

Manuscript



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The Manuscript Society

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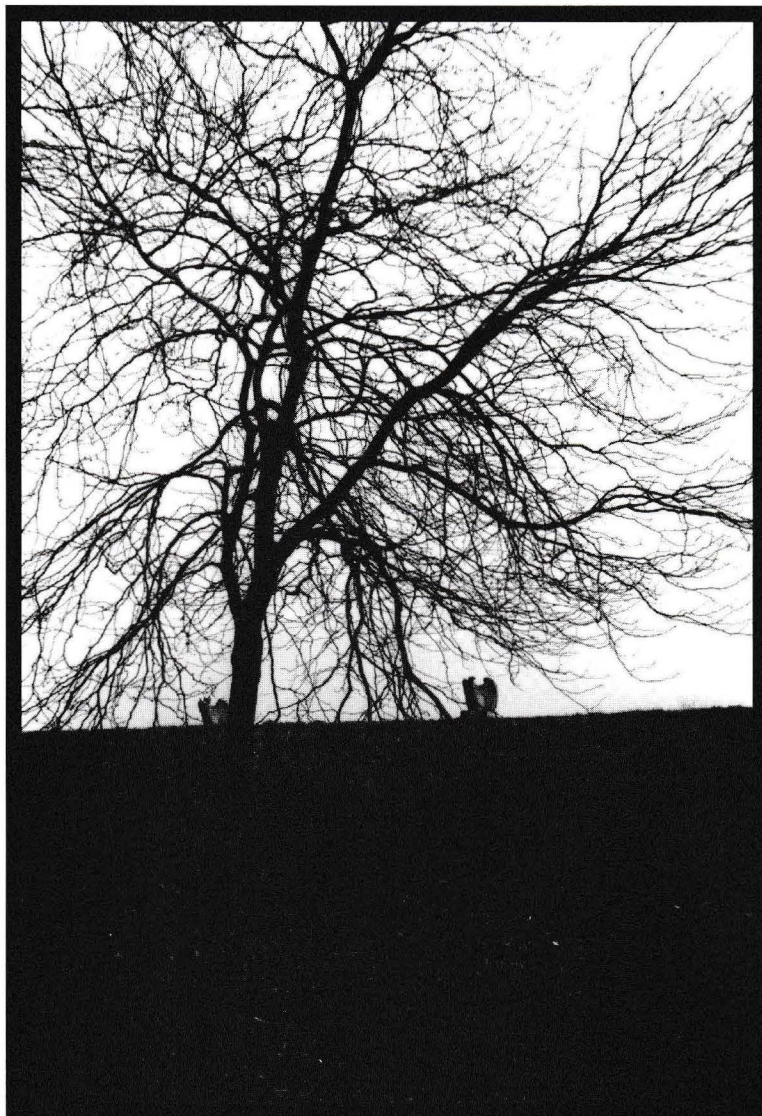
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Contest Winners

Art Cover: Molly Baines "Grow
Where You Are Planted"
Short Story: Melanie O'Donnell
"Ghosts"
Poetry: Sean Flannery "My Own
Colonus"

ty



Caucasus Cafe

Pushing the table-side cart towards the party,
I doubt if mermaids sing to me.⁽¹⁾
Trapped in a cage of intemperate women--
forced to enlighten, make them see.

Fashioning bananas Foster for all
flambéed for this matronly crowd
perched on their seats in breathless
expectation,
somewhat ignorant; somewhat loud.

And the sparks of the flame in the brandy
bottle
are ready to burn and escape.
And I flash on vermin by a tempting tree,
or magic's secret behind a cape.

And it burned and burned in a blue dancing
light
as gasps planted fertile seeds.
And they crowed for more flame like some Guy
Montag⁽²⁾
(Oh was this a flower or weed!).

Their hair-sprayed do's would have wrought
human candles
if the flame were more greatly needed.
And their cackling mouths turned devouring
beaks
so arrows divine were needed.

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(2) Ray

And I've known those arms and perfumes and
dresses,(3)
all crazed with unquenched desire.
There they were, a countless lot of Pandoras
wreaking evil for new-born fire.

I am no prophet--though the floods are so near
attempting to douse the match--
bound to the burner of this flame's contrivance,
waiting for hope to unlatch.

And I wonder would it have been worthwhile
to end it all with a smile (4) or
bask in regret of a misguided soul
as those eagles gulp my bile.

But my greatness in life has already flickered,
(arrows put eagles in check),
though mortal unlike the flame that I forged
I bear a piece of burner round my neck.

- *Sean Flannery*

(1,3,4) T.S. Eliot "The Lovesong of J. Alfred
Prufrock"

(2) Ray Bradbury, character in Fahrenheit 451

Even in sleep

Even in sleep you turn away
the marble of your brown shoulder pulses
You fill my bed; yet are void of it
Your selfish orbit
sears my marrow and fuels my turmoil
That space you carved out of my body
is bereft of child
and fairy tales.

I pant silently in the night
for the spill
of deep steel hatred into my bones
to erase the permanent stain.
The primal switch you pulled
can't be pushed back.

"Oh father who art in Heaven
Hollow be thy name"

Tears sting as the light of my lamp
Can't move, pierce, or steel into your
slumber.

"Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done"

Your side of our first bed is beyond my
grasp
and in the morning
nothing of your body stays
but your scent
trapped
in my dirty sheets
and the creases of my folded body.

Like a mad, naked priest
I will bury myself in those remains
praying for a spark of compassion

"On earth as it is in Heaven"

While keenly aware I ask for a miracle.

The furnace of your body won't warm
me.

Empty heat with no purpose willed to
me.

Even in sleep you turn me away.

- *Marisa Rae*



When a Thought Takes Over
- Jason Bass

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Poem 67

She said to him,
"It won't get you anything
except a cup of coffee."
English, Fine Arts, and 55 cents

And the truck, no matter the size
Barreled down the road
As they stopped at the bottom of the
steps

He looked at her, not knowing what was
next
She kept him on his toes
He was ready to lick her thoughts off
her lips,
No matter the thoughts

And kissed her goodbye
She said, "This is where we part."
Replying back, "Goodbye, Love."
English, Fine Arts, and 55 cents

- Sarah E. Karlavage

Nice Guys

"Saw Beauty and the Beast yesterday."

"Disney?"

"Yeah."

"Good movie."

"Pretty decent. I liked Aladdin better."

"It had Robin Williams. 'nuff said."

"Yeah ... Did you ever notice there's a double standard in the whole Beauty and the Beast motif?"

"Ummmm ... not really, how so?"

Osgood took a drink. "Look at it this way, every Beauty and the Beast story there ever is goes as follows.... Nice guy with heart of gold is ugly as sin. Ugly nice guy meets good-looking girl. Good looking girl ignores ugly facade and sees the heart of gold, falls in love with ugly nice guy. Ugly nice guy gets girl and becomes handsome. Now, anyway you look at that bad boy, you can find double standards.

"First off.... That whole ugly guy becomes good-looking. Now what we have here is the idea that it's great to be ugly and nice people should respect you for it, but in the end,...you have to be handsome. Beauty doesn't stay with a beast.... She stays with handsome Prince Charming. Basically what the legend tells our kids is a good personality only goes so far, then it always boils down to good looks.

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"Now that's pretty bad in itself. The story would be much better if the beast stayed ugly and they lived happily ever after, but no, he has to get good looking again. It's a ploy to get women to fall in love with ugly guys, I should know, I'm an ugly guy. I mean, come on, I'm a nice guy, but I'm nothing to look at. If a good-looking girl falls in love with me, I'm not going to magically become handsome, I'm always gonna be ugly. Hell, even my mom knows I'm ugly, but she won't admit it. As for that 'love blinds you' bullshit, I say fuck all that. You're ugly, you're ugly. You're dating an ugly guy and you think you don't see him as ugly. Every time you see a good-looking guy on the street you're gonna look at your ugly man and sigh, not because you want to be cruel, but because on some sub-conscious level you want something better, something prettier. It's like all those movies you see on HBO at two in the morning where the nerd/hero be it male or female, ends up with the cheerleader or the quarterback or whatever. Ever notice that the people they get to play the nerd parts don't really look like nerds? They look like good-lookin' actors dressed like nerds. Hollywood never quite got a grip on the idea that being a nerd isn't a purely mental thing, it's physical as hell."

Osgood threw down some more beer. "Now that one," he laughed, "that one's bad, but the big one is how chauvinistic the story is. Beauty and the Beast. Did you ever notice the beast is always male and the beauty female? Ever notice that it's

never the other way around. The woman must always search beneath appearances for that heart of gold, whereas the man must simply look for a good-looking girl to do just that. Women are given the short end of the stick.

"Have you ever seen a story where an ugly, but nice girl, gets the handsome guy? Fuck no! The fat, ugly chics are left out to dry by the good looking men who know they can have any girl they want because they're good looking. While all ugly men have a chance of finding their beauty, women have no luck. Beauty is skin deep, but ugly seems to be to the bone. Women are taking it bad here! I mean, while they're taught to look beneath the skin, men are taught, awwww fuck it, I'll fish around for a good one, no fat chics for me. You know what they call this big scam, Bill my boy, 'romance' that's what they call it, 'Romance.' Biggest scam in the world."

Osgood drank again, "Oh, the beast is so romantic! Why? Because he's really a handsome prince! Bullshit, I say! Handsome on the inside and handsome on the outside are two completely different things, Amigo, two completely different things. Romance is a scam so ugly guys can get good looking girls and mean, handsome guys can make up with their good looking girlfriends. Romance is the brainwashing of the feminine masses, Bill."

Bill smiled and shook his can. The little beer that remained in it sloshed around a bit.

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"Do you sit around and think this shit up all day?" he asked Osgood.

Osgood smiled. "You have to admit, I have a legitimate point don't I? I mean, it's so obvious I don't know how people can miss it."

Bill laughed. "Because they want to, Man. Nobody likes to think. It's too hard. People just like to go in the way the rest of the crowd is moving. It's a shame they don't see the shepherd's leading the flock to the slaughter house."

"Amen to that," said Osgood.

"Black sheep, Ozzy, that's us."

"Marching to the beat of a whole different orchestra," Osgood laughed.

Bill smirked, "Still, shame we can't get laid."

"Amen, kiddo, amen."

- Bernie Kovacs

The Daily Grind

I have nestled with grief
in my muddy travails
that are commonplace in a life:
there were three rosy barbs
belly-up in the tank,
and a thumb tip
cut off by a knife.

And that coolant refuses
to stay in my car
making driving an awkward adventure;
but that tear
in my contact my eye didn't see
established
too painful a torture.

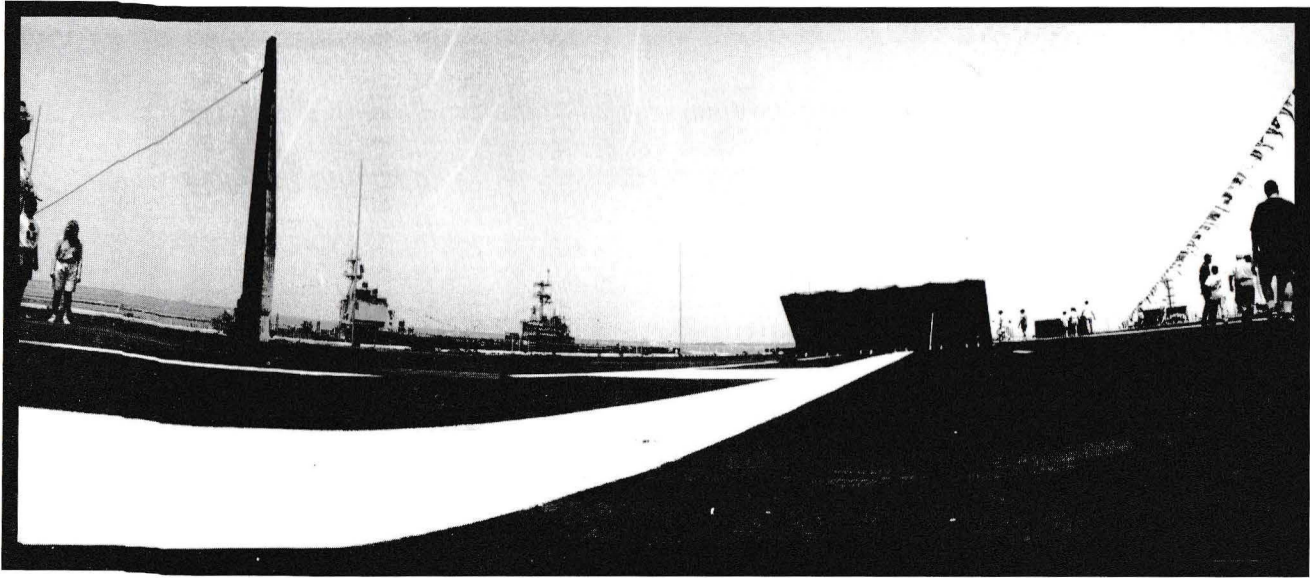
And my dogs have no concept
of decent manners,
howling heartless at three when
I'm tired, and
apparently unbeknownst
to my stomach and me
the milk had already expired.

And there's nightmares
of having to read
unabridged
the collected novels of Hugo,
but that's hardly a worry
when toilet paper's not found
immediately after you go.

So it seems I am hampered
no greater or worse
than anyone else in this race,
unless by a natural freak
it occurs, fits of joy
cold-cock me in
the face.

- Sean Flannery

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Naked and Often Wrong

Our boredom makes us susceptible to vice,
As we read and react we recall
that we never saw
the writing on the wall
It's on your tongue
 and burning
It's in the neon-day glow
 and grinning
Points make truth duller
Blunt-ended it starves the bellies of the hungry,
but
there are only so many poses you can throw to a
 Polaroid
before the shutter locks you in.
It steals your time,
 you don't care.
Inside the snap shot world
you're content to roll the holy papers.
Not me
 because I move between flashpoints
The trigger that moves me
 is the hairpin of my mind.
I wish my back was stronger,
I wish my heart was smaller,
Then I wouldn't feel guilty

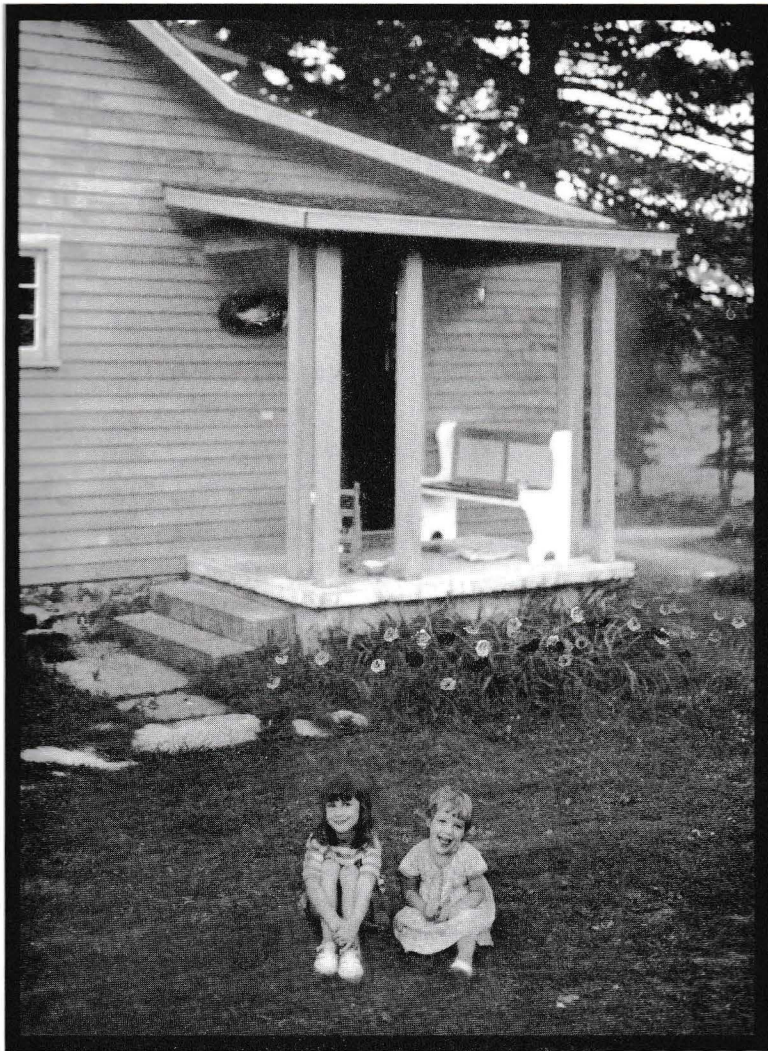
- *Jim Warner*

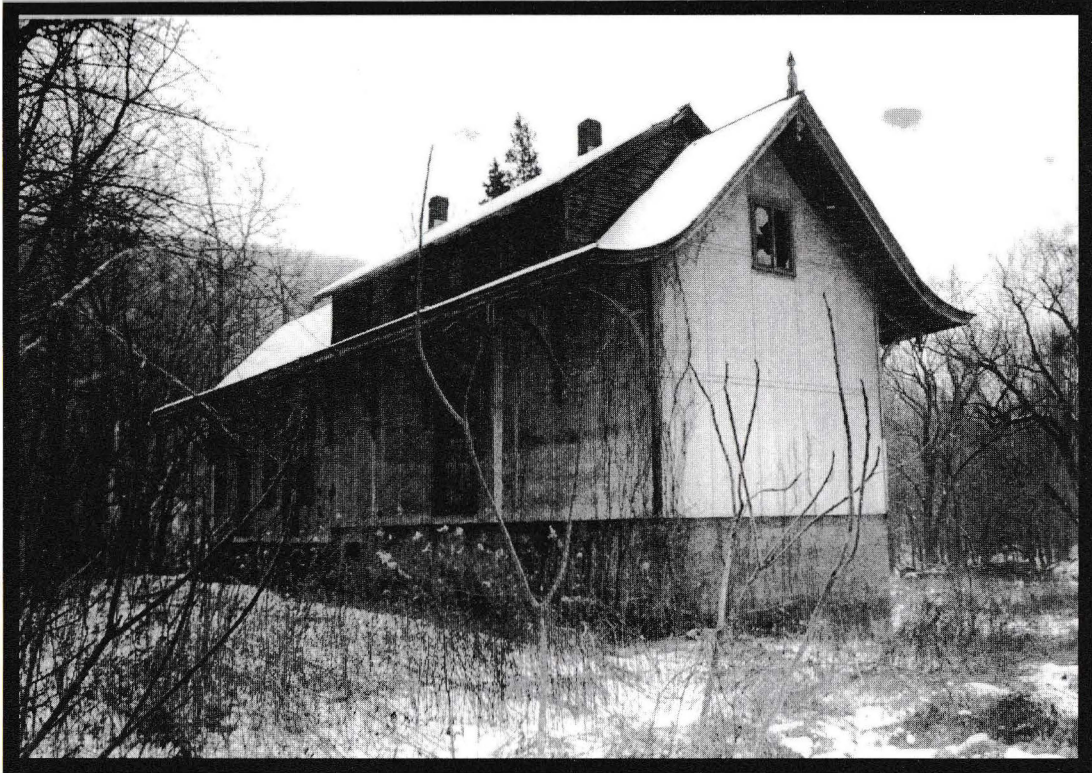
I
have never been valued
for more than the sum total
of my existing bodily parts:
the rise of my nipples
through my shirt in the cold
the curve of my buttocks
through silk panties
the swell of my hips
the caress of my hands
my fingers.

I
have never been valued
for my central *cerebral sulcus*
connecting left and right hemispheres
electricity synapsing endlessly
nerves reaching their tentacles
through my spinal cord to rest
in every dorsal ganglion peripheral
to my most celebrated feature
concealed between plush thighs.

I
have never been valued
for what I actually am:
a phenomenally interconnected
matrix of chromosomes
positively negatively neutrally charged
molecules cells organs pathways
working in miraculous unity to form
another fully functional fucking female.

- *Karen J. Arnold Ziagos*







Ghosts

Mornings were the worst, dawning gray and ominous, creating shadows where in the night there had only been comforting pools of darkness. But the nights were endless, too, though, especially after Lydia left, and Henry would often roam the upstairs, from room to room, searching for something to soothe himself. But he never found anything, and was usually awake in bed to greet the colorless, indifferent dawn.

He never went downstairs at night, even when the cat would cry for food, and often felt exasperated for not having a kitchen on the second floor. Being the richest man in South Wynoning, he often told himself that he could well afford to have a kitchen installed on his second floor if he wanted to, no matter what the neighbors would say. It isn't as though they could stop giving him their business.

He learned fifty versions of solitaire. His nephew had given him a book on that once; it was the only book he had never finished. But he didn't really like to bring the cards out much, anymore; the silence was so oppressive he would talk to himself, and upon his own conversation, become embarrassed.

The nightstand by his bed contained a .45 magnum. He told the police that he had received threats, and with his money, they believed him. He was fascinated with it at first, practicing his stance, shooting pigeons in the backyard. He taught Lydia how to fire it: load, cock, squeeze. They invariably made love after each lesson. They would bring it to bed with them, joking all the way, he having her

massage his body with it, prone on the bed: he wanted to feel the cold steel between his shoulderblades. Then he would turn over, and she would make tracks in his great belly with it, ending at his mouth, sliding it in, pulling it out, in a cold fellatio. She could have killed him then, and that was perhaps the thrill of it, knowing his life was in her hands, as surely as was his being. She knew that too, and must have decided it was too easy. There were mornings now when he would take the gray thing and play the fellatio again, with his own hand on the trigger, and then, shuddering, pull away, toss it back into the nightstand and wrench himself out of bed.

Thursday mornings he went for groceries, staples: milk, bread, ground beef, egg noodles. He often looked at the slick coupon inserts in the paper, dishes like Quick and Easy Stir Fry seeming so festive and exotic at first; he would later decide that rousing the bravery to try something new required even more effort than preparing meatloaf from scratch, and he would crack two eggs into his well-worn glass mixing bowl. It was different with Lydia, who had an adventurous spirit, and would make esoteric dishes often, filling the kitchen with strange aromas of a South American fish or Asian vegetable. Or she would bake bread, the clean, starchy smell permeating the air. He would watch her with her with the dough: punch, knead, let rise. Punch, knead, let rise. When she punched, it seemed as though her tiny hand had been swallowed up by the living mass of dough, only to rise again, and conquer it.

Now, when he was at the market, alone, everyone acknowledged him with a curt nod, having met him at one funeral or another. He would remember odd things about their relatives: a

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cherrywood coffin, perhaps, or the man who wanted to be buried in a full tuxedo, including tails and top hat. Henry championed the people who viewed their funeral as their last great hurrah--he could imagine his with caviar and champagne, and formal evening dress required. Perhaps a raffle for his paintings. The newspapers would drop by, certainly, considering who he was, and somebody would have to make a statement to the press about what a loss the community had suffered. They would speak about Lydia and him, the only true love of his life, and what a beautiful team they had made. Lydia might even send a nice wreath from Paris, under an alias of course, but Henry would go to his grave in peace knowing that she had given him one last wistful thought.

She had always loved to watch him paint, marveling, she said, at what he could do with his hands. Most men are geniuses in their minds, she had told him, not in their hands. He had taken her once to New York City, where they had strolled Museum Mile and prowled the Met: she had stood in front of Van Gogh's *Irises* in that suprisingly small gallery, within inches of the work, seeing each brush stroke, each subtle combination of color, and cried, overwhelmed by the genius and the beauty of it all, transgressing decades of war, politics, crime. They had bought a reprint in the museum shop before returning home, which now hung in Henry's sitting area. He would often use it to make conversation with an exceptionally distraught family. Henry had not yet buried someone who had resorted to any extraordinary form of self-mutilation, and so Van Gogh served well to illustrate the juxtaposition

of the tragic and the beautiful. If nothing else, the talk served to lull them into enough of a catatonic state to face the viewing. While a body was being waked, Henry would idle unobtrusively in a corner, keeping a perceptive eye on the event to curb a potential tragedy. He had only had a corpse sit up once, and once was quite enough, as the dead subject's eighty-two year old sister began to shriek, "He's alive! He's alive!" sending all the respectful into a state of frenzied panic, and subsequently sending the aforementioned sister to the hospital with an aneurism. She was waked two days later.

Henry would usually paint after that part of his workday, choosing his color schematic from whatever interesting clothing he had seen in his parlor that day. Regardless of the traditional decorum for funeral dress, there was usually someone who felt it was his or her duty to masquerade as a Bird of Paradise, selecting an eye-catching tie, hat, or dress. He found, after many years, that it is expected that someone fill the role, like the drunk at brunch. These were hidden customs, the subtexts one never quite learned in Mortuary Science school. This amused him, however, and along the baseboards of the upstairs room where he painted leaned inspired studies of the funeral wardrobes of many residents of South Wynoning. His favorite was a portrait of Lydia (really just an explosion of electric blue, in a vaguely womanly shape), upon which he always meditated briefly, and thus received an excellent recollection of her face, her smell, her unfailing wit.

In fact, Henry's entire art collection served to chronicle the funerals of some of the more memorable of South Wynoning's deceased: people like Hank Gallagher, the town recluse who froze to death in his own home one winter, and whose body

was not discovered until the spring thaw, when the stench drifted towards a popular fishing hole; like Amy Cassidy, the 14-year-old daughter of Jerry Cassidy, the baker, who had watched her grow more pale and thin with each passing year, until watching the inevitable occur this past fall; like Emily Sliwinski, perhaps the most famous of south Wynoning's dead, who was shot by her husband in front of their two small children more than 20 years ago because John Sliwinski thought Emily was sleeping with their welfare caseworker. John swore he would come back for the caseworker someday, too. Henry was often approached by the town gossips when a news-making death such as these would occur. Surely you have spoken to the families? they would ask him. "Yes," he would reply. "Did they expect this-- what were their last words--will they get a lot of money?" the gossips would want to know.

"The family is distraught," Henry would reply, and walk away. He witnessed too much sorrow to allow his knowledge to become food for the rumor mill; worse yet was to stand by as the same people would gather and wail to whatever God had allowed these things to happen. A certain sadness lay everywhere in Henry's home, even, as though the house itself could sigh heavily from bearing the sorrow of decades of grieving families. And yet, it was Lydia's spirit that truly possessed the house, giving a new cold starkness to his embalming room, a feeling of despair to the hushed parlor. It was, perhaps, because Lydia had made the house as much *hers* as it was *his*. When she had first met Henry eighteen years ago, he was living alone in the three-story stone structure his

great-grandfather had built in the 19th century. She was twenty-two; he, thirty-eight. South Wynoning had labeled Henry *strange* -- a not entirely undeserved title for a never married, overweight loner who made a living embalming dead people. But he came to Lydia's art exhibit when she graduated from the local college, leaving her no choice but to tell him that people said her paintings could wake the dead. To his surprise, she laughed, and when he asked her to tell him about her work over coffee, she accepted. And when he told her that his old home, which had once housed the owner of the local coal company and his many servants, needed an artist's eye to fix it up, she could not refuse. It was only months later, after she had renovated several rooms in the house and been presented with a 3-carat diamond ring, that Lydia discovered Henry's secret, artistic talent, hidden in a room on the third floor.

In the next eighteen years, Lydia was to discover many more things, as well: things like how many socks he wore in a day (four pairs), what his favorite subject was in school (biology, because of the frog dissections), the music he would listen to while embalming someone (Vivaldi). As time went on, there were the deeper secrets: how Henry was tormented by classmates in junior high; how he was truly afraid to be near a corpse once the light was turned off; how pigeon shooting contributed to his arousal; how Lydia was the first woman to love him. Henry reciprocated her interest, learning how she did her hair, what she liked to eat for breakfast, how to rub her temples when she had a headache. He watched her constantly, not out of jealousy but love, treasuring each moment he witnessed her taking care of the flowers, petting the cat, baking her bread. And when Lydia wanted to take

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painting again by driving to Philadelphia once a week for art lessons, he rejoiced that there was another way he could make her happy, encouraging her to fulfill her desires, follow her dreams, go where her heart takes her, until that painful day that her heart took her and her art instructor to Paris, and the last thing Henry was to discover was a note taped to one of the kitchen cabinets stating that she would not return, and to please feed the cat.

Upon reading the note, Henry at first dove for the telephone, feeling that there should be some formal procedure, someone he should call, for this type of emergency, as though Lydia had choked or drowned. But there was nothing to be done, none of the business that occupies the family of the deceased. And how could he tell someone--anyone--of Lydia's abandonment? Images of the junior high tormentors returned, except this time they were disguised as the town gossips. *Did you ever think she could really love you--are you so stupid you couldn't tell she was sleeping around -- don't you know how to pick out a good woman?* Henry sat in his kitchen doubled over, his tear-stained face in his fleshy hands. At least he had prepared for Lydia's death--he had thought that someday she may die first, that he may have to bury her. Indeed, it felt as though she were dead, being lost from him forever. Henry stopped suddenly and lifted his head. He need not endure the scorn. He could engross himself in other details. He had found the perfect solution.

Lydia's funeral was a quiet affair, closed casket (teakwood, of course), with pictures of her and floral displays arrayed in tribute throughout the rooms. He was surprised how easy it all was: a few bills to George the coroner, his old friend, to

spare Henry the agony of an autopsy; a phone call to the paper; final arrangements for the plot and the headstone, which he had bought years ago anyway. Some sandbags in the casket provided the proper weight, and after a brief chat with Lucy, the waitress at the local diner, the story of Lydia's untimely fall down the grand staircase, which presided over the foyer of their home, soon spread across town.

With all the chatter, talk of a ghost in Henry's home soon surfaced. It was noted that Henry made a daily trek to his late wife's grave, bringing with him not only flowers, but a small stool (for which he was comically too large, but this only earned him more pity), so that he could sit, sometimes for three quarters of an hour, and hold a one way conversation with Lydia, extolling his love for her, telling her how much he missed her touch, her smell, her laugh. He would raise his own face to the heavens, as he had seen scores of family do, not to pray for Lydia's soul, but to beg for the end of the punishment of his own. Soon guests at the funeral home began reporting strange events: cold spots, the ticking of the "unfixable" antique clock on the mantel, the faint sound of a woman's laughter. Some of the women would tell Henry they felt Lydia's presence, thinking he could find some solace in the fact that her spirit was still with him. "Love is stronger than death," they would quote for him. "Jealousy cruel as the grave," he would finish, and they would walk away clucking their tongues, later relating how Henry had truly become a broken man. Others speculated that he blamed himself for her death: had they fought? had he pushed her? surely Lydia had gone up and down those stairs a million times in eighteen years. But little credence was given to such mullings, with large, quiet Henry reminding so many people of a wounded animal, an

elephant perhaps. He *painted* in his spare time for God's sake. The man was gentle as a lamb. "Have you ever heard him talk about Van Gogh?" the people would ask one another. Such a sensitive soul.

On this particular day, Henry had completed the routine of dressing, shopping, and grave visiting, and drove his dark Lincoln to his doctor's office before going home to prepare for the afternoon's wake. It was a clear October day, less gray than most, but with the stillness and chill that preceeded winter. "Henry Blake," he announced to the receptionist, and she nodded and placed a check by his name, while he scanned the room for an available seat. He would have preferred the long blue couch he usually took, but that was occupied an ashen-faced man and woman, and her handbag. Instead, he settled into a wooden armchair, which was far too small for his girth, and his hips and legs pressed into the colonial-style pattern, growing redder and more marked by the moment. Henry studied the couple on the couch. He wondered what they were seeing the doctor about: heart trouble, arthritis, cancer? It occurred to him that they may be his next clients. The man stared at some faraway point in the ceiling, his mouth slightly ajar; his wife (or sister, Henry couldn't tell) kept snapping her black pocketbook open and shut. Shut. Open. Shut. Open. Shut. She peered at him over the top of her thick brown glasses.

"How's your ghosts?" she asked.

"Ghosts?" he replied.

"Ghosts. You got them, don't you?" She was looking at him curiously; as curiously, Henry thought, as he should look at her for asking such a peculiar question.

"Er--well--my ghosts--"

"What do they do, anyway? Do they move stuff?"

"No--"

"Make noise?"

"Well, no,er--"

"Then how do you know you got ghosts if they don't do nothing?"

"I didn't say--"

"Now, when I saw your wife this morning, that's when I knew you had ghosts."

Henry decided that the couple was seeing the doctor about senility. "This morning?" he said smiling. "Oh, I'm afraid you must be thinking about someone else. You see, my wife passed on about six months ago."

"I know that, fool." Henry suddenly thought he didn't need his blood pressure taken today. "I know who you are. Henry Blake. You buried my brother. Albert Gunner? The one with the Cadillac?"

"Yes, of course." Henry did not wish to press the issue with a mentally unstable old woman. "Have a good day."

"She was out watering the flowers, in that big white hat she always wore. She looked peaceful." With the old woman still chattering on about Lydia, Henry slowly, calmly, raised himself free of the chair slats, nodded to the woman, rescheduled his appointment, and left.

As Henry settled into the comfort of his Lincoln his blood began to drive back into the Colonial tattoo on his legs and hips. They ached and thudded dully, and he could visualize his blood crashing against vessel walls like an angry tidal wave. His brow soon joined the rhythm. He drove on, seeing yet not seeing, every heartbeat bringing on a surge of pain, his mind's eye fascinated and tortured by the ludicrous image of

in her large white summer hat and flowing dress, watering the barren flowerbeds in the midst of October. Of ghosts he knew nothing; he only knew that his wife now lived with a young man in Paris and no longer used the name Lydia. Paris was hardly heaven.

He pulled into his driveway. The respectful would be arriving in less than two hours. There was much to do. As quickly as he could move, he stumbled up the steps to his large patio, panting, wheezing, groping for his keys, trying to see through the mind's eye vision that still pursued him, Lydia in her long dress and large white hat, Lydia, now as large as life before him, clutching him, shaking him, squeezing her small fingers into the soft flesh of his arm, Lydia.

"Henry... Henry... you shouldn't attempt those stairs so quickly. Henry. My god, Henry, breathe. Breathe." And through the thudding behind his brow he felt her, saw her, smelled her. Lydia.

"Lydia? What are you--" he started, then slid himself onto a patio chair. She knelt beside him.

"Careful, Henry. Your pressure." He noticed cars along the road beginning to slow, people stretching their necks to get a look at the ghost of Lydia Blake tending to her husband. "I've come back, is all. I missed you."

"Lydia--" he felt a hotness rise in his face. Two cars had pulled over to the side of the road, the passengers openly staring. "Lydia, please help me inside."

And she did, and she helped him upstairs, and she helped him undress, and she helped him into bed, where she cried and he cried and they embraced and kissed, and they made love, as

he gun
he
illed



Reed's Bay - Melinda Sorber

Vicarious Reminders

In that maize-striped bathrobe you never
wore marked
"John Evans" I take on your implacable
metabolism,
the white flaring grandeur of your hair,
that seat behind
the wheel of your olive green 1973 Buick.

I feel Missy, the excitable Pomeranian,
dancing at my feet
while I wear a Phillies hat, carrying that
old battery-operated radio musing
on the observations of Ashburn, Wheeler,
Calas, and Musser.
I sit on that rocking chair on the porch
and see above
the hedges every time I hold up my head.

Holding your head up with those black-
rimmed glasses
wasn't always easy. They saw King Coal
rape this
valley of peasants; witnessed your
impenetrable house
dishonored, violated, burglarized; and
beheld that cancer

that tore through your body with
unmistakable precision -- a
discerning brushfire on drout-ridden
plains.

Missy and you went for that walk years
ago now,
with that bad cough dolefully apologizing;
and yet
the batteries are still in that radio rusting
a flaky firmness on Great-Grandma's
fingers to be changed.

- Sean Flannery

Kiss the Edge

All of us live on the brink of insanity,
A precipice clothed in darkness,
Shadowed, mysterious, misunderstood.
So many run from the edge.
More fools they,
For they are naked and unarmed,
They turn their back on an inner enemy.
The edge will catch them.
It wields a Viking axe, and Indian arrow,
An ancient golden scimitar.

Still others jump from the edge,
Directly into its gapping maw.
They fall, screaming, hysterically happy.
More fools they,
For they have joined their inner enemy.
They are encircled by its abusive
 comforting arms.
The Edge laughs with them.
Blood drips from its Egyptian dagger, its
 English sword,
Its boomerang upon which are carved
 aborigine warriors.

Not I!

I embrace the Edge, and caress its velvety
substance.

I warm it with my heat,

As it warms me with the sweet taste of
oblivion.

I exult in it, filling it with my own light.

I praise the taste of Spanish poison.

I breath the intoxicating ecstasy of
American gunpowder.

I slide my fingers across a brutal staff,

Pausing only to rub the symbols made of
Incan gold.

More fool I.

- *Larue Stackhouse*

Untitled

You've pushed
and pulled

relentlessly
hypnotically
without moving.

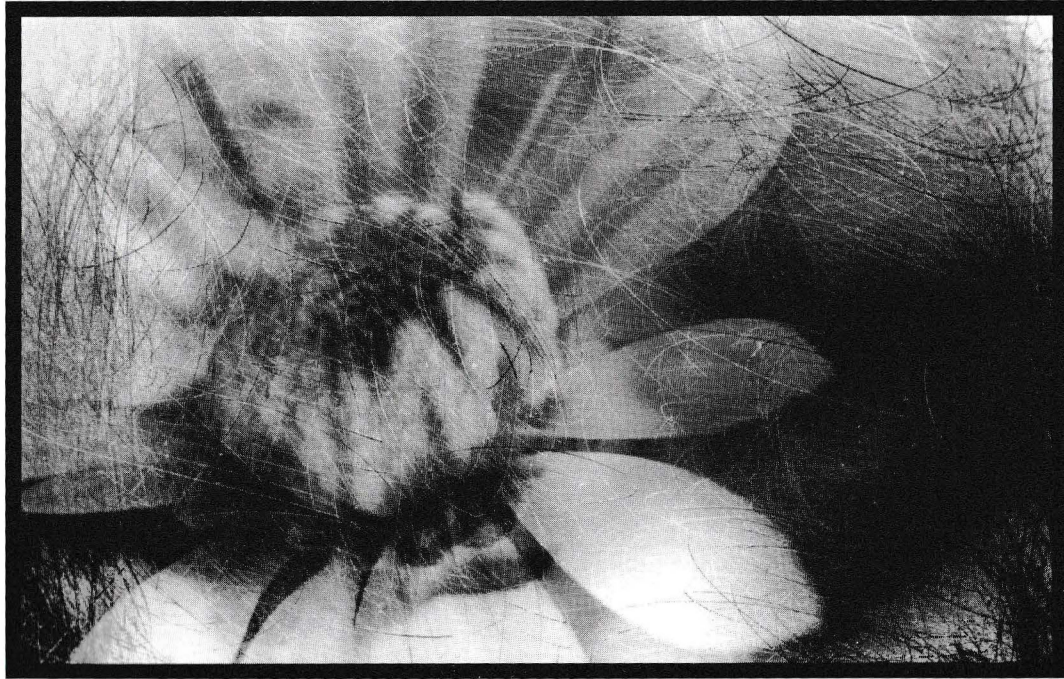
Cordially, you dismount
my useless chain mail

and as I watch your life
bead out onto my thighs

Soberly

I plan.

- *Marisa Rae*



Day Dream - Rebecca Mason

Too Fool Hardy For Homer

Once,
when an animal order arrived,
it seemed the distributor misread
the fax and packaged
green and ribbon snakes together.
They were displayed in separate tanks
at our store and would come packaged
individually so we could deposit
the parcel in the tank.
That day, something else took place.
My T-shirted arm
was destined to descend into that long
sack
attempting to sift through twenty of
the furtively wriggling beasts,
judging tail from head and
green from ribbon in the depths
of that slithy convention.
My godlike protection was hardly
a helm of invisibility or
winged sandals lifting me above
my indignant foes, but rather
a white garden glove
bespattered interspersedly with
with pink flowers,

green swirling stems,
and hard-worn remnants of
cockatiel pecks,
hamster gnawings, and
turtle wastes.

So my hand began to subside
encountering forked tongues
determining scents on my wrist;
an occasional coiling 'round
one of my fingers;
and a tempered bite on a
gloved knuckle by some appalled beast.
Unable to accomplish such a task
in a pit of peril,
I resolved to take my chances in the light.
Upon procuring a large mass
in my grasp I ascended
from the kibisis with fourteen or so
snakes firmly embedded into some wrinkle
or fold
of my hand and wrist.
I lifted my hand in jubulation
and distress to find
the Gorgon's head revisited,
righteously stoning
all restless customers
with awe.

- Sean Flannery

Walking After Class

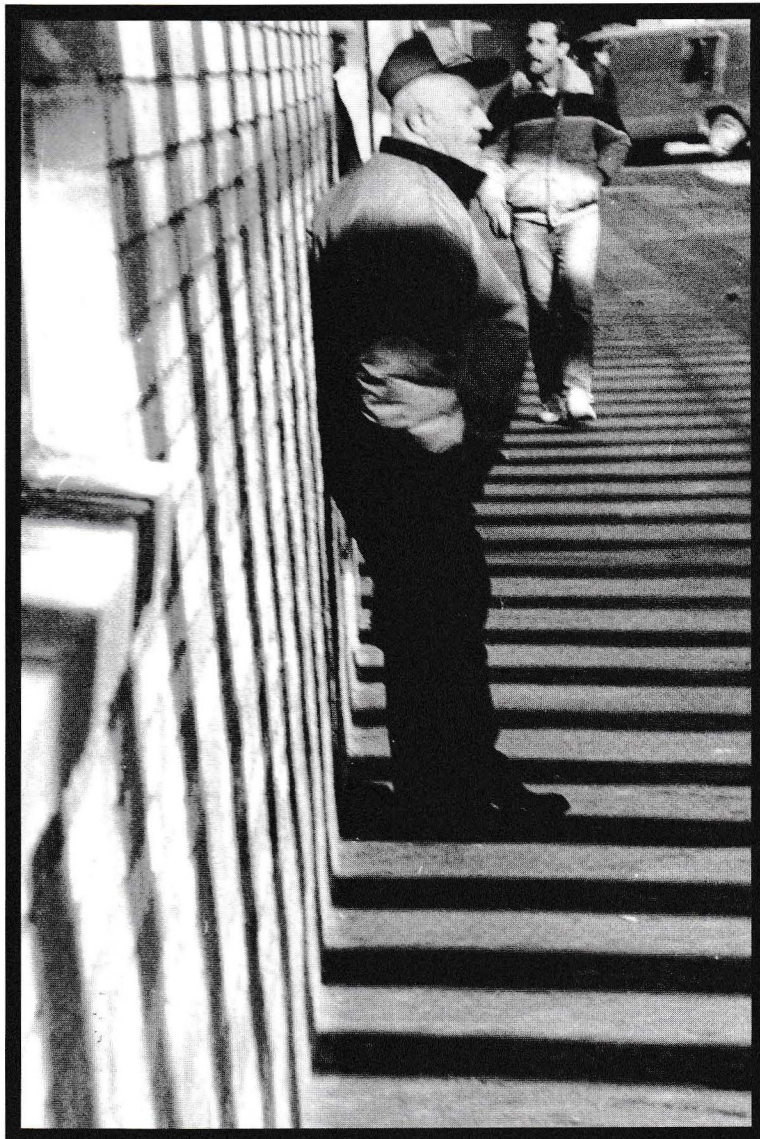
Next to you
Lungs full of smoke
I exhale
 a long, stinking cloud of brimstone
That dances through
 the chill autumn air
Drifting in lazy, nicotine circles
 through my breath
I'm full of fire
 full of fire
And ash
And coal
 and crippled Hephaestus' forge
Won't stop pounding in my chest

I'm full of

hunger and flame
 and
fire and lust
 and
nothing comes out
but smoke and air
with no words in it

Deformed Vulcan beating in my bosom
a slow, rhythmic hammering
like the hard flaps
 of descending wings
forging out the bowels of my breast
hunchback rhythm and lust
and all I can vent is smoke and air
as the club footed beast in my breast
bellows
and cries....

- *Bernie Kovacs*



- Jason Bass



Dear Ms Sexton,

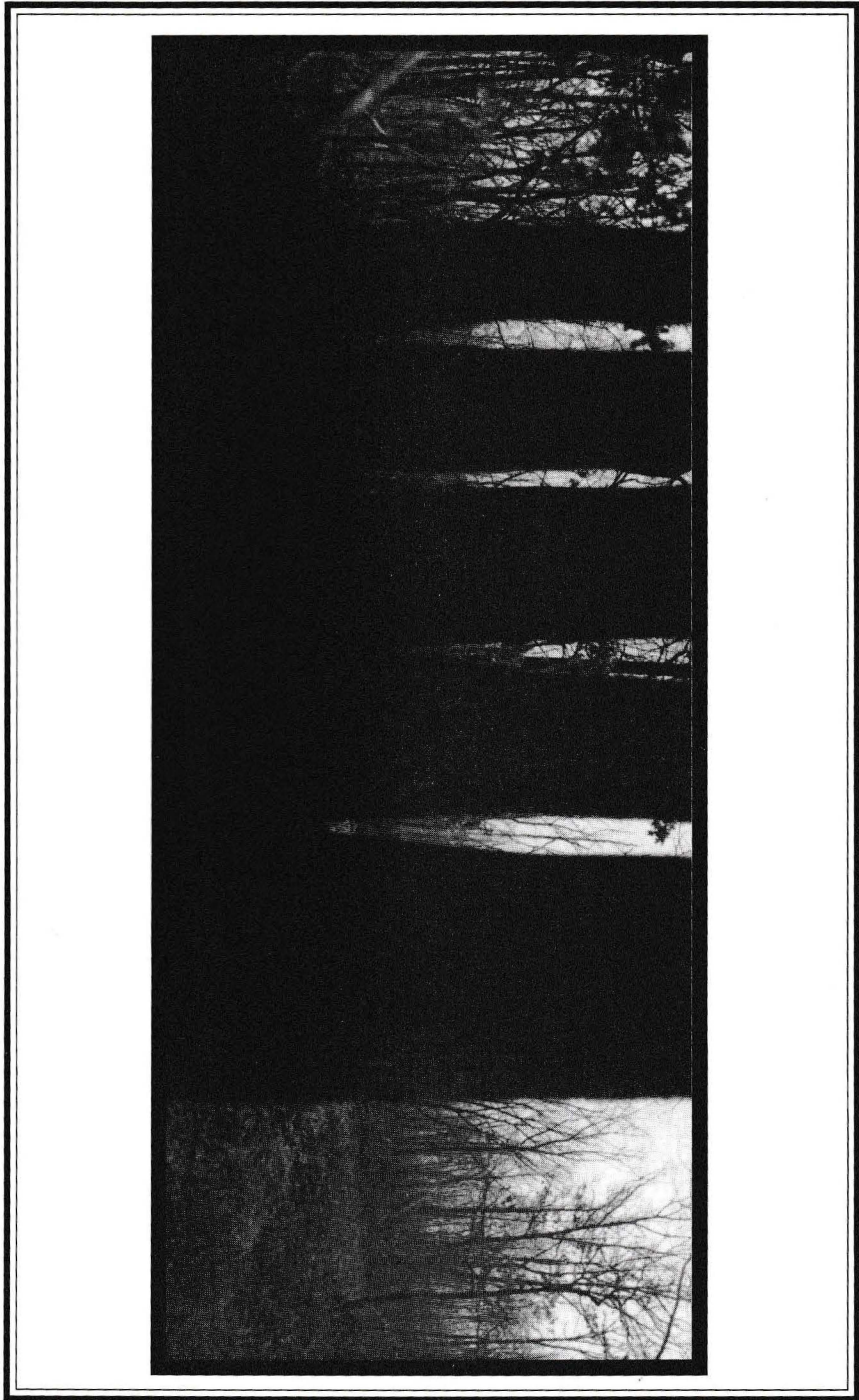
You were more than this, this book:
"The Complete Works of..."
with forward by an authorized biographer
who speaks without poetry of your agony,
and the twisting of your spirit as
a door to the beyond opened
and pulled you in-out, in-out between
reality and illusion;
How you sought an end in death yet
were denied the sin of suicide always
were brought back against your will.
So you wrote lines, created stanzas
with which to free yourself
to release the claws of life you created art
Yet how is it that you - Poet -
and singer of stories; Recounter of pain
have been captured a final time,
denied death through immortality,
vaccumed into existence once more,
here in "definitive text,"
and an authorized biography,
rarely read,
encased within a bookshelf.

- Nicole Smith

My Own Colonus

There she stands on the porch her masses of
pads and fur
barely cognizant of her surroundings,
blinded by the
inherent ignorance of her sheepdog breed.
Walking into doors, people, fences, other dogs,
her own
mortality, yet defying that porch, howling in
accordance
with the shrill
whine of the siren: (the red whirl of the engine,
the
weeping halo of the ambulance, the crested flag
of the
cruiser).
She never sees on that porch but only
solves the riddles of
their pain, traipsing the yard, healing per each
step,
hallowing with every elegiac sigh that can never
salve her own blindness. Each cry gnaws at the
body 'neath
her coat that will soon
stand alone, a tribute to this beast of
commiseration that
then will simply heal with
a touch.

- Sean Flannery





WILKES UNIVERSITY
MANUSCRIPT