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Cover Artwork: Harmony
-Amber Hyder

Instress has been published by the students of College Misericordia since December of 1966. The word *instress* was invented by the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. It signifies the moment that the reader achieves complete understanding of the written word. The author, through instress, conveys to and shares with the reader an emotionally moving experience.

The 2003 Awards for Outstanding Creations

Amber Hyder receives the Frida Kahlo Award for art.

Mike Duhoski receives the Sylvia Plath Award for poetry.

Amber Young receives the Flannery O'Connor Award for drama/short story.

Editors

Carla Cognini

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Megan Decowski

Marianna Fiorini

Rianna Johns

Crechelle Oliveira

Instress accepts short stories, poetry, essays, art, photography, music, and other creative works from the students and faculty of College Misericordia and the surrounding community. All works are judged anonymously by the editorial staff. Opinions expressed by the contributors are not necessarily those of the staff or the college administration.

Horse on the Wind
-Mike Duhoski

Galloping beast below,
Rummaging through my soul
Like some lost and lonely
Rider searching for
An answer on the wind.
Stale air halts the beast's
Search, his dark brown mane falls
Over his head like a dead
Dirty rag.

There is no wind here, the beast
Discovers.

Such a fruitful and frail
Environment. The sun rains ice,
The moon smiles rows of razor
Teeth and winks at you, letting
You know you'll never win.
Thin streams of mud cascade over
Cliffs—a waterfall of waste or wonder.
Bathe in the unclean pool and
Wash behind your ears with dirt.

The beast gallops again in
Search of his lost wind.

Across ravaged countryside and
Through the desert swamps.
Hollow logs lay traps in the sand,
Their rattlesnake innards ready
To bite and kill. Through these
Badlands the beast still galloped
And still he found no wind.

The beast climbed a mangled mountain
Only to find a vast valley
Being rewritten by a maelstrom
Of madness. This was not the
Wind which the beast sought.
Its harsh speed and angry
Air upset the beast. And so,
He galloped on.

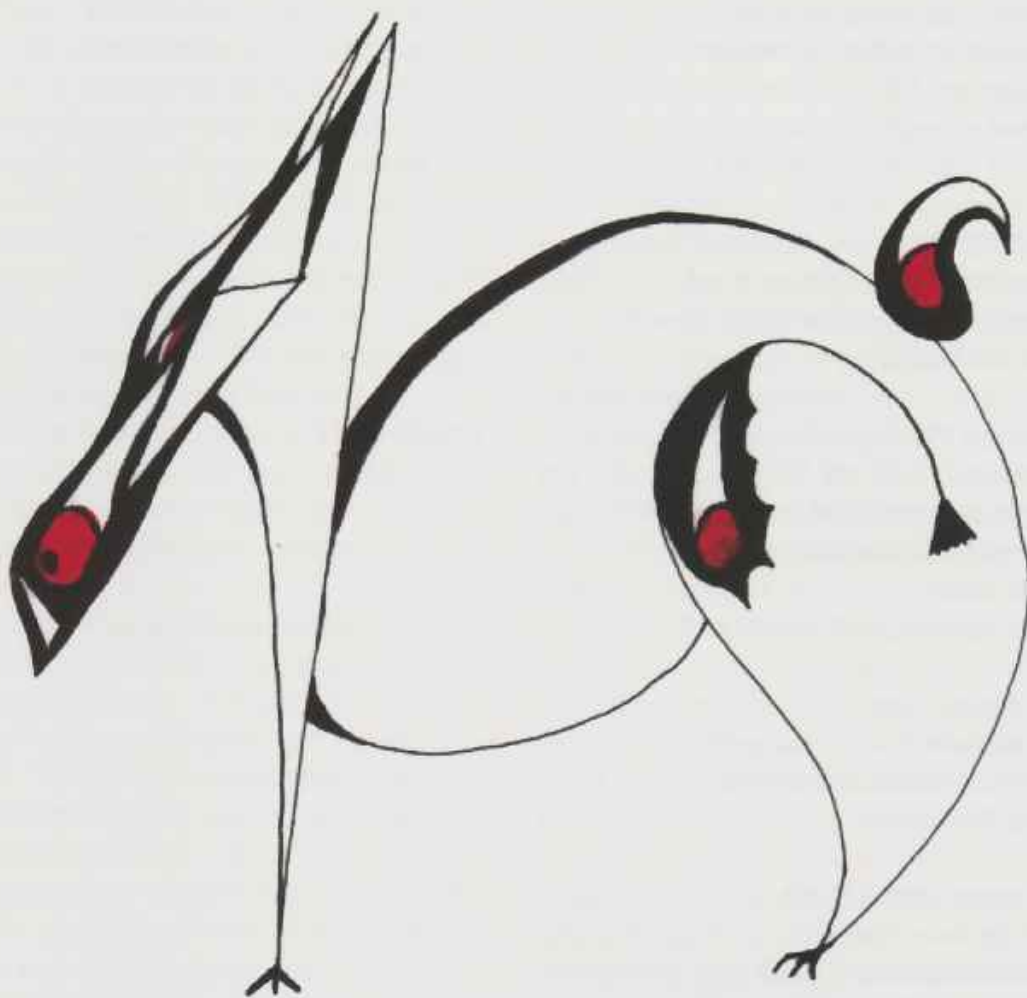
The gray sunshine spit a
Rainbow through the clouds
Above. The beast admired
The rainbow's brilliance against
Such a bold and blank
Background.

Yet, still no wind.

The beast searched
The lands and valleys.
He wandered through mist and
Mud, hail and hellfire.
And still no wind.
Finally the beast arrived
At the end of his journey,
The final plane between
Life and death. Before him,
Thousands of bones from
Thousands of souls as courageous
And curious as he.
The bone field, cemetery of the masses.
Long lost memories, the shattered
Spirits and deviled wills of his failed
And fallen predecessors.

The beast's heart heaved but
He shed not one tear.
Years of agony and struggle
Had brought him to this
Frontier. He would not stop
Now. The beast galloped over bones and
Skulls, rocks and worms,
Lost dreams and soiled souls.
To the end of the frontier he came and
Found a cliff, its bottom existing
Only in myth. The beast closed his eyes
And jumped, beginning his
Eternal descent. His mane was
Thrust back with the force of the fall.

Finally, the horse had found his wind.



Horsie
-Stevan Davies

Abigail

-Carissa Artz

Standing on the edge of a cliff
Looking down into the darkness
Of what we call life
Never good enough for anyone
Never good enough for myself

I look behind me
Remembering the brighter days
When I was the one glorified, loved,
Adored, cherished

Birds soaring through the air
Singing melodies of my life
Everything so beautiful to me then
Infant's eyes aflame with wonder
Green and Blue
Beautiful, Serene, and Innocent

I look at these now
And wonder what has changed
Everything is black and white
Nothing is the same

The blackness engulfs me
I can hardly breathe
A tear rolls down my cheek
As I take my last, final bow...

Drop

-Meghan Dwyer

the
water
dripped
from the
faucet

Just waiting to be turned off.
Another draining day.

When i Was Dying
-Amber Young

When i was dying, I didn't have an out-of-body experience like some people talk about. I had an *in-body* experience. When i was alive, my Soul expanded to fill up my body's empty places. But when i began to die, my Soul started to deflate until all that is Me was tiny and hiding in a dark corner of my head. My miniature eyes could not see, but I could hear everything around Me. All the shouting and the beeping was muffled and distorted, as was the pain. I knew that i was being slapped in the face and I could feel the needles going in and out of my arms, but they were soft, gentle sensations.

I was so calm there inside that primal womb, listening to people calling my name from far away. I laughed. Their voices were deep and slow and covered with felt. "She's not responding," said one. "We'll never get her to swallow the ipecac," said another. "We're going to have to pump her. We're running out of time." *No shit, Sherlocks*, the tiny Me said with a grin, *It's been over an hour. You can thank your ER secretary for that, and of course my stupid husband.*

Yes, step right up folks! Feast your eyes on the dumbest man on Earth, my husband! Weighing in at 235 pounds, this young man precedes every sentence with "Uh" and makes every statement a question. "Uh, Amber? Uh, is that your pill bottle on the counter?" No, Kirk, it just has my name, address, and phone number on it, but it's not mine. "Uh, is it empty?" No, it's full of air. "Uh, haha you're so funny." Goodnight, Kirk.

i snuggled up in bed and I thought about those 30 little pills swimming in fruit punch Kool-Aid and felt peace. Peace. What a strange sensation! From the moment I entered the world, I had

known no such thing. My life was a casserole of fear, rejection, abuse, sex, hiding, running and chaos cooked up by God and fed to greedy fools. He served them with silver like they were guests of honor. I kept waiting for my martyrdom to be rewarded, but the prize never came in the mail.

When i became a woman, I thought a husband would be my gift, but the one God gave me was a discarded mental patient with just enough religion in him to convince Me that it was God's will that we be married. Destiny, fate, and the Hand of God Almighty allowed Me to suffer all my life to prepare Me for this man's salvation. And when I had saved him from himself, I waited once again for my reward, but got nothing more than a tiny apartment in which I was trapped.

So, I did a little research at the pharmacy where i worked. When i got the next refill on my anxiety medication, I took them all at once instead of "one every 4-6 hours as needed." It was a beautiful thing, feeling all those pills happily cruising down my throat. i was going to go to sleep and not wake up. I wondered how long it would take Genius Man to realize i was dead. Be he was shaking me. "Uh, what did you do?" he asked, holding the empty medication bottle. i smiled. "There's nothing left of Me to give, Kirk," I said, "It's time for Me to go where I belong."

I could tell by the poetry of my words that the membrane of my Soul was already separating from its eggshell. I could never use such phrases with Kirk before because his oblivion to my meaning frustrated Me. i closed my eyes. "Oh no," my husband groaned, "Oh man. Oh no." *Don't decide to be smart now*, I pleaded silently. i heard him pick up the phone in the living room. *Don't call 911! I need more time!* Thankfully, he dialed seven digits. The pharmacy. I rolled my

eyes. "Uh Dave? Uh, I think maybe Amber just took some pills?" For a moment I felt some guilt. My boss, Dave, would feel responsible for this. He filled my prescription for me.

But then I was shrinking. i refused to get out of bed and into the car. So he carried me. *Drive slowly, Kirk. I need a few more minutes.* But we were at the hospital already. He made me walk. i started to protest, but then I came up with a plan. If i looked vibrant enough, maybe they wouldn't consider me a priority. "Uh, I think my wife took some pills?" Kirk asked the secretary. She looked up and frowned. "Have you ever been here before?" "Uh, no?" She handed Kirk a clipboard and said, "Fill this out, both sides." i smiled at her. This was going to work out well. He couldn't fill out a form in less than two hours to save his own life, let alone mine. Maybe he and the secretary would hook up after i was gone. The two of them could live together in utterly ignorant bliss.

Bliss. That was a new feeling too. I could feel it crawling through my veins. *I'll be there soon, God. My reward is there with you, right? That's where you've been hiding it all along.* I drifted off into happy thoughts. Then there was the beeping and shouting. I wanted to tell them, "This is great! Dying isn't scary. It's peaceful! And you are interrupting my new bliss with your noise." But they couldn't hear Me. I was as tiny as a flea.

"Do we have that pump ready?" someone yelled. *Hey morons, if i'm this far gone, don't you think that a stomach pump would be useless? I mean, hasn't most of the medication gone through my system already?* Down went the tube, scraping my esophagus an inch at a time. But i didn't gag. Pump and siphon, suck and slurp. i opened my eyes in time to see some red stuff fly across the room.

Some young cowgirl shouted, "Whoa!" I laughed. Was it blood? Or Kool-Aid? Maybe both. Out came the tube.

Now what? We wait, I guess. I'll leave it up to them since they're so smart. i sat up on the gurney looking at all the people. Whites and yellows and greens blurred before my eyes. Everyone stopped moving and stared at me, even the lady who looked like it was her job to write stuff on clipboards. (Did i say something funny?) Kirk was still pacing, but that didn't surprise Me. I tried to tell them all to leave me alone. *Forget your duty for one moment. Don't you realize that I die a little bit every day? What I did to shed this skin is a gift I gave to Myself. It was not a call for help or an attention-getting stunt. What you think is heroism is robbing Me of a long-deserved rest.*

Then suddenly it was like someone turned off an old TV that i was watching. My vision got all black around the edges and closed in slowly until all that was left was a tiny spot in the middle. Then there was nothing. When the television came back on, it was not heaven that I saw. Nor hell. It was much worse. i saw my husband's blank stare among the tubes and wires and machines. i felt like my throat had been raked by tiny gardeners and i had a hard time breathing. Everything was sore.

i was not dead. "i have to pee," were the first words out of my mouth. No one was surprised to hear me. Apparently, i'd been talking for the past three days, but I remembered none of it. Over the next week in mandatory boot camp for the insane, I came to realize that there was a lot about my life that i couldn't remember either. Favorite memories were gone, but there was little time to mourn their loss, for every task i was forced to undertake took such intense effort. i was too weak to hold a

fork steadily enough to eat. i couldn't stand long enough to get clean in a shower. i pissed blood.

But no one seemed to care. I tried to explain that my body wouldn't cooperate with me anymore. And I tried to tell them that every time i tried to leave Kirk, he barricaded me in a closet or put a pillow over my head and sat on it until I started to shrink away from the edges again. But they didn't want to hear these things. They had five days to get me up and running again and to convince Me that i had to leave my husband. Although it was physically impossible to do either, I remembered what Daddy

taught Me—how to nod and say, "OK," like a good little girl.

It snowed the day I was released. We were going to have a white Christmas. It's been said many times before that people who survive a suicide attempt suddenly see life anew. They find Jesus. They feel they've been "saved" for a reason. But I feel none of this. I am still dead. I told Jesus to leave me alone. And the only reason i was saved was because the doctor on call was a lucky son of a bitch. This afterlife is no heaven, nor is it a hell. But I don't just reside in limbo, I rule this purgatory and find that occasionally, it brings Me joy.



Before the Storm
-Amber Hyder

Punk Rock Love
(A Punk Found Poem)
-Rianna Johns

And I hate the fact that I've never said
what you mean to me.
You lifted me up when I needed you most.
You mean the world to me.
One broke my f*cking heart,
Another built it back.
So few have I loved in my life,
But you were right on time.

I swear to God; you were never more
beautiful.
We don't exactly fit.
I thought if I stuck around,
You'd believe you'd found
you'd made the best mistake you'd ever
made.

I will always be true.
So please be gentle with me,
I fall in love too easily.
Close your eyes.
I just want you in my life.
I can't wait to see you.
I'm standing here with my arms open wide.
Give me just a little taste.

And I'll still see you tomorrow, at the
show.
I confess, I fall in love too easily.
Letting you know that you're the bomb.
You're waiting for your one and only true
love.
You gotta know that I have a crush on
you.

Meeting you was just so unexpected.
You were so nice.
I'd give it all away for one more day with
you.
Your beautiful face-like God's amazing
grace.
I say your name and all that I can do is
think about the way you smiled and kinda

sorta held my hand.
You looked at me. I looked at you.
You made me laugh.

We've been together now for so long.
So many things I want to tell you.
I think I finally found a way I can get
through to you.
I talk to you.
It's you; it's you.
Totally cool that your hair is blue, totally
neat, totally sweet, I totally drool when I
think about you.
I totally love everything about you.

I wonder how my world would look without
you.
You are my everything.
I know it wouldn't be the same without
you,
You and me.
I'd rather rest forever in your arms.

I cherish our memories.
I want to kiss your tears away.
Your eyes see through my soul.
You're the words that come out easy.
Your star, it seems to shine above the
rest.
You're the beauty that is deeper than the
eyes can merely see.
You're the dream that hasn't ended and
I'm still anxious for rest.
You're the bud before the flower unfurls
into full bloom captivating beauty.
You're wonderful.
You made me your own.
Goodnight sweetheart.

But remember, this is not a love song.

Lyrics taken from: Screeching Weasel,
The Juliana Theory, Bedford and MxPx.



Autumn #2
-Jason Miller

Sphere

-Crechelle Oliveira

A beautiful terrestrial sphere,
Contained within herself a
Perfect balance of human and
Life.

A Being so
Unique and dynamic.
Containing beauty like a
Crystal snow globe.
Creation blossoming inside her,
The way a flower reveals
Itself in Spring.

A place where creation
Stories grow,
Like a tall oak.
An unwavering spirit of
Life.



Flower #2

-Kristen Englehardt

empty pictures. empty smiles.

-Rianna Johns

i cant go back
and i cant go forward.
stuck in this day to day world
looking for tomorrow
living yesterday-
unforgiving and unforgiven.

Don'ts

-Amber Hyder

Don't talk with your mouth full; Don't interrupt; Don't talk back;
Don't hurt anyone's feelings; Don't say anything you might regret;
If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all; Don't disobey;
Do what's expected of you; Don't disappoint; Don't talk about sex;
Don't go anywhere without telling someone first; Don't complain;
Always think first; Don't fight unless it's for protection; Don't eat fatty foods;
Don't get fat; Don't bite off more than you can chew; Don't take chances;
Don't be selfish; Don't be ungrateful; Don't think with your heart;
Don't live dangerously; Keep your feet planted firmly on the ground;
Don't choose dreams over practical; Don't be impolite; Don't be discourteous;
Don't be jealous; Look the person you're talking to in the eye;
Don't love more than one person; Don't wear your heart on your sleeve;
Don't kiss him first; Don't think of yourself before others;
And most importantly: Don't live.

Acrophobia

-Mike Duhoski

Hands shake and bones break.
Cracked hearts are bleeding on my shoes
but no footprints are behind me. I stand
still and alone in my smoke-filled room
and the brick walls are laughing as I
topple down. Can't turn to
open the door to leave. There's no room in my
room to grow or to breathe. Sometimes the
sun shines from my mile high sky light.
The only escape is to climb climb climb.
If only I were not so frightened by heights.

Burin:

Visit One to the Almighty Shrink

-Rianna Johns

I guess you could say it started two years ago when Jeff and I started talking again. And I guess you could also say it didn't start until one year ago when things started going bad. But I won't. I won't say it was his fault. And I won't say he indirectly caused it all. Because he didn't. I was graduating from high school. My life was perfect: the amazing mom and step dad, a "real" dad, a boyfriend who everyone wanted, and college starting. Nothing could have touched me. But the next few months everything did. RJ broke up with me; school was awful; I hated myself and everyone else around me. Each morning I woke up, looked in the mirror, and said, "How could you be so ugly?" If I were skinnier, prettier, smarter, wilder, more anything, he would have stayed in love with me. I guess now I know that you can't stay in love with someone if you never loved them to begin with. And I tell you now, that's when it started.

In October of 2000, two months after my freshman year of college started, I moved in with my mom and new stepfather. It was hell. Don't get me wrong though. I love my step dad with all my heart; he's amazing. With my mother's new marriage came six stepbrothers and sisters and I really didn't know them. And they didn't know me. They had no clue how to handle my sleeping late on Saturdays or the constant boyfriend gripes. Before I moved in with them, I was an imperfect size eight, imperfect to the Barbie dolls from high school that brought fat-free cereal and skim milk every day for lunch. I, on the other hand, wasn't afraid. I ate pasta, bread, and pizza on a regular basis. And the longer I

lived with the newlyweds, the more pasta and bread I ate. Every meal was pasta and some meat with bread to dip in the sauce. My body craved carbohydrates like it never had. And as I ate more and more, my jeans got tighter.

You're probably sitting there thinking, "This girl is nuts. How could she eat so much, so fast and not think she had a problem with overeating?" Trust me, it wasn't like you're imagining. I didn't eat as a comfort; I ate because it tasted good. Living on my own, I was used to bagels and fudgesicles for dinner. These new dishes were like fine dining. And I tell you now, that's when it grew deeper.

I began to hate myself. I felt like RJ had broken up with me all over again. I looked in the mirror and saw a short, fat dwarf staring into eyes that used to be beautiful. I knew that I had to take steps, and take them then. I started running every day. At first just a mile or two, then it was farther and longer. I would run twice a day, an hour in the morning and another hour at night. I walked to all my classes, taking the longest routes possible. My breaks during school would be spent in the library or eventually the gym. Every minute I had free couldn't be wasted. I had fat to burn and clothing sizes to lose. But I didn't.

After four months of the exercising, nothing changed. I was still the mirror girl cursing herself in the morning and crying to sleep at night. You're staring at me with disbelief, like there was something wrong with me. You can stop that look; I was fine; I am fine. Exercise wasn't the only answer. It was simply an enzyme, those chemistry things that speed up the reaction. Exercise was my weight loss enzyme. My diet was the answer. I had to cut back the foods that

were dubbed as evil: pastas, breads, pizzas, cheese, whole milk, and bagels. Anything that had fat left my diet. I strictly ate grilled chicken, fruits, and drank Slim Fast. After the first seven shakes, I was used to the chalky flavor. On this diet, the weight started dropping, slow at first, then drastically. And I welcomed every pound shed.

No one noticed how much weight I had lost, or if they did, they never mentioned it. I know Jeff saw what was going on. We talked online every night when he was at school. He wouldn't see me for months at a time, but yet he knew if I had lost weight or not just from talking. I don't know how. And still don't, but that's alright. I don't need to know. He knew though. It was some remarkable talent he possessed and probably the only thing he ever knew about me. People talk and say it started with him. They're wrong. You can see that now. It started before him.

The more we talked, the closer we became. There was never any true relationship. He made me believe we had one, but we didn't. It was a facsimile, a sham, and above all fictional. We were never even friends. I never saw that, not until a few months ago when I saw him with his ex-girlfriend. That was excruciating to see and feel. Yes, you're right. That did add to it all.

I felt numb to all emotion, except pain and hatred. I couldn't stand to even walk past a mirror. I was too ugly to look at. The one day I summoned up the courage to sneak a peek as I walked past the bathroom door. As I looked through the wooden arch, the girl from two years ago was still staring at me with green eyes and pale, limp blonde hair. This girl was a size ten still, or so she looked.

I knew then that I couldn't stop for anything or anyone. I needed to devote everything to going to the gym and exercise. The only time I had left between sleep and exercise went to my parents and school. By the end of my junior year in college, I was down to a size double zero in Abercrombie.

Then people started catching on. People from high school knew I never was that skinny. My old best friends started monitoring what I ate and didn't eat. No one ever told my parents or family. That's probably for the better. They didn't need to know about my weight loss. Everyone was acting like I had this major problem, which is true. I did. I couldn't get skinny enough to be good enough for anyone, not even myself. They couldn't understand how it felt to not feel. I didn't feel anything. Hunger, pain, happiness, and sadness were all foreign concepts. The only feeling I knew was that I wanted to feel again. And I suppose that was when it started again.

I started exercising again twice a day, but my friends were practically force-feeding pasta and bread down my throat. If they were doctors, I would have seen an IV in my arm pumping fat onto my bones. Thank God they weren't. I was never alone, unless I was sleeping at night. They surrounded me during school, after school, in the morning, all the time. There was no escape. I guess everything else started when I realized I still felt cold when certain objects touched my creamy skin. They were the only comfort I was able to get in life. The cool metal against my skin felt soothing and necessary in the way water is in a desert. I still don't see anything wrong with finding comfort in metal and blades. It never reached the point where I hurt myself. Just a few scrapes and bruises. Nothing more. It felt good. I can stop when I want to.

Right now, I don't want to and I won't.

You're shaking your head as if you can't believe I'm saying all this. Well, believe it. I'm saying it. There is nothing wrong with what I did. I didn't kill myself, or even had intentions of it. I haven't had stitches since I was seven years old. A few Band-Aids and long sleeves never

hurt anyone before. They aren't hurting me now. You see me in front of you. I'm fine. I can do anything that you can do. I'm a size two, graduating this semester, and have a job lined up already. And I like long sleeves better than short sleeves and tanks tops. Don't even try to say I don't. You didn't know me then and don't know me now. I'm fine. Really, I am.



The Canals of Venice
-Karyn Altman

colorless

-Jason Miller

he moves
unwillingly
through towns that rotate
in his head,
on another axis
with hope
in the form
of signs:
Gas, Food, Lodging
which press into the landscape.
one hand,
into another.

sometimes he'll stop.
stare,
at the letters
stretched flat against the green—
BP—Elm Street
think of the lack of texture,
how featureless,
how raw,
around the corner
he carefully caresses
like a child
moving slowly,
pulling slowly,
following the lines,
religiously.

he falls,
like Crayola shavings,
pack of 96—
sharpened to 74
and now the number one:
he tries to remember
the other colors,
buzzing bright like bees
or looming, like night,
around corners.

Contemplations

-A

when the lights are down
and I lie awake,
listening to the sound of the rain
produced by the sound machine
that helps me to sleep,
with the four blankets I sleep with
pulled over my head,
lying on my side, clutching the heart-shaped
pillow
I've had since I was born,
I think of the events of the day that's passed,
the test I failed, the work to do,
the outfit that made me feel sexy,
but uncomfortable, too,
the meaningless conversations...
and I think of the past,
of my dead grandparents who I miss everyday,
of how easy being a child was,
of the night I let my heart lead,
and drove nervously to his house in the rain,
letting him kiss me, then stopping it because my
head cut back in,
and then lying comfortably in his arms on the
couch
as we watched CNN at three in the morning...
and I think of the future,
what in the world I can possibly be or do,
knowing that I'll only be satisfied doing the
impossible
but only admitting that when no one can hear,
of the shirt I'm going to wear tomorrow,
the tight, white one with the plunging neckline
that makes me something I'm not,
of the book I haven't read yet and the music I
should have learned,
of working tomorrow night
so that my family can have the night off,
and of how I want him to kiss me again,
but my wanting that is something I'll only admit
with the four blankets pulled over my head,
listening to the artificial rain fall,
lying awake, clutching my pillow,
when the lights are down.



Flower #1

-Kristen Englehardt

Avalanche Lake

-Denise Widner

We walked quietly with no bells to warn
the others
Longing for the day to end, exhilarated by
the calm sun
Lagging behind hungry like a snail
Big shell; no legs

Soon to realize the other presence
Strength- bringing a horrifying
Being inside.

Making my way alone to the clearing
Magnitude and brilliance in disguise
The events to unfold unaware
Of the retrospective yearnings

Mounts of madness enswelled
The Rising of Rock overwhelming
As we stood separated in sadness
Divided yet drawn to unity
For the life of another

The flames of the Indian paintbrush
Followed us down, guiding us, reminding us
Of home.

The tumbleweed shone in the headlights
Floating in front of us like a ghostly
presence
Dancing sticks of the night
As each mile passed, awareness rose up
Into the sky once more the mountains
Became our revelation of the life inside
And of the life to come.

Sightless Wonder
-Matthew J. Rogers

Veiled beneath the *Ivory* keys
Entwined with *Ebony*
A sightless *Wonder* attuned so
rhythmically.

Prodigious are his *Fingertips*
Emotional release
A *Ribbon In The Sky* for all to see.

Enter now, the *Urban Suite*
Welcome his mystique
The *Highest of the High* ascends
soulfully.

His lips convey the flawlessness
Of femininity
In which he finds his *source of melody*.

Journey with the *Nightingale*
Takes flight on vocal wings
Ever so complex, simplistically.

Crescendos paint the images
With lyrical *Mastery*
The *Long Day Is Over*, so says she.

Letter of Decline
-Amber Hyder

Dear M,

I regret to inform you that due to our current situation, I am unable to accept your

-No, that's not right...

Dear M,

As flattered as I am and as much as I would like to, I cannot

-No, that's wrong too...

Dear M,

You know that I feel very strongly for you, but there are just too many other things involved here and I can't

-No. Damn it.

M,

I know that the offer still stands, and I am this close to taking you up on it, but...I'm just thinking about...I'm just concerned that...I'm worried...It's just not right because it's not just you and I and

-DAMMIT!

M,

No, I will not sleep with you. I am not just a piece of meat. I am not disposable. I am not your "beck and call" girl. I need substance. I need a promise that I won't just be a quick thrill for you and

-Too needy. Must sound stronger than that...I'm not but he doesn't need to know that...

M,

It's an extremely tempting offer, but you know why I can't.

-Well...no. Still leaves the "I want you" vibe. I do but...no. NO!

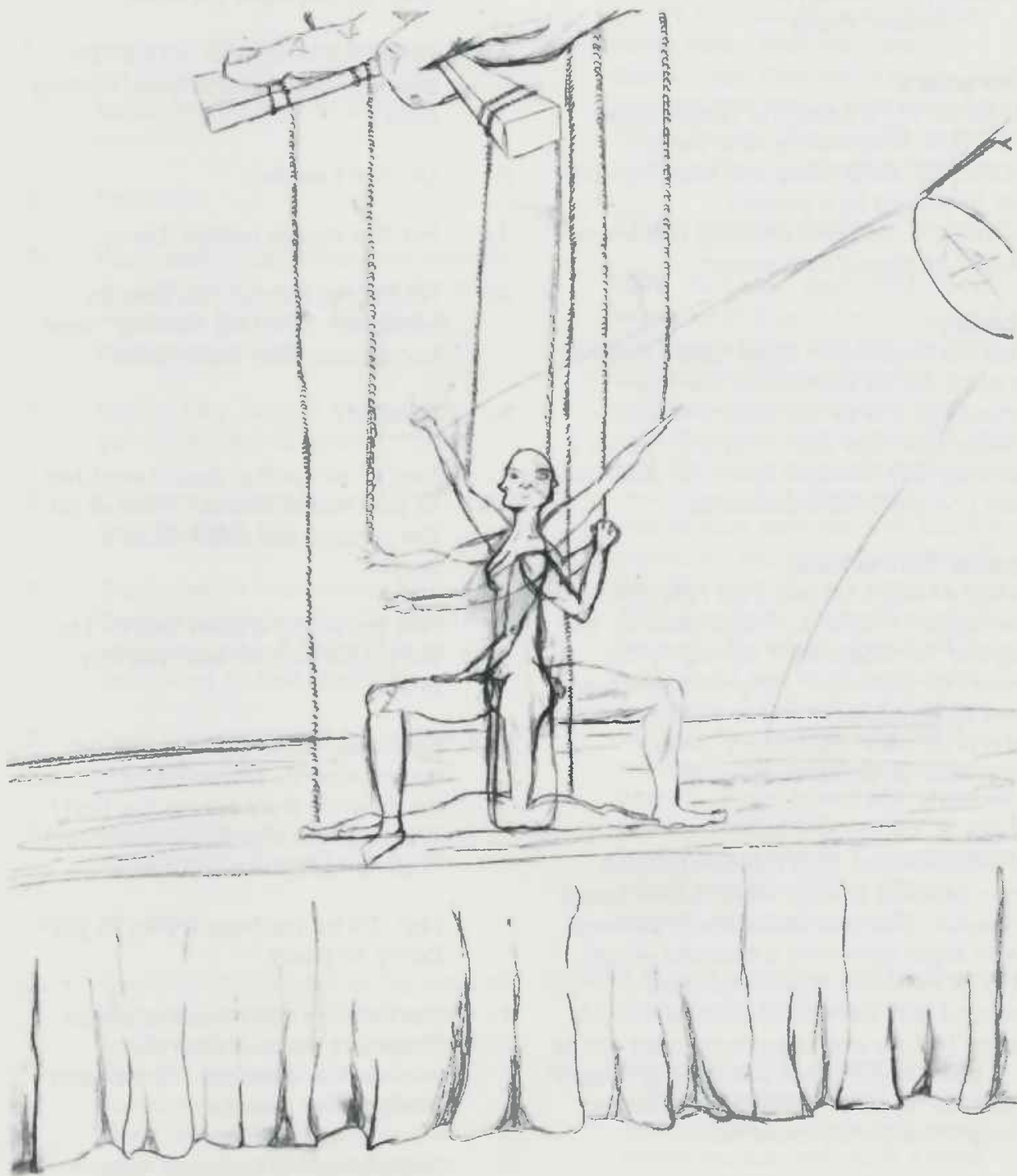
M,

Here's the thing. I get too wrapped up. I listen too much to my conscience. I

-This is absolutely unbelievable. UGHH!

M,

Meet me at 1:24am, my place.



The Show
-Carla Cognini

On Darcy's Shoulders
-Amber Young

Characters:

ANGELINA= a beautiful female angel

JUSTIN= a handsome male demon

VOICE OF GOD (deep and booming—but
can be played by a woman)

VOICE OF SATAN (sniveling and whiny—
should be played by a woman)

Scenery:

Two low benches or small tables covered
in black cloths that touch the floor
(should be sturdy for actors to easily
change positions on). They are spaced a
considerable distance apart (at least 10
feet). A plain black backdrop.

Special Instructions:

When ANGELINA and JUSTIN talk to
the human, they should look down by the
edge of the stage as if talking to the
front row audience. Actors should feel
free to move about on the tables as they
interpret their characters, unless
otherwise directed in the play.

Scene 1

ANGELINA and JUSTIN are lying on
their benches asleep. ANGELINA seems
at peace. She is dressed in a traditional
white angel garb with a halo and wings.
JUSTIN wears a traditional devil
costume with horns and a pitchfork. He
sleeps fitfully and sometimes cries out as
if in pain. ANGELINA stirs and gradually
opens her eyes, stretching and yawning.
She is immediately cheerful.

ANGELINA: (calling over to JUSTIN
as she sits up) Wake up Justin!
Justin, wake up! It's almost time
for her to get up.

JUSTIN: (grumpily without moving) I've
got five more minutes, Angelina.

Shut up and leave me alone.

A: (shrugging) Whatever. (JUSTIN
slowly awakens and sits up, rubbing
eyes.)

A: Oh, she's awake!

J: Hit the snooze button, Darcy.

A: No, no, no, Darcy! You have an
important test this morning. Your
bar exams! Muy importante!

J: So what?

A: You, of all spirits, should want her
to pass these exams. Think of all
the damage she could do as a
lawyer.

J: Hm, you've got a point there. (to
Darcy) Get out of bed, you lazy
bitch!

A: Now, now, name-calling won't get
you anywhere. (Pause) What should
we do while she's taking the test?
Wanna guess who in the classroom
is going to Heaven or Hell?

J: Nah, I'll be too busy trying to get
Darcy to cheat.

A: Justin! She won't need to cheat!
Thanks to me, she's got the
information down pat. She's been
studying for months!

J: (complaining) I know...we haven't
been out to a bar in forever! And
forget about sex! (ANGELINA
beams, proud of herself)

J: (looking down) Hey, this test is a
piece of cake!

A: I told you!

J: Don't get all high and mighty. It's not because of you. I studied human law back when I was in heaven.

A: You did?

J: Yeah, well, it definitely had more to do with ethics and punishment than American law does. But this is pretty basic stuff.

A: *(shyly)* Hey Justin? How did you get kicked out of heaven anyway?

J: *(Suddenly clamming up)* I don't want to talk about it.

A: Justin, we've been sitting here on Darcy's shoulders for 25 years now and every time I bring this up, you don't want to talk about it!

J: Yeah well it's a sore subject with me, OK?

A: *(sympathetically)* I know, sweetheart. I won't ask again.

(Both are quiet)

J: *(sighing)* It was back in the days of Babylon. You know. They were building that tower to Heaven and God got all pissed off and scattered the people and confused their languages so they wouldn't be able to understand each other. And I mentioned to Gabriel that I didn't understand what God's point was since Heaven was in a whole other realm and no matter how tall a building was going to be, it would never reach Heaven. And I pointed out all the buildings that would be

constructed by humans in the future that would be many, many times taller than the Tower of Babel. Plus, they would not be built because the people wanted to be closer to God; they would be built to show their economic prowess.

A: This is all true, Justin.

J: Shh! He'll hear you!! When God heard what I said, he called me into his throne room and told me that I had been walking a fine line between Heaven and Hell for several million years and that this was the last straw. He said, *(mockingly, in a deep voice)* "I should have sent you with Lucifer when I kicked him out eons ago!" And the next thing I knew, I was falling so fast. *(trembling at the memory)* My wings ripped off my body and I was in so much pain! Suddenly, I fell into a pit of the hottest fire and my halo melted right off and my white clothes burned. I was naked and standing in fire. *(calmer)* Gradually, it got less and less hot as I completed my transformation into a demon. *(Pause)* And now you know.

(ANGELINA is horrified and dumbstruck. At last she finds her voice.)

A: *(whispering)* Oh Justin, that's awful!! You poor thing! *(nearing tears)* I can't believe God would throw you out over such a small infraction!

J: *(recovered)* Well, you know how God is. Picky, picky. Good thing he's done making angels into demons over their sins. Hell is getting pretty crowded. You angels are

outnumbered 3 to 1.

A: Anyone can tell that. Look at the world today! So much corruption and greed. Why, even little children aren't so innocent anymore. Darcy is a saint compared to most people.

J: (*wryly*) Gee thanks. Make me feel like I'm doing a good job.

A: (*laughing*) Oh Justin, you know I didn't mean it that way, but now that you mention it, you are a pretty lousy demon.

J: So I'm lazy, big deal.

A: Justin, I think that's just your excuse.

J: Excuse for what?

A: You use that as a way of getting out of being absolutely horrible. I think God made a mistake sending you to Hell. You hardly have a mean bone in your body.

J: (*grinning*) Spirits don't have bones, Angelina.

A: (*dismissing him with her hand*) You know what I mean!

J: Angelina?

A: Yeah?

J: Did I ever tell you how beautiful you are? I mean, not just physically, but inside as well. I've really enjoyed working with you in the Darcy project.

A: (*blushing*) Aww, thanks.

(*There is awkward silence while neither of them look at each other.*)

A: Oh! She's done with her test! (*laughing*) And you forgot all about tempting her to cheat! Ha ha!

J: (*laughing*) Damn it! You tricked me!

A: (*somewhat hurt*) Honestly Justin, I did not.

J: I know, I know. I was only kidding. You're right. I am a lousy demon.

A: Aww, look at Darcy. She's thinking she did horribly on the test.

J: Did she?

A: I don't know. Let me go find out and I'll let you know. (*She turns her back on the audience.*)

J: Okey dokey. Take your time (*grinning evilly*).

(*Curtain closes.*)

Scene 2

Curtain rises and ANGELINA is just as she was at curtain close. JUSTIN is dancing suggestively on the bench and appears to be drunk. He's catcalling and being raucous and lewd. ANGELINA turns around on her table and is shocked and horrified at what she sees.

A: Justin!! What have you done?!

J: What? Hey! Welcome back! You've been missing a great party!

A: (*looking around*) What is going on here? A nightclub?

J: Yeah, but before that we were at

the pub for happy hour! I convinced Darcy she needed to ease the tension with some drinks. Then I had Diabolus, Allison's demon, put a bug in her ear to call Darcy and he talked to Victor and Curt and now the whole gang is here! Look, even Darcy's ex!

A: Oh no! Not Bob!!

J: Yep, Bobberoo my boy! (*salutes*)

A: (*shocked*) And she's dancing with him!

J: Grinding oh him!

A: (*turning away and covering eyes*) Oh, I can't look!!

J: (*laughing*) Bob's getting pretty excited there! Take him to the car, Darcy! Wahoo! There's gonna be some sweet action tonight! Bob always did know how to get freaky!

A: (*angrily spinning around*) Yeah, and he knew how to hurt her too! He's sick in the head! Didn't you hear about what he did to that young girl?

J: What young girl?

A: He had sex with his friend's sixteen-year-old stepdaughter!

J: Julie?

A: Yes, how did you know?

J: I've heard about her! She digs older guys.

A: She's still a child, and whatever she does is no excuse for what Bob did

did to her! He tied her up and beat her! She may have wanted to sleep with him at first, but when he got whacko, she tried to tell him "no." And you know how he gets off on that. He raped her, plain and simple. And he might end up getting away with it! (*sobbing*) What if he does it to Darcy?!

J: Aw geez Angelina, don't—don't do that. Don't cry. I won't let it happen. (*to Darcy*) Just tease him a little and walk away. Go on, be sassy. Tell him just how over him you are. Tell him how much better you are than he is. Tell him to have a nice life and get in that cab over there. Don't look back. (*to ANGELINA*) It's OK now, Angelina. She's in the cab on her way home. Bob still has his pants down in the car. He's stunned! (*snickers*)

A: (*quietly*) I don't understand why you did that for me.

J: (*looking away*) I guess I really just don't like to see you cry.

A: (*staring at him longingly*) I—

(*JUSTIN looks up, mirroring her gaze.*)

A: You—you're so far away...

J: (*coming to edge of bench closest to ANGELINA*) I know. I can't tell you how many times I've wanted to hold you in my arms and shield you from the ugliness of the world.

A: (*walking to edge of bench closest to JUSTIN and reaching out*) Sometimes when you are asleep, a lock of your hair falls across your eye. I try to reach far enough to

touch you...to move it so I can see your face more clearly. Your dreams seem to torment you. Why, just last night you were crying out as if in pain! Tell me, what is it that tortures you?

J: Oh, Angelina! The things of Hell are beyond terrifying! I couldn't possibly describe the horror that I see! There just aren't words awful enough. And if there were, I could never allow you to be harmed with such visions. I love you too m—*(he stops, suddenly aware of what he has just said. He buries his face in his hands.)*

A: You...you love me? *(He doesn't answer.)* Justin, I have loved you for the longest time. *(in a sudden rush of emotion)* I see such beauty in you! I remember the days when I would stand before God in His throne room and my heart was filled with such immense ecstasy that I thought I would burst just by looking at Him! All day long, I thought about Him and sang about Him and wept tears of joy that I could be near Him. And now...now I feel all those things, and more, for you.

J: *(woefully)* Oh dear God! What have I done?!

(There is a sudden loud rumbling. ANGELINA and JUSTIN cower, and look up.)

VOICE OF GOD: *(booming in anger)* What have you done? I'll tell you what you have done! You've taken my angel away from me! My hate for you has no bounds!

A: Please, God, it was not his fault!

VOG: This is the work of the devil!

(There is another loud rumbling. ANGELINA and JUSTIN cower and look down.)

VOICE OF SATAN: *(whining)* I had nothing to do with it!! You think I want my servants going around falling in love with angels?

A: *(upward, to the VOICE OF GOD)* I love him, God! All on my own! For all that he is and all that he is not!

VOG: Choose now between us, Angelina.

(She looks up, then down, then at JUSTIN. He pleads with his eyes and shakes his head.)

A: *(resolvedly, to the VOICE OF GOD)* I willingly sacrifice my place in heaven to be with Justin.

(The VOICE OF GOD roars in anger and ANGELINA appears to be thrown off the bench. She screams and cries in pain and thrashes about on the floor. Her halo goes sliding across the stage. Her wings come off. She eventually ends up under the bench, hidden by the black cloth. JUSTIN looks on sobbing.)

VOS: And am I to lose one of my minions to love?

VOG: Indeed you are. But he may be back in 80 odd years.

VOS: I won't hold my breath. He was a lousy demon. I don't know why you sent him to me in the first place. Good riddance, you shithead!

(JUSTIN appears to be thrown off

his bench. His pitchfork slides across the stage. His horns are torn off as he thrashes about in agony. He eventually ends up under his bench, hidden by the black cloth. Curtain closes.)

Scene 3

Curtain rises to ANGELINA and JUSTIN sitting beneath a tree on a hillside, having a picnic. They are wearing normal clothes for the times. They finish eating and tidy up. Sipping bottled water, they cuddle beneath the tree.

J: Are you happy?

A: Justin, this is the best decision I ever made!

J: *(teasing)* It was the *first* decision you ever made!

A: *(she smirks)* How about you? Are you happy?

J: Are you kidding? I'm finally at home. I was too rotten for Heaven.

Too kind for Hell. Here, I feel just right. And with you, I feel perfect. *(He kisses her cheek.)* And you *(he talks to ANGELINA'S stomach)* will make things *beyond* perfect!

A: *(laughs)* Are you ready for the trial tomorrow?

J: I think so. Darcy and I just need to go over a few more things, but Julie's testimony is solid and with those other three girls who are willing to take the stand, Bob doesn't have a chance in hell of getting off easy. The defense lawyers don't have a thing on Darcy either, thanks to you, so her past connection to Bob shouldn't interfere with her representing Julie. We'll all come out looking like saints on this one!

A: You're a genius of a lawyer, Justin. Now what are we going to name this baby?

(Curtain closes.)



Yellow

-Amber Hyder

Pound

-Stephanie M. Soriano

POUND,
on me
with voices
Screaming
I don't want to go
go away
Away, I've got to get out
She's crying
Don't cry
Smiles
world is better
He breaks in
I try to go
go to him
Him is gone
alone again
No touch
Is strange
Stranger to hug
I won't hug him
she is salvation
I can't save her
her, is not who I am
Am what?
To her a liar
Lie here
I can't stay
Stay with me
Me is too scared
Afraid
Afraid of what?
whatever
Happily ever after
life doesn't end in one line
Life isn't that long

Subfuscous

-Carla Cognini

Darkness overcomes me with the faintest of ease,
With the sweetest temptations I'd like to seize.

Opportunistically, more than a friend,
With the Garden of Evil's fruit to tend.

Tis a shame that purity holds,
not a one desire to be told.

Yet because of what the devil knows,
it is in his genius to compose,

Such a web of fates.
Such twisted lies to which he creates,

And though you more than I,
take notice but do not comply.

He knows my secrets and I his,
and in the end I know what it all is.

Just a cheap trick,
A game where he is quick.

And in the myriad of tainted roles,
he knows the way to our burdened souls.

Shells

-Amber Hyder

Watch:
the crack
grows
longer
and longer
as it
threatens
to shatter
the fragile shell.



Passion Lily
-Sarah Race

The Winds of Change
-Megan Decowski

The winds of change
Blow wild and free
Across the pages of my memory

Like leaves scattered in the wind
The pages just separated and blew away.
Two pages thought they would never separate,
Have been miles apart for months now
Before they were in separate chapters,
Now they aren't even in the same book.

The winds of change
Blow wild and free
Across the pages of my memory

Those pages once held every memory
Of our words, of our lives
Slowly those words have begun to disappear
One...
By...
One...
They are fading away, like the pages
We made.

What volumes had once accumulated
Time has only reduced to just scraps
Of old paper strewn across the floor
Of my life

I have since then started a new chapter,
And a new book as well.
Will this one have volumes?
Time will only tell.

The winds of change
Blow wild and free
Across the pages of my memory

For what started out as a few small words,
One day perhaps will be novels.
But who knows we have only just begun
To write the first paragraph.

Hate's Boulder
-Mike Duhoski

I stumble through life like
a boulder, eroded and dusty,
up that endless mountainside.
My bruised feet pedal a bike
with flat tires, no brakes and rusty
chains. My failure has ended my joyride.

Find me on that mountainside but ask not one question.
I'm not the talking type but I always listen. *Always.*
Hate drove me to this mountain in a colorless Cadillac.
I knew at first glance it was an unwanted destination.
"Drop me a line, when you get to the other side," Hate says.
Only at the top did I realize there was no other side...and no way back.

Dance of Shiva
-Denise Widner

Arms in Motion
twisting, turning
circling Fire of Life
toes spread, reaching
face Completion
ass protruding

jingle jangle chains

Palms connected
drums of creation
Serpentine twisting
Protector Divine
4 hands rotating
downward pushing
ignorance outward

flames of destruction
reaching higher
swiveling, circling
fluidity of motion
dwarf of Destiny
crushed under foot,
Enlightenment Abound



Ghost World
-Jason Miller

Coffee Frondescence
-Crechelle Oliveira

Our coffee frondescence
Hangs limply and tightly
In the brisk wind.
A hushed breeze
Twitches the dead foliage,
Who holds fast.
The unwithered force
Possessed by leaves of the
Winter season and the
Vigor of Spring are
Buried in the depths of
Their dead veins.
Silent strength.



Blooming Tulips
-Rekha Sharma

If I Could Write About Love
-Amanda James

If I could write about love,
I'd write about generosity, sympathy,
mercy,
And other things,
We're so undeserving of.

If I could write about love,
I'd write about wars, hate, and
destruction,
And other things,
We're so demonstrative of.

If I could write about love,
I'd write about the Son who came from
above,
His message and His prayers,
And other things,
We aren't allowed to speak of.

Serenity Found
-Heather Elizabeth Jones

There's just something so peaceful about
warm summer nights.
Lying in the cool grass, hair spread freely
between the blades, limbs outstretched,
eyes all aglow beneath the starlit sky.
In the still of the night, my senses
become heightened.
All that is audible are the whispers of
nocturnal life and the gentle thumping of
my heart.
The rigid blades of the grass gently poke
the bare flesh of my legs, arms, and back.
Waves of serenity pass through my body
and I sink deeper and deeper into the
grass.
A strong, clean breath of warmth is
exhaled all at once.
My eyes close.
A sigh is released into the air and ascends
into heaven to be among the stars.
The earth, the sky, and a soul in between,
all intertwined in a single moment of
undisturbed time.
There's just something so peaceful about
warm summer nights.

Speechless

-T.J. McGough

Though I saw her there, I could utter no appropriate sound
Words jumble, randomly blurt out what's not important
Brain create, voice speak...no...just emotional silence

There is no reason not to speak, well maybe there is
Fear...why fear...fear of what may happen or what might not happen
So I must face my fear...tell her how I feel...

No...Silent I remain, except for some useless comment
"How are classes? Mine, Great"
She walks away, one more time

She does not know how I feel, why I can't communicate
Maybe she'd understand or maybe she feels the same
I'll never know, I'll never share

Purpose

-Amber Hyder

There is so much pain in the world,
So much to hurt from,
So much to make you cry,
More bad than good,
More sorrow than joy:
The homeless man begging for change,
The little girl dying of cancer,
The man with the gun that just took a life,
The destitute woman stripping for tips,
And the boy that gets beaten every night.
It makes you wonder
If we are alive only to feel pain,
Or if we are alive to take the pain away.



Campo di Fiori
-Karyn Altman

smoke

-Jennifer Sency

dancing

floating

playing

twirling

the smoke envelopes the room

I watch it coming closer to my foot

soft

elusive

quiet

a ghost coming near

I smile and wait for it

captivating

peaceful

closing my eyes breathing it in

I give in and let myself go

entrapment

no way to escape it now

I sit surrounded on the floor

Silent Bay

-Denise Widner

Looking down the path into the open window, the smell of the salty air refreshes me. The crunching of the dried hay beneath my feet arouses curiosity in me. Down by the rickety grey fence, I can see more clearly the open window that almost seems like a vacuum. I hear the distant murmur of the engines humming repetitively and catching a glimpse of the boats lulling beyond the bay. As I walk through the tall dry grass, running my fingers along each fenced plank, pain rushes to my skin. Pulling each splinter out slowly from my fingertips the echo resonates of comforting laughter. The solitude of the afternoon is broken as the children emerge from the boats. The brisk wind gives me quicker stride and the roofs are beckoning for rain.

As I make my way down to the waterfront, the smell of dead fish fills my nostrils and I lift my apron up over my mouth and nose. The clouds are moving in quickly and I search for signs of my children. I see one, two, three of them, but where is Lucas? I tell my daughter to get her brothers and we all must find Lucas considering he is the youngest of the bunch and is always trying to get lost. We walk around the bay until nightfall, and as we call on the police to help us find him, I hear music coming from the opened window which is now a lit from a candle. I wondered who lives there, since I knew it was abandoned many years before, and with Lucas missing perhaps any new neighbors might be of help. I step up to the front entrance door and knock three times loudly. I can hear the sound of a piano and a violin, but no voices. I open the door slowly and am surprised that it is unlocked. I call out, "Is anyone home?"

There is no answer and I still can hear the music playing. In desperation I

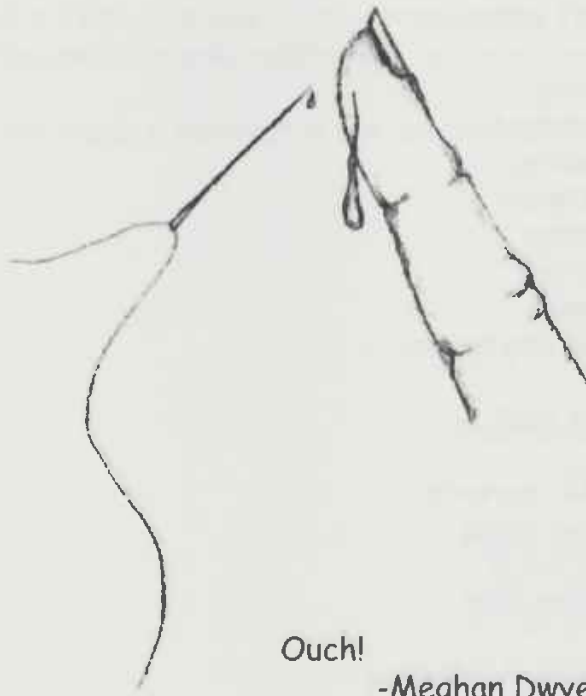
begin to walk through the house and up the stairs. I feel a cold draft coming from the open window as I make my way to the second floor. "Hello," I said again with no reply. The room with the open window is barren, but with one candle lit, and the music has stopped, although I could not tell where the music was coming from in the first place. I walk up onto the attic level and find a piano that is in good repair, but that is the only furniture in the whole entire house. I didn't think anyone moved in since the departure of the Scuthertons, but the music was coming from this house as far as I could tell. I stick my head out the window to see my lonely one room house high up on the hillside and see the candles lit by my children with still no signs of Lucas.

I hurry home up the hillside, feeling that my senses fooled me. How could I hear a piano and a violin when there was no one there? And why was the candle lit? And where was Lucas now that it was getting pitch black from the cloud coverage of the night? I glanced for a moment towards the wooded area and heard once again a violin. As I walked towards the music I found myself hesitant to continue so I turned around to go home. From the moonlight I saw a silhouette of a boy sitting on a rock. I said, "Lucas, is that you?" There was no reply so I ran home as quickly as my boots would take me. When I got home the three children were getting supper on and I asked them if anyone saw Lucas. My daughter stared at me blankly and said, "Mother, you remember what we told you yesterday and the day before and every day of our waking lives. Lucas does not exist. Now please sit down and we will pour you some soup." As I sit down to eat my soup, my Aunt Ruth walks through the door and asks me how I'm doing. I tell her I am fine and that the children made me some soup and how I was all confused

again about Lucas. She said, "There, there, Annie. Now you know that you live by yourself. There are no children dear."

I get up out of my rocking chair and look out the window of the room and look out on the hillside of the small little house and see a little boy and his brother and sisters playing in the distance with a

violin tucked under his chin. I go upstairs to my piano and begin to play along with the resonance of the violin in the night and I light the candle in the room with the wide open window as my Aunt Ruth shakes her head and leaves me alone in my mansion with the only sense about me in following the notes of the song.



Ouch!

-Meghan Dwyer

The Red Cross Told Me to Give the Gift of Life

-Amber Young

Plll...it beads up.
Iiii...and runs down the crease.
Iip! It drips off my elbow,
murdering my poem.
Nurse, I've sprung a leak!

My lost "God"
-Carissa Artz

A friend, a mother
Nurturing
You taught me class and charm
Always by my side
My rock, support
Foundation

I loved God then.

An angel came one day
And decided to take you away
The day of our dinner
That you were going to teach me
How to play checkers
Stranded
Helpless
A child put back in a dark frightening world

But God didn't know.

The hitting
I watched
The screaming
I listened
The fighting
I cried
The drinking
I cleaned up empty cans

Where were you?

A child raising her parents
The Barbies put aside
I was the victim of
Bittersweet homicide

But God mustn't have been watching.

You saved me from this Nan
You realized I needed a hand
A shoulder
Love
But you left me all alone
In a hateful shameless world.

But I guess Nan, God didn't know.

Jennifer

-Michael Greenley

On rain-kissed streets, your soft steps awaken the silence of this town,
As you walk past, you turn back, but keep your head down.
You look lost and down, drowning to be found,
And I'd search for you...if you'd only let me.

Through the windows of your soul, you leave this life from which you withdrew,
A walk to see, through all false truths, with an unaltered, unquestionable view.
Their judgment's seat's deceit, leave you with nothing but defeat,
But know that with your life...you owe them nothing.

Please don't go gentle into this night,
With only dreams and tears to hold your thread tight.
So bold and bright will Life's golden light fight,
When times left behind...with a glorious, victorious fought-less life fight.

When you walk past, turn back, and look into my eyes,
Through the windows of my soul I'll help you look up to the skies,
We'll sew this life tight, threaded by tears, love, and dreams,
Because I'm only really real...when you're looking at me.

You made a believer in me, because I believe in you...

The Paradox of the Closed Door

-Meghan Dwyer

There are some days when I am so tied up inside
That I don't know if I should open the door
and let you back into my life,
Or if I should keep the bolt locked
so that you can never come in again.

Please don't make this any harder
than it already is.

Just walk away
and leave me to think about what would have happened
If I had opened the door
and given myself another chance.

Contemplation Coffee
-Jennifer Sency

Sitting down, I take a sip of my coffee. *Needs more sugar.* Not wanting to get up from my couch, I put down my favorite mug and look around the room. I'm just so sick and tired of it. Everything is still the same from the day that I moved into this apartment: the colors, the furniture, the pictures...and you. Sighing, I feel that something is just not right. *Maybe if I paint the walls...umm...yellow...Yeah! Yellow! Brighten things up a bit in here...maybe make it cheery. Nah, not yellow. I hate yellow. Too happy and bright.* In contemplation, I grab my coffee mug again and take another sip. *Needs more milk too...too strong.*

Hearing the shower turn off upstairs, I roll my eyes. I don't want to deal with it again this morning. *Maybe I put too many grinds in...is it two scoops or three? How about blue? It'll brighten it up but still be...I don't know. No, not blue.* The bathroom door opens with a squeal that I've been meaning to oil up since day one. But just like every other thing that needs to be fixed, it just never got done.

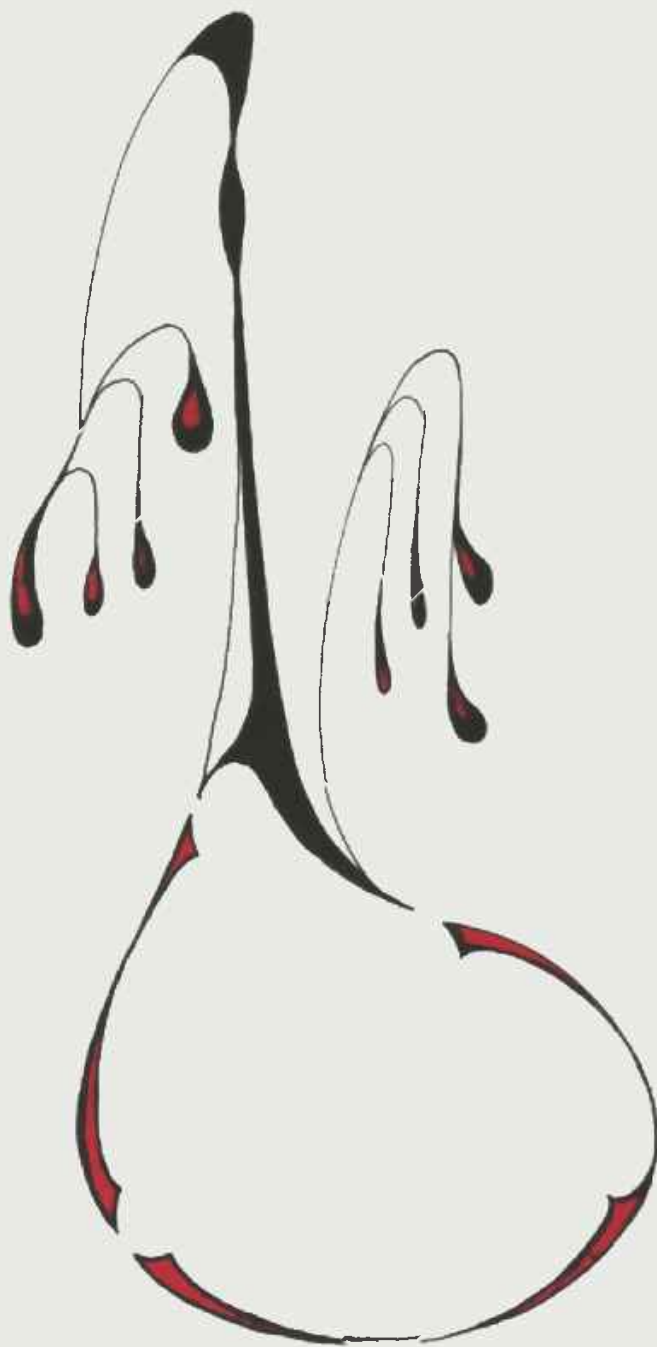
Nothing ever seems to get done: bills go unpaid, friends never get called, birthday presents go unwrapped. I just have no motivation. Something needs to be changed. *There is no such thing as strong coffee, Cassie. Just weak people. There is...no...such...thing...as...strong...coffee...just weak people...weak people... Very true. If you weren't so strong maybe I could tell you that I hate you, that you keep me in a box. But I'm the weak people.*

Dressed and clean, you come downstairs and go into the kitchen to pour yourself a cup of the bitter coffee. I watch as you put one, two scoops of sugar and a bit of milk in and stir. *You stir funny.* Taking a big gulp, your face tightens up in a dwarfish kind of way as the coffee rolls over your taste buds and unwillingly goes down your throat. I silently giggle. "Cassie, it's two scoops of coffee to every four cups. I tell you this every time. I can't believe you don't remember that by now." I bow my head, but a smile is trying to peek out from the corner of my mouth. *Does it ever occur to you that maybe I do know that? Maybe I'm really the strong coffee and you're the weak people.* I smirk as I watch you walk out the door.

"Why Don't You Ever Talk?"

-Mike Duhoski

I have a lot to say but dare not say it.
I want them to beg for all of my statements
That they so dearly seem to need. Here
Are some words that have flown from my
Head, dead on arrival but here all the same.
You wonder what's wrong with me, I
Wonder what's wrong with everything else.
Things are backwards and I'm upside down,
But now that I've figured the hard stuff out,
I don't know what to do with it.
Double bubble foil and rubble,
That's not the way it went but
I've spent too many years listening
To Metallica to remember *Macbeth*.
Around and around, again and again.
They say the world is coming to an end,
But, my friend, the world ended long ago.
The flames were just too bright to see, but
Now it's time to start all over again. We
Know where you've been, we know what you've done,
But what did you sing as you walked into the sunset,
What did you scream as the Earth spun into the sun?
Time to find out, my boy, double digits twice done over.
You've nowhere to go but up, but you can still see the
Depths of the depression at your feet. Slower
It goes until it all stops dead and starts over again
And again and again. It's not the circle of life,
It's a big fat zero, empty and looping all of us
Into a great big herd to be locked away into
The playground of the slaughterhouse.
What does it all mean? What did I just say?
I could tell you but that would be giving it all away.
So...sit and stay and listen to more? Run to mommy
And lock your doors? Or tell me to start talking again?
It's not that it's something I'm not able to do.
Next time, I think, I'll talk about you.



Cheney
-Stevan Davies

Total Quiet

-Meghan Dwyer

Step into a thoughtless moment of total quiet.
Let the enveloping silence tickle your senses
Like cool dewy grass brushing your bare feet in the summer.

Quiet as lemonade drawing frosty pictures on your tongue
Running down your throat, sending shivers down your spine,
Quenching your thirst for a moment of perfect serenity.

Hushed as the sacred time between waking and asleep,
When dreams still dance in the safety of your head
Preparing to silently open the curtain on a new day.

The simple peace as the orange moon slips the silver sky
Mirrors frothy waves pulling tiny stars of sand,
Rearranging the universe in the stillness of the dawn.

Letters

-Richard Brown

Shaping a hole in the curtains' praying hands,
he allowed his eyes to consume the falling snow,
which danced around the hanging street fire.
As his nose drifted towards the thin pane of glass
that shivered with the sky's breath, a fog stole his attention
and offered an area for artwork.
Slowly, he raised his finger's dull tip,
and drug it carefully through the moisture's blanket,
which allowed the capital letters "F" and "B" to be written.
Lowering his pencil,
he stared at his creation for a few moments,
and then turned away leaving the letters
to decompose with the Earth's soil.
A crystal teardrop soon formed
in the corner of each hazel eye,
which pulled a temporary blanket over his sight.
The pressure was overwhelming
and so the floodgates burst
and a stream of sadness trickled down
the cheeks of a bothered man.

Change

-Stephanie M. Soriano

My hair changes
long, short
Words change
slang, a curse
educated
core remains
I pull back
little girl with pigtails flying
in a dirty park in Brooklyn
amazement at the light shafts
as wood and dust fill my nose
height changes, strength changes
still little girl
covers over chin, afraid of dark
crawl to top bunk
big sister will protect
still scared at five six
big sister moved away
fought with her while she was there
opinions change, fingernails grow
still little girl bobo in her mouth
father was invincible, strongest man alive
riding high on his shoulders, taller
than the world
he's getting old, remembering fights
Remembering the past
little girl, curly blond hair
Mother combing it, french braids
hot chocolate, shopping on Fulton in
Strawberries and A and S
hot pizza, our spot
she was everything, untouchable
now tall girl, Fulton rundown pizza place
closed
hair too short for french braids
see the stress in her, the loneliness
she can break
Missed mortgage payment, utility bills
associates calling
would you like to make a payment?
Hiding in a tent
bucktooth girl, pulling baby brother in
little sister too scared
turn on fisher price flashlight

Tent grows light, green and red
she laughs
all three
we pretend we are camping
wild adventure
too big for flashlights, can't fit in tent
clean up, clean up
book bags in the living room
The two outside
did you do your homework?
Me, taller, hair dyed
my daughter sleeping
curly blond hair
pigtails bouncing in a dirty park
Be happy
I won't break
humans
we never were
always are
sweet. Sweet smiles
she has dimples
makes me laugh all the time
she will grow
her hair will change
Long, short
move away
grandchildren
The core will stay
my little girl, older sister
My mother, my dad, little brother
Baby sister
my core
Little girl
Tall woman
Family's child

The Show Is Over
-Jeremy Shrawder

The show is over for our tale
The puppets return to their box
The magician puts his hat on the rack
The dancer loosens her shoes

The show is over, time to move on
Another string is fixed
A new trick is learned
A step moved forward

My show is over, it was fun for a while
The puppets are now past my style
The tricks I used are old
My steps are now slowed

Go home, be free of the show
It is over and there is nothing more.

Another Little Girl Found
-Meghan Dwyer

If I had a William Blake of my own,
He would ride around snug in my pocket
Like a love-worn book of poetry.

He would laugh at all the little jokes
That no one gets but me
And
On a bad day
He would say things like
"Your hair looks especially nice today."
Or
"I think it is time for a bar of chocolate."

He would listen when I got upset
And even help me find things to throw.
Then he would help me clean up later,
After having a perfect cup of tea
And a biscuit
Seasoned with sniffles
And tears
And a spot of strawberry jam.

Society's Child
-Jean Stanley

Where have all the children gone?
Did you not see them- They were just here yesterday
Skipping and laughing- swinging and jumping
Delighting in their play

Some are running from something
Others have been led astray
Struggling with confounded indentities
Needy of acceptance and desperate to change

Impressionable minds of misconceived ways
Gather together like birds of a feather
Voices in black boxes and writings on a page
Singing and shouting with words having nothing to say

Violence and hatred presented center stage
Immorality prevailing on each corner turned
Coveting useless desires and greedy for more
Games with guns and swords no longer are play

Tempted with potions of poison and small sticks aflame
Fallen under spells of white dust escaping self-afflicted pain
Unveiled and unprotected precede the epidemic realms
Brings forth the angel of death to carry them away

To honor false idols and their heroes proclaimed
Celebrities and players adorning endless walkways
Concealing reality and pretentious array
Flashing lights, a pot of gold, and the thrill of the game

Robbed from their houses hence where they lay
Unaware of the beast that stalks in the night
Secretly walk among the missing
Smiling pictures now sadly displayed

The days of innocent years shall be no more
Mermaids and sandcastles have been washed away
Black Beauty and Silver never to ride again
Lullabies and teddy bears- memories of yesterday

Where have all the children gone?
Why can we no longer see them- They were just here the other day
Come back sweet child for your tiny hand I must hold
There are stories still to be read and precious prayers to be said
Let me hold you in my arms and search the windows of your soul
I promise this time to be here and never to let go



Cupid and Psyche
-Carla Cognini

Nothing Less
-Jessica Helock

We met that first time I saw you, and only you
Nothing more, nothing less
You were a picture, a memory, painted in my mind
Nothing more and surely nothing less.
We met again, though it was only I when I turned,
You were gone, a memory
A little more but nothing less
My heart dropped, I missed your voice
You were a picture in my mind, a painted memory
A little more and surely nothing less.
We met once more, but this in a dream
I talked, you listened, the time we had
A bit more but nothing less
When I awoke you were gone but still you remained there
A painted memory pictured in my mind
A bit more and surely nothing less.
The time we met, you and I, you talked, I listened, the time we had
It became more but nothing less
The Lord gave us patience and time in His will
Soon to be more and surely nothing less.

Italy

-Stephanie M. Soriano

I want to take my daughter to Italy
I'm not Italian but I want to take her there just the same
Once we get there I'm going to clothe her in thick Communion dresses everyday
white lace dresses
nothing but frills and ribbons and bows
till all that is left of her is blonde curls
A mass of pure white with two shiny black shoes poking from beneath the hem
I want to stand and watch her run under a Mediterranean sky
to look at her and see a shuffle of legs and arms whizzing around me till I grab her up
in my arms
to look into her bright hazel eyes, and see the ruins of ancient Rome reflected in them
to see them absorb it all, as she realizes the wealth that was and what she can attain
I want her with understanding to laugh and take my hand down cobblestone streets
running with me happy as the sound of our hard sole shoes slap the pavement
seeing her smile amidst a sea of people, cafes and beaches
I want her to see boundless adventure, to know that she knows she is not polluted by
the same weakness that lives in me
I will be content and we will leave
I want my daughter to take me to Italy
I want her to take my hand and lead me down halls in museums naming painters and
their styles
I want her to buy me coffee in a small cafe and take my arm in hers as she rests her
curls darkened by time against my shoulder, my withered hand on her face
I will look at her and smile
content
I will leave
I will wait for her on a sandy beach in Italy
and when she comes to me I will hold her
my baby once again
under a deep sky and setting sun
living Italy for eternity

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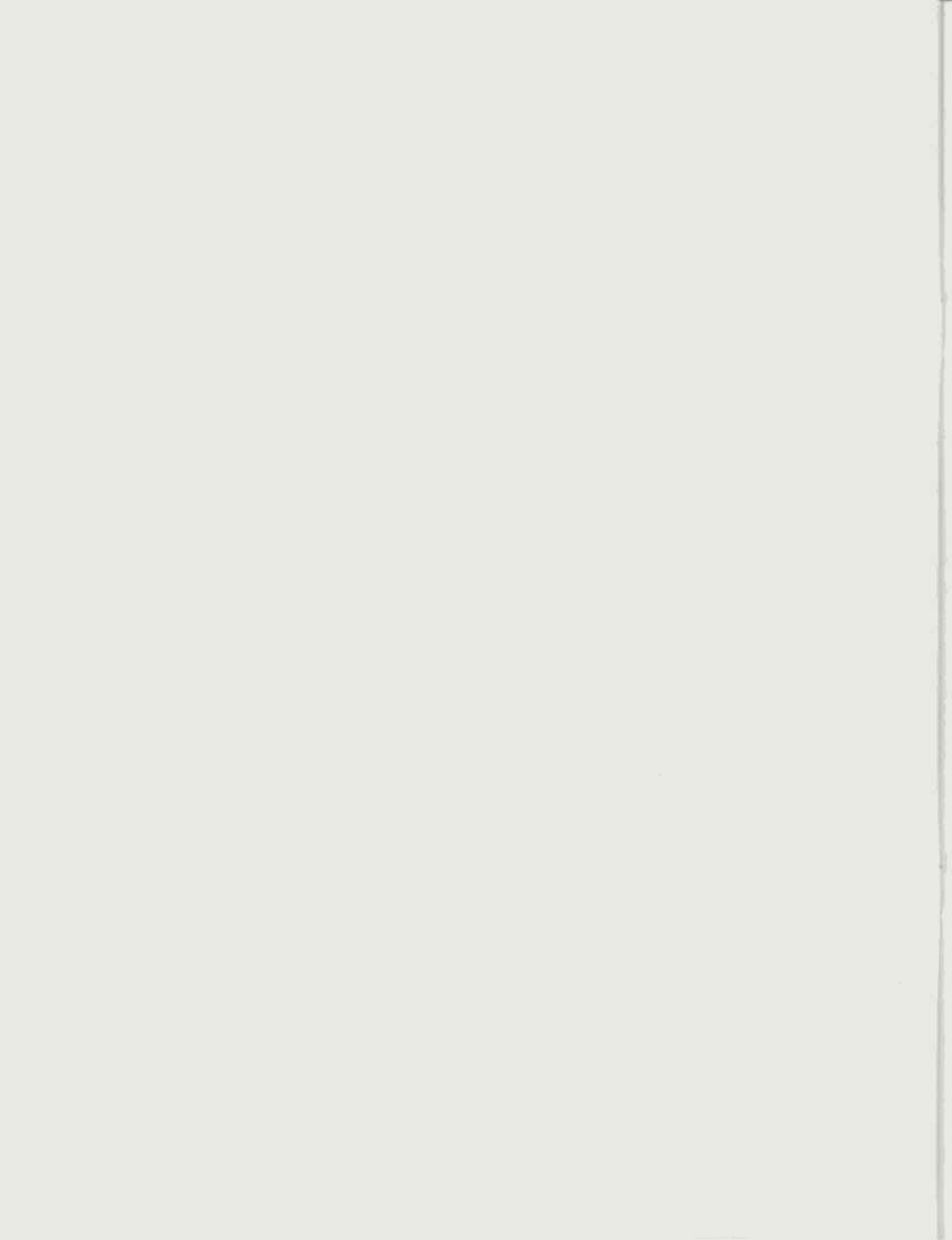
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