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2009**

*Janus Lady
"The Ideal..."
With Love
and Fight,
Hyo Kwon '09*

Hyo Kwon '09

TALKING LEAVES

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Statement of Policy and Purpose

Talking Leaves accepts original works of fiction, poetry, photography, and line drawings from students at Indiana University-Purdue University Columbus. Each anonymous submission is reviewed by the Copy Editors and is judged solely on artistic merit.

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FOREWORD

We know that in troubled times, great art is salve to soothe our wounds and make life more livable. Furthermore, tough times are often the impetus for great art. While we find that many of the submissions to the 2008-2009 *Talking Leaves* deal with tragedies—death, the “end of the world,” and natural disasters—others deal with much more personal trials, tribulations, and victories. Many of the submissions may have been cathartic for the writers.

We hope that you find characters in the poems, plays, pen-and-ink drawings, and short stories that resonate with you and your personal lives. Perhaps you will find reading these texts to be cathartic. It is also our sincere hope that, in seeing others take the risks associated with sharing their work with a broad audience, our readers might summon the courage and resolve to submit their works for future editions of this magazine. Many of the goals of IUPUC are also the goals of the editors of *Talking Leaves*, especially the ones associated with contributing to a vibrant arts community.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the IUPUC Division of Liberal Arts, the English faculty, and the IUPUC English Club for their unceasing support of this campus tradition. Of course, we would also like to thank all of the students that submitted their stories, poems, drawings, and photography. Without them, we wouldn't have a literary magazine to publish. We wish we could have accepted every single submission, but space and time constraints dictated otherwise.

From the Faculty Sponsor

Talking Leaves showcases prose, poetry, and artwork of IUPUC students. The faculty sponsors are proud of all the students who submitted work and are thrilled to share the following selections in this year's magazine. IUPUC students submitted works under a blind review process, and the editors based acceptances on quality. *Talking Leaves* is a student literary magazine designed and published to empower student voices and to encourage self-expression; as such, accepted works receive only minimal copy-editing to preserve the unique personae and ideas of the authors.

One of the English Department's goals is to help students realize they have something to say. The story goes that American settlers carrying maps, letters, and other documents caught the attention of Native Americans. The papers rustled like leaves, and the Native Americans realized the power of written documents that "talk." We hope you celebrate the written word as you read and talk about IUPUC students' creative expression here in *Talking Leaves*. Each contributor has created something new and original—something never seen or heard before—and we honor their willingness to share their ideas in the words and images that rustle throughout this issue.

With special thanks to the IUPUC English Club and the IUPUC Student Council, enjoy *Talking Leaves* as you listen to the struggles and joys of its contributors whispering, crackling, blowing, and falling across the four stages of this year's magazine.



Telephone Burn

Kyle Willey

Why Farm Machinery Scares My Daughter

Cher Cramer

Already apprehensive of area unenclosed
Agrarian acreage impedes her tremulous trek.
Eyes averted each instant implements implode
Into nearer noisome nastiness
Razor-ripping, flesh-threshers
Sending shockwaves into soil, skin
Whirling, wretched witches' teeth, talons
To others—everyday, unexciting, ignored;
To her—anxiety alert above anything, an unusual awareness.
Massive monoliths moonlight as modern machines,
Agriculturally-oiled animals activate internal alarms;
Whether shiny and solid, sloughing soil as skin
Or rusty remnants on forgotten farms.
Unconcerned with city construction, capable of deeds unthought-of,
No connection is captured, these metal teeth that tear and tumult the land.
My daughter's dread desires distraction, denies description then departs
As silent silver slips savagely from her vision.

Stoic Vale

By Oshu Huddleston

Vale Verena hunched over and peeked around improvised curtains. He pinched back the patchwork covers with his quivering hands. His breath was quick and hot against the frozen window frame, which dispensed small clouds of steam back to his face. He was so terribly nervous that he had tears collecting in the corner of his eyes. As he tried to brush the tears from his eyes, it occurred to him then that in order to see outside he would have to use the ice scraper again. It was just too much for him. He closed the curtain tight and stood for a moment trying to regain composure. His voice squeaked sharply as he cleared his throat and removed the scratchy, knitted wool scarf from his face. It was time to tend to the fire in the wood stove, right there in the living room, where he would spend another several days arousing the courage to take another peek through the window.

Vale had survived for weeks in the frozen wasteland of North Dakota in a small burg called Gilby. He wondered if there were still a world outside of his tiny rental house. According to what he saw from his living room window, whenever he mustered the will to take a look, the world outside was an unkind, iced mistress that he didn't see coming.

At first, Marcus "Marc" Ragan, the local weatherman on channel two, gave predictions of the coldest winter in recent history. He spoke of the weather with a chuckle, and suggestions such as "be sure to bundle up" and "have those furnaces double-checked." The wind and the air became cool in August, which prompted these predictions from the experts. When the average temperature of the fall season ended up at around twenty degrees, the same people that so calmly calculated a colder than normal winter began to dread something worse. There was a questionable weather phenomenon that Marc Ragan would never get a chance to figure out.

Marc Ragan and local weathermen like him were replaced with national and multinational weather news broadcasts. It wasn't just Gilby, or just North Dakota, or just the northern United States. From Vale's perspective and what he understood of the speeches of government officials about a coming massive cold wave, these important climate change warnings had to do with something greater than just global warming. Vale took interest in the news when the broadcasts featured details on a few coincidental volcanic eruptions that happened the year before. Mount Saint Helens caused a bit of a stir and had a minor eruption, but that occurrence was eclipsed by two massive eruptions: Kluchevskoy in Russia and Hekla in Iceland. These two volcanoes had massive eruptions within three weeks of each other, and just two months after Mount Saint Helens. There was some major sort of geological event happening, but that was as far as the warnings went in Vale's mind. Vale was more concerned on whether or not he would receive hazard pay as he worked outdoors, trimming trees that had grown too near to power lines. In all of his thirty-seven years, the most important lesson Vale felt that what he had learned was that "money makes the world go 'round."

These volcanic eruptions occurred in the late spring and preceded the under-informed weathermen's predictions of a record cold winter. Vale noticed how his neighbors in Gilby were progressively more and more concerned about the state of planet Earth. "These eruptions may have altered the Earth's atmosphere profoundly." He passed off these new complications of planet Earth

as the next big thing to worry about, like scientific know-it-alls did with global warming. He simply went on about his life.

Gilby, North Dakota, was definitely not on the pulse of the world. It had just under a few hundred citizens, and any business was no more than a fuel stop. If anyone needed anything more than gas or some overpriced groceries, it was better to just take those extra miles over to Grand Forks. In Gilby, Vale was almost a typical denizen of the small burg. He was a lonely, thirty-something nine-to-fiver whose highlight of the week included not only payday, but the Saturday night jaunt to the Down Under Sports Bar in Grand Forks to watch whichever University of North Dakota Fighting Sioux team was playing. Vale Verena had found his time and place in the world. What set Vale apart from others in Gilby, though, was an awkwardness that even he could not explain. He was not a good conversationalist, as he felt he had nothing that was worth contributing to a conversation. He felt that his life was just plain enough for himself but far too plain and simple to other people. In light of that, Vale Verena kept to himself. In doing so, Vale had enveloped himself in an indescribable loneliness. There was a constant pain in his gut that he knew could only be thwarted by the company of someone that loved him, but he simply was not willing to go out into the world and take the risk of exposing himself.

Vale was mainly an agreeable person, but had trouble socializing with the opposite sex. An outsider might speculate that if a woman in Gilby wasn't already taken, she shouldn't be too picky in such a sparsely populated hamlet. The reality was, though, that women, even in Gilby found Vale tiresome, thus Vale's single status. He was pudgy and laconic as a child and teenager, which left him rejected by girls more often than not. The lasting effect was the rarity of Vale even making small talk with women. On top of his loneliness in love, his parents were long passed and his only brother and sister resided far away from the miniscule haven of Gilby. He was alone, and upon observation, one would establish that Vale didn't care. He simply went about his life with regularity.

Vale was certainly paying attention to his loneliness after Gilby was evacuated. Even more so after the news informed him that the entire state of North Dakota was being evacuated to refugee camps in the southern United States. Upon further news viewing Vale discovered that the entire northern half of the United States was being evacuated to the southern half. The massive cold wave was predicted to last for much longer than anticipated. Vale was suddenly forced to take the so-called massive cold wave crisis seriously. His stubbornness had left him in Gilby, more alone than ever, ignoring the state of emergency and pleas to evacuate. Unfortunately, the horrors of emotional and literal aloneness set in a bit too late. The government issued the evacuation when it did for a reason: within forty-eight hours of the notice, the temperature in Gilby, as in the majority of the rest of the planet, dropped seventy degrees.

Vale obsessively ran the scenario over and over in his head. On one November day he was outside of his house stacking some firewood, the temperature cold, probably around twenty degrees. He indeed found it strange that the temperature hadn't been much warmer than that since August, but it wasn't enough to make him budge from any routine. Alarming as it was that the people he knew in Gilby and the surrounding area were taking the cold wave warning seriously and evacuating, Vale was steadfast in his loyalty to his time and place in the world. Everything was agreeable on that one November day. Two days later came a very different kind of day.

Vale had a stubbornness that people talked about. His mulish nature was the one thing people thought of when someone mentioned his name, if they recalled him at all. If they didn't know or remember his name, he was "that stubborn guy." His stubbornness is what caused him to

risk his life and kept him thinking that the massive cold wave would just blow over and everyone would get on with their lives. When businesses were shutting down, Vale simply stocked up so he could ride out the storm. His stubbornness blocked the fact that there was no storm to ride out. He had heard the government officials and the scientists. He had heard the weather experts and all the warnings everyone had to offer. He simply didn't allow himself to understand that something has caused the atmosphere to go haywire and reduce the Earth's temperature for an amount of time that no one could predict. His stubbornness guided him to innocently go to bed on one night only to be awoken just hours later.

A nuclear bomb could have detonated in North Dakota for all Vale knew. His house shook with such force that the wall that made up the rear of the house had cracked. The resulting gap in the wall was like a naturally improvised doorway in his bedroom that led to the wickedly cold outside world. A powerful vibration trailed the thunderous sound through Gilby, through Vale's home, and through Vale. He was tossed from his bed and onto the floor in time to hear an enormous explosion, the sound of what he imagined the propane plant up north sounded like when it went up in flames. The vicious noise rang in his head so hard that he was pained instantly and before he could even get to his feet, he was so cold that he could see frostbite begin forming on his fingers. He struggled to get up, like he suffered from an advanced form of arthritis. He moved toward the living room to get closer to the wood stove and his feet began to freeze to the hardwood floor with each step he took. He grabbed his flannel blankets from his bed as he hobbled toward the living room. He noticed that the severe cold was coming through a person-sized crack in the wall, so he closed the bedroom door once out, and then he stuffed one of the blankets in the space under the door.

Vale turned to his living room, which was in disarray. His initial perception was that North Dakota had experienced an earthquake, or his living room did, in a sense. The wood stove's flue disconnected, but Vale easily repaired it. He then wrapped his remaining flannel blanket around himself and stayed as close to the stove as possible – more than a few feet away left the bitterness of the cold attacking his extremities. He took the time while he tried to warm himself to collect his thoughts. He knew that something major had just taken place and that despite all the speculation, warning, and foreboding of what just happened, but he had no idea what had just happened.

After an hour so of bundling near the wood stove, Vale gained feeling back to fingers and toes so he felt comfortable with leaving the stove for a moment. Luckily, the commotion had not damaged the power in his house, so he ventured across the room to turn on the television. Upon pressing the power button, the television's screen cracked, accompanied by a loud crunch. Some sparks vented from the rear of the set, which caused Vale to retreat to the woodstove, and the television soon fell still, useless. The house phone apparently suffered a less dramatic fate, as it simply did not work. "So much for discovery of what the hell just happened," Vale thought. Cell phone? Vale almost wished he didn't foolishly decree that the cell phone craze wouldn't last.

"I'm fine with my house phone," Vale told people with cell phones as often as it came up in the past.

"What if it's an emergency and you're stuck somewhere?" The cell phone people would ask.

"There are payphones," Vale said as he denied his world of the handiness of cellular phones. He pushed the notion to the back of his mind after assuring himself that walking to a payphone in such wretched cold may not be a great idea. He'd have to figure something else out.

Hours passed as Vale sat inches from the wood stove. He knew that he would run out of firewood soon and that he would have to venture outside for more. He masked his concern for these mysterious weather changes with his willful inflexibility, by rationalizing that he shouldn't waste time with worry over the big picture and figure out his immediate survival. He psyched himself up for a trip to the kitchen and grabbed some random canned goods. In the same, continual motion he grabbed a Rubbermaid hamper of dirty clothes that he left by his bedroom door. The numbness returned to his hands and feet, though, just the twenty seconds Vale spent away from the stove.

It was time to go for the firewood. Vale layered himself two sets of thermal underwear, two sweatshirts, two pairs of cargo pants, two ski masks and heavy duty steel-toed work boots with climbing spurs attached. Gloveless, as he had accidentally left them in his out in his aged Toyota, he improvised some mittens with two pairs of socks. He opened the door to his house very slowly and kept a solid grip on the door in case the wind took it, but there was no wind. Vale was astonished, almost disappointed at the lack of wind. He imagined himself fighting against the elements to get his front door closed, but the wind just wasn't there. Vale also noted the odor of the cold. He could *smell* the air, his frozen nostrils apparently blessed with the ability to sense what "cold" really was. At that moment, smelling the cold was no different than smelling an overcooked microwave TV dinner, or the aroma his armpits gave off after not showering for a week. To Vale, for a moment, and it very well could have been true, he was the first and only and last person to experience sensing something in nature that was previously just a word used to describe the temperature outside. To him the cold smelled sweet in a way, which made him feel like nature had something wonderful to show him. His tingling, numb extremities argued otherwise.

He stepped outside and closed the door as he looked at the sky. There was an endless gray haze of clouds that covered as much of the sky as Vale could see, but they simply weren't moving. The stiffening of joints and fading feeling in his fingers reminded him that he needed to accomplish his task with haste.

There was a small stack of firewood just outside of Vale's front door. It looked very insufficient considering the turn that the weather took. Vale allowed himself to feel foolish for ignoring the warnings and leaving only a small stack of firewood, and then went back to task. To make it more accessible, he kicked the far side of the stack so it would collapse toward the front door of his house. He knelt down on the frozen ground and raked an armful of wood against his chest. After a great effort to return to his feet, Vale jockeyed to return inside with the wood.

The windless atmosphere left an unnerving silence, but that was shattered by a feral avian screech. Vale was startled and dropped the majority of the firewood he had collected. To him it sounded as if a massive, angry eagle was about to swoop in on him. His eyes darted around in all directions until he spotted a great wingspan overhead. A snow had begun to fall and left the view hindered somewhat, but Vale made out a huge, blackened wingspan circling directly above him. He eyed the sight for a few moments, gathering that a turkey vulture was scouting him out. Feeling that permanent loss of feeling in his body was imminent, he grabbed whatever wood he could on his way back into the house.

After securing the door, he piled the wood near the stove and warmed himself. He found that some frostbite had set in with his fingers and toes despite his thorough bundling. He sat by the stove and heated himself, as well as a can of baked beans. As he rested, he let himself consider the circumstances he had found himself in. He ignored the idea that he was in his current situation by

his own doing and reassured himself that he just needed to keep warm until the cold wave passes and everyone returns to Gilby. The idea of the wave not passing and no one returning to Gilby muscled its way into his thoughts and took center stage. Vale realized he was alone. He wasn't just alone in life, but he personally watched much of the residents of Gilby drive south past his house. He denied with all of his powers of denial, but he finally realized that he was completely alone in every sense of the word.

He crept to the living room window like a flannel-wrapped hunchback of Notre Dame. The window was frosted over, inside and out. He tried to erase some of the frost with his makeshift mittens, and then realized that would only deal with the frost that had accumulated on the *inside* of the window. He lit a stick of kindling and held it to the window, careful to not catch his cheap curtains on fire. He noted that some thick covering of the windows would be necessary. Eventually much of the frost on either side of the window had melted. He placed the stick in the stove and returned to the window to find it already chilling over again. "So much for watching out the window."

As Vale used electrical tape to fashion several dirty towels into a throw rug to create a thick, hideous curtain, he heard the screech again. The buzzard was apparently waiting for a meal.

"I'd like to know how that thing isn't freezing out there," Vale said to himself.

He used electrical tape to attach the edge of the patchwork sheet to the curtain rod. He heard the screech again, more vicious. He moved back to sit by the stove when another screech sliced through the air, accompanied by an unmistakable shattering of glass and scraping of metal.

"The hell was that?" Vale moved to the window and quickly remembered how ineffective rubbing frost off of the window was. He went to the front door and cleared it of the protective stuffing he had placed there before. The door creaked sharply under the weight of ice that had formed since last it was opened. The cold jabbed at Vale's eyes, causing him to squint hard into the bright reflection off of the ice covered everything. He saw that his truck had become an alternate version of its self. Half of the Toyota's cab was crushed in on itself leaving little space for anything. Vale was shocked; he still would have been speechless even if he could have opened his mouth in the horrendous cold without getting immediate, severe frostbite.

There was someone there. On the other side of the truck was a human shape. Vale squinted harder to focus his eyesight and could not immediately process what he saw. Surely the cold had gotten to him, but there was a pale, nude woman there. She had long raven colored hair that went all the way down her back. She turned to lock eyes with Vale, only for a second. To Vale, that second was not measured by time. It was long enough for him to gaze into her dark, glimmering eyes. It was long enough for a feeling to wash over Vale that he had not experienced since he was a boy: he felt *wanted*. The reason of want did not matter to Vale; the feeling simply overcame him. The moment, in which Vale wished he could have lived in forever, was then shattered. The woman hopped into the air and fanned out two enormous, feathery black wings and bolted off into the frigid air.

The whole occurrence lasted no more than ten seconds from door opening to door closing. Vale closed the door and stuffed whatever was nearby into drafts that fought through. He sat by the wood burning stove and closed his eyes, unable to imagine the reality of it all. The biggest part of him was sure that the cold was making him sick. He surely had an intense fever that made him imagine what he had just seen. He reviewed the occurrence in his mind. "There was the most

gorgeous woman...no, so youthful...a *girl*. She had no clothes, outside in that cold, then the girl – the *creature* flew away.” She was the most intensely beautiful thing that Vale had ever seen. As he repeatedly assured himself that he was simply losing his mind because of the cold and probably getting pneumonia, he could not shake that *look*.

Here is something that would have possibly driven someone to the brink of madness, but Vale Verena just saw a ghostly, winged woman launch herself into the sky, and he has fallen in love. She looked at him, her gaze only lasted for mere seconds, and Vale was hers. She may not have been real, but that did not matter to Vale.

“I’d never seen such a beautiful thing,” Vale mumbled to himself as he stoked the fire.

Vale spent the next three days huddled near the wood stove, completely befuddled. He pondered if that woman, that *girl*, whether she was winged or not, really meant that *look*. No woman has ever gazed into his eyes with such meaningful intensity. She *wanted* him. Vale strongly believed in his feelings for the creature, but he felt so foolish for believing in what he saw. The impossibility of some freeze-resistant nymph wandering Gilby during a rogue cold wave came second only to Vale’s immeasurable feelings for that *look*.

“Nah,” Vale muttered. “Of course she wasn’t real.” She was completely nude. Even if you took away the wings, how could a naked woman survive out there? It was suddenly all so silly. Vale was outside days before for not much more than a minute and got patches of frostbite on the parts of his face that were exposed. He still couldn’t even feel most of nose. But to be out there in nothing but the natural female form, exactly as Vale always dreamt it to be...that was impossible. The logic of it all left him feeling scorned by his object of affection, as if she hurt him by lying about her existence.

Vale sat for days more in his living room, leaning in close to the stove to keep the ability to feel his body, he thought of how the creature girl looked at him. He could not measure the damage that the cold had done to him or how his body was fighting to keep him alive, but he felt a certain anxiety. He held on to that anxiety like one would hold onto love, hoping that it would return to him and be real. He thought only of his mixed feelings, the creature, and basic survival.

During that time he developed a cycle that left him somewhat embarrassed. He had not bathed for many days, and his body odor coincided with that. His handling of his own human waste became shameful processes that resulted in several bottles of urine lined up in the kitchen next to foil wrapped stacks of fecal matter, which he planned to launch into the back yard if the smell became too unbearable, and if he could find the energy to do so. He would sleep for an hour or so, and then he would be awake for three or four. To deal with what his life had become, he kept himself in a cycle of sleeping, eating, pissing and shitting, and occasionally getting firewood. Vale knew that he was doing what he had to do to survive, but he was still embarrassed, perhaps self-conscious. Despite there being a question about the existence of the elegant winged woman, he felt the existence of someone or something that *wanted* him. He was like a self-conscious teen with a face full of acne the night before the junior prom. In Vale’s case, though, the embarrassment was pee jug number six and the previous five that had already frozen over in the doorway due to their distance from the wood stove. The embarrassment was piles of newspaper and tin foil wrapped fecal unmentionables that sat nearby the frozen jugs of urine. Notwithstanding the concern of disposal of such, his mind had another focus. Were the creature, this love of his, to be real, he definitely did not want to disgust her.

When Vale gave himself time to ponder something else, he wondered what had happened to his truck. His *BELOVED* truck. It struck him for a moment that the beautiful creature may have had something to do with his Toyota's destruction, but the mere thought of anything to do with the creature returned him to his fanciful thoughts. The face of the love of his life was etched front and foremost as far as Vale was concerned. Even with all of the possible embarrassment that Vale would endure if his love were to really exist and return, he welcomed another visit from the beautiful feathered goddess that had enamored him so endlessly.

No matter how often he attempted making a one-sided hole in the frost of the living room window or cracked the front door open for a second to get a useless peek toward the devastated truck, she didn't come back during that time. She would surely come back, though. The routine that Vale had begun to endure became so routine that he had run out of wood for the stove. He would have to go back outside. But the last time he went out for wood to burn, there was that vulture; that was the first connection Vale made from the hungry vulture to the nymph he now obsessed about. Each could have been one in the same, but did each want the same from Vale? The question echoed around Vale's thoughts.

"Hello?" Vale heard the voice of a man crackle out from somewhere in his house. Vale thought he was dreaming. "Dammit, someone is there, right?" It was the scraping voice of Jimmy Landard. Jimmy was what Vale would call his closest friend if Vale had ever let another human being in his house, considering Jimmy was his only all-time visitor, once. They worked for the same tree-trimming company, but their association with each other did not go much further beyond that.

Vale's vacant gaze into the coals of the stove had shifted to a radio near the couch, inches away. The radio, as far as Vale knew, had not made a single sound up until that moment. Vale picked up the radio and returned to the warmth of the stove. The radio crackled a bit more and Vale could make out Jimmy's voice, but not what he was saying. It seemed that this AM radio was picking up some interference, probably from Jimmy's CB radio. That being the case, though, Vale could not attempt to talk back to Jimmy. Vale *did* have a CB radio, but it was installed in the truck. Vale tried hard to think of a solution other than going out to the truck and salvaging the CB radio, but came up with nothing.

"The angel of death," sobbed the suddenly clear voice of Jimmy. "It's the angel of death." After that, all of the radio interference and crackling stopped.

Vale's eyes widened. What did Jimmy mean? Vale shook the radio as if to shake Jimmy out of it so he could question him. Surely he didn't mean the beautiful winged girl. Maybe there *were* two different flying creatures out there. Maybe Jimmy was referring to the vulture that haunted him when he procured some firewood. Vale figured he would find out soon enough: he had to go back out for firewood.

Vale bundled up as much as he could; he even crammed wads of newspaper down his first layer of thermal underwear. He forced on every piece of clothing that he could until he could barely bend his arms or legs. He imagined how silly he must look, which added another layer to his negative self-worth. "How could such a gorgeous creature ever want a ridiculous man like me?" He removed his coverings on the door and cracked open the icy doorway.

There was a light snow falling outside. Vale thought that maybe it had warmed a bit, but then dismissed the thought. "How would I tell with all this frostbite?" He stiffly made his way into

his front yard and halted near the woodpile at the front of his house. He turned and looked around his yard for possible company, but there was none. He glanced around the sky, but saw nothing but the falling snow. He then began to gather wood while a concern set in that the beautiful, pale girl might not visit him again, or that perhaps something had happened to her.

As Vale was on his way back to his front door, a startling noise caused him to drop the wood. It was a sound similar to a large tree bending and snapping in half, as a windstorm did in Vale's yard just a couple of years ago. Vale instinctively fell to the snow-covered ground in an attempt to not have his head bashed in by a collapsing tree. There was no head bashing, however. Vale waited a moment, then brought himself to his feet and peered around to survey damage. There was none. He gathered the fallen wood as quickly as he could and went into his house.

When Vale opened the door to enter his home, he became devastated. The back wall of his house had a huge hole, large enough that he could have driven his truck through if the Toyota had not been destroyed. He dropped the wood and closed the door behind, then fell to his knees in hopelessness. "What do I do now?" The hole was too large to simply cover with any blankets or dirty towels. The material from the back wall of the house was strewn about in the field behind his house. He knew that freezing to death had become inevitable.

The beautiful creature, the winged girl, the irresistible nymph stepped through the hole and into the house. She moved intently, carefully, as if every small motion she made was meant to seduce. She tilted her head as she stepped forward so that any light would shine in her black ink eyes. She brushed her dark, flowing hair back from her face with porcelain fingers tipped with short, black talons. She stepped so that her sleek thighs glimmered. Were there such a thing as the mythical love at first sight, Vale had then been completely seduced.

Vale gasped at the immaculate image. His hot breath froze directly in front of his face then faded into the cold air. He would never take in another breath. He shed tears that froze on his face around his blurry eyes. The otherworldly vixen gently placed a clawed hand on Vale's face and brushed away the solid tears. Vale closed his eyes with the image of her face emblazoned, etched into his memory. He felt her place her lips on his forehead, her literal kiss of death, and Vale was frozen in his place...in his time.

Flying to Atlanta

Heather Uebel

Floating over spider webs

Lights glisten like rain on silk

The grid flashes from one edge to the next.

Like a spider I hover above

Watching the ants crawl into the web below



Goddess Capricorn, Anti-Gravity

Hyo Kwon

Picture Window

Heather Uebel

Sitting on the deck at sunrise

I stare in awe as the morning arrives

The trees frame the new light

Spilling over the horizon

As once again God paints the day

And in solitude I gaze through the picture window

Angels Alike (of Epic Proportions)

Hyo Kwon

(Well then if I may, I would like to bend some Yellow Light...)
Both hands on my chest, Star-crossed...an internal bleeding
This is my loudest silence...What happened to us people...I was just wondering
Windex to your back window, do you what I see?
The picture's so much worse now than what I remember 10 years ago
Back when I played games like Tag and red light...green light...stop and go...
Are you ready... are you set...into a green...time machine... shall we go...
So pick your weapon of choice from the table of round
Caps off, a telepathic pen is a crown less king's branding
A memory digging deep in the REM sleeping sand and digging
Hey look over there, fire ants in straight lines and marching
Ants marching so proudly not seeing without seeing...
Just the backs of another...Disillusion...Are you seeing what I'm seeing?
Again and again and again...I can't take any more of this constant repeating of
history...
Enough is enough is enough but why won't the fighting stop already...
My chest is pounding...Is it just me or is everything pulsating...
(Deep breathe...inhale...exhale...) It feels like my back is expanding...
What happened to love unconditional, because the red you show her now
seems to have lost its meaning?
See without seeing love ... the view is agitating...
Hey, didn't you read the book; the reap of our left is sowing
And it really is...look 10 more years back...can't you see...10 more back...please...
But hey, it's all in your mind...Right...
Well, you are right about that... the left and right to be exact...
So why not fold up what you keep on that finger cutting Paper
Cause painting Red on Red on Red will never ever change its color
Its better sending red paper air planes into the Blue Recycling Binner
Cause our ego-trips can be much healthier when sent to an Ever Green litter
It's not too late though...things can get better...remember who you are...
Look, the children's eyes...Youth...Innocence... Yourself...Rejuvenate...

Hey the secret is out...We were all heaven sent...
Unlearn the hate, resist the herd, and never ever be the same... rejuvenate...
Learn to love...learn to love...learn to love...Please, can't you even remember?
Damn, those older kids with their red paintball guns
Hey, look at that girl and boy holding hands and skipping rocks...
Splash!!! ...and so the water begins to ripple...
The pulse of the sea... an ultrasound...Mother Nature's womb and temple...
Hey look, water sparkles and diamonds in the sky...Just wondering, have you
made it there yet???

Someone perfect... Yourself...expanding...unfolding...evolving...
The Universe is shifting and resisting...remembering...
The Galaxy is...Unlearning...how could of we have not known this before.
Can't you feel it tingle in your spine?
Such an awaking of limbs to wings...Evolution... All Angels Alike...
This one will never have an end...Because you have got to admit now I really got
you thinking...
And it's too damn good to not make an effect unless...Hey wait... unless I... spell
check...
Okay there...let's try and read it again...shall we...
It's like high fives to better judgment...It's Divine Comedy...
The back door's open with welcome mats for everyone that understands what
they're reading...
...Love... Light...and...All Your Wonderful Childhood Memories...

Inspiration, Guardian

Oshu Huddleston

Candlelight wavers as I raise my hand

My fire vanishes when I lower my eyes

I let another brighten my path

And I feel my spirit climb

Evoking dreams with love and words

Impossible without inspiration

Drawing from vividness

Rather than the shadows

Wisdom flows now clearly

Clouded views are long in the wake

Behind an everlasting muse

My Guardian shines my way

Izel

By Fabiola Cabrera

The Pyramid of the Moon was ready to accept the sacrifice of the virgin. The rain god Tlaloc and his wife the water goddess Chalchiutlicue were ready to feel the blood of a young woman. Tenochtitlan's people proclaim the name of the gods and the name of their king Chicahua. The smell of blood could be sensed easily all through the night. The decision to see death again under the full moon was something that only King Chicahua could make.

"She escaped," the old and lame servant whispered in Chicahua's ear while the whole crowd was proclaiming the king's name.

"What?" Chicahua replied, surprised in the middle of the ceremony. "Izel escaped?"

"Yes, Master, she's no longer in the prison, she's gone...."

She runs and runs between the plants and the trees, between the jungle and the sky, between death and life. She is scared to look back but also fears to look forward. The moon is her only witness in the lonely night. She wears a ceremonial dress, long enough to cover her knees and big enough to fill out her figure. Her dress has woven figures of Aztec gods, such as the light god Xolotl and the death god Xochitonal. She wears a gold necklace with precious jewels of different colors and a gold ribbon on her forehead that has a small symbol of a snake to symbolize Tlaloc.

Izel, whose name means "unique," is only a 16-year-old slave girl, who now is escaping from a tragic death. She believes in death and life, she believes in gods and mortals, but most of all she believes in herself. Izel is a beautiful young woman with a dark skin tone and big eyes, with a steady bust and a tense look. Her mouth is small, but from it flows a plethora of ideas. She is exceptionally smart and she always brings up controversial issues. Izel never talks too much, but when she speaks, the ground trembles; her aura brings a mysterious feeling of hate and heartrending desire to learn. She always thinks about the rain, because it is the only way in which the sky and the ground stroke each other. She is afraid of the gods but she also hates them. She cannot understand why she had to give her life to arrogant and wicked gods. They never considered her feelings when her parents died, they never thought about her isolation as a simple slave. Izel is ready to die anytime but she is not prepared to give her life to the gods. Her life is the only thing that she absolutely owns. She is terrified, she cannot believe what she just has done, and she wants to cry and to laugh. She thinks about her parents and what they would think if they were alive. She hates the intolerable feeling of cowardice. But in fact, she is also happy; she is proud of herself. Finally, she laughs in the face of these gods that took her parents' lives.

Izel was only seven years old when she experienced the feeling of being almost dead. The war killed and captured every person in her little village. She can remember that day when she hid between the grass and the mud. Her mother, a gorgeous woman from whom Izel inherited her beauty, was hugging her so hard that she could hear her mother's heart beat. Her father, an active and thin man, had climbed up an old tree a few feet away from them. The soldiers were destroying the thatched roofs, stealing livestock and animals and taking slaves and lives. Izel could hear the screams of terror from women and babies being separated. She could smell the fresh blood of villagers and almost feel the weight of the potential chains of slavery; she knew this was the end of her innocent life. Suddenly, a soldier appeared out of nowhere and hit her mother with a large stick, destroying her head which was full of wisdom and blood. Her father could not control himself and he jumped directly onto the soldier. He bravely grabbed the soldier with all his strength. He took the knife which he had hidden in a little piece of cloth that he tied around his waist, and he carved out the soldier's throat. The soldier wailed in pain while Izel's father cried out of hatred and sadness. Izel

could not move. She was there watching as her mother's blood enveloped her face and as her father wept while he mangled that man's throat. Other warriors came after hearing the scream of the soldier. But Izel and her father were not there anymore. They were running to the west, trying to escape between the crowd and the trees. They were running so fast, that she felt like she was flying. Her father grabbed her by the hand so hard that she could not feel her hand anymore. Unfortunately for Izel and her father, there were too many warriors.

"So you thought that you could escape," said one of the youngest soldiers to Izel's father as he pulled him by the hair. Izel's father shook in terror but he still looked at the soldier with courage in his eyes. "Why you don't respond?" The young warrior continued. "Maybe you're scared." There were five more soldiers with arms; Izel knew that she and her father could not escape. The young man looked for a few seconds into the black eyes of his new victim, and he made a peaceful smile. "Don't worry. Your fear ends here." He grabbed a knife and he passed it over the throat of Izel's dad with elegance. The soldier dropped the dead man in front of her, so that his last glance fell upon his horrified daughter. Izel was terrified; she could not talk, move, defend her father's honor or run away from death. She expected to be killed. However, the young killer looked at her very calmly, and he came very close to her so he could see her eyes covered with blood, mud and horror. The soldier touched her face very gently and he murmured to her, "Don't worry young girl, your parents are now with our gods."

"Look everywhere!" the king barks orders to his servants. "She must be very close. Check the gardens."

"Master, we must continue with the ceremony," the lame servant replies.

"Are you disobeying my orders?" the king says. "Izel must be tortured and killed in front of the people and especially in front of Tlaloc." The servant does not say a word after that. He does not want to be a sacrifice too, so he runs to the soldiers giving orders to look for the rebel woman.

The king is a tall man, and he has small eyes and thin lips; he has a quiet and strange look like that of the jaguars. His body is strong with sturdy muscles like his name, Chichahua, which means "strong." He always wears ostentatious regal clothing, full of colors, wings and many jewels. King Chichahua wears clothes with pride of his position. However, Chichahua's interests at this moment were not the clothes, but Izel. Now he curses Izel, the rebel woman, for escaping her destiny, but he curses himself even more for loving her so much.

It was a spring morning and Izel was a virgin, only fifteen 15 years old. She looked at the sky and compared the color of the corn with the color of the sunlight. Her body was tired from work in the corn fields, but her mind imaged a place where she could play with the animals and talk with her dead parents.

"Izel! Keep working! We have work to do!" An old woman screamed in the back of Izel's ear. "The king is having dinner with our masters tonight. Stop dreaming! We need to have everything ready before night." Izel continued grabbing corn from the ground and thought no more about her parents. She felt the pain of being nothing but a slave, who was nothing before people and before the gods. She was not special or unique. She was only a servant and she hated that. She was nothing but Izel.

The night came and the king arrived at the noble's house where Izel worked as servant. The nobles were celebrating the profitable harvest of the past year with a big banquet and alcoholic beverages that only important warriors and the elderly could drink. The artisans, traders and peasants also celebrated while the slaves brought food to their masters and tried to do their best to fill requests. As usual, Izel helped the other servers until midnight. Then half the people were already drunk, and she could escape to the back of the property, climb a tree and watch the stars. She always

tried to figure out which stars her parents had become. She wanted to be a star, too, calm and shiny, and high enough so nobody would be able to reach her, grab her, own her or even touch her. She wanted a place in the sky where she could create her own light and be close to those who really love, a place where she could be free.

Chicahua walked away from the craziness of the celebration for a moment. Sometimes he grew tired of being a king, always full of people and adoration but never time for himself and his mind. He walked around the fresh grass and the yellow flowers which covered his feet. He felt the intense darkness of the night and observed the beautiful sky lighting up with the millions of stars. He thought about his new command as king, and the breeze reminded him the day which his name was praised, the day that Chicahua became “the king of Tenochtitlan.” He remembered how hard it was for him to get the throne. He remembered the long wars, the suffering, the isolation, and the death. He had a bittersweet feeling as he remembered his past. Sometimes he felt proud for the things he had to accomplish to become a king; sometimes he did not. But the truth was that his culpability was killing Chicahua very slowly. Chicahua looked into the sky with melancholy and saw something that impressed his pupils and made him forget about the past and the wars. He saw something more beautiful than the stars. He saw a goddess. She was sitting there over that tree, wearing the clothes of a servant, but with a beautiful aura over her body that translated the curves of her slim figure. There she was, looking at the sky like she could read every message from the gods. Her brilliant skin and her deep gaze made him want to know more about her. He stood there for a moment, watching her beauty without saying a word, and then he returned to reality.

“Who are you?” Chicahua said to her with a grim voice.

Izel looked at the man as though she had just awakened from a dream, and then she turned her gaze again to the sky. There was only silence.

“I ask you who are you?” Now the king insists upon an answer. “Woman, are you deaf or what?”

“I’m not deaf. You’re blind, my master. Can you see my clothes? That must answer your question.” The king froze for a moment. He tried to speak but nothing came from his mouth. He could not believe that a servant would answer like that. “I’m not asking you what your work is. I’m asking you who are you?” the king finally replied.

“I’m a slave. I’m nobody until I become free,” she continued. “My name is nothing. My feelings are not important. I’m not anybody. I’m just a servant”

“Look who you are talking to, servant,” he said. “I can send you to the world of the dead with my power....”

“You have no power,” she interrupted him. “Your power is nothing but the people’s beliefs and the blessing of your gods. You don’t own your power.” There was a small pause and she continued. “And if you send me to death’s world I may be overjoyed, because finally I will be a free soul.”

It was the first time that someone denied his wisdom. It was the first time that a beautiful woman looked at him so coldly. He felt empty and angry for a moment. But he also felt surprised by her beauty and her ideas. He could not sleep that night; he knew that the beautiful servant was neither a dream nor the result of alcohol. She was real and different. She was a servant who acted like a goddess. She was nothing but unique.

After six nights and seven days Chicahua stood in the palace’s gardens at dusk. The orange and blue colors of the sky reflected the beauty of the white roses, red poppies and purple lilies. Therefore, the beauty of the sunset and the flowers made Chicahua continue thinking about that goddess trapped in the body of a slave. He felt foolish for thinking about her and not about his people’s needs; he knew he was selfish, but he could not control his emotions. He saw a black

butterfly flitting between the white roses and followed it until its wings arrived in a woman's hands, the hands of Izel.

Chichahua could not talk or think. He could not believe what was happening. It was like magic, like a message from Tlaloc. She was now watching at dusk with lonely and silent breathing, hiding between the white roses and her reality. She was wearing the same old and soiled slave clothes and had the same arrogance in her eyes. She felt his presence but she ignored him completely. She was too busy watching the sun hide behind the mountains.

"You're not going to greet your king?" the king said after a few minutes of silence and devotion. She looked at him from the corner of her eye, and she retraced her sight to the butterfly dancing with the sun.

"Have a wonderful night, my lord" she said, and she walked out of the rose garden.

"Wait! Come back," the king said, grabbing her by the hand. Without thinking, he asked her, "What's your name? How does your master call you?" Izel did not demonstrate any resistance but she was surprised. "My name is Izel," she said.

"What are you doing near my palace?"

"I worked in your gardens, my lord. The elder recognized my knowledge of plants and flowers and gave me the opportunity to care for your garden."

"How you know about flowers?"

"I was born and grew up with flowers, my king," she continued "My dad cultivated them and from there my feelings and knowledge toward flowers came on." The king recorded every word from Izel in the depth of his heart. Every sentence made him want to know more about her.

"I have to leave, my lord. I have other duties that I must complete before darkness. Excuse me...." She walked out away from him. After that, Chichahua would visit the garden more often.

Izel can hear the voices of the warriors. She can feel the adrenaline and the smell of her death. However, Izel cannot surrender to the gods. She still has the opportunity for death with dignity. She continues running, even if her legs beg her to stop. Her body sweats and her heart beats as fast as a hare's. She does not listen to her body, only to her mind. Then she sees a cascade falling into a silver lake. She feels safe for a moment. It is the perfect refuge. However, she knows that the hidden place behind the water curtain is also her death.

Every spring and summer day Chichahua visited Izel at the garden. He was surprised by Izel's beauty and knowledge. However, after spring and summer the flowers shriveled. For that reason, Chichahua gave to Izel another slave position in which she would take care of the pyramid's sculpture and maintain handicraft. After months of work and hearing the stories of Chichahua, Izel learned to read every message, symbol and secret code from the pyramid. She could understand completely the legends of the gods, the beginning of the sun and the dark, and again hated being a slave.

Chichahua believed that he deserved Izel. He believed that he was born to understand the reason of life and to navigate the gardens of unreality, and so he thought that Izel had the same feelings toward him. One day, when the sun was nearly hidden, Izel was cleaning the gold floors of the noble part of the pyramid, and a servant came to her and gave her an order.

"He wants me to go to the garden?" Izel asked to the old servant who was always by the side of Chichahua.

"Yes, Izel. He told me to not tell anybody what I am saying."

"Thanks for the message. I'll be there...." After she heard the message, she stood up, and walked calmly to the garden. It was the beginning of spring, the flowers just started to sprout and the garden was covered with the green stems of the flowers. When she entered the garden, she looked for Chichahua by the white roses where she met him for the second time. Indeed, she saw Chichahua standing in front of the roses and the green stems, watching the orange sky with a vague smile. Quickly, after he felt the presence of Izel, he smiled broadly and went to her. He was wearing

one of his extravagant loincloths full of decorations, as well as a poncho with the symbol of a snake in its center. He also wore a gold belt at his waist and more jewels over his chest. He came near her, and with a bow he took her hand very gently and started to talk.

“My beautiful Izel, I was waiting for this day, the day in which you will be happy with me, the day in which you would be free.” Chicahua did not see any response from the facial expression of Izel and he continued, “Today I want to give you your liberty. Stay with me as a partner. Stay with me as a woman. Stay with me as a wife, and you would be free.” Izel did not respond immediately, but she knew for sure that any response would cost her life.

The king runs with the other warriors. He looks in the dark for Izel, barking orders and hitting every plant and rock that is on his way. The angry king can remember very clearly that spring day when he declared his feelings to Izel, and she refused. She refused to become his wife, and she negated her opportunity to escape from slavery. She told him that she would never marry someone that her heart hated so intensely, someone who follows the rules of the gods that made her a slave and especially to someone who killed her last hope, her father.

Chicahua was only a 15-year-old soldier when he first killed a man, in order to be recognized. He followed the rules of the elders and gave more life to the gods. Now, he can remember how he took that man’s life and how the little girl looked at him with resentment. He is the soldier who killed Izel’s father.

He was proud of being a warrior but he also felt pain for being a killer. It was the pain of being the king; he was the one who took Izel’s smile. Now he cannot handle those horrible feelings that he hid for so long and he can remember every nightmare that he had when he was only a child. He can remember every person he killed and every sacrifice he made, when his soul was satisfying to the gods. Although he forgot his past with the intensity of Izel eyes, now they were the ones that refreshed all his memories. He reproached Izel for his suffering, which he hated most of all.

In that calm dusk, where the flowers grew, Chicahua grabbed her with hate and he threw her over the white roses. She didn’t move. She was scared but she did not demonstrate any resistance. He beat her with his fist over her gorgeous face and then he kicked her ribs many times. And finally he tried to make her his woman. But Izel was like a body with no soul, with no tears, just anger in her eyes and a silence of hate. And then he realized that he could take Izel’s body, but he would never, ever take her soul. He stopped his anger; he shook in hatred while Izel shook in pain and fear. Chicahua took the slave to the pyramid’s dungeon where the sacrificed slaves were hidden. The king decided to leave her in the prison until her life was necessary for Tlaloc.

Izel hides behind the transparent color of the waterfall. The little cave is covered by wet rocks and the crystallized reflection of the water reflects the terror of Izel’s face. She sits on a flat rock in the depths of the cave and touches her ribs. She is bleeding again. After Chicahua had beaten her, she still has serious injuries. She feels sorry for herself but she does not want to think about her suffering. She looks at the rock roof where the water is leaking and a tear comes from her eye. It is the first time she cries since her parents’ death. After a few moments of reflection, she sees a green snake swinging against the current. The snake has slanted yellow eyes and a soft, smooth and green skin. The snake moves continuously over the water, making a magic reflection in the cave. For a few seconds, Izel believes that it is not real. Then Izel sees the snake slide its dark green body very slowly over the rocky surface to where she is. The snake looks quietly at Izel for a moment. It opens its mouth and moves its tongue, speaking to Izel.

“Why are you crying?” the snake asked Izel.

“I don’t know,” she said, responding like it was very common to talk with animals. “Why do you ask?”

“Because I have the feeling that is because of me,” the snake responds.

“Who are you?”

“I’m Tlaloc.”

“Why are you hidden in a snake?”

“Because this is how gods like to appear.”

“What do you want?”

“I want to know why you hate me so much.” Izel does not respond and the snake insists, “Is it because my young warriors killed your parents or because the king who follows my orders loves you? Why Izel? Why do you hate me so much?”

“I don’t hate you because your soldiers killed my parents. I hate you because you allowed them to keep me alive. You kept me alive as a slave and I became the shadow of my masters and a soul without life. I don’t hate you because you sent that same warrior that killed my father, to meet me and love me. I hate you because you use his feeling in order to keep me on your side. I hate you because you’re the one who made me a slave. You’re the one who took my freedom, and even worse, you’re the one who destroys the life of his people.”

The snake looks at her for a moment; he slides very close to her and asks her again,

“Are you scared of me?”

“No.”

“I want to help you.”

“I don’t want your help.”

“I know I have been doing too many things to you Izel, but this time I want to compensate for all the suffering that I caused.”

“I don’t want your help.”

“It’s not my help. Let me repay you with a miracle for your suffering.”

“I don’t want a miracle. I just want my liberty, and my liberty isn’t in this world.” Tlaloc looks at Izel a little confused and Izel continues. “I want to die. I want to be a free soul. I want to become a spirit. Let me die.” Tlaloc looks very surprised to Izel, and he sees also the same sadness and pride that Chicahua saw.

“If that is what you want, I’ll help you.” The snake slides on Izel’s body, and softly Tlaloc bites her neck. Izel smiles after all her suffering. She is finally free, light and calm as the stars.

The sun starts to appear, and the warriors and Chicahua still search for Izel. Chicahua feels guilty, because it was he who showed Izel the pyramid. Because of that she knows how to escape from the prison with no problems. But he feels guiltier because he followed his emotions and now he is destroying Izel’s life. He wants to quit searching for her, but his heart asks to continue for her research.

“My king, I think we have found something,” one of the warriors screams. Chicahua quickly jumps to the lake where the other soldiers were. He follows his soldiers, walking through the water, and then they climb to a little cave behind the cascade. They walk for a few minutes over the wet rocks and finally arrive where Izel’s body lay. He views her body and he realizes this is his end, too. He grabs Izel’s body very gently from the wet rocks and slowly touches her face. When he strokes her hair he notices the bites of a snake in her neck.

“She died hours ago, my Lord,” one of the warriors says. Chicahua does not speak. There was a silence, and mixed feelings of culpability and confusion.

“And now who are we going to sacrifice, my lord? Do you want me to look for another slave?” another warrior asks, thinking that the king was sad because of that.

Without looking away from Izel’s body, Chicahua says, “No, my blood will be the sacrifice.”

IZEL

A play by Fabiola Cabrera

Characters

Izel: Young and beautiful slave girl.

Chicahua: Handsome and arrogant King of Technochtitlan.

Ecatzin: Old and lame man who serves King Chicahua.

Cuauhtemoc: Quiet and obedient Chicahua's warrior.

Acacitli: Young male servant who is in love with Chicahua.

Izel's father

Izel's mother

Warriors

Scene

There is a pyramid in the right side of the stage; the wall has a painting of Technochtitlan city. There are people around the pyramid dressed as Aztecs, and they are shouting Chicahua's name very enthusiastically especially young women. Ecatzin enters limping to the scene and stands firmly in front of the pyramid. Everybody becomes silent.

ECATZIN: Good night my Technochtitlan people. Today we are here to announce the beginning of Chicahua's kingdom [*women get excited*]. Chicahua demonstrates that he is the best warrior in the city, and now we honor his name and presence. It's an honor for me to be part of this event, so please, ladies and gentleman, servants and owners, children and elders, let's give a big round of applause to KING CHICAHUA!!

King Chicahua enters to the scene. All the women run to Chicahua, and they try to kiss him and take pictures with him. They knock down Ecatzin who is unable to stand up for the rest of Chicahua's speech. Warriors enter the scene and separate the women.

CHICAHUA [*fixing his loincloths*]: Thank you, thank you very much for receiving me with this warm welcome. My beautiful ladies, it's a pleasure to be your king, and it's an honor for me to hear the appreciation of the elders. I also appreciate everybody who believed in me from the beginning and who knew that I am not only a good looking warrior, but also that I am capable of leadership and courage [*some women yearn*]. If there is anyone out there who still doubts that Technochtitlan is a place where all things are possible, who still questions the power of my position as king, tonight is your answer. Tlaloc stays with me in this journey, now that I am the king of Technochtitlan. We will give to Tlaloc what he deserves. [*Everybody claps and screams*]. It's time for us to live in a better Technochtitlan full of beauty and tequila, full of corn and tortillas. It's time to see the rain over our fields and over our young and naked ladies bodies. [*Everybody claps again*]. So now, my question is to Technochtitlan, to all these beautiful ladies who believed in me [*all women get close to Chicahua*], my question is... [*women get excited*] who would be the woman ... [*women start to say "me"*] who would be the woman, who would sacrifice voluntarily for Tlaloc? [*Everybody remains silent while the women take a step back. A male servant enters the scene and jumps into Chicahua's arms.*]

ACACITLI: I will my king. I will volunteer my beautiful body just for you.

CHICAHUA [*letting him go*]: What are you talking about? Acacitli, you're a man!

ACACITLI: And what's the problem of that? I'm still beautiful and almost a virgin.

CHICAHUA: What are you talking about? Go away! [*Acacitli grabs his arm.*] No, no don't touch me! Cuauhtemoc! Please take this woman—I mean this man! Or whatever this thing is! Just take it away from me [*Cuauhtemoc enters to scene and takes Acacitli.*]

Ecatzin stands up finally and limps to Chicahua.

ECATZIN: My King, the sacrifices are only for slaves. Why did you ask your people to sacrifice their blood for Tlaloc?

CHICAHUA: I thought it would be a good idea to sacrifice someone with a higher rank. I think Tlaloc would be happier drinking the blood of some beautiful women who are not slaves. Slaves are dirty and ignorant.

ECATZIN [*nervous*]: Well... If you think slaves are that way, why don't we use them as sacrifice get rid of all the dirty and ignorant people of Technochtitlan?

CHICAHUA: Mmh... good point, but...

CATZIN: My lord, my lord! Why don't we discuss who is going to be sacrifice later? We still have time to think about it, the sacrifice ceremony. It's not until the next three full moons.

CHICAHUA: That's true [*to the audience*]! Okay everybody bring your happiness and tequila! Let's go and celebrate!

Everybody proclaims Chicahua's name and follows him, leaving the scene. After everybody leaves, Izel enters the stage with a broom and begins to sweep. She stops for a moment and starts to talk to the audience.

IZEL: A new king? Bah! It's always the same thing, always the sacrifices of innocent people. The noble people treat us like animals; they sell us or buy us without thinking about our souls. They treat us like we are not humans; we are only slaves in their eyes...

Chicahua enters the scene again, but this time he is drunk. Izel looks at Chicahua and continues sweeping.

CHICAHUA [*grimly*]: Who are you? [*Izel doesn't respond.*] I ask you: who are you? [*raising his voice*] Woman, are you deaf or what?

IZEL: I'm not deaf. You're blind, my master. Can you see what I am doing? That must answer your question [*Izel continues to sweep and Chicahua comes close to her.*]

CHICAHUA: I'm not asking you what your work is. I'm asking you: who are you?

IZEL: I'm a slave. I'm nobody until I become free. My name is nothing. My feelings are not important...

CHICAHUA [*interrupting Izel*]: A slave, huh? You don't act like a slave at all [*walking around and looking at her more deeply*]. And you are really beautiful for being a simple slave. Tell me my gorgeous servant, why don't you buy your freedom by giving me some special services tonight? I guarantee that you would not regret it [*Chicahua smiles, but Izel beats him with the broom*].

IZEL: I may be a slave, but I am a decent person!

CHICAHUA: It was just a joke! Don't get mad at me! Therefore... [*touching Izel's hair*] just looking at... [*looking at her breasts*] your eyes. I can tell you're more than a simple slave, my darling. On the contrary, I'm the servant. I'm a faithful servant who kneels in front of you, a beautiful goddess [*Chicahua kneels in front of Izel*].

IZEL [*rolling her eyes*]: I think you have drunk too much my master! Go back to your party!

CHICAHUA: I just got drunk by looking into your eyes.

IZEL: Men are always the same [*walking away*].

CHICAHUA: That's not true. Not all the men are as handsome as me.

IZEL: All men lie and lie!

CHICAHUA: And all women believe and believe!

IZEL: I don't believe you.

CHICAHUA: You may be lesbian then...

IZEL: Gosh! You're just stupid! You think only about your appearance and your recognition over Technochtitlan girls. You don't care about your people.

CHICAHUA: Of course, I care about my beautiful servants, and of course, I care about you my cutie slave.

IZEL: Leave me alone! I'm too busy cleaning your mess [*sweeps again*].

CHICAHUA: Leave that for another slave! Your hands shouldn't clean it [*kissing Izel's hands*]! You should be my partner for tonight and forever.

Izel removes her hand.

IZEL: Don't touch me!

Izel walks away and exits the stage, Chicahua tries to follow her.

CHICAHUA: Please wait!

Acacitli enters the stage.

ACACITLI: My king! My king! Where have you been? We all worry about you! [*Chicahua doesn't respond.*] My king? Are you okay [*snapping fingers*]? Come back to the earth. Or does the king want a wake up kiss?

CHICAHUA: Hey, hey! Don't take advantage of the situation [*pushing him away*]! Anyway, Acacitli do you believe in love at first sight?

ACACITLI: Of course I do. Anybody can fall in love by just looking at you.

CHICAHUA: Yes, I know that, but I think I just fall in love by looking into this girl's...eyes.

ACACITLI [*looking around*]: You drink too much my king, nobody is here. Let's go back to the party.

CHICAHUA: But she was just there, asking me to make her free.

ACACITLI: Yes, yes, now let's go back and dance. They are ready to begin the Macarena for you.

Acacitli takes Chicahua by the arm and exits the stage. Izel enters again with the broom and she talks to the audience.

IZEL: Chicahua is an idiot! How can he say such stupid things? It's obvious that Tlaloc is his spiritual guide. Chicahua would never understand my suffrage. He loves Tlaloc's rules. [*She points to the sky.*] I hate you, Tlaloc! You destroy my happiness. And I hate you, Chicahua! Your father is the one... who killed my parents [*Behind Izel, soldiers and village people enter to the stage, Izel's mother, father and a girl who represents Izel when she was a child. They start to act out the story while Izel narrates the story in the corner.*] I was only seven years old when I experienced the feeling of being almost dead. The war killed and captured every person in my little village [*People start to run around the stage, while the soldiers capture them.*] My mother was hugging me so hard that I could even hear her heart beat. My father hid a few feet away from us [*Little Izel, Izel's mother and father are in the right side of the stage, hiding in the pyramid.*] The soldiers were destroying the thatched roofs, stealing livestock and animals and taking slaves and lives. I could still hear the screams of terror from women and babies being separated [*screams in the back*]. I could smell the fresh blood of villagers and could almost feel the weight of the potential chains of slavery. I knew this was the end of my innocent life. Suddenly, a soldier appeared and... [*Soldiers hits Izel's mother with a stick, Izel starts to cry.*] My father could not control himself ... [*Izel's father takes a knife and carves out the soldier's throat. The soldier wailed in pain while Izel's father cries out.*] I could not move. [*The body of Izel's dead mother in the back while the father mangles that soldier's throat. Other warriors came to where Izel and her father are, but now they are running around the stage.*] We were running so fast that I felt like I was flying... But there were too many warriors [*warriors surround Izel and her father in the center of the stage*]. And then, one of the soldiers said to my father...

SOLDIER [*pulling him by the hair*]: So you thought you could escape? [*Izel's father doesn't respond.*] Why you don't respond? Maybe you're scared [*making a peaceful smile*]. Don't worry. Your fear ends here [*grabbing a knife passing it over the throat of Izel's father; the soldier drops the dead man in front of child Izel, touching Izel's face very calmly*]. Don't worry young girl, your parents are now with our gods.

IZEL: Tlaloc, you allowed them to keep me alive. You kept me alive as a slave, and I became the shadow of my masters and a soul without life. You're the one who destroyed my happiness... You're the one who took my freedom.

Izel leaves the stage. Lights off.

Lights on, Chicahua enters again. He looks very tired. There still some blood on the stage, and Chicahua step in it.

CHICAHUA: Ew! Cheeses! Are we out of tampons or what? Acacitli! Come and clean this!

Acacitli enters to the stage.

ACACITLI: What's the problem, my king?

CHICAHUA: Clean that! It's disgusting!

Ecatzin enters the stage.

ECATZIN: Good Morning, my lord. How are you doing today?

CHICAHUA: I've got a really bad headache. What are you doing here so early?

ECATZIN: My king, it's already noon, and I came here to talk about the sacrifices.

CHICAHUA: You said it could wait.

ECATZIN: Yes, my king, but we need to find a good slave who could become the sacrifice.

CHICAHUA: Well, you take care of that. I trust your opinion. Find a good slave, and we'll see.

ACACITLI: But Chicahua! You say that you want someone with a higher rank than a slave to become the sacrifice.

CHICAHUA: Yeah, that's truth, but we have enough time. We will find a good sacrifice later. Now, Ecatzin, look for a pretty slave who could be a sacrifice. You know, just in case. Acacitli, please prepare my nicest loincloths; I have another important task to do.

ACACITLI: Like what?

CHICAHUA [*raising his voice*]: Cuauhtemoc, please come! [*Cuauhtemoc enters to the scene*] We need to find the girl that I saw last night, she'll become my wife. I decided it last night.

ACACITLI: But Chicahua! That is too soon!

CHICAHUA: You said you believe in love at first sight, I believe it, too. So now, Cuauhtemoc, let's go, because I'm sure she loves me, too. And she will do anything to be at the side of a man like me.

ACACITLI [*grabbing him from the arm*]: Chicahua that was just a dream! You can't just leave me this way! I'm your queen!

CHICAHUA: No, It wasn't a dream Acacitli. I need to find her, no matter what. Cuauhtemoc, let's go! And don't touch me like that!

Everybody leaves the scene except Acacitli, who stays on stage cleaning the set. Acacitli starts to cry.

ACACITLI [*to the audience*]: When will king Chicahua understand how much I suffer? I am the victim in this play. There are no gay rights, even in Technochtlan. I wish he could hear my heart. He could feel my emotions and he could understand how lonely I am without his presence. Tlaloc please, let me be by his side even if he is with someone else. I'm the only one who understands him the most. I am the only one.

Cuauhtemoc and Chicahua enter the stage.

CHICAHUA: This cannot be happening! She is nowhere in Technochtlan!

ACACITLI: Thanks, my Tlaloc!

CHICAHUA: What did you say?

ACACITLI: Nothing my king. Now do you understand that it was just a dream?

CHICAHUA: No! She was real. She was just perfect for me! Why must beautiful people like me suffer like that? Why, Tlaloc? Why?

Ecatzin enters with Izel.

ECATZIN: King Chicahua, I found the perfect sacrifice for Tlaloc [*Chicahua stops talking and looks at Izel*]. She has pretty skin and body, and of course, she is a slave.

CHICAHUA: My beautiful wife! Where have you been?

ECATZIN: Wife? But sir, she is a slave, and she is the sacrifice.

CHICAHUA: No, no. She will become my wife.

IZEL: Can you guys stop talking and explain to me what's going on?

ACACITLI: Are you replacing me for this?

CHICAHUA: You are the girl of my dreams.

IZEL: Oh no! You again!

ACACITLI: Don't talk to the king that way, or I will take him away from you!

IZEL: You can keep him! I don't want him!

ECATZIN: Please calm down.

CHICAHUA: Listen, my future wife, you will be rich and more beautiful. I will give you your freedom and my love. Please, Izel, marry me.

IZEL: No.

CHICAHUA: I know that you love me... What? Did you said no?

IZEL: Yes, I said no.

ECATZIN: If that's the case, you will become the sacrifice of Tlaloc.

IZEL: What? But... why?

ECATZIN: You're only a slave; we decided the future for you.

CUAUHTEMOC: What's your name?

Everybody remains in silence and looks at Cuaubtemoc.

CUAUHTEMOC [*very calmly*]: Do you have a name?

CHICAHUA: Cuaubtemoc! I thought you were mute!

ACACITLI: If he has no lines, that doesn't mean he is mute.

IZEL: Izel, my name is Izel.

CHICAHUA: Izel? What a perfect name! Izel means unique, and you're just unique.

CUAUHTEMOC: Izel, think about the offer that King Chicahua has offered you! He can give you your liberty and a higher social position. Don't regret your life!

ACACITLI: Look dear, if you don't like the king that's fine. Tlaloc will love your blood.

IZEL: No! I won't give my blood to Tlaloc. He is the god of evil.

CHICAHUA: After you marry me, you'll start to like Tlaloc, I promise.

IZEL: No, don't get close to me! I don't want to marry you.

ECATZIN: Slave Izel, think about this opportunity, and let us know in the next two weeks. [*Izel doesn't respond.*] Now, Cuaubtemoc, take her to the slave room.

Cuaubtemoc and Izel exit.

ACACITLI: Why her? She doesn't respect you or love you! She's not a match for you!

CHICAHUA: Acacitli, you have to accept that she is beautiful.

ACACITLI: And that's the only thing that matters?

CHICAHUA: Well... duh, of course!

ACACITLI: I'm good looking, too.

CHICAHUA: You're a man.

ACACITLI: So?

CHICAHUA: Ecatzin! Prepare everything for the wedding. Izel will marry me. Unless she prefers to die, and that would be pretty stupid.

Everybody leaves the stage. Chicahua enters again with other clothes and talks to the audience.

CHICAHUA: Finally, the day arrives, the day that Izel will be on my side forever. After two long weeks of waiting, I will have Izel in my side.

Izel enters to the stage.

CHICAHUA: My beautiful Izel, I was waiting for this day, the day in which you will be happy with

me. Today, I want to give you your liberty. Stay with me as a partner. Stay with me as a woman. Stay with me as a wife, and you would be free.

IZEL [*looking at the floor*]: I know for sure, my response would cost my life... And I am ready to take that risk [*looking at Chicahua*]. Chicahua, I prefer to be a sacrifice than to live with you the rest of my life.

CHICAHUA [*shaking Izel*]: What? What are you saying! Why? I can give you everything!

IZEL: Chicahua, your father killed my parents. He killed my family— he killed my only hope. I can't be at your side, because in your veins runs the murder who killed my happiness. I still remember everything, and every time I see your face, I can see your father too. He destroys the only thing that I have, my own liberty. Chicahua, you are the shadow of my past, and I hate you for that. I can marry you for convenience or love. I just prefer to die.

CHICAHUA: But...

IZEL: I'm sorry.

Izel leaves the scene. Chicahua stands in shock for a moment. Ecatzin enters to the scene.

ECATZIN: King Chicahua, where do you want me to put the white flower for the wedding?

CHICAHUA: Ecatzin, prepare everything for tonight. There is no wedding tonight, only Izel's sacrifice.

Ecatzin and Chicahua leave the stage. Other servants enter and start to decorate the place. Music is in background and the lights focus upon the pyramid. More people appear and they are screaming Chicahua's name. Ecatzin enters the stage.

ECATZIN: And now ladies and gentleman, today is the time to sacrifice our slave's blood. Today, Izel the slave will be sacrificed to Tlaloc, the god of the rain. Tlaloc will give us the fruit that we eat, the tortillas that we make, the water that we drink with Izel's blood. And now, King Chicahua will begin the ceremony.

Chicahua enters.

CHICAHUA: Tonight, we will witness of the sacrifice of Izel, the woman who broke my heart. I mean the woman who broke the rules of Tlaloc. She has no respect for our god, so she must die for our sake. [*Everybody claps.*] Now warriors, bring Izel. [*Nobody goes out.*] I said: Bring the slave! [*Pointing to the left, nobody go outs.*] I said...

Ecatzin enters to the scene.

ECATZIN: King Chicahua...

CHICAHUA: Not now Ecatzin.

ECATZIN: She escaped.

CHICAHUA: What?

ECATZIN: Yes, Master, Izel has escaped. She's no longer in the prison, she's gone....

Whispered background.

CHICAHUA: Look everywhere! She must be very close. Check the gardens.

ECATZIN: Master, we must continue with the ceremony!

CHICAHUA: Are you disobeying my orders? Go and find Izel, or the sacrifice will be you! [*Ecatzin runs and leaves the stage. Now Chicahua speaks to the audience.*] Izel must be tortured and killed in front of us and especially in front of Tlaloc. We will not do anything until we find her. Everybody must look for Izel right now, and the first person who finds her will marry me.

[*All women run everywhere and begin to look and to scream Izel's name. Everybody leaves the scene, and Acacitli enters.*]

ACACITLI: I must find her. This is my opportunity! Now king Chicahua will be mine, no matter what [*walking out the stage and looking for Izel*]. That woman is stupid. Why does she prefer to die instead of marrying Chicahua? She must be a suicidal or have a really strong reason. I wonder what reason?

Izel appears, but she hides behind the pyramid. Acacitli sees her, but he only comes close to her.

IZEL [*talking to herself*]: I prefer to die, but not from Tlaloc's hands. I must kill myself before somebody catches me [*grabs a knife and put, it on her throat. Acacitli jumps to her*].

ACACITLIL: What are you doing [*takes knife away from Izel*]! That's sharp!

IZEL: Let me die Acacitli! I prefer to die right now, rather than to be tortured in front of Tlaloc.

ACACITLIL: Why do you hate him so much? Why you don't decide to marry Chicahua?

IZEL: Chicahua's father killed my parents...

ACACITLI: So?

IZEL: What do you mean by so?

ACACITLI: That was his father; he is a completely different person.

IZEL: Well, yes he is more stupid.

ACACITLI: Not only that, he is more handsome and stronger.

IZEL: Yes, whatever. Give me my knife back.

ACACITLI: Look Izel, killing yourself because of the past won't bring you anything good. Even if you do, your life will have been nothing but the life of a slave. It's what you want?

IZEL: No, but...

ACACITLI: Then just shut up! Now go with me. I need to give you back to Chicahua, so I can marry him.

IZEL: What? What are you talking about!

ACACITLI: Yes sweetheart, the first person who found you will marry king Chicahua.

Chicahua and Cuauhtemoc enter to the stage.

ACACITLI: King Chicahua! I have found her! Now you have to marry me.

CHICAHUA [*ignoring Acacitli and grabbing Izel*]: What do you think you are doing?

IZEL: Get off me!

CHICAHUA: No, I won't. You would be killed and tortured...

CUAUHTEMOC: Chicahua, she escaped because she was afraid.

CHICAHUA: Shut up, Cuauhtémoc!

IZEL: Take me if you want to, but Tlaloc would hate me!

CHICAHUA: What? Why did you say that?

IZEL: Because I don't have all the requirements to become a sacrifice.

CHICAHUA: What? Shut up, you're pretty, you're young, and you're a virgin....

IZEL: Not anymore!

CHICAHUA: What? What are you saying?

IZEL: Ask your friend [*pointing to Cuauhtemoc*]!

CHICAHUA: Cuauhtémoc what does she mean by that! [*Cuauhtemoc runs away.*] Cuauhtemoc, come back [*grabbing him from the ear*]! What did you do to Izel?

CUAUHTEMOC: Nothing that she would mind.

IZEL: Please, Chicahua, leave him alone.

CHICAHUA: You helped her to escape, right?

ACACITLI: Stop, Chicahua! [*Acacitli puts a knife in Chicahua's throat.*]

CHICAHUA: What are you doing?

ACACITLI: If you move just a little, I'll kill you.

CHICAHUA: But why?

ACACITLI: You can't see it? They love each other; you cannot be in the middle of everything. Accept that you lost this war.

CHICAHUA: But... But Cuauhtemoc never talks.

IZEL: And you talk too much!

ACACITLI: Let them be free, Chicahua, please! [*Acacitli takes down the knife and Chicahua stays silent.*]

CHICAHUA: If is what you guys want, I'll leave you alone. I will be alone for the rest of my life
[Chicahua begins to cry and hugs Acacitli].

IZEL: I'm sorry Chicahua, I really sorry.

CHICAHUA: I'm sorry that my father killed your parents. I promised I would never hurt you again, neither you nor the people who make you happy.

IZEL: Thank you, Chicahua. *[Izel begins to cry and hugs Cuauhtemoc].*

CUAUHTEMOC: But who is going to be the sacrifice then?

ACACITLI: If you don't have anybody, Chicahua, I'll sacrifice myself.

CHICAHUA: No Acacitli, my promises are promises, and you have to marry me.

ACACITLI: Oh, Chicahua!

IZEL: But who is going to be the sacrifice then?

CHICAHUA: I don't know. I guess someone who is pointless in this story and doesn't bring too many contributions to the end.

Ecatzin enters in the scene.

ECATZIN: My lord! You finally have found Izel. Do you want to continue with the sacrifices?

Everybody look at Ecatzin and smiles.

CHICAHUA: Yes, I have found my sacrifice.

CURTAIN



Fifth Element

Hyo Kwon

She Was Taken

Sherry Traylor

Words on tomorrow's recycled grey paper
She was taken in the night
Warm she had snuggled into cartoon sheets
Morning brought silence
Mothers cries muffled into an empty mattress
The sheets were gone
Dad looks in every room talking to himself
She's just hiding, she's just hiding, mother mumbles
The siren blares out the calls of her name
Dad answers questions ever pounding
Mother can hear her voice, "SSHHH"
They don't mind her
The tears dry on her stark white face
Not believing, not seeing, sitting motionless
The latest picture in a uniformed hand
Dad picks up a crumb from a clean floor
Mommy cries into his hands
She was taken

The Song of Neko Huxhold

By Nick Morrow

Neko Huxhold was not a child who needed his mother to wake him up in the morning. Not once had she ever had to knock on his door, or jostle his leg, or call his name, or pour cold water over his face. Unlike his older sister, who would stay in bed as long as possible, until their mother practically threatened her life, Neko was quite a disciplined young man. The very thought of daybreak was all it took to wake him. As soon as the first ray of sunlight peeked through the window and struck the boy's face, Neko would spring out of bed in hopeful anticipation.

Neko's mind raced as he quickly peered through his half-opened bedroom door, just in time to see his father's hand pull the front door shut as he left for the day. Neko's brow furrowed itself, and his fingers danced across the black and white keys of the tattered piano that sat in the corner of his room. His head bobbed slowly as his fingers found their way towards the right notes. A small, involuntary smile formed on the face of the boy as his ears heard the melody in its proper succession. He felt as if his fingers simply could not keep up with his memory, which was scrambling to recall the recent music that had played through his head as he slept.

You see, ever since Neko could remember, he had always dreamt the most unusual dreams. His dreams were not in pictures, colors, or words, as most people's are. Instead, Neko's dreams were filled with *music*. Music filled with stunning melodies and lush harmonies, the likes of which Neko had never heard elsewhere, occupied his sleeping mind. While most musicians set out to write classical music, or jazz music, or rock music, Neko simply wanted to make music that sounded like his dreams. The boy knew very little about music itself, and frequently described his songs in vague terms: "The song I finished yesterday sounded like the sun breaking through a group of storm clouds," he might say. Or, "my latest piece feels like a mother bird feeding her chicks an ice cream cone, combined with the sound of a farmer cutting down tall blades of grass."

"Oh, so you're a songwriter," most people would reply to the boy, after hearing about his strange dreams. But these were no normal songs. In fact, it could really be said that Neko didn't *write* songs at all. Rather, his mind somehow *imagined* this fascinating music, only to be remembered by Neko just as soon as he woke up. Neko hardly considered himself a songwriter, but rather a scribe recording what was dictated to him. And the songs seemed to grow increasingly spectacular and ever more winsome, so that they seized Neko's lively imagination for hours on end.

Of course there were days when Neko could not, in fact, remember the music from his dreams. But more often than not, the young man woke up with a fresh, lovely melody bouncing around in his head, just waiting to be found on the keys of his piano. And when the piano failed him, Neko promptly grabbed for another one of the instruments that decorated his room- guitars, oboes, trumpets, fiddles, marimbas, didgeridoos, and all sorts of other musical gadgets.

Neko always worked on his music with a frenetic pace. He rarely took breaks and only stopped when he realized he was hungry. By the end of most days, before his parents got home from their important jobs in the "real world," Neko would have finished transcribing the music from his dreams. Whenever the song was finished, the boy was careful to hide the pages of music

underneath his mattress. Then Neko would fall across his large bed, staring up at the ceiling and smiling.

Mondays and Thursdays were particularly delightful, because on those days Neko's father, Philo, would stop at the market, giving Neko an extra hour or so of enjoyment. Neko was always very careful never to play his music while anyone was home. But it was not because he was embarrassed. No, Neko would gladly play and sing his songs for anyone who wanted to listen, if given the chance.

Ever since Neko first started having these "song-dreams," as his family called them, his parents had sternly disapproved of his musical endeavors. "If you want to take piano lessons," his mother had said, "then we'd be glad to pay for them. But I will *not* allow you to pursue these senseless fantasies. Don't you know how difficult it is to make a decent living as a musician? And for goodness' sake, Neko, you can't even read or write music! How do you expect to *make* something of yourself if you can't even do that?" Neko neither confirmed nor denied his mother's lectures; he just listened in patient silence for his mother to finish. "We Huxholds have always been a hard-working family, and you're ready to throw all that away for a foolish hobby. Your stubbornness is going to get you into trouble someday, Neko. You should try to put it to some *real use!*"

One evening in particular, Neko's mother had spent several hours telling the children a lengthy tale about a young boy who wasted his whole childhood playing meaningless music. When the boy grew up and left his parents' household, his mother told them, he'd become poor and found that he couldn't even make enough money to buy food or decent clothes.

"Sounds like a real *imbecile!*" Margot laughed.

"Oh, but there is a happy ending!" replied their mother. "Once the boy had grown up and realized that chasing silly dreams never got anyone anywhere, he decided to get a real job and quit messing around with such trivial things. Now he is a very successful businessman! In fact, I have met him once before- he works with your father now. He is a very fine man indeed..." she trailed off, and slowly directed her eyes toward Neko.

While Neko was the youngest in the family, he was not naïve enough to overlook the fact that the stories were directed at him. But despite his parents' constant efforts to discourage him from pursuing his musical aspirations, Neko never showed any signs of conceding. Nothing else seemed to hold his attention quite like music, and although his mother often made plans to get Neko involved in some more "normal" hobbies, he simply wasn't interested.

When he was a small child, Neko's obsession was so apparent and so irritating to his family that they tried to devise ways to convince Neko not to sleep. Naps were eventually forbidden in the Huxhold home, even for Margot, who openly resented her brother and his strange dreams. She would often tease Neko about them and even took to telling him horrifying stories to give him nightmares. Occasionally, Margot even snuck past their parents' door and into her brother's room to wake him up in the middle of the night, causing him to forget the music from his dreams altogether.

One day, as Neko's mother was cleaning his room, tucking in his bed sheets, she saw the edge of a piece of paper sticking out from underneath the mattress. Puzzled as to what Neko might be hiding, she pulled out the paper, which was full of Neko's incoherent musical scribbles. Page by page she pulled out the music Neko had been working on for years. Each piece was meticulously dated and named, and the stack was in proper chronological order. As she thumbed through the

papers, her confusion turned to horror, and then quickly to anger. *"This must be stopped!"* she said to herself, and began plotting to end her son's nonsense.

That evening as the family finished their dinner, Neko was surprised at his mother's peculiar request: "Make sure to save room, everyone! I made you all a special dessert!" Neko grew short of breath as his heart began beating faster with anticipation.

Dessert at the Huxholds' was a rarity usually saved for birthdays and special occasions. And it was a well-established fact that Neko loved nothing more- nothing except music of course- than his mother's exceptional pies. From an early age, he had begged his mother to make the dish more often. But after continual rejection, Neko learned not to ask for or expect it. His mother could entice him to do nearly anything by baking him one of her pies, and Neko hardly minded the exploitation.

And sure enough, when it came time for dessert, Neko's mother brought him a delicious pie that filled up the entire plate. She studied his face closely and mimicked his reaction, as he grinned with widened eyes. Neko grabbed for his fork, but closed his eyes and inhaled deeply before cutting into the pie and taking a bite. His mother had baked a tray of brownies for Margot, and set a dish of cheesecake before her husband as she gave him a kiss.

"Why shouldn't I make dessert for my beautiful family?" the mother answered to the family's surprised faces. "Neko has been asking for this since he was a young boy. Business is going well for your father, and I just believe we deserve it. I think that from now on, we ought to have dessert *every* night with dinner!" But the family barely heard her words, for they were quick to stuff their faces with the contents of the dishes set in front of them.

The next evening, just as she had suggested, Neko's mother produced another round of dessert for the family. And every evening from then on, Neko got one of his mother's pies after dinner. She would often vary the dishes she made for Margot and Philo, but it went without saying that Neko would want nothing in place of his mother's delectable pie.

The excitement of pie as a nightly treat must have contributed to the musical process, Neko figured, because he found that he was waking up earlier and earlier every morning. Some days he would wake up long before the dawn, and lay silently in bed waiting for the day to break and his family to leave the house. This proved to be a difficult task, though, after many consecutive days of diminished sleep. Neko attempted to retain as much music from his dreams as possible, but the more time that elapsed between his waking and his family leaving, the less he remembered the melodies he collected in his sleep.

Weeks passed and Neko's situation did not improve. In fact, the more time passed, the earlier he seemed to wake up each morning. Neko grew increasingly frantic as he noticed himself sleeping less and less. Eventually, the boy could not even rest for a few minutes. Neko became deeply troubled, struggling to understand why he couldn't get to sleep.

What *really* seemed to torment Neko, though, was the fact that the less he slept, the less music seemed to be born in his unconscious mind. He began to spend his days staring blankly at the keyboard, wondering if he would ever create music again. Occasionally he would plunk the same notes over and over, only to scratch the entire song at the end of the day. And the only music Neko *was* able to write seemed dark and angry, devoid of any hum-able melodies. And at night, with a belly

full of pie, Neko would lie in bed and listen to the stray noises outside his room, wondering if maybe he could make music from the sounds.

“Maybe I will be sad forever, and this is just part of becoming an adult? Could this be normal? Maybe this is why most people don’t grow up to make music?” Neko wondered to himself. Eventually he gave up on trying sleeping altogether. Neko grew increasingly sluggish, and after weeks and weeks of this physical and musical deterioration, Neko found that he could not bring himself to play even a single note. It was as if some thief had stolen not only his ability, but his desire for music altogether.

“The family is going to try a new pie I made, Neko,” his mother said a few nights later, popping her head inside his bedroom door, “but we’re going to eat it in the dining room. Would you like to join us?”

“No thank you,” was the only reply she received, other than a blank stare, before Neko plodded to his bed to lay wide awake, staring at the ceiling. With a large motherly sigh, Neko’s mother set a large piece of pie beside his bed and joined the family to finish dessert.

And from that night on, Neko never even left his room. He simply stayed in bed all day and all night, in hopes that eventually he might fall asleep. The only food he ate was the dinner and pie that his mother set beside his bed each evening, which went nearly unnoticed except for a meager, toneless thank you.

“What’s wrong with the boy?” his father asked his mother one night at the dinner table. “He walks around like a zombie. He doesn’t seem to react to anything. His isn’t even interested in anything having to do with music. Even your *pie* doesn’t seem to excite him much anymore.”

And with that, Neko’s mother burst with a sudden barrage of sobs that both surprised and confused Philo and Margot.

“I have to stop it, I have to stop it, I have to stop it” she said in between gasps, “I had no idea he would turn out so...*lifeless*.” Then she let out a long heave and made the most heartbroken, painful face Philo and Margot had ever seen. Her statement, however, did not answer the family’s confusion. Philo just gave her a dull, puzzled look and chewed his food slowly. Margot quit twisting strands of her auburn hair and set down her fork, leaning forward and anticipating some sort of explanation. The two sat silent in the uneasiness, until the crying came to a halt.

“It’s true,” said Neko’s mother. “I’ve been upping the dosage and mixing it into Neko’s pie every night. I couldn’t stand to watch him waste his life away on that *music*. But I had no idea this would happen. I didn’t mean to turn him into a zombie. I didn’t mean to. I just...I have to stop it. Neko needs to sleep again, even if that means he writes more songs. I don’t care anymore. He needs to sleep.”

Her confession was responded to with more blank stares, but now the reaction was out of disbelief rather than confusion. So after months of mixing sleep deprivation pills into her delicious pies, Neko’s mother quit making dessert altogether, in hopes that Neko might sleep again.

“Sleep well, Neko, sleep well,” his mother had whispered as she set the food next to his bed the next evening, “And don’t forget to dream, if that’s what makes you happy...” Neko hardly even noticed that he received no pie with his dinner that night. Instead, he fell into a deep, heavy sleep.

Neko slept for several days straight, and at first the family was quite relieved. But as days turned into a week, they began to grow worried. His mother felt particularly guilty, knowing that if anyone besides the family ever found out about what she had done to her son, she would be shamed forever. But she couldn't bring herself to go into Neko's room. She felt like she had already done the boy enough wrong, and the least she could do now was let him sleep in peace.

After more than twenty days of continuous sleep for Neko, the family heard the faint sound of music coming from the direction of the boy's room. "Neko is awake! Neko is awake!" his mother shouted excitedly, clapping her hands and racing through the house. But when she swung open Neko's door to welcome him back, the family discovered that the boy was still very much asleep. At first they were perplexed as to where the sound was coming from, and then they scanned his room and realized that the boy's instruments were playing themselves!

Neko's piano looked as if a dozen invisible fingers were banging its keys. The guitars swayed to the rhythms that they strummed. Bows elegantly danced across the stringed instruments, the wind blew itself through the horns, and the drums pulsated and slammed against each other. Shakers and tambourines jumped from one end of the room to the other. Their sounds and movements wove together like performers in an intricate musical.

Terror overcame Neko's sister and parents, as they looked and were petrified by the sight of the boy's body twitching to the rhythm of the music. They quickly ran from the bedroom and huddled around the kitchen table, Neko's mother being sure to shut the bedroom door behind them. They began discussing what they had seen and what, exactly, they ought to do about it. Rather than seek help for Neko, the family decided it would be best to keep what they had seen to themselves.

As the family's feelings of guilt grew, however, so did the volume of the music coming from Neko's room. In a frantic effort to cover up the eerie phenomenon, which would surely attract the attention of the neighbors, they began to try and reduce the amount of sound escaping from Neko's bedroom. At first, they stuffed pillows underneath the doors, but this proved to be useless, as the music just grew progressively louder. Margot had the idea of covering up all the instruments with blankets, but this also seemed to be futile.

So the family boarded up Neko's windows and started to build walls around the boy's room. Philo quickly constructed a wall made of spare lumber, which hardly seemed to deaden the sound at all. So, Neko's family banded together to build a second wall, which they stuffed with thick foam. Without even stopping to listen, the family worked painstakingly throughout the day and night, erecting a third wall. This time they used heavy concrete blocks glopped together with thick cement. "Surely this will do the job!" they thought, but soon enough, the fantastical music persisted right on through the foam, through the walls, and onto the streets of the Huxholds' neighborhood.

The family's task seemed impossible, and when they finally realized that there was no way to stop the noise of the music, they gave up and ceased construction. In their defeat, they decided to tear down the walls, no matter how loud the music would be or who would hear it.

Before long, large crowds of spectators began gathering to listen to the music, just as the family had feared. Young and old folks alike came to enjoy the sounds coming from Neko's bedroom. Seeing all the people sitting on the grass, leaning against the fence, and standing in the street, Margot had an idea.

“Why should we let people listen for *free*? These people can’t just hang around on our property all day long. We should start charging admission!” she suggested. Her parents seemed pleased at Margot’s industrious attitude and encouraged her, so Margot set up a ticket booth on the property line and sold tickets to listen to the music.

As the news spread that there was wonderful music to be heard at the Huxhold residence, more onlookers gathered, and Margot began to raise ticket prices. She continued to charge more and more until the family had no more room to store all the money. After long, the crowds grew so large that the family couldn’t control them, let alone charge admission. The volume of the music grew, too, and eventually the crowds could hear nothing *but* the music. Even shouts and screams could not be heard over the sound of Neko’s songs.

This went on for days and days until finally, the music paused briefly and there was total silence as far as anyone could hear. Of all the thousands of spectators, no one moved a muscle or uttered a word. The eyes of everyone in attendance fixated on the boy and his instruments.

After the silence, a beautiful piece of music began flowing from the source they had all been listening to for so long. The song was not too loud, nor was it too soft. The music was at the perfect volume, and yet not one person attempted to make a noise. And no one wanted to. In fact, no one seemed to want to do anything except focus all of their attention on the boy and this beautiful piece of music. No one was quite sure how long the piece lasted, because no one seemed to be concerned with the time. No one checked their watch, or asked their neighbor politely for the hour. It appeared as if no one really *cared* how long the song lasted, so long as it just lasted.

Neko himself was now upright and suspended, theatrically conducting all of his instruments, which continued to play by themselves. They all hovered in the air above the house for everyone to see. Inaudible gasps filled the crowd at the sight and sound of Neko and his instruments. Even Neko’s mother, father, and sister watched in silent admiration. Never before had they heard such an extraordinary piece of music.

And as the song ended and the final notes rang out, the boy’s body collapsed and fell asleep, never to awaken. Neko’s family stood in a circle surrounding his body, not sure what to think of what had just happened. As Philo slowly put an arm around his wife, she began to sob.

In the midst of the large crowd, which was now slowly making their way home from the Huxholds’ property, a curious little girl had toddled away from her parents. The tiny child had an eager face and dark brown hair, which was pulled into two ponytails that shot out of the side of her head.

Displaying a childlike awe on her face that had formed during the performance, she approached Neko and his symphony of instruments. Without much hesitation, she scanned the items lying on the ground beside Neko and picked up the bow of a violin. She waved it around like a wand and watched the invisible trail as it swooped through the air. She stumbled through the grass and approached Neko sleeping peacefully next to his piano, but was interrupted by a sudden shout.

“*DOT!*”

An adult woman, accompanied by her husband, broke through the crowd of people into the clearing where she’d found her daughter reaching towards Neko’s face. “Dot! How did you get away

from us?!” As her mother and father both exhaled in relief, the child ran and jumped into her mother’s arms, still clutching the bow of Neko’s violin.

“Oh, sweetie, we need to put that back. You can’t keep that,” her mother said, realizing what was in the little girl’s hand. But as the girl’s father began to gently set the bow back down, the family saw an elderly man inspecting one of Neko’s trumpets. The older gentleman picked up the trumpet and pressed down its buttons. He put his lips near the mouthpiece and pretended to blow the horn. Slowly, the old man walked off, still holding the trumpet and staring at it in disbelief.

Dot’s father handed the bow back to her, patting her on the head. Smiling, he picked up one of Neko’s cymbals, and tilted it back and forth, casting a reflection of the sun’s light on his daughter’s playful face. She waved her wand at the ray of light, and the young family ambled off toward their home.

One by one, Neko’s instruments were carried away by the fascinated onlookers. But before all of them were taken, Margot slung one of Neko’s guitars over her shoulder. Children grabbed drumsticks and guitar picks, as adults carried off the larger instruments. But as the instruments were scooped up, no one made a sound with them. A silent reverence seemed to fill the departing crowd.

Then, once the audience had all scattered and returned to their homes, Neko’s mother and father wheeled his piano back into his room and covered it with a large white sheet.

Hermetically Sealed

Lisa Siefker Bailey

My son goes to school in sublime cornfields
Wearing Redneck Soccer Club shirts, arrives early for
Drama and stays late for golf;
Three boys drive John Deere PowerTech tractors.
My daughter rolls to therapy wheelchaired,
Laughing for Cheerios, seizures controlled,
Drool bibs hang, high-waisted blue jeans cover
Diapers; four girls cannot even say “mom.”
I go to church in a whirlwind of doubt
Questioning the division of children
And trying hard not to think about why
I’ll never join the PTA or teach
Sunday school no matter how many times
They ask or how often I wish I could.



A Bending Silver Spoon

Hyo Kwon

Too Much

Heather Uebel

This hunger in my soul will not cease

I cannot fill it with food or drink or lavish gifts

Though God knows I try.

There's no satisfaction in the endless binge

Only confusion that rots the thought

But I couldn't tell you why.

It amazes me that everything I want is here

The belly of my spirit still growls

Take away this incessant shower of everything I want

I was happier without

At least then I was full.

The Enders

Kyle Willey

The crickets sing their midnight song

The dawn of mourning

Mists lie in misshapen patterns

Chaotic as life itself

Blood of man

Once it spills, never can it be undone

Intertwined

Death and life

We run for all our days

Still they find us

Life and death

Lurking in the minds of our maddest men

The Price for Death

Fabiola Cabrera

There she was

Waiting for the shop to be open,

There she was

Ready with five bucks in her wallet,

There she was

Looking for that rat poison bottle,

There she was

Asking God to forgive her,

And there she was

Trying to kill her own children.

There she is

With only five bucks in her pocket

There she wants

To have the rat poison bottle

But the price,

The price for death is too high,

And she knows

That a dollar more is not an option

There she is

With only five bucks in the wallet

She's upset

And her children are hungry

She must buy

A gallon of milk, some bread and coffee

And there she was

Without God's permission to die.



LeafLock

Kyle Willey

Pupils Dilate

Kyle Willey

Forced down the throat of the sky, tonight
Wretched up onto the earth
A plague injected through the city's syringe
Takes flight in the night of its birth
The wind whistles songs from the time fog
The fire echoes its heed
Buildings go flat tonight
The ground covered in nameless meaning
Mother Earth has struck an artery
Now, she bleeds and dies
Her pupils dilate as they pull the strings of our lives
Microfilmed and left on display
The library echoes her cry
The film set to play and play but no one will hear it tonight

Don't Talk in the Plains

By Chris Sims

Kindred lay on his back, peering up at the low ceiling he had become so accustomed to and bored with over the past few weeks. He didn't mind being alone in his shelter; in fact you might say he liked it that way for a time. He always thought the rest of the Katereneans spoke of nothing but the perils of modern life, something Kindred was not too fond of. Kindred stroked his whiskers that were starting to grow scraggly from lack of grooming. He chuckled to himself thinking about what his mother would say were she to see him in such an unhygienic mess. Too bad she didn't make it. Kindred's smile turned into a somber line across his snout. Kindred nearly always thought of the catastrophe that happened a little over a month ago, as if the war wasn't bad enough, now everyone had this strange, new, and frightening threat hurled into their lives. Kindred truly thought nothing could be more horrible than full-scale modern warfare between the two superpowers of the planet; he resolved the events of the recent past were worse than even that, however. The first few days of living in the four-room two-closet dwelling was a nerve-racking experience as the shock, the questions, his claustrophobia, and all elements leading to his first few panic attacks that took place in the closet with the dried Lopta meat in it. Whenever Kindred felt an attack coming, he would read the back labels of the packaged foods to calm his battered nerves. Sometimes it worked, and other times he would crawl underneath the table and feel himself being crushed by imagined walls. Eventually however, his claustrophobia all but disappeared and panic attacks became a thing of the past, as he became comfortable living in his quarters alone--utterly alone. Being alone had never bothered him before. It was usually a way to escape from those he viewed as burdens or nuisances. How he wished to have a nuisance now. Kindred's thoughts were interrupted by a crackle that came over on his Comm-Rad. He sprang up immediately to hear if someone was actually going to be on. His heart pounded with excitement until he realized he didn't even hear static over the speaker. Kindred opened the back panel to see one of the photon crystal conductors had gone out. "Damn it!" Kindred yelled, as he pounded the wooden table with a closed fist. Kindred rose and pulled on a raised floor board and others came up with it on a hinge. He then descended down into his storage room where he kept his numerous electronic components amongst other things. Kindred wasn't upset that the radio was out; at least that gave him something to do. Kindred was upset because he hadn't heard another voice besides his own in two weeks. Kindred picked out the part he needed and went back upstairs. After carefully laying the trapdoor back down he sat down at the wooden

table and began to repair his only view to the outside world. During the first few days of the catastrophe, Kindred was able to tune into over two hundred fifty Comm-Stations that aired reports and official messages about the situation. By the second week, there was only one left. Kindred then recalled the last broadcast he heard. He remembered the patriotic slop they would always bombard you with before the bad news, so you wouldn't feel totally ready to take your life by the time the broadcast had finished. He didn't care about any of that. Kindred was only interested in the facts and what was happening. When they got around to it they also tried to bolster the spirit by being passive about death tolls, preceding the information with phrases like; "Now, these are only preliminary reports," "This is unconfirmed information," "We cannot verify exact numbers at this time," etc. This information was also useless to Kindred. He didn't care about how many more people had died. Not because he was heartless, but because deep down inside he thought they would all die. But then an item of interest, information from the government! Kindred remembered how his ears perked as he heard the announcer rattle off survival techniques "compiled by military experts in the greatest of care and public well-being in mind." Of course, Kindred thought, they had just slapped something together to make the public think they were trying to do something to help them. But how was Kindred to know for sure? He then remembered the sound that made his stomach churn with a nervous twinge. He could hear background noises coming in over the Comm with the announcer's voice. It sounded like crashing and explosions. The announcer's voice became shaky as an alarm became audible from behind him. Kindred felt sick as he listened to the announcer's last words over the radio "...and the Government would also remind everyone listening....don't talk in the plains...by that we mean don't use your Comm-Rads...to make outgoing signals...the invader wi--" and with that final piece of advice the chaos of the explosions and crashes drowned out the civility of the announcer's voice. A scream could be heard. Oh, how he screamed! It was a scream of mortality, a scream that only came at the climax of fear, the kind of scream heard only when Death removes his hood to claim a life. Kindred's eyes watered as he listened to this man die, as the whole world listened to this man die. The screaming stopped as the explosions began to grow louder and louder until...all was suddenly quiet...with the tranquility of static. And that static remained uninterrupted until just a few minutes ago. After Kindred shook off his reliving of that horrible moment, he realized he had taken the wrong component out of the Comm-Rad.

Kindred awoke the next morning and went into his pantry room to get some food. When Kindred first took shelter, he thought he would run out of food quickly, but he was mistaken. His lack of physical activity demanded little nutrition, so his food supply ration would last a very long

while yet. Kindred then felt a stone drop to his stomach, as his mind went on a tangent about starvation. He quit looking through his pantry and sat down in a chair. His thoughts drifted for a time before he became fixated on the other Katereneans whom he saw running through the streets the night the catastrophe happened. Even though before he had enjoyed his loneliness, he now began to loathe it. Kindred began to wish he had someone to share his bed with, a person to eat with, a person to talk with, and a person to be with. Kindred's face dropped into his hands, "God," he thought. "Here I've prepared this shelter for anything and yet I have my own doomsday playing itself out in my head." Kindred chewed his claws as he paced and tried to calm himself. He thought, but something in his mind wanted to retort all of his reasoning.

"I won't be down here too much longer. The government will get the invaders, and then I can come out and be with everyone else."

"They don't know how to fight them. We're going to die down here."

"No, we have plenty of food and medical supplies, not to mention the weapons."

"The military had those too..."

"But we can't be found!"

"We'll see."

Kindred then froze and realized not only was he talking aloud, but he didn't think twice about it. He walked out of the room and went to bed. There he stayed for three days.

Kindred sat in a chair, eating some of the dried meat from the closet. The static on the Comm-Rad had become a necessary ambience in this closed setting. He had turned the Comm-Rad off a few nights ago and found himself unable to sleep. Kindred finished eating, began to listen to the static, and tried to pick things out of it. Sometimes when he listened carefully he thought he heard blips of unintelligible voices. Kindred liked to humor the idea that others were broadcasting somewhere, although he knew it wasn't so. But still he listened for the chatter of others. Kindred thought back to when he was a child. He recalled how he used to think static was a bunch of people talking over the Comm-Rad at once, making everything "conjunkled up," as he used to say.

Then a voice crackled into existence over the speaker, "---H—lo? Is an-one the-e?" Kindred swung his neck over to look at the Comm-Rad. Now he truly believed he had lost it. First talking to himself, now he was hearing voices. Still, there was a voice and he could hear it. "Must all be in my head," Kindred thought. He switched off the Comm-Rad and the voice ceased. Kindred seemed

surprised; it was almost like he expected to keep hearing the voice. He switched the Comm-Rad back on and the voice returned. It was a female voice, calm, but slightly shaken. "I've been in my bunker for a month now. I found it in the Macinol Armory. No one else has come and I need to know if anyone else is alive...or if they've been taken by those things." Kindred listened. She sounded beautiful. He could already picture her golden hair and her soft green eyes. His heart pounded with the promise of companionship after all this time alone. Kindred looked at the corner cabinet which contained the other half of his communications systems...the transmitter. He then remembered that his microphone was missing. "It's around here somewhere." Kindred said to himself. At first he looked through the drawers quietly, listening to the girl talk. "I really wish someone could pick this up. It gets pretty lonely not talking to anyone," the girl continued. Kindred began to sift through the cabinets and boxes faster and with less regard for the other objects. "...What I mean to say is my father was... taken by those things..." the girl said. Kindred then looked up at the Comm-Rad as the girl's voice became shaky. Then the girl began to sob, "They look just like us d-don't they? But their eyes... their lifeless eyes! Then t-there are those green metals all o-over them! I-I'm so scared. Is anyone there?" By this point, Kindred was searching feverishly for the microphone. He threw things aside and cursed with each search that turned up nothing. "I don't even know if they are still up there. I hope they aren't. Every night I dream of those hideous things coming in and taking me away into one of those big walkers. I wish someone was here with me..." the girl said in a calmer tone than before. Kindred then came to another box, and he threw open the lid to find the microphone resting atop other electronics. Kindred laughed triumphantly as he scooped up the device and kissed it. Then he promptly began to set up the transmitter for use with the Comm-Rad. "...and my mother had always made the best Geophra Steaks. How I miss her. She died in the war during a Unimar Airship attack." Kindred listened as he worked, eager to talk to another soul. All the while, however, he felt a sense of apprehension. The girl continued to talk about things. "...Oh and how my brother chased me with that icky thing! Ha ha ha! I hated Smeck bugs with a passion until I got one as a pet. They aren't so bad if you don't mind the shedding." "There!" Kindred said, as he finished hooking up his device. Still, that funny feeling remained. He just about threw the switch to begin transmitting when he stopped cold. He then remembered the broadcast: "Don't talk in the plains." Kindred then became scared. A cold rush went down his spine as he stared at his finger, one movement away from either reuniting himself with the outside world, or condemning himself for an unknown fate. "What if I really am imagining her and I just give myself away?" Kindred thought. The girl still continued, "The dehydrated stuff is weird. I didn't

know how to prepare them properly until a few days after being down here, but they don't taste half bad either. I never ate too much before, so I'm not much of a gourmand...so how could I know? Does anyone else?"

"But I have to talk to her!"

"Don't talk in the plains."

"I really wanted a Cottrenik felt scarf though, it shines up so much better than Meensk fur."

"She's been talking for a while now. If they could find us somehow, they would have gotten her already!"

"Don't talk in the plains."

"...it never seemed to work though. I'm not a technician, but boy I sure liked electronics."

"But she needs someone, too! She is probably going just as crazy as I am!"

"Kindred, don't talk in the plains."

"The loneliness is unbearable at night, though. I wish I just had someone. Is anyone there, anyone at all?"

"What am I going to do?!"

"Don't talk in the plains."

Kindred threw the switch. "H-hello", Kindred said as he strained words out through his mouth. "I-I'm Kindred." For a long moment, there was no response, but just as Kindred was about to depress the transmit button again, the girl spoke. "Yes, yes. Those things were all fine but I found myself desiring a different kind of education, something in communications maybe." Kindred thought maybe she did not receive the message. "Hello? Do you read me?" Kindred said. "But no, she just had to move away to Jeinika. I wonder how she is doing now. Is anyone getting this?" She said. "Yes, I am!" Kindred replied. But the girl continued, "It's ok though. I just wish my father had spent more time at the fountain and less time at the Dome. Lots of women at the fountain you know." Kindred was confused. He checked his transmitter over again to see if everything was

hooked up correctly. It was. He then made sure everything else was functioning correctly. Everything was fine.

“My favorite song is the third one on that orchestra. It’s so lively and beautiful. Anyone else have a favorite song?”

“Hello?” Kindred repeated. “Hello!?” “I wonder what it is like outside today... I bet it’s all sunny and blue with a little cloud or two. Ha ha! Hey, that rhymed a little.” Kindred began to become frustrated, “Look, if you can hear me, say so!” “If it weren’t for Henik, I would have never gotten into that fantastic restaurant.” Kindred then stood up, furious. “Listen! If this is your idea of a joke, then you’ve got something else coming!” Still, the girl chattered, “But you wouldn’t believe how fast that ship was! It made the Recer Racer look like a slimy Nandis!” At this point, Kindred was an absolutely enraged. He threw his chair as tears welled up in his eyes. “But at that point, I had asked him to leave. I didn’t feel that way about him.” The girl said in the same manner. Kindred was about to yell into the microphone again when he heard a boom. Then another. Then another. Kindred sat and listened...as they became louder! He then felt the shelter shake, with a more intense shake with every boom. “I didn’t want that kind of wood on the floor, so I kindly asked Tiller to lay down different kinds to see which ones I liked.” Things began to fall off of shelves and counters. Kindred fell over as the ground began to shake violently. Despite the shaking, the girl continued. “It wasn’t like I meant to drop his plate, but that fat lady bumped me and made me do it.” Kindred yelled out as the shaking became unbelievable. Then suddenly, it stopped. Kindred stood up, looked around, and breathed deeply. “...and then the manager told me that if he messed up again he would send the man back to training school. The poor dear, he couldn’t help the fact he wasn’t given the opportunity to go to school.”

Kindred turned around to walk out of the room and into the pantry to pick up the mess, but then a giant metal spike crashed through the ceiling right in front of him! Kindred screamed and turned to run the other way, but another spike crashed in! Kindred then heard a terrible whirring noise as another crash came from the bedroom. “You might think I would have stopped there, but no! I was on a gambling spree!” Then, with a terrible rumbling, tearing, grinding, and crashing noise, the claws began to retract, and the entire ceiling came with it! Kindred ducked and covered his head as debris fell from the rising ceiling. After a loud crash, Kindred looked up to see a bright white sky, with a four-legged machine, two hundred feet tall, standing over the hole that used to be his shelter.

The Comm-Rad was not damaged, so the girl continued. “People just need to work together to get what they want. If everyone works in opposite directions or against each other, no one will get anything, right?” The machine made a noise that was completely alien in nature, then a spherical shape spun out from the bottom of the machine. Kindred backed up slightly as the sphere opened to reveal a mechanical blue eye. The eye observed Kindred as the panicked Katerenean made his way to what was left of the bedroom. Kindred then reached under the mattress and grabbed his Mangnar Rifle. “...as if it weren’t enough, the entire vehicle was covered in mud! Oh, my brother always did that to my things!” The eye retracted as Kindred loaded and cocked the rifle. An arm came out of the top of the machine at a frightening speed. Kindred frantically took aim at the gargantuan machine’s arm raced toward him. One shot and one scream were heard before the rifle hit the ground.



From Sea to Sky

Hyo Kwon

Ripped in Two—an Eyewitness Account

Matt Rothrock

My town is ripped in two
My town is ripped in two
Because the water came down
Because the water came up.

Columbus split open
Columbus split open
And the wound runs deep
And the wound may never heal.

I was going back to work
And the creek just started rising.
Stinky mocha frappucino
Moving at breakneck speed.

On the wrong side of the creek
To go back to work but on
The right side to attempt
The journey home and away.

Half the town, it seemed, was
On foot while the roads clogged
With refugees and rubbernecks
Rolling ridiculously.

My town is ripped in two
My town is ripped in two
And it is cut off from the world
And then it is seen by everyone.

The spirit of Columbus
The spirit of Columbus
Will put it back together
Will bring the two sides into one.

The flood of the millennium
The great leveler of homes
Depositor of silt and stench
Planter of cornfields in midtown basements.

Chaos at the doorstep of CRH
Helicopters overhead
School buses thread the needle
As traffic inches over Gladstone.

Finally on 10th and heading east...
Finally Clifty Creek begins its work
Covering fields of corn and beans
Blue herons pause at a volunteer wetland.

I was only trying to
Get back to work when I saw
What I saw... trying to get
Back to something I knew.

I won't forget the faces of Pleasant Grove...
Beholding the rising waters from
The rim of McKinley Avenue...
The desperate buzz of helplessness.

I won't forget the refugees in Arrowwood
And Greenbriar camped out as I came over the rise
Of Taylor and 31st, initially fearing my own roots
Were saturated and rotting in floodwater.

I won't forget the chaos from verse nine...
And the people walking everywhere.
The cars of Windsor Place fleeing through
A cornfield for the closest speck of high land.

I won't forget because I can't...
I'm an eyewitness to history—
An eyewitness to tragedy—
A citizen of Columbus.

My Inner Beast

By Abby Jones

While waiting for the movers to arrive, I leaned my forehead against the cold window. I had never felt such utter sadness in all my life. Am I going to feel like this forever? It felt like God was taking his hands and pressing down on my shoulders as hard as he could. I thought to myself, “I will *never* survive this. I will *always* feel this way.”

It was moving day. My ex-husband and I had lived in our dream home for five years. Our home was an old farmhouse situated on five acres just south of town. I remember telling my ex that someday when we are old and gray, someone will start missing us and come in and find us sitting in our rocking chairs looking like we had just fallen asleep. Sadly, my ex was gone, my dream house was gone and all that was left was me. That was almost two years ago.

I met my ex in high school during sophomore Health Class. It was love at first sight and we were destined to be together forever. We were the perfect couple. I cannot ever remember Jody not being a part of my life. Yet here I stood in our empty house with Jody gone, wondering who I was, and I was scared to death. Beginning the day my ex moved out and demanded a divorce, I remember thinking to myself that even though this was the lowest point of my life, it was not going to destroy me. These were the cards I was dealt and I am going to make the best of it.

Being in a committed relationship or following a certain set of rules does not define you as a person. The short story “The Tale of the Rose” by Emma Donoghue is about the daughter of a merchant who is sent to live with a beast that dwells in the forest. Although the daughter is frightened of the beast and of the unknown, she still feels excitement of breaking away from the rigid lifestyle she has always known and experiencing a new life for herself. The daughter describes her feelings: “Now you may tell me that I should have felt betrayed, but I was shaking with excitement” (77). I can identify with the daughter’s excitement. Although I did feel betrayed over the end of my marriage, the practical side of my brain was telling me that I had a whole new life to look forward to. The slate was clean and “for the first time in my life I seemed to own myself” (77).

I remember the first time I tried mowing five acres by myself. I had never touched a lawn mower in my life. I had gone from being my father’s princess to my husband’s queen and had the long, polished fingernails to prove it. I was spoiled, to say the least. Luckily, determination is one of my best qualities. I hopped on that lawn mower and four hours later I was finished. I remember how elated I felt as I sat on

the front porch and looked out over the yard. I felt such accomplishment. Donoghue describes the same feeling in her story. After losing his fleet of ships, Beauty's father moves them to a farm where they are without servants and must do the work themselves. Beauty describes how good it made her feel to work and accomplish something: "It gave me a strange pleasure to see what my back could bend to, my arms could bear" (76). Even though, throughout our marriage, my ex had always taken care of our home, that didn't mean that I couldn't do it. I just never had to. The feeling of satisfaction from doing something I had never done before gave me the confidence I needed. After mowing those five acres, selling my home and buying a new home I would have to take care of myself, did not seem so daunting.

Dating is another world I was thrust into after my divorce. While I was married, I thought of myself as one of those lucky people who had found "true love." My ex represented everything I wanted in a husband. I had always thought he was perfection. After only one glance from him and my body would tingle all over and my heart would start beating fast. . Since I couldn't quite figure out what I wanted in a man, my friends took it upon themselves to find one for me. Although my friends' intentions were good, the men they chose for me made me question their mental competency. Those men bored me. I wanted that electric feeling again. Donoghue describes the same bored feeling in her story: "I had suitors aplenty but wanted none of them: their doggish devotion seemed too easily won. I had an appetite for magic, even then" (76). I had an appetite for magic too. I wanted something different. So I set my friends down one by one and explained to them that I would be setting my own rules for dating, and as much as I appreciate the way they worry and care for me, dating was something I needed to tackle myself.

Since I have been divorced, I have noticed that so many people make the mistake of rushing into another relationship without giving themselves the proper time needed to grieve the death of their marriage. You really do go through a grieving process when you divorce. You have to treat it like a death. Now that I have two years under my belt, I remember my frame of mind back then and cannot even comprehend starting a new relationship. However, society teaches us from an early age that being with someone after a certain age and accomplishment is the natural progression. You graduate high school, you go to college and then you get married and have babies. I tried that and it didn't work. But does that make me any less of an accomplished person? Since I have been divorced, I have bought and maintained my own home, traveled with my friends and have made the decision to quit my job and pursue a degree in English Literature. I didn't settle for the guy who had a decent job but was as sexy as a piece of tape. I didn't settle for the guy with the great abs but no brain. I didn't listen to my friends. I went against the grain, took time to grieve and made my own set of rules. I have discovered a person in me I never knew was there.

If I were still married, I am not sure I would have ever met her. Now that I have, I like her very much.

I find myself back at the farmhouse with my forehead leaned against the cold window, and I remember something I saw that I will never forget. Two deer were running through the cornfield with two coyotes chasing them. The coyotes never had a chance. The deer were much too fast for them. What a beautiful sight to see on such a sad, desolate day. I think back about that day and how far I have come. I didn't follow the rules and I didn't rely on someone else to make me happy. It took me a while to figure out, but I am responsible for my own happiness. I am my own person, and I am proud of that. "It took me weeks to understand why the faceless mask and name of a beast might be chosen over all the great world had to offer. After a month of looking, I saw that beauty was infinitely various, and found it behind her white face" (80).

In Donoghue's story, Beauty discovers that the beast is actually the missing princess who had mysteriously disappeared years ago. Because of her choices and experiences Beauty understood how the princess had given up the life of royalty for the life of freedom. "This was a strange story, one I would have to learn a new language to read" (79). Divorce is my strange story. I too have had to learn a new language. To me, learning this new language was what I used to overcome the grief felt when my marriage ended. This language has taught me to be so much more than I ever dreamed I could be. When I was married I only allowed myself to be a wife. Now I am allowing myself to be so much more. I am allowing myself to discover who I am and how far I can go. "In this life I have nothing to do but cavort on the wind, but in my last it was my fate to be a woman" (75).

Donoghue, Carson. "The Tale of the Rose." *The Conscious Reader 2004*. Ed. Caroline Shrodes, Harry Finestone, Michael Shugrue. New York: Pearson Longman, 2004. 75-80.

Christening

Jami Ray Graham

Woman scorned, damned is the day
Punishment for thoughts not held at bay.
The fire is kindled, prepared just for her
Accusations in order~ a razing will occur.

Sneering and laughing
Mankind calls out her name,
Jezebel!
Forever christened~ her priceless new name.

Esther's Choice

By Sherry Traylor

Clearly, she had no business here in the sun. Her old bones eased into the porch swing, covered with the yellow rag quilt, her life held in patchwork from clothes torn to rags by hard work and learned lessons. She closed her wrinkled eyes to the light of the afternoon sun and slowly moved the swing to the rhythm of the breeze. Her eighty-second birthday had come and gone and she sat alone thinking of those who waited on her. Her husband Rupert, her daughter Ruth, and her parents all had gone before. She lost her husband to pneumonia twenty years ago. She had sold the farm and moved close to her daughter, only to see her follow her father two years later.

Drifting into the high back of the swing and padded coverlet, Esther slipped into her dream of life as she knew it to be. She was only twenty when married to a thirty-year old Rupert Donovan. He held over five-thousand acres of land which produced wheat from several leased farms. Her father leased a farm and gained ownership of his land with the promise of his daughters hand to the bachelor Donovan. It was not of any real concern to Esther, as she accepted that her fate would be to marry a farmer, and there were no boys her age with any promise of more than Donovan could bequeath to her. She felt he was respectable looking, but too old and quiet. She met him with her parents weekly until the day of the marriage one month later.

They had a hurried ceremony at the local county church and then rushed off to Kansas City for the wedding night. She had never stayed at a fine place like the Kansas City Inn and Tavern. They had real starched sheets on the bed and goose down instead of straw mattresses. She hoped she could sleep but knew she was too afraid of Rupert to rest.

Rupert was gentle with Esther, but her wedding night introduced her to a necessary but unhappy experience related to the duties of a wife. She arrived at her new home the next day very exhausted. The farm was five miles from a main road and the dirt road leading up to the house was dried with ruts from the wheat wagons. Her stomach rolled by the time they stopped at the barn. Rupert helped Esther from the wagon and told her to go up to the house and he would meet her there after the horses were put away. She was angry with him but did not dare show it. Rupert had shown her in their courtship that he was a serious man, not to be questioned when it came to caring for his farm and his responsibilities. However, Esther did not doubt that he would assure her security until his death, because he was known as a loyal and honest farmer in the area.

Her day was spent finding room for her small bag of clothes and cleaning the kitchen to make the area more useable for her daily needs. She left Rupert's coffee cup and pipe box by the table where he had it placed. She knew not to disturb his rituals. She assumed her dutiful role as cook, wife and maid to the house. During her first few days, she saw Rupert very little except to heat his dinner, down his bed, or comfort him in the night once a week. She was told to wait up for him every night to ready his meal, which sometimes fell late into the evening.

One morning, Esther was hanging out a load of freshly scrubbed clothes to dry in the early summer breeze when the sound of horses pulling a heavy load forced her eyes to the road. She turned to see Rupert meeting a wagon load of immigrant men from the South. The driver talked loudly and Rupert bargained with him on wages for the immigrant workers. He pointed at four men who jumped from the wagon quickly. He looked over the rest of the men, and then pointed at a large, dark tan man who stood up slowly and nodded to Rupert's questions. He took one step off the truck where others had jumped. His immigrant status was apparent, but Esther did not think he was from Mexico or the Indian Reservations like a few of the other men. This man had a distant foreign look, with skin the color of bronze and eyes deep like black hollows. His stature was tall and strong as the pictures of statues she once saw in a book. Rupert caught her gaze and he waved her return to the house. The man glanced at her then back to Rupert, who gave him an unfavorable sneer. She thought he might be gone before he began to work. Rupert was very protective of her youth and simple beauty around the help. It was made clear that any efforts to communicate with her would reward them with termination of duties without pay. Most men working on the farms were family men in need of the money to support their wives or children.

The next morning Esther awoke to a loud banging like she had never heard. The ringing in her head was intolerable. She quickly dressed and put wood in the stove to heat the burners. She stepped outside to see a bronze man on her roof swinging a claw hammer. He stopped working when seeing her red hair against the pale yellow dress below him. The sun gave Esther's red hair a glow that looked strangely fairy-like when the morning sun enveloped her. He regained his conscious thoughts and spoke to her in an unfamiliar accent.

"Pardon me, did I wake you Mrs.?" he said.

"No," Esther lied. "I was just wondering if it is necessary to work on this side of the house?" Esther loosely pulled her hair in a top knot away from the obvious view of her acquaintance on the roof.

“I might start at the back side first. Will that be ...” the immigrant stopped short and immediately walked to the other side of the house and began to hammer.

Esther turned in time to see Rupert coming toward her in a hurry.

“You will not talk with the help ma’am.” Rupert held her arm and walked Esther back into the house. He grabbed his coffee mug and sat at the table. Esther did not speak, but put yesterday’s leftover ham and biscuits on a burner to heat while she cracked eggs into a cast iron skillet. She had to say something to tame Rupert’s anger.

“I am sorry if I did something wrong Rupert. I just asked him to stop hammering on this side of the house so it would not disturb your breakfast.”

She placed the plate of scrambled eggs, ham and biscuit in front of him with ease. She gave him a glass of water and filled his mug with fresh coffee and fixed herself a small biscuit with ham and sat down beside Rupert. He smiled up at her as tenderly as she had seen and touched her hand.

“I am sorry, Esther, if I scared you. You don’t understand these Brazilian men; they are quite different than we are used to. They have a reputation with women, and I want you to be careful around Sam, that is all. So, please avoid talking with him if you want to please me.” Rupert pulled his hand away with his smile and returned to his breakfast. He was a man of few words.

Esther did her best to avoid Sam, who continued to work on their roof all week, pulling tin sheets and replacing them with new to ready the house for the winter months ahead. Rupert promised to make her house more comfortable and warm this winter, and he was true to his word. The new tin roof went on top of a thicker wood base than was originally on the house and Sam made quick work of the job. He showed powerful skill at carpentry and Esther so wanted to ask his help inside the house, as well. She managed to talk Rupert into letting her make up a list of repairs and furniture building for Sam outside of his other farm duties. Rupert finally gave in to her requests but in turn Esther was to promise to leave the door of the house open so other workers on the farm could see if she were to have a problem with Sam.

The next morning Sam knocked at the door at a reasonable time after Rupert had left for the wheat field. Esther showed him into the house without much eye contact. She was afraid her gaze would reveal her hidden thoughts into his hollow eyes. He went to work fixing a broken chair, a teetering table and a broken bed slat. His work was quick and effortless. His next chore was to build a shelf beside the door with pegs for coats and hats that now littered a bench. He worked cutting and measuring on the porch, rendering a small shelf in less than two hours. The pegs were

strong, hand-shaved from pieces he found behind the barn. His talents as a carpenter and builder were apparent enough that Esther had to ask questions.

“Sam, where do you live?” Esther asked as she brought a mug of water to him.

“I lived in Brazil most of my life now I live where I am needed.” Sam continued to work on measuring a second shelf piece.

“And why did you leave there? With your talent as a carpenter I would think you would find steady work there.” Esther did not know where Brazil was or why he would leave it.

“My family and I were very poor and the work is better here.” Sam tried not to look up at Esther, but their eyes briefly met.

“Would you like to stay in this area, or do you need to go back to family there?” Esther felt her face flush as she knew she was asking too many personal questions.

“I wonder why such a sweet lady as yourself would be working in a hard life such as this. However, just as I have no choice – maybe you also have no choice? Yes?” Sam smiled up at Esther with a wide white smile. His deep hollowed eyes now bared a clear hazel color and warming friendliness.

Esther quickly retreated into the house, feeling a red flush across her cheeks. She mumbled for Sam to get back to work and she closed the door of the porch. She busied herself the rest of the day doing cleaning that she had already done. She thought about what he had said and was extremely bothered by his rudeness. Why did he presume she had no choice? She could have said no to Rupert and her father would not have forced her to marry. She chose to agree to marriage to secure her future and that of her family and did not see that to be a wrong decision.

Maybe Sam was sorry for his own decisions and was transferring his regrets onto her situation. Esther had no remorse for her decisions and did not like a stranger trying to make her life seem a mistake. She would speak to him tomorrow.

The next morning after Rupert left for a trip to a neighboring farmer’s ranch, Esther decided to tell Sam of her displeasure with his assumptions. Before she could get to the door, a hard knock startled her. She stepped back to the table.

“Who is it?” Esther said.

“Sam. It’s Sam...ma’am.” He said.

“Come in please, Sam.” She said.

Sam opened the door slowly and walked humbly into the well lit house. He looked around then at her. He placed his dirty work shirt on the back of the chair and removed his hat, nodding his head in a friendly gesture. She waved her hand at the chair for him to sit. She repeated the gesture as he seemed unsure of his right to sit in the master chair. She sat next to him in her regular seat and began.

“Sam I wanted to discuss something about our talk yesterday.” Esther said.

“I am sorry if I was out of place, ma’am. I was just making statements about life.” Sam said.

Esther looked puzzled and asked, “Whose life, yours or mine?”

“Why, mine of course.” Sam said. “It just seems so unlikely for a lady such as you are to be in this type of life.”

Sam looked down at his hands, which were rough and scarred from work. His gaze floated back up to her blue eyes, and they sat in silence, lost in thoughts. They both lived a lifetime of thoughts in those few moments, aware of what could never be, and the lives they were destined to live just by their stations. They slowly both looked down at the table as though it held their secret thoughts and absorbed them unseen into the grains.

“We all have choices Sam, but those that don’t seem to suit us can still satisfy if we learn to adjust our thinking to it. You can find a life anywhere, and enjoy moments within that life if you look for those moments. I believe that anyway.” Esther closed her eyes, thinking it true as the words left her mouth.

“You are wise for a young woman. I suppose you are right about choices, but I wonder if life can be more satisfying if we let it lead us, rather than stopping to watch it pass us by. What you have chosen is only a part of a whole life because you have not known another. The world is more than what you make of it here and now, Ms. Donovan. I hope you can forgive my forwardness, but I only wish happiness to you.” Sam eloquently rose from the table and pushed in the chair. He gently laid a small purple wild flower on the table in front of her which he had held in his palm all the while.

“I will be leaving today Ms. Donovan. I will be catching the next wagon to a farm north which needs a barn builder.” Sam turned toward the door.

Esther resigned to stay in her chair, looked down at the table and closed her eyes as she thought of ways to keep him on the farm. But she thought better of it and kept silent. The door latched quietly, and steps across the porch faded in retreat. She sat for a long while, listening and waiting to hear hammering or footsteps. If he

returned, would she go? However, the place was silent and all she heard was the breeze blowing and the bucket banging from the well. She felt her life pass by and imagined herself in fifty years, old and tired sitting like she was now.

Rupert came in through the door and looked at Esther. She was as white as a ghost and he was suddenly concerned.

“Esther, my dear.” Rupert sat in front of Esther at the table and held her hand.

“Is there something wrong?” Rupert waited.

“No, I was just suddenly very tired. I will be fine.” Esther started to rise from her chair to fetch coffee for her husband, when he pulled her back into the chair.

“Esther, please sit down so we can talk. I know I have not been spending any time with you lately because of the crop, but I promise to make that up to you. I also know that you have been very unhappy, but have been silent about it. Please do not leave me, I couldn’t bare it.” Rupert dropped his head onto Esther’s hand, which he now gripped tighter. Esther was shocked by his action, as she had never seen him with any emotion other than the day they married when he smiled widely.

“Why, I never said I was leaving. Why would you assume?” Esther thought about her time spent with Sam and realized why he was concerned.

“I know you have no excitement on this farm, and I couldn’t blame you if you decided to leave with him. But just know that I would like you to stay and that I think I can make a life for you here.” Rupert looked sad and somewhat younger than he did before. Then Esther knew. She knew that her choices had been made long ago. She had sold herself into bondage to this man, but it was not a bad fate. He would care for her without regret, and she would do the same for him. She could only hope to be his friend and a respectable wife, but her love would forever be with a man she barely knew, a man who challenged her to think about choices that sacrificed her will. Choices that would leave her rocking on her porch when she was eighty-two, happily under a rag quilt made from Sam’s shirt left on her chair. The pressed purple flower dropped from her cold hand, and the creaking rocker fell silent upon the porch.

Seven Birds

Nick Morrow

Seven birds

Fly in seven separate ways;

But tie them together by the tips of their feathers

And they will fly together always



Eclipse

Hyo Kwon

It's Aretha's Fault

Matt Rothrock

Invitation of a lifetime, to see
The Queen of Soul, backed by
The Richmond Symphony Orchestra...
I packed for a weekend's jaunt to
Earlham College, for little sibs weekend...
To see my brother, to see Aretha,
To see College.

But perhaps, yes, most definitely the "college"
I see is in white block letters on a Navy
Blue field, stretched across the Windy City's
Barrel-chested ambassador of excess himself,
Friend of futility, Brahman of booze, John Belushi,
As he hoists that bottle of Tennessee sour mash
Up and at an angle, consuming its contents
As Bluto; not an artistic stretch, but then
John Landis knew this...

Then the news that Aretha had contracted
The flu or the diva disease or a case of creative
Differences and my reasons for being there shifted
To fellowship and brotherhood...
Yet I had a strong desire to knock on her door,
Tap on her windowpane.

Instead we partied like it was 1999,
And it was, so we did.
I got so tight, besotted with beer...
I remember party lights, house music
Mixed with Lenny Kravitz 5 mixed with
Limited responsibility and lowered inhibitions—
The party moved over to the International House,

Across four lanes of the Old National Road, to
Darkened rooms pulsating with Latin Salsa rhythms;
And I formed the quickset concrete rationalization
That hip movement and beverage alcohol consumption
Were a direct, one-to-one proportional relationship.
I was making smoke on the dance floor with
A tight-bodied blonde named Rachel, teaching her
The merengue, weaving our legs together,
Syncopating our hips, speaking truth through movement,
With primal, aboriginal focus written all over our
Glistening faces... we reaffirmed life on that dance floor
In a daze of steps and suggestive hand placement,
As if Carnival had come to Richmond, Indiana.
That night I could do no wrong, I could say
Everything and it was hilarious, I was cool...
Even Rachel's boyfriend thought so...

That ephemeral feeling, that incredible lightness
From that indelible tightness—I chased it from that day
Forward...chasing those feelings, that environment,
That loss of earthly reality that comes from intoxication.
I never had that feeling again... I never had a night like that again...
I came close, and sometimes I struck out completely.
I chased the replication of that drunk, that state of being
To the gates of insanity, to the gates of death.
As I've recovered, I've found relief from that drive to recreate
Those circumstances, those events...
And discovered the man I've always wanted to become...

But if I don't feel like taking any responsibility,
If my forgetter starts playing the old records,
Those old songs from the playlist of my alcoholic life,
I can plop myself down in a folding chair with a cup of rotgut coffee,
Two sugars, and say, with joy and resignation,
"My name is Matt, and it's Aretha Franklin's fault."

Στυπιδ Ποετρψ

Fabiola Cabrera

Full of obsessions and desires
I'll never understand
My own feelings and my rhymes.

I can't confess to the world
My poems are more than simple words
Like myself its now in confusion
Of this method of destruction.

What these phrases have become?
What this poem has transformed?
I don't regret
Poem is poetry,
I don't complain
Stupid is stupidity.

Reality versus imagination
All together forming a relation
And after dealing with myself
I conclude once again
Poetry is stupid
and I'm more stupid
Because I can't write a simple poem

Every Evening at Four

Sherry Traylor

Every evening at four

I ran across the empty road and up the hill

While mom watched and waved

To sit and swing with old and wrinkled Mr. Pipe

He was monstrously tall and thin

Quietly he nodded and tipped his brown felt hat hello

I took my waiting seat on the white porch swing

He watched the birds as they gathered around dry bread

My voice penetrating Mr. Pipe's silent day

To tell one of many stories

About my imaginary trips to a castle

My saving the life of a three-legged dog

The apple I planted to grow a mystical tree

My treasure hunt in my brother's room

Mr. Pipe smoked a ring into the air around his head

And nodded with a smile

Just inside the breezeway door
I retrieved my lady's black feathered hat
Mrs. Pipe's old black-tattered handbag full of fine things
Just for me
Like a broken lipstick case and matching mirror
I pulled each finger into the stained white dress gloves
Folded an embroidered hanky
Mr. Pipe looked down
My legs too short to bend over the last white painted oak board
I tapped my shoes, pulled up my white knee socks – and giggled

I held the hanky over my mouth as the pipe smoke choked
Until the Spring breeze cleared my breath
We watched the birds as they gathered around the dry bread
My mother called me home
I placed the bag back in the breezeway
Mr. Pipe held my seat
On the white porch swing
Every evening at four

In Robes of Green, In Garments of Adieu

Robert Stillwell

Can you explain why we were granted

“*Der Abschied?*” Or the *Alto Rhapsody*

Brahm’s two *lieder* with viola, Handel’s

great cantilena arias that help us forget

How closely *largo* will trace back

to *lard?* What are we giving that deserves

Tolstoy, John Muir, Kropotkin, Schweitzer,

And those numberless others? Also: I’d like

to understand love’s hard providing. I still

love a woman I haven’t seen

in more than thirty years---she was the one

who showed me how to vote, unfailingly,

for Gene Debs and Kathleen Ferrier,

marking their ticket straight ...

Ourselves

Cher Cramer

I am you and you are me and we are all together...

See how I fly, see how I'm fly faster than you can catch me catch me betcha can't catch me myself and I are all in this together

The committee and me we seldom agree shake myself free from those voices that say conform, reform, take shelter from the storm of

A tornado of ideas swirling twirling whirling inside this curious brain I learn from pain a grain of truth is all I need the seed that takes me

On a journey of who am I who I am today who was I yesterday who can I be tomorrow powerful tragic magic static always changing rearranging life to fit

Impulsivity beats passivity changes beats staying the same standing on the ledge looking down being on the edge looking 'round

Don't need stagnation use imagination which one of me is gonna win today? The wild red-headed biker chick or the emo-writer poet girl?

Self versus self I don't mind it's in my mind the things I find to amuse schmooze even get the blues just being the me's I am

What do you have to say for yourself sitting in your chair your tighty-whitie underwear choking off your thoughts cuz they're too high

That everything you never experienced is a lie your ivory tower pie-in-the-sky centeredness not me not my cup of tea please

Think what you will take another pill to get to sleep dream too deep wake up in a sweat get up to write try words aren't right

I am you and you are me and we are all together

See how I fly so high over you cuz I am true to myselfes though they fight I can
take flight cuz we get along

We integrate with the world to find that higher calling calling calling

Ourselves are aware of ourselves and the wholeness of the world around us we
get on the bus and go go go unafraid of what the future holds

Biographical Notes

Fabiola Cabrera

Fabiola Cabrera is an English major with a concentration in creative writing at IUPUC. She was born in Mexico, and she moved to Columbus, Indiana, when she was fourteen years old. She loves to write and draw, and she wishes to become a recognized novelist. Her aspiration is to join the entertainment industry.

Cher Cramer

Cher is majoring in English Literature with a minor in History at IUPUC. She is a lifelong poet and has been published in *Scholastic Magazine*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and *Poetry.com*. “Besides poetry, I am interested in the paranormal. I live in an old cottage-style Queen Anne home with my husband, a cat, a dog, a turtle, some fish, and a ghost.”

Jami Ray Graham

Jami is a non-traditional History major at IUPUC with plans to pursue a Master’s at Bloomington. “I write poetry as a creative outlet and, until now, have never shared my poems with others.” Jami’s submissions for this year’s *Talking Leaves* are from her collection entitled “Tattered Remnants.”

Oshu Huddleston

Oshu is an English major at IUPUC with a focus on creative writing. His ultimate goal, which is publication of collections of short stories, has been with him as long as he can remember. “It would be nice to teach composition in some form, as well as writing/reviewing/editing for the entertainment industry in some capacity.”

Abby Jones

Abby is a non-traditional student pursuing a Bachelor’s Degree in English Literature, with a goal to earn a Ph. D and teach post secondary English Literature. “My passion is reading. Put me on a beach with a stack of good books and I will swear I have found paradise.”

Hyo Kwon

Hyo is a freshman studying English Education at IUPUC. "In Seoul, South Korea, my date of birth is July 24, 1984, the solar astrological Cusp of Cancer-Leo and the lunar of Chinese astrological animal of the 'Wood Rat.' If you're interested in astrology or like reading them more than just what's on newspapers, Gaia's painting of the stars sure is a lovely masterpiece. I love art to the deepest breath of my soul, lungs, heart, and respiratory system. Spirituality, meditation, yoga, chi, good music and art shared from others, and the magnification of the better half are all the otherworldly impulses that pulsate me into creation. Hats off with both my hands on a melting chest to Mother Nature's beauty and all those nice fuzzy sweaters, especially the green ones...love and light...."

Nick Morrow

Nick is an author, poet, and songwriter currently living in Columbus, Indiana. He is pursuing a degree at Indiana University in the recording arts field.

Matt Rothrock

Matt is a December 2008 graduate of IUPUC with a degree in English Literature. He was named Outstanding Student in English in 2006 and has been a part of the IUPUC community off and on since 2002. He also was a teaching assistant in the history department and a tutor in the IUPUC Writing Center. He plans on attending graduate school, hoping to obtain a Master's Degree in composition and rhetoric or literature.

Lisa Siefker Bailey

Lisa is a Lecturer in the English Department at IUPUC. She received her Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University in 1996.

Chris Sims

Chris is a writer/artist in the works at IUPUC. "I plan on writing and illustrating my own comic books in the future."

Robert Stillwell

Rob received his Ph.D. from Ohio State University. He has taught literature and writing at IUPUC since 1985.

Sherry Traylor

Sherry is seeking an English degree at IUPUC with a focus on literature. She has been writing as a hobby for thirty years, with several of her poems published by local newspapers. Her book, published in 2006 by Publish America, is called The Platonic Wife, and has a sequel scheduled to be finished later this year.

Heather Uebel

Heather is a non-traditional student working towards a Bachelor's Degree in sound engineering. "I live in Hanover, Indiana, with my husband and four non-human children. Music is my passion, but poetry provides an expressive outlet for when there is a need for quiet."

Kyle Willey

Kyle is an Anthropology major at IUPUC with a background in the arts and entertainment industries. He has a short film titled "Fracture" in circulation, and his band Robe has had recognition in several publications, such as *Aurthur Magazine* and *Blow-up Magazine*.

