Creation Space 2005
Bare Naked Soul
Dear Readers:

Dearest ones! You, out of all the population at Knox University, are reading this magazine right now. I, as the editor-in-chief, am asking you to be loving and appreciative of our literary submissions. I strongly believe that our writers who were brave enough to expose themselves in their work, are exposing their souls—bare naked to all. That is a big step for a creative writer. Writers give out in their work a part of themselves, an atom or issue of their pain, sorrow or joy. They are exposing their feelings, thoughts and everyday worries. Be loving and caring of these feelings. Cuddle them as your own, because we are fragile, and sensitive to one’s critique.

Who would just bare-naked to a large crowd of critics? Well, I was hesitant—so were they, but we gave each other hope and here we are with the Creation Space 2005 “Bare Naked Soul”! Please give applause to those heroes and heroines. They were not afraid to bare-naked, and with them I join the group. I applaud their bravery, and so should you, dear readers. Cherish their work, and enjoy.

I would also like to thank the following for their continued support. The staff at the Cougar’s Byte for the informative article that appeared in the Spring Edition. I would be remiss if I did not thank Professor Creadwell and the staff at The Tower for the many ads that were placed in the newspaper. I would also like to wish Prof. Creadwell the best of luck with his upcoming retirement. The staff of the English Department and all of the professors who listened to me “rant and rave” for four years; without their help and support I would not be where I am today a graduating senior and the Editor-in-Chief of Creation Space. I especially need to thank Dr. Sutton and Dr. Parada for all of their help getting the magazine together. A special note of thanks needs to go out to Christine Anne Alkauf, last year’s Editor-in-Chief and patient friend, for completing the difficult task of layout and the even more impossible task of ignoring my irrational mood swings the last few weeks of this semester. Thanks to Maria Michelle Staudt for their splendid work on the cover photograph. The staff at Student Organization needs to be thanked again for their continued support, if it were not for them the edition that you are now holding in your hands would have never come to exist.

On a personal note I would be neglectful if I did not thank my son Michael Dybek for his continued support and love. All of my successes and achievements are as much mine as they are yours. Thanks for everything; a woman could not ask for a better son.

Betty Modoleczko
Editor-in-Chief
Creation Space

Spring 2005
# Table of Contents

**Authors & Titles............................ Pages**

**Petrá Silva**
Cheater ....................................................... 22
San Francisco: You and I .................................. 25
Tuscan Wine .................................................. 24

**Rodrigo Oliveira**
Destiny ....................................................... 26

**Ursula Velez**
The Four Seasons .......................................... 27

**Amanda Hope Taria**
The Other Woman ........................................... 28
Arsenic and Gun Drops ..................................... 29
My Love My Light ........................................... 30

**Sean O’Connor**
Girl Who Wants to Paint Love Down My Stomach .......... 31
Relax Your Eye Graceful Body On My Mattress ............ 32

**Drew Allen**
Cocoa ......................................................... 33
Living In Cyberspace ....................................... 34

**Christine Anne Al-Sharif**
An American Childhood ..................................... 35
October 7th .................................................. 36
Prison Birthday: June 23th, 1969 ......................... 37
The Dead ...................................................... 38

**Justin Cohen**
Intrinsic Glamour ........................................... 39
Perception and Wit ......................................... 40
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors &amp; Titles</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Piera Silva</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheater</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco - You and I</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TuscanWine</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rodrigo Oliveira</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destiny</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ursula Velez</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Four Seasons</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Amanda Hope Toria</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Other Woman</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arsenic and Gun Drops</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Love My Light</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sean @Connor</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl Who Wants to Paint Love Down My Stomach</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relax Your Eye Gracing Body On My Mattress</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drew Allen</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cocoa</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in Cyberspace</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Christine Anne Al-Sharif</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An American Childhood</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 7th</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison Birthday; June 29th, 1969</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dead</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Justin Cohen</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsc Glamour</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception and Wit</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors &amp; Titles</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Justin Cohen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Day of a Lifetime</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The French Kitty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bare Naked Soul</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al Triesti</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words are Always Remembered</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Smith</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amtrak is for Lovers</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aja L. Shepard</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Friends are For</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drew Allen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shotgun Santa</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Betty Modrzejski</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleepover</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casey Summ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Untitled</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Staff of the Spring 2005 issue of Creation Space wishes to thank the members of The Kean University Student Organization for their continued support of the student writers at Kean University. It is because of the financial assistance of Student Organization that many of these writers are able to be published for the first time, proudly, at Kean University. Thanks again.
STRANDED

The rain falls steadily washing the street,
The man waits silently chilled and drenched.
Someone drives by but it isn't her and he frowns.
A barking dog stares and squints his eyes at a fool.

His raincoat is dripping wet with icy water and sweat.
A wristwatch reminds him that it is getting late,
As another car drives by splashing water and doubt on him.
An image of a sweet blonde starlet brings him hope.

The sky grows dark and he still stands wet and weary.
A car appears, it's her, who smiles, waves, and leaves him standing as she leaves.
Easter Sunday: To my Sister

The tires of my Volkswagen churn loose gravel
into tiny orbits as we park between two mini-vans.
You call the stable where you keep your horse "home"
or "heaven"; walking towards it, a chubby tiger cat
winds around your ankles and prances away
its stomach swinging in a rhythm
that doesn't match the trotting paws.
Cardboard cut-outs of bunnies are tacked to fence posts,
signs instruct: No Cars Beyond This Point.
You open a rusted screen door that clangs and clangs
behind us. A woman speckled with hay,
Kmart jeans, and a bleach stained Rolling Stones T-shirt
shakes my hand, tells me you are the best rider she teaches.
Majestic noses playfully bump bars behind her.

I remember the years of fighting, the spring Mom's wedding ring
topped down our cement front steps in three giant pings,
her screaming at Dad, "Why don't you just fuck her then";
the sitting in the middle of the staircase, you on my lap,
carpet scratching the backs of my knees;
Dad saying nothing, my arms around your little belly;
you would never belong to them.
Now your dresser drawers are filled with Trojans
and half-written suicide notes expanding like water leaking through a roof,
staining the ceilings of our house. For years,
I wore her ring on a frayed string around my neck
until she took it back insisting, "Nothing was ever wrong."
Watching you gallop in giant circles lifted
by a creature stronger than you and me—nothing is.
Depression

crawls along my spine,
joints crackling
like dried leaves,

his crab claws scurry
along my shoulder,
his little needle
teeth prickle my chest,

He gnaws a hole
between my breasts.
Like a shadow rolling
through a room,
he climbs inside

and spreads his limbs:
a paint spill turning
to cement in my veins
and rubber in my skin.
Drinking and chewing
a current through my

heart, he whispers,
"I'm going to kill you."
but my blood is sweet,
intoxicating, gleaming
inside of him like words.
“Fat makes you fat,” you always say. 
The kitchen lamplight makes stripes 
of bright silver as it collides with 
the blade of the butter knife in my palm.

I’m slicing a banana into poker chips, 
and placing them in little rows of four 
on a piece of paper towel. Sometimes 
they stick to the knife and my fingers slip 
them off. I remember my six-year-old 
reflection in the door of your mini-van, 
I looked like a hunter green hot air balloon 
sinking in its own bulk. I stopped eating 
because of you. You stood like windblown 
grass in drying cement. I was dying 
and you watched like I was a camera lens 
out of focus you’d prefer never to adjust.

I run my thumb in circles around the open jar 
of peanut butter, all natural no sugar added. 
It’s like I’m making music with a wine glass 
until I plunge skin into something more 
like glue than food. It’s like I’m stabbing you. 
Moving peanut butter between thumb and index 
finger is like rolling scotch tape over skin or 
peeling a scab off of healing flesh. I mold 
a little peanut butter wig for each banana chip. 
Their hair is blowing in the wind. They 
fill my mouth with fat, hate, and vomit.
Allison Ruskin

They Must Desire

Leaves are like freckles
in ballroom dance about
the sky. They point
to places where it wants
to be seen, wants you
to come inside its music, spin
in cyclones, ferris-wheels,
curling hair, rolling eyes.

Rain sticks leaves to the street
like stamps. Branches hang
naked for months,
they must desire.
Ryan James Valdez

Poem

Bedroom walls are blank as me.
At my Mikael desk from Ikeas,
Looking through my window,
Staring into our empty yard,
I want to fill this white sheet.
Unable to start.

Pretending the paper is my yard,
I write a word onto the page,
A title seed I implant in your soil.
I search through paper scraps
With lines of phrases to add on.
Manure I dig into your earth.

I water you, giving phrases flow
With music tuned to taste
Hoping you'll share
Crisp Concord grapes,
Sprouting through ground,
Needing light.

I find words that radiate
Transforming you
Into a grapevine with lines –
Untamed in length.
Using shears,
I prune you to revise.

But you lie flat on soil.
So I gave you structure with
Two stanzas where you
Run across my fence,
And climb the storm drains
To my roof,
Feel the sun.
Ryan James Valdez

Hard-boiled
Caught fresh from hot water,
I drop you, to crack you,
Penetrate skin
You've hidden behind.

I finger to open
The crack that gapes wide,
And claw with my nail
To get inside.

Stripped, virgin -
Marshmallow white jelly,
Warm flummy still,
Ready for eating.

Your oval shape
Shanked up from behind.
Your jello white
Crushed under my spoon.
Your yellow heart
Pierced through with my fork.
Alone

The gutters rattle with rain,
Collecting on the roof,
As I stare at the ceiling from my bed,
Hoping someone will come home.

I picture what raindrops do,
As I listen to the splatters
Through the ceiling,
Drops rolling down shingles,
Gathering in storm drains
Above my window.

Flooding the drains,
Drops creep to the gutter’s edge,
A slide where they’ll zip through
Coasting down in metal tubes,
Catching grass to land,
Trickling into roots.

I want someone home to watch me,
So I can go outside and play,
Splashing puddles
In my Rubber boots,
In this dripping gray world,
Wearing my yellow poncho.
Morning

The sparrows hunt the green for grubs and worma.
While chirping loudly in the morning light.
With little beaks they pinch up prey and fly
Until they reach their young who wait for food.
(Without a thought, these birds have taken life.)

Inside each bush or tree branch near the ground.
The spiders cloak behind the leaves in wait
Since they have cast their nets into the breeze
And reel in bugs like gnats, mosquitos, flies.
(Without a thought, they kill for their own life.)
Remember

"Never mind," you say, "I'm not hungry."
At the dinner table, I serve you rice
And with each spoon of sticky white you eat.

Your hand trembles. You only finish
Half a scoop and say, "I give up; I'm done."
"But you haven't eaten all day," I say.

I grab your saggy arm and lead you down the hall
As you shuffle behind. When your dress snags
Beneath your step, I catch you falling forward.

I lead you to the bathroom as you hang
From my arm to sit onto the bowl.
I leave you inside until you finish.

And I find the toilet seat covered
With brown mush. You missed.
I'd have to clean that up.

But first I lead you to your bed.
Cover you
In that blanket I had as a child.

(continued on next page)
White lines on top of black,
A barring pattern
Cages you in sleep.

I leave the light on, since you're afraid —
A withering gray cat
With shivering eyes.

Do you remember
When I was swaddled in this blanket
That sopped up my sweat,

Muffled my cough,
And silenced my wheeze.
When I was afraid?

With each shuffle step,
You near the checkered flag.
Don't be so quick to end your race.

Just take your time, please.
Do it for me —
Eat.
Swing

I walk with grandma
To a park bench,
Watching the children
Play nearby.
A boy in his jumper
Hops into a swing
And pulls himself back,
Legs kick the sky,
Chains squeal in bliss.
World rocks into haze.
A metronome
In human beat,
Climbing to a peak,
As the boy
Ejects from his seat,
And runs into the
Clouds until his legs
Catch the earth.
My grandma coughs:
I tug her up,
Watching the boy
Run home,
As she struggles
Just to walk.
what happens to the little boy who realizes his dreams will never be
what happens to the little boy who doesn't like the reality he sees
i'm dying for the little boy who lives inside of us all
i died for the little boy who hoped that he'd be tall
what happened to the little boy who lived inside of me
what happened to his dreams that will never be reality

what happened to the little girl who prayed that she'd meet love
finally she met it and couldn't understand what it was
i'm crying for the little girl who knows not what she do
i cried for the little girl who's dreams of love didn't come true
we all know little girls and the fancies in their minds
don't forget the little girls who seek but never find
i'm praying for the little girl who's silent tears i hear
i pray for the little girls and all of their biggest fears

the little things in life are often took for granted
suddenly we get old and feel so disenchanted
life is working magic, we stand and watch in awe
constantly trying to find the things that no one has ever really saw
what happened to the little people that we all used to be
what happened to the dream of life and this nightmare of a reality
what happened to the bright futures we all tried to find
Maybe your mother chose
a pink lining
with a pink satin pillow
for you to rest on.

Maybe she chose
your wine colored,
sparkle covered
Jessica McClintoc
prom dress
for you to wear.

Maybe you are lane
as beautiful as
the day you died;
glass shimmer
adding to the shine
of your thick brown hair,
red blood rouge
on your cheeks and lips,
dressed in your
blood stained, blue jeans,
next season's latest fashion.
You always were a trendsetter.

Maybe all well see
is a waxed, cherry wood,
closed casket with gold handles-
brass looks securely fastened.
Closed but no closure.

Rumors laid to rest
upon entering
the pink and green
flower stenciled, white walls

of the funeral home:
cracked skull,
shattered shoulders,
broken neck.
your father
in a grey, silk suit jacket
rubbing the broken legs
of his daughter on display
in an open casket.
Cristina Barbier

Silent Alarm

I heard you stop breathing.
Is that possible?
The sound of the train
whizzing past the chain link fence
outside our bedroom-
Stopped.
The leaves that rustle
in the wind after it passes were still.
The chronic buzz of the heater,
the sound of suctioning rubber
as I opened the window.
Silent.
I poured water from the green bottle
on your nightstand. The sound, muffled-
as if my glass was filled with sand.
A small white feather from your pillow
Was floating above me, and falling,
failing toward the receiver of the phone
resting on your blue dress shirt
I answered it.
Not because it had rung,
but because I knew you were gone.
I had heard you stop breathing.
Bring the light of your soul
Into my eternal bosom
As we lay broken-winged
In heaven’s arms
Singing praises
Through your carefree caress
Let us commune
With our eroticism
Nourishing high in ecstasy
Uncover our nakedness
To the open universe
Love me as eternity loves
Forever

bring the light... forever
The love between a man and woman is like the soft sand sinking deep between your toes.

It's the rush of two lips interchangeably colliding at supersonic speed
It's the feeling that I felt when the force of you felt the force of me
Undeniably, I wondered if your toes curled while our bodied spasmodically burst into a flaming star

I crumbled at your request of irrefutable pleasure
Your words tickled the sensate sending the rational into oblivion
You have a knack for this
I wanted you to do more and more and more beyond the capacity of memory
Instead, the waterfalls trickled slowly down the path of Heaven
No words were needed to exchange
Only the deep sensual moans of the sea whispered your name
Of melodic melodies of the sky
Gravitating to our bodies
Was the Milky Way
Exploding through the tunnel leading to the light
Delight I take pleasure in you
Wrapped myself into you
You and only you
Mi amor
I sleep soundlessly
Precella Speid

Crossfire

Just a few words to say that we should butt out
Cause some advice we sometimes never think twice of
Is it me or is it you that the fool has caught in the twin
Can't you see that it's not your problem?
But that of those who have built life together

What we say can come in one ear and leave the other
The advice that we give can sometimes leave others distorted
Do we really want them to hate us or should we just butt out?
Let me tell you a story of two people who were in deep love
They loved each other so much, that a child was sent from above

When suddenly things went wrong,
What was oh so well ended up looking like a cast spell?
The dog decided to taste another bone, forgetting that he has one of his own
God forsee it came with colic, the dog might have just caught it
Waiting in the kennel stood the other dog and puppy,
Wondering where is my daddy and my husband to be

Sleeping somewhere else is what pique her mind
With great doubt and hesitation, she cast away the idea that he's cheating
The puppy becomes a stranger to his father
Without even getting the chance to know him well
Off he goes by the day and the night,
With uncles and aunts all by his side
Where is my daddy he might soon ask mommy, almost desperate to reply, "There isn't any"

What a thing to tell a puppy that sees those all around him cuddled with daddy
Left up to mommy to play both roles pretending that she is all he needs
Mommy calls upon daddy for help with their puppy
Only to get the response that I don't have any
Yet still daddy can have a good time,
Smoking and dressing like he is the dune

When puppy becomes grown, the question to ask is would puppy call upon daddy?
Left with mommy at six months old, while daddy pirogue the streets looking daddy
Mommy can only encourage her puppy to be kind to his daddy,
But it's up to puppy to decided whether daddy is worth even a penny
Can you blame puppy if he rejects his daddy?
The one who left his faithful, loving and kind mommy
To share a bone with another daddy
Punishable Disease

A - All the things that I don't want in my precious body
I - Infections that pollute the immune system drastically
D - Deadly sexually transmitted disease
S - Sisters and brothers be cautious in your actions

H - Heartless
I - Incurable
V - Vagabond

AIDS is an epidemic that can only be stop by you
It is an infectious disease that can destroy you and me
It is a deadly virus that has cause great harm and greed
Whether we are responsible for our behaviors is decided individually
Cunningly awaiting its next capable victim
Lurking to riddle the body with an incurable ailment

Who can we blame but ourselves and those who raped us and violated us sexually?
Take control of your life, body, soul, spirit and most importantly your sexuality
We must not judge, smirk and scorn those who suffer
This could happen to everyone, even you and me
Life is a gift so is our body, and the possessions it comes with
Avoid selling, and ill-treating
—the smooth, sensual, beautiful body that God has given to you and me

A dreadful epidemic without a face, heart and soul is frantically running loose
It has a mind of destruction and an image of evil.
Don't give it to a brother; don't give it to a sister
Revenge is not the way!
Killing the population, corrupting the mind, leaving many orphans that may never
be able to wine and dine.
Don't be a heartless soul or an AIDS infection contributor.
Avoid if you can the life of prostitution, sexual traffic king, careless behavior, rape,
and sexual exploitation.

Educate oneself and other(s)
Teach the children as they grow, encourage the spouse and significant other to
wear protective equipment.
Sex is for pleasure and should not be pain.
Be careful in your endeavors, make our future free from this killer and not in
vain.
AIDS is a massmurderer that's busy at work, confident that he will always be fed
second by second of a new body that was left vulnerable.
Protection is the best strategy, but prevention is better than cure.
For Babalon and every other redhead...

HERA MEN

(a prayer for the higher arts of dissociation)

Prayer to the seal of higher dissociation, a memorial for the un-miraculous soul
Flesh is the experience frenzy of existence offered, a dream of its own intent
-nerves coyly calculating the limits of our void-
-channeling the cosmic fixation on time, place, who we grace-
or gracelessly seduce into witnessing our moving
-or unmoved in silenced partaking-
lives, Deathe our communion with the bleak, beyond believed-
the blessed: the father seed cast dancer, pulsing thunder from pursed
serpent lips

the son: the force conjuring scriptures from the 'yet to be' passing

 tantric phrasing

the holy ghost: a haunting, totemic whisper ever self-defining in the
cavernous, soulish slide of the am. God, radio dials tuned to spin
hieroglyphics

Numb, nihilist concerts pulling the hushed mates of ego-ed self-
Kabala branded for the march of parting farewells, fornicated
The dress of fashionable nether Gods

willed to the host of all lords in ritualized sermons, and seizures of vision
Animal attention, foaming lesser-hidden symbols divine-
bare as the cross and its original feats

Escape Acts 1:69

Enter now the wilder-oneness drone and dance the heated beast-
pounce upon the venomous volumes of 'word' in strident copulations-
highest fevers in scathing cathedrals erected with charred wood-
burnt, landing crows, festering wolf packs in broken regions of moonlight
The vibrant call, tomes of release from runes and tombs embraced

Move swifter still to Jesus-

move pallid, rubbed, and raw to Jesus Christ Consciousness
wine in this dynasty of Kahlwini, and Noir'ish saviors

continued on the next page
the seedy primitive state-
newsreel of apocalyptic, beatific misdeeds cart wheeling through neon puddles-
down undressed streets, through the vein, and the moth trial of lamp light-
Crawl to Jesus, his witness is vapid valor and symbiosis-
nicotine bluescape patterned to revelations of rhythm
line a thousand rages in the temple halls-
beat the heart to whiskey scorn: ANGELS DECIDE BESIDE DECLINED MEN
One thousand lines, cocaine and last, lust supper-
the majesty of the kingdom verbatim—
Fracture for and towards the speedball of Vishnu hollows-
Root your love in the ever-darkening soil of crucifixion
THEE bond of the new revival:
The wonderful illusioniness of saints—
in parting, sinful:
No one will drown the mystery,
only drown within her birthing.
She is swifter magic:
a shadow's sway on the edge of the mind—
Her;

amen.
Cheater

Your car not your car but a place to get laid
Your phone not the phone but a secret file
Your body-warm clothing a piece of cold evidence
The smell of you hair when your whore is gone
I, like a fool, looked for lipstick on your collar

Wet kisses and the smell of sweaty sex
In our bedroom on a Sunday afternoon
And all over the world during better times
From Paris to San Juan - memories
Betrayed and feelings lost in space

Moments of precious joy
Holidays spent in Aspen and Vermont
And a Christmas full of spark and light
And drunken embraces like in fairy tales
Cynically wiped away in one night

Any hotel a haven for fucking
Any path a walk with that slut
Any bar the next date
For licking and groping and more cock-sucking
Like she said on your phone: Oh, I just can’t wait

Nothing is as it felt before
Nothing seems sane, nothing secure
Everything’s new and old at once
Everything hurts
Everything’s gone
You and I were married
And we lived on Russian Hill
With a view of the Golden Gate
And black and white tiles in the kitchen
The inevitable bay window facing north

We slept late on the weekend
And shopped on Saturday morning
In Chinatown and the North End
We bought olives and rice dumplings
And you cooked tapas at night

On Sundays we drove over the bridge
To Sausalito to watch the boats
Up and down, side to side they bounced
And we made fun of the tourists
In their socks and Birkenstock sandals

You tried to finish your screen-play
And you worked south of Market
Directing and lighting the Moscone
I wrote and read and taught Yoga
And practiced Tai Chi in the park

None of this is true, of course
You left without me for the West
In our old Mazda with the dented door
And I stayed back East and inhaled
New York pollution and resignation
I buy a case of Tuscan wine
And a carton of filtered Gauloises
Maybe a couple of joints
A Black Forest cake for sure

I move to Alberta or India
To meditate under a mango tree
And I'll let my hair go grey
Or dye it purple

When I despair over the future
Over Fox News and Reality TV
Wal-Mart and McDonalds
Wall Street and Halliburton

When I can't pretend to look away
From gassed geese in the park
Smug golfers on borrowed land
And Disney this and Hallmark that

From the masses in their white socks
And elastic waist shorts
Advertising the "Hollywood Accents"
On their oversized T-Shirts

From the all-you-can-eat Super Gulp crowd
Blindly marketed into mini-van clones
Herded to suburban decks and dying ball fields
And just hoping our boys come home soon

continued on the next page
From the good old days in their pickup trucks
With a bible and a gun under the seat
And a word of advice for the rest of us
America: Love it or leave it

When I try to find a path among the destruction
With meditation, or yoga and chants
They all become one: Tai Chi or Chai Tea
A desperate attempt to make sense

When balance and inner peace leave me
My friends off to Europe and California
Courtesy of Fulbright or a trust fund
Each on their own escape route

I remember my kind neighbor and her dog
And the time she picked up my medicine
And the mailman, a Russian Jew
Who never leaves the mailbox open

The Puerto Rican man who changed my tire
In the rain on the Belt Parkway
Who wanted nothing in return
I help people all day, he said

My first boss who walked a mile
To bring a can of gas for my ancient car
And gave me money to fill her up
And walked away before I thanked him

In the final days, before the abyss
I will invite them all
And a Soccer Mom or two
And share my Tuscan wine
From the good-old guys in their pick-up trucks
With a bible and a gun under the seat
And a word of advice for the rest of us
America: Love it or leave it

When I try to find a path among the destruction
With meditation, or yoga and chants
They all become one: Tai Chi or Chai Tea
A desperate attempt to make sense

When balance and inner peace leave me
My friends off to Europe and California
Courtesy of Fulbright or a trust fund
Each on their own escape route

I remember my kind neighbor and her dog
And the time she picked up my medicine
And the mailman, a Russian Jew
Who never leaves the mailbox open

The Puerto Rican man who changed my tire
In the rain on the Beit Paraway
Who wanted nothing in return
I help people all day, he said

My first boss who walked a mile
To bring a can of gas for my ancient car
And gave me money to fill her up
And walked away before I thanked him

In the final days, before the abyss
I will invite them all
And a Sober Mom or two
And share my Tuscan wine
Destiny

Life's miserable woes
deal a death blow
right in the heart,
tearing it apart.

"Try not to think."
I hear with a wink.
So I condition my brain:
"it's all not in vain!"

I can be driving,
but never arriving.
I call my boss
and she is at a loss.

Then it's solved
with a pill dissolved.
A new destination —
Elation!

It gets worse
with each new dose.
A twitch in the legs
with an appetite for eggs.

I call Mitch
about my twitch,
but he can't say
I will have my day.

I fight
and I am right!
Here today
without a melee.
Ursula Velez

The Four Seasons

Colors on the tree of orange, yellow and red
Reminds me when we get mad and makes me cry with the things you said.

Trees become bare.
Makes me think of all the memories we have shared but have now faded.

Sidewalks become filled with brown fragile leaves.
Makes me think of all the lies I believed.

Ocean waves cool away the misery and pain
Heat sizzles, makes me insane
Makes me think about why I fell for you
When all you made me feel was blue.

Sun showers appear
Making my pain all clear
Making my life new

Four seasons change, at there own pace.
You and I have changed because we needed space.

But never will I again fall for your game.
Because the next time we meet up things will still be the same.

And never again will I try to even be your friend.
Because I swore to myself that this is the end.

So now as the seasons come and go, so will you.
It's over, this is the end because I no longer love you.
The Other Woman

I see your lips upon her
Your arms around her waist
And though I should attack her
Instead, I crave her taste

Though how you can possess her
Of that, I am not sure
And yet you still undress her
The sight a sinful lure

You lay her down before you
Desire in your eyes
And now I do approach you
To give you a surprise

A fight I do not give you
A tear I do not shed
For I know our love is true
And join you without dread
Amanda Hope Taria

Arsenic and Gum Drops

I want to run away
I want to stay today
I want to sit and cry
I want to lay and die

To take the arsenic off the shelf
To lift my glass - cheer! in good health
To hang a noose down from the beam
To wallow in my low esteem

I want to jump and fly
To crumple broken in demise
I want to run away
Not live to fight another day
My Love My Light

I look to thee my light
For in the darkness you are a sight
That makes the shadows fade away
Leaving, in their absence, me to stay

And as you approach, I turn blind
Your Brilliance too great for eyes or mind.
Yet, in the darkness I shall stay
Until thy light too fades away
lives.
Girl Who Wants to Paint Love Down My Stomach

My brain cells won't
Quit producing these
Thoughts. Where is this girl
Whose tongue wants to
Paint her love down my stomach
And this girl who enjoys letting
Lady bugs tickle her fingers and
This girl who naps her body on the grass
So Mister Sunshine
May whisper to her
Poems
that get her high the way
summer thunderstorms do.
Relax Your Eye Gracing Body On My Mattress

Relax your eye gracing
body on my mattress I'll ease the
tension between your legs
that's wetting your panties
if your arms squeeze me into your bones
and your lips
speak of love to my aching skin.
If this midnight exchange of
loving through touch
is for tonight only
then fine,
so long as you
touch me now
like
stopping
would suffocate your lungs.
Cocoa

My wife, who is from the Philippines, and her friend from Germany were driving to the shopping mall. Her friend’s three-year-old son was strapped into the child seat in the back. As they rode, my wife and her friend somehow began to talk about cocoa. My wife was amazed when her friend mentioned the word “kakao”, meaning cocoa in German. She exclaimed, “In the Philippines we call it the same thing!” Although, she soon found out the spelling was different. Then just as she said that, the presumably unknowing and unlistening little three year old chimed in from the back seat, “But in America we call it Nesquik!”
I can’t seem to reach you
You’re living in cyberspace
You’re surfing digital freestyle
Just a billion byte child
I used to pick up the phone
But even though I know you’re home
You’re out where chatters roam
Talking ‘bout who the hell knows?

I used to see you on the bus
But now I hear you won’t ride with us
Your tele-commute avoids the rush
And provides you with a tax write off

You’re living in cyberspace
I haven’t seen you face to face
You’ve got lots of friends now
But they could never point you out

You’re loving all this digital age
On the forefront of the human race
Faster than a speeding bullet
Able to scale tall buildings with a single mouse
I hear sometimes you stay up all night
I guess it helps if you don’t have a life

You have favorite places you can go
And get the best free downloads
I check my mail when I can
But lately it’s just full of spam
Viagra ads and re-finance
Click here for guaranteed return
It’s seems like such a waste of time
Half of what you read’s a lie
I guess for you it’s entertainment
At least you try to use your mind

You’re living in cyberspace
The cookie is your only trace
Your password has been misplaced
Withdrawal is what you embrace

Now all you do is hibernate
Can’t go out ‘cause you’re sleeping late
Can’t come in and it just frustrates
Me to the point where I just can’t relate

I guess I’ll go on down to the Cyber Cafe
I’ll down some java and check out eBay
Millions of items are on display
Maybe I’ll bid on you someday
‘cause you’re living in cyberspace

If I see you I’ll flash a camera in your face
Just to prove that you still exist
Or like proving that Bigfoot lives.
They were a gift from grandfather. 
Grainy prints hung around my room: 
I would fall asleep looking at them. 
Longing for the Norman Rockwell 
images of the ideal American Childhood. 

A small boy finds Santa's suit in his 
father's chest. Dressed in his big boy p.j.'s 
Santa's hat lies on the floor, his white 
beard torn to shreds; a young boy's 
innocence is stolen by the truth that 
was concealed in a bottom drawer. 

I long to find my Daddy in that same 
chest. Is he there? 
Have you seen him amongst the 
mochballers and roaches? 
Time has taken him away: he lives 
now in an urn on the fireplace, 
smaller than a bottom drawer. 
I can barely picture him in my mind 
anymore. 

He has been replaced by the bearded 
monster that you claimed to love; 
the man who I call "Father." 
Who stole my childhood while I imagined 
You standing at the bottom of the bed 
unaware. Did you notice the blood 
stains on the sheet? 

I look now at a picture of a girl, 
another print, a different part of the 
wall: she sits in front of a broken mirror, 
supported by a chair, searching for the 
part of her she lost in broken mirrors 
and bottom drawers. 

I am her.
Christine Anne Al-Sharif

October 7th

I will not be singing "Happy Birthday Mommy," or giving you bottles of expensive cologne, or Opal stones set in yellow gold with pink bows, yellow streamers and helium balloons that shrink into the cold vestige of your heart. For the first time: no guilt.

The only gifts that you gave freely were the ones I did not want. Wrapped up for me was neglect packaged in empty sweater boxes, ribboned by faded Christmas red and green was hate. Tagged by angry words that replaced the colorful packages of childhood.

I woke up this morning knowing that you sat in your isolated Lazy Boy Chair moaning that I did not remember that it was the 7th day of the 10th month. You are wrong.

I have simply chosen to ignore it; as you pretended to ignore me. I sing "Happy Birthday" to myself as I blow out the candles on my cake, small gray wisps of smoke will rise.
Christine Anne Al-Sharif

Prison Birthday:
June 29, 1969

I was not present in the florescent lighted delivery room. What a shock-born from darkness into the cold bright white light of the living. I know, I have been born into the darkness of a steel gray womb, handed over to wait for death.

You were born, the first daughter of a marriage redefined by a life sentence, while my vision was marred by vertical green stripes. My world was not panoramic, but seen in five inch strips, separated by drab olive green lines, an inch in diameter.

You will learn to stumble around in freedom, making your way, becoming what it is you are to be. While I shuffle about forever chained to my memory, unable to cross into the path of your freedom.

My anger, my resentment towards you grows. minutes old, your lungs have only begun to inhale, exhale, work on their own, and hatred has already filled me. It has become the air I breathe. No fatherly joy exists. Only envy of your beginning, my end, and all that I have denied myself.
Brewed in barley and hops
were the memories of your past:
the uncle who called a barstool home.

Lost somewhere amongst the old jukebox
songs are the children you abandoned for
the sake of your favorite tavern.

Imitation leather, the stale smell of alcohol,
the rich mahogany of the bar turned you on
more than your wife ever could.

I sat with you on my twenty first birthday, trying
to understand the attraction as the Jack Daniels burned
my throat on its way down, my first, my last drink.

You rallied against everyone who loved you
including me not understanding why it was no one
ever visited, not willing to see the dead we had become.

You were safe in the muted light of the bar,
in that place you did not have to see the pain
you had managed to brew for all who loved you.

I watched as the blue gray veil drew itself over your eyes
slowly as the alcohol pulsed its way through your veins
the anger leaked out of your heart, poisoning you.

Your liver would be the final betrayal infecting your body,
alcohol could not make the pain go away,
we watched as you turned into the yellow crayon

that was always missing from your daughter’s Crayolas
It was the one she always removed and threw away, her least
favorite color forever lying in the trash.
Intrinsic Glamour

Beauty is a journey, not a destination,
A feeling from the heart, a great sensation,
The spirit in the soul is what people do not see,
The inner strength, one's personal purity.

Right from birth, the soft skin implies
The fragile nature seen with the eyes,
Every person has a countenance that is unique,
The true colors come from the blush of the cheek.

Walking with the wind, one's scent blows in piles,
His natural hygiene is exposed for miles,
Physical attributes is what people see the most,
A person's freshness stays deep inside his post.
Perception and Wit

The pathway lies ahead, the road is near,
The man stands still, awaiting his fear,
"Which way to go?" he asks in vain,
To the right, to the left, swinging his cane.

The landscape of euphoria, the colors he sees,
The sun shines the way, the wind makes the breeze,
Branches sway, the leaves glisten in the light,
He envisions the present on this dark starry night.

The hummingbird directs with his clear, chirping sound,
The call of the wild guides him around,
Knowing that nature will show the right way,
Blindness becomes his strength today.
The Art of Music

Music is a melody that lingers in the ear,
It travels as a sound wave distant from the pier.
The ocean roars to the timbre of the instrument,
The seagulls approach the shore with great merriment.

Its sound conveys a true message from within,
This blissful feeling awakens the well-rested Poseidon.
The wood on the inlet now starts to rumble,
The G-d of the sea is appalled by his stumble.

Birds fly low through the wide open air,
Mindful of the echo that they could not spare.
The light shines bright, its radiance so great,
All due to the healing power of the music's destined fate.
The Day of a Lifetime

Live everyday like it's your last,
Seize the moment, don't let it pass,
Yesterday is gone, tomorrow is here,
Take a stand, forget your fear.

This is the time to go outside,
Take yourself on the ultimate thrill ride,
The chance of a lifetime lies ahead,
Explore the world now, get out of bed.

A thousand miles ahead is what you can reach,
Suck in life's juices like a leech,
The horizon is near, yet so far away,
The endless possibilities awaits here today.
"Johnny, I told you, no more car racing videos. You are getting out of control and you aren't listening to me or your father. Calm down." Mary Bowler takes his videos away and turns off the television. Mr. Bowler says, "You can watch one of your cartoons with us or forget it. Too much of those videos is no good. If you get mad, you can go upstairs." Johnny's face grows tomato red and he blurs out to his parents, "I hate you. I hate you. Go away." He puts his hands over his ears and runs upstairs and cries. Mary looks at Larry and says, "He's getting too hyper. But it will stop!"

Johnny cries and throws everything around his room and makes a mess before going to bed for the night.

Johnny is crying. He is alone in his house. It is very dark and silent. He calls out, "Mom? Dad?" No answer. No where to be found. No parents. The ticking sounds of clocks and the leaky kitchen faucet are all he hears. The house grows colder and everything else around him is foggy and unclear.

Suddenly there's a loud knock on the front door. Johnny runs to the door, hoping it's his parents and answers it. But, instead it is an old man with long gray hair, a full white beard and moustaches, black dirty and baggy clothes, and dusty looking black leather shoes. He has a pair of small black eyes that do not move. He extends one of his icy cold hands out to Johnny. Johnny slowly takes his hand and the old man leads him out the door. They begin to walk down the endless brick steps that lead to the sidewalk. They begin to walk faster and faster as they go down the bumpy sidewalk that is lined with apple trees. They are now moving faster and begin rising into the air. A strong wind gust pushes them higher into the air. They disappear out of sight and are surrounded by total darkness. Things change fast as another wind gust enters the scene.

The old man and Johnny begin to descend rapidly. As they go down they begin to spin. Descending and spinning, they travel at great speed through the total darkness. Johnny is frozen with fright.

continued on the next page
Johnny wakes up fast and sits up in bed. He is sweating with fear. His back is sticking to his pajamas. He gets out of bed and runs to his parents' bedroom crying, "Mommy, Daddy. Mommy, Daddy." His parents wake up and switch on the lamp by the bed. They both look at him with great concern. Johnny says, "Mommy, Daddy, I'm sorry. I love you. I don't hate you. I don't hate you. I don't want you to go away. I don't want you to go away. I love you."

Mary and Larry Bowler remembered what happened earlier in the day with Johnny and they wrapped their arms around their six-year old son. They give him many warm hugs and kisses and Johnny does the same.
Ethan sighed as he sat back in the weathered seat, the cheap, plastic-like fabric torn and poorly stitched, graffiti and knife carvings decorating the back of the seat in front of him. Indecipherable signatures left by people who wish to be remembered, but seem to lack the intelligence to write legibly, and poor attempts at witty catch phrases like “Suck yo momma” engraved with atrocious grammar. He glanced down at his expensive briefcase and pooh shoes, noting the fossilized gum on the train floor, cold and hardened with the passing of time. He fiddled a little with his suit, adjusting his tie here and his cufflinks there, but he knew there was no need. He looked perfect, he knew this, and smiled to think that he was far superior than the people who had left their markings, carvings, and chewed gum behind.

Adjusting himself in his seat, Ethan set his glance upon the faded, plastic window, it too a victim of the unsuccessful. It’s décor that of nicknames like “Tiny” and “Boo-boo”. A misshapen heart with “Kevin Loves Jenelle” etched in the middle was near the bottom of the window, towards the shredded rubber strips lining the window. He smiled, thinking of his Rachel, warm and safe at home. He thought of how he had skipped out on the breakfast she had cooked him this morning, and how he had ran out the door clutching his briefcase, without so much as turning around to say goodbye. Ethan shook his head, dismissing the guilt, for she understood, she always understood. Certain things just came first. Work was always one of those things.

The passengers were filling in regularly now. A college student here, a couple traveling into the city there, and of course the occasional businessman, who Ethan would smile and nod at, feeling there to be a mutual understanding of greatness between him and his unspoken compatriot. But then a stranger amongst the joyful stereotypes walked in, bedraggled, unkempt, with clothes torn and shredded. His eyes shot across the car while his head quickly turned right and left, as if looking for something with a reckless abandon. Ethan sunk back into his seat a little bit, lifting his briefcase next to him, as to avoid this mysterious man as best he could.
He walked calmly down the aisle of the passenger car, examining each seat carefully, every person's face. As he came closer to each individual person, those very same faces looked right back at him, fixed in their gazes, as if they had done this a thousand times before, and then went about their usual business. While the man's head turned to and fro, wisps of long, thick brown hair swung about his unshaven face, so if one was to look upon him, they would only catch flashes of his deep eyes.

Ethan felt the man drawing nearer, so he turned his attention to the outside, looking past the carvings and the misshapen heart in the plastic window. As he did this, he felt a thumping on the back of his seat, and an elderly woman peeked at him through the narrow space between his seat and the window.

"You had best turn around young man, he's getting closer." She whispered, and she leaned back into her chair, fixing her gaze upon the ragged man who was quickly approaching. Ethan felt his heart race and his palms start to sweat, as a light shadow cast over his seat, the man now staring down upon him. Ethan glanced towards the window and the graffiti on the seat, hoping that somewhere in these ancient carvings and taglines, that there would be an answer to what was going on here.

The man leaned slightly over the front of Ethan's seat, looking him up and down, as if to size him up. Ethan felt the adrenaline rush through his body, his muscles clenched together. If this man was to attack him, he would put up a fight like no one had ever seen, for he doubted any man or woman alive would have seen a person get beat down as quickly as he probably would have been by this mysterious stranger. The man's eyes looked curiously at Ethan for a moment, and then the man stood up straight.

"I've never seen you on my train before." He said, his voice echoing through the car, as a silence fell over the other passengers. Ethan looked about; the other passengers' eyes were all fixed upon him. Surely he was about to be killed, this was some sort of strange religious sect that only met on this train, and this man would sacrifice him. Or perhaps he was simply dreaming, and was really asleep at home next to his beautiful wife. He thought of Rachel, and realized that he might be late for work today.
“No... I'm... this is my first day,” Ethan timidly replied, expecting the death blow at any minute. He prayed for an open casket funeral and that someone would have the sense to bury him in a better suit, for he had many more at home. The passengers would be no help against this man, for they stood there, transfixed in their gazes upon Ethan and the stranger's confrontation.

“I see, well if you're going to ride my train, you had best get one thing straight. Always look me in the eyes, for you see...” he paused briefly, glancing around the train. “I have to check everyone.”

The stranger backed away from Ethan, his gaze leaving him, focusing on the elderly woman in the seat in back of Ethan. “Hello Mrs. Thomas,” he spoke warmly, “you are looking as lovely as ever.”

Mrs. Thomas smiled kindly, “Thank you dear. You always know what to say.” The stranger smiled back, and sauntered towards the back of the train, sitting down in the very back row, disappearing behind the seat.

Ethan sighed and let himself collapse a little into his seat. What had just occurred here? Who was this bizarre man? Why was he checking on everyone? Ethan turned around and peered through the crack between his seat and the window. Mrs. Thomas was looking out of her window at the scenery that began to slowly pass by. The train had started moving.

“Passeur!” Ethan said, trying to get her attention. “Pardon me, Miss?”

Mrs. Thomas turned around, looking through the narrow split. “Yes?”

“What just happened here?” Ethan asked looking about to make sure no further strangers were upon him. “Who was that man?”

Mrs. Thomas looked at him confused. “What are you talking about?”

The train jolted a little. “What am I talking about?” Ethan said, equally confused by her misunderstanding. “That strange man who just talked to the both of us.”

Her eyes and voice were suddenly full of understanding. “Oh, him. Well, he's been here so long that I've just dismissed him as being some sort of an oddity. No one is really quite sure who he is or what he's looking for. He's just always seemed to be here.”

“You mean no one has ever asked him?” Ethan questioned, shocked at the fact.
"What are you looking for?" He said, feeling his voice tremble.

The train jolted and the man's gaze stared beyond Ethan. Slowly, Ethan turned around, to see the passengers' attention was once again fixed on them. The silence was deafening. The stranger looked at him, with eyes that were suddenly kind. "No one has ever asked me that before."

The stranger sat back down and gestured for Ethan to sit next to him. Ethan looked down at the seat and then at the passengers, and hesitantly sat down. Right away his attention was drawn to the back of the seat, graffiti practically filling up the entire chair, and seemingly hundreds of malformed hearts scratched crudely into the plastic window. The stranger's head sunk down and he clasped his hands together, and breathed a heavy sigh.

"Seven years ago was the last time I rode this train as a normal man. I was like you, arrogant and sure that I was the most powerful man on board. I had a suit once, and a briefcase, but all I have now is the clothing that people leave behind on this train. T-shirts, mittens, scarves, jackets... items that were probably once treasured and loved, now just thrown aside..."

"One day as I was on my way to work, I saw this beautiful woman. Everything in me, the superciliousness, the egotism, the arrogances... all gone in a moment. I couldn't believe my eyes. When she walked past me, the sun shone in through the otherwise blurred plastic windows, the beams playfully dancing between her hair in a secret tango that I only, and no other man, would ever be able to understand. Her eyes glistened, beaming and bright, and she walked with such assurance, like she was on top of the world, and it was that which gave her grace. She wore no makeup, except that of a light red lipstick, the hue of the most beautiful rose. Her head turned, her hair dancing about her shoulders, and she smiled the most radiant smile I had ever seen."

"And then what happened?" Ethan asked. The stranger looked up at Ethan, pausing, his eyes glistening with tears. Ethan shed a slight smile, realizing that this man couldn't be all that much older then himself, and he felt compassion for this broken man.

"She said hello." The stranger said. "She got off at the very next station, and I never saw her again. Since then, I have been riding these rails, searching for her everyday." His head hung low and breathed in deeply. "I may never find her, but I have to keep trying. That's why everyday I ride this train. In hopes that someday, in some way, she'll come back to me."

49
Ethan couldn't help but think how anyone could be driven to this. Truly this man was on the brink of madness. Ethan noticed a piece of paper clutched in the stranger's hand, a photograph, now tattered and torn with time. Ethan gestured toward the photo.

"Is that her?" he asked.

The stranger looked up at him, and slowly nodded his head, handing Ethan the picture. Ethan began to unfold the photo, the paper worn and creased.

"She left it on the train." Spoke the stranger.

Ethan smiled softly and looked down at the unfolded photo. His eyes opened wide and his mouth went a gape. He felt his heart beat quicker and his throat go dry. He looked around wildly, the passengers all gazing at him as one, and the stranger suddenly felt huge and overbearing. He was sweating, short of breath, and the photo had sent his mind reeling.

It was Rachel.

The stranger noticed the sudden change in Ethan's demeanor, and looked at him with eyes of desperation.

"You know who she is, don't you? Please, please, you must tell me." He said, pleading. The strength Ethan had noticed when he first met the stranger was now gone, replaced with that of a lost child. The man's eyes glistened with tears and his voice choked back hundreds of sobs that no one had ever bothered to hear.

For the first time in Ethan's life, he forgot about work, his business cards, his over-priced shoes and suit, and thought about Rachel. He took out his wallet, and opened it up, thumbing through several photos. The stranger's eyes beckoned to see whatever mystery lay beyond the small plastic pages of miscellaneous photographs. When Ethan arrived at his wedding photo, the stranger's face froze and looked up at Ethan.

"I see." Said the stranger. "Tell me everything about her, and if not that, at least her name."

"Rachel." Ethan said reluctantly. "Her name is Rachel."

The stranger sighed. "Rachel," he said, barely above a whisper. "Thank you, you've set me free."

The train jolted to stop. Ethan had arrived at his destination, however he no intention of going into work today. He took one last look at the stranger and all the odd passengers who had been watching them this entire time, and ran off the train. He forgot his briefcase.
What Friends Are For

He wouldn’t have even been recognizable if it wasn’t for that old red Cincinnati hat. That hat now blended into his greasy black hair. Just a bit of the once shimmering blond peeked out at the tips. His face was somewhat clean compared to the rest. His mellow green eyes carried a glaze that looked as if it would never leave. His stare was no longer hard and cold but now beamed misery. Dry white lips peeling away in layers formed his grimace. He wore a thin coat that looked to have been green. The coat just barely crossed his broad shoulders and fell short down his arms exposing his wrists. Although his skin was now dark and musty, there were two lines across his wrists where his gold watch once laid. His manicure was now layers of dirt and grime. He had aged fifteen years in six months.

I sat in my car for at least an hour and watched him. I remembered playing catch out in the butterfly field behind the horse farm. I remembered all the girls at school drawing his name all over their notebooks. His all-star pitching brought Ashbrook High to the championships for the first time.

He knew he would make pro, but still he was always surprised when the chant of his name rang through the ears of the entire stadium.

He sat there. He didn’t move or even pay attention to the people walking across his feet. The other guys begged for money, food, anything. But John – he just sat. I wanted to know what he was thinking. It had been three weeks, why hasn’t he come to see me? Why hadn’t he done anything? Why was he here? Did he even want to see me? Should I leave? What should I say?

I opened the door of my silver Mustang and walked in his direction. He didn’t break his stare or even move his head. Finally, I stood right in front of him. Still, he didn’t even glance at me. “John?”

Emotionless and blank, he looked up at me but didn’t say a word. He looked and stared through me as if I was just some other jerk on the street. After a few minutes of staring at each other with nothing but the hustle of the city to break the silence, I sat down next to him. I kept waiting – waiting for him to break and tell me everything, waiting for him to look over at me and tell me he was so happy to see me. He just sat and stared forward as if I didn’t even exist. I started to pick myself up to walk away but I stopped and sat back down.

“John, I’m sorry I wasn’t there for you. I didn’t know what to do. I don’t even have an excuse. I was just... just scared. I mean...I knew you didn’t do it, but I don’t know. I just didn’t know what I would say. Come on man. Give me a break.” I was speechless. I had no idea what else to say.
"Ya know, a few weeks ago, I watched an entire game on TV automatically thinking it was you out there on that field—just pretending. Nowadays, I sit at work and just wander off thinking about us in that old butterfly field. Remember that field? We used to have so much fun back there. And remember high school? All the high school baseball games won because of you. Man, you are the only reason we even made it to the championships. That's why all the girls loved you. Girls like Nancy Clark and Lauren Pratt writing, "I love John" all over their notebooks. Ha ha, those were the days. Right man?" I nudged his shoulder but he sat stiff and firm ignoring my presence.

A man sitting to my left scooted toward me and I felt him lean up against my side. I looked over to get a good look at his bony aged face. He looked to be in even worse condition than John. His long gray beard and mustache were weaved with black grime and dirt. An overpowering stench seeping from his body caused me to hold my breath. "Hey Richie Rich" he shouted in my ear, "If yer gunna be sittin on are corner, you gots to pay some rent." He held out his bony hand and extended his long skinny fingers towards me. I looked away and ignored him until eventually he left. John still held his stare. It was if he didn't even hear the old man.

"I guess it's almost like I felt that if I didn't see it, it wasn't true. I never let myself think about where you really were. I guess maybe it's just that I didn't want to face it. I... I... I don't know. John, just say something! Come on buddy."

Still, he didn't turn his head. His face was like that of a carpenter's hand. He had a wrinkle for every newspaper headline written about him. He crouched with his chin on his knees. His had dark brown construction boots missing the laces. He would never wear anything like that; he always had his black leather loafers. His old ripped Levi's came up from the boots when he was sitting. His ankles exposed the one thing that filled my heart with hope. He had on his red striped baseball socks. They didn't even look soiled. Actually, compared to the rest of him, the socks were the one thing that shined bright.

The sun was starting to go down, and the streets began to settle. I followed his stare. Straight across the street was a young couple on a bench. The girl was wearing mostly white with a blue coat and white fur all around it. She was very small and leaned over to lay her head on the chest of her companion. The man was large and chesty. He was in dark colors hard to make out with such little light. He sat with his arm wrapped around her side and his hand settled on her thigh. As I watched, I noticed they continually looked at her hand. She would pull her left hand off his lap and extend her arm out forward facing her palm to us. They would look at her hand then proceed to kiss and cuddle. Have they been there the entire time? Is this what John has been watching?
“John, Karen misses you. I’ve stopped by to see her a few times. She’s not doing so well either. She feels so bad for everyone. She’s sorry. We are all sorry. Why don’t you go home to her? I hope there is some way you can learn to forgive us. I don’t know what is wrong with me? I know you would never do anything like that. I never really believed you did it. I just didn’t know what to think. Everything that girl said...it just sounded so good. And Karen was just jealous and confused. I’m sure she didn’t know what to think either.”

The image of that scrawny little tramp sat in my mind as if it was right in front of me. That same interview they played over and over again on every channel. She sat in her short little bright pink tube top dress with her knee high pink boots clutching her little Louis Vuitton purse... probably all paid for with John’s hard earned money. As she gently blotted around her eyes with a tissue, careful not to smudge her clown makeup, she said, “I am scarred for life.” Those nasty heartless words will ring through my ears forever. How could she do that? Why did she have to go and fuck everything up for me? And for John.

“Ugh! That evil lying bitch! Why don’t you get her back? Take her to court. She made up the whole story and even got your money because of it. John, she sent you to jail. She ruined your career. She took away baseball. She smeared your name as a heartless rapist. If her friend never ratted on her and told the truth, you would still be in jail. Ugh! John, you can get her. You can get it all back. You can play again. Are you listening? Talk to me!”

I looked over at John again. He still hadn’t moved. The couple across the street was gone now. I didn’t even notice them leaving. The bench was empty and besides the occasional passer by, there really wasn’t anything across the street to look at. It was getting quite dark but the streetlights provided me with enough light to see the tears welling up in his eyes.

“I know you hear me. Listen, I talked to Eddie, you remember him? My buddy from the gym? Anyway, he’s a lawyer and he can help you. You can get all of the settlement she received back from her plus more. You might even be able to send her to jail. Plus you can get more money from the government because of court issues for being wrongfully accused. He can also investigate into what Jim has done with your money while you were in jail. I know you trusted him, but Eddie said that something isn’t right for there to be nothing left. Even though he was your manager and he had control over all your money, you have the ultimate say-so over your personal earnings, so technically it’s illegal for him to continue to operate your accounts without your permission. Come on... John don’t you care? Don’t you want to fight and get your life back?
Once again – silence. That was it. I was done. I had nothing else to say. I tried. What else could I do?

“This is my life, Steve.”

He startled me. I almost didn’t hear what he said because I was so shocked to actually hear him speak. After a minute I recalled his words and responded, “No, John your life is out on that field, and you can get back there. You just have to fight back.”

It was quiet for a minute. This was it. This was what I was waiting for. Finally, he was going to reach over, hug me and tell me everything so I could tell him everything is going to be all right and get my life back to normal.

“Ya know, I was ready to fight back six or seven months ago when all this shit started. Hell, I was even ready to fight back three weeks ago when I got out. But where were you then Steve? Why didn’t you come to my rescue with your lawyers and crap then? Huh?”

The smell of brandy jetting from his breath was almost enough to mask the stink of the garbage all around us. Once again… speechless. This was what I was afraid was going to happen. But that’s not what is supposed to happen. He’s supposed to forget that and come home. He supposed to go back to Karen and get married. He’s supposed to play ball.

Once again – silence. That was it. I was done. I had nothing else to say. I tried. What else could I do?

“This is my life, Steve.”

He startled me. I almost didn’t hear what he said because I was so shocked to actually hear him speak. After a minute I recalled his words and responded, “No, John your life is out on that field, and you can get back there. You just have to fight back.”

It was quiet for a minute. This was it. This was what I was waiting for. Finally, he was going to reach over, hug me and tell me everything so I could tell him everything is going to be all right and get my life back to normal.

“Ya know, I was ready to fight back six or seven months ago when all this shit started. Hell, I was even ready to fight back three weeks ago when I got out. But where were you then Steve? Why didn’t you come to my rescue with your lawyers and crap then? Huh?”

The smell of brandy jetting from his breath was almost enough to mask the stink of the garbage all around us. Once again… speechless. This was what I was afraid was going to happen. But that’s not what is supposed to happen. He’s supposed to forget that and come home. He supposed to go back to Karen and get married. He’s supposed to play ball.
Drew Allen

**Shotgun Santa**

I remember it vividly. Bayou Lacombe, Louisiana. It was late afternoon, the beginning of my shift working as a night watchman at Ballhi Marine, a shipyard located at the edge of Cajun country. It was mid-December on the Bayou and it seemed like everyone except me was out taking advantage of deer-hunting season. That's right, all the coonsasses were out with their super-sized mud trucks, the gun racks loaded and pick-up beds full of beer and bullets.

Let me tell you, just about all regular activity came to a halt during huntin' season. I mean, nothin' was business as usual. Nobody was gonna sandblast barge with the scent of venison in the air. Sure, the Pajane brothers were goin' out all four of 'em. Pep, Pop, Pap, and Pip (he was the shortest one). I know they sound like the Seven Dwarfs, but honestly, I never learned their real names.

This time of year, they were all Santa's helpers. That is, for Santa-on-the-Bayou, a Christmas celebration complete with gifts for the kids delivered from of St. Nick (or Cajun Claus as I would call him). Of course this was Bayou country and things were done a little differently down there. No chimney for this Santa. No, he was far more comfortable coming up the Bayou in a motorboat in.

But the tradition didn't stop there. The idea was to kill two deer with one stone, so to speak. That is sure, you'd always eat the venison. But why not have a local competition for the biggest deer and that one would be proudly displayed belly-down on the bow of Santa's boat for all to gawk at! And there's more the hunter of that year's honorable lead reindeer (fake antlers attached at this point) would get to play Santa, joyously waving to the throngs of eager revelers.

Well wouldn't you know it? Pop had shot the biggest deer! Word spread quickly throughout the community: kept to a mere murmur with small children present (although I'm sure they knew Santa really had a shotgun instead of a sleigh!) As the Christmas craft slowly glided up the Bayou toward town, people literally dropped everything and ran to the edge of the water. Even I stopped what I was doing (not that it was a heck of a lot!) and sprinted toward the crowd. Whole families had taken the short cut through the shipyard on word of Santa's imminent arrival. 

86
Sweetie, finally, I can sit down and type up a couple of words to you. As I mentioned before, the boys are having a sleep-over at my place. No-can-do today, red zone for us. I bought them pizza pies and rented a couple of horror movies. I hope that might keep their teenage stomachs satisfied and hyper bodies scared to the point of muscle stiffness. You might think --I am so far away from her. Not really. I feel your warmth, near me, right now, right this moment.

Besides the loud belching, belligerent laughing, and a couple of custs thrown frivolously, from the boy's room-- I can hear absolute, dear silence from my opened window. As the gentle draft caresses my red-silk Victoria Secret's night gown, I think of you. I pretend the wind are your hands that tangle with my long hair, stroking the tips of lovely wild endings that absorbed the vanilla shampoo, permeating the whole room with a scent of tension, becoming from my body in the cinnamon candle light.

I imagine your hands, sliding down from my neck, slightly brushing my breasts, going lower, to my hips. My hips shiver a bit and you can feel the tension built up, waiting to let go. I stop breathing for a brief moment, as your fingers go into my moist self. I whisper a silent "O Sweetie..." and all becomes chaos. I say: "O baby... I want you..." Your manhood slides into the dark, wet pulsing area and sucks you in deeper, and deeper, to the steady rhythm of my muscle and your hardness, a chaos of forgetting and wanting, wanting and yearning of ... ... YEARNING SOME PEACE! No! Not those little monsters again! I have to go and get those three clowns in order. They are going absolutely nuts, like a wild herd of cows. O lord, I just heard some glass breaking.... I better go there before they decided to knock the windows out. I cannot write in this atmosphere! Hold on a sec... The windows are still intact, but they broke the lamp. Thank god Fluffy got away unharmed. I still have to find the cat. She ran so quick, that I forgot about the rope hanging from her tail. The horror movies -- bad idea. I'll get them "Gone with the wind" next time. I cannot believe they wanted to play 'teether ball' with Fluffy...ok, were I? So, as we move both in a synchronized, steady rhythm of our passionate love dance, your sweat drips down my neck, to evaporate in the air from the heat of my flesh. I can smell your body: sweet, but sour, salty but so spicy. Spicy enough to burn my thirsty vagina in its own flood of desire. I moan: "O babe, o babe...". Your body, soft but so hard, presses against my body so intense, it leaves an imprint on the sheets. The bed is knocking against the wood floor louder, and louder. I hear you shivering and feel that you are coming... no, no, no!
For crying out loud! The neighbor at the door again! Be right back...

O Baby! You will not believe what just happened... It was Eva, the neighbor again. When I opened the door she started yelling so loud, half of the complex came out to listen. Well, remember my amusement about the absence of pepperoni on the left-over pies? The slick devils took them off prior to me throwing it away. They stashed it in a pop-corn bag... Now Eva has to take one of the work-shoppers to the emergency room. I don’t think he will lose his eye, but might not be able to write for a couple of days. The flying pepperoni pulled off the rubber from the sling-shot, and both items hit his eye with full force. The injured guy, Steve, was out there too. Quite articulate man, might I add. He was rhyming me to death, with his half swollen face, about how I should pay more attention to my wild boys. I refuse to quote him. You have to understand me. As much as I admire the man’s multi-flavored rich vocabulary — it is not meant to be quoted loud. It could fit to a sleazy street novel, but not my writing. This is not all...

Eva’s screams must’ve terrified poor Fluffy, because the cat went berserk and stormed out of the apartment. Fluffy landed on Eva’s head with her paws tangled in the neighbor’s hair. Beside minor scratches, Eva suffered a ripped ear piercing. Shit, I forgot to take the string off Fluffy’s tail. Steve tried to pull the cat off Eva’s head. I guess Fluffy didn’t like the way he handled the situation, so Fluff got the best of him too. Forget the couple of days I mentioned about Steve’s ‘time-off’ from writing. It might be extended to a couple of months as of now. Fluffy shot out into the darkness like a torpedo. I never realized she is that fast! I’ll look for her later.

Someone must’ve called the police. While Eva and the swelled up man were ripping me apart with garbage-writer’s choice of words, I saw the flashing lights approaching mighty fast, and then the car screeched in a sudden stop. I heard some loud thumping from underneath the vehicle, but paid no mind to it. Must’ve been a squirrel.

The officers came over to resolve the situation. As we were all talking, the other officer dispatched animal control to the complex. He said that they better check the area for abnormally behaving cats, possibly rabies-infected. The cop came across a ‘kamikaze’ cat, running around with such great speed, he was tempted to take out the radar and measure the speed violation, but was too late. After all there is a 25 mile per hour limit in the town. Anyway...

I have to go to court for disturbing the peace of the complex. I don’t understand. I was sitting quietly, writing on my laptop a note to you...
Let me begin by saying that I don’t care if you don’t like my story, nor do I care if you even get anything out of it. Nothing has ever bothered me more than people saying I have meaningless stories, because nobody ever sees them the way I do. Perspective may seem like a worthless, annoying word, but nobody will make it through life without it. This is mainly because with perspective comes understanding, and through understanding there is peace. I never learned about perspective or understanding until only a few days ago. The dew on the grass still sweats my brow from the very moment it stuck in my head.

Kailka called me a few hours after we got back from school.

“Yeah?”

“Hey! What’s going on?”

“Just watching TV with my dad. You?”

“Nothing fun at all. I was wondering if you wanted to go to blockbuster or something and get some movies. I really don’t want to be stuck at home again for the third Friday in a row.”

This was typical for her. What she fails to mention is that we did the same thing every Friday night, but she simply doesn’t count me as a person. She has always known how to make me feel like an accessory, as if I’m hanging off her shoulder, holding all of the crap that she doesn’t need but brings with her anyway.

“I don’t really feel like doing that for the millionth time. Why don’t we go for a walk or something? It just stopped raining, like, half an hour ago, so it’s the best time to go. We can check out that new development off of Edison.”

“Okay, but I have to go, my father needs the phone.”

“Bye.”

“Another one of your girlfriends?” asked my dad, suggesting I’m becoming a ladies man.

both laughed a little. “Nah! Just a friend, dad.

“So? That doesn’t mean anything these days.”

“Uh, it’s nothing between us, I can’t really explain it,” I said as I tried explaining my way out of it.

“Whatever you say, but just remember you came from me. You know what that means?”

“What?” I asked, humoring him a little.
"It means all the wrong ones are attracted to you at first, then realize you are an asshole. However, all of the right ones are a little harder to reel in, but when you do..."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah dad, you tell me this every day, then I have to hear the whole sex talk from mom."

We chuckled a little, then he added "Why do I keep saying it? I love the looks you give her when she tells you that crap."

We both laughed, then went back to the TV with the mutual understanding of the events that just went on. He was making sure his son, me, is comfortable with talking to females, and I was simply telling him it's all good. He simply was trying to guide me to the right place, which, in his eyes, is towards the girls. This may seem kind of awkward, but if you understood my dad and I, you would realize it is more than normal.

I met Kalika in front of her house. It was only about a five or ten minute walk from my house. We walked along the busy road as if it were a tightrope that wasn't tight enough. The headlights reflected into our eyes off the pavement, wet from an earlier freak rainstorm. Our feet splashed in the puddles, making our shoes and pants soaked. We talked very little on the way there, which was odd because Kal usually wouldn't even let me get a word in. We finally made it after about a mile of walking. It was dark, quiet, and lonely, so no one else would be there to bother us.

In complete silence we sauntered. The sound of the cars hissing over the wet roadways in the distance filled the silence. The moon tried to hide behind many of the passing clouds until finally giving up. Only a very thin strip along the bottom escaped the darkness of the damp, dark road. The stars twinkled in the sky, shining as brightly as possible. Millions upon millions tried to break through the light and be noticed. Neither streetlights nor traffic lights stood and shined down on the newly paved road. It was simply complete darkness.

We found a grassy field that looked over the whole town. We could see our houses, the grocery store, the mall, and the stretch of woods up until the highway. I laid down my sweatshirt and sat down on it, admiring the scenery, but Kal just stood there, silent and steady.
“My dad and I are sort of like that. We talk about girls and cars. There isn’t really much more to life than that. I mean, he makes sure I’m doing well in school, but for the most part, just girls and cars. My mom has always been weird with me, but I don’t really know why. I guess I choose to make it weird, now that I think about it. I just don’t want the relationship my dad and I have to get messed up by her.”

“Girls don’t always ruin everything like that. Believe me, if your mom wanted to mess up that relationship, she would have already. Maybe she, too, realizes what you and your dad have. I know that usually the relationships boys have with their fathers aren’t quite the best until they are older. My older brother and my dad still don’t talk, and he is twenty-one. So maybe she realizes the fact that you two simply talking is great.”

After that, there was a long period of silence. We both peered into the sky, counting the stars as they slowly crossed the horizon. There was a slight wind, which blew any excess water from the storm onto us. It actually felt a little refreshing, like a little reprieve from the heat (even though it wasn’t too warm, it still felt good). The moon turned red as it sat upon the horizon in the far off distance. It had a slight haze around it, and surrounded itself with thousands of bright stars.

Not knowing what time it was, I suggested we get going so we don’t annoy our parents by being really late. She reluctantly agreed, and we made our way back to her house. On the way we talked about our favorite movies, people that annoy us, and how we can eat more potatoes than anyone else. We eventually got to her door, which is where I planned on letting her off.

“Thanks for hanging out with me tonight. I had a good time, and I really needed to get that off my chest,” she said to me, thankfully.

“I had a good time too, even though you dragged me out of my house and now I’m probably sick from the wet grass,” I said, sarcastically. We both had a short laugh, then realized the telephone was ringing, but we ignored it. I was very excited to tell my dad what had happened, he would have loved to hear the news. The answering machine picked up, and we were just within ear-shot of it while we said our goodbyes.

“Hi, I was wondering if Kalika was there with my son,” a sobbing voice said.
"Is that my mom?" I asked myself. Quickly, a blanket of anxiety smothered me and I could not move. Kaikis ran to answer it, but she was too late. We looked at each other in disbelief and, without a word, ran out her door towards my house. My brain was throbbing with thoughts, and my flesh was burning with sweat. I did not run, for I had too many thoughts racing through my head, but my body took over, realizing what I had to do. We finally arrived at my house and barged through the door. I saw my mom sitting in the kitchen, hunched over and crying. She saw me, stood up, grabbed our arms and took us to the car. There were no words spoken from then on. The radio was not even on.

My worst fears came true when we arrived at the hospital. I didn’t have to ask any questions, I had already known what to expect. The only problem was that I was not ready to expect it. I was not ready to admit to the fact that this could happen to me and my family. I couldn’t comprehend how this could even happen. All I knew was that it was happening. I found my father, laying in the white room, in pain after a heart attack. The white machines moved and made noise, and the white curtains cast the silhouette of the window frame. His grey complexion was difficult to look at. I was very frightened. Frightened to go in, frightened to hear his voice, frightened to talk to him, frightened to know what is going to happen. I was scared, and without my father there by my side. I slowly walked into the room, which he noticed immediately.

"How are the girls treating you?" he asked with a hoarse voice.
"Could be better, could be worse," I said, not knowing what else to say.
"They don’t give me very long," he said with a descending tone.

I paused. His breathing got heavier and he became paler as the seconds went by.
Was it really minutes? Or hours? Thoughts raced through my head. I remembered when he taught me how to ride a bike and when we played baseball in our back yard, and when he took me to my first day of school. I thought of how he felt when I got suspended for fighting, and how he must have felt when I got into my car accident.

He taught me anything having to do with life that he had to learn the hard way. He always tried to make my life easier whenever he could. A second went by, then ten seconds. I could not stop thinking about this. I could not stop thinking about how he led me to the right direction, and how he tried so hard to get me the very best. I choked out my last few words to him, and hopefully helped him realize how great he was.

"But you’re my father. I would be lost without you."