SIGNATURES
a magazine of art and literature - 1995

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CREATIVITY. It is a gift that exists within all of us. During our childhood years, we expressed some form of creativity such as scribbling with crayons, drawing stick figures with pencils, or writing our names in graffiti lettering. As we grew older, matured, and assumed more responsibilities, it became rare that we received the opportunity to scribble or draw or graffiti. Fortunately, many of our classmates have found the time to scribble, draw, and/or graffiti through their contributions to this magazine.

Without a doubt, the works presented in this edition of Signatures Magazine vividly reflect the talent and spirit of our fellow classmates. Every year, Signatures Magazine receives an overwhelming amount of student entries, which are incredible works of art. Unfortunately, we can not publish each and every entry that the magazine receives. However, I think that you will agree that the talent represented in the preceding pages are phenomenal . . . PHENOMINAL works of art, photography, and literature. Therefore, I congratulate the students published in this year’s edition of Signatures Magazine.

With the explosion of imaging technology, we were able to acquire and publish a rendition of the historical, and original, Temple Scroll from the legendary Dead Sea Scrolls. The ability to present the Temple Scroll in such distinct detail is just a small example of how far our generation can leap with technology at our command. This rendition of the Temple Scroll has not been seen by anyone . . . until now. Therefore, it is with great pleasure that we present to you a rendition of the historical, and original, Temple Scroll.

Fortunately, this year’s publication would not have been possible without the interest and assistance of the staff, the contributors, the advisor, the magazine’s secretarial assistant, and you, the readers. Thank you! On a special note, I would like to express a special THANK YOU to the magazine staff. Honestly, this endeavor was plenty of hard work, and sometimes organized chaos. However, your overt dedication, consistent interest, and motivating stamina to continue with the magazine went far and beyond your call of duty: you are appreciated . . . .

Finally, I would like to dedicate this issue to past and present staff, contributors, and advisors who propelled Signatures Magazine through the years. This one’s for you . . . .

God Bless,

Christopher Redwood
Editor
Along the Tracks
—by J. A. Cantor
Masks

Behind one's face, another face weighs, Guarded by layers of rights and days. All actors within shielded by stealth, Stand guard over one's delicate self.

These performers hide pending the play, Dancing and singing all night and day. Switching control of one's conscious pride, Putting their unique talents in stride.

A Barbarian lives deep within, Fighting the terrors like Gunga Din. Full of vitality, guile and might, Protects the true soul however slight.

To balance the power, lives the Saint. Virtue unwavered, never to taint. Finds only light that evil shades dark, Where kindness and passion hits the mark.

A Jester supports this growing band; Joking, make merry, with toys in hand. Eyeing the world with ludicrous wit, Showing all what we are made up with.

Weeping within, a timid babe crawls; Uncertain, unguided, scared of all. Wishing for help, coping with self doubt, Anxiety builds pending a shout.

Defending my soul depends on me, Of the sum of masks varies from thee. I am the gross of these thespians; From which you view my players within.  

—Ralph F. Donatelli, Jr.

Infant

Everyone has a small youngster inside, Wanting to sob, shudder or hide. Physical size can't protect you forthwith, Regardless of age, sex, nor wit.

Pending the gathering our babe withdraws, Not to show face, not to have cause. Shedding a tear will destroy all that's built, Exposing the weakness and guilt.

Forced into seclusion to hide a flaw, Our puny being tries withdraw, A courage to retain sanity's strength, For an instant of obscure length.

Once every moment a baby is born, Some out of love, some out of scorn. Regardless of purpose souls will survive, Facing a life never to die.

—Ralph F. Donatelli, Jr.

Jester

The joker is wild, basic and carefree, With merely one task, protect only thee. The objective is clear, simple and neat, To bend reality around ones feet.

Life's daily haggles with torture and stuff, Some very peaceful, others very tough. Wave of one's arm, an attitude to match, Relieves all the tension before you snap.

Accessories include laughter and mirth, Developing skill beginning at birth. Disarming the mightiest of foes alive, the Fool guarantees the spirits survives.

The talent of dolts is hard to master, Timing and grace to avoid disaster. A well trained buffoon will balance the load, To protect one's ego from outside cold.

—Ralph F. Donatelli, Jr.
A Day in the Life

The day is born of freedom,
   Early morning and a time for introspection.
The woman walks in the morning grass
   And sings with the life of dawn.
Taking in the quietness of the hour—
   Planning her day ahead—
Remembering her place in Nature's garden.

The day is born of triumph,
   Early afternoon and a task well done.
The woman strides the pavement
   And smiles with the excitement of her success.
   Basking in her results—
   Tasting her own potential—
   Convinced that she can move mountains.

The day is born of strength and grace,
   Later in the day and an hour of effort.
The woman stretches her liquid muscles
   And glories in the healthy machine of her body.
   Feeling like she could go on forever—
   Nurturing her own stamina—
   Knowing that she embodies beauty.

The day is ripped apart,
   Evening and a "hey there, hot mama... wanna do me?"
The woman tenses and draws her body inward
   And sickens with the fear in her stomach.
   Feeling shameful and naked—
   Thinking that she shouldn't have walked this way—
   Trying desperately to remember the beauty, the mountains, the garden.

The day and night stand behind her,
   Now is the time for action and challenge.
The woman makes a stand and feeds on the wild power
   Of adrenaline and her anger.
She is the mountain immovable—
   Guarding the garden of truth and innocent beauty—
   Knowing that she is strong and enduring.

—Molly K. Gregas
I Know It

It was a long time ago
When I was handed the scroll
That determined the rest of my life
A scroll so white, so innocent
The antithesis of what it produced
But I lived the life anyway
Hey, I had heard of promised land
I searched far and wide and long
Gripping the scroll in my hand

I used it as shelter when I was cold
I used it as nourishment when I was hungry
I used it as a torch when I was blind
I used it as a map when I was lost

But it gave me no warmth
It gave me no food
It gave me no light
And certainly no direction

For when I reached my life
It was all burned and scarred
Dreams crucified on burning stakes
That once were the pillars of confidence
Souls splattered on the earth
Blood soaked into the dirt
And pools of dark hatred
Reflecting my haggard face

I stumbled around my life
Trying to find a way out
But fire blocked my way
The flames reaching high
To keep me in my life
As the heat began to rise

I looked at the scroll again
Trying to read the words
That had determined my life
But I was suddenly unable
To decipher the meaning of the scroll
The meaning of my life lost
On a scroll I could not read
Lost forever, but always in my hand

I tried losing the scroll
In the wall of flames
But my captors only laughed
And returned the scroll

Perfectly white and cryptic
So still lost in my life
I looked up towards the sky
Hoping for a miracle
To happen from above

And then you appeared before me
Brighter than all the flames around
And you had a scroll in hand
And as you walked through the fire
And ever closer to my life
I saw you smile
And I knew a miracle had come

We sat down and talked
You giving me more hope
Than I thought was allowed
You showed me your scroll
And I tried to read it

I could
I did
I knew why you were here

But as I passed my scroll
Into your waiting hands
I hoped you were far wiser
Than I had been in my life
And as you tried to read my scroll
I saw your face cloud
And you turned to me smiling
And told me you couldn't read my scroll

And that scared you
You walked away
Toward the flames
You passed through the flames
And as I tried to follow I burned
And could not pass through
You left me alone and burned
But cold sadness soon engulfed me
And again I looked toward the sky
Hoping for any miracle

Years went by as I lived in my life
Growing older faster than before
I could see people walking
But always outside the flame
Looking in, but being blinded
By the brightness my life caused
All that passed knew I was there
But none were brave to come by me

People all had their scrolls in hand
Looking around, but not at, my life
A landmark to remember
But always too painful to enter

I lay down to try to sleep
And my eyes finally close
As I drift off to my only escape
I saw the green ground, blue sky
And I saw where other people go
But then a flame nipped me on the ear
Kicking me out of my own dreams
And I cried
And I cried
My tears dampened the ground
With their spent up emotion
And I cried
And I cried
The ground was wet with my mind
Softening with each drop
And I cried
And I cried
The tears started to form puddles
And then formed streams that shot out
Into the wall of flame
A hiss sounded as emotion and fate
Combined at the edge of my life

And I cried
And I cried
The wall of flame was weakening

As I spilt more of my mind
And it was working
I saw an opening in the wall
I dashed toward the opening
But the flames were quick
But I was determined
I slipped through just as
The border of my life closed
I am on a new road
And I have no scroll
I am alone, and I have no where to go
But without a scroll, I'm free
Free to live the life I want
And as I walk on down the road
The wall of flame a dim light on the horizon
I smile
It's my time
And I know it

—Jeffrey X. Izel
The dust settled slowly; some of it on his shoes. The sun was no longer at its peak; the shimmering glow had softened, but the dead heat still remained to sullen the hour. She was sweeping the mud path that stretched from her court-yard to the wall, which divided the two grass patches that she like to call her gardens. The grass had shriveled in the abrasive heat and most of the flowers had wilted away. Only a bunch of chrysanthemums clung bravely to the soil in one corner. Rubble from mortar shells lay strewn all over the courtyard. The attack had been stronger than usual this morning, but the people of Mostar had gotten used to it.

He stood by his outpost at the wall. The early morning attack had taken its toll on him and the bags under his eyes showed it. The stubble was a long way from a full fledged beard and the short, almost spiky hair lent credibility to his semblance of a soldier in fatigues. And fatigue was all over him. The last remains of his formerly smoldering cigarette dangled from the side of his lips. It was the last one he had and would probably be the last one he’d have in a long time. The Serbs didn’t even let humanitarian aid into the besieged city — and cigarettes were almost considered ammunition. He watched the dust settling on his boots from the corner of his eye. Life was hell in Bosnia, and the people were almost resigned to it.

She continued to sweep, raising clouds of dust as she went along. The lines on her forehead were deep like the Miljacka that ran a little ways away from her home and criss-crossed the main city of Sarajevo fifty miles to the northeast. But the Miljacka was no Danube, and Sarajevo was no Venice. Two years of war with the Serbian forces had taken a huge toll on the city and the people. The Lion’s Cemetery and Kosevo Hospital had become the most frequented haunts, having taken over from the bars in Olympic Village behind the railway station. Mostar was no different. The people were just as defeated and the city just as scared. The only difference was the names of the people that were dying from sniper fire and mortar bombs.

She finally reached where he was standing and gently gestured him to move out of the way. He looked down intensely for a moment at the old lady bent over double. He dropped the stump of his cigarette from his mouth and moved out of the way. His contemptuous sneer was only outdone by his hatred for what was on the other side of the wall. His hand dropped unconsciously to his AK-76 as he thought about them. I think I got four this morning, he said to himself. He wasn’t really sure about how many, but he knew he’d like to have gotten more. The only half-decent Serb was a dead Serb, he told himself.

He looked at the wall again. It was two hundred years old — Mama had told him that when he was a little child — and it certainly looked it. The mud wall had seen a lot of action but today it looked extremely fragile. He leaned against it gingerly. It held on — for now. He could see the cracks that had developed into deep fissures from the heat and the pounding of artillery. They looked like the groove marks of the cars that once roamed the city and the highway into Sarajevo. Not much except combat vehicles and tanks covered those routes now. Serbian tanks, he reminded himself.

He shook the dust off his shoes even as more settled on them while the lady swept the mud courtyard. Watch it! he told her. How can we fight the Serbs when we have our own people making our life difficult... this dust will be the end of us! The lady looked up at him and slowly parted her lips to give a toothless smile. If it doesn’t kill you, it will only make you stronger.
We don't have to fight. They are humans too, you know! How many did you kill today? Two? Four? Ten?!!

WHAT? Do you know how many THEY killed today? Dena told me that they get old Petrov and the Hanna sisters. And an old couple down the lane. I can't remember their names.

Kill, kill, kill. Is that all you know, young man? Is that how you think this problem will be solved? Do you think you can claim victory by wiping them all out? Do you really think that peace will come out of bloodshedding?

I didn't start this war. WE didn't. THEY did. THEY walked all over our people and our lands. THEY killed our innocent civilians. THEY took OUR land and OUR homes. THEY plundered our livestock and our women. THEY besieged our cities and our villages. THEY attacked today. THEY killed Petrov and the Hanna sisters!

If you had the freedom to do what you wanted to one of their cities, what would you do?

Why . . . I would take out all the people, put them in a straight line and shoot them. I'd make them say 'thank you' for every bullet I put in them. I'd make them apologize for EVERY one of our people that they killed. I'd make them SCREAM to the heavens for forgiveness, and by God . . . I would not spare a single one!

Did you hear the sound of your own voice? Did you hear the hatred that poured out of your own heart? Do you feel your own anger — and the extents of your own antipathy? You do not even shirk from shouting, at the top of your voice, that you would do to them exactly what they did to you... then how can you say that THEY are the only animals?

But they ARE!!! Every time they attack these walls start to crumble even more. Each mortar that falls on our side kills someone I know. Each bullet that passes this flimsy contraption snuffs the life out of someone I loved. Every time I pass through the city, signs saying "PAZNJA: SNIPER!!!" ... "WARNING: SNIPER!!!" — greet me. What have THEY done to MY home? Look at WHAT they have done . . . !!!!

And you think that this mud wall is supposed to protect you? Protect us? Do you think that this wall means so much to you that you are willing to KILL for it?

This wall is our protector. Grandma! Two hundred years and it still stands proudly to protect us. I want to be as strong and invincible as the ideals it represents. I risk MY life for yours, and I will take this fight into THEIR homes if that is what it takes for us to win.

Two hundred years it stands to protect — and for TWO hundred years this wall has divided brother against brother. For TWO hundred years, walls like this have sprung between us in the name of language, race, color, creed and religion. For TWO hundred years these walls have stood proud to tell us that they have won in dividing us. For TWO HUNDRED YEARS, we have been blinded by our faith in these damn WALLS!!!!

Lady, you want to tell me that I should turn a blind eye to all they do to me and all the people I love? Do you want me to turn the other cheek when the sting from the first slap is still ringing in my ears? You want me to forget the refugee camps in Karlovac and Travnik and Stolac? You want me to offer them the olive branch when all they do to me is a bullet in my back?

How many men did you kill today?

I don't know . . .

HOW MANY . . . !!!!

Three . . . maybe four . . .

You killed FOUR mothers’ children, FOUR women’s husbands and God alone knows how many children’s fathers! It may be their war, THEY may have started it, but YOU have pulled yourself SO deeply into this that you cannot differentiate between the killers you denounce and YOUR OWN SELF! You cannot blame them alone for all that you see around you. It is your anger that blinds you and does not allow you to think rationally. IF THEY kill YOUR people and YOU go kill THEIR people, WHO will be left to claim victory?

All that will be left of this country will be steeCI— beautiful tombstones—with no one to cry over them. Look at the world around you as all of us can see it. Can you recognize this ghost town? Piles of bodies lie on the soccer field waiting for their turn in the hope for a decent burial. Burned bodies, shot bodies, horribly mutilated and raped bodies; bodies with no faces and no identities; bodies that belonged to people with wives and mothers and children who will never be able to go back home to them. Smoked skulls with gleaming white teeth
light the darkened nights with their grotesque visages. Limbs lie scattered over the streets like the wares in a shop. Death hawks its pandemonium, and the stench that emanates from the emancipated remains clings to the air like a child to breast. Voices pierce the stillness — sounds of despair and dejection and hopelessness ring within the walls of our soul unendingly. And the survivors, if you can call them so, can only wait and hope that when Death comes it will be swift enough to take them from this hell to the next before they really die.

'I should turn a blind eye to all they do to me and all the people I love?'

The bodies are not the only victims of this senseless and perverse conflict. The soul within is dying long before it leaves the body. The constant screams of agony and pain are dulled by the spurring blood from the unevenly spaced holes in the cadaver lying on your lap. The motherly instincts are forgotten when all you have remaining of that life... in this world is a charred body rotting in an open mass grave. You can’t think about loving thy neighbor because it becomes awfully hard to say hello to body disseminated into a million pieces and scattered over the lawn. You can’t be yourself because you are so overwhelmed by the idiosyncrasy of the monstrosity all around you, that you lose sight of what really counts in the end.

No son, it is not the dust that will kill you, it is you and your blind faith that will be the end of you. See not the lie that is first perceived by the eyes of the blinded; look for the truth with the eyes of your mind.

Just then another round of rapid fire reverberated around them from the mountains. He swore under his breath and pulled up his AK-76. It was time for business as usual. She shook her head and continued to sweep the rest of the courtyard...
Japanese Impression

Mt. Fuji raising
Winter white clouds
Brilliant blue sky shining
An amazing journey

I remember Japan
When the Bougainvilliaea
Hot Pink and Cool White
Danced in the dawn

Peace and war
Life engulfed in
Yin and Yang
Pulling understanding

Gulf reporters
wanted to know Me,
a pacifist
Military blood

Bombs fell
Tortured Mosques
Engulfed in Flames
Genuine gentleness

—Phyllis Hoffman
A Walk In New England Woods

The cold wind stirs the tops of the trees,
Sending leaves spiraling down to the forest floor,
To crackle beneath our boots as we walk.
Even with my companion I am alone.
Just me and my dog-
Her tail wagging in circles as she carries
A branch twice her length in her mouth.
The sky is troubled; clouds rolling on, greys upon greys;
A stark contrast to the orange, the yellow,
the red, and the brown leaves;
Still clinging to the branches of the trees of the forest
still clinging to the side of the hill
that is still clinging to the roots of the mountain.
The brook babbles nearly as much as I do-
Maredadd is a good listener.
The years have come and gone,
and soon our depart paths will be upon us.

We still remember our first meeting,
Our first laugh, and first cry,
We still realize our spaces, it is our differences
that pull us from continued closeness.
We still hope for the future,
Our hope that our paths will cross again.
Rachel brings me her stick, hoping I will take it from her
So that I may throw it for her to hunt it down again.
I watched as she bounds, single-minded, for her prey.
How we too seem to be stalking our life long goals and dreams.
Will there be room for each other, or another?
I take the stick again and throw.
We may never be here again,
But for now, we are.
To be saddened by the future is to forsake the present.
Maredadd and I sit, then lay, among the leaves;
Enjoying the entanglement our lives have allowed each other.

—James Craig
My mind has slowed
to match my heart
that beats contentedly in my chest
It worries not
about my life
and sets all of my cares to rest

The sun falls down
in patches of light
that travel through the forest gate
it warms my hands
as well as my face
and lets me rest my woes of late

The wind that soothes
and ruffles hair
has covered me in playful touch
It skirts my neck
my shoulders drop
I know that nothing is too much

I see my friends
they walk before
and call me to laugh and smile
I can catch up
today at least
and let them take me to my vial

I see myself,
I sit alone
and simply wait for things to be
I am myself,
no pain controls
that would avenge itself on me

The storm has passed
the sea is calm
my ship rocks gently in the night
I sail ahead
to find my life
and know that from my dawn springs light

—Brian M. Hamrick
Sub-division
HELL

They're the latest and greatest—
Thirty-two brand new homes
"Under two-hundred thousand!"
Purrs Ms. Real Estate Jones.

The siding is spotless,
They all look the same . . .
"The grass is impeccable
Since the lawn service came."

The Smiths have a pool
"Stop by for a dunk!"
You'd mistake this for your house,
coming home late and drunk.

You'll be right at home
In Conformity Park,
If your name ain't too ethnic
And your skin's not too dark.

You can't park in the street,
Garage doors must be shut.
The Homeowners Association
Won't tolerate your truck.

Have 2.5 children!
Buy a minivan and a boat!
When you make middle management
The whole family can gloat.

Vacation in Disneyland!
Complain about taxes!
Bitch about your job
And the government assess.

Don't take any risks.
Can't paint your house green—
Only three shades of grey.
Regulations, it seems.

Nothing in this cold suburb
But developments and signs
Like "Greenbrier Cove Homes"
That all scream, "I got mine."

They all got their share
Of the American dream;
Now they all live together
To prop up the seams.

So jump off the cliff,
Aging yuppies and mates,
They're growing old in the backyard
But they say life is great.

—Molly K. Gregas
Sea Song

Hear the whales sing,
see the light shine upon the sea
through the swirling fog
great beasts moving slowly in the water
waves pounding against towering cliffs
yearning to escape
returning again and again.
Long white fingers digging in the sand
leaving behind treasures from the ocean
the Green Lady has lost the battle
yet, she will get her revenge.
The moon beams reflecting a thousand times
shimmering waves rocking you to sleep.
Fog horns blasting their mournful song
towering masts heaving under the starlit night
billowing sails pullding out with pride.
dolphins frolicking
chattering filled with laughter.
emptiness stretches out below your eyes.
darkness meets darkness.
shadows dance aimlessly.
Hear the whales sing
dance with the mermaids.
swim with the creatures of the deep.
Murky darkness.
cold flesh pressing against you.
nudging with wonderment.
flashing silvery bodies surrounding you.
Silence, deep stillness.
listen to the song of the whale,
echoing long and mournful.
bringing a tear to your eyes.

—Tabitha Kryger
LISTENING

I saw in the courtyard a weeping willow, thin, pointed leaves
dangling on branches like tendrils, dangling to the grass.
Interconnected, grass in turn reaching up to the willow's leaves
with its own.
The light green of the willow leaves mingles with the grey
of the sky behind it.
The willow stands in the courtyard, but not alone, next to it
a companion maple.
Here is a younger tree than the great, open, hook-branchedness
of my friend, the willow.
For it is my friend, this willow, often enough have I perched in its
branches to study, sleep, wonder, eavesdrop.
I eavesdrop on the trees' conversations (My friends the willow
does not mind)
I hear this willow and the young maple speaks of their life together,
wondering if it is right that they intertwine their branches,
blending at the edges like two paintdrops against the light grey palette,
melding spontaneously at the common edge, one yellow, one blue.
Eavesdropping on further, perched as I was, the two lives around me
knew they were right, always.
Perched still, I wake from my nap, and though the interconnected lives
chatter away below, around me, I no longer hear them.
My friend the willow lowers me gently to the comfortable support
of the grass.
I walk to the edge of the courtyard, the common edge between
buildings and lawns, mingling together.
I gaze at the willow, knowing that it is right to love, right to have
some other life with which to intermingle my own,
To become part of that other life my love, and to let that other life
become part of me.

—B.J. Leopold
Aspirations are diluted when structured, formed, molded, yet soar when set free.
Traveling with me you find what never tires,
The quest for knowledge, in search of the empowering light.
For it is the light that will guide you when I am gone
Light, Enlightenment, Enrichment
It is they that led you to me, it is they that will lead them to you.
A thousand perfect men and women appear,
Around each gathers a cluster of friends, and gay children and youths, with offerings.
All behold knowledge that is to be shared with each, each with knowledge to be held by all.
Through Nature, Time, and Space, you will roam
The distance you will travel will depend upon the legs, feet, toes that carry you.
The distance you will gain depends upon the heart, soul, and mind that guides you.

— Elizabeth Ramley
Paradise

Let's go to paradise
Where nothing's out of reach
Let's get out of this lonely place
And make love on Paradise Beach

Let me stare into your eyes
And see the radiance of the sun
Let me speak straight to God
And say, "God, job well done!"

In this heavenly place
Where nothing can go wrong
Our emotions will make a perfect pattern
Like the rhythms of a song

Well, I hope to see you in this paradise
I'll be waiting there
The choice is all up to you
'Cause my paradise is in your stare.

—Joseph L. O'Campo
One of the Dead Sea Scrolls that was found in a cave at Qumran, eight miles from Jericho along the Dead Sea. This document, made of vellum, is believed to have been written approximately 2000 years ago.

(Courtesy of Emmanuel Tov, Editor-in-Chief, Dead Sea Scrolls Publication Project.)
The Center for Imaging Science, supported by the New York State Centers for Advanced Technology (CAT), digitally enhanced this image to extract the black text from the colored background to improve readability.
Untitled

You who stole my hand,
now inter-laced with mine,
Without the touch of you round tips all
else would be no more,
Yet, I give you heed before tempting me further,
I am that of another creature.

Are you so daring as to try for my affections?
Are you as brave and bold as the knights of old?
Are you as cunning and keen as a lion who stalks
his prey?
Are you willing to risk all, for you to be mine
and I yours?
If your mind is at odds, then leave me now and calm
yourself,
Release me now and go.

If your heart, mind, and soul are certain, then here—put your
lips to mine, I permit you.
Kiss me with the kiss of a friend, a mate, a lover,
Know that the warm moist touch of the kiss will
tell me of your soul.

Is it your dream or mine,
the souls becoming one,
The grooves, curves, angles of the two fit
together as one,
They work together, play together, dance
together,
The beat of your heart, the tou
carries me to a place
one mind, one soul,
Hold my hand.

—Nicole S. Claassen
Ah, the Speeches of Presidents!

Did you hear President Clinton last night?
He spoke of God, Mother and Country
of the brilliant light
of Democracy
Hypocrisy!

The United States invades
evades
Bosnia,
the carnage there
Tienmen Square?

To rid us of dictators in the western hemisphere.
Fidel, did YOU hear?
The Haitian God, the Haitian Mother and the Haitian Country!

The President spoke eloquently, more eloquently than ever before
He spoke of war!

Why Haiti—just because
A new dictator Priest was
Freely Elected
Rejected
By Haitians who prefer VOODOO?

Who's protected!
The people of
CUBA watch and wait
bleeding
reading
Their transmissions blocked
Rocked

New people
Church steeple

Just as bad? or Good?
Who would
Replace the Dictators Spaces
While Democracy Races

We shoot many
To
Eliminate
Incriminate
Excommunicate
The Dictators
from the Human Race

At what Pace?
Release
Peace

—Phyllis Hoffman
The Traveler . . .

The Traveler came to me:
standing by the wayside
looking north,
looking forward,
looking up,
waiting for a ride
to take me to my life.

I stood by the road;
battered satchel in hand,
tattered clothes on my back,
looking across the desert,
judging the wasteland,
having it judge me.
My eyes like a pale sky
scanning
watching
waiting for my ticket
toward my utopia.
The ticket would lead me on
but only my mind
could finish the journey.
My lips were cracked;
so long from love
so far from water;
salt-caked by the wind that was
stripping my mind
blowing away my illusions...
leaving my tears.
I am afraid.
I am alone.
My skin was cooked
by the unforgiving winds
of the ruthless sun.
Brutal orb
of fiery power
that shattered the night
and forced the day
onto my hardened body,
fragile heart.
My bag was near empty;
only my verse I cared to keep
stuffed between dirty shirts,
empty bottles,
worn-out sandals
covered in glistening sand.
It survived through no fault of its own,
it survived by my fault...
the evidence of my soul
that no one ever sees.
I tell the stories,
I weave the tale,
but only to a few
I give up my mind,
sacrifice my love.

cared about his journey.
A thousand years
on a nameless road
in biting wind
had stripped him of care,
of feeling,
of thought,
and now only
the resolve remained:
the unquestioning
stubborn process to travel the road
for no other reason
but...to move.
To live the vagabond.

The Traveler came to me.
He stopped, and
with no greeting,
began the sermon
that he lived...
the Prophet of Discontent.

I walk alone
to find the truth
that no one
ever found.
The philosophers passed it,
as did the saints;
the carpenter passed it,
as did the sinner.
I am on the road
to find it,
yet never will
I get there.
I am resolved
to my fate.
Let not your feet
follow mine
for there is no joy
on this road...
the road forever
to nowhere.
Turn away,
gather love in
your arms,
find happiness
before knowledge
and do not be
damned as I.”

The Traveler left me,
to stand by the wayside,
to watch his shadow,
to turn,
and find my way
home.

—Brian M. Hamrick
The Camp

Barbed wire and machine guns
Rotten meat and muddy water
Searchlights and growling canines

These are the images that haunt my mind

Children crying for their mothers
Husbands searching for their families
Hoping to catch a final glimpse
Before the eternal fires catch them

These are the realities that have been forgotten

Bullets at first pierce my flesh
Then the flames of freedom sear my soul
And finally the gas, yes the gas
The gas that choked my life away
The gas that stole my family, my son, daughter and wife
The gas that took six million with it as it evaporated through
The shower vents, their lives evaporated with it

These are the horrors that I can not forget

Bosnia, Serbia, Croatia
Ethnic Cleansing
Processing centers

These are the words we use to describe the past
Which is now the future

—J. A. Cantor
I’ve Been Reading . . .

I've been reading the same,
For what seems like years;
The story never changed,
With respect to my peers.
And now this page is over,
And with it I lose you;
Exactly what you meant to me,
I guess I never knew.
You meant my life was constant,
I never thought you’d leave;
At least that's what my slighted eyes,
Had led me to believe.
But as I watch you go now,
I see that life moves on;
Will you mean the same to me,
When I realize that you're gone?
You taught me how to trust myself,
How to grow and how to change;
The love-hate feelings I kept for you,
Right now don’t seem so strange.
And so this story’s ending,
And a new one has begun:
Yet still it breaks my heart to know,
Our history is done.

—Megan Bord

—At the Crossroads
by J. A. Cantor
Wolf Tree

On a roadside
I pass
each morning
near dawn
a woods
with a fallen tree
broken off
ten feet up
into the shape of a wolf
howling at the sky and trees above
expressing her sorrow at death
a natural example of art in transitions
Each day the wolf startles me
and in the misty mornings
she teaches me lessons
of life
of death
of myself
of beauty
of love
of grace
and transience
then,
I proceed
each morning
to a closed room
square
windowless
airless
with artificial order
we sit in rows
and listen to a man
in a tie
drone about structure and function
xylem and phloem
genus and species
speaking in ordered pairs
until I wonder
what can he teach me
that can compare
to a message
from a dead tree
or living wolf
that speaks to me
in sunshine
on a roadside
I pass
each morning
near dawn

—Melinda Freckleton
Hidden Dimensions

Come on child,  
close your eyes  
you'll be able to see me better.  
Listen to the shaman,  
set your mind free.  
Come fly with me  
in spiritual ecstasy  
riding the rivers  
of thoughts and feelings.  
realizing things  
you thought were impossible.  
Out here there are no barriers,  
no limits except the ones  
you set upon yourself.  
Fear is your only enemy  
and love your only map.  
You can do everything  
you only dreamed of;  
here, in this mythological  
realm of your mind.

—Tom Gavin
Razor Sharp Tongue

Razor sharp tongue
You know all the things to say
Just a woman child
With all these people to play
You fill them with dreams
And sprinkle them with hope
You tie them the noose
And tease them with alternatives
Bit with a crooked smile
You've already broken their necks

Wretched little beast
Speaking your faith to the innocent
Corrupting lives with your oh-so smile
Draining the energy from their will
Laughing all the way to the brain
Making yourself critically insane

If I had the will to kill
I'd let you be my first thrill
Gunshot, thud, bloodstain on the rug
And dropping you into the grave I've dug
Letting you rot till your just dust
Finally, the end to your evil lust

And me, so innocent, so deadly
Such an underachiever to them all
But it would be me, the hero
Hero to all that you killed
I take my crown the applause
The posterity, the power, the fame
And everybody will know my name

But I have not the will
An underachiever forever
I slink away, beaten, wounded
Your ego is bigger that mine
Your heart is colder than mine
Your brain is more evil than mine
And I, the mental, gentle giant
Die before you, writhing in sadness
Dying slowly, surely, painfully
And with just one last thought
“Good bye, sweet Princess.”

—Jeffry X. Isabel
A Snowy Night

She continued to walk through the snow. Her feet were so numb, she couldn't tell when they hit the ground. She stumbled, regained her balance and continued on. Things weren't too bad, she thought. The wind wasn't blowing and the night sky was illuminated by the moon. She trudged on not knowing where she was going.

Hours passed. She continued through the snow. Her thin jacket did nothing, her bare hands were beyond frozen. Angry gray clouds rolled across the sky, covering the light from the moon. The snow began to fall faster. The winds whistled passed her, setting her ears and face on fire. Her skin was so dry, in places it bled.

Her hands and feet began to sting, then burn. "Who ever thought freezing to death would hurt so much?" she wondered. She shivered violently and fell to the ground. The wind howled at her, the wicked fangs of bitter cold tore at her flesh. She tried to keep moving, she tried to stay positive but things looked so bleak. She was hopelessly lost. With the fresh blanket of snow, there was no way of telling where she had been, or where she was going.

She curled up in a tight little ball and dreamt of camp fires, warm beaches and hot chocolate. Too bad her sleep would last an eternity...

THE SAME SNOWY NIGHT

... it seemed a million miles away, but it was snowing there as well. After a wonderful day of skiing, the couple retired to their lodge. A fire crackled in the fireplace.

She stood gazing out across the fresh snowy blanket. "It's so beautiful," she said. He stepped behind her and held a glass of champagne in front of her. She took it and turned to face him. They smiled at each other. The reflection of the firelight danced in their eyes. They sipped their drinks. She turned back to gaze at the snow as it continued to fall. "It looks like a movie. It's so angry but so beautiful."

"You say that because you're in here and not out there." He put his glass down and wrapped his arms around her. They stood by the window, gazing at the beauty of the deadly, but breath taking storm.

—Jeffrey X. Izel
Forever

—Vince Cuciti
Leaving Home

Invisible to your eyes
(except to demands and tantrums)
I have wandered from coast to coast
within your walls.
Quiet things
Like reading and thought
To you are harmless,
(stay in control)
But dangerous ideas play in idle minds
And avenues open to those at the end of the line.
I cannot talk to you anymore
Because you do not hear,
And the language barrier has become
a fortified borderline.
Since nothing matters outside your
small and selfish sphere,
Then you won't mind
(keep sitting there in your chair and ignore me)
when I step outside your door
And drive off into the night,
Visible to myself again at last.

—Molly K. Gregas
I had a dream;  
It was deep, and vivid.  
I saw myself walking  
Slowly along a forest path.  
The shadows lay dark.  
Like pools of tar,  
Thickly tumbled along the way.  
I was not frightened, or even weary  
I walked on endlessly, it seemed like days.  
And finally the landscape changed.  
The trees thinned out  
The grass grew tall and golden;  
Sunlight filled the air.  
As I felt the warmth of the sun  
Shining down on my uplifted face,  
I stopped and turned,  
And looked back at the way I'd come.  
I saw each step I had taken;  
Each turn I had made.  
The long distance I had come.  
And I remembered  
all the things of beauty I had seen along the way.  
I turned around once more.  
To continue along the path I had chosen,  
Ready to face the journey again.

—Pamela Hubbard
Love Spirits

The simple truth that loneliness has been with my soul only makes the future brighter for it is time for it to go.

Call up the spirits of love force them to appear For it has been a long time since I have seen them here.

Shadows that have filled my days shall soon become the light The spirits of love will be aroused when the day becomes the night.

Please do you love dance and draw the spirits near For it has been a long time since I have seen them here.

—Mary Denick
Kamikaze Ants

running
stumbling
mumbling
ants at my feet
you are dumb to
think
you could hurt me
because i am bigger
than you

—Benjamin Spencer

—Dragonfly
by Rachel Potter
the mirrors fell silent  (part one)

early one shadow laden evening,
while the setting sun slowly stole its way
through the dancing leaves of autumn,
I came upon an old man
staring blackly into the deepening gloom.
the shreds of his long forgotten clothing
hung loosely from his trembling frame,
the shreds of his sanity
lay scattered to the four winds.
blinded by the hollow promises of the night,
lost in his own lonely musing,
he could not see me draw near.
I looked to his tortured face
and found myself staring
into his tear stained depths of despair.
in those shattered eyes it is always winter
and everything lays dead and dying,
buried beneath his wrinkled brow,
frozen in the dark pools
that mirror his hidden thoughts.
the shrill cry of the hawk blazes across the skies,
but all that he can hear
is the mocking song of the raven,
the taunting cries of the winged night,
that fills his head with whispers from the darkness.
his bloodless lips are moving,
screaming.
I draw closer
but I cannot hear him crying out his agony
into the gathering skies.
for an instant his mouth stands frozen,
whispering his ancient and empty prayers of sorrow.
the distant howl of the wind
calls back like an answer
and silence haunts the air with its touch.
like a broken scarecrow,
left to guard a forgotten field,
he stands alone,
awaiting the coming of the night
when his sadness will be complete.
I stared into his unseeing eyes,
long into the night,
until the darkness finally came
and the mirrors fell silent.

—Rob Ackles
Stump

by Jeffrey X. Izbel

Sam walked down the main street of Gillmore so proud. His head was high, his step bouncy, with a large smile across his pale face. The paleness caused by not being able to see the light of the sun for the last seven years. Seven years of being in a padded room, strapped up to a chair, and being asked a thousand questions on how Sam felt, what the color of his urine was, and how the color of his urine made him feel. But no more of that. Sam was out of the institution, and ready to face the day as a normal human being. So normal in fact that, that he wanted to sink his teeth into a nice, juicy Big Mac at the local McDonald’s.

So that’s where Sam went.

The McDonald’s was nothing like Sam remembered. The boring beige walls were painted with bright colors, and the dark walnut molding was replaced with funky looking pink. The old white chairs and benches were also bright colors. And the walls no longer had paintings. Bright signs telling patrons about how great the food was, and how nutritious the food was littered the walls. A lot had changed, it seemed, in how people decorated eating establishments.

Sam went up to the register with a smile that few people ever flashed at the McDonald’s register people. He happily ordered a Big Mac, large fries, and a medium Coke. The register girl politely told him that his order was actually an Extra Value Meal and it would be cheaper than ordering the items separately. A larger smile came across Sam’s face, as if he just saw Heaven in McDonald’s.

“Well, if it’s such a deal, I guess I’ll order two then. Make it two Extra Value Meals,” Sam said, beaming.

“Are you sure, sir?” the register girl asked.

“As sure as I am sane.” He waited many years to be able to say that.

The food was great, he thought. He had taken his place in a booth, not even thinking to take a table made for one. It was his day, he thought, and I’ll sit anywhere I want. As he drank his Coke, munching on his fries, and chomping on his Big Mac, he couldn’t help but smile. The taste of the all-beef patties, lettuce, tomato, and special sauce on a sesame bun almost made the seven year ordeal in the institution worth it. The fries were amazing, he thought, as the salt covered his tongue, making him thirstier for the Coke he was also treasuring. The taste of the watered down Coke seemed to give him more life, more sparkle in his eye, in addition to quenching his thirst.

After finishing his fast food feast, Sam took a few minutes to enjoy himself as he watched all the people around him. Nice people. Sane people. Hungry people. People who kept staring at him like he was crazy. A couple of years ago, they might have been right. But now, he was just as sane, just as stable as any of them. And that just made him smile more. Oh, yes. This was Sam’s day.

Finally after a half an hour of just sitting there, Sam decided to leave and continue his walk down Main Street. The sun was bright, the birds were singing, and Sam was still strolling down Main Street with a huge smile that was almost ethereal. His stroll took him all over. By the library where he once spent so much time reading Stephen King. By the zoo where he once spent so much time trying to imitate the gorillas. By the supermarket where he once worked as a youth, bagging groceries, and where he got employee of the month for three years running. “No one in Gillmore could bag groceries as fast as Sam,” people from all over would say. He smiled more as remembered those revered days of his youth.

It was about four o’clock in the afternoon, when he strolled by the Gillmore Park. He had many memories from the park. His first baseball game, his first fight, his first girlfriend, his first breakup, his first evil thought towards his ex-girlfriend, his first taste of alcohol, his first joint, his first overdose, etc. There were so many good memories, it was hard for his mind to recall of them. And then he saw Her.

Her was sitting in the middle of the park, reading a book. Her’s name was unknown to Sam, but
Her looked awfully familiar. In fact, he was sure he had seen Her in one of his dreams. But there Her was in the flesh, reading a book. Her hair was auburn, her skin was porcelain, and Her eyes looked like they were made of jade. Sam couldn't get over how purely beautiful Her was. And Her was there. Sam wanted to speak to Her, say hi, ask Her if she wanted to get a cup of coffee, and many other things. But Sam didn't have the confidence. He just sighed and walked away. Maybe another day, another time, another place. But not today, not now, not there. So Sam continued his walk, and eventually went home.

The next day, he repeated his walk through Gillmore. He had two Extra Value Meals, walked through town, and again saw Her. Her was in the Gillmore Park again reading a book, just smiling as she turned the pages. Every so often Her would run her fingers through her hair, and toss her head to one side to let the hair fall to the same side. Sam nearly fainted. He was now positive he had seen Her in his dreams. He had to meet Her. But again, he didn't have the confidence. Maybe later. There was always tomorrow.

This ritual continued for many weeks. Everyday at lunch, Sam would get two Extra Value Meals at McDonalds, walk around town, and then toward the park just to get a glance at Her. And everyday Her was there reading, running her fingers through her, and tossing her head to one side. And everyday he would want to go over and talk to her and say something, but wouldn't because he lacked the confidence.

But the confidence finally came. It was on a Friday, the sun was out, and the air was warm. It seemed like a perfect day for something good to happen to Sam. However, he felt kind of wierd. It had been many years since Sam had gone up to a woman and said "Hi, how's it going? My name is Sam." But it felt great. Confidence was a great upper.

As he went through his daily regiment, he thought of all the things he could say to Her. Should he be cool? Should he be suave? Should he be like James Dean? Should he be himself? After many seconds of deliberation, he decided to just do what came to him at the time.

It had been many years since Sam had gone up to a woman . . .

He walked very quickly to the park, but stopped short of actually entering the park. He took a minute to gaze at Her, and get his mind straight. But soon he started walking toward her, slowly but confidently. Her didn't notice his motion and remained reading the book, running her fingers through her hair, and tossing her head to one side. This didn't bother Sam at all.

When he was finally next to Her, he spoke.

"Hi. How's it going? My name is Sam."

Her didn't say anything, but turned to him and smile. Then Sam thought he was hallucinating. Her started to change. Her's once porcelain skin darkened and became very rough looking. Her hair seemed to melt into her face, as her whole body seemed to becoming smaller, and knobby looking. Her clothes seemed to turn brown, and almost take on the appearance of bark. Her body, clothes, and skin continued to change . . . and change . . . and change . . . until she became a . . . a stump. Just a stump in the middle of the park. A dirty, old stump.

At first, Sam was dumbfounded. And then he realized the truth. He had imagined the whole thing. The girl, the smile, and the running of her fingers through her hair. He was just as crazy as he was before. They had lied. The doctors, the nurses, everyone with fake assurance on the end of a handshake. He was crazy, nuts, wacko, wrapped too tight, whatever. Normal was someone else, and he didn't know Normal.

Sam dropped to the ground in tears. More than just tears was flowing out of Sam. His confidence, his self esteem were nothing more than a puddle on the ground.

After, about an hour of crying, he began to get angry. The stump became the focus of all his anger. Sam began kicking the stump, screaming at it, trying to destroy it. A man of about thirty saw Sam, and came over to console him. The man put his arm around Sam, and said so nicely, with so much compassion, "Man, it's just a stump."
In the Mourning's Light

Cold black infinity surrounded you for so long
That time itself had lost meaning, Any sentiment
Of mourning was discarded with bouquets
Left to be carried to their great beyond from
An urn of galvanized steel.

Dust had settled between the cracks in
The wall I built around my heart,
The mortar slowly crumbled over the years
Into a powder ripe for the impressions
Of your jealous clawing fingers.

Dry lay the well from which
Sprang my sorrow, that dark
Brackish water long since used
To water the garden which
Has hid me so well.

Forgotten the words of regret
And remembrance, the stolen tomorrow's,
The completed yesterdays, marching
In the chaotic unison to the
Maelstrom called today.

Garrish and pale, the light of memory creeps in
Weakly illuminating the dark corners of a mind
So set against reminiscence that the light
By which the mind is blinded.
Hollow sobs echo and resonate
Against straining cords of neck muscle.
Forgotten grief remembered, A futile attempt to run.
Through meads of yesterday with the feet of
Today, forgetful of the sting which awaits
The runner.

Tonight I cry and think of happier times, but to no avail
Because tomorrow awaits the grey and real, where
I shall wake in the mourning's light and have
Forgotten you again.

—Christian J. Kuznia
Flat on my back
Legs up straight.
Spread Apart
By a doctor I hate.

Big white room . . .
Almost bare.
Faces look at me
but I know they don't care.

He bends his head
I hold my breath.
What is to bring me life . . .
Is causing me a death.

Ropping, tearing sensation . . .
We are no longer one.
"Just lay still and relax honey . . .
he's almost done."

A pool of blood . . .
I get out of the bed.
My screams haven't stopped . . .
and my baby is dead.

—Aileen Pagan
Webs

Darling,
Will you do something for me?
Close the drapes
Light the candles
Come and sit next to me
Sing to me, darling
Chase away the darkness in my eyes
Brush away the webs of entanglement
Clear the skies
Make the sky blue
I do not want to be sad anymore
Lift me to heights
Never achieved before
I do not want to be this way
I want to follow the giggling river
To splash in the waterfall
Crystal clear and refreshing water
Cascading over my shoulders
And ride with the stars
To roam the heavens
Sleep beckons to me
Hold my hand and do not let go
Until I bid you farewell,
And walk among the dead
In the gardens.
Wild roses growing with thorns
Ripping your feet to shreds
Tears mixing with the soaked earth
Hands digging at the ground
Searching for you
Do not let me go
I want to hear a song
About the sunshine and the breeze
Blowing through the trees
Let the birds sing their lilting song
Tell me no lies
Where am I?
Do not sing the Liar's Song
I feel your grasp loosening
Why?
Open the drapes
I want the sunshine to shine upon my veiled face
I am so cold.
Must I roam the garden of the dead?
Hold on to me, my beloved
Be my anchor
In the raging sea
Tell me that you will always
Remember me, no matter what
Sing to me, my darling.

—Tabitha Kryger
Girl

My eyes are fixed
She's wearing blue jeans
soft faded baggy
with corduroy style socks
and a tan sweater
loose fitting
with her sleeves rolled up
so she can see the time on her watch

This class is so boring
and around her sky-blue grey eyes
are the simplest framed glasses
and everything about her is perfect

"Sugar and spice" (oh, isn't that nice)
I can tell
that's what the girl is made of
her hair is pulled back
relaxed
so that some of it is just out of place
and everything about her is perfect

But she's uncomfortable
I can tell

With each progressing word I write
she moves changing position
She's thin
she can get really twisted in her seat
as if she's one of thousands of
pieces of spaghetti . . . stirring
weeding through the time left

20 Minutes

GODI

I have stared at this girl the entire class
I have to say something

No, I can't
Yes, I should
Maybe, when I see her next time

She put her head down
it's been about five minutes
she must be sleeping
strange how she sleeps
How cool!
I'm watching her sleep
it's almost as if I'm sleeping with her
Well, maybe not.
but it's great to watch her anyway.
I Did It

I did it - I tricked them. I did what was against the law.
On school time - not my time.
The teacher's time.
taxpayer's time.
People-who-get-uptight-at-an-irrational-argument's
time. I did it all by myself. I had no help, no accomlices.
Not everyone saw what I was doing. Not everyone knew.
But some did.
No one encouraged me.
No one instructed me.
No one told me it was right or wrong.
I did not pray to get away with it.
I did not pray for the people who obstructed it.
I simply prayed. In school.
Of course, it was for a good grade.

— Michele L. Brown

— James Meacci
Germinal: Images Across a Screen

Images across a screen
Keep assaulting my mind
As I recall Germinal

Tall derricks reminiscent of oil wells
Towers rising from the ground skeletal
Large cables pulling carts up and down the mine
Shaft
A strong black horse pulling a cart of coal

Mud, water, grime, cold tykes
Going down the shaft to work
women
I didn't know about the women
I suppose if I'd thought about it I would have known
Women help with
hard work fighting wars growing crops

Fighting for families furiously
Making bargains with Machiavellian merchants
This is 1994 not 1884
Where are we going in the next hundred years?

Images across a screen
Taught me to touch the
Petrifying, stultifying, numbing, suffocating terror
Of Hunger helplessness hopelessness
Men finding
Warming fires

People dying crying wailing
Horrid conditions
Homes without food
Not money enough
Depend on charity with dignity?
Is such a thing possible?

And the privileged going their way
As privileged often do
with the exception of a few Good souls
who offer care to help alleviate the suffering

Images across a screen most vivid
Explosions blackened faces
coal dust everywhere
Miners with black lung disease
Expectorating black goo drool Death

Characters
Bonnemort: Good death
Eienne strong antagonist
Chaval: Machiavel
Maheu a strong father forty-two
Maheude melancholy thirty-niner
The children: Alzire, Jeanlin, Henri, Lenore, Estelle the baby
Catherine the innocent
Zacharie caring fun loving twenty-one
Father Mouque a mockery
Maigret regret scrotum and penis cut off

I know of places in Rochester
where people starve
die death disease
Homeless . . . alone
no one to speak for them

We will never change

—Phyllis Hoffman
Beyond the heat of the day, on the swells of the rolling western grasslands, they rode together on what seemed like an endless, aimless journey. He was a good man of warm character and good heart and though he truly loved the woman who traveled with him, he felt that the two of them were trapped in a terrible danger of their own making. He drove the big machine with the keen alertness and attention to the road that motorcycle travel demands and his skill made him seem a part of the steel, leaving only the woman free to consider the problem that they had recently found between them. It had surfaced suddenly and frighteningly full grown, seemingly from no root, surprising only to the two of them after many years of truce. The roar of the wind and loping of the big twin engine did not pause for conversation and so miles of silence fed the quiet darkness in both their hearts.

As the hot sun drifted toward the horizon, she shifted in the worn leather seat, trying to chase a cold finger of fear that reached out to her from beyond the miles that she thought would hold it back. She was weary of dreaming, tired of living for the future and anticipating its promises only to watch tomorrow turn from the hopeful to the unremarkable past. The heavy watchfulness between them had simmered while they were waiting and wishing their lives away. Sometimes she was seized by a desperate restlessness, an urge to move now, to make things happen instead of waiting for them. At these times she appeared as in a fevered state, her speech rapid and feverent, her cheeks flushed with a frantic heartbeat, and her eyes full of something that others often mistook for desire. The smooth band of gray highway soothed her now; movement assuaged her restive spirit and even with their spectre as a traveling companion, she was glad to be on road to anywhere.

The hummin vibration of the bike and the road flowed through to the man's grip on the handlebars. The feeling was soothing; it was constant, immediate, and most of all, the result of his control. So many things in their now unfamiliar lives were not, although it gave him comfort to know that at least this was unchanged. He too was relieved to be traveling, feeling the endless highway take them away from their lives. It struck him that they might be attempting to outrun the dark demon that had followed them ceaselessly and mercilessly these last few years, but he was aware that this shadow rode with him, a silent passenger along with the woman whose leather-wrapped limbs surrounded his body on the cycle.

A strange and ghostly trio was how the Indian woman at the small prairie oasis had described them. He had, at first, misunderstood her and thought that she was admiring their bike in the heat and dust of the lone gas pump until the old woman handed him a small leather pouch on a deerskin thong and wished him success in finding peace with the spirits. The amulet chafed at his neck, another small reminder of the myriad of thoughts that were pushing their way into his focused attention to the motorcycle and the road.

It had been many long years since he and the woman had traveled this way. The Harley was a reminder of their younger and less cautious days, when the two of them were young and tan and strong with fewer battle scars and gray hairs. They had loved to ride back then, roaring off in a cloud of dust and bark of straight pipes, bareheaded in tight faded jeans and T-shirts. He glanced down at the thick gloves that encased his hands and wrists in the tough leather which armored the rest of his body down to the heavy boots on his feet. They wore a lot more protective clothing now and hot, weighted helmets; times had changed. They wore another kind of heavy armor around their minds and hearts from the years of trying to carve out a peace of their own, both in their different ways. She was resigned but often restless, and though he felt her sorrow for this thing that stood between them, he often suspected that she did not know or did not acknowledge that he felt it too and that it had changed his dreams also, in ways that were too foreign for her to grasp completely.

The warm, earth-scented air was suddenly broken by a cool and pensive breeze, carrying the promise of rain and storm. The woman looked to the west and paled at the columns of dark, brooding thunderheads advancing on their horizon. For a brief moment she thought that the nightmarish clouds were the materialization of their impasse, that it had followed them all...
these miles and was now threatening to close the distance and break over them in fury. She fleetingly wished that they had traveled by car and again thought that they shouldn't have taken this trip at all. But that sort of hindsight had become an all too familiar pattern in her thoughts and plans. Too much looking back and seeing what should have been had contributed to the palpable strife between her and the man. On the motorcycle, it was unsafe, uncomfortable, and damn near impossible to look backwards for too long; this way they could only see the road ahead, absorbing and analyzing the moving landscape in the brief moments before it disappeared behind them. It was in this way that dedicated bikers developed a very different perspective than most people, a philosophy that was very immediate and given to introspection rather than spoken exchange.

Maybe they should have ridden more often. Somewhere between yesterday and today, their lives had become inexplicably complicated by careers and living; existing as hard-working and unrewarded slaves of prudent budgeting and motionless hope while they put their real lives on hold in the expectation that tomorrow would be their day. Years, even decades, had slipped by while they trudged off to every morning, thinking that at last, this was the year that they would advance their dreams. In the past, they had shared this pursuit of a noble goal, the two of them standing as one against the disappointments which accompanied their trouble like wolves in winter. This latest ice age was threatening to freeze them forever in a glittering stasis; unable to move back towards each other, to close the distance and melt the coldness that had grown between them. With a grim smile, she realized that the howling beasts, the ones that they often fought off together, had not only bridged the door, but that she and the man had now accepted them as living room pets.

The bike slowed as the man let up on the throttle, downshifted, and coasted somewhat aimlessly into the vast dustiness of the truck stop lot. He too had seen the impending storm and felt the chill as the temperature backed away from the onslaught of cold air pushed by the charging clouds. The aimlessness gave way to a decisive expressness as he backed the Harley under the meager cover of the eaves of the squat, weathered building. The woman took this to mean that this was where they would wait out the wind and rain. The comforting sound of the engine suddenly died, leaving an empty space in the still air, and the rhythmic chugging of an idling diesel rig at the far corner of the dirt parking area only compounded the strangeness in the quiet roadside. She shivered and swung off the back of the bike, slowly straightening her stiffened joints and anticipating the warmth of the restaurant. Without looking back, she started off toward the door, knowing that he would follow shortly after seeing to the motorcycle.

The weathered sign in the truck stop window that declared the place open for business of whatever kind looked as if it had faded there throughout years of sunlight, giving a sense of permanence to a place where transients gathered for momentary respite from the endless dust and driving. The man joined her in the yellowing light of lamps that had gathered a thin coating of greasy dirt from the kitchen. As they settled into a cracked vinyl booth in the no-man’s-land between the truck drivers’ counter and the family dining room, the woman noted the tired faces of the other customers, mostly long-haul drivers and local ranchers, with a few vacationing families looking out of place in their enthusiastic appreciation of the local road culture. She listened to the farmers’ and ranchers’ guarded welcoming of the rain, understanding their apprehension of hail and lightning-borne fire, both of which would be instantly devastating to the fragile, dry crops in the lateness of the season. She felt a silent camaraderie with the motley group in the restaurant. They were all children of the road and ageless land and although they lived differently, they were all wearily proud of the life that they had chosen.

Her thoughts on this subject produced a brief, warm smile before her momentary good feeling was squelched by the nagging shadow that followed her, a poisonous reminder that something was terribly and fatally wrong between her and the man. It had been like this for so long that she barely recalled their other life.
Across the scarred table, the man saw her face break into a light that faded nearly as quickly as it appeared. He remembered again how she changed when she smiled, how it showed another treasured side of her, and how he had fallen in love with a girl who had turned that same smile on him a long time ago. She was so guarded now, expecting nothing malignant around every corner, assessing each situation like a field general, only thawing slowly for very few people and preferring to be quiet and alone most of the time because it was safer. She had become very hard to reach, so much so that he wondered if one day he would wake to find that he had been completely shut out of her private world. They were very lonely in their current nightmare and he hated the constant reminders. He wanted to say something to her that would reach through all of the carefully constructed walls and stomach-churning fear to address the situation head-on. He had wanted to say something, anything, so many times but could never find the right words to start, to open the floodgates of strangled emotion. He regretted that the people he loved most were those that he could not seem to reach. They talked about mortgages and bills, vacations and plans, what to have for dinner, and the local news, but they did not share the things that mattered. He could not remember if they ever had, and he wondered why he had not noticed that they did not connect on more than a surface level.

A wilted and harried looking waitress flashed by with a well-worn smile leaving sweating glasses of ice water and battered menus, and then disappeared as quickly as she had arrived. This hurried and desperate service seemed incongruous with the leisurely and aimless pace of their travel and the woman looked up with a start before taking a long drink of the cool water that rinsed away the dust of the highway. It was refreshing and delicious, a thing to be wondered at and appreciated after the dry travel in the summer sun. The sight of the menus lying like islands in the center of the table reminded them that they were here for a purpose and were expected to state their intentions, eat, and move on so as not to disturb the efficient rhythm of the serving crew. The man roused himself from near sleep; propped up in the corner of the booth with his legs stretched out over the length of the slippery bench, he had become lost in his own faintly disturbing thoughts while at the same time his body had relaxed and taken comfort in the rest. The waitress appeared twice again, to take their order and bring their meal on heavy white plates.

The woman toyed with her food, which though hot and home-cooked, was indistinguishable from so many meals eaten in roadside stops. She noticed that she and the man were the only people in the restaurant that seemed to be moving and living in slow motion. The truck drivers ordered, made phone calls, gulped coffee, and left quickly, trying to stay on schedule and make an unknown destination by an unknown time. Still, they were in a hurry to get there. Similarly, the farmers and ranchers, who probably lived only a few miles away, were by habit efficient and driven folks whose responsibilities also called to them to eat and be on their way. Parents with small children cut up food, wiped messy faces, soothed conflict, and occasionally caught a bite of their own meals before shuffling everyone off to the bathroom and back to the car. They all seemed to have a purpose in traveling that could not wait for idleness and wool-gathering. Only she and the man had no destination, no schedule, no responsibilities, or reason to hurry off. She felt the familiar feeling of the world passing by around her while she caught only a taste of what it felt like to be fully participating in her life.

The man also noticed the hubbub that surrounded them. To his dulled senses, it looked as if they had been left behind by the businesslike world around them and he wondered what it would be like to feel everything, the whole experience of being alive, again. He knew that they had been happy a long time ago and wondered what it was about daily life and time that inexorably twisted his perceptions and feelings into something far different from what had begun; it was not so much that he and the woman had reached a point where they could not meet on common terms—he had seen this happen to countless friends and acquaintances—but that the events of the past few years had deeply shaken his confidence and belief that he was aware of where his life was taking him. He could not have foreseen
wheels as they traveled. The wetness of the grass was not dew, she realized, but blood and gas and oil, which stank of carnage, flesh and machinery, like a sick libation to an industrial god.

Even in near-death she felt as numb as she had when she was supposedly whole and alive. If this were the end of her life, she thought, then it had been a shameful waste. She wondered what had become of the man, and knew with the sudden certainty of one who has nothing to lose, that she should have asked that same question long before he disappeared from her inner view. The night filled her ears, still and so quiet once again as if the tragedy had never taken place, a void that swallowed them with the same unjudging procession of minutes that had swallowed their love and dreams. A tide of grief, fear, hope, and hopelessness washed over her as she felt herself sliding into semi-consciousness and realized that complete darkness was not far away. She did not know if she would wake up from this night. Before the sensory world was lost to her fogging mind, one thought tinged with regret and clarity slipped through to give her a taste of her other life, the one which she might

The woman froze in terror in the brief second that she was allowed while the man instinctively tried to swerve out of the inevitability of the oncoming impact.

As the crickets resumed their evening serenade and the prairie wind whistled over the battleground, something came into its untimely but overdue end on a back highway that led from one unknown place to another. And there, beyond the heat of the day, on the swells of the rolling western grasslands, the dark shadow finally lifted at the end of the endless, aimless journey.