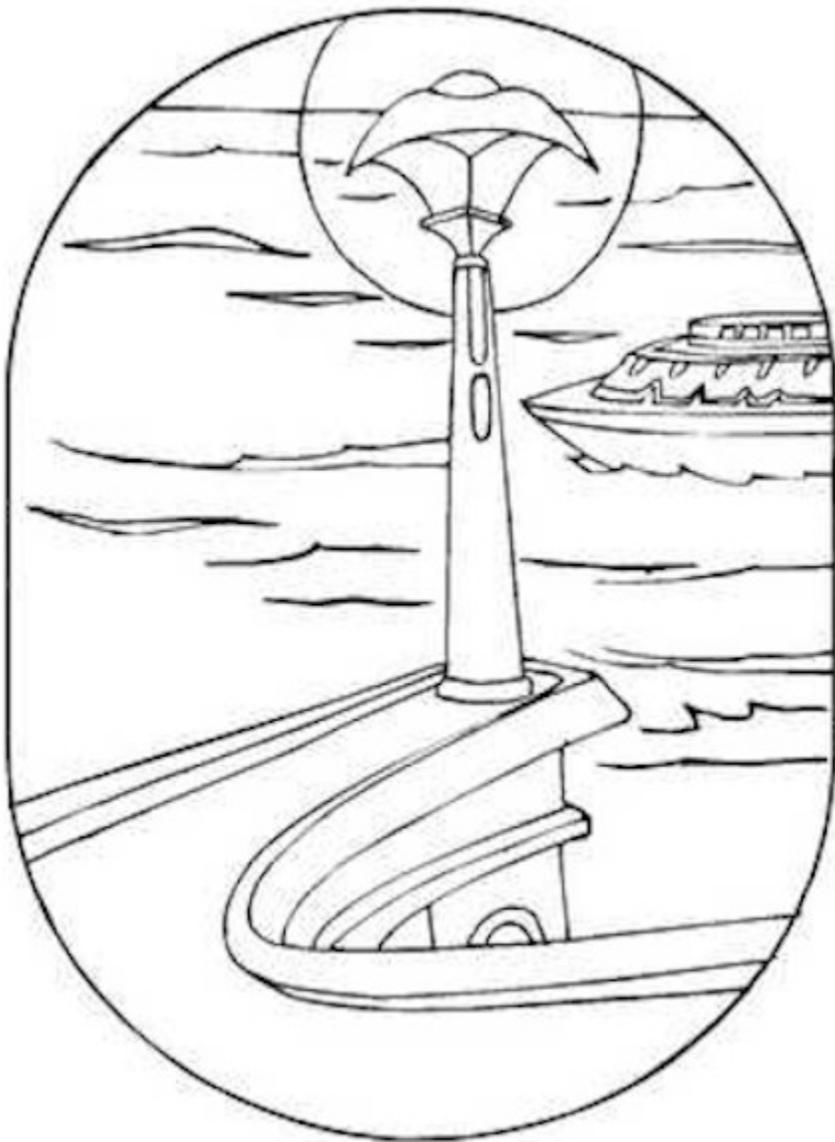


The Lamplight



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Liberty University

Acknowledgments

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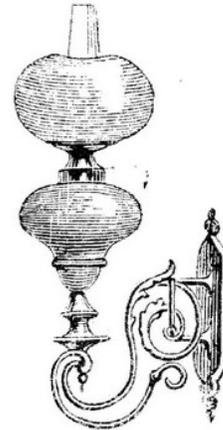
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LOGO by Mike Greene	
IRON RAILS by Rachel Burkholder	2 Best Poem
LIFE OF INDIA by Ashley Ferren.....	2
A SMILE CAME OVER ME by Amy Caroline Parker.....	3
RACE AGAINST THE CLOCK by Kristie Rutzel	4
SYLVIA PLATH VS. THE ELEMENTS by Elizabeth Johnson.....	5
WRITING ON A BLANK WALL by Chris Gaumer.....	6 Best Fiction
ON THE ACCOLADE by Melinda Lauta	9
OVERDUE VISIT by Danielle Brackenrich	10
PENELOPE'S ODYSSEY by Laura Large	10
AS THE FRESHNESS FLOWS by Jennifer Walker	11
THE ISLAND by Nick Harme	12
APOCALYPSE PARTY by Ashley Shay.....	14
MY REGRET by Rae Ann Franks	14
HUMANITY CONVERSES OVER LUNCH by Brittany Godby	15
THE METROPOLITAN OPERA by Amanda Carson.....	15
HANNA by David Detwiler.....	16
FIRST FLIGHT by Krista Jardine	21
INNOCENCE by Sabrina Earley.....	22
OUR LIVES GIVE...DOUBTS by Jonathan Lenker	22
SPRING OUT LOUD by Danielle Viera.....	23
WINTER by Heather Shelton.....	23
LEAVES FALLING IN A SUMMER BREEZE by Jessica Cornish	23
SACRED PRAYER by Annamarie McCoy.....	24
I AM by Jennifer Shumaker.....	25
SLICE OF ROCK by Kenzie Avol.....	25
ON GETTING A GIRLFRIEND by Andrew Milacci	26 Best Nonfiction
WHAT I CAN BE VS. WHAT I AM! By Rebekah Gail Ghenco.....	30

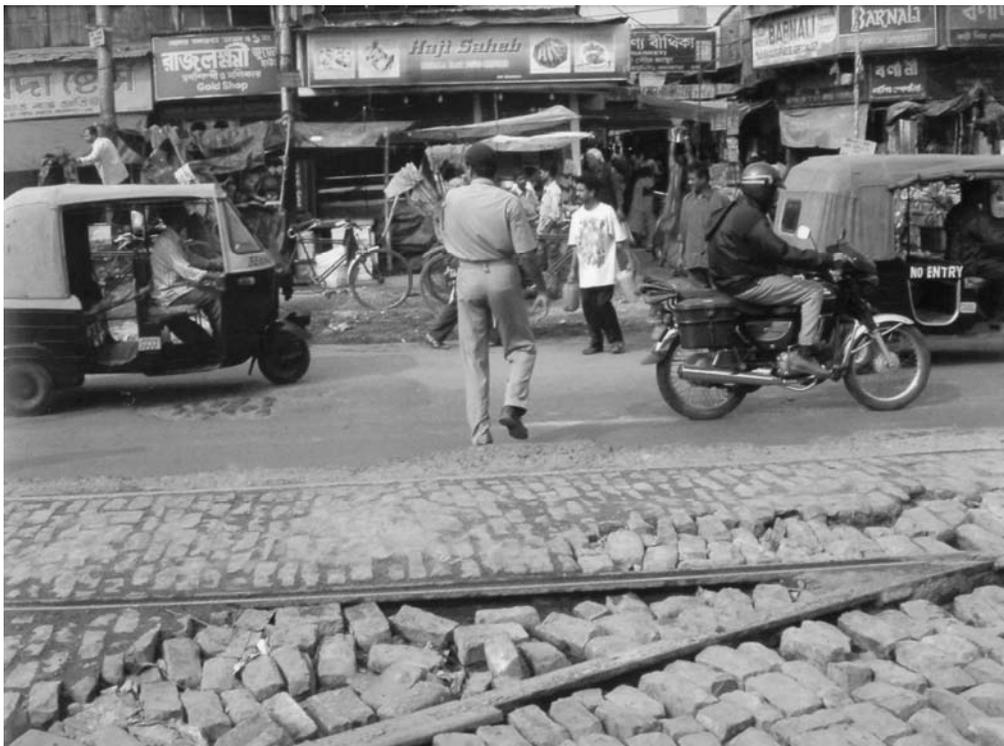
This poem integrates "India by Rail and the Journey of Paul Theroux and Photographer Steve McCurry." *National Geographic* 165.6 (June 1984). Quotes from the original are italicized.

BEST POEM

Iron rails sew spiced lands together
They are dusty but monumental
As ancient as India herself
From Peshawar to Chittagong
The iron threads invoke *happy memories*
Of lovely evenings, the color of tropical seas
Qissa Khawani Bazaar, the Storytellers' Bazaar
The sweetness of curry, chutney, cinnamon in the air
Men and women washing clothes in the Yamuna River
The Desert Queen like a needle seams her way
East from the stony cliffs...to valleys of Indus
The embroidered Himalayan foothills
Lush contrasts to the iron weave
Darn a stitch to Simla
where all things begin and many come to an evil end
Hem straight to New Delhi
into scene of "temple India" the dome and minarets of the
Taj Mahal
Baste a way to Calcutta then *nip into Bangladesh*
Like the maharajas in palaces on wheels
Plait and dart, weave a path
A tapestry of India with iron rails

Iron Rails

By Rachel Burkholder



Life of India by Ashley Ferren

A smile came over me

AMY CAROLINE PARKER

(February 1999)

**A SMILE CAME OVER ME
LIKE THE ESCALATING SUN
IT ROSE IN MY HEART
AND GROWS IN MY EASY**

**I HOPE THAT YOU SAW IT
FOR PERHAPS IT MAY FADE
AS THE SETTING SUN
AND OBSCURITY THAT FOLLOWS**

**AND IF BY CHANCE YOU MISSED IT
I WILL BRING IT BACK TO LIFE
FOR I WANT YOU TO COMPREHEND
THE HAPPINESS I FEEL INSIDE**

**I HOPE YOU NOTICE IT IN MY FACE
AND LINGERING WITHIN MY EYES
I PRAY YOU HEAR IT IN MY VOICE
THE ONLY PLEASURE OF ITS KIND**

**FOR IT IS FAR MORE
THAN SOLELY A DAY BREAKING
IT'S THE SUN ILLUMINATING THE SKY
AFTER A DISHEARTENING STORM**

**THE REASON I WANT YOU TO SEE
IS SIMPLY BECAUSE IT IS YOU
WHO BROUGHT THE SMILES
TO ME WHEN I COULD NOT ENDURE.**



Amy Caroline Parker was killed in a car accident when she was a senior at Liberty University. The daughter of Drs. Leonard and Karen Parker, she was a talented vocalist, artist, and poet. She often included her life verse with her signature: "Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee" (Psalm 25:1, 2).



Race Against the Clock

Kristie Rutzel

12

The journey of life is run as a race.
God has set the mark, yet there are choices to make.
You saw the need for a Savior and accepted Christ into your heart;
It's time to start the race as one who is set apart.

You started off anxious, excited, ready do what He may say.
Throwing off weights and burdens, you sprint on ahead out of Satan's way.
But you became tired and weary, forgetting His course, making your own trail.
You ignore the Clock of your life; you are set up to fail.

God is holding the watch, keeping your life in His perfect timing.
It's time to make up your mind; choose which way you should go.
You shout for Him to stop the Clock. You need time to think.
But time goes on; years pass by in a blink.

Seeing the end draw near, you look back to see how the race was run.
Regretful of how you lived for yourself, forgetting your Creator.
Looking ahead to the finish line, hearing the stop watch tick,
You lift your eyes to the Savior, and it finally clicks.

The clock is running out. Endure the last stretch. Make it count.
God forgives and will provide strength 'til the end.
It's time to fix your eyes on the cross; don't look behind.
Run to His embrace, for in Him alone
True contentment you will find.

6

Sylvia Plath vs. The Elements*

Elizabeth Johnson

You were fire. It ignited your soul and slowly smoldered outward, until your passion was so all-consuming that your mind and body burned with a fervor that could not be put out by fan, lover, water, or success. You were a like a blue flame: awe inspiring in its irony.

You were ice. Your cool demeanor could not fool your fiery center; and so you slowly began to shed sheets of frigid water until you lost your shape and became nothing more than an inner core of passionate knowledge, while outside you became nothing less than an unstable puddle of emotions and haunting thoughts, left to be stepped in and on by all who came through winter's doorway in order to gather 'round, drawing nearer to your warmth.

You were frost personified, my dear Sylvia Plath. Fire and ice cannot mingle, for all it creates is an unbearable prickling burn, like pins and needles on the hands of old man winter coming into the warm house of summer, seeking shelter. They cannot cohabit, and thus you could not do anything but live in a torturous purgatory of scalding heat and chilling cold. Everyone loved to watch you burn, but no one allowed you the relief of tepid waters—a happy medium between extremes.

Oh no, they loved you for the same reason an old, silly cat loves a fireplace—to warm their icy ignorance with the heat of your passionate and profound discourse. Once you no longer provided them that heat, they put you out and all that's left of your flame is the smoldering ash of your memory and the rising smoke of your nostalgia.

*For information about this Sylvia Plath, see <http://www.plathonline.com/>.

Writing on a Blank Wall

Chris Gaumer

It's four a.m. and I'm remembering. I can't recall when this memory actually happened, whether in the last ten days or five winters ago, I don't know. But it's resurfacing for a reason, and I want to hold onto it. I need to hold onto it. I've got part of a pencil, and I will write it down in detail before I forget.

The memory is of a heavy blizzard in the city. I am running and stumbling through the snow on the sidewalk, both hands tucked in the thin cotton pockets of my medical jacket. I can feel a stethoscope bouncing up and down against my chest as I seek refuge from the raging whiteness. The storm is allowing for only a few yards of visibility, but I am a determined man. The snow steadily builds on window ledges and old store signs, and neatly covers cigarette butts that have been discarded into the cracks of the sidewalk. I run by a coffee shop to my left. The light and warmth draw me inside. With a shake and a shiver I close the door behind me. An old black man standing near the window turns in my direction.

"Hey Doc, where's your coat?"

I kind of laugh, then blow on my cold white knuckles, and put the stethoscope in my jacket pocket.

I place an order for coffee while the phone behind the counter begins to ring. The shop feels good and cozy in the way coffee shops are supposed to feel, I guess. Or maybe it's just the combination of brown overtones and a mild addictive. The pretty woman behind the counter holds out my coffee and says it's free of charge.

"Free?"

"Yup," she replies, "everyone can use a free cup of coffee on a day like today, right?" She gives me an odd glance.

"Is it supposed to keep up all night?"

"I don't know, but you better make yourself comfortable. We might be here a while."

I thank her and head to a table toward the back.

Settling in a seat, I put the warm beverage under my nose and inhale. The steam diffuses through my nostrils and immediately warm me. Then leaning back, I take a slow pan of the café scene. The attractive woman behind the counter talk close to the ear of another employee, a couple holds hands over a table, and two women murmur near the giant front window. The black man I encountered upon my entrance is seated at a piano along the left wall, swaying to his own music. It's the kind of song you would expect to hear in a coffee shop while the snow falls on a darkening evening, and it is perfect. I sip my coffee. Outside the glassy window it's nearly black, but the snow shooting across the glow of the tall iron lamplights that line the sidewalk affirm the storm is still pretty heavy. It is certainly a typical, if not overdone coffee shop scene, but having not had a normal evening such as this in recent memory, it makes a deep mark. The power of the moment ends abruptly as everything just described goes black for about fifteen seconds.

I mark this as a significant moment in my recollection because from now on the things which occur slip into the category of extraordinary. Let me continue....

The power outage didn't last long, but in the exact moment it cut back on,



the door flung open, exposing the café to a fiction-worthy wind, instantaneous cold, and a large huddled figure looming enormous in the door frame. A shiver shot through my spine.

The door slammed shut almost as fast as it had opened, and the inconceivable mass stepped forward, his boots enormous and black with the rubber lace-shrouds flopping out on either side like wings. The clomp of his boots dropped a half-foot pile of snow on the wooden floor, and I will admit that I've never been witness to such a breath-taking entrance. I was not alone in my shock as I saw couples huddling close together, the employees whispering amongst each other, and the black man at the piano cowering close to his familiar keys.

The scene continued its odd course when the elephantine man stepped toward the counter. It seemed that the farther he stepped from the door, the smaller he became, and when he reached the counter, he was of average stature, and maybe less than that. He was not colossal, but rather ordinary. The collar of his green trench coat was pulled up high, and he was wearing a red mesh cap on his head. Throughout the shop, customers resumed their murmuring, the black man took up the keys again, and the employees served the new customer his coffee. Having nothing better to do, I watched the man in the trench coat sit down with his cup of coffee at a table not far from my own. I looked beyond him for a moment to the iron lamplights on the street outside. The snow was beginning to let up. Bringing my visitor back into focus, I caught a glimpse of his features around the side of his collar. I was repulsed. He wore the eyes of a mad man. They weren't round or like a three-dimensional ball at all. They were kind of like sharp almonds, or maybe triangles. And his pupils, for lack of a believable description, looked like the top of an acorn, spinning and darting around at a furious pace. Down from his eyes a nose rolled out and up like a ramp and the two nostrils on either side flared like rocket engines. I grabbed a nearby newspaper and hid my revulsion from his view. Around the rest of the shop everyone minded his or her own business, unaware of the creature among us.

I wondered what kind of man this was. In all my years practicing medicine I've never encountered a man with such odd natural features. He wore no scars of obvious medical construction, so this couldn't be the creation of a mad plastic surgeon. Eyes just don't look like that; you can't have triangle-shaped eyes! I peered out from the paper. He had his long boney fingers wrapped around his cup while tapping on the table with the others. His mouth was a frozen half-grimace, illuminating large white teeth and a large overbite. The white teeth matched his white hair that was protruding every which way from under the mesh cap. I deduced he must be about fifty or so. I was dumbfounded by the caricature-like quality of this man, almost a living cartoon head. Suddenly he cranked his neck, catching my nosey eyes. I leaned back and nearly toppled over. I then slouched low and held my breath as he slowly stood up and crossed my path on his way into the bathroom. I began to let out a sigh, when I noticed red spots on the floor.

It was no wonder this man was holding a grimace! He was bleeding, and from the looks of it, quite badly! I looked around. No one else in the shop seemed to have noticed the bloodied floor. I had no choice. I had to forget my fear of this freak and help him.

Following the red trail, I peered into the bathroom. It was empty, save a good bit of blood on the tile. I bent down; there was nothing in the stall. Dumbfounded as to how he got by me without notice, I stepped back onto the café floor. The man was sitting in his seat. The café was calm except for the woman behind the counter who seemed flustered as she held a phone close to her ear. Outside the snow had stopped altogether and began to drift, uncovering the ugly cracks in the sidewalk and creating drifts against parked cars.

Gathering my wits, I approached the hideous nightmare. He glared up at me quickly. I

took a slow, heavy swallow and began.

"Sir, I work at a medical clinic down the street. Can I help you in any way?"

The face between the collar grinned and spoke very slowly. "I...don't...think...so."

"But sir, you're bleeding quite badly. You must have medical help." I pointed to the blood on the floor.

"Yes, well I suppose the bleeding comes and goes. It should be fine for a while. If you really want to help, you could stop embarrassing me in front of all these people."

I looked up. The employees behind the counter were looking at us. The rest of the shop was quiet. I turned back to the smiling, bleeding man.

"Well, I must get back." He stood up. "I've been away too long. The bleeding gets only worse when I go out." He began to step away and I took him by the arm. It was as thin as the pencil I'm writing with.

Just then two familiar men wearing white medical jackets identical to my own stepped through the door and looked at the woman behind the counter. She put down the phone and pointed toward us.

"My colleagues!" I waved them over.

"Dr. Hobbes, Dr. Foreman, this man here is bleeding badly and needs medical attention." I let go of his arm.

Dr. Foreman put his hand on my shoulder and whispered, "We need to handle this one carefully, Doctor."

"Absolutely," I said.

"Inform us of the relevant details."

"Certainly. Well, I was running from our building..." We turned from the bleeding character and headed toward the door. Dr. Hobbes nodded at the woman behind the counter and followed close behind us, listening to my story as we headed back to the practice. The snow had begun falling again, and by the time we reached the tall white building, the uncomely cracks in the sidewalk were again hidden with a layer of fresh snow.

I am straining to remember what happens next in this story. It gets quite blurry. A sound at the door startles me, and I pop up from behind my bed frame.

"Hey there." It is Dr. Hobbes. "I heard you yelling about something a minute ago. What have you been doing in here?"

I stand to my feet. "Writing."

"Writing what?"

"A story."

"What is your story about?"

I pause. Through the iron bars of the small window overhead I can see snow. The flakes are likely falling to a sidewalk, or grass, or perhaps a small child running with an open mouth, trying to catch a big one. But I will never see that sidewalk, or grass, or child, whatever the case may be. The window is high against the ceiling and I have done humanity too great a disservice to get a room with a view.

"So how are you writing the story down?" Dr. Hobbes queries.

"With this broken pencil." I hold the pencil between two fingers.

"I don't see a pencil." Dr. Hobbes said.

I look down and then to the blank wall behind my bed frame. He is right. There is no pencil.



ON *THE ACCOLADE* by Melinda Laut

You do not know the truth of tale
You do not hear its tune
You cannot trace the tragic trail
Seized secret of the moon
There is a story not so told
I bring you to today
A canvas shows a fragment
What's left brushes cannot say

Sweet maiden drifts to sleep each night beneath a canopy
There lies a princess lacking, a heart you couldn't see
Breathe deep at midnight stroke and clear your burning mind
Aching eyes stare toward the painting for peace she yearns to find

Her memory drifts to that charmed dark room
Throwing shadows upon the floor
Each color drips with darkest gloom
The whispering wind a lonely shore

Every color runs together to bleed with ghastly gray
As a strangled sob grows weak and faded
When there is nothing left to say
Each fleeting breath now jaded
Her heart's last picture painted in this way

Her gown snowy white from clasp to hem
Pure as the soft light within a gem
Falls shining to chilled stone blocks
As silent dust gathers upon bluish rocks

Flecks of light and shadow dance
Glistening and glittering with noble stance
Strands of amber surround her as a fiery veil
A carnal sun that shall not fail

He, clothed in crimson,
The color of passion running through his blood
The life that he had to offer
Rose from trailing bubbles to a flood

His deep gaze downward does not lift
Head bowed low and fingers tightly locked without shift
He kneels before her, his helmet cast aside
Without his opaque mask, nowhere can he hide

This cold, sharp blade pressed upon his shoulder
Yet weight of veering eyes the penetrating boulder
His duty is to fight battles to protect
But with invading army did her heart he wreck

Her mind ponders in this moment

Honest dreaming with fiery eyes
Gazing upon him, the amethyst of skies
The world emptied of beauty but for he
The one I so love, shall never love me



The Accolade by Frederick Leighton

I thought him the kindest, most handsome of all
So charming and witty, in his web did I fall
I have run through blazing villages to escape his face
I have stumbled about in hills of vines but he did not erase
Passing through all the land in an ivory chariot on wings
Never to find any such as he, the feeling that he brings

At sunset he entered my world
I was never again the same
Sunrise to twilight
My heart beats for him
A horse galloping wildly over a drawbridge
Flying over the edge into a boundless deep pit
He is the flame behind the diamond light in my eyes
When he is unknown, I can no longer see

I will trade my gems, my gowns, and my gold
If for only one moment his hand could I hold

If only one second in my heart he could stare
For what he would see, he could never prepare

He's the King, and a pauper, the bravest, strong knight
A servant, a peasant, the brightest star's light

And if he could see it, what should it change?
Without the bow, the keen arrow lost range

Strawberry lips sealed in a line
All of his glory emerges with mine
In downcast eyes silence sleeps
Thirst to know what it was that I couldn't be
When is that day that I shall be free?

I hold this sword so tightly
So close to his dear head
If he looked upon my face
He'd known that now I'm dead

Dead without his eyes
Dead without his voice
The songs of the stars sing no more
He left them with no choice

Overdue Visit

Danielle Brackenrich

Several times, it would have to be done,
Filling my car up with gas.
We had 800 miles to roam
And for what?
Now I'm not so sure.
We were off to see her, my brother and I.
It had been 13 years or so.
With her soft curly hair and spunky attitude,
At least that's how I remembered.
My brother didn't, and that was probably for the best.
We arrived.
My brother with ignorant anticipation
And me with crestfallen hope,
As her decrepit hand opened the door.
Her face was ashen like a ghost.
Her lips, smeared
With the color of a child's crayon,
Bent up into a crooked smile
As her frail arms reached for my neck.
She smelled like decaying flowers
And I cannot forget
Counters filled with bottles of half-taken medication
And old age lying about the room.
And after listening to the same story
For the sixth time
I knew

Penelope and the Suitors
By John Waterhouse, 1912



Penelope's Odyssey

Laura Large

softly creaking,
as the constant sound of a
wooden loom,
resonates my writing chair,
I sit weaving my
words to lines
crafting steadily
the tapestries of waiting.
he Will come
he Will come
with each sigh and rest
of my looming pen
my coldly warm soul replies.
Penelope
Penelope
virtuous wife,
entwine my soul with
threads of steely wool.
we are the wives
of the soldiers' alive but lost.
he Will come
he Will come

As the Freshness Flows*

Jennifer Walker

She is twenty-six
and her friends are pregnant.
"There's something in the water," she giggles,
and I see springs of water sprouting
from mountain sides when we visit our spring gardens.

New life all over!
Picking the weeds from the garden, gathering
them up, we drop green life into the bag.
"How beautiful!" my sister declares.

I think of water,
how it flows with unceasing fervor,
fresh, continuing like a perennial tulip.

My sister is almost bursting now.
Her belly sticks out beyond her toes.
Embraced by the perfume flowers,
she flows through the garden, trickles
the beginning of her day, excitable,
bent in her extra weight
that fuses baby and mother.

In morning the dew settles on the garden,
water flowing up and down the rows,
sprouting new life.
What crispness permeates the air
as the plants begin to thrive and grow.
One kick out, an anxious spin.

It's hard to hold the weight
growing heavier each day.
The water is falling.
The baby is ready.



*Modeled after "As the Cold Deepens" by Elizabeth W. Holden

The Island

Nick Harne

Deep water passes all around, but I'm still standing on the island where no one leaves. It's not really crowded—just a few people call this their home. Home...I guess this is home now. I can't really remember the last place I called home. It must have been that shack, the one by the Susquehanna River in Maryland. Yes, it was. Poor times, but good times. Four people are here on the island including me: a middle-aged woman, a teenage boy, an old man, and me (whoever I am). These are the only people I have seen for two long years.

The woman is tall and has dirty blond hair with just a wisp of gray. She used to live in the place that everyone leaves. She was a stockbroker and had married a complete loser. She lived in a town that everyone leaves, so, in the course of time, her husband and she left too. They took a cruise to the islands where everyone has been, and she went off by herself after seeing her husband flirt with some natives. The woman got lost and, through the course of events, had made it to this very island. She always swims in the surf along the east side. She says that she used to swim in college before marrying Richard, the loser. After swimming for a couple of hours each day, she naps under the palms.

There is also a teenage boy. He lives over there among the palm trees and the coconuts. No one knows his name. He keeps mainly to himself, but I catch him talking to the fish in the nearby lagoon sometimes. He must be between 15 and 17, but he acts as if he is 50 and bitter toward the world. I don't blame him. He's still young, and there's so much of the world to see at that age. Tomorrow, I'll bring him some salt I gathered from the sea. Maybe that'll break the ice.

The old man's name is Nelson. He knows everything about the island. He used to be an admiral, or so he says. He's been here longer than the rest of us put together. Nelson says there were more people on the island, natives, and other stranded sailors. However, everyone either died sitting on the beach or died trying to leave. The admiral is opting for the former way to go. He'd rather watch the world go by and be apart from it. I usually spend my mornings with him conversing over the possible shark sightings and incredible, if not impossible, ways of escaping this island. He doesn't show much interest in escaping. He is quite content to sit and stare across the surf to the swift ocean currents beyond.

As for me, I've been here over two years. I used to be an airline pilot, traveling the world, but never really seeing it. I saw lots of place, sure, mostly the airports. I did get to stay a week in Bombay because I flew in just as a monsoon was hitting. That storm wrecked the airport, and I stayed in a tourist hotel similar to any one found in New York or Paris. However, the predominant skin color was somewhat darker than I'm accustomed to, and the language did not bear any resemblance to Latin. I tried living as a native for an hour. I failed miserably, not for lack of language coherency, but for lack of melanin. After five days on the ground, I started feeling homesick for my cockpit. I hated the feeling of not moving. Now, I guess, I've grown used to the feeling of moving slow. On occasion, I stay in the same square mile everyday for a week, not because I try to, but because I don't want to see another part of the island.

I grew up in Maryland along some river and moved to Kansas when I was ten. I think that move made me want to travel and keep moving. Yet, here I am, on the island where time moves slowest in all of God's creation. I have sat on the south beach and, without moving, seen the sun rise and set in the same day. I didn't move except to dig a hole and find some water. I can't see myself leaving this "paradise." So many people dream of their own deserted island. I guess, in some roundabout way, I'm living their dreams for them. The peace and quiet, which sometimes drives me nuts, the serenity of the wildlife, we have all kinds here, and the ocean, that blessed oasis, keeps me from killing myself.

I've been all over this island now. I know every square inch of it. I know there are thirty-eight trees in the south grove. There used to be forty-five, but one of my signal fires got out of hand and burned seven. I know the best place to go during a storm is the storage cave on the hill, and I know the quickest ways to get there from any part of the island in case a storm arises quickly. The north end of the island is where the reef is. Good fishing, but I've seen too many sharks to venture out. Apparently, the sharks like fishing there too. The walk from the north end to the south end of the island takes about an hour follow-

ing either beach, though it takes only fifteen minutes to walk the width at the narrowest part. The east side has good surf to swim in, and the west side has great sunsets. We have our camp, if you can call it that, on the west side where the wind doesn't hit so hard. Sometimes I sleep on the east side just so I can feel the spray from the wind and wake up with the sun in my face. But I haven't done that in awhile now. I guess I should.

I've seen many forms of government in the places I've been: social democracy, totalitarian dictatorships, monarchy, and social communism. They're all the same: corrupt, incompetent, inefficient, deluded. Ours is an understood system rather than one in writing. I think it works only because of the small number of people. No one can slack off here. It's understood that we each have different weeks to do certain jobs, and the other jobs are meted out according to what one is good at. This system has had only one "problem" since I've been here. There was this guy named Jake and he would consistently scavenge for shellfish at low-tide. He would sacrifice all of his time to do this menial task. He wasn't good at it at all. The poor guy couldn't seem to focus on any other task, even when we confronted him about it. He'd start mumbling something about liking to eat clams when we did say something. As a result, some things didn't get done during his short stint here. Short...as opposed to long? What is length? Anyway, he was here for only six months. I don't know what exactly happened to him, but we found some of his clothes on the north reef. I'd say the sharks got him. At least we didn't have to bury him.

The woman is now going to get some firewood. It's her job this week. Or was it last week? Well, I won't argue with her if she wants to do it. I didn't ask her to. I'm starting a new project this week. I'm going to make a small boat out of some trees that were knocked over in the big storm last year. The wood is nice and dry, and there's a slash on one of the trees that has gum-like sap dripping from it. I'll use that to caulk the seams and make it water tight. I'll start that tomorrow. I'll probably use it for fishing. I'm not confident that I could build anything really seaworthy.

Nelson, if that's his name, took up residence near the woman about a month after she came here. He used to live in the cave and rarely came out to sit with the boy and me. I noticed that the Admiral has become more relaxed since he moved out of the cave. The woman and he now live close to the cave in case of storms. Nelson likes to take care of the woman. He tells stories of his family back in the annals of his memory. Sometimes he gets the stories mixed up, but I have stopped trying to correct him. He seems content to tell the stories as he remembers them at the moment instead of striving for consistency.

The woman is back now. She is stoking the fire and sits beside me. I pretend to be reading one of the books that washed up on shore the other day, a cheap paperback novel. Still, it's better than listening to her go on about her cad of a husband. I think that in another time or place we wouldn't be friends at all. We are so different from each other. She left her home only when she had to, and I left mine as soon as I could. She loved her world so much that it hurt her to leave it. She had to. I'm glad I'm not like her. She always is muttering different nursery rhymes to herself. I sometimes try to listen to her, but she gets carried away and either starts singing in some fabricated language of hers or she starts another rhyme. The sun must be getting to her. Someday she will go for a swim and not return. When she is comprehensible, she talks of her childhood, of the long nights under the stars dreaming of the future in her town.

The boy is sitting with us. He usually sits by himself away from the nightly fire. But he does contribute his share to the daily supply of food, meaning fish and some berries. "Where are you from?" I ask quietly, almost a whisper as not to scare him. He turns and looks at me like I'm an idiot but answers my question. "A small town in California," he says. Well, that explains the distance with which he relates to all of us. He goes on, "It's outside of Sacramento, a really nice place, almost perfect." "That sounds nice," I respond. "You miss it?" "Not really, I rarely think about it," He says, "I really wanted to see the world, really to just get out of that small town. Looking back, I wish I could have stayed though." Just at that time lightning streaks across the eastern night sky. It branches out from right to left. The lightning resembles a tree stump. The top is short, but it looks as if it has a host of roots. The boy nearly jumps out of his skin and stammers an excuse to go to back to his lean-to. I don't argue. I have gotten a lot more out of him than I had expected, so I don't push it. I have to go to bed anyway. Early day fishing tomorrow. The other two turned in a few minutes before the lightning flashed. But I'll sit here by myself for a little while anyway, watching the storm roll in.

The world spins around once more, wars continue to rage, nations plot in vain, and here I am, resting on the beach and watching the storm and tide withdraw. I will not continue living or breathing. I will just exist and quietly converse with myself. I solve the problems of the world on that beach, but no one will ever know.

Apocalypse Party

Ashley Shay

We whisper war over teacup brim
and raise our pinkies high.
Our solace in the warmth of drink
as the heat of blood draws nigh.

With anxious murmurings we await
the arrival of guests divine.
To each we'll greet with thanks
for all their gifts supine.

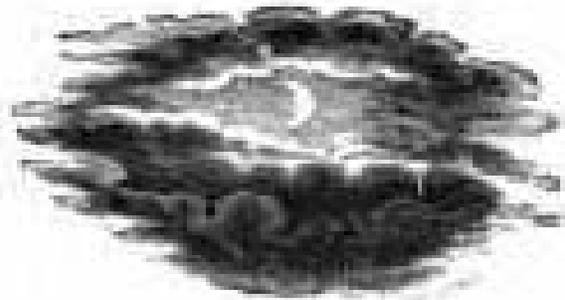
First to arrive, enters the victor
adorned in robes of white.
Graced with the gift of conquest
the guests he did oft smite.

The second we greet with cheer
and praise his robe of red.
For though we slay ourselves
we do so love bloodshed.

The third is always a charm
when luck is dressed in black.
He finished all the snacks
and to the finest wine gave slack.

The fourth had traits of three
though his garb was rather pale.
Bundles of conquest, blood, and famine
made it easier to laugh than wail.

The fifth guest hasn't shown
been tied up since noon.
But now we'll shake the earth
dancing beneath a bleeding moon.



My Regret Rae Ann Franks

I am the one God assigned you to nurture
You starved that I might eat
Then stood patient
As I ignorantly inflicted you with agony
I am your daughter

I am the one you passed yourself into
You watch from a distance with strangled strength
As I look in the mirror
And curse your freckles, arched foot, thin hair
I am your daughter

I am the life that thrashed out, drowning your own
You diligently wait, desperate for love
But my cold, hateful eyes show you no hope
And you beg God to forgive me
I am your daughter

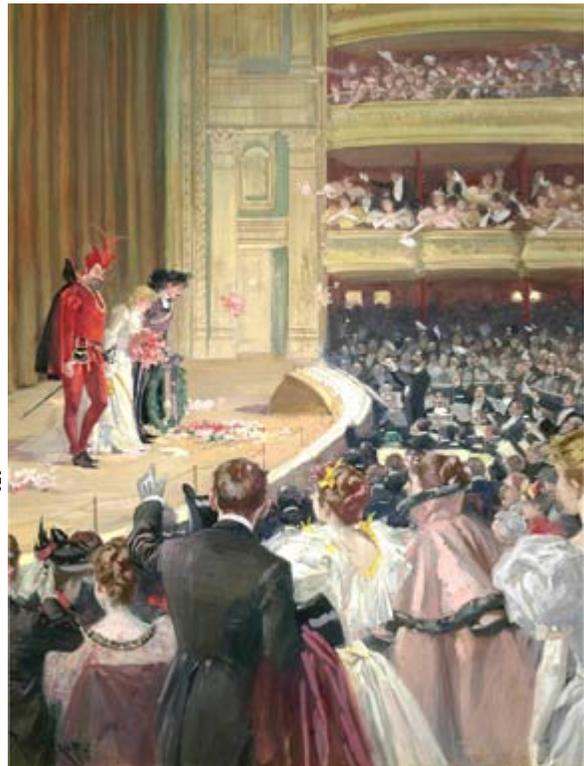
I am the monster inside your closet, stealing your rest on
long, anxious nights
Until a slow awakening unleashed *my* terror
Your beauty and wisdom seeped into my conscience
Panicked with regret when I see your sacrifices
I am your daughter

I am the one who admires you most
I am the wounds on your soul

Humanity converses over lunch

Brittiany Godby

humanity converses over lunch
and assumes an odyssey
a venerable journey past this world
on to utopian prisons
fictional happenings,
places filled with distant tragedies
like unrelenting desires
that conflict with duty
and marriage, which is not love—
all animated movement of ideation
and imagination perplexing create
easy decisions and logical assumptions
about an unreal, impersonal fate
humanity concentrates
on resolving issues
that revolve around intangible scepters
of illogical, impossible gods
but humanity should realize
the deep plunge of love's dagger
into its very soul
and its tragic issues
and that dinner is being served



The Metropolitan Opera

Amanda Carson

No longer quaint but still queenly
Day after day from September through April,
The Met *dominates* New York's Lincoln Center.

Today,
decades of memories flow from the *color and sound that surrounds us*.
Anticipation looms over the audience as the lights fall...
Stagehands crowd everywhere.
I am overwhelmed as I stand in the *drab corridor*,
Quite different from the gilt-and-crystal auditorium waiting on the other side of the door.
Ghosts of famous artists like Lehmann, Toscanini, Domingo, and Pavarotti *generate excitement* throughout the
bystanders such as I.

The time comes, the music plays.
It is over.
The rapt audience has happily left part of themselves in another time.
Amid the tears, confetti of torn programs, and flowers
guests of the Met leave content and in a state of bliss.
And I am here.

Hanna

David Detwiler

It was wild, in a Hemingway, or Indiana Jones kind of way. I got stitches. Twice. I lost at least one tooth and not on God's good timing, if you know what I mean, but God was watching. I know that. He was breathing down my neck all summer long. Heaven itself bore witness to that summer in its passing and when I get up there, no doubt, there will be a record, written in dust and scratched with a sharp stick in Hanna's wild scrawl. They'll pull me aside and say, "Cody, son, you got some things to answer for," and I wonder what the retelling will be like. What images will I have to see again?



The cold water worked its way up our legs and felt so good. The creek made its delicate noises among our not so delicate yelps and gasps. The rocky bottom stabbed and poked and slipped and pretty much kept us on our toes. Gaps in the trees above left clear splashes about our ankles down through the icy, running glass. Even though the water came up only to our shins, we were soaked from head to toe. We shed our shirts and shoes, except for Hanna who went right in, sneakers and all. Those muddy black chucks would squirt and squelch for hours afterwards, probably all the way home. We had begun our march about a football field up stream and were working our way down toward the bridge. Somewhere in that creek was a mud guppy of gargantuan proportions, according to Jack, and we aimed to catch him. Of course we had nothing to put it in once we caught it, but it was the hunting that we really loved. Trouble was, as we moved, the mud churned up and things swam away, a careless step could dislodge our prey and we would never know. It had to be a slow and precarious process. So there we were, cast in gold and green, standing very still, or as still as possible. Watching. Shivering a bit.

"Wait." Hanna slowly squatted down with one hand ready. Everybody froze.

"Don't, Hanna. Just tell me where it is." Jack took a careful step toward her.

"Stop it, Jack. Stop moving!" Splash! She slowly stood, her fist clenched gently as the droplets hurried down her elbow. Every eye was now on Hanna's right hand.

"Lemme see it."

"You didn't get it, did you?"

"I got it." She slowly opened her hand and a bright blue flash sat in the palm of her hand.

Jarrett leaned in closer. "Holy crap, dude, it's a lizard! I mean, like, it's got scales!"

Hanna sat down on the edge of the pool and pulled a stray bit of wet black hair out of her face. "Yeah, it does," she said. The little black gecko had a fat blue stripe down its back. We all gathered in and studied the fine black body with its tiny scales. The little head moved back and forth slowly. Its neck puffed in and out with its rapid breathing. Somehow I doubt this shining little creature woke up that morning seeking an audience with the gods, but at that moment he found himself small and finite in a quickly receding puddle in Hanna's cupped hands, with the thunder of our small breathing on his skin.

Jarrett reached out a hand but stopped short, afraid it might start at his touch. "Look at his claws. Dude, that is so cool." The gecko moved a nervous claw, one small step toward Hanna's wrist. She held it out and it took another measured, respectful step, feeling the heavy pulse beneath its feet. These gods were mortal.

"Cody, Cody, take it." She held her arm up, and I slid the little creature into my own hand.

I had nothing to put it in, so I reached down to the rock and it crawled slowly down amongst our feet and surveyed the grey expanse.

"It's no mud guppy. The mud guppy is huge." Nobody answered Jack. "Hold on, let me get a rock."

Hanna understood Jack a second ahead of the rest of us. "Stop it, Jack." She stood up and carefully straddled the gecko between her feet. Jack looked at me.

"Come on, Jack, just let it go."

Jarrett realized Jack's intentions a bit late. "Ew, that would be so gross."

Jack worked his way back into the water. "Whatever. I'm gonna get that mud guppy. It's huge." Jarrett and I followed him, turning back to the hunt. Hanna sat down on the rock poking at her sneakers with a muddy finger and watching the cool rivulets of water running around the gecko's little feet. I turned as we were approaching a bend and looked back. I was about to yell to her, but what the heck. She was content to play with her lizard, and Jack couldn't bother her if she wasn't here, and if Jack didn't mess with her, then I wouldn't look over and see those dark brown eyes hurting at me. So I left her there. We went on. She caught up later and asked to see the mud guppy.

"You think I got him in my pocket?" Jack said.

"Oh, you didn't catch him?" Hanna asked.



Boy, it was hot that summer, the kind of hot that keeps grownups inside and makes the pavement too hot to stand on. The sun beat Georgia into a sweaty submission and baked the forgiveness right out of the hard bare dirt. From the park to the creek was a vast stretch of hot living wildness. The woods and the creek were our last landmarks. It was the very rim of paradise, as if God had pulled the earth brand new out of the forge and we were standing on the sharp glowing edge of Eden, wading in the frigid pools and drying our bodies on the burning stone. We were the Titans of this New Earth. We named the groves and tested our might amidst the oak and willow pillars of creation.

Those blazing hours found us wrestling in the shallows, exploring the woods, doing pretty much whatever it took to release the troublesome energies that summer inflicts on the bodies of fourth grade boys, and Hanna.

Somehow there is an unspoken rule that if the AC goes out in your house on a really hot night and your parents carry you next door and the folks next door tuck you in on their living room couch for the night and their kid wakes up to find you in your PJs watching cartoons on his TV in the morning, he owes you something. So what was it I owed Hanna for the last year? I'm sure I couldn't tell you, but forever after that, there she was in our woods, in our creek, in my backyard. Sure, Jack and Jarrett complained at first, but why did they complain to me about it? Because she was mine, as sure as if I'd brought home a stray dog. You know how stray dogs attach themselves to the first person that will notice them and then you can't get rid of them? Somehow I felt as if God would strike me dead and the Devil take my soul if I dared try to kick that stray dog to the curb. She had a stray dog's begging brown eyes too. It wasn't so bad, I guess. Nobody thought that I liked her. I didn't. None of us did, and I guess all of us knew it, maybe even Hanna, but when somebody had a problem with Hanna, all eyes turned to me, including hers.



I think my parents wanted to have a girl. Not a girl instead of me. They just wanted a girl. Never mind, I think what my parents wanted was Hanna. Not that I was jealous or anything. It was a relief sometimes to get their attention off me. What this means is that Hanna was sitting next to me on the back porch eating a hamburger. I guess that was a pretty regular thing, the two of us, out back, trying to finish hamburgers bigger than my head, while our parents played poker inside. If the evening began to cool, we were sitting near the warmth of the grill so we didn't notice. That was sort of what started summer for me, the grill rolling out of the shed and reappearing on my back porch, a sooted metal prophet of the sun. Its burning presence melted spring into the hot, crazy madness of summer. Far as I was concerned, summer in Georgia started in a kerosene tank on my back porch and spread from there, outward and upward. The sun had not yet gone down entirely but already it was showing some of that laziness that hits right around the middle of summer. The air was taking on the approximate shades of a barrel of ripe peaches, sweet and heavy.

"Whizz, thock," cut through the air. Hanna bent to find another pebble.

"Can you knock it off?" I taunted, "You keep hitting it, but it ain't going nowhere." Hanna cradled her chosen missile in the pocket of the slingshot and stood in flawless form at the edge of the porch.

"I got it," She said. "Whizz, thock." The battered Dr. Pepper can stood defiant on its nail with an epic of scars and craters in its surface. I stood up and brushed the grime of last winter's woodpile from my back.

"Lemme try again." I held out my hand. Hanna passed me the slingshot and chose a large rotted log from the pile to rest her legs.

"You keep pulling them out of the stack, and my dad's gonna get mad."

"He never gets mad at me for anything."

"That's because you're a girl. Geez, Hanna, you don't know anything." She stuck her tongue out and threw a piece of bark at me. I turned with the slingshot pulled back and acted like I was gonna snap that rock clean through her brain, but she didn't even flinch.

"You can't shoot me, Cody. I'm a girl."

Of all the awkward peculiarities of the human race, this one floored me. I knew she was right, but I couldn't for the life of me tell you why. I looked at the hunk of bark and simply turned back to the Dr. Pepper can. Hanna could do no wrong, and yet everything Hanna did was wrong. I held my breath. Across the backyard I aimed for the first "e" in Dr. Pepper. "Whizz, thock." It rocked back and forth and hung precariously on the head of the nail. In one sense Hanna was harmless. She wasn't too hard to ignore. We pretty much did whatever we wanted to do without asking her, and she just tagged along. She had no say in anything that mattered to us really, but at the same time she was right about a few amazing facts that made everything just plain strange. For instance, she was right about the fact that my dad would probably never get mad at her for anything. She was absolutely right about the fact that I could just as soon walk on water as let go of that slingshot in her direction. If she said that everywhere I'd go, she would follow and there wasn't a thing I could do about it, she would be right. If she said that I had to stand between her and Jack or take geckos from her if they made her nervous, she would be right too. Why?

"Watch," I said, "Whizz, thwack." The can did a dark red pirouette and landed in the dirt with a clatter. That made sense at least.



Part of the great tradition of going to the barbeque with Jarrett's dad was the four of us riding in the back of that old gray and tan truck. The ride back was the best. Better than the actual barbeque. We always rode back in the dark, and it was always clear, infinitely clear. With the sweet taste still in your mouth and the V-8 chugging away in your ears, you could lay in the bottom of the truck bed and lurch and sway with the uneven back roads under you. Looking upward there was only the vast universe hung with lights which, sporadically, Jack's outstretched hand would black out. His cap gun made empty clicking noises as he shot down stars. We were drunk with it all, swept up in our chariot of fire through a wide-open ocean of space. I rolled onto my side and looked across the gently rocking truck bed. Hanna, curled up in one corner, had the dog's head in her lap. Having worn himself out in the heat of the day, Abomination was content to simply flop his tail about and bask in the loving attention.

Jarrett sat across from me with his legs stretched out. "Darn it, Hanna. You're getting me all wet." He moved to avoid the constant trickle of water coming from Hanna's sneakers. Her shoes never made it twenty-four hours without getting waterlogged.

"You pushed me in the creek, so it serves you right."

"Well, go drip on Jack. Besides, you're gonna get Abomination wet, and then he's gonna want to sleep on my feet tonight and then they'll smell like wet Hanna." Jarrett had meant to say "wet dog" but somehow this absurdity was too golden to correct.

"Are you kidding?" Hanna laughed too. She buried her head in Abomination's scraggly fur and inhaled deeply. "He smells so much better than your feet." Abomination lifted his head and eyed Hanna's dripping black hair with a sad resigned look.

"Get her. Bite her head off!" Jack coaxed.

Hanna looked up and made a face at him. "Your momma's gonna whup you for getting all muddy and wet and making a mess."

"No, she won't. She doesn't care. Does your mom ever care?"

"No, but I don't fall in the creek and get soaked with my shoes on. Besides, boys are supposed to be muddy. You're supposed to play with Barbie dolls."

"Jarrett pushed me!"

"Well nobody wants their carpet smelling like wet Hanna anyways."

I turned to sit up and rolled right into Hanna's growing puddle. "Aww...dang it!"

She pointed at Jarrett, "Don't look at me."

It was impressive how much water one pair of clothes could hold. The slow-running River Hanna trickled down between our feet, down the grooves in the truck bed and under the tailgate.

"Here we go. Here we go!" Jarrett jumped up and took a position hugging the back of the cab. We all scrambled to our feet and found a place to grip the roof. The first bounce was a great one. The truck bed bucked up under us and it felt like the surfing you see on TV must feel like. The old farm trail scudded off into the night toward a tree line we knew was out there, up ahead. The crumbly strip of black pavement faded into the dusk silhouette, and all we heard was chug, chug, chug and the soft rushing of wet grass under the tires. We all clung the sides of the roof and to each other. My parents would probably die, or at least kill us if they only knew what we were doing. The ocean of hard packed hills rolled beneath us. Exhilaration is too cheap a word for the short cut through Rutter's woods. The tree line loomed close and the headlights poured into the opening of the trail.

"Yeeeha!" Jack hollered. Our four heads ducked as we barreled into the tree line and lost the sky. We slowed down but not very much. Trees rushed by, and we splashed through the creek, uphill, downhill, the old truck echoing off the woods and coming back to us sounding like a mighty roar. With all our yelling and the engine roaring and Abomination barking and carrying on, there wasn't a peaceful creature sleeping for at least a good solid mile. It wasn't till we got back out on a civilized road that we loosed our white-knuckle grip on the roof of the truck. Hanna had a grip on my shoulder so I shrugged it off, leaving her wet handprint.

"Geez Hanna, you're still wet."

"My hair is mostly dry." For some odd reason Hanna looked normal with damp, messy hair the way other girls do with pigtails. We pulled up to my front yard, and Hanna and I jumped out. Hanna slipped and got herself well plastered in mud, again. I had seen her once with nice, neat pigtails. It looked ridiculous, and I had told her so. I remember. Instead of sticking her tongue out she smiled at me. She would have pigtails again the first day of school. She hated that.

"You better take your shoes off now," I said as I headed for my front door. "Hate to have your carpet smelling like wet Hanna."



Summer was dying. Tomorrow morning those awful buses would come for us. Nothing could stop it. Georgia was sliding out from under the sun, and when the last rim of orange dropped out of view, we would be finished for good, slipping into the eternity of academia. We had ignored it passionately for the last week. While Jarrett and Hanna had actually gone with their parents school shopping, Jack and I had managed to avoid even that. But now it was the last day. D-day plus 0500 precious hours, and still in the face of earth's inexorable rotation, we fought.

It was so perfect. Hanna had seen it first weeks ago. Deep into the woods, where it was hard to get unless you really wanted to, was an old barn, tall and aching with age. The woods clung to its dry timbers with thorn and vine and struggled to pull it down. The roof was shot through with gaps where the sunlight could capture the dust in the air. It looked down right apocalyptic. It was beautiful. It was a coliseum worthy of our last day of freedom. Four desperate gladiators, cap guns blazing, defended their last bastion and their final hours from buses, homework, drudgery, from tomorrow. To the loft I ascended with lightning in my left hand and brimstone in my right, daisy revolvers cracking and smoking with a fury. We had discovered that if you fold a roll of caps over and double them up the resulting explosions are mighty powerful. "Crack, crack" reverberated off the aged timbers.

Jack and Jarrett were down below, trying to accomplish some kind of catapulting device from a few rotted 2x4s and several dirt clods. Hanna pushed with her elbow, and I moved over to make space in the loft window. It was just a little bit scary because the window was so high up; it opened in the bottom of the surrounding treetops. Between the gaps in our makeshift barricade, we poked our barrels and poured fire into the advancing woods.

"Ready," Jarrett's voice rose up between the planks. We paused for a moment with our heads down, looking back past our feet to see how our artillery was coming along.

"Fire in the hole!" He yelled. A loud wooden clunk and then a perfect cantaloupe-sized chunk of planet earth sailed up and hit the wall just above the loft window to explode in an awesome cloud of dust and twigs. Hanna yelped, and when the skittering dirt settled, we peeked from under our hands and surveyed each other.

"Holy cow!" Jack was ecstatic. Hanna sat up and looked for a clean piece of her body to wipe the grit off her face. We crawled to the edge and looked down on the stall far below.

"That was awesome," Hanna whispered

"Let's do it again. Reload it." Jack grabbed a dry root poking out one end of another dirt clod and tried to hoist it onto his device of madness. Jarrett grabbed another protruding root and centered the load. What Hanna and I saw from above was a sort of seesaw built over a pile of concrete blocks.

"Wait." Hanna didn't want to be up in the loft for a second dirt shower. I started to crawl toward the wall where we could climb down. I looked back in time to see Hanna lose her balance.

She can't fall. My heart felt as if it was full of cold cement. She has school tomorrow. She's in my class. She can't fall. She needs to be there in the morning when I get to the bus stop. She needs to be watching cartoons with me last summer. She has to be there to make things weird for me, as she did all summer, and all the summer before that. Oh God, She can't fall. She has to confuse me and drive me crazy. Sweet Jesus, you can't let her fall. She's a girl.

Hanna didn't make a sound. Her little 60-pound body hit the ground with a soft thud and barely a puff of dust. Other girls looked normal in pigtails. Hanna looked normal when she was dirty. Like just then. The next day there were desks with our names on them. Hanna had a desk with her name on it. I had to explain to the teacher why there wouldn't be a Hanna. I don't remember what I said. There were other girls with pretty brown eyes; I hated them. Stupid girls.



First Flight

Krista Jardine

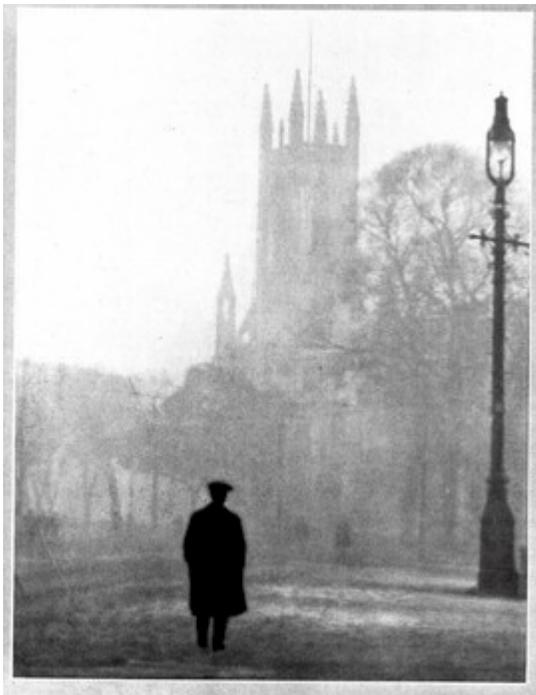
Blurred ground blows by
Tears freely falling
The drum of hoof beats echo in my ears
Grass and field fly by—like thoughts and fears released
Coarse hair gripped like death
Mind clear
Freedom is reached

Innocence

Sabrina Earley

Mom stood behind the stove
and I stood behind her
watching her long, familiar hair

dancing,
swaying about her waist
While she moved gracefully
here and there, preparing our dinner
I squirmed as I watched
the steam rising and fogging up the mi-
crowave door
I draped my arms over the
ancient
wooden chair
the one my brother always sat in
I step onto the rung of the chair, trying to see
what I can see from "way up there"
It creaked in its struggle
at being used
as a playground
"Mom?"
"Hmm?" so patient



Our lives give the dead living doubts

Jonathan Lenker

Our lives give the dead living doubts
If whether that which they had known
Could ever be called life.
We have redefined it, made it our own.
In choosing each day to live
In such a way to cast and hone
Uncertainty on those who claim they are living.

And when we die we will know death for all it is.
Because, we have known life in such a way.

SPRING OUT LOUD

Danielle Viera

The morning sun smiles down,
offers me a look around,
Just to see what marvel there is,
awaiting to be found.
While delicate daisies and daffodils
still slumber in their bed,
The flowers lean toward the sun,
foreshadow what is ahead.

Yesterday, tiny shoots
of green were found.
Today, the crocus, I proclaim, is the surest sign
of spring out loud.



WINTER

Heather Shelton

Gold flickered within the
fresh layer of snow
as I pressed my temple
against the door frame.
The cold winter winds
caressed my skin, and
I felt the hairs on my
arms rise and take a bow.
I closed my eyes for a moment
and let my mind paint
pictures freely,
and I thought about last
winter— sledding
down a hill, laughter echoing
through the crisp air, my hair carelessly
wrapped inside my ski cap—
and caked blood matted upon my
hands—
I opened my eyes and
crossed my arms, gently
touching the plastic
of my left arm.

LEAVES FALLING IN A SUMMER BREEZE

Jessica Cornish

leaves falling in a summer breeze
a sky of pearlescent wistfulness
pushing against the flat protruding hills.
waves of the brown river pounding
white and rippled like frosting on my cake
one hundred days of brilliance
one hundred days of never drawing breath
i was born to stand here, silhouetted
a speck of black enveloped in roses.
the early autumn threatens in the stillness
of oppressive summer heat waves
my breath is heavy, lacking crystal brightness
only dreaming of awaking under a swath of blue.

SACRED PRAYER

Annamarie McCoy

O, Comforter, how I need your sheltering wings.
As tears wet my cheek, I want to be set before you like a flint.
I only want to abide in the shadow of your wings. I do not want to feel defeat.
Guide me when I cannot find my way. Lead me into the way everlasting.

O, Cleft of the Rock, I shall not be moved.
Let your presence fall all around me.
Let me hide myself only in you; make me a true worshiper, a true seeker of your Temple.
Help me never to stray or flee.

O, Lover of my soul, quiet me with your overwhelming love.
I adore the place where your glory dwells.
Let your spirit be poured out on me.
My heart leaps for joy like the ringing of a bell.

O, Lily of the Valley, I am made complete in you forever.
Let me not wander into idle man's teaching.
I am whole and full in your eyes.
You are fair, and lovely is my gaze before your throne.

O, Jehovah Shalom, My God of peace,
Reign down your cleansing on my restless soul.
Whisper peace into my veins so it flows through all of me.
Be my strength when I have none.

O, Lord of my heart, set before me your vision.
Let it be all of you, not me, my Savior.
Let me be satisfied in all your ways.
Take all of me. Take my heart, it belongs to you.

O, Lord my banner, I lift high my praise up to the heavens.
Place your Holy Spirit on me as the enemy tries to battle for my mind, body, and soul.
I will draw nigh to you, marvelous are all of your ways.
Your banner is love. Continually set my thought before that very thing, your love.

O, Abba Father, I just yearn to sit at your feet.
Your Word settles in my heart day after day.
I love spending quality time with you in prayer.
I am Daddy's little girl.

O, My Redeemer-Kinsman, my sin is ever before you.
Make me more like Ruth who had faith.
Cleans me with hyssop; refine me as pure gold for noble purposes.
I desire to be blameless in your sight, O God of Jacob.

O, God of the Nations, do not consume the fire that burns within me.
As I lift my eyes to the fields, where are the ones who will go?
I am anxious; send me to the nations.
Empty your power; drive down more fire on my soul!

LET THIS BE MY PRAYER



Light of the World by William Hunt, 1851-53

I AM

Jennifer Shumaker

I was...

Sailing into oblivion
Sinking like an abandoned vessel
Hiding like a clown fish in his anemone
Waves of fear crashing over and over
With a flash of my façade
Of brilliant exterior colors
I swam—only to be swept up into
The current
Of something skimming close to life.

I was...

A sunken ship buried at the bottom
Meant for the beauty of the open sea
Emptied of my coveted treasure
Intended to conquer a valiant voyage
But I settled into the depths of
A lie.

I am...

Lifted from the rubble of
A bubble buried low.

I am...

A shining ship with wind-filled sails
Waiting just to show
You I won't sink.
I will not fail You.
I am steady.
I am loyal.
I am faithful.

I AM

Only because You steer me.

SLICE OF ROCK

Kenzie Avol

And I am but a slice of rock
Cut from a larger stone
Or, more precisely
A chunk,
Like flesh
As though Portia hadn't been there
To save Antonio's breast,
And I am but a pound
Removed from near the heart
Whose pulse continues beating
Congruent with His.
Departed, I'm now dirty,
Jagged, and on edge,
Ingrained with red clay,
Chaffed with charcoal
And worn thinner by erosion
As I step
Nearer to the Rock from
Where I came.
Come someday, I'll fade away
To a single grain,
And find myself
One and the same
With the boulder who I am.

On Getting a Girlfriend

Andrew Milacci

Where do women get off treating men the way they do? Is it because of the perceived years of domestic abuse that we all see on *Cops* that women have gained the right to flirt and curtsy and bat their eyelashes so tauntingly? Many people today say that men are strong and silent, or insensitive, or even uncaring. I myself have an unmarred record of manliness, well attested by my family who have seen me fix roofs, clean toilets, and hammer nails into many a two-by-four; but I am not the typical man. Apparently, I am different. Having established my grounds for masculinity, I would like to take this opportunity to show you the world of men and women through the eyes of a man who doesn't fit the typical male stereotype.

First, I would like to state that I am a very sensitive male, and I am fine with that. Many men reading this will groan for embarrassment when I reveal that I have cried during movies in the past and have felt sincere sadness for characters in more recent cinematic tear-jerkers: e.g. *A Walk to Remember*, *Cast Away*, and *Ladder 49*. I don't care. I am not writing to prove my manliness; if I were, I could talk about my days as a firefighter, or when I rode motorcycles, or I could talk about some "hot girl." Really, guys, do we have to live up to this idea that men are obsessed with women's looks? I for one am embarrassed when my friends talk about the "hot one over there," or the "one in the pink shirt," etc. I was raised to respect girls and hold them in high regard as delicate, caring, and wonderful creatures. However, I am not sure I believe that entirely. Though I do believe that men bring much of their problems upon themselves, instigating their own misadventures by opening their brutish mouths, there exists a male population that in my opinion is exempt from this category and should not have to take the blame for how women treat them. I am part of the latter.

Walking down the sidewalk or driving through a "slow" zone, I notice something around the typical college campus: couples. At one time, I was part of this privileged majority that could be seen talking to their "honey" in the grass or holding hands with their valentine; but now I belong to the minority that has begun to abandon hope of finding someone up to standards.

Standards, now that's an interesting word. Some people tell me that I am too picky and I shouldn't set my sights so high—I should find a nice girl who is mildly attractive and who contains a slight amount of intellectual prowess. Personally, I will remain solo if my only other option is to settle for anything less than an intelligent, witty, caring, sympathetic, and responsible mate. Now, some may have noticed that I didn't mention anything about appearances. This is due to the fact that I believe beauty is relative. Yes, relative. For me, attractiveness is important in a relationship. Honestly, I don't want to wake up next to a woman who doesn't take my breath away every time I see her, but I must admit, personality is vital to beauty. I have noticed that a friend of mine may be fairly pretty when I first meet her, and then, when I get to know her as a person, she becomes Miss Universe. Conversely, there have been females that I have known who are stunning upon first glance but turn into the wicked witch of the East's chin mole when I realize that their vocabulary includes only the words "like...uh...yeah, phone, me." But I digress.

Couples used to make me want to spew my frozen latte all over the linoleum floor patterns—whipped cream and all. Now, I am indifferent: actually I am happy for them. If they want to skip homework and watch a movie for a buck fifty a piece, then go for it. In my dating days, I was the king of Movies 10, the local dollar theater. "Hey, how was your day?"

"Good...." "Wanna see a movie...?" "Ok, the 9:35 showing of...?" I could tell you every movie and its length to the second. That's how much I went. The problem that occurred as a result was that my grades suffered. Honestly, I speak English and got a "D" in 102. That is pathetic. That's what girls do to you. And for the women, that's what guys do to you. I think that most of my animosity comes from a deep wonderment and jealousy. I wonder how "that guy" can get a girlfriend while I remain as single as a slice of Kraft cheese (perhaps it is because of corny jokes like that). The question of how I got from my state of perpetual movie-outings (otherwise known as dating) to the homework freak I am now is a feat that I am not entirely sure how I accomplished.

I remember growing up, coming home from school, and my parents asking me how my day was and sometimes I would be somewhat upset. Sniffing as my eyes watered, I responded, "Jimmy called me names in school," or "Brad said I was a goody two-shoes." Now, let's think, what is the natural response for a parent? "Oh son, they are just jealous of you. You are handsome and smart. They wish they could be you." Don't take me wrong here; I appreciate the affection my parents response (pardon the believed that everyone and winsome personal-gets mad at me, I think like ME?" This is am too nice.

I really do begirls by being their hard times. I have given them were" (yeah, right); BACK together with problem. I am not selfish enough! I should have moved in for the kill. Instead, I left myself teary-eyed and dateless again.

It's not that all I want is a girl to date or court—necessarily. I hate the term courting. To me it is just a way to segregate Christianity from the norm of dating—an attempt to Jesus-ize relationships. For me, relationships are not about the physical—that is what the secular world would have me believe—nor are relationships a means to have an accountability partner of the opposite sex. I believe that to be wrong. I really do enjoy the companionship. When I did date, before I became the boring student I am now, I enjoyed holding my girlfriend's hand, and giving her a peck on the forehead; but for me, the best part of having a relationship was being able to talk to someone who always wanted to listen to you and doing things with someone whose company I enjoyed. I called my gal and she wanted to talk—I "I.M.'ed" her and she would stop her research paper to tell me hey.

I have the same needs as any other guy, but no earthly comfort can be afforded that compares to the feeling I have in knowing that "someone" who cares about me, who likes me for me, and who wants to be with me is only a text message or phone call away. Sure, kissing is fun, but what good are red lips when I just want to know how her day was? In short, I am not looking into the whole "casual-dating" scene. I am looking for a fulfilling, God-honoring relationship. Is that too much to ask?

Apparently it is, for in the times I have experienced "crushes" or whatever you want to call them, they have resulted only in my crushed heart. Then, if I manage to "land" a steady



showed me, but I bought this cliché hook, line, and sinker. I was jealous of my dashing looks ity. Still today, when someone to myself, "How could they not where my ineptitude begins. I

lieve this. I have tried wooing friend and consoling them in them phone calls to "see how I have even helped them get their boyfriends. Yes. That is my

girlfriend, things inevitably go sour—resulting in a...break-up. Ok, ok. "Stop complaining!" one may say. Seriously though, popular culture portrays the male as being a strong, ape-like, gargantuan that is impervious to emotion or pain. Hollywood should be whipped for this. I am not a giant. I stand an unassuming five feet, ten inches—weighing 165 pounds: but only after eating the whole buffet at a local Cici's. Also, I am anything but immune to emotions. I am a friggin' fountain of emotion. I am not saying that God makes mistakes, but I wonder why I got the abundance of emotions and my brother got none. He is a "hoss." Weight lifter, good athlete, and scholarly too. He's a stud. I got "blessed" with scrawny arms, overactive tear ducts, and a voice that cracks for no reason (mind you, I went through puberty some EIGHT years ago).

I have to defend myself though. I think I am pretty good-looking. Again, my parents always say I am a looker, my friends tend to agree that I am a handsome beau, that I have very clean and white teeth, and that one time a random girl approached me at work to tell me I was hot. That was quite a confidence booster. But what evades me is the perspective of the women of my same age. Most of the time they say that I am nice or cute or something like that. What they mean to say is, "You

turtle I once had. He was so that I am most appealing to church and their five-year-

I live at home. I try get a tuition break and all dwelling as an economical way I can tell people where a George Castanza. Italian blood—so I will til I die.) I have to admit my family. Everyday, no I come through the door,



remind me of a little pet adorable." I have found the elderly women in my old granddaughters!

to be proud of this—I do So I claim this home-decision. That's the only I live without sounding like (Luckily, I was born with keep a full head of hair un-though, I love living with matter what time it is, when—even if they are all asleep

when I get home from work—my family is in the house. If I had a bad day, I can tell them. If I had a great day, they want to know about it. If I need space, it's given. I guess that is what I want and need in a relationship. I need a girl who will want to talk with me, listen to me, always be there for me. I want to be able to listen to her, talk to her—be there for her.

Like I said, I tried to do the whole "friends first" thing. What usually happens is that I have just set an amount of time to be friends. For example, Suzy is nice. I would like to date her. So, let's be friends for another month, then I'll ask her out. This happened a pair of times. The first time ending in a vague "I'm not sure that we should be together" and the second ending in a mutual "I'm not sure we should be together." Though those are the only two "official" relationships that I have had, that doesn't mean I haven't tried. The two times I tried to get to know a girl, the first stopped contact altogether and rather abruptly, and the other just didn't work out. I can only begin to tell what it felt like to admire someone so much from afar for so long and then have your heart dragged through a meat grinder. I felt deeply. I feel deeply. How could they not like ME? I like me. I'm cool.

Actually, my relational life is like a cosmic refinery. First, the prospects are entered into the vat. They are tested under high intensity circumstances—conversations, friends' input etc.—then some are removed that are deemed "not right." The prospects are fired under what some may consider a superficial flame—Is she nice? Is she pretty? But I have already

explained my reasons for insisting on someone who I am attracted to. Next, I try to establish contact—just let her know I am out there. I kind of get a reading on her, ask people who know her about what she's like, if she is as nice as she seems etc. This eliminates many. A trusted friend's opinion can save a lot of hurt. Finally, if any "prospects" remain, I put them to the "could I spend my life with this girl?" test. I know this is superfluous, but this is my process just so I can determine if I even want to ask her on a date. If one in fact remains, I build up the courage to really talk to her and ask her out. This process, in my opinion, allows me to choose from only the best possible. The problem is that I have a great deal of effort invested in the "relationship" by the time I even ask her out! There's the rub. What has happened in both failed cases is that I have gotten to know the girl—she is wonderful, amazing, fun—and it turns out she wants to remain friends. "I'm sorry if you got the wrong idea," she says to me. "I don't want to lead you on " she explains. And the process begins again. My average time for this whole process is about, oh...a year and a half, two years. What could I expect? I am a great friend apparently, but a boyfriend I am not. For the men out there who feel with me on this, can I get an AMEN?

I would have to say that my approach is just too logical. Maybe I should just throw a dart at pictures in the yearbook. Logic, that is what also hinders me from being more involved in relationships. I find women to be terribly illogical. Do not misunderstand—not all women are illogical. I have just had too many encounters with illogical women. But, logic also hinders me in a different way. I try to plan things too much. I plan phone calls, trying not to sound too excited—I map out my walking route so that I can "bump into" her—I try to do everything for maximum likeability with one exception: speech.

I will not lie to build myself up. I portray myself the way I am, honestly, tastefully, bluntly—corny defects and all. In writing, the author doesn't lie; he exaggerates, uses hyperbole, takes poetic license. But in life I cannot take back a lie that I said. I have seen too many sitcom relationships go wrong as the result of one teeny-weenie lie. I know better than to speak untruths with regard to myself—I am not good enough at lying to keep on top of all the potential lies I would like to tell.

Honestly, I have tried to live up to the manly standards that have been placed before me by the gurus in show business. I just fail miserably. I helped my dad re-roof the porch and build a deck all in one summer. I can diagnose simple car problems, I play video games, and I even enjoy sporadic exercise (or working out). But, I will never be able to align myself completely with the schema of men today. I have many emotions: happy, sad, angry, mopey, elated, joyful, understanding, misunderstood, and many more. Truth be told, I am not the only one in the world like this. In fact, many men out there feel the same way, but are not as expressive.

So, why is it that men get such a bad wrap? I think it is because we choose to allow our reputation to precede us. We tell dirty jokes, degrade women, sweat (a lot), and are generally not good listeners. Really, on the two poles of heterosexual manhood we have the super-manly construction worker—fingernails bruised, dark complexion, white stained tee-shirts, and low emotional output—and the one in touch with his lighter side—he expresses himself openly, listens well, and sheds occasional tears. Being that the former of the two male prototypes is so alienated from woman—the typical man—women don't expect much from him. The chauvinist pig who considers himself a "leg man," if he even listens to a woman's problems for a minute, is praised to no end. The woman feels as if she has caught a unicorn. But, if we men show that we are genuinely interested, caring, and sensitive individuals, we are used as the emotional junkyard for women and their woes. What I mean to say is that if you want to have a steady girlfriend, be a stereotypical man.

What I can be vs. What I am!

By Rebekah Gail Ghenco

**Bound to the things I should
Chained to the things I ought
Lost in a world of musts and dos
Lord, rescue me from despair!**

**Oh Father, so often I drown out Your voice with my pointless words.
Open my eyes that I may truly see, make my heart a greenhouse in which you
grow!**

**Help me to see beyond the misconceptions in my mind!
My failure to unwind, keeps this tossing ever turning.**

**“We are to be”.... I can no longer remember!
“True leaders are:”... more than just these words!**

**I strive to improve on my Christian walk
But I feel so swallowed up by these *tasks*
Always seeking to be the best,
Lord, help me to find true rest.**

**Lord, help me to continue to grow, but keep from striving for too much!
All the great & awesome words are but mere flattery in Truth’s perspective.
For tho these words challenge and stretch me,
I ask myself if I can improve my life in their mere utterance?**

**Overwhelmed at what I’m not.
I fear that which I have not got... I’ve already lost!**

Such foolishness abounds deep inside my heart.

**Swimming in these words that convict and flood my soul,
I pray that You would rid me of all!**

**Remove the shallow
Remove the waste
Remove the stubbornness**

**Betrayed by my own self, I know that I must choose...
Choose to be
Choose to see
Choose to act!**

**Lord I long to find intimacy in You and to share with You my dearest thoughts.
I’ve been drifting for oh so long...Anchor me in Your Love!
My Dearest Provider, guide me through these uncertain times.**

