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# *Anthology*

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# Anthology

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Members of the Division of Languages, Literature and Communication  
are patrons of the magazine.

# Sonnet—to Sleep

(A parody of Edgar Allan  
Poe's "Sonnet—to Science")

Sleep: meet daughter of all Mankind thou art  
Who alterest all things with thy sweet embrace;  
Why prey'st thou thus upon the student's art,  
Vulture; whose lack wreaks such changes  
Within the faces of those who miss thee.  
What student would leave you and quit his dreams  
Albeit, he miss the due date of his paper next?  
Hast thou not dragg'd him from his classes  
And deliver'd him unto Morpheus?  
There to seek a happier and gentler  
Vision than that presented by his teacher,  
In the terrible form of the essay test?  
All this, merely from the desire for rest.

—Melissa Landis

## A Picnic on Mount Entity

I am hanging  
to a limb  
over a cliff

by one hand  
yelling for help

while my cries  
echo all around.

My friends, safe on level ground, tell me to shut  
up or people might think I am in real trouble.

—Mike Heckman

## Tempted

He never, never shows up the same way, because whenever I see him, he knows I would recognize him the next time he appeared that way. So he changes.

One day he's my best friend, giving me advice and patting my back about something I never should have done. The next he's a minister, spitting out fallacies like ticker tape at a parade of piety. Then he's a dark exotic girl, winking slowly at me from under long, foamy black hair; he's a ghost of my worst

memories and most intense passions—a propaganda machine that coaxes me into worthlessness.

Then he's a dragon. I know I'm getting weak when he dares to come to me that way, but he knows it's too late for me to do anything about it. He swoops down and blows a burning wind over his metal scales, and while I lie there in the dust of a desert, he screams an obscene challenge—defies me to stand up and be a man instead of his subordinate fool. And he knows I can't. So he passes boldly again and again and blows me down with no contest from a sword, or armor, or courage. Or God.

Well, today, he's mine.

I remember stale church-talk about relying on my own strength and how insufficient and unworthy and all that I am. I remember the crackling, blinding reservoir of power I dangled my toes in when I first met God. I remember because, maybe out of survival instinct, I gave up and took the one thing the dragon could not steal or scar and offered it to "St. George." Not my soul, because the dragon could take that, but my ability to decide my allegiance. My choice.

God heard me choose, and I suddenly felt Him as I spit sand and propped myself up on my elbows. The tempest stopped, and I saw a calming, warm light smearing away the red haze around me. I felt years lift off my back, breath push into my lungs, and finally, a gentle giant who lifted my racked body and set it on a high precipice over the desert. My limbs grew strong and straight, having been twisted from tortures. At last, my eyes burned with determined vision, not with crusted sand and blood. I had a purpose.

So today is here. The dragon won't return—I know him now, and I have some armor. I'm afraid of what he may be today, but God raises an eyebrow (which I'm aware enough to see, now) and reminds me again that it doesn't matter. We are ready.

I never expected to be chosen to do what I have to do today. I'd dreamed of it while I grew on the rock—fantasized about how bold and courageous I'd be if I got to do this my way. But as soon as I stood and looked over that infinite desert that I hadn't seen in so many ages, it all came back. Pain, crying—I—saw my friends down there. I'd never noticed them around before, hurting with me, but there they were, yelling for help. It should have galvanized me, readied me to fight. Instead it made me sick. And when I turned to look at something else, there was nothing else to see. Desert everywhere. And I could find God. I called in panic.

"I'm here," He answered.

"Why'd you leave?"

"I don't leave. I'm watching you; you just can't watch Me right now."

"That's good. He's on his way, and I can't do this myself."

"I don't expect you to. In fact, I don't want you to try to. Trust Me, son."

I got mad, and mad must have been the cue. Because someone was standing on the rock with me.

It was an old man with gleaming eyes and a child's smile. He held a book, and leaned hard on a knotty black teakwood staff that propped his left shoulder almost to his ear. That staff looked familiar to me. I could tell he was once a powerful young man; he looked like pictures of Alexander the Great I had seen. Now he was a venerable priest-scholar, and he spoke to me.

"Why do you stand there on this rock?" The voice was the sound of a splashing brook in the wasteland. "I've watched you for some time, and all you've done with yourself is look at this disgusting desert. Don't you believe in God anymore, young man? Don't you think He wants you to DO something?"

He leaned into the question, and an eye reflected the flash of the sun. I felt like I'd been sung to. And I was sure he was right. I shouldn't wait on my rock until the devil came to me! He's too crafty for such tactless methods of taking

my soul.

"What should I do?" I asked.

The old man eased back from his anxious position, as though I'd said the right thing, and laughed low and sweet, shaking his head slowly so that his long white beard swung back and forth—a lion's tail wagging. "Child," he purred, "step off your little rock and drop down to the sand below. God has provided you with the strength of thousands. You will surely not die." He waved a crooked finger at me, grinned and moved up to my nose. "Then you just come with me."

I started to take his hand and saw the staff again. Upon my hesitation came a tiny voice I barely recognized. It had been a long time since I'd last heard it. "Be still," it hummed. I stared at the black walking stick until I remembered. I'd been beaten with that thing thousands of times in the desert. By . . .

I think I blushed and bit my lip. I looked as bald-faced as I could at the old man, wondering what I should do. His voice beckoned again, a more forceful coaxing. "Come, child."

How dare he call me child! I wanted to humiliate him—to grab his long white beard and swing him around over my head until I got tired, then slam him on God's rock.

"No," answered God. "He doesn't know you have recognized him. I haven't let him see. Now think of Me and do what you know is right."

Well, I got mad again. Today is the big day. It's half over, and all the visions I had of Satan with his big whip standing over my shackled body keep coming back. The sight of my friends in the same tortures . . .

In my dreams, those visions always end where God touches me and I glow, and Satan flies into a fit when he realizes he has another Samson on his hands. I'd drop him with one thunderous punch in his filthy mouth and stand with my foot on his chest while the imps skittered around looking for hiding places. Now God tells me to do what is right.

I decide today he's mine. I raise my fist, and do what I thought Christ should have done from his cross: I call ten thousand angels to clean up the mess when I'm done. And they show up. The old man sees it, and his face melts, contorts, and pulses with nauseating colors. Eyes glow from a visage of bile encased in Alexander the Great's white robe.

He knows I'm scared, and he laughs again, only now it's the laugh of a hundred banshees, fed by my fear. I break my stare and look to the angels, who hang between the clouds over the rock. God says nothing.

I send them back and close my eyes as the staff lands like a flaming hammer on my cheek. I finish my prayer despite the throbbing in my head (ironic that it's my cheek, I think), and turn to the devil.

"Not today. God will take you down for good, someday, but I'm not responsible for you. You've lost."

The oozing mass forms into a more human face of bruises, cancer and burns. I tighten my stomach. He appears calm, satisfied, and a little tired. The sweet, coaxing voice returns.

"I've lost. Hm." He nods and smiles. "I should leave, then, I think." The pause is electric. I expect a puff of smoke and purple flame to take him off the rock.

"I don't leave."

No puff of smoke. No explosion. No fanfare. I am alone on the rock. I spend the day in prayer, but when I rise up, I don't feel as if I've won anything. I don't feel defeated; on the contrary, I am as stable and strong as I ever could be. But I realize at that moment the consistencies of my life. And he never, never appears the same way.

—sean kipling robisch

## Behind Her Back

Our eyes meet.  
She smiles, knowingly,  
I pull her  
close to me.  
Her hair brushes  
my cheek.  
My lips  
enfold hers.  
She sighs.  
My arms trap  
her in an embrace.  
She says, "I love you."  
I  
smile behind her back.  
Now.  
What is her name again?

—Steve Sykes

## Yesterday's Underwear

I used to be as Holy as the rest of the bunch,  
and I had more faith than Paul himself.  
But I caught up with Jack Daniels and my  
life began to die out; slowly like the slow  
pouring of whisky out of the bottle.  
I slowly got away from the Good Book and into  
one where the woman-at-the-well would have been.

And now today I wonder where I'm at  
amongst my bedroom clutter,  
and yesterday's underwear  
is lying on the floor somewhere.

I finally get dressed—slap some Brut under my arms.  
If I jog really fast, I can make the late service.  
I leave the clutter behind,  
and yesterday's underwear is lying on the  
floor somewhere.

—Mike Heckman

# Godliness

Two men entered the temple together. One had his head down, sunk in thought. When he glanced up to avoid collision, the shine of his eyes revealed strong emotion. Close enough, I saw past the sheen of tears to the anguish and remorse of his soul. Something rose within my own soul, forcing me from surface concerns and leading me to the source of upheaval. I edged closer, maneuvering through disjointed streams of people busy establishing their own righteousness. His head was sunk on his chest again and broken words and phrases came from his lips. What had affected this man so strongly? A man of obvious wealth and status letting himself be affected in such a way in public.

Curious now, I pulled closer and followed him through the outer courts. The flow and swish of his shimmering robes and the hint of spice caught in my nostrils helped me keep track of him as he hurried through the throng. He reached his goal and slowed to a stop. It wasn't as noisy in the inner court; the women couldn't enter. His fists clenched, his knuckles whitened. I heard a groan and the words, "God have mercy on me, MERCY on ME, a sinner!" He drew his clenched fists to his face and stood silently with head bowed, facing judgement. A shudder rolled down the length of his body until the bottom edges of his robes quivered. He was still. I averted my eyes. I could see the tears squeeze out from under his fists. I stepped back. His shoulders lifted and straightened as he drew in a breath. His hands eased their grip and fell to his sides. He lifted a face ravaged by emotion but with calm foundation.

"A sinner," another voice vibrated. "A SINNER. God, I am glad I am not like him. You have shown me a better way and I have walked in it. I stand upright before you. I have not committed adultery, stolen, lied, or done any such thing. Men know of my righteousness. They are a witness to my good works. They see how important you are in the time I spend every day of the week with you. Let me be an example to bring others to their knees before you." His eyes were gleaming, his hands strictly folded, his body held rigidly. I stepped forward, eager to be close to one so attuned to God. What road had led him to the pillar of right-ness that he now was? What was I, that I thought I could reach such a level? Where would I find in me the ability to sacrifice wayward emotions to trim in a straight line? I could see a fire from unknown fathoms in his eyes and was awed. Stifling an impulse to lean closer and catch a glimpse of something more, I eased back and turned partially away. I would go seek in private what this man manifested. But what of the first man? I swung around and caught a flash of his meditating walk, squared shoulders, and calm, settled mouth before he melted into the crowd. Would he ever attain the religious height of the man before me? Would I? I wandered away, seeking outside distraction from whatever it was that probed and prodded inside.

A few days later found me wandering and wondering again. Was this religious thing becoming an obsession with me? It was coloring all of my life. The more objective I tried to be, the more engrossed with it I became. Even a glimpse of the temple made me feel like someone thumped a sore muscle. Next thing I know I'll be . . . wait a minute, don't I see a familiar sweeping walk? Yes, that was the "sinner man" from the temple! Curiosity and something else tugged me forward. Almost even with him, I hesitated and wondered if there were other things on his mind. How could I slide into conversation? "Sir," I said tentatively, "I know you don't know me, but I saw you at the temple yesterday."

His head swiveled, one eyebrow rose, and his eyes sharpened. "Yes?" he said noncommittally. Despite his outward chilliness, I saw a gleam in his eye that wasn't suspicion. "Yes, you were so . . . so fervent. I don't aim to pry into your personal affairs, but I can't help admiring honest feeling even though you are

a . . . I mean, uh, pardon, I am just intrigued with those seeking satisfaction through the church. Something about it busies my brain, often to distraction. I don't mean to overwhelm you with a stranger's befuddled thinking but I thought I sensed a kindred spirit." Was he offended by my slip of the tongue or my forwardness? Now I cursed myself for getting into an impossible situation. I stole a glance. He wasn't offended! There was a smile on his face and, yes, a wrinkle in his eye. He caught my timid look and the smile widened.

"Yes, I was at the temple yesterday," he said, sobering. I could see his eyes clouding as if to shield them from sharp light. "And you saw honest feeling. I didn't realize anyone noticed. It's difficult yet simple to explain. As you started to say, I'm called a tax collector, a publican, and many other names I don't care to think about. We choose ostracism with our occupation. Why be a tax collector, then? Money. So easy to channel it in my direction. So easy to become calloused about wrong. Then I learned to justify my actions so I could go home happy. But one day I met a man. A different kind of man—meek and strong with eyes that unfolded my life before me.

"That look and a few simple words tore down my defenses and showed me what I was. I was broken by it but strangely determined to be done with that person. I then sought God in His tabernacle and that's where you saw me."

I was silent for a moment, trying to comprehend. I struggled to bring my blind fumbblings in focus with this concrete action. What about the law we were to live up to? All those catechisms that trained me for . . . what? What was actually demanded of me? Was it just seeking or was there a finding, too? The look on this man's face told me to believe in the findable, but I was reluctant. Surely God expected more than this from me.

"Well, sir," I said. "You have dropped a pebble into my smooth pond of complacent searches. I thought I was asking radical questions but you've wiped them out with radical action. I'll try to digest this and see how it fits in . . ." My forehead creased, my words had come out wrong and struck sour. I felt like I was sliding into a side trail around a great big secret.

He stopped and looked at me. My gaze faltered. Now he had a pucker in his brow as he said, "You try too hard." He lifted his hand then let it fall. "Rest," was all he said before he slipped away through the crowd. I turned and kept walking.

The next Sabbath I met the second man, a teacher at the synagogue. I provoked a discussion, remembering the righteousness of this man and searching for the secret. There was something fearful and inspiring about him. His adherence to the letter of the law caught my admiration. God must smile on such a man. What sacrifice for the glory of Jehovah! What brought him satisfaction in his life? That question tickled my brain and bade me linger until I saw an answer. I wanted truth. I thought of his great example. Everybody knew of his generosity in giving and the things he did for the underprivileged who came to the temple. His eloquent prayers drew crowds of people who hoped the blessing of those raining words would splash onto them. He brought forth words of wisdom to any who sought his advice. Anyone looking for a man of God turned his direction. I laughed at my earlier notion that the publican could bring me light. The evidence was clear. The publican, ever since that day at the temple, had shown no sign of change in his life except for setting his books straight and paying back those he had cheated. And that was expected. Why, he hadn't even changed the way he dressed!

I stepped up to the other man now. His cursory glance held little encouragement but I smiled and said, "Your reputation as a man of God inspires me. Daily I seek the Scriptures, tighten the control of my wayward self, and thank God for showing me a path to trod."

He grew in stature, and his gracious nod acknowledged my praise, "Yes, honoring God with upright lives is ultimate good. I follow a strict regimen of



work, Scripture study, prayer and work. Service to God must be seen or it is worthless. In serving the Holy One, I must keep myself clean and separate from all those who are a part of this world of sin. Those who do not listen to the almighty voice of God and adhere to His commands have been led astray by the looseness and wickedness of this generation!" He had worked himself up during his little speech. I could tell it was something that weighed heavily on his mind. I searched his face eagerly for the answers to my hanging questions. I lifted my hand in supplication, feeling a compulsion to blurt my frustration but my hand slowly fell.

—Karen Johnson

## Through Their Own Eyes

When I set an apple  
                  on the shelf  
                  and tell my students  
                  to draw it  
as they see  
it through  
  their own  
eyes;

and I receive  
                  twenty apples  
                  that look the same,  
I am not turning out  
individuals—  
  I am producing automatons.

                  But if Johnny jots in more jade,  
                  and Sally sees some shadows,  
or Billy bangs in bruises,  
                  or Wally wants a worm  
  then I grab these children—  
hug them—  
and thank God  
  they are individuals and see  
the world through their  
  own eyes.

—Mike Heckman

## Summer Storm

Whispers come softly  
of a front flowing.  
Finally she comes—  
setting me  
freeing me  
letting me rest  
peaceful, refreshed  
my life is quenched.  
She suddenly storms  
drenching me with cool  
breeze-water on my face,  
whipping my hair  
with her fingers  
lightly caressing my body

drawing me  
into  
cool  
refreshing  
rest.

Whirlwind breeze comes from her wet-  
warm mouth flowing over me  
taking me somewhere  
setting me free  
letting me go

—John M. Hardin

## Devil's Night

The crooked grin turns toward me; one eye blazes. I jump behind a tree. Maybe it doesn't see me. It growls and springs forward as I pull two white orbs from my jacket and then, in a gentle arc, lob them at the midsection of the beast. They crush against its side and, screaming, it clutches the ground to stop. I run for the nearest cover. From behind a mountain I hear it growl and scream.

I had broken out my dark sweats the night before, using them as a stimulus for my list. Santa Claus' evil brother lay inside me and it was time to deliver.

Drippy Dry Harry was first, because I was first on his list. Then Breeches, Lucky Joe, Double Hernandez, Sleaz Finder, Dog Breath, and the worst—Limp Harry.

Drippy Dry was an easy target. His house, as he always said, "was a piece of dirt." Many eggs had been and will be thrown at his garage. After adding to the stains, I headed for Lucky's.

Lucky couldn't find it tonight. When I arrived I heard Lucky's dad cussing him out. It was dark in the house and from what I could screen through the adjectives Lucky had blown a fuse. I was walking around to the front of the house, half crouched and staying in the shadows, when I could see what happened. Writhing out from underneath his garage door were 10 to 15 extension cords.

Each one had about two lights on it. Lucky wouldn't be out tonight or the next week.

I left one on his door.

I was checking my list behind a pine tree at the edge of Double's yard and realized that I had missed Breeches. I decided to continue and to pick up Breeches before Limp Larry. Limp had to be last. I crossed the deserted street to approach Double's from the front.

The screen door opened and Puggs skipped out. Cute name for a Great Dane. Puggs knew me. I jogged up to the front porch and sat down as Puggs greeted me with a nuzzle in the crotch. I thought about feeding him an egg, but he was stupid enough to choke on it. Mrs. Hernandez popped out of the front door and offered me inside. I refused and told her I was in training. She let Puggs inside and I started a slow jog to the sidewalk, and, as the front door closed, heaved two eggs and kept on jogging.

Sleez was a good name for Frank. Then again, any name is a good name for Frank. He had gotten his name "Sleez" from his method of picking up girls in a bar. He'd walk right up to them from behind and goose 'em nice and hard. When they turned around he'd offer them a drink. Great way to meet that special someone. His house was a complete condo. He lived separate from his parents and had his own garage for his car. Sleezer wasn't home when I arrived and I was glad. He wouldn't be for hours, guaranteed. I checked in his parents' window for their location. A skin flick was on the TV, and another on the couch. I tossed two on both doors and headed for Dog's.

Dog Breath was the only one of us without parents. He used "Whadda you want" for hello and "later" for good-bye. Dog was on his porch with Dipweed the faithful at his feet. In his right hand he held a pellet gun (man, did I hate that thing) and in the other a sleepy cigarette that glowed faintly through the ash. They were both asleep, but I knew they were both light sleepers. I pulled my drenched ski mask from underneath my sweatshirt. It felt like wet underwear on my head but I had to use it for this job. I worked my way around several houses and in the end was leaning against the outside of this garage wall. I was reaching around to crunch the second egg when a hand caught my wrist. I pulled. No luck. I pulled again, and the hand connected to my wrist appeared.

I bit into the first finger and, upon release, ran like lightning through his back yard. A predestined fence, invisible in the dark, caught me at the knees and sent me sprawling.

I felt a burning in my butt and knew Dog was loading in another round. Dipweed had my pantleg and was tugging on it. I got up, heard Dog laughing, and yanked my sweats from Dipweed's mouth. He grabbed again and got my ankle. I shook him off and felt another burn in my butt. Finally, I ran out of the yard and headed for Breeches'.

Upon examining the wounds, not too deep and no blood, I walked for Breeches'. Breech lived in a ranch-style house with just his mom. He was always screwing around until late and was easily victimized. His garage door was a femmie yellow and too sweet to pass up. I dodged some headlights and sprinted across his yard, leaving three eggs behind.

It was about twelve and Larry would be getting home soon from his prestigious McDonald's job. There was an elm tree Larry and I used to climb when we were friends that hung right over the sidewalk to the front door. I climbed up and waited. His piece of junk car turned the street corner and in anticipation I removed my last dozen eggs, still in the carton.

He pulled into the driveway and got out, needlessly locking the door. I waited. He was fat, slow—a beautiful target. I had the carton opened and ready when he stopped. He looked at me, and deep inside I hated Larry. He picked on me and put me down in front of my friends. My vengeance was released every

year, in every way, and it was time. I had to.

He was still looking at me. A tear tore through his right eye. The carton shook in my hand. Why Larry.

His voice spoke in me, "Johny, please come down." How sweet it would be. "Johny, please come down." I could, I couldn't.

—Stephen Boice

## Gift for a Little Child

I'm sorry, little child  
I wish I had a legacy to give you,  
A legacy of hope, of brightness  
I'm sorry, little child  
I wish I had a god to give you,  
A kind, beautiful god  
But the world you will get  
is a horrid place, riven with strife  
and anger and fear and pain and hurt  
I'm sorry, little child  
I wish I could change  
But the voice in the wilderness is not crying  
Anymore.

—Melissa Landis

## The Tornado

Home . . .  
the place where memories were made.  
My bedroom, the kitchen, the living room . . .  
fighting with my brothers, eating Mom's cooking, introducing my wife-to-be.  
Left without a roof to protect it.

School . . .  
the place where ABC's and 123's were taught.  
The playground, the cafeteria, the gym . . .  
my first kiss, food fights, shooting my first basketball.  
Destroyed by the big, uprooted oak tree.

Downtown . . .  
the place where everyone came together.  
The bank, the gas station, the grocery store . . .  
cashing my first paycheck, learning to drive a car, running into friends.  
Polly's Farm Store nowhere to be found.

Memories . . .  
take a lifetime to create.  
Tornados . . .  
take a moment to destroy.  
Why?

—Scott Perry

# Let's Hear It For Xmas

I really hate to call Christmas Christmas, and I've made this known to my friends. They call me a grinch, which is not a completely false accusation. Still, there's more to it than a bad attitude for holidays. We call December 25 "Christmas" because of Christ's birth. That's the whole meaning: Christ, with a m-a-s thrown on the end to make it sound official. The truth is, Christmas is Xmas, because that's what we've been celebrating for years. Yeah, I've been told not to "Take the Christ out of Christmas," and I wouldn't if there were such a thing. However, I don't think Christ has been in Christmas the eighteen years that I've been around for it, so Xmas is fine with me without question.

I have a feeling, whoever coined the word "Xmas" knew more what he was doing than the public realizes. Traditionally, X is a substitute, a fill-in-the-blank, an anything goes. Someone said, "Let's renovate Christmas," and it was so. "Make it adjustable to everyone," he said, "filling contemporary ideas, pleasing the me-generation." And the world thought it was good. So trees were put up and crosses taken down. Ten percent of all income was tithed faithfully to IRAs. Traditional carols were brought up-to-date.

Silent night,  
Greedy night.  
I hope Santa  
gets it right.  
My new fur coat  
and shirts for Dad;  
the pair of boots  
Mom hopes to have  
Santa, these things I wish;  
Sleep in material bliss.

And while "O Holy Night" was being replaced with "Grandma Got Run Over By a Reindeer," Bible verses were being modernized:

Give unto others . . .  
Returnable items.

Honor your father & mother  
For they shall reward you greatly.

For God so loved the world . . .  
He created Mastercharge.

In a changing world, we needed a changeable Christmas; we needed Xmas. Yes, Xmas is convenient; yes, it's easy to write, but it also says, "Put what you want to here." This way, you see, we can make Christmas what we'd like it to be. And what is that? A new set of skis? A Black & Decker power saw? Perhaps, for the younger ones, a Barbie & Ken Dream Spa? This is what Christmas means now. Many people, at least, some that I know, would feel ridiculous and maybe a bit sacrilegious saying "Microwavemas" and "Chevroletmas," so X is put in, and there you have it—a new holiday, very much resembling traditional Christmas, but representing things—wanted things, luxury things.

To me, Xmas means the same thing every year: money. Money that I want, money that I need. Money to buy an expected and expensive gift so I don't feel stupid when we exchange. Money to buy decorations, to travel, to pick up the tab. My Xmas is Moneymas, and I don't bother saying otherwise. There's a large group of die-hards who pretend to fill in their X's with Christ, but plastic yard ornaments of Mary, Joseph and the manger don't quite get it. Even attendance at midnight mass falls short of really getting the meaning, because the meaning is in what we get. After all, what goes on in these people's minds on that sacred day?

"I'm glad I got the coat I wanted . . . I'm so full I won't need to eat for a month . . . I must replace the bulb in the third Wise Man."

Honestly, I don't think it's,

"There was a Man who gave up living in the best resort spot ever to be born to unwed parents who were broke. He did this even though He knew that after He told everyone they should be nice to each other, He'd be killed. And He did it so I could join Him sometime."

See, that was a long time ago. I'm not sure we can even remember what happened last week, so it doesn't surprise me that the only thing kids think of at Christmas is a new Laser Blaster, and the next week, forget what they got the week before. When you think of it, it all makes quite a bit of sense, doesn't it?

What is your Xmas? Is it, like mine, Moneymas? Or, perhaps, Clothesmas? Is it Christmas, as you claim? Feel free to use the X, and then fill it in appropriately. It doesn't offend me. Actually, it can clear some things up. After all, Christmas is a time when we should be honest with ourselves and with our gods.

—Susan McIntosh

## Going Home

I sit watching the train whiz by as the dull brown, yellow and green boxcars blurr together in an unending line, thinking that four months ago I would have been on the opposite side of the tracks. Then I would have been on my way out of town instead of coming into town. Home was the farm house eight miles from town where the dogs greeted me by putting their cold noses into my hand and the horses whinnied loudly, wondering if I were coming to feed them. The kitchen light was always on and I could see my dad sitting at the table with a Winston in his hand. Sometimes he was watching the Bears or the Cubs, but more often he just sat silently thinking about his problems. He looked unhappy, but he seldom talked about problems to me and when he did I never knew what to say.

My mom tells me that dad wasn't around much when I was little. He was away on business a lot she says. He was gone so much that I couldn't tell him from his twin brother, so I just called them both "uncle daddy." But I remember all the things he used to do for me. I can't think of a time when he told me no. One time he was playing catch with my brother, and I insisted on sitting on dad's leg while he squatted in the catcher's position. He missed the ball and I caught it in the eye. Dad felt so bad that he rocked me until I fell asleep that night.

One day when I was playing at a neighbor's I heard my mom calling. When I got home I found a grey, striped kitten that dad had brought. He said, "It's yours, and you can name it anything you want."

I decided on Cha-Cha, but my brothers and sister said that was a dumb name. Dad told me it was a perfect name.

Another time my family went to Chicago at Christmas time. We all squished into a taxi and went downtown. The windows were filled with animated figures and sparkling snow. I couldn't look at them long enough before I was whisked away to other windows. Marshall Field's was the best of all. The huge, tall Christmas tree towered above me and I wondered how they got those lights all the way to the top. Standing at the base of it I couldn't quite see the top. I thought it must end in heaven, with a real star topping it. I couldn't tear myself away from the dolls in the glass cases. There were baby dolls reaching their tiny arms out to me, each in its own little case with a complete set of clothing. There

were china dolls with shiny faces and red cheeks and lips smiling at me. And there was a Heidi doll with yellow braids and real leather boots. When I asked for her I ended up going home with her sitting prettily on my lap.

I was afraid of the dark and I wouldn't sleep without someone in bed with me. Sometimes my sister spent the night at a friend's house. On those nights dad slept with me. He always rubbed my back until I fell asleep.

Dad always tried to give me everything I wanted. I'm grown now and on my own, but he still does. He knew I needed a stove for our house, so he bought us a new one. When I protested, he said, "Let me do this because I want to do it."

So I let him. Now he wants to buy new carpeting for our living room. I told him that I was on my own now. His answer was a little different this time. He said, "Let me do this because I love you and because I'm not going to be around that much longer to do anything for you."

"What do you mean?" I asked, not wanting to ask.

He frowned saying, "Anne, I'm sixty years old, I'm not going to be here in twenty years, and if I am I won't be worth a damn. Let me do things for you while I still can."

He kept talking but I couldn't raise my eyes to look at him. I realized that his life was one thing he couldn't give me even if I asked for it.

My mom was always in the family room when I got home, watching a movie or reading *Good Housekeeping* or *People*. She would look up as I came in and say, "Oh it's you, I didn't hear you come in." Sometimes she would add, "You're a little late aren't you?"

"Sorry, we were watching a movie on the VCR," I would explain as I threw my coat on the chair by the closet.

I'd go back into the kitchen, grab a can of Pepsi and some Oreo cookies, and sit down to watch Johnny Carson with mom. I would ask her, "Did you hear about Denise Seward?"

"No, what did she do now?"

"Well, she was at a party Saturday night . . ."

We sat there talking, laughing and watching TV until I could no longer hold my eyes open. Then I went up to bed.

My mom was always around when I was growing up and I guess I took her for granted because of that. She was more of a disciplinarian than my dad and when I was little I didn't notice all the things she did for me.

When I was four mom took me out sledding on the big hill behind our house. She sat behind me and we pushed off, but we went too fast and mom didn't know how to steer so we ended up hitting the cement step by the back door. We both fell off. That was the one and only sled ride we took.

In grade school mom went to all of my games. After the volleyball or basketball games all the kids would go to the local pizza place. Mom always went too, but she sat in the front with the other moms.

She made all of my dresses for the school dances. We would go together to pick out the pattern and material. She would have me try on the dress often while she was making it. She wouldn't quit making adjustments until it was perfect and usually when I was getting ready for the dance she was sewing lace on or finishing a hem.

I always buy my mom sentimental cards, and she always ends up crying when she reads them. One time she told me, "One of these days I'm going to get you back!"

She did get back at me and when I least expected it. At my bridal shower she put a card inside my gift. It was a poem saying that she'd always be around for me. This time she cried and I did too.

Now I'm on this side of the tracks waiting to cross over them and go into town. Now home is a white two-story house on Beaver Street. I have to go through the alley because we park behind the house. The yard light is on. I run

into the house. There is no one waiting for me. The little tulip-shaped lamp is on but the room is empty. The house is quiet. I look around, everything is where I left it. My coat hangs on the back of a chair and the shoes I wore to school lie under the table where I kicked them off. I tiptoe upstairs and find my husband asleep; he always goes to bed early.

I go back downstairs, do what little homework I really need to do, then settle down on the couch with a good book, a warm afghan and some hot chocolate. I sit there until I cannot hold my eyes open, then I go to bed.

The home I had then and the home I have now are different. So are the people I live with. In some ways I miss the old and I do miss my mom and dad. But the new one is mine and it's up to me to make it a place I want to come home to.

—Anne Nicholson

## Poo

He sat in the corner and looked straight ahead at me. The tattered bear had been my closest friend since my first trip to Disney World. My parents bought him for me as we were leaving the Magic Kingdom. I hugged him from the moment he was set in my arms until we reached the hotel. I named him Poo.

Our friendship was close from the beginning. He went with me everywhere, even to the bathroom. At night he would lie by my side and play in my dreams in meadows of laughter and fields of happiness. When I woke from a nightmare, he would be there to comfort me with his permanent smile and ever-opened arms.

He was also there for me on my first day of school which I had anticipated for months. I was both excited and hesitant.

"No, you can't take him with you," said Mom. "You wouldn't want the other children to break him, would you?"

Tears welled in my eyes as she gently pulled him out of my arms. I shook my blond, curly head and rubbed my brown eyes. Mom touched my hand softly and said, "I'll set him right here on your bed so he'll be waiting for you when you get back."

"Good-bye, Poo. I'll miss you today, but don't worry. I'll be back faster than you can believe." I gave him one last squeeze, waved good-bye to Mom and shuffled off to school.

"Mom! "Mom! Guess what I did today!" I yelled wildly rushing into the house. She pulled me into her arms.

"What dear?!" As she listened intently, I rattled off the events of my first day in school. "I'm very proud of you!" she said squeezing me as I had squeezed Poo earlier in the day. Suddenly, I pulled away realizing that Poo was waiting for me. I looked into my Mom's surprised eyes and said sternly, "I have to go tell Poo now!" She smiled her motherly smile and nodded in understanding. I raced to my room and found Poo right where I left him with open arms and stationary smile.

"What? . . . Fine . . . How was your day? . . . Good . . . I missed you, too . . . You would've had fun with the children . . . Yes, I know you were bored here, but school is only for children, not bears." I hugged him and told him about my day.

Every day after that was the same. I became bored with kindergarten but no



matter how my day went, I let Poo know about it.

Another boring day passed, but when I came home, I didn't feel like talking to Mom or Dad or Poo. I wasn't really bored or excited—just tired. I sat in front of the color television and watched cartoons until my brain was “Bugs Bunnyied” out. I ate supper in silence. When my Mom asked me how my day went, I gave the thumbs down without saying a word. After supper, I went to my room to get ready for bed and saw Poo sitting on my bed with his arms spread waiting for me as usual with his sickening smile.

“School was boring again! I hate it. I hate it!!! I HATE IT!!!!” He still smiled at me as if he were happy I hated school. I stuck my tongue out at him, threw him on the floor and went to bed.

A few years later I was looking for my fall jacket. I peeked under the bed. “What are you doing down here?” I asked the dusty, yellow bear as I pulled him from the mass of knick-knacks and misplaced toys, books and half-colored pages torn from coloring books. He still had his silly grin and his arms were open wide ready for the hug of his best friend. I brushed him off, hugged him once, and set him on the third shelf of my bookcase.

Starting a new school is never easy, but starting a new school in a new town is worse. My first year in middle school was exactly that—horrible. I felt like an outcast. My theory was proved right in the first week. One of the popular girls in “Cindy's Group” (the group of girls that had all the neat clothes, hairstyles, and all the boys) slapped me in the face for taking her swing. My round, wire-rimmed glasses flew off and splashed in a mud puddle three feet from my red, white and blue double-knit pants, splattered brown muck on my red and yellow Trax tennis shoes, and twisted to a never-mending shape.

“Mom! Mom!” I yelled as I entered the house. After no answer came, I cried the tears I had held back all day. Running into my room, I tripped over a rug and hit my head on the wall. Now screaming, I flung back the door to my bedroom. It slammed. I wanted so much to hit something. As I looked around the room, a faded, little, yellow bear with a stable smile and arms flung open sitting motionless in the closet caught my eye. I threw him three times against the wall and punched him ten times in the nose. After I looked at him and realized he was happy to see me again, I hugged him as hard as I could and said, “I can always count on you, Poo! You're always the same.”

Middle school was nothing like high school. My insides flipped in and out throughout the entire first day which was filled with finding a locker, getting lost for two classes, tripping in front of the football team as I was getting on the bus, and getting off at the wrong bus stop. I collapsed in relief onto my nerve-calming bed. I turned my head slightly and saw on my shelf a tattered-looking bear with one ear torn and half a smile. His arms were still open and his half smile was as steady as his full one. I smiled back. “You're still around, huh? I've missed you. Today was terrible. . .” and I went on to tell him what happened.

I made it through high school and my first year of college. When I walked through the door of my quaint, familiar room, the first thing I saw was an ugly old bear with no smile and drooping arms looking straight ahead at me.

—Sherri Ide

# A Short Quip from a Modern Day Beatnick

Societal reject—that's what I am  
Never conform to established plans  
-of war, hunger, and poverty,  
-destitution, prejudice, and misery.  
Never could I fit the mold,  
I guess my heart was never that cold:  
-reducing life to human rubble  
-as long as you live inside your bubble  
-you never see the hurting face—  
your "societal concern" is a big disgrace!

... *the Businessman:*

Clean up your life—go get a job!  
Instead of breaking into houses that you pillage and rob.  
While I sit and hide within my coffers;  
Don't bother me—I gave at the office!  
As long as I get residuals,  
Don't worry 'bout low-life individuals;  
Let 'em hop on the boat that brought 'em here  
They could leave—and I wouldn't even shed a tear.

... *the Politician*

Attention, please—yes, look at me;  
And don't forget to vote in the primaries!  
Have you heard the most important news today?  
The polls just came in—they're going my way!  
We'll send our boys to kill those "Commies"  
(Even the ones that are daddies and mommies).  
Our social programs are doing quite well  
(And even if they aren't what the hell).  
I don't hate anybody—I love every man;  
But they have no excuse if they live in this land  
Of "golden opportunities" that always knock twice!  
(Get away from me, boy—you prob'ly got lice!)

... *the "Pious" Parson:*

Come all who are hungry, come all who thirst,  
Sorry, only white folk allowed in my church.  
There's no place for you on that side of the tracks;  
Now walk away, boy, and don't come back!  
I'll give you a pamphlet that'll save your liver;  
I'll pray for you while you starve and shiver;  
But how could I ever explain having you here?  
To my board and congregation, who're all so dear!

... *the Beatnick, again:*

Well, those are the ones who care about people,  
with their high-rises, soap boxes, and even their steeples.  
I wonder if Jesus would be pleased;  
He said He was the least of these.  
But who's the least, and who's the best;  
Is it the man in office, or the man he detests?

—Joseph L. Ireland

# The Strays

The smell of apples and cinnamon was strong as Mom stood over a stove stirring a lumpy brown soup that would soon be apple butter. This yearly ritual was almost completed. She would pour the stuff into small Mason jars with white labels that said "From the kitchen of" and these would become parting gifts for anyone who happened to drop by. She had to give the stuff away because no one at home would eat it. I was sitting at the kitchen table reading the latest Victoria Holt. Mom turned from the stove long enough to ask why I wasn't doing my homework. I told her I was reading a library book for English. Well, it was a library book.

Feet bounded up the steps, across the porch, and the screen door slammed. I heard Mom's sudden intake of breath. Dad was home, and not alone. A large, black, mangy dog, drooling on the Mr. Clean Shine, stared at Mom as globs of apple butter dripped from the wooden spoon in her hand and made shield volcanoes on the same shine across the room. Dad really did it this time. It wasn't the first time Dad brought home an animal needing care, but it was certainly the largest.

Last June Dad brought home a white angora cat with blue eyes that had been run over by the milkman. Dad fixed a box lined with old towels and a small pink pillow from my old toy box. The pillow had belonged to my Tiny Tears doll. The cat lived only three days on his pink throne and Mom made Dad throw everything in the trash to be burned.

Two years ago, Dad came home with a baby crow. Its feathers were jet black and slicked back over its body making it appear small. That silly bird had its mouth open all the time. My brother, Dale, used to catch nightcrawlers for its nutritious needs but the bird preferred the raw hamburger Dad used to sneak out to the porch. The bird stayed until its voice grew as big as its body and the shrill *caw! caw!* thundered through the house. Dad could tell from the set of Mom's pursed lips that there must be a better home for the crow somewhere else.

Looking at the heaving black dog, Mom's lips were pursed in the same way. Dad's eyes were darting around the room trying to fix on something other than Mom's lips. Dad, "Only for a few days Hon! Just til we can find where he came from or a good home." We knew that no one was going to claim this sorry looking mutt and a good home seemed doubtful. Mom sighed and turned back to the unwanted apple butter. This meant she would discuss this later. Discussions worth hearing always took place after 9 pm in frenzied hushed tones.

Two weeks later the large, black dog, named Thistle now for some reason known only to the strange and confused mind of my nine year old brother, was still around. However, he was relegated to the front porch and den. I never knew he was around til his cold, wet, black nose found some exposed part of my body to nudge or till the damp soaked through my socks. Thistle wasn't going to make the same mistake as the crow.

Wednesday night was meatloaf and as we sat at the supper table, I could see that Thistle had cautiously crept to the kitchen doorway and put his front paws into the forbidden zone waiting for the roof to fall. When it didn't, he pulled the rest of his lank body through the door. I quickly turned away, not wanting to draw attention to this act of bravery.

I had to raise my voice to make myself heard above the noisy business of eating. "Mom, I need two packages of hot dogs for the Girl Scout meeting Friday. And please don't forget to hem my black skirt because I have to wear it

with the red sweater on Saturday.” This was going to be an important weekend. Friday night was our award meeting for Girl Scouts and I was going to get three badges, and Saturday night was the dance at Parish Hall. This weekend was never going to get here and Mom wasn’t paying any attention to me. “Mom!” I said but she kept looking at Dad forcing him to clear his throat and look down. Mom said, “It’s time.” Dad quickly took another bit of meatloaf. I looked from Mom to Dad and back again. A small glob started to build in the pit of my stomach. “Please,” I prayed, “Let me be able to go this weekend.”

Dad finally swallowing meatloaf and finding courage said, “I invited Janie Shorb to spend the weekend with us.” As my eyes met his and my mouth opened to speak he continued, “She’s having problems at home and needs to get away. I knew you would understand.” Dad expected the conversation to end but not this time.

“You can’t do this to me. Not this weekend! Not Janie Shorb!” My voice was quivering with fear. This was not a nightmare. This was really happening. You can’t take guests Friday night to the meeting. I won’t be able to go and I won’t go to the dance with Janie. Mom’s eyes were fixed somewhere over Dad’s head on the cracked plaster that sent spidery veins to the ceiling. Dad looked at me, set his jaw, and cocked his head to one side and raised his hand with index finger pointed ready to give his standard “kind to those less fortunate” lecture.

Knowing that Dad wouldn’t change his mind I cried, “How could you? Janie’s not some stray like Thistle. She has a home.” And I ran out of the kitchen and upstairs to my room.

Looking out my window, half expecting my bedroom door to split from the hinges so Mom and Dad could make me understand, I began the steps necessary to feel sorry for myself. Nobody really cared how I felt, nobody understood me. It wasn’t easy being his daughter. He was gentle, thoughtful of others and kind to strays. I was tired of it. It wasn’t any easier to be her daughter. She was patient but firm and could discuss things quietly. I was impatient and screamed. I should have had Karen’s parents. They never expected her to have Sunday manners everyday of the week and to always do unto others. . . ! They even used words like “nigger,” “wop” and “spic.” I didn’t know what a “wop” was but I wasn’t about to ask Dad because I knew what a nigger and spic were. Dad wouldn’t allow me to go to Karen’s if he ever heard their discussions.

Karen’s parents wouldn’t have Janie Shorb in their house. Janie lived at the edge of town in the old Hamilton house with nine brothers and sisters. Her Dad was an alcoholic and her mother didn’t care anymore. Janie was one year older than me but she was in the same grade. She had long brown hair that hung in stringy strands around her waist. No matter what she wore it was gray and wrinkled. Almost everyone at school made fun of Janie. She wasn’t smart and she smelled of grease and sweat. I never made fun of Janie but I never had anything to do with her unless I had to. I didn’t know her well enough to dislike her but I couldn’t risk losing friends. Maybe I would be exposed to a deadly jungle virus and die before Friday. That seemed better than going to the dance with Janie in tow but I knew I would have to take her. Dad wouldn’t even let me stay home now. Dad was the one who didn’t understand that it was okay for him to associate with those kind of people. It was part of his work in the church. But it wasn’t okay for me. I knew Mom understood because she wouldn’t look at Dad but I knew she wouldn’t interfere because she wouldn’t look at me.

I fell back onto my bed and closed my eyes. I was surprised Janie even wanted to come here to stay. She had to know she wasn’t wanted. I heard the screen door slam and heard cries and howls from the back yard as my brother

and Thistle started to play. Thistle was a friendly dog, I couldn't imagine why someone wanted to get rid of him. I guess Janie was a stray too. She had a home that didn't want her either.

I pulled myself off the bed and went to my closet to examine my black skirt. Janie wasn't going to the dance with me in gray. As I took the straight pins from the hem of the skirt, I could hear Dad's gentle footsteps as he slowly climbed the stairs.

—Pat Guy

## Pause

By the river  
Tall  
Solemn trees  
Reach up  
To touch  
The gray cotton sky.  
Dew crystals yawn  
And blink like  
A baby awakening,  
Just as the sun  
Comes up to smile at them.  
As the smooth,  
Sleek river  
Begins to reflect  
The blinding sun,  
A nervous squirrel  
Leaps across the bank.  
It is now  
Time to move on,  
For morning is nigh,  
And the moment is gone.

—Rachel Brewer

## McClain 313 - 4:01 a.m.

The clock read 4:01 a.m. when I woke up this morning. The first thing I was aware of was my hand on my right eye. I was playing around with something. It was small, hard, plastic and crumpled up. When my consciousness caught up with my fidgeting fingers, I realized I was holding my soft contact lens. This sudden realization made me sit up and try to focus on the floor from the top bunk bed so I could jump out and quickly soak my contact back to life. My blurred vision along with my early morning incoherency caused this to be a difficult task.

I nursed my contact back to its previous state and climbed back into bed. Pretty soon my eyelashes began to flutter and my eye felt uncomfortable again. I reached up and my contact popped back into my hand. I sat up and reached over for my contact solution and after placing the normal two drops on the contact, tried to put it back in my eye. The funny thing was, it wouldn't stay in. The contact just fell back into my hand. There was no suction left and the contact lens no longer fit the curvature of my eye. I played around with it for five minutes or so. Still I had no luck.

Then, the strangest thing happened. My contact, actually the size of my finger tip, now seemed larger than normal. It had at least doubled its size. I rubbed my eyes and looked again and it grew larger still. I tried dropping more contact solution on it and putting it in my eye before it got any bigger but it was no use. The contact was the size of a half dollar and like a limp piece of plastic. Just weeks before when my parents bought me these contacts I was threatened that if I lost one or destroyed one, I would have to buy the next replacement, which wasn't in my student budget, or go back to the dreaded glasses, which would be a blow to my ego. This frightening thought made me try desperately to think of ways of returning it back to its normal size.

By now it was the size of a pizza pan and I was holding it in my hands with it draped over the edges. I gave up on keeping it moist with the solution thinking that that may be the whole problem. I carefully reached for my hair dryer and headed towards the bathroom so I wouldn't disturb my roommate. I plugged the hair dryer in and began blowing it at the contact lens in smooth back and forth movements hoping the heat would have some effect on it and shrink it down to size. Unfortunately, my theory failed and the contact lens kept growing . . . and growing . . . and growing. It must have been six feet in diameter now and I was carefully holding it over my arms with the draping edges nearly touching the floor. I began to cry because I didn't know what to do but I knew I had to save this contact lens!

Beep . . . Beep . . . Beep . . . Beep . . . Beep . . . Beep . . . Beep . . . the sound startled me and I sat up in bed, adjusted my eyes and saw that it was 6:15 a.m. I reached over and shut off the alarm and look around the room with clear eyesight, heaved a heavy sigh and lay back down to catch my breath.

—Beth Riley

# The Silent Majority

I have been trying to study since 9:30. Now it's 11:30, but how can I study when the bear in the corner keeps looking at me. Sure, most people think he's a cute, huggable, stuffed bear, and he almost had me fooled, too. But I've watched him closely these last few weeks, and what once was a silly smile has turned into a sneer. Occasionally when we are the only ones in the room he growls a low, barely audible growl. I act like I don't hear, but I really do, and he knows it. So now I'm lying on my bed, studying while he glares and me with beady, button eyes.

"Stop staring at me! I know you are not a normal stuffed bear, so don't play games with me. Why are you always staring at me?"

"Because I'm hungry," said the bear.

Even though I had asked him the question, it still startled me to hear him speak. I jumped up on my bed and wrapped my blanket around as much of me as I could. With one eye I peered out of a hole in the blanket, wondering if I had heard right or if this was just my imagination.

"I said I'm hungry!"

My astonishment turned into indignation as I threw down my protective covers and stared at him, daring him with my eyes. "Oh no, you are *not* going to eat me! No way buddy! Besides you haven't had the nerve to try anything yet."

"That's because you didn't believe in me before."

"What makes you so sure I believe in you now?"

"Because you are standing there talking to me, a simple stuffed bear."

I ran to the door as he leaped from his corner and lunged for my leg. We collided and then crashed to the floor. He was strong, but I finally subdued him in my unbreakable hold and pushed him as hard as I could into the closet and slammed the door. Just then Roommate walked in.

"What did you just hurl into the closet?"

"My bear."

"Why?"

I don't know," I said as I opened the closet, grabbed my bear by the ear, then gently set him back in his corner. I looked at him then noticed that his sneer had turned back into a silly smile.

"Do you want to go to the beach party with me?" asked Roommate.

"No, I'm really tired, and besides, I need to study."

"All you ever do is stay in the room and study. You need to get out and have some fun. Come on, everyone is going to be there," said Roommate.

I gave her a half-smile and sank onto my bed. She really doesn't understand. She is always trying to be so nice to me by inviting me to everything. She thinks her life is better, but thinking about it makes me laugh. Her world is so insecure. She is always worrying about what she looks like, if "he" will ever ask her out again, and if any one likes her at all. But I am secure because my room is stable, unchanging. It always welcomes me, and I am never alone. I have myself and my world of infinite possibilities. I am the center of attention at parties; my adventures are unlimited, and I even go out with football players. Why would I ever trade my world for one on the outside? Once I went to a party with Roommate, but I can't remember it very well.

Later, I woke to the sound of applause, but I couldn't see its source because the overhead light was shining in my eyes. As my eyes slowly adjusted to the spotlight, I realized that my milk carton dorm room extended into a larger room, an auditorium. I got up, moved closer and tried to look beyond the spotlight. The audience was staring up at me, clapping and cheering. They were

even chanting my name. The music began as I frantically searched the room for some object that looked like a microphone. I took my place on my stage and began to sing. I was uneasy at first, but after beginning the song, the words seemed to tumble from my lips. The eager faces urged me to continue, and I sang with all my power, all my enthusiasm, and all my feelings. My whole body was singing.

“Shut up, I’m trying to sleep,” came a voice from the next room.

The music suddenly died, and the walls of my room boxed me in again, only this time my room seemed smaller. “That’s okay,” I answered to myself, “I’m through now, and all my fans have gone.” I turned off my overhead spotlight and went back to bed.

—Sally Swan

## The Photograph

The cracked and brittle photographs lie haphazardly in the shoebox before her. At her feet are two photo albums, still in the stiff, clear plastic from the five and ten. She is trying to organize a lifetime of memories before they slip away. Her only legacy will be these vinyl coated albums stuffed with the years. Her reddened hands, rough from washing dishes, planting gardens and sewing quilts, shake as they carefully select a photograph from the box. Her eyebrows rise in question, her blue eyes narrow as she tries to identify the faded face. The photograph is yellowed and the upper left corner is gone, but the unmistakable gleam of youth shines through. She settles back in her seat as a wave of memory runs through her. Eyes closed to lessen the reality of age, she recites the tale of a young Swedish girl’s arrival in America.

Her voice cackles and cracks as she chuckles to herself; her nostrils twitch from the smell of salt air and adventure. The story she tells has been told before and the words tumble fast and strong as her toes tap out the rhythm. Each breath quickens and her fingers hold tight, not wanting to let go. But the tale is told. She opens her eyes, they narrow and widen trying to adjust to the light of the time. The lines etched in her face are deeper and her shoulders sag more. A gleam of youth has come and gone on a Saturday afternoon. Her head falls back, her hands relax and the photograph falls to the floor.

—Pat Guy