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INSTRESS

2000



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disdainful affliction

you are sick today
with a fever in the middle of summer
your cheeks are red
on fire your whole body
seems to be burning perhaps
it is the twisted revenge of
those imbeciles who smile when
you approach and snicker
as you proceed past
eyes only half
closed as you rest
your head on my shoulder
a child who
fears missing midnight on new
year's eve I would give
anything only to see
you well again smiling
laughing about
nothing

Anna Golod
-first place-

English Department Award
for a high school student

Little Boy Blue and the Man on the Moon

It's been thirty-two years since I killed my mother. No crime a resentful father can forgive, much less allow a regretful son to forget. Even now your silence is laced with more expressions of resentment and disappointment than any words could possibly carry. But silence was all we ever had. Now, more than ever before, I find it so very tragic. But such has been my life.

Every father wants a son. A primal desire words can deny but instincts naturally indulge. But in a civilized society, fathers are expected, nay obligated, to sprout promises and assurances that their child's strength and health are their only true concerns, nearly to the point of convincing themselves of their own sincerity. But deep within the crevasses of long-forgotten instincts of basic survival, they are forced into the awareness that which they can most efficiently mold their own image. An indistinguishable clone in which to vicariously re-live days of youth and freedom long since vanished. You were such a father-in -waiting, but not a man who denied what you most wanted. You wanted a son. No pretenses or assurances. Nothing else would be acceptable. Finally, after years of rigorous work and hardened determination, you were gifted with one--cursed with another.

One would think my brother Gibson was born pure gold, a trophy to be polished and displayed for all to see. Conceived during a passionate anniversary of candlelight and flowers, he was a healthy young lad that instantaneously won a father's pride and a mother's love. I, on the other hand, was a product of drunken lust and faulty contraception. A disappointment from the start. Weighing in at ten pounds and eight ounces, natural birth proved impossible. An emergency cesarean proved fatal.

Such hopes and dreams you must have had for Gib. A track or football star to cheer for in the bleachers. A scholarship to a pristine university. Employment that supplied benefits, securi

ty, and respect. The opportunities must have seemed endless. But to achieve these goals, you began molding him into manhood quickly with the early introduction of physical fitness and strict discipline. I suppose part of me was always relieved such expectations weren't made for me. My steadily growing weight in my early youth made it impossible to complete, much less keep pace with a father and son's five mile morning jog. I remember many a morning beginning with a sharp pain in my side telling my short stubby legs to stop their galloping pace, finally complying as I expelled my earlier breakfast while watching my father and brother disappear into the distant horizon.

No, I didn't belong at home. At least, that's how I felt. And no one made any effort to make me feel otherwise, least of all you. Unfortunately, after entering school, I found I didn't belong there either. While Gibson's popularity flourished with each passing year, I was mocked and bullied, as those with ample girth are one to be. Fortunately, I saw little need to attend school to suffer such unnecessary humiliation. Did you know that? How could you? It was your indifference that made it possible for my brief sabbatical from that public institution. But I never wanted to fail. If, by school policy, missing twenty days meant expulsion, I missed nineteen. On the rare occasion I attended class, I would pay strict attention to do well on exams. As much as I detested school, I never wanted to disappoint you with failure, despite knowing you could never see me as anything but.

As years passed, our silence grew. Fortunately, the taunts and mockery began to subside at school, prompting better attendance. That was until my inevitable venture into a harsh frontier I could scarcely fantasize. An unforgiving world where strict natural selection eradicates all organisms unfortunate enough to evolve into anything less than perfect. A domain of such evil, to send shivers down the spine of Dante himself. And thus, I walked down the valley of the shadow of high school.

It was there I was introduced to unwarranted expectations brought about by the reputation of big-brother Gibson. He spent three years of massive popularity as football quarterback and track star, entering his senior year with many lovelorn underclass coeds left circling his wake. Although certainly making you proud, I'm sure, there were many that disliked Gib's arrogance, athletic prowess, or abilities to charm the ladies. These were the jealous few who found themselves lacking the appropriate backbone to confront Gibson with their grievances, but found in me a source of redemption.

"Hey, you Gib's fat little brother?"

"Uh... yes..."

"You think you're a tough-guy too?"

"No..."

"Come on, chubby, how's bout we see how tough you are?"

"No that's okay..."

"Right now! Let's go!"

Most altercations such as this I answered with a brisk walk in the opposite direction. It was after all, a no-win situation, If I entertained the thoughts of a physical response and lost, the humiliation would only increase as the years passed. If I defeated my opponent, other challengers would surface to test my mettle. But I often wondered if all it took was one victory to win a father's attention. What would it have taken to slice through our palpable silence? To transform your all too familiar scowl of disappointment once, just once, into even a brief glace of recognition? I never found out. Not during my years at college. Not during my brief visits on holidays. Not even today..

Gibson's inability to make parole made it impossible to attend the services. I was left to greet stranger claiming to be old friend wishing to say their last goodbye. One told stories of your youthful years as a poolshark at local billiard halls and many other tales I never heard or was aware of. Why did it take the stories of

strangers to learn more about you? Why didn't you ever teach me how to play pool; something we could have shared together? Why didn't I know you? Why didn't you try to know me? Such regrets would make any loving son break sown with tears, but none came. I thought I was unable, that your years of resentment and apathy spawned an inner-hatred of my own. But searching deep, I found no hatred. Only regret. Still I never cried...

Now, standing alone with you on this brisk autumn morning, I cry. The tears flow freely and uncontrollably. Not because all my accomplishments and victories went unnoticed or that my opportunities to win your pride, though always fleeting and seemingly impossible, are gone forever. I cry now at this moment over the sudden revelation that it is easier to talk to a marble headstone than it ever was to you. No, I don't weep for what might have been, but for what is...

Bill Jeffery

Mint Green

he sits on the dream where I dwell
we breathe in the mint
exhaled from the droplets
of dead lights
not because of what they are
their pieces- our projections

he sits in the center of my soul
the gods we near
warm in our hearts
of hands holding
left on a back porch in July
our noticing- our peace

he sits in the light of my eye
see- we are the droplets
we glitter
and ripple
and drop to dwell
what we can not touch
our darkness- our brightness

he sits on the mint I have tasted
still fresh on our tongues
lights past and looming,
we are trudged in lemon-sun laughter
our feet only upon the grassy trickle
trodding merely trodding
lights burn within
constrained to breathe without
we breathe- we breathe

April Masters

Absolute Miseri

I am a student at Miseri and I can't get any ZZZ's
and I'm hounded in my e-mail by curious family,
who say eat your potato skins because they're good for you,
and pick up your vaccinations and an Irish Catholic too,
but the girl I want is Russian so what am I to do,
but I don't even have time to worry.

I got home the other night and had homework galore,
and inside is my roomie naked with his whore,
and guess what the dryer isn't working anymore,
and it turns out some drunk smeared guacamole on our door,
and I'm not sure if I can take this lame @*#% anymore,
so I think it's really time for merit housing.

On weekends I run races while Coach chases a groundhog,
and I read a dozen e-mails bout my grossly stupid dogs,
then at night I work on a corny little play,
and no one listens to a thing I have to say,
and I have homework nearly every single day,
but it's all stuff I don't feel like doing.

I don't know why I wrote this, I'm just in a bad mood,
My social life sucks almost as bad as college food,
I have projects scattered out as far as I can see,
and I have a stress fracture because of cross-country,
and when I asked her on a date all I got was maybe,
I have to stop writing cause I really need to pee,
well I have another test this week in a subject I don't know,
So I guess I have to study and I must go.

anonymous
-second place-

Resurrection

“GOOD MORNING CAPE CITY!!” yelled an unbelievably perky voice from the radio. “Today, unfortunately, there is no good morning for the families of the nine missing girls kidnapped this past week. There are no leads in the case according to the CCPD. Let’s hope they find them soon. In other news...”

“Geeze,” thought Marie Valjean, “I can’t believe they didn’t find them yet. And THEY are suppose to be one of the best police forces in America.”

Marie looked at the now silent clock radio. “Oh no! I’m gonna be late!”, she screamed in a panicked voice. She grabbed a school uniform from her closet and threw it on, hunted for her shoes, and threw her books into her bookbag. She zoomed down the steps and rushed to her car. Just then she heard her aunt shouting for her.

“Marie!” she yelled. “It’s SATURDAY! You don’t have school today.”

“Oh, yeah,” said Marie sheepishly.

“What’s more, sweetie, it is also your birthday. How on Earth could you forget?” said her aunt.

“I guess I have been so over worked recently that I totally forgot,” said Marie.

“Come on, Marie, I have your breakfast ready on the table.”

“Cool,” said Marie.

“How on Earth could you screw up a perfectly planned kidnapping?!?” yelled a sinister voice.

“Hey, I got the ninth virgin like you asked for,” said Proteus incredulously. “So what if I accidentally dropped a lousy piece of magic root.”

“SO WHAT??” roared the voice. “If they ever identify the root and trace it back to me, I will not be able to invoke the absolute immortality spell, which can only be done tomorrow.”

"Hey, the cops are good, but none of the could ever identify magic root in a million years."

"I don't have time for this. Get me the last one ASAP or heads will roll, namely yours!" said the voice.

"Oh, I won't fail this time. It's only some nerdy chick that lives in Vermillion Acres. She won't put up much of a fight."

"Fine. Go and get her."

"Right away, Lord Magus."

"So, how did you enjoy my blueberry pancakes?"

"Unbelievable like usual, Aunt Anne," replied Marie.

"Good," said Aunt Anne. "I now present you with a gift that your father would have given you if he was still alive today."

Marie opened the small ox and took out an exquisite gold cross, studded with rubies. "Oh, Aunt Anne! It's beautiful!"

"I'd thought you would like it. Read the inscription on the back," said Anne.

"O.K. here it goes..I don't understand what the inscription means," said Marie in confusion.

"Read it out loud," said Anne patiently.

She read the inscription out loud: "Rise, O Phoenix, from the flames, Lend me your power to save the world again."

Suddenly the room was flooded with a bright light. There were flames emanating from the cross and were slowly surrounding Marie's body. Her clothes seemed to be consumed b fire. Just as the fire started, it was over.

Marie was now wearing a suit of golden armor with a red phoenix on the front. She looked at her arms and found pair of ruby studded gauntlets. She looked at her feet and saw a pair of boots that looked like they were just made by a cobbler. Instead of holding the necklace, she was holding a sword that looked exactly like the cross.

"What the heck?" said Marie startled. "One minute I'm dressed in my school uniform and the next I'm dressed like a

reject from a Camelot movie holding a claymore. What give's, Aunt Anne?"

"It's a long story, Marie," said Anne. "That armor is about 1000 years old. It belonged to all of your ancestors and now it is yours."

"How is it possible that you know this?"

"I will get to that in a few minutes. I will tell you a little bit about your family first. Your ancestor from the Middle ages was given this as a gift form saving an Arab magician's daughter from a group of renegade crusaders. He showed a virtue that was way ahead of his time: the virtue of understanding. He was given the armor and the sword to fight for the side of justice for all who needed it. The tradition has now been passed on to you, Lady Phoenix."

"Lady Phoenix???" said Marie.

"That's right. The armor chooses the identity for you. It always reflects the way a person wearing the armor is. You are intelligent, strong and beautiful, just like the mythic bird."

"Cool!" said Marie finally realizing what was going on. "Am I a super hero, or something?"

"In layman's terms, yes."

"O.K., what are my powers?"

"You have to establish them for yourself."

"So, could I say that I can fly and I can?"

"Not really, these skills must be a part of those who took up the armor before you. Fortunately, you have the makings of great hero abilities already."

"Like what?"

"Well, you are a high level martial artist in various fighting styles, you can use a sword pretty well, and you have the potential of becoming a master mage knight."

"No wonder you taught me how to fight," said Marie.

"Yes, but the style you were taught was different than most conventional styles," said Anne. "You were taught Talon."

"I never heard of it."

"Naturally. Most humans don't know the style for one reason: it is the fighting style of gargoyles." said Anne, differently.

"Gargoyles?? I thought they were just glorified rain spouts and Saturday morning cartoon characters."

"Let me assure you that they are real. I should know, I am one."

"Yeah right, Aunt Anne," said Marie skeptically.

"Anything is possible; let me show you."

Marie stepped back.

"Orus, Tricourus, Revertus!"

Suddenly a bright flash of light flooded the room. Marie saw her aunt standing five inches taller and what looked like bat wings on her back. Anne's other features looked normal, except her ears were pointed and her skin was a shade of brown.

"What the..?" said Marie. "You are a GARGOYLE???"

"Yes I am."

"But shouldn't you be a statue at 8:50 in the morning?"

"Honey, you watch too many cartoons. We gargoyles are nocturnal by nature, but can handle sunlight like anyone else."

"I guess you really weren't my mom's sister, huh?"

"No, but we were close friends. I have more to tell you, so you better sit down 'cause this could take a while."

"Well this looks like the address," said Proteus. "I can't barge in there right now, so I'll wait for night fall. If I get her quickly, Lord Magus can start the ceremony tonight." He climbed up a tree to wait until evening. "I hope this Valjean kid won't put up a fight," he thought to himself...

"..so your father challenged Magus to a sword duel that fateful night out of anguish over your mother. He knew that she was poisoned by Magus and would challenge him on the grounds of love and honor. Unfortunately, Magus was packing a venom

sword that could kill a person with the slightest scratch.”

“So he died in battle to honor Mom’s death,” said Marie.
“How Romantic!!”

“Honey, he was that kind of person. He was whipping Magus, when that scum bag pulled a dirty trick and ran your father through. However, I knew you would continue the crusade eventually. Today Magus created a seemingly legit corporation called Darklight Industries. He’s trying to gain absolute immortality.”

“What do you mean by that? I thought that once you were immortal, you remain immortal?”

“Yes, but this type of immortality prevents you from being killed, namely the blood of a golden hind. It is a highly toxic material that can kill anything, even immortals.”

“How do you get absolute immortality?”

“Well.” began Anne, “there are three ways to obtain it. First, a person could drink a potion made of god knows what, second a person could win ten straight Brotherhood of Mages tournaments, or it can be obtained by sacrificing ten female virgins. Marie, I hope you use your powers responsibly. You must promise.”

“I promise to do this and to become the greatest hero that this world has ever seen!”

The day passed quickly for Marie. She learned how to cast five spells and how to mix simple healing potion, using cola, garlic, and vinegar. Soon she was in bed and dreaming of becoming a legendary hero in the city.

Little did Marie know, a certain lackey for crazed wizard oozed through her window pane. “Finally the last girl!” He grabbed Marie and slipped out of the window. He took a shortcut to the warehouse because he was late for the ceremony.

Marie woke up on a concrete floor. She realized she was in a cell with nine other girls. “Where am I?”

“We’re in some type of warehouse,” said a bond sitting next to her. “I think we are part of some psycho ceremony.”

Marie remembered Aunt Anne. “Hey, are you a virgin?”

"EXCUSE ME??"

"This is serious!" said Marie.

"Oh all right, yes I am."

This is not good thought Marie. If I'm right he is attempting to get absolute immortality. I'll go first to stop this werdio.

"Lord Magus is ready for the first, uh, volunteer. Who will go?" asked the guard.

"I will!" yelled Marie.

"What do you mean that I have to wait ten hours before reporting a missing person!!!" screamed Aunt Anne angrily into the phone. "I have a feeling I'm going to have to take matters into my own hands!"

"Ahh, my first victim right on time," said Magus with anticipation. "Strap her to the alter, Proteus. Well, what is your name little girl?"

"My name is Marie, you psycho! What are you some kind of satanic priest or something?"

"Why no, I am the most powerful wizard in the world and I will obtain absolute immortality by sacrificing you. Now, Drop Dead Gorgeous!!!" said Magus as he lifted the jeweled dagger.

"I don't think so!" yelled Marie. "Rise O Phoenix from the flame, Grant me your power to save the world again!"

Suddenly light filled the room. A flame consumed the alter and Marie stood in her armor as Lady Phoenix. "You will not hurt these girls!" she screamed in anger.

"Well this is a pleasant surprise. The long lost heir to the mantle of the Phoenix has returned. But, not for long!" He shot fire balls at Marie, which she barely dodged in time.

"Is that the best you can do! Hey Magus, hit me with your best shot!"

"You asked for it!" yelled Magus shooting another fireball.

Marie knew he would do this, and suddenly jumped at the

last minute. In mid-air she did a reverse heel kick and shot down Magus with unbelievable velocity. The kick knocked him out!

"Oh my god! I knocked out Magus!"

Suddenly there was a loud crash of breaking glass from the ceiling and Anne fell from the sky light. "Alright Magus! You're really gonna get it now!" she yelled.

"Uh, Aunt Anne, I, uh, knocked him out," said Marie.

"How did you did you do it?" asked the startled gargoyle.

"I just tricked him into shooting a fireball, I jumped into the air and hit him with a reverse heel kick. Man, for someone who is suppose to be all powerful, he really has a glass jaw."

"Why do you think I resort to physical attacks when I fight him," said Anne. "You were also quite lucky this time. He wasn't prepared, so be careful when you go after him next time."

"No problem Aunt.."

"Don't call me that here. Call me by my true name in public when we fight together, Nightangel. I'll tell you the story later."

Suddenly there was a groan from where Magus was laying. "Oh great," mumbled Nightangel, "he's waking up."

Magus got up off the ground and stared at Marie angrily. "You little minx!" he screamed. "You prevented me from beginning the ritual in time. Now I have to wait another 500 years to do it!"

"C'est damage, dimwit!" yelled Marie.

"This is not over yet, little girl. I will get my revenge. That is why I brought a little insurance, I planted a bomb in this building that will go off in ten minutes."

"You pathetic creep! Only a coward would do such a thing."

"Ta-Ta for now little bird. We will meet again!" said Magus with a laugh. He reached into the air and threw down a smoke grenade. It exploded and when the air cleared he was gone.

"Nightangel, we must get the girls out!"

They ran down the corridor and found the cell. "What took you guys so long!" asked the surly blonde.

After everybody escaped, Marie realized, "NIGHTANGEL!" screamed Marie. "I think we forgot to get Proteus out of there!"

"Don't worry. He mad it out alright. I sensed it. You will acquire the same sense of magical presence the more you train."

"COOL!" said Marie.

No sooner did she say this, a massive explosion rocked the harbor. "Man that was close!" said Marie with relief.

Marie ran to the back of the building and chanted a spell to change herself back to her normal clothes. "What happened?"

"Well, Red," snorted the blonde, "some girl calling herself Lady Phoenix saved our lives and blew up the building. I bet you fainted when theat sleaze ball tried to kill you."

"I guess I did," said Marie faking grogginess. "What's your name, Blondie? I'm Marie Valjean."

"I know you! I'm Jen Carpenter. You won the All City Martial Arts Tournament last year! So why did you faint?"

"I guess I was terrified, that's all!"

Suddenly sirens were wailing in the distance. "Flnally!" said on of the girls. "We can all go home now!"

"Not yet," said Nightangel, "first you have to go to the station and give a report of what happened."

At the Darklight building, Magus was brooding. "I can't believe it! How could I have been beaten so easily by a girl!"

"Maybe she was well trained," said Proteus, to calm him.

"No matter I will destroy her if it's the last thing I do."

"I just hope Ares won't find out, he gets testy."

After the police left the scene, Jen sat on the edge of the pier. "I can't believe that I was caught off guard and kidnapped by a lunatic wanting absolute immortality," she thought . "This would never happen in Aquitaria! And the humiliation of being rescued by a land dweller." At this she jumped into the icy waters of Lake Erie and magically her lower torso turned into a tail. "I'll be back,"

she shouted into the cold night air. "All who dare dishonor Aquina, Queen of Aquitaria, will feel my wrath! HA, HA, HA,!"

"So, do you still want to be a hero, Marie?" asked Nightangel.

"Of course, Aunt Anne. I saw how the girls reacted when I saved them and I liked that look. I think that I can make a difference in this city."

"That's the spirit! But I will warn you ahead of time, Magus wasn't ready for you this time. If he knew that you were coming, he would have beat you with ease. Please don't get cocky. I don't want to lose you, like I lost your father."

"I won't, Aunt Anne."

"Oh, yeah. Good job of beating Magus. He hasn't had a good kick in the head for a long time. I think with a little more training, you can be the greatest warrior of all time."

"Thanks, but the training has to wait."

"Why, Marie?"

"It's Sunday, my day off!"

"Oh, brother."

The End... For Now...

Jeremy Shrawder
-second place-

Each Day We Live

Each day we live, a part of us dies
We push ourselves, like baby chicks hatching from eggs
The journey of life is a garden maze,
never knowing when you'll hit that dead end

Each day we live, a part of us dies
As we grow wiser with age, bodies become wrinkled and weak
Time has played games with our lives, but never the soul

Each day we live, a part of us dies
Legs that used to run for hours, can barely make it down the hall
Canes, walkers, and wheelchairs become our lives

Each day we live, a part of us dies
Wild crazy hair from the wind and the rain,
turns silvery gray with age
The sparkle in our eyes will turn dull with signs of cataracts

Each day we live, a part of us dies
Through the times we won't forget the people
who have given us so many memories
The love in our hearts will always remain,
though they become tired and weak
We are here to live and die
They day will come when life won't be able to be lived any longer

Each day we live, a part of us dies.

Sarah Race

Enmeshed Aberration

Enchanted fury ripples through my veins.
Rage crumbles the rusted tin.
Indignation shatters the windows within.
The souls wrath breaks free.

Wind entangle the universe,
And their source is all the same,
Deep-rooted anger boiling ever on,
And perpetual fear of their ultimate end.

Kristen M. Stewart

Mother's Burden

A life is expected in the spring
The young mother wears no wedding ring
Avoid the responsibility her partner flees
The missing branch of the family tree

The winter has thawed, the child is born
The young mother's body is tired and worn
Most joyous occasion, darkened by shame
Young girl's misfortune the infant's to blame

The infant is brought to her side to feed from her breast
There is no time for her exhausted body to rest
For the infant's needs come before her own
Tortured by the thoughts of raising the child alone

The responsibility causes her mind to go astray
Overwhelmed, she decides to give her child away
to an older woman who will provide a loving home
By treating the beautiful infant like one of her own.

Cory Rubino

Self Portrait*



Nicole Dixon
-first place-

glass

the casserole is dead and dry
cracked around the edges
separated from the glass
which held it together
layered noodle upon noodle
year upon cheese soaked year
(vegetables scattered- insignificant chunks)
grease from a tarnished golden:
 a peach over-ripened
 juices sealed in a box
(other's forgotten- tuna turned to a jello mold
 mashed potatoes linger
 for muddy gravy
 fuzzy mustard waiting patiently)

casserole untouched
walled by itself- within itself- is void

no warm bites will be taken
to fill a belly round
nothing to savor in sleep
stray cats roaming, bypass the
cardboard stale sacrifice

the casserole is dead and dry
(keeping form even when separated from the glass)
invisible walls still exist
around
a casserole wasted

April Masters
-first place-

dote paragon (apparently he tried to gather wool)

sleeping down in a valley
where the rivers frozen cold
darkness of the winter settled
deep within his bones
laying under a lukewarm sunlight
restlessly, his mold
seems the glimmer of his daydreams
have been cast away in stone

and as he tried to reach us
he found a broken telephone
ran to tell his sister
but she left him there alone

sleeping down in a valley
in this february land
a whitened pennsylvanian
and a north male american
can find his insulation
with a little acquiesce
sometimes it's hard to stay up
too long in the present tense.

unsigned

Color Blind

I am color blind
To all th happy colors in the world I am unable to find
I can not see the color of love
Or the passing of a beautiful dove
I am color blind
To the color of a stop sign
To the color of the warts on a toad
I am color blind
To all the poetical lines that rhyme
Am I color blind towards God
Or the color of Jesus' favorite fishing rod
Am I color blind towards you
And all of the black and white visions that I am able to see you do
Is the world only black and white for me
Why is it I can not see the color of a bee
Am I color blind to the sight of pain
And the rainbow that occurs after a heavy rain
Why do I not like your kind
Is it because I am color blind?

Corey Gallagher

DEATH at Stop 305

Curtain Opens: On a dark stage, a single spotlight shine down on a simple bus stop bench. There sits JOHN MABLE, a serious business type, beside his briefcase quietly reading a newspaper. THE GRIM REAPER (DEATH), complete with black cloak, skull face, and sharp scythe enters and sits beside him.

Both sit quietly, neither taking notice of the other. As John turns the page of the paper, he barely acknowledges his new companion with a polite nod of the head.

JOHN: Hey.

GRIM: Hi, how you doing?

John returns to reading the paper. Both continue to sit quietly.

GRIM: You..uh...done with the sports section?

JOHN: Sure, help yourself.

John hands Grim the paper. Both are now reading. John slowly lowers his paper realizing what's beside him. He looks at the Grim Reaper reading the paper, then shakes his head, dismissing it as he returns to reading. Grim finishes and puts the paper aside.

John takes another look and stares at Grim, unsure what to make of him. He looks around to see if there is anyone else who sees what he sees, but there is no one. Grim notices John staring.

GRIM: Something I can help you with, buddy?

JOHN: Hmm? Oh.. I'm sorry. I was just...uh...I was just wondering about the get-up.

GRIM: Get-up?

JOHN: Yeah, the whole Grim Reaper deal you got going there.

GRIM: I am the Grim Reaper.

JOHN: Yeah, I know. But is it for a costume party? A

prank?

GRIM: No, I am the Grim Reaper.

John realizes he's sitting next to someone not in his right mind.

JOHN: Oh. Okay. You're.. You're Death.

GRIM: Nice to meet you.

Grim shakes John's hand.

JOHN: All right. Yeah. Nice to meet you, too.

John laughs to himself as he returns to his paper.

GRIM: What as that?

JOHN: What was that?

GRIM: That laugh.

JOHN: Did I laugh?

GRIM: Yeah, one of those little silent chuckles...

JOHN: I was reading Family Circus...

GRIM: You don't believe me.

JOHN: Hey, I'm not judging. You say you're the Grim Reaper, as far as I know you're the Grim Reaper.

GRIM: No, really. You don't believe me?

JOHN: Seriously?

GRIM: Yes.

JOHN: Come on. Of course not.

GRIM: Why not?

JOHN: Because.. Look at you. You're not Death. The Grim Reaper isn't real...

GRIM: Yes, I am.

JOHN: No. No, you're not.

GRIM: I am too.

JOHN: (impatient) Fine. Fine, yes, you are Death. You're the Grim Reaper.

GRIM: Oh, don't humor me, man.

JOHN: Well what do you want me to say?

GRIM: I have I.D.. Here, look. My license.

JOHN: (reading aloud) Reaper, Grim T.. What's the T stand for?

GRIM: Thomas...

JOHN: (handing back card) This is ridiculous...

GRIM: I got the cloak, this sharp thing I got here. Look at my face! I got a skull for a face for crying out loud!

JOHN: It's a mask!

GRIM: No it isn't.

JOHN: I can see the rubber straps!

Grim embarrassingly takes off a rubber-skull mask.

GRIM: Okay, I'm a temp.

JOHN: Oh, come on...

GRIM: Hey, I've built a reputation to live up to. People expect a little flair when I show up. I can't come to someone's door in a suit and tie and say, 'Hey, I'm Death, get in my buick...'

JOHN: You're insane...

RIM: What? You want proof?

JOHN: Yeah. Gimme some proof.

GRIM: You name's John. How about that? Pretty good, huh?

JOHN: Is that it? Do you know how many John's live..?

GRIM: John Mable. You're an accountant. You live on the corner of 36th and Clifford Street. You have a wife, Helen. She used to work in a bakery. Took time off after getting pregnant, never went back.

JOHN: How did you know all that? Have you been stalking me or something?

GRIM: No, John. I know everybody. I have a list. A very long and extensive list. And you really should watch your blood pressure.

JOHN: So... You're.. You're the Grim Reaper? You're Death?

GRIM: That's right.

JOHN: And you're ... waiting for a bus?

GRIM: Yep.

JOHN: (looking around) Am I on T.V.?

GRIM: It's simple, John. A bus is going to crash today and there are a few people on my list, so I thought I'd save some

time by cutting out the middle-man.

JOHN: And I'm on this list?

GRIM: Everyone's on the list, John, it's just a matter of where.

JOHN: Well, where's my name?

GRIM: Oh, I don't think you really want to know that...

JOHN: Yeah, I do. If you're the Grim Reaper, tell me when I die. Today? Tomorrow? Fifty years from now? In a few minutes?

GRIM: You're one of those people who skips to the end of a novel, aren't you?

JOHN: You don't have a list.

GRIM: Tell you what, I'll give you until my bus comes to think it over. If you still want to see where your name is, I'll show you. How about that?

JOHN: In the meantime, answer me this: If you're really the Grim Reaper, why do people die?
Grim sits back, giving a serious reflection.

GRIM: Death exists to appreciate life. Knowing one's life is fleeting; being aware of one's own mortality enables him to..(bursts out laughing.. I almost got through it with a straight face, did you see that? I'm sorry it's just that I get asked so many times... I don't really know.

JOHN: How can you not know? You're Death!

GRIM: Hey, I get handed a list. That's all. I don't get the 'why's' and 'what for's'.

JOHN: So what? Death is meaningless?

GRIM: No, hey, I didn't say that. I'm just saying it's not my department.

JOHN: You have some nerve, you know that? You think death is something to joke around about?

GRIM: No.

JOHN: I see it on the news everyday. People are murdered and killed for no reason. Women, children, people who didn't do anything to anybody....

GRIM: You think I like my job? Why do you think they call me Grim?

JOHN: There has to be a reason. Right? If you're not just some crackpot roaming the streets you'd know the reason. Am I right?

GRIM: It's not my department, John. Listen, there's a plan. Okay? There's a reason for everything. The boss just don't share it with all of us, that's all.

JOHN: (returning to the newspaper) Yeah, well, maybe your boss doesn't know what the hell he's doing.

GRIM: Jeez, that was harsh. I'll be sure to tell him that next time I see him.

JOHN: Fine by me.

GRIM: What flew up your skirt all of a sudden?
John slams the paper down on the ground as he turns to Grim in anger.

JOHN: My wife carried our child for seven months. Seven months! She didn't drink, smoke, use drugs.. And it was healthy! Our baby was strong and healthy. We did everything the doctor told us. And what did we get? Stillborn. Stillborn. No reason. never saw it coming. A stillborn baby girl. You explain to me.

GRIM: What do you want me to say, John? Some are on my list sooner than others...

JOHN: I don't want to hear it! You think you're Death? Fine! Then show me your list! Show me my name! Show me my wife's name! Tell me when she's dying on m! When and how! Give me time to prepare for it, because I can't go through that hell again!

GRIM: Is that what you would have preferred? To know your baby was going to be born into death? To know when your loved ones are going to die? What would be the truer hell, John?
Tears begin to drip from John's eyes. He doesn't bother wiping hem away.

JOHN: My wife... she sits in an empty nursery. Praying. How does somebody get on your list that didn't even live long enough

to get a name? There has to be.. There has to be a reason...
John's head falls in his hands as he breaks down in tears. Grim
puts his arm around him, consolingly.

GRIM: It's okay, John. It's okay. I see it all the time.
Sometimes it's expected, sometimes it's not. I really can't tell you
which is easier. Some people find it easier to forget. Personally I
think that's the wrong way to go. I think your wife would agree.
See, you're not alone in all this, John. I know you think you are,
but you're not. She's home right now. She's in that nursery sitting
next to an empty crib. She thinks she's alone too.
John looks up to Grim, who gives him a handkerchief to wipe his
face.

GRIM:(continued) That's right. Only she doesn't want to
be. Don't you see? You two shouldn't be crying on opposite ends
of the city. You should be crying together. That's how things get
better, Jon. No matter how much you engross yourself in your
work or avoid going home, deep down you don't really want to
forget. Nobody does. And nobody wants to be alone. Am I right?
John looks to Grim, too proud to agree.

GRIM: So? What's the verdict? Am I crazy?

JOHN: Yes.

GRIM: (laughs) Then I guess it won't do any harm to show
you my list. If you're still interested?
John continues to wipe away his tears.

JOHN: Just leave me alone for a minute...
Grim smiles, nodding his head as he pats John on the shoulder.
We hear the sound of a large bus pulling o a stop in front of
them. Both stand, preparing to board.

GRIM: Oh, you're on 305?

John thinks a moment, quickly deciding to sit back down.

JOHN: No. No, I... I'm on the next one.

The Grim Reaper puts his skull-mask on and walks out of the spot-
light, leaving John alone. John takes out a cell-phone and dials.

JOHN: Hello, Honey? Yeah, it's me. No, nothing's wrong. I

just ... uh.. I just decided not to go to work today. No, I'm fine,
really... I just want to come home...

The spotlight fades out until the stage is completely dark.

Close Curtain.

Bill Jeffery
-first place-

Fading Daylight

Come here beside me child.
Come watch the daylight fading.
Remember times we shared.
Remember people who cared.
They'll always be in our heart,
Each one in a special part.

Come here beside me child.
Come watch the daylight fading.
Where there times you fell down?
Where there times you frowned?
Don't let it make you blue.
Don't let it get to you.

Come here beside me child.
Come watch the daylight fading.
Tell me of your pain.
Tell me when it rained.
So vulnerable is our heart,
So easily is it torn apart

Come here beside me child.
Come watch the daylight fading.
Did you have your heart broken?
Thoughtless words spoken?
I'm sure you'll find,
All wounds heal with time.

Come here beside me child.
Come watch the daylight fading.
Did you know of love
Flying on the wings of doves?
Once it comes your way,
Cherish it each and every day.

Come here beside me child.
Come watch the daylight fading.
Long days are now gone.
The end of my song
The last notes flow
Just a little bit slower.

Come here beside me child.
Come watch the daylight fading.
Setting after a full day.
It makes no fuss as it slips away.
Fading quietly and beautifully.

Joshua Coy

Comfort Zone



A Girl

She awakens to another day gone by
She stretches slowly and lets out a sigh.
She feels like a stranger lying in her own bed.
When did she become so lost- so much confusion in her head?
When did she lose control of her life and herself?
She's nothing but an object, like a doll on a shelf.
Who cares if she laughs or if she cries?
They're too blind to see through her lies.
They think she's got it all-the perfect life.
They don't see her crying, holding the knife.
She stares in the mirror at a face and body she doesn't recognize.
But she's still portrayed as the popular one
with a pretty face and little in size.
She doesn't want to play this role anymore;
she doesn't like this little game.
She's starving for life and ready to go insane.
They took her for granted, but they won't anymore.
The conclusion of her masterpiece hung from her bedroom door:
*Consider these words from the girl you never really knew
Although you gave me nothing, I leave this thought got you,
To me life was more like a nightmare, rather than a dream
So just know that things are not always what they seem.*

Jennifer McCall

Seclusion of Insanity

There is a great silence throughout the world. The chatter of life that used to abound echoes through an empty void. The last person on earth is in a room. The last person in a once lushly inhabited environment sits alone in a small, sterile white-walled room. There is a knock at the door, but it is not answered, for he is the last person on earth and so no one could possibly be knocking.

Looking out the lone window in this isolated prison, a misled teenager once again scans the street for a brief trace of activity, and is not awarded. All that he can catch are glimpses of what used to be, as the streetlights fight in vain the oncoming night. Their bright struggle reflecting the helplessness of his own - for the night will come anyway, rejoicing as it swallows the light.

Pale faced agony quickly turns away from the window in a rejection of truth. His will strains against the tears that threaten, contorting his face into a picture of pain and hopelessness. Turning back to face the cold blackness that envelopes the world in its folds, evokes from him a powerful cry that vibrates like a siren, but is neither heard nor felt by anyone.

It is despair that now takes the place of the bit of hope that had been holding on. Despair that had been threatening since the day they had put him here. He was glad they were all dead, for who had they been to tell him how to live his life? They thought that they knew everything because they had lived for so long. They had been asking for it when they took away his life and locked him in the room. When they took away the drugs that gave him power.

Withdrawal affected his mind and body, and he talked to the great gods that came to visit him in the room. They had magnificent conversations about what a genius he was to have gotten rid of them all. Why hadn't it been done sooner? He must surely

be the greatest god of them all, coming up with the perfect solution to all problems. But the vanity they tried to plant in him did not grow, and he was not convinced of his own grandeur. His body began to shrink, for lack of the drugs, and also from lack of food, and he became like a crippled old man- every move became painful. Life was meaningless and crazy, and he shrunk up into the corner of the room.

Although people stood outside the room pounding violently on the door, their pleading voices begging to be let in, he could not hear them. For in the room he was deaf to their knocks and their cries. And in his room he stayed, where it was safe and he could avoid the problems of life.

The people outside peered into his eyes and saw that he was no longer there, but were unable to find a key to unlock the door of his mind and so, the knocking stopped.

Megan Heckman

Each

the leaf fell
on my plate
and I ate

green crisp shiny bites
torn by mighty whites
the creamy platter gently displayed
the veiny soul base
plucked from its place

the leaf fell
in my depths
churning steps

christmas swirling lights
stream like ribboned kites
my vicious center
grimly welcomed
the dead lifeless green
soul within- soul unseen-
equal soul in each

April Masters

The Picture

Sitting here when all is silent. The white room is big enough just for a single white bed and another piece of whit furniture.

He gazes outside the window and wishes he were on the opposite side. He watches the children laughing as they play. He starts to wonder what things sound like. He wanders into the past thinking about how his life has been ruined by deafness. He cries.

Just then a lady in a white suit comes through the door. She is carrying a tray of delicious foods. He can smell the foods. The tray is filled with chicken, mashes potatoes, broccoli, an orange, and orange juice. He looks at the foods and decides he is not very hungry. She smiles and walks away. He wised that she would stay because she is the only one he can look at.

Time passes and it begins to grow dark. He looks through the open door into the hall. He starts to wonder if there is anything wrong because there is so much commotion. Men and women in white are scurrying back and forth. He remembers the last time it was like this. He read that someone had died. He starts to wonder about death.

The next day he finds a piece of paper and pencil on the side of his bed. He starts sketching a picture of an old man, himself. He draws an unhappy mouth, small nose, sad eyes, then a small amount of hair. Only the ears are missing. He picks up the paper and starts to examine it. The paper then falls out of his hands onto his lap.

A couple hours later, the lady in white comes into the room. S he looks at the old man; he is dead. She looks down on his lap to find the picture of a man without ears.

Keri Gustave

Memories

A mother
lonely room
Come together
and share.

Little knickknacks
Strewn about
Forgotten
By them Only.

A rock sits
Once loved and cherished
A reminder of birthdays past
And when cheap gifts were worth
More.

The mother looks around
Scared of what
These items left behind
Mean more to her
Than to the owner
No longer present.

A book for a child
Sentimental value
More for the giver
Than the receiver
But given hen both could
Appreciate the lesson.

An old doll
Used and loved to disfigurement
Always found: Reminders of
Him who gave the present- gone
Long ago.

A thought-
Does she still have that dime?
Lost and found, then
Lost again-

Or that picture he drew for her
Why did it have no name?
Her first gift from someone
So special
And is there a blessing on the item
Keeping it intact?
The guitarist turned artist
Bringing feeling to pen
And thought to drawing.

many things are in this room-
Candles, racks, books and pins;
But the most important
Item in the room
Is no longer here.

And the mother sighs as she leaves,
The room stays imperfectly still,
Both forever waiting for an

Absolution.

Because everything in this old room
Both here and remembered
Are a part of the
Memories
called love.

C.C. Price

Stale Clinging Odor

Stale clinging odor of naivete
from little puppets, unstrung
I'm sure one day you'll wake up
but before you corrupt the young?

For now though I'm the skipper
on a pirate ship of fools
as you answer "it's not right"
'cause you apparently know the rules.

but one day when Henry's had too much wine
and the crows have not been fed;
when the bells ring out
everyone will cry
as poor Annie's lost her head
and Jesus Christ and Joan of Arc
get drunk one afternoon
while conservatism is laid to rest
the dish runs away with the spoon.

Sometimes though I'm a printing press
with blood and bone for ink;
I spit out what you want,
I spit out what you think

and sometimes I'm an angel
who is riding in your pocket
It never occurred to me to fly away;
It never occurred to you to lock it

Maybe though I'm smart enough
to know that you've been wrong
someday I'll be brave enough
to let myself be strong

But for now I walk on eggshells
and let you show me up
yet one day you'll want your coffee
forgetting you threw away your cup.

Then that's the day when Henry's had too much to drink
and the crows have not been fed;
when the bells ring out
everyone will cry
as poor Annie's lost her head
and Jesus Christ and Joan of Arc
get drunk one afternoon
while conservatism is laid to rest
the dish runs away with the spoon.

Tracy Bergen



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Prose: Dr. Lynch

Dr. Turner

Poetry: Dr. Johnson

Dr. Blanchard

Fine Arts: Dr. Congelton

Dr. Curtis

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Thank You.

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April Masters





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