Silhouette (Spring 2004)
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The agents of change range from written to spoken
Black to white
Voiced when the devices of equality were broken and the agents
of the revolution revolved around this society’s evolution
towards fair and equivalent treatment for everyone
and it takes a great man to say with a calm hand
that you need not be a social leech but that you need to breach
this
country’s conventions of making no mention of the things we do
to those different from the majority
the mass minority has the same rights and the fights need not
occur
to see that we should assure their freedoms and we should change
the town,
turn life around, change the city, make no witty remarks that
make racial sparks
fly
change the county, give the blacks back the bounty we said we
would, change the state
fix the state of your mind, remind yourself that you’re just the
same as them
change your country, grab a hand and demand equality and
change and make a revolution
peacefully force a resolution and say what space race? what arms
race? what about the equality race? the race for race, the run
against the gun, against the chair, against the fists and the hate
and the things they scream and don’t forget to forget to worry
about what the racists and the supremacists think and then you’ll
see that it’s not too late to be a man and stand up for a fellow citizen,
a neighbor, a shopkeeper, a fellow human being. doesn’t that
mean something to you? a human being. are you one? prove it.
do something for someone else. don’t ask a country to fight your
battles, you won’t win a war like that. instead join your countrymen
and light in the streets in peace and rattle the cage and show
and show your rage by sitting, and rattle that cage by sitting, rattle that cage by not reacting, rattle it, rattle it, shake it up, make a stir, when we are truly equal, were will you say you were? were you shaking it up or were you beating it down? beating a fellow human into the ground? you can make a difference in one life, and make a change in this world of strife, alter their reality and they’ll see the reality of the situation, how wrong they were, how wrong they all were, and they’ll see those dogs, those gas bombs, those firehoses turned on men didn’t make them men. it made them the lowly beasts they accuse the oppressed of being. being a human, a man, a citizen, a

strand of DNA sequence that is you, that is almost him or her or that boy that holds hand with your white daughter, recognize what you are, you need to drink the same water to survive, use your eyes to see the real deal, steal a glimpse of what is really going on, then join those who keep going strong, the masses that yearn to be free and to breathe without a heavy hand pressing their lungs down when they try to suck in their air of America, land of the free, home of the brave governors that hide behind the guardsmen in front of the schools, that hide behind the laws that block the blacks from the drinking fountain, keep them from the bank line to the teller of equality so that they cannot cash the check that we wrote and Jefferson and Hancock and Washington and so many others signed. Let them in, learn a lesson, open up the vault doors to a new America. The liberty bell seems to be something of a shell, robbed by those that lobbed the rocks at the protesters, but it can be filled again, push through those that will only watch you strike the bell with chagrin, and let freedom ring. let it ring and let the sound escape the doors and let it blow the roof off with its resonance, and let the bell strike down those that tried shoving you
away from the lighthouse of equality, those that house resistance to what the point really is... be equal, be free, listen to me, hear me, join hands with your brothers and sisters and urge them to grab someone else’s hand and join in a circle, in the chaotic never ending shape find the order of life, find that peace does not come with a knife, is not held there like a hostage, live life hand in hand without segregation, and disregard the degradation that will be done along the road of inevitability.

Untitled Kim Crum

Photograph

https://digitalcommons.shawnee.edu/silhouette/vol2004/iss1/1
Absolutely Sweet Marie

Charles Haskins

Oil
Scene from a Yellow Kitchen

We are a study in contrast.
Our bodies, our kitchen tables,
our junk drawers.
We are light and shadow.
the skin and mystery of Caravaggio.

As you sit across from me,
I arrange a pile of unopened mail
into a neat stack to prove that I
can be industrious, organized.
You see through this effort.

When you lift your arms to raise a glass
crumbs from yesterday's dinner
stick like scabs to your forearm.
You brush them into a pile
and deposit them in the trashcan.

Through this, our husbands wonder
what we laugh so loudly about
from this yellow room.
We laugh over a stack of dirty dishes.
We laugh over the hum of the refrigerator.
We laugh from the same place.
Street Life

Nathan Barr

Acrylic
Measured By Pain

If you measured my love
by how much pain I feel,
the gashes would paint rainbows
over my skin.
Blood is to bone
as I am to you.
Wet, cracked and mangled
if how I'd be then.
Lost in your embrace
I choke on possession,
I drown in the knowledge
that you love me so.
Beat me blue bruises
all over my body
to prove without question
those feelings I show.
Tie me spread-eagled
to the posts of your bed.
Carve your initials in deep.
Nothing short of anguish
is what I would feel
and for your blood kisses
I'd weep.
Prove me like silver
and shine me like brass,
Then watch me
as I fall and break.
Helpless to stop it
and hurt to give in,
with no choice, but suffer
and take.
(For victims of abuse everywhere)

Words, thrown like spears,
Painful words, aimed at the heart,
But striking the soul.
You smile as you throw them.
Steel tips piercing, wounding
I bleed my tears; they never stop
It makes you happy to hurt me.
Does it thrill you to make me cry?
Last night you said you love me.
Your mouth, a lipped bow,
Your tongue-string shooting arrows into my heart
Striking where it hurts the worst
My body quivers, shakes, weeps.
Practiced words
Spoken too often,
You know just how to hurt me.
Even your eyes laugh at my pain.
Last night you said you love me.
I am too hurt to be angry.
I will be angry after you leave,
After you stop hitting me.
That always comes after the words.
Hurting me with words is not enough,
Not enough to satisfy your thirst.
Steel hands like hardened hammers,
Pounding my body and my face,
What is left inside of me,
Trying to destroy what there is of me.
Last night you said you love me.
I only wanted your love.
You only wanted my pain.
I give it to you.
You take it from me.
There is nothing left of me.
You have taken it all.
Last night you said you love me.
Last night you said you love me.
Last night...
Hot Rats

Charles Haskins

Acrylic

https://digitalcommons.shawnee.edu/silhouette/vol2004/iss1/1
Proxima and Alpha in Spring

Noticing these homes
and empty acres, I see that
everyone has awakened.
The cold has gone from their bones.
Wool sweaters are packed away;
dogs are losing their thick coats.
Pansies in window boxes,
geraniums are opening up and out,
red giants exploding out of terracotta.

Everyone has come out to bask like lizards.
They are straddling riding mowers,
untangling yards of hose
and breathing, taking in
the eventual coming of
clear sky and road mirages.

All of this would be nice,
but icicles are still stuck in my throat;
my thaw has been slower.
Even Neptune brightens in the spring,
far-flung and blue.
Crocuses are brave enough to
bloom through inches of snow.

These hours I've spent traveling to you
to meet in a hotel
and stay quiet while you work,
have found me lost.
Out of our usual orbit,
I am backwards-moving.
I am Proxima to your Alpha,
the dwarf in this system.
Dim, cold,
small
invisible to the naked eye.

Barbara Biggs
Untitled
Monica Stafford

Photograph

https://digitalcommons.shawnee.edu/silhouette/vol2004/iss1/1
Fence Row

Stacia Drapsia

Oil
Untitled  
Terry Allen  

Photograph  

https://digitalcommons.shawnee.edu/silhouette/vol2004/iss1/1
Untitled

Belle Walters

Photograph
Time Loss

William Anthony Sinozich

Where was I
when this winsome lass
learned to fly
and not cry
for Love lost in the twinkle of an eye?
Where was I
when this same child
tamed the wild and wantons ways
of youth defiled by passing time?
Where was I
when needed most
I played a ghost
who slipped and slid and hid
in my own uncertainties
peeking out from cubbyholes
of my own making
forsaking those who needed hope
to cope with times without?
Where was I?
Iron Gate

Shelly Richards

Photograph
Spiderweb  
Rodney McKinley
Kids

Do you have kids? Well, I'll tell you I do,
Not four or five though, in fact, only two.
But boy let me say that's more than enough,
Just raising those two has really been tough.
I remember as babies on me they would spit,
And one in particular seemed to master it.
When crawling time came, away they both went,
Just chasing those two left me so spent.
They seemed to skip by the first "walking" part,
Running, and falling, was more in their heart.
A new bruise or new bump appeared everyday,
How they all got there I just couldn't say.
One point in their childhood they turned on each other,
Things would get ill between sister and brother.
Mom to the rescue there I would go,
Ask how it got started, and neither would know.
Now that they're older fights are few with each other,
The new game they play is called "Argue with Mother".
But that's okay, things are turning out all right,
Now in them both I can see a future that's bright.
All we've been through was worth it, plus more,
Just to have those two kids that I will always adore.
Plus knowing the fact that they’ll go through it all too,
When justice is served and they raise a few!!
Untitled

Monica Stafford

Photograph

https://digitalcommons.shawnee.edu/silhouette/vol2004/iss1/1
Words Unspoken

Words unspoken, we often think to ourselves,
Emotions and feelings put upon a shelf.
The time passes by so quickly,
The dust settles in layers discretely.
Why must we harbor those feelings inside?
Caught in limbo by foolish pride.
Stirring, rising, wanting to get out,
However, they will stay deep inside without a doubt.
Time passes, seasons change, feelings fade away,
Only to return upon a cold winter’s day.
Autumn River

Gail Ingalsbe

Oil on Masonite
Tunnel Debra K. Whitt

Photograph
Shopper #1
DeNelle Hickman

Acrylic
Sphere

Laura Beth Pottinger

Graphite
Untitled

Stacia Drapsia

Oil
I only miss you in the morning.
The few minutes right after I open my eyes and
Realize, another day of minutes without you.
Well I guess I miss you in the
Afternoon, but only when it rains. Of course it rains
Everyday now.
Then again, evening comes around and you’re still
Nowhere to be found.
I don’t miss you at nightfall
Until it’s nightfall. I wonder why you’re not home yet
Then I remember I’m not at home.
Where do you go for home now?
No.
Don’t tell me, because I can’t miss you
Anymore, for it’s 3:00 am and I
Haven’t opened my eyes yet.

Scattered fragments. Momentary reflections
Of the past five years.
What to do with them?
I can’t run, for they chase me.
I can’t rest, for they wake me.
I try and I try
To hide from them.
You know, store them
In that deep empty space that our
Spirited
Love once lived.
We both have broken down,
And
We both have broken through. Still
Tell me
What to do with them.
Five years…
Momentary…
Fragments…
Reflections…
Scattered…
Kyle closed their old yearbook for the final time. He refused to look at it any longer... any more. After running his fingertips around the gold-embossed letters for a minute or so, he laid the blue an gold vinyl-covered book on a stack of papers that had been stored in a box with the gifts he’d given to Tyler; they were covering Tyler’s football jersey. So many memories, trapped in the objects in that box... all of them... they were just too painful to remember. Maybe I should burn them, he thought to himself for the second time that afternoon. Standing by the nightstand alongside of the closet door, Kyle searched the room over once more for someone who wasn’t there, still hearing a breath upon his ear.

The sheer white curtains along the open window wisped toward where Kyle sat, drawing his attention to the cedar chest-of-drawers. The material’s shadow traced across the wooden dresser where the afternoon breeze pulsed into a silent corner. Pictures of Tyler’s family stood proudly in front of a newspaper clipping of his favorite college team’s bowl victory. The two pictures on the left corner were his sister and brother. Those had been taken at the water park just north of town. His siblings never could stop fighting with each other, and being twins didn’t help. They rested in front of the photo in the silver-wire frame, the one of him and his parents in the fishing boat on Lake Superior. His father, Tim, had taken his family to the Great Lakes on fishing vacation. Tyler had fought and begged his parents to let Kyle go with them, until finally they had given in. That was a long time ago, just after the two had started to become more than best friends.

His senior photos and football pictures were still laying in their packages in the center of the desk; they had come in just before Christmas, on the last day of classes. Mrs. Gaitton, the school secretary, had asked Kyle to take them to Tyler’s parents, claiming she didn’t know how they might handle getting them so soon afterwards. Kyle had held on to them for weeks, rummaging through the various sample shots the photographer had taken in
front of the pond in the park and in the local garden shop that Kyle’s dad owned. Finally, he forced himself to take them to Tyler’s parents the day before New Year’s, unsure of the picture’s reception and reluctant to let go of one more piece of Tyler. Tyler’s mom had cried for hours on Kyle’s shoulder as they had looked through them, then when she had been asleep for a few minutes, he’d brought them up and placed them where the sun was now reflecting off the plastic into his eyes. Tyler’s favorite antique dagger lifted up the front edge of the package, silver dragons’ wings sticking out into the light.

Kyle stood and walked over to the opposite side of the room, away from the open window and the laughing children passing by it. Often Tyler and he had sat out there on the roof and watched the neighborhood at its work. The kids were always having a good time, jumping fences and breaking rules, while Old Jim Wallace was bellyaching about kids tearing up his yard. Many times, Tyler had put the younger kids up to the mischief, challenging them to cross Wallace’s yard though the flowerbed. Once, old man Wallace had watched on little boy talk to Tyler before running through the man’s garden, and had come into the yard, threatening to teach Tyler some respect. Tyler’s mom had calmed him with quick reassurances that Tyler would be punished and had tried to placate him with iced tea, to which he had responded to with a slamming screen door and a turned-up television. He laughed to himself. She had punished us both all right... we learned that any trouble to Wallace, and Tyler’s mom would force us to eat pizza until we were stuffed. She seemed to get tired of listening to the old man’s whining, and was more than willing to hassle him. Those were the best times with Tyler, when they were on the roof. Especially at night... Tyler would bring out his telescope and start pointing out all the constellations and planets. He knew every myth given for each of the stars by heart, and spoke as if he had written each one of them personally and just for Kyle’s ears. Kyle just smiled at him and nodded. He never really knew any of what Tyler was talking about. Kyle just enjoyed being there with him; he used the telescope as an excuse to lean on Tyler’s shoulder,
even after they started dating. Usually Kyle fell asleep on Tyler’s shoulder, and he just left them out there, curled up together. The two of them would wake up to watch the sunrise, and then go into the house before Tyler’s father called up to them that breakfast was ready.

Shaking his head to clear the broken memories away, Kyle realized he had wandered onto the middle of the carpet in front of Tyler’s bed, the black and white rings paling to the electric blue onto an almost indistinguishable shade in the dimmed lighting. He ran his hand along the woolen blanket Tyler’s grandmother had bought for him on his face. He dashed them away and quickly stepped to the box and tossed the last of the things Tyler’s parents had told Kyle to take into it...

"Go ahead and take what you want. Tyler would never forgive us if we didn’t let you have any of his... his...." Connie had started to tell him earlier that week, but had broken up in a fit of tears. Tim had moved next to her, cradling and comforting her. Kyle had turned away from them, unable to watch even them together. It just brought up so much jealousy. Why wasn’t Tyler there to hold him?

It’s not fair! Why am I the only one that can’t have someone there to comfort me...? He asked this to himself in his mind for the millionth time. He didn’t bother crying to God or whoever...if they were there, he didn’t care; where were they that day, huh? As far as he cared, they hadn’t stopped the drunk from getting in the car and tearing his life apart. Hell if they exist, they really screwed up...they let the wrong guy live. The drunken fool walked away with a broken nose. He could still hear the radio playing in Tyler’s car, even as the emergency crew tried to get Tyler and him out of the crumpled mess...

Kyle had seen him the other day, at the gas station. He was driving a new Mercedes his parents had just bought him. Of course, he had gotten time served, community service and lost his license for a few months; he was only 16 after all, his lawyer had said, the money burning holes in this pockets. The County can’t put the son of the local rich man in jail. Such a fine, religious
young man can make mistakes, but we must learn to forgive. That would have been a tragedy, he thought as he viciously broke a pencil into smaller and smaller pieces, sitting now on the edge of the bed. Kyle had waited for the lawyer to break out a bible verse, but it never was said, just implied.

The nerve, though... buying him a car... a Mercedes at that... after the accident. Kyle had been fine until the girl had gotten out, hanging on the boy’s arm... Didn’t even see me coming through her empty head. He had knocked Tyler’s killer out cold, then, despite the harpy-like screams of his bimbo, Kyle had used a metal sales sign to break out all the windows, destroy the paint and the dash interior controls, and before the nearby people had managed to stop his rampage finally, he had shoved his pocketknife through two of the four tires. The judge had given Kyle two weeks working at the local animal shelter and forced him to see a grief counselor.

Won’t have to worry about that moron anymore either... Kyle snapped back to, letting go of the now-mangled pillow he had picked up during his reminisces. Fixing it neatly into its place. He stood and looked down at the until-now forgotten box, not willing to pick it up. To take these things... would mean that Tyler was never coming back for any of the things therein. Kyle reached down and lifted the box to his shoulder, the weight of it reflecting the felling of loneliness in his heart. "But then, we already know that don’t we?"

All I want is Tyler. Nothing else. Walking past the end of the bed to leave Tyler’s room for good, Kyle grazed the footboard by accident with the side of his left arm. Shouting in surprise, Kyle swore as pain filled his skin. He grabbed his arm in reflex, sending the box crashing to the floor and shattering the frames within. After a few seconds, he pulled his hand away and looked it over. Cherries of blood ran down his fingertips to his palm. All he could do was stare, seeing Tyler’s face as he was taken to emergency surgery. A waste... All that blood... his blood.

He finally looked up at the sound of creaking floorboards just outside the door. Briefly, he remembered the night last Valentine’s Day when Tyler had snuck into the room with the bottle of wine
he'd 'borrowed' from his parents. It was for the two of them to share a glass only but the creaking boards unfortunately had awakened Tim. He had come to check on things, and was disappointed to find wine. He had taken it quietly though and said not to say anything about it to Connie, then gone back to bed, leaving them with a stern smirk.

"Kyle...honey, did you yell for something? I didn't hear what you sai--... Oh god, Kyle! You're bleeding!" Connie had entered during his flashback, and now was holding a towel from the half-bathroom on the open wound. Kyle, still dazed, stared dumbly for a few more seconds then tried to help with his injury.

After they got his arm bandaged, Connie invited him to eat lunch with her in the kitchen. They talked for a short while over cold turkey and Colby cheese. He barely heard a word she said, too enthralled by the past. Before leaving to go home, Kyle asked distractedly if he could come and sit in Tyler's room still, if she and Tim didn't mind.

Connie looked at him in mild astonishment. Seeing his growing apprehension, she told him, "...Yeah, Kyle honey. You know you're always welcome in our house, even if we're gone. The key is still under the third block on the right, as always... Why did you ask?"

Looking out into the sunny daylight, he quietly whispered, not to Connie, but seemingly to someone far off. His eyes were unfocused as his lips formed the words, "I'm not done. I still have a thousand more words to tell Tyler. Oddly enough though," he said, forcing his eyes to focus solely on her, "they all seem to come out as 'I love you' and 'why aren't you still here'" With that utterance, Kyle lost his reserve. Tears glistened in the creases of his face, forging their paths down to his chin to stain his shirt and necklace.

"Oh Kyle..." He could see Connie force her own tears away, being strong for her other son. He let her cradle him close. He couldn't do it any more.

It just hurts. Everything, every place... Tyler was his life, and not even words could bring him back. So they sat, like a saint sheltering a martyr, the sunlight bathing them. The children still kept running innocently in the street.

He wanted just to be numb, because then it wouldn't be so bad....
Grandpa’s Rocking Chair

Michael Olugbile

Ceramic
Untitled

Zach Smith

Photograph

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Synchronicity

DeLynn Coppoletti

Colored Pencil on Tone Paper
Sonnet I

Guinevere Elizabeth Mercer

Oft have I with my inky wand
Preserved some fading ache or bliss
An elsewise mortal maiden’s hand
Will ever know her lover’s kiss
The Blue Queen’s tear hangs on her lash
Beneath a never-changing moon
But look! All words now cool to ash
The fire-breathing Muses swoon
The solemn, graceful poem twine
Unravels swift, a lightless ray
All words become unscented wine
By loving you, my gift I slay
Earthbound poetry can never capture
This, my unbound, Heaven-gazing rapture

No Illusion

John Stegeman

I was thirsty in the desert,
Hungry on the streets,
Lost in the wilderness.

Yet, I saw no oasis,
I saw no feast,
I saw no city,

I saw only you.
And it was no illusion
Untitled
DeLynn Coppoletti
Charcoal

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Together We Fall

Take one for you
And two for me.
A line between what’s fantasy.
A dream.
So real I’ve lost my soul.
These feelings
That take control.
Take control…
Sniff away…
From end to top.
Squeeze the pain.
Each last drop
I’m falling
Farther
Than most can see.
I hide it well it’s blind to me.

Take one
For me and two for you.
Puff in…
Puff out…
And pass it through.
My days are
Calm.
My nights are crazy.
I write it down
I wish I may.
I wish I may open up,
And guzzle down
Another cup,
Of poison love.
My heart is found
Next to you.
On the ground
My eyes are closed,
My mouth is wide.
I’ve lost
Your touch on my
Side.
Trid’n, Trump’n
Trap’n who.
All the times
I thought I knew.
Is there…
Was there…
Could there be.
One more
Chance at life
For me.
Take one for you
And two for me.
A line, a sniff, a puff
We’re free.
Mannatti sat quietly by the swollen river. He knew the shortening days and longer, cooler nights foretold the coming of the time when he would have to seek out the shelter of the warm mother trees for his winter sleep. The leaves had already turned to the brightened colors that were the first portents of the coming cold times. Some leaves had begun to fall, swirling lazily to the brown dried grasses of the forest floor.

He had lived through three cycles, what the humans call years, and so was well attuned to the changing seasons. He was tired from all the gathering of nuts and foodstuff to carry him through the winter, but not nearly so tired as was his mother, Estarna, and even less so than his grandfather, Ganuul, who in human time would be nearing eighty years of age. His father, he had been told, had been hunted before Mannatti was born, in the shortening season, when humans dress in their orange hats and vests and point metal sticks into the trees, pouring out thunder and shredding the bark from these givers of life, these homes and shelters of the squirrel tribes. When one becomes hunted, he was told, he or she is never seen again, carted off by the humans to some place far away, to some unknown destiny, unknown, because none had ever returned to tell the tale of where they had gone and what had become of them.

He thought that perhaps the leaves that fall in this season shared the same fate, as had his father. The winds carry them far away to mysterious places, and no one sees them again. He often wondered if the leaves find new trees in the lengthening days of spring, and start a new life, only to be carried away to yet another destination in the following seasons. Had his father done the same? Had he started a new life and then been hunted and carried away again to another?

His mother and grandfather had told him that when a squirrel had been hunted, that they go to a place where there is no more coldness, a place where there is a bounty so great that one
eed not gather to survive, for food is everywhere, and there are no more of the night-hunter owls and other predators to worry about and from whom to hide. He found it hard to believe such a tale, because if there were such a place, and if that was where the hunted go, why would not everyone wish to be hunted? Why would squirrels run from the hunters, and try not to feel the lightning from the metal sticks?

If mother and grandfather really believed in this place, would they not stand boldly in front of the hunters and say, "Take me to this wondrous garden!" Grandfather talked of his painful joints and diminishing eyesight incessantly these days, and yet he tells that in this wondrous place, there is no more pain or suffering, no more dimming sight. Yet he still hides from the hunters, and shakes in fear when they approach. Why would he fear such a garden of plenty? Why would he hide from its promise of health and food and comfort?

Mother said that grandfather did not want to leave them behind and alone, but why could they not all go there together? Mannatti thought that perhaps there was not really such a place, or that Ganuul and Estama did not have so much faith in that place as they had let on. Perhaps they were just sleep stories. Sleep stories like the ones he had about running and playing and lying in the summer sun, not real, just wishes that would shield them from the cold, and make their lives a little brighter in the darkness.

Mannatti supposed that no one would know if such a place were real, until they were hunted, and that then it would be too late to turn back if such a place did not exist. He thought that perhaps, this not knowing was why the squirrels hid from the hunters. Don't we all fear the unknown?
Untitled

Christina Little

High-fire Stoneware Ceramics
Jntitled

Belle Walters

Photograph
Self Portrait

Charles Haskins

Mixed Media

https://digitalcommons.shawnee.edu/silhouette/vol2004/iss1/1
Morning. Standing in front of the mirror. Painting my face. Taming my dark hair. Perfect. Must be perfect. He wanted this early in the morning. He didn’t want to ruin a whole day. He didn’t realize it would ruin our whole lives.

"Are you ready?" my husband asks.

"I can’t do this, I answer while the tears begin again. My paint’s going to run. I must stop crying. He would want that. He hated tears. He loved laughter. If laughter won’t come, the tears must stop for just a little while. I gather myself together and we leave.

Rain. Perfect. Pouring rain. Nice. Any other time it would be. August is so humid rain should be a good thing. But not today. No, today it is fittingly horrible.

"Do you think this will let up?" my husband asks.

"Why should it? It’s always raining or snowing every time we bury someone on that hill. Why should Daddy’s be any different?" I reply, venom in my voice.

Thunder explodes. Lightning strikes. I don’t care. I am deadened. My heart is too broken. Sitting beside my husband, my daughters in the back seat. All of us drenched head to toe in black. My husband looks perfect and so do my daughters. The weather is fitting. It is as black outside as my heart is inside. Perfect.


"You’re Daddy would’ve loved all this," someone says into my ear, hugging me.

"Yes, appearances meant a lot to Daddy. It’s perfect," I answer.

The deep, southern voice in my head laughs and says, "It’s pretentious and an ounce of pretension’s worth a pound of manure!" I laugh out loud. Can’t help myself. I must be crazy.

"Naw, Sissy, you ain’t crazy. Let me hear ye laugh. I loved fer everybody to laugh," that voice says again. I look
directly in front of me and there he is. Lying in repose. Dark hands folded across his belly. Rings of diamond and gold sparkle on huge, rough hands. He’s smiling. My Daddy, a man who loved life. Who loved his family. Who loved me. His dark hair shines in the light of the chandelier. He was a wonderful, laughing, southern, man’s man. He died right where he loved to be. He was checking his cattle out on his farm. His age didn’t slow him down. He loved his farm. A heart attack and a tree ended all that.

The lights flicker, flashing against the blue steel of the casket. A casket he’d picked for himself. Taking care of us even in death. Perfect. Perfectly peaceful.

"We’d better find some candles, just in case," I hear the pastor whisper.

"I’ll get them. Lord, what horrible weather," the parishioner says.

Thunder crashes. Laughter. I hear his voice again claiming credit for the blast of thunder.

"Whatch’a thank ‘bout them apples, Doodlebug!" he says. He laughs and so do I.

Songs are sung. Pastor preaches. All I hear is his laughter. It’s over. One by one the one thousand file by. They hug the family. They hug me. Sweltering. Crying. The laughter in my head stops the tears begin again. Who cares about appearances? My heart is perfectly broken. The paint runs.

Thunder and Lightning. This huge storm is ruthless.

"Please Daddy. Show me you’re still here. Please God make this rain stop. Misery loves company and I’m miserable," I think.

Driving miles to the cemetery. Miles on paved road. A little ways on gravel. The top of the ridge rises in front of me. We are here. The stones rise up out of the ground like the stumps of trees. There’s where he’ll rest. He’ll be buried at the head of his Daddy. He loved his Daddy with all his heart. People everywhere like ants on these mounds of earth. Beautiful here. Suddenly, the thunder roars and lightning strikes a tree on that ridge surrounding...
us all in blinding light. Some gasp, some jump. I smile.
"I’m right here Sissy. I’m never far," he says in my head. Laughter again in my head and coming out of my mouth.
"See, he ain’t even been there a week and he’s already causin’ trouble," my husband whispers in my ear. I laugh again.
"He was full of vinegar on earth. Uncontrollable. Why should heaven make him any different," I say to him through a face full of smiles and tears. This is so my Daddy.

Sitting between my sisters, my husband and babies stand behind me. Again the pastor speaks. An army man comes forward. He speaks words spoken many times over other graves. Words telling of America’s gratitude for this man’s service. Today they are spoken for the fallen comrade that was my Daddy, their friend. The army man’s voice trembles with grief.

Gunfire blasts along with the thunder on the dark hill. My eyes close, tears come again. Twenty-one times the report sounds. The thunder explodes even louder than the gunfire. Daddy always has the last word.

It’s over. Perfection. Daddy would’ve been proud. The people begin to file past for the last time. I can’t hear his laughter anymore. I can’t hear his voice anymore. The tears fold, unstoppable.

My heart breaks perfectly with no pretension.
Courting the Dark

Phillip Cooke

Take my hand again; it’s gotten cold
Don’t wait long though, it hurts
Without the comfort you took with you.
Sometimes I hope that dreams are untrue,
They never occur, so I’m told,
So parting is a dream I had.
Nothing more...

My eyes know the room, closed.
You won’t be there through my wishing.
Drenched fabric clings to me, chilled by pain.
No one lives here now; the hall is nature’s.
A feather pushes somersaults around the room,
Following a leaf in an endless chase.
Empty as the grave...

I mimic them and chase after your shade.
Lead me to my feet again; let’s awe the dawn.
Share the floor with the sylphs, lead me,
Wrapping your arm around my waist. Just a breeze,
Light spirals in the dust from our feet...
You’re so light; I can lift you for once.
The room circles...

I can feel the sun’s warmth, but you stay cold
As our final dance goes on;
I will never let go, willingly.
Please hold on sun; I’m not done!
Don’t fade without me, my love.
A gust and you leave me standing...

And the music stops forever.
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