober these days. I promised my daughter. But sometimes, sometimes I get blind drunk, trying to burn memories out of my mind. Matthew and the girl he'd met after a Paris concert. And then the rest, the worst.

You know, Suddenly Famous is a hell of a thing to experience. Critics had liked the second album, but it didn't chart quite as well as the first. We were struggling to come up with enough good material for the third, and with that pressure, to be as great as people first thought we were. And then there were the women swarming him, my god, it was like rutting season everywhere we went.

I know he found ways to get with other women. But it was that blonde Frenchie that he really glommed onto. That's when the merde hit le fan. Matthew and I had screaming, throwing-things fights that would've done my parents proud.

I humiliated myself to stay on tour. On the planes and buses, and backstage and at hotel pools and bars, with her and Matthew. (And yes, of course, when she wasn't around, I still went to him.) Now here's where people say, maybe God meant for me to be there. You know, the god who did that to Matthew.

Matthew clutching his head on the tour bus. Crying for me, even with Frenchie sitting next to him. Me, enjoying that for a brief moment, until I saw his face, and he whimpered "Something's wrong, baby, something's way wrong."

Sitting with Matthew in that doctor's office, because the blonde

girl had run back to France, and he hadn't told his mama about his headaches yet. And him staring out the window, intoning, "I believe the Lord will protect me. I believe I have too much more to give this world."

And the doleful-looking doctor briskly entering the room, as if he wanted to get in and out before he caught Matthew's cancer.

I've made my living partly by writing words. And glioblastoma is the fricking ugliest one I ever heard.

Nobody should die at thirty-one. Well, Nazis should die at thirty-one. People who torture animals. People who molest children. (Although my father didn't die until forty-two.)

Of all the people in the world who should die of an ugly word, my Matthew wasn't one.

Arnie somehow scraped together money to come to New York for the funeral. Even in my pit of grief, I did find shame at seeing Arnie there, after my long indifference to him. He hugged me, and whispered words about God, and somehow it didn't sound as lousy as when everybody else said it.

Eleven months later, I was dreading the anniversary of Matthew's death, but preoccupied with my baby, my beautiful-girl-reason-to-stay-alive. I was pushing her stroller in the park when I got the call. In the middle of a school performance, Arnie had felt sharp chest pains. He managed to stumble offstage. Some of his friends and students (weren't we all both?) joked darkly later that he never died onstage before, and he wasn't going to start then. But we all knew it was his last act of love for kids, not to see him like that.

I'll be back in New York later this week. Next month, I'll do what I've done almost every year for the past twenty-five. I'll go to the Lower East Side. Maybe with my daughter. We'll stand below a balcony, and remember the voice, the face of her father. I'll send my love.

But today, I'm paying respects to the other man of my life. The one without whom nothing else in my awful, wonderful existence would've been possible.

Someone's looking out of Arnie's-window-that's-not-Arnie's-window anymore. They probably never heard of Arnie. Probably did hear of Matthew.

"It's in the Key of See ya later," I say to the frigid air.

I get back in the car. Damn rental won't heat up fast enough. But it's got satellite radio, and hell, guess what song is on? No, not "You Are Always There." It's the fire escape song. Matthew singing forever to me of no plans and dreams, no hopes and schemes, no fond desires, no happy hours.

I won't turn it off this time. I pull away from the curb. And Arnie's house gets smaller and smaller in the rear-view mirror.



Oakland
Township

JANET ALMSTADT-DAVISON



Here are some watercolor and acrylic paintings of flowers and still life I've completed.

Above, counterclockwise:

- "Bright Times"
- "December Gift"
- "Texture Flowers"
- "Flowers in a Vase"
- "Gesture Still Life"
- "Wild Still Life"



Redford

ALLEN DELOREY

Beware of Wounded Birds

Beware of wounded birds,
drawn to nurturing as moths to the
flickering flame;
stilled and vulnerable
‘til time and tenderness
return to strength
the vision of self in free flight.

Taking leave with knowledge,
without malice,
with gratitude, without caring,
of the nest you now discover
you’ve been building
only for yourself.

Beware of wounded birds,
whose clutching talons cling
as children fearful of the storm,
ripping without cruel intention
small fragments of the heart
left unprotected from the inevitable

—
left now wounded, without wings,
to mourn the loss of joint flight
which now will never be.

Women Without Shelter In The World

Women without shelter in the world
walk with our heads down
or our chins pushed too far out.
We push mops
but our floors are not clean.
We dress badly,
or cannot pay our bills so we can buy nice clothes

—
so perhaps you will notice us
and like us for a change ...

We care for your old, your sick, your dying
and yet, we cry alone.

We go with men of un-kept promise
because men of promise want something better,
though they are not unwilling to pass the time
between our legs while they search for real
treasure
elsewhere.

Oh Lord of we without shelter in the world, be our
man.

Wrap your cloak about our bent and shaking
shoulders.

Our hearts cry out to you —
Father God — Daddy — Husband — Beloved —
Friend!

For you alone can save us
from this long and longing life.
We grow old and weary waiting on others
while we wait for you.

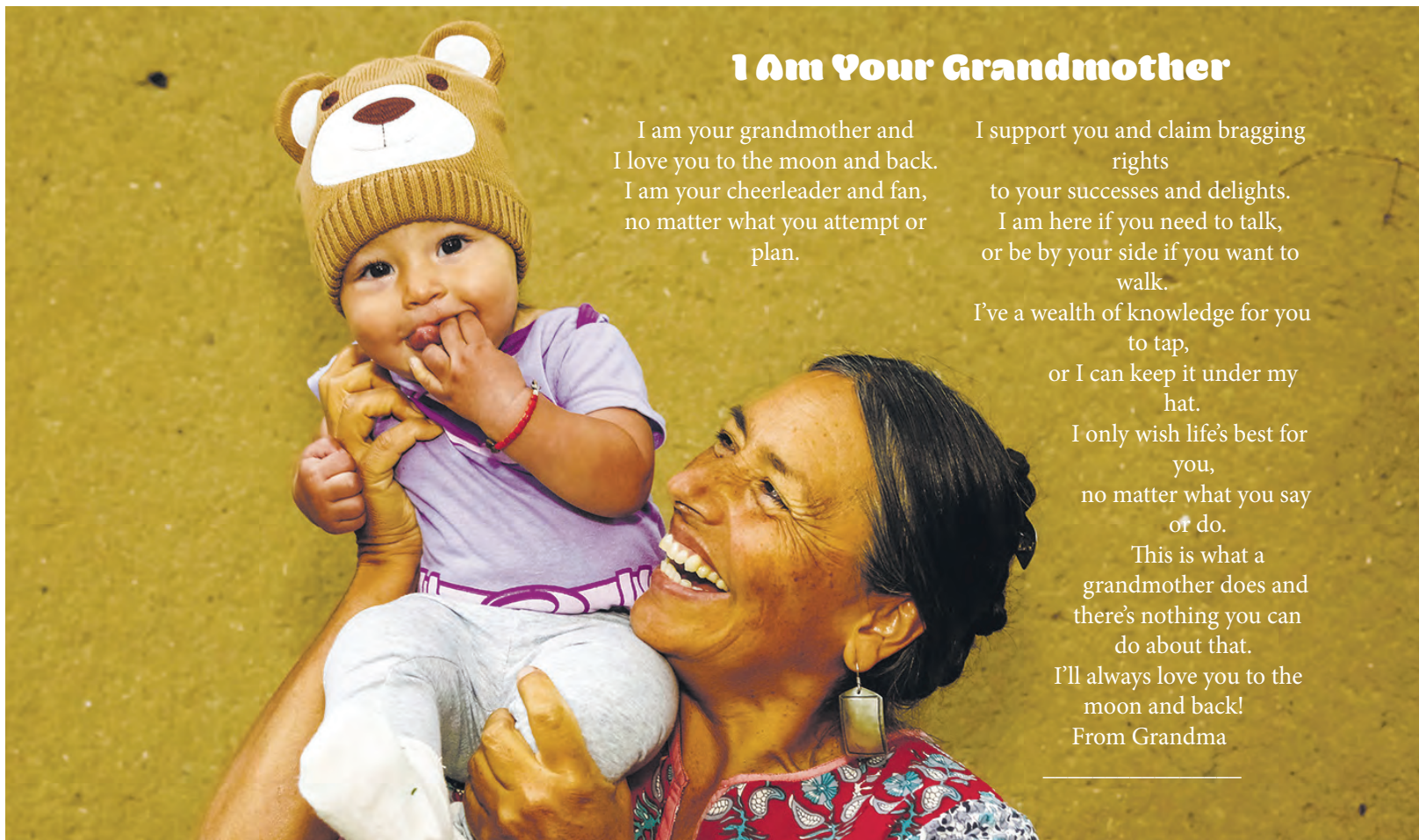
Do not forsake us or judge us harshly
though our weariness weakens faith.
We weep with the grief of our fears and failures.

You are our strength and Savior
and without you
there is only an endless sea of floors to mop
and loveless lovers.

Be in our hearts, Lord.
Raise our chins to your knee.
We kneel before you seeking your healing
touch.

For only you can see us
and we are lost
and travel with a broken mirror.





I Am Your Grandmother

I am your grandmother and
I love you to the moon and back.
I am your cheerleader and fan,
no matter what you attempt or
plan.

I support you and claim bragging
rights
to your successes and delights.
I am here if you need to talk,
or be by your side if you want to
walk.

I've a wealth of knowledge for you
to tap,
or I can keep it under my
hat.

I only wish life's best for
you,
no matter what you say
or do.

This is what a
grandmother does and
there's nothing you can
do about that.

I'll always love you to the
moon and back!
From Grandma

Sounds of Island Living

Between the U.S. and Canada,
Lies the Detroit River Island;
Grosse Ile, Michigan.
The wind blows from the west,
from the mainland U.S.
A train whistle --
Calls out "Woo Woo!"
Listen to hear the "clickety clack"
On the railroad track.
The wind shifts from the East,
"Dong, Dong" of church bells;
Sound out from Canada.
It must be noon.
The fog's settling in,
With the shift of the wind.
A foghorn blares "oooggah."
What's that "low and slow vibration"?
Feel the base vibe in your body.
The "grinding" engine of a freighter,
Now echoes it's reply: "oooggah!"
Chugging up The Livingston Chanel.
The Sounds of Island Living.



THE ANNETTE GROSSE
Ile

Grosse
Ile



Left: Spring collage

Below: These photos show fawns on Belle Isle in Detroit and a deer in Lake St. Clair Metropark in Harrison Township



KATH IBERSHOFF

Lincoln
Park

GERALD THOMAS

Taylor



Right, clockwise:

- Sterling State Park in Monroe
- Schoolhouse On The Pond, Heritage Park in Taylor
- Heritage Park in Taylor

Left, clockwise:

- Pointe Mouillee State Game Area in Rockwood
- Kensington Metropark in Milford
- Lake Erie Metropark in Brownstown Township
- Milliken State Park in Detroit



Excerpt from my novel, 'Wanted'



he book lay on the bed alone in a sea of goose down.

Cailyn sat at the dressing table across from her bed staring at it. Only 30 minutes prior had Jules produced it from her trunk

and handed it to her. Once in her grasp, Cailyn had the strangest sensation of falling. Given the blame was Tequila initially yet now as she gazed at it she felt that was not the case. She was like a child staring in the dark at a cracked closet door waiting for the monster to emerge. It was an eerie feeling of expectation. For many minutes, almost 20, she sat in the same spot eyeing the ornate pentacle on the cover. Not being very versed with the occult or with witchcraft she was sure the pentacle meant evil. This is exactly what she had voiced to Jules earlier as they stood in the bar's parking lot.

"Evil? No that is a misconception. It is a symbol of life," Jules reassured.

"I have seen meditation books and none of them looked like this. This book looks as if you stole it off of some witch's mantle."

Jules laughed. "You watch too many movies. Those books you saw are crap. This is the real deal. Here let me show you." Cailyn stepped back as Jules closed the trunk and placed the book on top opening it up. She quickly turned to Chapter 3: Opening Your Spirit. Her fingers knowingly flipped a few pages. "Here exercise one." She began to read, "Sit on floor comfortably, inhale to a count of four, exhale to the same count, and repeat. Envision a glowing sphere in front of you. Repeat this process until you feel a warm light moving through your body." She stopped reading, closed the book, and looked at Cailyn. "Now you tell me, does that sound evil?"

The words rang through her now and they gave her the courage to stand up and walk over to the bed. Cailyn stood above the book for another long moment. She had to admit that it was beautiful. It was wonderfully crafted, ancient; it had to be worth thousands. Must be nice to be dating a book dealer, Cailyn thought, otherwise how would Jules get her hands on such a volume? She was amazed she even got upstairs without being stopped by Naomi. Cailyn had heard her in the kitchen preparing dinner and talking with Mika. Mother and daughter were engrossed in a somewhat heated exchanged which allowed her to only answer Naomi's calls with a "yes it's me." Then she scurried up the stairs to her room where she stood now contemplating whether to touch it again. Being nauseated has always been one of her greatest fears and even the hint of the

sensation could easily transform itself into vertigo, which could cause that sickening feeling. Yet she no longer felt intoxicated, she was quite alert. The more her eyes travelled over its textured surface and grooves, the more alert, or aware, she became.

Books like this are no longer crafted, she thought. Now everything is about cheap easy design. She even suspected that one day hardcover books will be a thing of the past. Soft cover and digital is taking over. Don't they understand that the allure of books goes beyond the words? It is the majesty of the pages, the cover art, and the feel. That cannot be felt by holding a palm pilot, it must be experienced with all of the senses. Cailyn sat on the bed next to the book and began to stroke it with her hand. Her skin felt the rough design and bumpy artistry. A rush of adrenaline coursed through her suddenly. "Open." Came a command inside her mind, yet it didn't seem to originate from her. She obeyed eagerly picking up the large book with both hands. The rush arrived again. This time it was stronger, more potent, more revealing.

Cailyn flipped to Chapter 3 as Jules had done earlier and began to read. Sitting down and doing a meditation could help her. It had been such a long and arduous day that she needed some peace. Already she was beginning to feel better like after the first sip of good wine she was feeling warmer. "Lock the door." directed the thought in her mind and once more she complied.

The instructions were very simple. Sit in a comfortable position on the floor and breathe in and out. The carpet was soft beneath her. She spread the book out in front of her, pages open. An illustration demonstrated the suggested position as well as the image to try to envision in your mind. Cailyn glanced down at it, a spinning fiery ball hovering in mid air, in space. "Close your eyes." She did so steadily taking in slow breaths and slowly releasing them one by one. The room grew quiet. She at first could hear the footsteps of Mika going into her room and her music coming on. She could hear the faint sound of RJ's television and his muffled laughter but all of that went silent as she drifted further down into the meditation. After a moment, she tried to bring forth the image of the spiraling orb.

The orb first appeared as a ball, spinning but that didn't seem right to her, and she shook it away. Her concentration needed to go deeper. Cailyn breathed in a long breath then began again. She thought it best to start gradually. An image materialized of her sitting not on the floor but on a dark ground in a field at night with nothing illuminating her but the glow of the stars. She became aware of the rustling of the trees. A breeze swept by her and she could





smell the cool dampness in the air. Her clothes in this vision were light and fluttered in the wind, as did her hair. In her mind, she opened her eyes and saw the dark landscape. Civilization was far removed from this place. It almost felt like a dream yet she strangely had control here. She heard the water lapping up against the rocks of a stream, which appeared in front of her and began to stretch further and further until it became visible more as an ocean. There was an unveiling of the moon; its pale rays shimmered off the water.

Across the landscape darkness rolled as far as her mind's eye could see with only the shadowy trees on the horizons. Fireflies ignited in front of her not far from her face. She marveled in their blinking dance. Flashing on and off like little sulfur bulbs. They were beautiful, haunting. More appeared in front of her almost blocking her view of the surroundings until there were so many, that they came together as one. The shape they made was a fiery sphere and inside of her mind, she smiled knowing she was still on track. "Spin." And this time they obeyed. In unison the insects started to fly in a circle faster and faster. Their flight made a buzzing sound that deepened into a low steady hum. It expanded so forcefully that she had to hold up her hand to shield her mind's eyes.

The rotating formulated into an elongating wave like a string of fire reaching downward instead of up. The ball became a lengthening tube, which widened and split at the base looking like an oddly pulsating upside down V. The top stretched up towards the sky as it sprouted two appendages from its side. Cailyn could easily see what was being created; it was a man or at least the figure of a man. The sweltering form seemed to solidify though real features did not emerge. It took upon the colors and used the scene that surrounded it to create dimension. The male

form was literally the water, the ground, the moon, and the breeze. This unnatural sight caused Cailyn's face in her waking mode to frown. Fear replaced her feeling of calm. When its dark slits, she assumed were eyes, split open the fear inside her sent cold chills like daggers through her.

It had no white sclera, no hint of an iris, just a pupil that stretched the entire length of each eye. Even though she couldn't determine where it was looking she was sure it was looking directly at her, she could feel it. Cailyn suddenly wanted to stop, her fright was getting the best of her.

"Fear not." It spoke in the deepest of voices that reverberated into her making her bones shudder. "I cannot harm you nor do I desire to." Those two voids where eyes should be never left hers and seemed to hover above the rest of it. "See me."

Cailyn's body, not only in her mind but in life as well, began to hover a few inches above ground. Only in her mind did it start to move forwards towards the entity and it towards her. She was no longer in control, or so she thought. She was too scared and mesmerized to stop it, and deep within her, a part of her didn't want to. There was something familiar and peculiarly comforting about his stark darkness, his coldness, his exactness that spoke to a feeling that had never left her since waking from the coma and learning of her daughter's death. What she was moving towards did not share space with light it did not dwell with warmth and benevolence but with iniquity. She didn't know how she knew this but she knew it. In this place it was not about logic or even seeing with the senses but with the soul's life-force. This is what she understood now. This is all she understood.

His darkness engulfed her, it touched her, and it became her. She welcomed it.

She welcomed his entirety.



Lake
Orion

KIMBERLY KELLY SANTINI



This is some of my original artwork. From top left, counterclockwise:

- *Stardust*
- *Many Moons*
- *Poppy Moon*
- *Swallowtail*
- *Spruce Final*

Warren

FOSTIE-LYN PATALON

To Host a Spark

Sparks are funny creatures
Only seven millis tall
You'll find them around children
And daydreamers of all

They're attracted to inventors
And artists of all kinds
They whisper in their ears
And get inside their minds

They make them shout eureka
And think of silly thoughts
Like a baseball bat to shave a cat
And mashed potato yachts

Now this might seem quite harmless
And you'd be mostly right
But once they get their grip on you
Boy do they hold tight

Sparks are tricky creatures
You can't swat them like a fly
And if you acknowledge them
Their numbers multiply

Forget to eat, Forget to sleep,
Forget your best-friend Mo
Until the spark's idea's complete
They will not let you go

You can not kindly ask them gone
And they're impossible to ignore
Yet you never see them swarming
You'd think there would be more

They are not sitting on your shoulders
Or in your eyes and ears
I had one up my nose once
But that hasn't been in years

Sparks are hardy creatures
You can't squash them with a book
But they are quite vulnerable
To an unkind look

And cruel words are yet more potent
At keeping sparks away
Than a citronella candle
Or eighteen cans bug spray

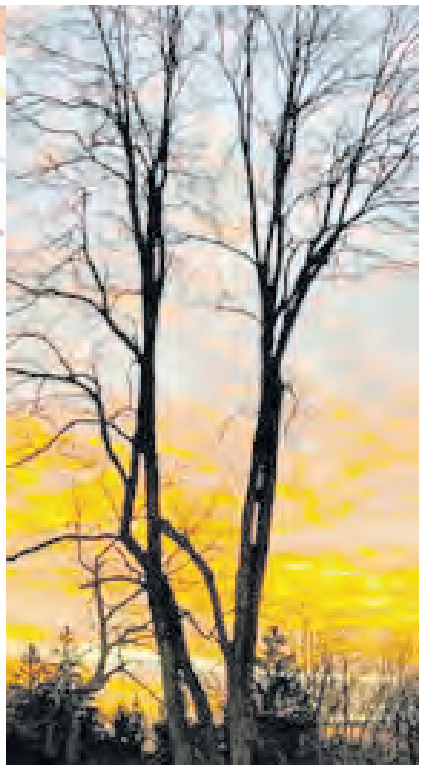
If you were to chase one
They'd vanish in a blink
It's when you are not looking
That they come by, I think

They whisper when the wind blows
They hide behind your doors
I even saw one surfing
On my father's snores

Sparks are uncommon creatures
Most won't stay for long
But you'd if care to host them
Keep your imagination strong!



There are creatures all around my home in Clarkston every single day. I have chipmunks, rabbits, horses, birds, squirrels and my doggie, Capone, who waits by the window everyday to see which ones stop by.



LOUISE CRUTCHFIELD

Clarkston

Chesterfield

LESLIE MIX



Sterling
Heights

SLIM
ESSIG



It's a Living



If

or years people have been wondering where Santa Claus gets the money to buy the merchandise with which he makes the toys to give to the kiddies. After months of scientific research,

I have come up with the answer.

It seems that many years ago the people in the world were awake all the time. They thought it was kind of funny that half the day was light and the other dark. While it was light, they did all their work; but when it was dark they just sat around with a finger in their ear. This is where Santa comes in.

One night while he was changing fingers, he leaned back in his chair and, quite by accident, dozed off. His brother, noticing that he looked rather funny, stopped eating his fish heads and ran to Santa's side. When he got there, he kicked Santa in the gourd. Santa, feeling a sudden pang of insecurity, jumped high into the air and began shouting a few words that he pulled from his French vocabulary.

After he calmed down from this rude awakening, he stuck his finger back in his ear and decided to think. He thought he had something here so he rolled down to the patent office to get a patent on sleep. He got the patent and began to give demonstrations on how it was done. All the people liked the idea and decided to sleep nights. He could not collect from the people personally for the right to use his patented sleep because he had fungi of the left foot so he asked the governments of the different countries to collect taxes on his patented sleep and send him his share of the money. So ... Mr. Claus was in business.

To this very day, Santa is pulling in money from all over the world. I had a private interview with Santa a while back and was informed that he does not want to cheat us, so any night we do not get around to going to sleep for any reason, such as doing homework or cleaning fish, we can write it down on our tax return and it will be deducted.

Commerce

LINDA ONDERKO



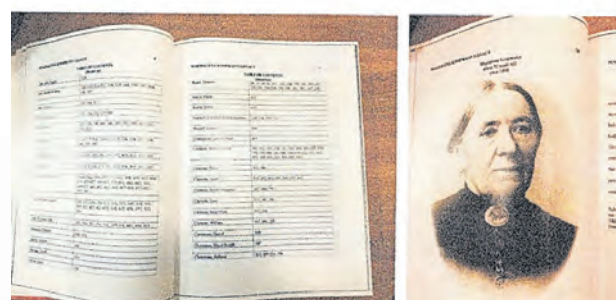
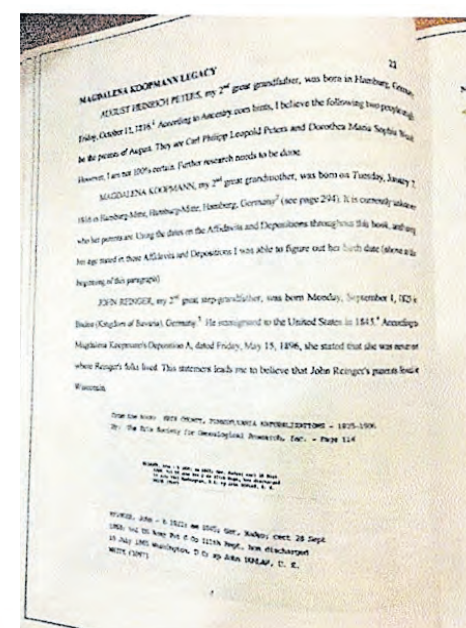
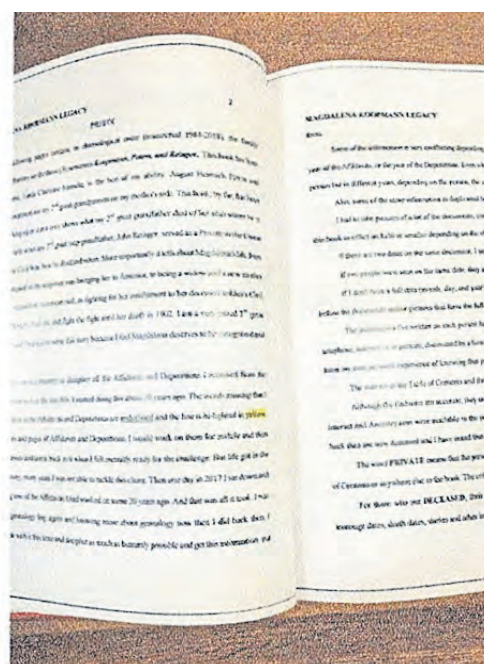
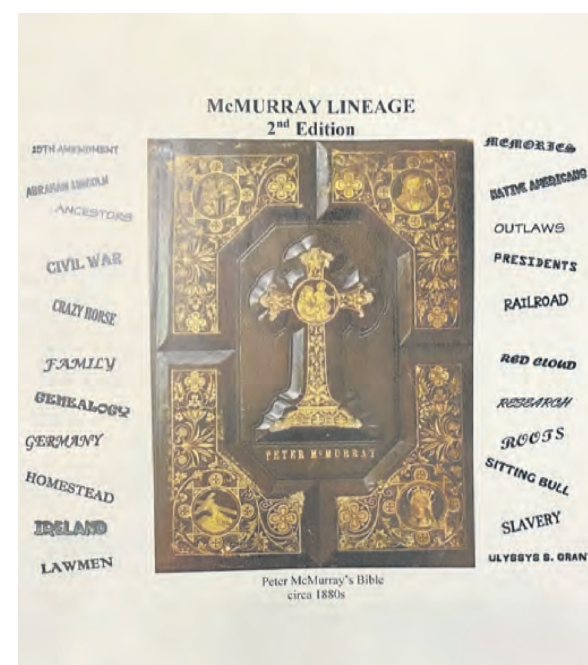
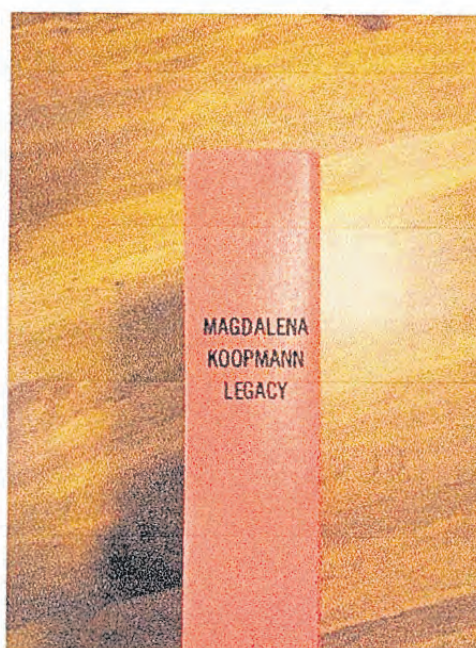
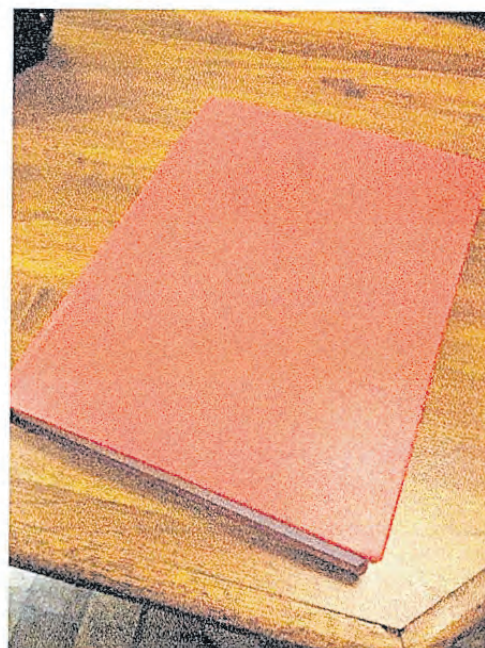
Various examples of my artwork,
including watercolor, pen & ink,
collage, colored pencil, etc.

- The Woodcarver (pen & ink and watercolor)
- The Red Shoes (colored pencil)
- Running with Sisters (watercolor)
- Boblo boat Columbia (pen & ink and watercolor)

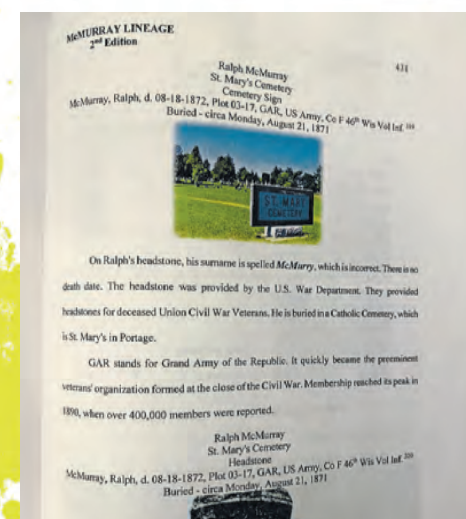


Woodhaven

LINDA PASTORIUS



Since 1984, I've researched my ancestors and then took all my notes and created a book. The book combines my ancestors with parts of history that may be erased in the future.





The woods at the end of the street



RON HEADY

Clarkston



The woods at the end
of the street,

where we would go
after school to escape.

The neighborhood
ended once you
stepped onto the path.

Dense brush and
trees, pond and
meadow seas.

We caught frogs and
snakes back there,
played army-beware.

Hid from the
teenagers sneaking a
smoke.

Built forts and stayed
dry in the rain.

No cars to dodge, no
chores or homework
there.

All adventure and
possibility.

After 6th grade,
we visited less.
Schoolwork,
responsibilities, sports
and paper routes were
demanding.



Pretty soon we didn't go
there anymore at all.

Then it happened, the
city bulldozed our
woods and filled in the
pond, cut down every
tree.

Buried all we used to be.
The magic the mystery
covered over and gone.

Forced to flee and
pushed into what was
to be.

Our secret place erased,
the never-land of our
youth.

This same process of
turning over, burying,
moving on, repeating as
we age.

Each stage of life buried
and covered over by the
next. You can look back,
but it's not there.

The woods at the end
of the street, where we
would go to retreat.

Only exists now in the
memory of the kids
from Calvin Street.



THE RESA NIELSEN

Royal oak

Rochester
Hills

ROBERT F. MILLER

SUZY

She was a kerry-blue terrier
Suzy was her adopted name
Our household became all the merrier
just because of that canine dame.

Suzy loved to romp and play
The kids cardboard fort
Was demolished in the fray
Her enthusiasm never came up short.

Our eight foot wide patio creek
Was her favorite game
She would run and leap it
Until she accidentally became lame.

A ride in the pick-up truck
With window down she would beg
jumping out early changed her luck
landing hard broke her right rear leg.

The vet made a fine repair
Suzy was back in the game
All her old stunts were now fair
She was obviously no longer lame,

At age fourteen Suzy passed away
And the statue of a boy fishing stands
on the side of the creek
Where she was buried and will always stay.





I Am The Leprechaun

One day I was a modestly successful Detroit advertising man, going about my day of quiet frustrations like anybody else. I still recall walking among people in downtown Detroit on a hot day, deliriously anonymous and carefree as I looked forward to a Mackinac Island vacation with my Sadie, not yet concerned whether my hands held the coins or, say, whether a storm might throw a sudden freak rainbow across my path.

Then, up on Mackinac Island, it was March 17, 1940. The war hadn't started for us yet. We had a picnic, Sadie and I, having a grand time on a red checkered tablecloth and minding our own business. Then a storm blew up from nowhere (I later doubted its timing and meteorological likelihood), and we took cover in a park shelter. It didn't rain for more than two minutes, probably less. The sky cleared blue, and there it was.

You never see them right in front of you, do you? They're always far away and behind trees or skyscrapers. But it landed in the grass right next to us, so I had to go out and touch it. Because of course I did.

The end of the rainbow.

How do I know it was the end? In conformance with the legend, there was a pot of gold coins the size of a Volkswagen bathed in spectral Neapolitan glory there on the grass. I came to know this validates the rainbow's end (apologies to Vernor Vinge; read his book) and I later learned it completes an ancient earth circuit, because the prismatic pulse generators throwing the beams are on the rainbow's originating end in seventeen remote locations around the world. That's also why I believe someone targeted me specifically. Because the beams can be aimed.

So, short story long, the first thing I did was scoot out of the park shelter and go to that pot of gold. I stood in the rainbow, bathed in colorful stripes like a Facebook profile picture on June 28. I felt warm, happy, saturated somehow in what? Love? No, joy. Flooded with joy and the certitude, somehow, that I was in the right place at the right time.

The gold was like a magnet. The very

moment my fingers closed around a gold coin, I received a mild electric shock, like you might get pulling clothes from the dryer. Just a tingle, nothing more. Then the gold and the rainbow vanished, like flipping off a light switch. My dark brown hair became Technicolor red, my tan skin became fair and freckled, and Sadie screamed and fainted dead away.

Because I had become the Leprechaun.

Yes – the Leprechaun. There are others on Earth, but they derive from me and my masterclass predecessors. They all report to me now. I'm the master Leprechaun creating petty leprechauns across the spectrum of our rainbows.

Some unknown entity had made the Leprechaun protocol for his or her own purposes or amusement; there's no owner's manual, no Welcome Aboard! packet, just a small notebook with only our real names and our years of service. We must figure it all out on our own. There are a few rules discovered by trial and error — a trial to experience and mostly in error — but I'm able to bend some as I see fit. One of the primary demands is to help people, and that's where the pot o' gold comes in handy.

I always enjoyed helping people in life, and there are so many deserving people needing help. I've left money on porches, in mailboxes. Once I even snuck cash into a woman's purse when I sensed her anxiety in Kroger as she bought baby food. That was one of my favorites. I'm not all-powerful, though. The rules of the protocol don't allow me to just impose world peace and prosperity, for example, would that I could.

But back to the rules. There are some I can bend, and some I must submit to. I can't fully break any of them, I've learned. They are the semi-rigid template for what I've become. However I may amend them now, my eventual successor someday will have the rules snap back in place to discover and manipulate as he sees fit.

Yes, regrettably, despite our modestly enlightened times, his rules. Have you ever seen a legit female leprechaun?

Neither have I, just drunk girls dressed up on St. Paddy's

Day. I tried to convert a few through various means, but only one such wish ever took. This is a mystery of the rules I haven't figured out yet.

Number one among the rules is that I can choose my appearance. You've seen classic leprechauns, about three-four feet tall all dressed in the green team uniform? They're usually hawking a St. Paddy's Day sale down at World of Mattresses, but I don't fault them. Those traditionalists gotta eat, too. I choose to be six-three and dress like a regular guy. I mean, I was six-one before, so extra inches are just a little self-indulgence.

In all respects.

I embraced the fair skin peppered with traditional light freckles, and I really like the red hair in a Danny Kaye kind of way. But I've gone into bars as short as Peter Dinklage and to Renaissance Fairs as dark as Idris Elba, so I have a range of expression.

I did discover, after too many Old Bushmills shots one night, that my transformative powers extend to gender change. God bless my human brothers and sisters struggling with gender identity, but mine is pretty set. I stayed home one night to satisfy some curiosities, but I've been my regular self ever since.

Some of the old myths about leprechauns are defective. I needn't hold the obligatory coins in each hand all the time, but I must keep them ready in left and right pockets. I spend the left-side coins, and they later are returned to my pocket. I spend the right-side coins, and they later turn to dust or stones. If anyone knew enough to "catch" me, they couldn't make me do jack, so no pots of gold for you, bucko. My subordinate leprechauns get "caught" from time to time, but that's a game they play with humans to practice outwitting them.

That's enough for now, then. I succeeded in granting Sadie her wish in October of 1940, and we're celebrating its anniversary tonight with dinner. I love her red hair. We will grant each other's wishes somewhat later.

That's all then, lad. Maybe watch your mailboxes for me. May ye be in Heaven 'a' an hour before the Devil knows ye're gone.



DANNIEL CHARLES ROSS

Macomb



These are various art
paintings I've done
over the years.



ERICA JACKSON

Sterling
Heights



RON CURRENT





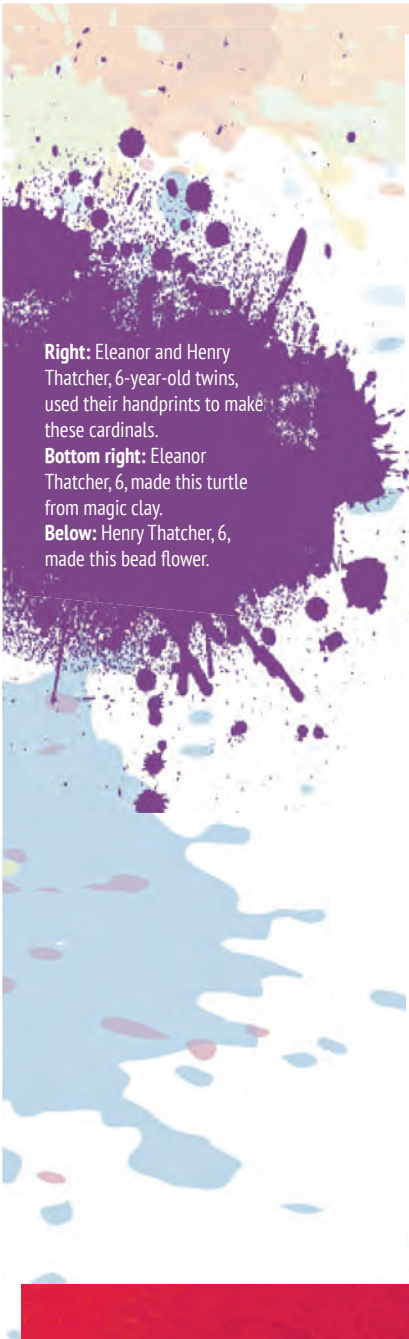
Left, clockwise:

- St. Mary's Churchyard graveyard near Whitby Abbey in Yorkshire, England.
- A fresh coat of snow has fallen on these winter trees.
- An American flag flies on the side of Somesville Bridge in Somerville, Maine. The arched, wooden footbridge is a popular tourist attraction.

Right, clockwise:

- A Hawaiian sunset.
- The Old Mill Bridge in Vermont.
- The reflection of the former county courthouse is shown on the side of the Macomb County Administration Building.





Right: Eleanor and Henry Thatcher, 6-year-old twins, used their handprints to make these cardinals.
Bottom right: Eleanor Thatcher, 6, made this turtle from magic clay.
Below: Henry Thatcher, 6, made this bead flower.



ELEANOR & HENRY THATCHER

Harrison
Township



Dear Nancy

Dear Nancy,

I don't know your address.
I don't have your email or cell number.
All I have is right here,
with hopes that you remember me.

We became pen pals in the fifties.
You entered a contest
on American Bandstand
to name the pup of Frankie Avalon's collie.
Dick Clark announced
Itsa Lady, your winning entry,
broadcasting your name and address
live on national TV.
Imagine that today.

Nobody stalked you,
stole your dog for ransom
or vandalized your house.
We were free
to walk to the library,
go to a show,
as we called it back then,
take the bus to a Tigers' game,
without parents.
Yes, it was that long ago.

Nancy, we were connected
by all we shared, living in Detroit,
you on the West Side, me on the East.
Well, sure, and an undying love of Frankie.

That's why I had to send congrats,
not on loose leaf or steno pad,
but in Peacock Blue ink
on stationery of pale green, pinks, flowery,
or textured satiny white.

Merely one postage stamp
pasted our friendship
that unfolded
as did the years papered before us.

Meeting each other,
not in person,
but in black-and-white photos
you and Itsa by the shade tree,
your sister, Cyndi, with her boyfriend
in front of the fireplace.
A wallet-size photo of you at CMU.

Friendship arrived in the mailbox
compressed into bulging envelopes
with words newsy, interesting, compelling,
but never problems, concerns, regrets,
simply affection, warm-as-a-snuggling-pup,
signed with your loopy cap L, in
Love,
Nancy

I can't imagine why we never met.
If you don't have dementia,
if you still remember me,
if these words reach you,
then there's still time,
still one letter
that you could tear open
to show me your face.
The color of your eyes.
Will you break the seal?
Love,
Sherrill

STERRILL ALLESTIAK

Clinton
Township

Rochester
Hills

CAROL HANSON



DESTINY



Henry's mom would not let him have a dog. "Forget it," she told Henry. "Dogs cost way too much for their upkeep. Besides, you have far too many chores on the farm to take on a dog." Henry knew this to be true since his dad had passed on. There had been a couple of strays come around now and then and sidle up to the chicken coop and cause a ruckus. Due to the lack of rain, even the crops were wrestling with each other for survival, and the sunflowers Henry's mom grew at the side of the house were hanging their heads in defeat this summer.

One afternoon when Henry and his mom were at the market, Henry decided to stay outside and watch dust devils kick up their heels. Henry spotted a beat up Chevy pickup. About a '68 he figured. The truck had a peace sign in the back window, and a peeling bumper sticker that said "Buy American." Henry had no argument with that.

In the back of the truck was the hulk of a yellow dog, whose fur looked like a mass of melting butterscotch. The dog was staring at Henry, staring him right down, like they were making a connection. She had huge, friendly brown eyes and looked like a yellow lab, but was a whole lot bigger than any dog Henry had seen.

As Henry approached the vehicle, the dog came closer. The dog was pulling on her tether. Her tail was flapping back and forth in long sweeps, cooling them both down. Henry just knew that this dog wanted to be his friend. He was about to nuzzle the dog's scruff, when his mom came out of the store carrying two lumpy bags of groceries.

She squinted into the brilliant Kansas sunlight. "Henry" she called. "Come and help me. What are you doing over there?"

Henry replied "I was just enjoying the company of this dog. She's a real beauty."

Just then the owner of the pickup came out and noticed Henry's

mom and introduced himself as Henry Stephenson. He told them that he had just accepted a job in Alaska working on the pipeline, and was not going to be able to take the dog with him. Mr. Stephenson stated that he had not been able to find another home for the dog, and that he was on his way to the animal shelter to drop her off. He said that was going to be the hardest thing he ever had to do.

Henry felt a tear slip from his eye. She said "my son here, his name is also Henry, and he has been after me for a long time to get a dog, but with the upkeep of the farm, I just couldn't pay you what the dog is worth."

Mr. Stephenson said, "Ma'am this dog is not for sale. I'm offering her to you as a gift." A smile slowly crossed Henry's mom's face. Henry couldn't keep still any longer. "Please mom, this must be destiny." "I guess you must be right son, this is destiny," replied Mr. Stephenson, grinning.

Henry's mom thanked Mr. Stephenson for his generosity. He said "The look on your son's face is thanks enough." They asked Mr. Stephenson some questions about the dog, and he gave them the paperwork and food he had planned on leaving at the shelter. They wished him good luck with his new job, and he said he knew how lucky he was to find a family for his dog. As Henry turned to leave he said, "By the way Mr. Stephenson, what is the dog's name?"

"Her name, Henry, is Destiny."



Auburn
Hills

RILEY P. MURDOCK

you are michigan

the weather isn't always kind to you
but beneath the extra layers,
your heart is never hidden.
your mood's never far from a bonfire
cooking smores at all times in your mind
sometimes the leaves fall too soon
sometimes the winter stays too long.

the conversation moves from the living room
to the front door
to the cars. eventually the hugs end
and we drive away, pausing thrice to wave and
smile
spring will come, tax season with it
death someday.



but whether it's the great lakes in the air,
in the clouds, on the plows or at the beach
i am alive in your every season.
you are an oversized hoodie and gym shorts,
you're crocs in the snow.
you're drive-thru coney dogs,
you're the unstoppable tide of square pizza.
you're the unbreakable spirit of lions,

you're the immortal, undead faith that this is
their year.
you're you and that lets me be me
two puzzles we can work on together,
especially when it gets dark and rainy.
i'll never tire of the landscapes
they depict.
(i refuse to compare you to potholes.)

Clinton
Township

JOSEPH W. MAZZARA



DOMINIC AND THE EARWORM

Dominic had no idea why the man with the angry piranha face was chasing him. At first, he ran like a spooked rabbit, but then his legs began to melt and his feet became mired in quicksand. Try as he might, Dominic could not get his limbs to move any faster than if he were under water — which he apparently was. This is so crazy, he thought. I am on the track team, why can't I run? Still, the menacing sharp-toothed assassin advanced relentlessly, now chomping and nipping at Dominic's heels. The scaly human-monster then morphed in an instant into a gigantic great white shark, then, just as quickly, back into a vicious piranha intimidating Dominic with his furious gaping maw.

The piranha/human/shark's sharp teeth were now fully bared and his gills flared with ravenous anticipation. To Dominic, the creature's evil intention now seemed very clear: to rip his young body to shreds and devour the pieces. He had no idea why he was being pursued, but his lack of mobility made one thing crystal clear. If he couldn't run, he would have to fight. He stopped abruptly and turned to face his tormentor. Steeling himself against the fear roiling in his gut, he confronted the ugly man/fish head-on. He cocked his arm back and prepared a roundhouse punch that he was sure would knock the creature out cold. But to his chagrin, Dominic's arm and fist were no more powerful than his feeble legs. The punch fell flat with all the force of a wet noodle.

We don't need no education!

We don't need no thought control!

Dominic awoke with a start. His sheets were soaked with the brine of his dream. The sounds of Pink Floyd immediately yanked him from his nightmare and then gently deposited him back into the safety of his warm but damp bed — and the awareness that, although he was saved from becoming fish food, he now faced an even greater peril: he had to get up and go to school.

Dominic's iPhone was programmed to awaken him to the sound of Album Rock Classics — his brother Tommy had suggested that it would yank him from sleep better than any other playlist. The jury was still out on that. When the song stopped, he didn't immediately hit the

snooze button because he feared that, if he did, he might fall right back into that same horrible dream. Instead, Dominic let the annoying song run its interminable course and went downstairs for breakfast. He would later regret that he didn't turn the song off sooner.

"Good morning Dommie Boy," said Mrs. Baccala, "did you sleep well?"

"Sure," said Dominic, "until I was violently attacked by a wild man with a Piranha face. And then a shark."

"I didn't hear anything unusual last night. You should have awakened me."

"Mom, it was just a dream. And I told you, I don't like to be called Dommie anymore. I'm almost thirteen years old."

"OK, OK Dominic," she said, her words dripping with the kind of sharply honed sarcasm that only mothers can perfect. "I guess with an I.Q. as high as yours, you're old enough to have a fancy name too."

Dominic had been double promoted after psychological testing had determined him to be in the Very Superior range of intelligence. Mrs. Baccala gave her little Einstein scrambled eggs, bacon, toast and a fruit cup. She then set to assembling his bag lunch for school: his favorite sandwich, garlic bologna with mustard on fresh-baked Tringali's Italian bread, celery crammed with peanut butter and two fresh chocolate chip cookies.

All in all, it's just another brick in the wall.

Dang it, thought Dominic, there it is again. Now I'm gonna hear that stupid song ringing in my ears all day long. Sadly, he was prescient.

Dominic grabbed his lunch bag and noticed that his mother had written Dommie on the side — and added a garish smiley face rendered boldly with a big red marker. It looked like the Kool Aid man had melted. He secreted the shameful bag deep inside his jacket and slinked out the door with his head hung low. He did not look forward to the bus stop. It was only eight houses away, but, at his weight, running it felt like eighty. His boy's husky blue jeans made him feel even heavier.

At the bus stop, he met the usual suspects — Dopey Donald and his twin brother Dopey Ronald, Kaitlyn the

Terrible and his arch-nemesis, One-Eyed-Eddie Bilbot. Eddie was taller than most of his peers, possibly because he was held back in first grade and thus, had enjoyed an extra year of growth over the rest of the kids. In addition to being tall, Eddie had one other peculiarity. He had lost his left eye in a cherry bomb mishap a few years back and now wore a black patch over the damaged organ. Never fully adjusting to the injury, Eddie had spent the remainder of his youth seeking retribution on his binocular peers.

"Hey Dominic," Eddie taunted, "where's your stupid bag lunch? Did you lose it again? Ha, ha. I could take you with one eye tied behind my back."

You probably could, Dominic thought, but that's still one seriously mixed metaphor.

Indeed, Dominic had lost his lunch bag once last week when a small but determined toy terrier named Buddy had lunged at him, barking like a deranged Cujo — but in a much higher register. Dominic had reflexively tossed his lunch to the miniscule pooch to keep it from killing him.

"There, Gargantua," he proclaimed, "catastrophe avoided." Still, he somehow knew that One-Eyed-Eddie was probably far more dangerous than that ferocious terrier.

Hey! Teachers! Leave them kids alone!

There it is again, dang it, thought Dominic, I hate that song. I don't even like Pink Floyd. But hearing the line, he forgot about One-eyed-Eddie's pointed barbs. He entered the school bus and scanned the faces of his peers, searching for a harmless seatmate. Toward the back, in a window seat, he spotted sweet little Maggie Dinwiddie. She was nice and sort of shy, so she seemed like a safe bet.

"Hi Maggie," he said, "do you mind if I sit here?"

"It's a free country," she answered, while never taking her eyes off her phone. Ouch, thought Dominic, even the nice ones dis me. He wondered what could be so important that she couldn't bother to look at him while speaking. He glanced over and noticed that she was busy affixing a risqué emoji to a text she was sending to her friend, Taylor. Ignoring Maggie's obvious disinterest, Dominic decided that this might be a good time to make some small talk.

"Do you think that we will all die a horrible death when Global Warming reaches its inevitable conclusion?"

"It's called Climate Change," she said, "and I don't care."

That second dis stung more than the first.

If you don't eat yer meat, you can't have any pudding. How can you have any pudding if you don't eat yer meat?

Dang it. There it was again. Dominic closed his eyes and spent the rest of the bus ride stewing in silence. His only friend was the earworm.

Dominic entered the building through the newly fortified, guaranteed assault-proof doors of Dan Quayle Middle School, and stopped at his locker to retrieve his textbook for first hour: Advanced Mathematics Without the Bigotry by Dr. Sunshine Q. Wannamaker. He settled into his favorite seat in the back row and opened his notebook. On the last page, he found his most recent doodle, a crudely scribbled likeness of his teacher, Miss Deromedi as a two-humped camel with horns and buckteeth. Dominic knew that Bactrian camels, not Dromedary's, were the ones with two humps, but it was more fun to draw two.

Miss Deromedi asked the class to open their books to the chapter on Probability Theory. Dominic wondered at the probability of him staying awake during Miss Bucktooth Camel's boring lecture. He tried his very best to stay awake. He really did. He thought of the Detroit Tigers' chances of winning a pennant this year. That only made him feel more tired. Then he thought of how pretty Patty Hodges, three rows in front, looked in her pretty flowery sundress. That made him feel funny, in a different kind of way. Finally, he thought of the fresh, pungent garlic-bologna sandwich waiting for him in his lunch bag. All this thinking made him drowsy.

At that point, Dominic couldn't resist the siren song of sweet slumber, so he laid his head down on his desk. His recent nightmare of the human/piranha/shark/monster had deprived him of quality REM sleep last night. As he succumbed to the inevitable, the real world quickly morphed like a kaleidoscope, into another dream world, with ever-changing images. At first, his dreamscape was a wonderful amalgam of bacon, eggs and Patty Hodges. But soon, he was again beset by a host of very determined piranhas ripping at his flesh. One of the fish bore the visage of One-Eyed-Eddie irritatingly nipping at Dominic's nose. Dang it, not again.

"Hey! Teachers! Leave them kids alone!"

Sadly, this time, the insidious earworm had somehow wiggled its way from his ear, down to his mouth where it escaped loudly into the classroom. There it was. Dominic had given



voice to the heretofore silent earworm. As the words left his lips, Dominic knew that he had screwed up royally. That danged earworm! Miss Deromedi squinted, and with that, her eyes burned like lasers, into the very center of Dominic's tender pupils. Dominic's retinas couldn't handle the damning burn of that piercing light. He froze in a guilt trance. She asked him to stand up.

"Mr. Baccala, would you like to explain your curious soliloquy to the rest of the class?" she challenged.

"No ma'am," he said.

"Do you have a problem with the teachers in this school?" she asked.

"No ma'am."

"Then to what do you attribute your outburst?" she asked.

"An earworm," he mumbled.

"An earworm indeed," she said, "would you care to explain?"

"Yes ma'am. This morning, I unfortunately awoke to the sound of a pernicious, vapid and interminable Pink Floyd song which lodged itself deeply into my inner ear and I have not been able to extricate the intruder all day long."

"OK, thank you Dominic," said Miss Dormedi, "now please take your seat and refrain from any further disruptions."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Nice work, moron," said One-Eyed-Eddie, who was, naturally, seated right next to Dominic in the next row. He made a hand gesture indicating the slashing of one's throat, and the now universal gesture of two fingers alternately pointing from Eddie's eyes to those of Dominic.

Dominic said nothing.

The rest of the school day didn't go much better.

Fourth hour English brought a new humiliation for Dominic. Mr. Penrod, who wore only Birkenstocks and carried his books in a canvas Greenpeace tote bag, asked his students to turn in their essays on the topic Why My Generation Will Not Survive the Coming Apocalypse. Dominic, clearly not reading the room, titled his paper "Apocalypse Shamocalypse. We're Not Going Anywhere." This didn't sit well with Mr. Penrod.

"Dominic Baccala," said Mr. Penrod. "Stand and deliver!" Mr. Penrod clearly saw himself as a much more influential teacher than he was. Dominic hesitated before he answered. Then he heard the earworm. Dang, he thought, there it is again.

Hey you, standing in the road
always doing what you're told,
Can you help me?

Embarrassing, thought Dominic, now I am Pink Floyd. That stupid earworm started out this morning just in my ear, then it took over my mouth, now it is me. I am now, literally, a Pink Floyd earworm.

"How can I help you?" Dominic stammered.

"How can you help me?" asked Mr. Penrod incredulously. "You can help me by explaining what you mean by Apocalypse Schamocalypse, if you please."

"Sure, Mr. P," he replied. "I just don't see the evidence for all this doom and gloom. The climate has always been changing, and the earth has always adjusted, one way or another. What's the big deal?"

"Mr. Baccala," said Mr. Penrod (known to his students as Mr. Nimrod), "do you not realize that you, Mr. Bilbot and Miss Hodges could all disappear from this planet very soon if drastic measures are not taken immediately?"

"That's OK by me," said Dominic, "what's the difference?"

The trip down to the principal's office saved Dominic the embarrassment of enduring the derision of his peers. Also, he got to board the bus first, which meant he could sit anywhere he liked. No seat selections fraught with social peril this time. Dominic took a seat in an empty row. As it happened, the seat next to Dominic was soon filled by the warm body of Purvis Peabody, one of a clique known as the invisibles. Purvis wore large aviator-rimmed glasses and sported a pocket protector bearing the logo of the Dan Quayle Middle School. Junior Scientists. Purvis said nothing as he settled into his aisle seat. He opened a book and began to read. The book was Trout Fishing in America by Richard Brautigan. Dominic sighed. Finally, it would be an uneventful ride home.

Dominic exited the bus and was immediately confronted by the puffed-up figure of One-Eyed-Eddie, with arms folded into a tough guy James Cagney pose.

"What do you want, Eddie?" asked Dominic.

"What do you think," asked Eddie. "I want you to quit looking at Patty Hodges as if you own her."

"I can't do that, Eddie," said Dominic. "I just might ask her out myself one day."

With that, Eddie hauled back and stupidly telegraphed his intended right hook, which Dominic intercepted easily (due to Eddie's lack of binocular perception) and countered with a clumsy, but effective direct punch to the nose. Eddie's nose exploded like an over-ripe cherry. He dragged one well-used hanky up from his pocket to staunch the blood, now flowing profusely from his nose, and said, "You'll be sorry, Dominic."

Dominic, savoring his unexpected victory, traversed the eight houses to his home in record time. Mrs. Baccala, as always, greeted him at the front door with a hearty smile and a warm hug.

"How was your day, Dommie?" she asked.

"It was bad. I was tortured all day by a danged Pink Floyd earworm. It got me in trouble with my friends, my teachers and even Maggie Dinwiddy," he said, "but it turned out OK."

"Oh, Maggie is such a nice girl," said Mrs. Baccala, "and whatever is an earworm? And for that matter, what is a Pink Floyd? You don't look pink to me. Should I set up an appointment with Dr. Cooper?"

"No," said Dominic, "an earworm is not a disease, it's when a song gets stuck in your ear all day long and won't let go. And Pink Floyd is not a disorder either, although some might consider it a kind of a sickness."

"Oh dear," said Mrs. Baccala, "that sounds serious."

"Forget about it," said Dominic, "I don't want to talk about it. I'm going to take a nap."

With that, Dominic retired to the same bed from which he had awakened this morning and laid his head down to rest softly on his Mr. Pillow. Within minutes, he was out like a light. Some time later, he didn't know how long, he awoke once more to his phone blaring a song. This time, it was Rick Astley:

Never Gonna Give You Up.

"Dang," he muttered, "this is much worse than a normal earworm, I've been Rick Rolled."



The Stone Face of an Angel

I met her only because I first met Howard. Howard and I happened to be sitting next to each other during a college entrance exam. During a break we talked and discovered that we lived only a mile from each other. Since I had taken the bus to the university, Howard offered to give me a ride home. When we completed our exams, which we both struggled through since neither of us were any good at math, we found his car and began driving.

"I forgot one thing, John," Howard said just as we stopped at the first traffic light. "I need to stop at the hospital to visit a friend of mine. We went to high school together. You can come in with me or wait in the car. I hope you don't mind."

"No, I don't mind. If I had to wait for a bus it would take me forever to get home, especially since I would have to transfer twice."

"Cool," Howard replied. "I shouldn't be too long. She's pretty sick and I can't bear to see her like that."

"What's wrong with her?"

"She's dying of leukemia. She found out about it a couple of years ago when we were juniors in high school. You'd think that in this day and age that they'd have a cure for that stuff by now. But her brother told me she only has a few more days left."

"What's her name?" I asked. I could tell he wanted to talk about her even though it was tough for him.

"Pam. She's not my girlfriend or anything. I wish she were. No, I take that back. If she were my girlfriend this would be even more difficult for me. She's such a sweetheart. As you can see I'm not much to look at and she's beautiful, so I never really thought I had a chance with her. But she was always so nice to me. Always treated me like she did her other friends. I never was a part of the "in" crowd like her, but she kept trying to get me involved in school activities and made me feel smart even though I know I'm not. She's the main reason I took the entrance exam today. She thinks I'm college material. I hope I don't disappoint her." He hesitated a few seconds then offered, "Whoever said, 'Only the good die young,' really knew what they were talking about."

I felt sorry for Howard. It was easy to see that this girl was very special to him. As we pulled up to the hospital I said, "I'll go in with you if you want me to."

"Great," he said. I think he was relieved not to have to see her alone.

Although there were four beds in the room, hers was the only one occupied. Looking at the other three beds I wondered, had they contained patients who had already died, or were they waiting for those who were dying? Of course I knew the answer had to be both. I hoped those beds would not be filled soon.

"Hi, Pam," Howard said brightly. "This is a friend of mine, John. He took the entrance exam with me today."

She said hello to me and I said it back.

She looked just like what I thought a dying person might look: dark circles under her eyes, very thin face and arms, a strange color to her skin, a little yellow, a little gray. But Howard had said that she was beautiful and she still was. Death can't take everything away at once.

"So, how did you guys do on the exam?" she asked smiling.

"I think we both bombed the math section," Howard said shaking his head. "If we make it in at all we'll probably have to take some pre-college math classes."

"What do you think, John?" she asked looking me directly in the eyes.

I liked the way she said my name. "Yeah, Howard's probably right. Math is difficult for me. I avoided it in high school as much as possible. Now I'm going to pay for it."

She continued to ask questions about us, never mentioning anything about how she was doing. I could tell Howard was avoiding that subject and, of course, I did not really know her well enough to ask such questions. My mind just kept trying to grasp the idea that she was actually dying and would not be speaking in a few days or weeks. I had never been around a dying person.

When we got ready to leave Howard leaned over and hugged her.

"Howard, I'm really proud of you," she said. "I know you're going to make it into that university. They will be lucky to get you as a student."

Howard was a little embarrassed but I could tell her words meant a lot to him.

"And John," she turned towards me. "I know you'll also make it. Sorry we had to meet in this dump. I know these walls could use some redecorating. I'm sure I could too."

"You look just fine, Pam," I replied. "Of course I don't know how you looked before so I can't compare."

She laughed. "I do think I used to look a lot better than I do now. But I don't have a magical mirror anymore. Ask Howard to show you my high school graduation picture sometime. They always make people look good."

JOHN HOWARD DAVIS

Brighton

When she looked at me my heart pumped faster and ached at the same time. As I said goodbye I knew I'd be back.

Two days later I took the bus to the hospital. During the trip I kept asking myself why I was going back. Did I feel sorry for her? Yes, of course I did. But that did not seem to be my reason for returning. I certainly was not curious about death and the dying process. I avoided confronting those things as much as possible. Finally I convinced myself that I just needed to know more about her, wanted to hear her say my name again.

When I walked into her room she looked surprised. She was alone. It was quiet, no television blaring. "John," she said it again, drawing out the "ahhh." "What are you doing here?"

Good question, I thought. What would be a good answer?

"Well, I was going to say I was just in the neighborhood and thought I'd drop by, but that wouldn't be true. Actually I just felt like I wanted to talk to you again."

"Boy, John. You're a fast mover. Of course, in my case it's probably a good thing."

"No, it's nothing like that," I tried to explain. "It's just that, well I liked your personality when we met." (That sounded lame).

"Good personality?" She wrinkled her nose. "That's the fastest way to end a relationship, John. That's what people say after a disastrous blind date." Luckily she laughed.

"I'm sorry," I stumbled for words. "That's not exactly what I meant. I just ... I just felt like I wanted to spend more time with you." I immediately felt bad about the word "time."

"Don't be sorry, John. I'm just kidding. I feel lucky that you came back. The reason isn't important, only that you did. It's for sure that most of my old friends, except Howard, have disappeared. I guess it's not easy to see someone in my condition."

We talked for about two hours. We discovered that we had one major thing in common: a love for poetry. She liked Keats and I liked Stephen Spender. No one I knew had any idea whom Spender was, even my high school literature teacher. But Pam knew a little about him. I felt brilliant when I quoted his "Daybreak" to her:

"'Darling' — upon my heart the song of
the first bird.
'My dream glides in my dream,' she
said, 'come true.
I awaken from you to my dream of you.'"

She thought that was great, while I thought how great it was that we both had read so much poetry in high school. What were the chances that two people who had met in such a way to have so much in common? Nobody reads poetry anymore.

I did not want to leave that day but a nurse threw me out. She said Pam needed her rest. She seemed just fine while I was there.

Two days later I returned. Pam looked more fragile but she was happy to see me. She was now on oxygen. She took my hand and squeezed. I sat in a short chair that only made my chin reach the level of her bed, but I did not let go of her hand. I asked how she was feeling and what the doctors had to say. She said firmly that while I was there she did not want to talk about her illness or doctors. I agreed not to.

Pam asked me if I had any girlfriends while going through high school. I said that I fell in love every two weeks for four years, so that worked out to about 100. "Unfortunately," I said, "it was usually one-sided."

"What about you? I asked.

"I had one boy I liked a lot in my junior year, but he moved away. Since then I haven't found anyone else. It's not like I've been all

depressed since he went away. Maybe I'm too particular."

"What about Howard?" I needed to ask.

"Howard's always been one of my best friends. He'd probably hate it if I told him he was just like a brother."

"Yes he would," I agreed. "Has he been back?"

"Not since he was here with you. I know he's working a lot of hours so he can go to college. His parents don't have a lot of money."

"He really likes you a lot. I can see why."

She smiled and said, "Thanks."

Slowly she turned on her side towards me and put her other hand on top of mine. "John, do me a favor, will you? If you happen to see Howard in the fall at college will you sort of look after him, make sure he's doing okay? I know it's going to be tough for him. I know he can make it but he might need a little encouragement once in a while."

"We both can do that," I said.

"Just promise me?"

"Yes, I will."

I lasted about three hours that day before that same nurse tossed me out. Before I left I kissed both her hands, which were both still holding mine. "I'll be back tomorrow," I warned. "And I'm bringing poetry."

She laughed carefully. I knew there had to be a lot of pain in her body, but she did not show it in her eyes.

The next day I came back early. In my hand I had a copy of Stephen Spender's poem "Daybreak." It was the same one that I had quoted to her the second day I visited. It was a great love poem, one that made me think it was somehow written about her, about us. When those types of feelings come over a person it allows them to forget about other things, the future, for instance.

As I passed the nurse's station, the same woman who previously had asked me to leave (although I must admit, nicely) took my arm and ushered me into a small room. She asked me to sit down and I did, reluctantly. I was scared.

She gently told me that Pam was in a coma and probably would not live more than a few more hours. She had just talked to Pam's family on the phone and they were on their way over. If I wanted, I could go in and be with her for a few minutes. I told her I would like to.

When I entered Pam's room and saw her, I immediately lifted Spender's poem, still in one of my hands, and looked at its first words:

"At dawn she lay with her profile at that angle
Which, sleeping, seems the stone face
Of an angel;"

I could not believe how the words matched this moment. I walked slowly to her bed and touched her face. I placed the poem next to her cheek.

I did not go to the funeral. No one, except Howard, would even know who I was. And I especially did not go because of him. Pam was very special to Howard and I did not want to take anything away from their relationship. It would be his time with her. I already had mine.

I had only spent a total of about six hours with Pam in those three visits. For a long time I asked myself how two people could have connected so quickly? Some people take weeks and months, some years. Eventually I came to realize that it really had little to do with me, it was mostly about her. Maybe I was special to Pam, but I know now that everyone was special to her. Once in a while we are lucky enough to meet someone like that. Howard knew that long before I did. Even though I never got to see her out of that hospital bed, in the sun or under the stars, I have taken her with me to those warm and brilliant places.





JUNE

Actually, the family farm hasn't been a family farm for at least 10 years. Kyle, at 17, kills summer afternoons here in 1973 on rambles in the weedy fields. He passes rusting drags and planters, and peers into the decaying chicken coop. Farming is near enough in his past to evoke childhood instincts related to chores and cowshit (which lacks the spicy, romantic aroma of horseshit). These roaming, rutty farmland paths themselves have romance about them. To country boys, they represent a path for discovery.

Kyle can crown a hill, and among the sweep of June grasses, see the field where his grandfather died. Kyle was there at the time. He was seven, early in the summer, and Gramps was pulling stumps with the John Deere. Kyle passes the spot. Gramps was almost digging the tractor in, trying to yank a particularly stubborn pine knot, when the connecting chain snapped. Before Gramps could clutch in, the green monster fetched nose first into another stump a few yards before him. The force jammed his stout granger chest into the tractor's steering wheel, and specifically the iron steering knob cast into the wheel. The knob crushed into his sternum directly over his heart, probably (the undertaker was uncertain) killing him instantly. Gramps fell from the back of the tractor to the ground, where the rear wheels, still churning on the jammed machine, tossed up enough mold to softly bury him from the waist up.

Probably the proper end for a sort of old, dumpy farmer who was already dead anyway. Except that Kyle, playing nearby, came trotting over when he heard the chain snap, and arrived in time to see matters a bit differently. Arriving as the wheels were still frothing, he watched with big child eyes as the various strata of midwest sand and clay fossilized his grandfather. Kyle showed no sign of panic, fear or sadness, only an expression that can best be described as Oh Wow.

Gramp's corpse lay supine, the growing layer of earth resembling a clotty mummy case. But then Kyle saw something meant only for him. The arms rose slightly, trembling, the hands extended, clawlike. The head, already masked by the soil, strained upward, the mouth

stretched unbelievably wide. A sound, surprisingly soft, as if already smothered by flailing earth, escaped, followed by silence. The hands pawed for a fitful second, seeking to push away the thickening hail (Kyle notes the dark particles still clinging to the backs of Gramps hairy hands). They bat away in final, convulsive impulse. Oh neat, thought small Kyle, Gramps thinks he's being buried alive. It was like on that horror movie mom discouraged him from sneaking out to watch on late night TV.

The spasm lasted only seconds, and Gramps surrendered to the earth. Kyle wondered if the tractor would run out of gas eventually, or maybe bury itself and Gramps altogether. Would it dig down to China? He'd heard that was on the opposite side of the earth. Kyle headed back to the house, in no great hurry, to tell dad that Gramps fell off the tractor. He never mentioned anything that happened after that.

The furrows remain visible, if weedy, over there behind that matted pile of wood slashings. Passing those, he continues along the summery path, forming a This is Your Life of the mind. The scent of wild strawberries underfoot captures him. Kyle thinks of laying among the flora with a girl named Ann, even though he never actually got that far, and is unlikely to now that she has broken up with him for a guy she met at band camp named Greg. A rule of teenage life in 1973 is that the guy she breaks up with you for is always named Greg or Craig or such. Ann had been drawn to Kyle by his dark green eyes and the way he moved. She had ultimately shied away for reasons she could no more articulate than could Kyle.

He crests the low hill that forms the highest point on the farm. From here to the furthest property line is a wide plain, bordered by an extended rill. On closer inspection, the latter proves to be the C&O Railroad track, working its way from Saginaw to points west. The tracks, half a mile distant from Kyle's house, were still near enough for the sound of trains to rumble into his childhood nights. He associated them with warmth and security.

At the turn of the century, however, this line (at the moment Kyle is walking tightrope on one rail) had almost the opposite meaning for the folks who lived here. Lived here, in the middle of nowhere? Well, after the Civil War a small, very small, farm community had sprouted

RALPH WARD

Riverdale

on this spot. It survived for several decades, until that old devil topography dictated that these rails run right down what was Main Street.

Paleolithic foundations can be traced here in the early spring, though now obscured by June foliage. Kyle has never learned the town's name, but considers its death. A town meeting would have been called, the scene looking like the set from Gunsmoke. Suitable character actors crowd into the local church, as the vested, bowler-hatted mayor (played by Pat Buttram) rises to speak at the pulpit. "My good and Christian neighbors. I have for you some good and some bad news on the railroad situation" (mass mutterings). "The good news, I am pleased to announce, is that the railroad is finally coming to our fair community!" (Cheers from the multitude. Jack Elam, as the town drunk, uncorks a pint of rotgut with his teeth and waves the bottle in lush celebration.)

"The bad news," says the mayor thoughtfully sucking his dentures "is that, well, it's gonna come a lot closer than we figured." Stunt work takes over now, angry mobs parading through the nighttime street with torches, townsfolk and Pinkrtons shooting each other from rooftops. Sounds compelling, though historically doubtful. More likely the mayor and local congressmen took their payoffs from the railroad, the farmers took what they could get, and the Town With No Name became the Town With No Town. Structures not demolished by the railroad fell apart with the years, though one farmhouse, furthest from the tracks, remained tenanted until the Depression.

It's rotting bungalow structure remains, buzzing before Kyle's eyes in the shimmery June heat. Actually, it's not in such bad shape. In fact, it looks almost new, which would give Kyle quite a surprise, if he weren't also seeing a young woman in full, modest, late-Victorian dress stroll idly from around a corner of the building.

Kyle accepts this. Sleepy June afternoons lead one to accept ghosts, and he's always had a sort of nonchalant attitude about time; past, future, they all look about the same. Kind of cute, for a ghost. Young, stocky, dark hair (that blue muslin dress must be warm on a day like this, though). She ambles along, 30 feet or so away, oblivious to him. Kyle moseys her way, expecting her to fade like a chased rainbow, but her image seems at least as real as his own. He starts to say "hi," but considers that this was probably not a proper greeting in the 1890's. The girl halts and looks his way, without surprise. Stuck for an opening line, Kyle can only manage "You must be hot on a day like this." He adds an artless smile for punctuation.

The Country Girl (as Kyle now dubs her) is slow to respond, her attention seemingly distracted by a building that disappeared when Grover Cleveland was president. She is even younger than Kyle first thought, perhaps his own age. Her face is handsome, freckles and an occasional mole giving it Celtic presence. Her thick, raven hair seems barely tamed under a braided bun. Green eyes turn their attention to Kyle. "Yes, it is a very warm day for June, isn't it now?" Her voice is casual, yet proper, and betrays a slight accent too vague for a 17-

year old yokel to trace.

Kyle remains stuck for conversation, current event being out of the question. "Uh, you from around here?"

"Not originally. I teach, in the school." Sure enough, there it is, one of the ruined foundations revealed as a dowdy, but very operational one-room school. Not a little red schoolhouse, sadly, but dusty whitewash. Two towheaded boys in overalls trot from the front door. "You teach? You don't look old enough?"

Country Girl's face shows that she's heard this before, thank you. "I have more than one year at the Normal College toward my teaching diploma. I plan to attend more classes in the autumn.

Gee, a schoolmarm, just like in the movies. "Oh, that's cool." Damn, what accent is that? "What's your name?"

"No." The answer is firm, but pleasant, showing how good a schoolmarm she's shaping to be. "I mean, that is one of the questions that you are not supposed to be asking."

"That's cool." Kyle accepts this, but can't resist throwing in "Now is that your rule, or somebody else's?"

Country Girl's eyes turn to the ground, the tightening of her lips hinting that this question has scored a point. Kyle senses that he's being rude. "Oh, okay, sorry, like, I don't get to talk to..." He hesitates. Saying "a ghost" would probably be tasteless. Saying "a girl" would, given Kyle's current love life, probably be more accurate. But romance is crowded out by the supernatural. He trails off in mutterings.

The summer breeze stirs the alfalfa to hissing

conversation. It also stirs the dust of Main Street, frightening the tired gelding that pulls a one-horse shay past the shabby general store. Dusty human scarecrows go about their business in the small rural crossroads, hard stick bodies in wool and calico. The two overalled boys chase past. A yellow dog sniffs at lumps of horseshit, trots on.

Kyle is wonderstruck at the lived-in, prosaic quality of this human ant farm. "It's a whole world here, the people, their lives, and everything." Country Girl seems mildly pleased, as if one of her slower pupils is finally getting the point. Nodding toward a distant, middle-aged farmer in baggy work clothes, she whispers sotto voce "That's Mister Wright. There was some bit of a scandal about his daughter, Esther. A commercial traveler came through town..." She catches herself. "Well, I've no room for gossiping."

The distant figure shuffles into the post office, returning the empty street to its daguerreotype stillness. The warm June shimmer is passing, ethereal visions fading as a distant train whistle sounds. "Uh, can you just tell me the name of the town?"

Her strong face looks familiar as her lips again purse. This time she appears less affronted than sad. "I believe that's enough, for the moment."

"OK, look..." Kyle has only one more shot as clouds pass over the sun, fading the scene. "Why are you here talking to me?"

Not much left now, save the Country Girl's fading green eyes. "Well, it is your family farm, isn't it now?"

"Yea" says Kyle to himself and the weeds. "It's my farm."





Dog Whistles

You who whistle to dogs
Who slice palms midair,
Pandering to the hungry, Pavlovian,
Drool Drip
Of triple K's, takers of oaths, and the freely swayed —
You whose trespasses traverse treasuries and treatises
Who keep your left hand unsuspecting of your secret deed,
Leveraging pulpits to obscure mutinous misdealings
And brokering an altar call
To cattle cars and crowning czars,
Thickened with theology I cannot heed.
You who call forth an age of pyrite,
With eugenic glee,
Cloaked in caches of coin.
I cannot follow where you would lead.

You, the very few of you.
Whose whistle, ever an undertone,
Is a formulaic symphony
Its finale a quotient
Drilled into our conscience
Where we stand on separate sides
Dismantled.
The few of you,
Know this.
Don't look for me
Counted amongst your pious plutocrats.
My boots shall not thunder
In a chorus that drowns out my brother.
I'll not join you in lockstep,
Spitting on the strides of suffragettes
Burning pages and alliance.

You hope I'll get lost in the simplicity
Resting fault at the feet of my neighbor, my cousin, the
fluid, or foreign

That lots will be cast and enough lines will be drawn —
Snow flake or news fake,
Shades of red or blue
That my head will spin with the obscurity.
You bide your time while we do the heavy lifting.
Whistling that happy tune,
It matters none too much to you,
Certain
We'll feast upon one another in the lean times
While the hand slights first one and then the rest of us.

Don't look for me in the separation
Under burdens too great to bear.
I've played games with stones and sticks,
And know well enough where names can bleed.
Look for me, instead, at the foot of the fig
Or at the tea table of my mentors
In schools of kindness where I revise my story,
Where I seek degrees of apathy.

I shall reach forth these clean hands
And align with the many.
I do not sing for dogs
But I will call to America's forlorn children.
The sweet trill I share
An arpeggio of welcome,
A call for our unity
A verse
To shield us from injury.
A prelude to a time when you can
See our humanity
A hand on a heart that beats for
The smallest
The softest
The very parasitic amongst us.
But also for
Casters of stone.
Some may whistle,
But today I hum,
And tomorrow,
We can all still sing.



SARAH PETTIGREW

Wyandotte



I create these one-of-a-kind dolls. Everything is handcrafted. There are no molds used. I do all the costume designs, sewing and wig making myself.

ROBERT CRAIVIER

Pontiac

dead end

they say “if you open up you’ll feel better.”

so i tried it —

“You’ll be fine, I’ve been through much worse”

“You’re always complaining”
“Be grateful you have _____”

and — it got me, nowhere.

they say “try talking to the person”

so i tried it —

“What do you want me to do?”

“You’re being disrespectful”

“You’re so selfish”

and — it got me, nowhere. but a
dead end.

they say when you bottle things up, it’s bad
for you

so i tried it —

“If you need someone to talk to, I’m here”

“Are you okay, you don’t seem like
yourself?”

“What’s wrong?”

it’s funny how when i listened to others, i
suffered.

i had to use silence as a form of punishment,

to earn back a form of dignity.

they depict my character because i’m always
angry.

but, it’s not fair when expressing myself
— leads to no solution.

they degrade my well-being because
i’m always depressed.

but, it’s not fair when i’m battling a re-
occurring cycle with people.

it’s not fair, that i have be silent, to be
awarded peace.

it’s not fair it’s not.



LATA DIXON

Bloomfield
Hills



The juggler on the street

Yesterday the juggler on the street
went straight for my jugular
without even knowing it

Stopped for the red light
I watched him toss the balls up
and around
as he stood on Gratiot
where the Fisher freeway ends

I read his cardboard sign:
HOMELESS
HUNGRY
HELP

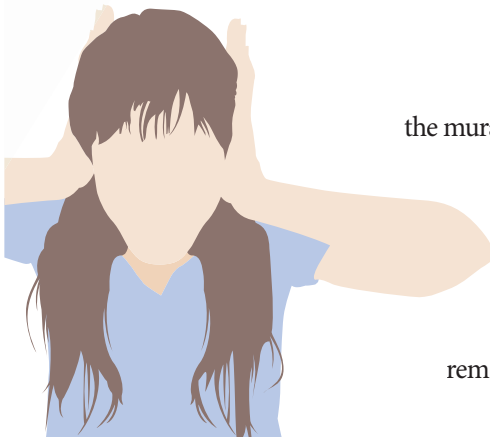
His words followed me as I turned
onto E. Vernor
"Is there any Remover of
difficulties save God? Say: Praised
be God! He is God! All are His
servants, and all abide by His
bidding!"

I heard myself pray as I continued
my commute

This morning the light is green
I cross Gratiot and make my
faithful turn onto E. Vernor
with the other speeding cars

As Vernor becomes one way I see
three silver 1950's style campers
a lone black & white cat sitting still
the blight
the mansions
a gaggle of geese
the mural on Crane St of two
children
patches of young
trees

Unconsciously I
touch my throat
remembering the juggler



JENNIFER BETH MARKLEY

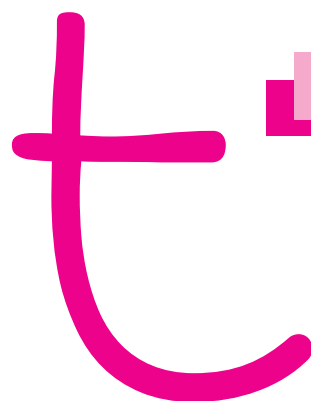
Allen Park

Shelby
Township

TEA DELUCA



Ups and Downs



tomorrow she was going to find a backbone and the ability to say no. A loud, emphatic, not at all confusing, no, because today, she hadn't said no, and she was at her least favorite place in the entire world, an amusement park in the heart of Ohio. She hated walking

under a blazing mid-western summer heatwave. She hated the greasy food that swelled in her stomach and threatened to reappear, but mostly she hated the rides. The twisting, turning, looping, heart stopping minutes in the name of fun.

She wouldn't be here if it weren't for her sister and her best friend. They had tried all summer to drag her out to the land of nausea and clenched teeth, and finally during an August meltdown, she caved.

"Why do you hate rides so much?" Linda had asked. "It's so much fun."

No not fun, but embarrassing to explain why the mere thought of driving for hours to spend the day here left her physically sick. It was easier to agree to come and deal with the consequences. She couldn't explain the first time she had gone to an amusement park was with her well-meaning parents. She was only five and hadn't experienced terror prior to that day. Her mother had taken her two older brothers and sister on the big rides, while dad dutifully introduced her to the joys of their outing with a ride on a merry-go-round. Harmless enough. Not so.

The colorful shiny horses weren't pretty or appealing. They were menacing with barred teeth and heavy hooves. She couldn't reach, but before she could protest, Dad swept her up and plopped her on the beast. He was so happy, she bit back her tears and clung to the animal as the music began, and the ride moved. The real terror

came when the merry-go-round made its first circle, and her dad disappeared from sight. She held her breath till it returned, and she saw him waving frantically and grinning like an idiot.

She was ready to get off except up and down she went and round and round a second time, then a third, and a fourth. Each time she held her breath again, but the fifth time she didn't release the air from her lungs. She couldn't, because her heart stopped while she searched for her father. He was gone. The ride ended, and no one came to help her down. Fear of losing her father was bad enough but having to go on the ride again had the tears welling up in her eyes and slipping down her cheeks. Out of nowhere suddenly her mother appeared. She clung to her and cried for ten minutes while she tried to explain Dad had joined her brothers.

That colored her day and left a significant hatred for all things amusement park.

And here she was again, steering clear of any and all rides, using one lame excuse after another till she ran out of excuses and big sister and so-called best friend had her by each arm and deposited her in front of the Monster. It was called that for a reason. A roller coaster to shame all roller coasters before it. Longer, faster, higher drops, open air cars, the whole experience to ruin her day with the potential for an early death. She would never survive this.

"Here are the tickets," Linda said, shoving them into her hand. "Stay in line and grab the front bench."

"Where the hell are you going?" Maddy asked. "You're not going to leave me here alone, are you?"

"I'm just going to run to the bathroom with Jill. Keep our place in line. We'll be back before you reach the top."

They ran off before she could stop them. She considered stepping out of line, but it was moving swiftly, and the crowd of people behind her forced her to keep moving. Where the hell were they? How long did it take to go to the bathroom? She moved through the maze; the tickets sweating in her palm. She hung back as the last of the kids in front of her filled the car. Thank God, but another car was right behind it. Damn. Where were Linda and Jill?

The car was indeed open with a metal bar and a seat belt. Had anyone ever been ejected from the ride with the amount of force and speed it traveled? She didn't want to know. She slid in the first seat and pulled the belt as tight as she could. Was it supposed to have this much slack? Oh, shit, she could see everything: everything except her best friend and sister.

She should get off quickly. Glancing back, her car was only half full with not another passenger in sight. She was definitely getting off until a smart-ass attendant yanked on her belt and announced, "That's it."

"No," she screamed, "my sister, my friend. They're coming." He probably didn't hear as the car moved, and the squeal of passengers drowned her out. They exited the enclosed tower and started a steep steady climb. "Hell no." She gripped the bar tighter while realizing her bottom was two inches off the seat. "Gonna die, gonna die," she cried into the wind.

"No, you're not," a definitely male voice responded. God?

The car was still climbing, the view startling, and just over the hump would be the first drop. She was going to

be sick till the car suddenly groaned and jerked back and forth then ground to a painful stop. Why weren't they moving?

"Probably a mechanical problem," the voice responded from behind her. Had he read her thoughts? And why was he so calm?

"Mechanical problem?" she questioned without turning around. Her knuckles were turning white in her grip on the bar.

"Something down there. They'll fix it, and we'll continue."

"No, this isn't safe," she groaned. "Maybe the problem is up here. Maybe they'll get us moving, and we'll fly off the tracks or smash at the bottom."

"Lower your voice," he whispered firmly. "You'll scare everyone on this ride."

"They should be scared," she reasoned, "and I'm not doing this. I'm getting off." She unbuckled her seat belt and pushed away the bar.

"Slow down." An arm grabbed hers. "Where do you think you're going? If you think you can scale this ride, you will die. Calm down. This is supposed to be fun."

"Not fun," she said between clenched teeth. She locked eyes then with the deepest blue seawater eyes. Long dark lashes and perfect teeth behind a reassuring smile. Distracted, she momentarily forgot her fear, staring at the good-looking guy behind her. "I... my friend and sister..."

"I take it they stood you up? No reason you can't have fun, right?"

He was so calm; it was kind of contagious. "I can't do this alone."

"Want to do this with me?"

Could she? They still weren't moving; the view of the park was still chilling, but somehow, she wasn't ready to jump. "I don't know you."

"Tim, and who are you?"

"Maddy. Short for Margaret. I never use my given name, because I hate it."

"Margaret's a great name, frequently used in the Bible. Some great women behind that name. Now that we know each other, my offer still stands, but you better hurry. Don't know when we'll suddenly be moving. Can you climb back into my seat?"

She didn't hesitate. Climbing over the seat, the car gave a little jolt. She screamed as he pulled her down on the bench beside him. "Are we moving?"

"Not yet. Buckle your seat belt."

Her hands trembled; the buckle refused to lock in place. "Can you help me?"

He reached around her, carefully avoiding contact, and snapped it in place. "There. Now, we can enjoy the ride?"

She doubted it. "Maybe you should hold my hand or something."

He turned a pale shade of green but dutifully tucked her smaller hand in his. "Better?"

"No, maybe..." She ducked under his arm and wrapped his hand around her shoulder. "Don't let go, please."

For all his calm, he seemed a little nervous. "I won't let go no matter what, but you have to let go of the bar."

"No," she screamed as the car suddenly moved toward the edge of the planet. Then without warning, they were barreling down the first drop. The air whooshed from her lungs; the wind pounded her face. "No," she screamed

again into her knees.

"Let go of the bar. Raise your hands in the air," he screamed back over the crowd behind them.

She almost straightened as the car picked up speed and raced much faster along the tracks toward the second drop.

He pried one hand off the bar with his free hand. "Let go of the bar," he grinned.

"Shit no." And then they were careening down what little she saw in a blur with their locked hands over his head, but his other hand still holding her shoulder. Was this the end of the ride? Two drops, more than enough excitement for her.

The car continued the pace around several bends, over some wavy tracks, and through a short tunnel. She planted her feet, trying to stop the force that pressed her against her new friend. The handsome guy with the great biceps and washboard abs. She wasn't a child at twenty-five, had never made a move on a guy first, but she was inviting him for a drink if they lived. The car seemed to slow a bit. Were they done and approaching the station? That's when she saw it up ahead. Stunned, she turned to Tim who was grinning from ear to ear. The car dropped, then flipped and continued upside down. "F... this," she screamed, closing her eyes tightly.

He held their hands up or down, depending on how you watched till they righted and sped down a long straight away, gaining speed. She was too exhausted to care or register when they slowed and stopped in the station. "We lived," she screamed. "I did it." She threw her arms around Tim's neck and slowly backed enough to see his eyes. They were close enough to kiss, but he looked ...

He pushed her back and scrambled off the ride and was suddenly surrounded by a dozen or so people. "So, how was the ride, Father Timothy?" one of his parishioners asked.

"It was great," he mumbled, his cheeks flaming. "Ok, everyone, go get something to eat, then we meet on the bus in half an hour."

"You did it." Linda was screaming in her ear, but she couldn't take her eyes off Tim. He was standing alone watching everyone leave.

"I'll be right back." She walked up behind him, tentatively waiting for him to turn. "Father Tim?"

"Margaret," he answered sheepishly.

"We didn't die," she replied, "but you knew we wouldn't."

"Inside track. You know," he pointed heavenward. "God and all."

"Of course. Thank you. I couldn't have done that without you, and it was kind of fun."

"I think you could have," he said, stepping closer. "Margaret, you're a special woman. I'm glad we met today."

"Me too." They separated as they should, but she couldn't help turning back one more time. "Why didn't you tell me you were a priest?" she asked.

He smiled softly and shrugged. "I'll be praying over that question tonight."

The End



Rochester
Hills

WOOD "FROMRURU" NAJIM



I am a self-taught digital artist who draws vibrant cat, dog and plant art, in addition to vintage inspired artwork. I draw pets to honor and remember them. I design under my artist name FROMRURU.

