

Front Porch Review



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Zucchini
- Deanna Morris

Summer months my father carried
green, lean, curved zucchinis
from the garden into the kitchen,
handing them to my mother
as if they were flowers.
Each time, without looking up from the sink,
my mother handed him a colander to put them in.

She rinsed the zucchinis, then cut precisely down
the middle of each, one after another,
placing them on a terry cloth towel,
each pair not touching.

She missed once when she sliced, the tip of her finger slightly slit,
one or two drops of blood absorbed by the fleshy zucchini centers
discarded in the sink.

She pulled out her 47 recipes for zucchini, closed her eyes,
and picked one. Zucchini boats, filled with cheese and onions.
The onions made her cry. So did the zucchinis.

Years later I learned the zucchini vegetable is the swollen ovary
of the zucchini flower. The zucchini flower's beauty bursts forth,
the petals later to fall to the earth. The zucchini then serves.
Maybe that's what made my mother cry and my father carry them.

Will and Grace
- Dixon Hearn

"She ain't gone yet," Gray mumbles audibly. "I can still feel her presence in this house. She knows we're here."

"Spirits do that, Gray," his sister Ardell replies. "They linger a while. Sometimes they don't know they've passed over."

Heads nod and shift, uneasy at the thought of Grace Whittaker's spirit flitting about the room, over-listening conversations, peeking into their thoughts.

"It's unnatural to believe she ain't in heaven right this very minute, where she belongs." Catt never lacked for an opinion. "Sweet thing's gone home to Jesus. The *Bible* don't say nothing about circling the airport – she's landed."

"*Bible* don't say we sprout wings when we get there neither, but it's common knowledge around here," Gray replies, his head cocked in awe at his big sister's curt remark. "For that matter, aint' nobody come back to tell us – ANY of us – on the TV set what they found when they got there."

"That's enough, you two," Auntie Nell interjects. "I want to remind you this is a wake, not a religious debate. And if you two got to argue, take it outside and beat it around. I won't have you bickering while my dead sister's spirit is still in this room."

Nell was officially the head of the family now, though in truth she'd been in charge of things all her life – when Catt wasn't around. A stubborn old soul that some likened to General Patton when she was younger and had more feist. Told everybody where and when and how about every family matter, right down to who's bringing what to Christmas dinner. Ran her home like a Swiss clock, somebody once said, working Uncle Chap till he finally stopped ticking himself one afternoon last summer. In the Whittaker house, though, big sister Catt had always held the rein.

Gray – Catt's younger brother – was a Republican, and this made for a testy relationship. He didn't accede so easily to his sister's dictums. The two years he spent at the state college taught him to question authority and to challenge – and challenge he did. Some said it was needed, others that it would tear the family apart, but the shoving match has been going on too long to call a truce.

"Judge Lally's coming on Tuesday to go over mama's will," Catt announces. "I hope you can all make it because he says we all have to be present for the reading."

"Why are we meeting here, Catt, when you know the judge wanted to meet at his office?" Gray inquires.

"Do we have to put every damn thing to a vote, Gray? I was thinking of ya'll. You wouldn't have to get dressed up and trot off downtown when we could be more comfortable right here in mama's parlor."

Gray purses his lips and slides back in his chair. "What you were really thinking about, sister dear, was how it might embarrass you if we ended up in a squabble at the law office in front of everybody."

"I don't think any of us mind making the trip to town," April says in her squeaky little voice. "Maybe we could all have lunch at the Piccadilly on the way."

"And who the hell do think we are, April?" Catt scoffs, "the Waltons?"

Ardell, the middle sister – in more ways than one – has been watching the fireball go back and forth long enough. "I say we keep the appointment at Judge Lally's office. If there's

any harsh words, it's better to have them there instead of here in mama's house."

The room grows silent for a cold spell. "I can take us all to the Piccadilly," April beams. "I just got my tax refund. What do ya'll say to that?"

"April, put your damn tax money in the bank," Gray snaps. "You're gonna need it come the first of the month – you always do."

The conversation dies as each one makes their huffy way out the door, having finally agreed to meet at the judge's office.

Catt arrives at the office first, trying her best to coach the judge on how to handle things. But Judge Lally is having none of it and tells her to park it in the waiting room until the others arrive – which is one hour later by the clock.

"Good Lord!" Catt exclaims, when April comes floating in the door. "Do you really need that sack of doughnuts to make it through the will reading?" The secretary sniggers as April saunters across the room to the waiting area.

"You're something else, April. Just sit down over there in the corner with your Bear Claws," Catt chides, "And try not to get the crumbs all over the judge's new carpet."

April had always done what Catt told her. She's also grown used to the sniggering when they're out in public together. She knows Catt thinks it will make her see how she's let herself go, how funny-looking she appears to everyone.

Ardell and Gray arrive at one-thirty sharp, cordial but serious-minded. Auntie Nell – not being included in the will – remains at home and is grateful for that. There is nothing of earthly value contained in her dear sister's will that could interest her. Her memory is all the legacy she needs. Indeed, none of them really wants to be here, to sit through a formal reading – except perhaps Catt. When their daddy died, there was no meeting with the judge. He'd left everything to his wife. No mention of his children at all – each of them different as the four seasons, and all still unmarried.

"How long you been here, Catt?" Gray speaks up.

"Just a while," she replies.

"Long enough to get a peek at the will?"

Catt comes out of her chair and marches over to where Gray sits. "Don't you ever think about anything except aggravating me? Mama's barely cold in her coffin out there at Hasley Cemetery, and you want to start a row at her will-reading?"

"You're neither one guiltless," Ardell speaks up. "I've had a lifetime of keeping my mouth shut, but it ends here. I don't care if you WROTE the damn will, Catt! And I don't care if mama left every damn dime she had to you, brother dear! But I do care about mama and daddy and April here. And if I hear one more smart remark from either of you, I'll make the biggest stink you ever saw – right here in this office. I don't care if the judge calls the law on us!" Catt's eyes narrow, and her face pinches till it's beet red. "How would you like to see that in the morning paper, Catt?" Ardell says, wagging her finger. "It wouldn't look too good for your job neither, brother Gray. And, hell, let's face it – neither one of you looks worth a damn to a camera."

April sits pie-eyed and pitiful, her mouth encircled with pastry icing. Ardell had done her best to not be heard, but the secretary has already summoned the judge. When he arrives, you'd think nothing had transpired except a patient wait. Gray and Catt both grab the judge's hand and pump it all the way to his conference room – leaving his secretary with her mouth agape and pondering just what kind of people the poor judge is dealing with.

The judge ponders this as well. By the time they are all seated and settled, he has sprung open a thick red file and begun rifling through some papers. “The first thing I want to say to all of you,” Judge Lally begins, “is that the contents of Grace Whittaker’s will may contain some surprises. As you know, Catt,” he says, turning to face her directly, “your mother came in a month ago to see me. Alone.”

Brows wrinkle all around. Catt is the only one aware of that meeting, though she was never able to pry a word about it out of her mother, which cut her to the quick.

“Like I was saying,” the judge continues, “Grace asked to see me about some changes to her will, and if I didn’t know better, I’d guess she suspected she’d be gone soon.”

“We didn’t get any notice about a change,” Catt cuts in. “Mama kept a copy of her will locked up in her old chifferobe. She said she just came to *review* the will with you, Judge Lally. Didn’t say nothing about any changes.”

“Let the man speak, Catt,” Gray intervenes. “I think that’s the point. We weren’t supposed to know the details, sister dear.”

“I’m warning you two,” Ardell whispers.

”Would you like a doughnut, Your Honor?” April peeps up. “I got a jelly and a chocolate with sprinkles left if you’d like.”

“The man don’t want your stale doughnuts,” Catt scolds again. “For Christ’s sake we’re holding a will reading here.”

“I didn’t know I’d need my gavel, folks,” Judge Lally smiles. “Can we please just get on with matters here?”

Everyone settles back in their chairs and draws a fresh breath while the judge finds his place in the file. “Now first of all, Grace asked me specifically to withhold the terms and content of her will until she was in the ground. Why, I’m not sure, but she was adamant on that.” He retrieves a clipped set of legal-length documents and pores over the first page.

“I’m going to paraphrase the will by its four sections,” he says, “starting with Section One. This section deals with your mother’s liquid assets: bank accounts, stock, savings bonds and the like. The second section deals with real estate – her house and the second property your father purchased back during the war.”

Catt springs to her feet. “Exactly what property would that be, Judge Lally? I’ve been living with the woman most of my life, and she never once mentioned owning another property. What kind of property are we talking about?”

The rest are equally perplexed. The house on Lawson Street where they grew up is the only place they’ve ever known.

“Had she lost her mind?” Catt asks, eyeing her siblings one by one. “No wonder that doctor told me to monitor her medication. I thought she was just a bit forgetful. Not delusional!”

“Sit back down, Catt,” Ardell says, biting her tongue before it shouts. “We’ll get to the bottom of it.”

“You surprise me, sister dear.” Gray smirks. “I’d have bet you could recite mama’s financial affairs chapter and verse after you moved back in bag and baggage while I was away at college.”

“Do you think your secretary out there would like this last jelly doughnut, Your Honor?” April says. “I could run it out to her.”

“Thank you, Miss April, but if this is the best we can all do, maybe I’ll take it to her myself.” The judge heaves a frustrated sigh and pushes back in his chair. “Can we just proceed? This meeting is on your dime.”

“And the third section,” the judge continues, “deals with Grace’s personal effects. She asked that this be addressed separately from liquid assets. It seems there are some particular items that cannot be appraised.”

“All she had was her wedding rings and pearl necklace and lavalier,” Catt blurts out. “The rest is all costume jewelry. I know. I sat down and made a detailed list of every item in her jewelry box and her safe deposit box, too. I tell you that’s all the woman had that was worth anything.”

“Like I said, Catt dear,” Gray smirks, “chapter and verse.”

“Are there any other secrets she withheld from us?” Ardell asks politely.

“The lavalier belonged to her mother,” April says. “Grandma Barker. It’s pear-shaped with tiny little diamonds all the way around it.”

“The man don’t care about the shape of mama’s diamond lavalier, April. Don’t you have another doughnut in that bag you need to eat before it goes rank?”

“That’s it!” Ardell yells. “If you take that tone with her one more time, Catt, I’m going to paint your face with the back of my hand.”

“Ladies!” The judge yells. Gray just sits on his hands, rocking to and fro with a crooked smile stretched east to west.

“I’m going home now,” April announces, rising to her feet. “You can tell me later, Judge Lally, what mama has to say in her will.”

“Hell, no, you’re not!” Catt yells. “He can’t read this will unless we’re all present. So you just park your lard butt back in that chair.”

The judge calls a brief recess and slips out the back, leaving the four to wrangle. Ten minutes later he returns carrying his gavel. Not a peep can be heard— just like earlier when he first met them in the waiting room.

“We’re going to try this one more time,” the judge says. “I know you come from a good home. Act like it.”

Catt starts right in: “So what’s the fourth section about, judge? Seems to me you’ve covered it all.”

“Well, the fourth section has to do with living arrangements. You see your mother wanted her home to stay in the family, a place where any or all of you could come if and when you needed to.” The judge pauses here and says, “But let’s come back to that one. I’d like to talk about this second property first.” He clears his throat and commences to explain that back during the war, their father had accepted a piece of property as payment for a debt. Shortly afterward, the city acquired the adjacent property to create a storage facility. “In short,” the judge says, “your daddy leased his property to the city for fifty years – at which time the land will revert back to your family.”

This news creates an outbreak of head scratching and eye-rolling. Not once had this ever been mentioned to them.

“In addition,” the judge says, “it is stipulated that April is to move back into her house and share it with Catt as long as either one needs it. Same goes for you, Ardell and Gray. The house is now held in all four of your names.”

“Oh, hell no!” Catt yells. “I can’t live with that woman – smacking and chomping on sweet cakes twelve hours a day seven days a week. Blubbering and stammering like a gimp dog. I’d as soon move in with them Scabbards and them six hellions out there in Trailer Haven.”

“You don’t have a choice sister dear,” Gray smiles. “You got no job, no place else to go. And let’s face it they wouldn’t hire you as night clerk at the 7-11 where they can’t even find

help.”

“I can make it on my own,” April speaks up. “I’ve done fine so far.”

“But you can’t live on disability forever, dear,” Ardell says. “Mama wants you to live in her house again, honey. So you don’t have to worry about making the rent. Paying the bills. Catt will just have to change her ways a bit.” She eyes her sister Catt sternly.

“I’m the oldest, Ardell,” Catt smirks. “You don’t dictate what I will and will not do. April needs her space – and room for them feral cats she’s taken up with. I’m sure mama meant that when April was old and on hard times that she could come home. But it ain’t that time yet.”

Judge Lally lowers his gavel and everyone snaps to. “There is one other page here, folks, and you need to hear it. Since your mama apparently thought it might fall out like this, she included an addendum. It states that if you cannot agree to these terms within one week from the date of this reading, the entire estate is to be dissolved as soon as possible and all the proceeds bequeathed and settled upon Mendonhall Bible College over in Tallulah.”

“But that’s a Baptist college!” Catt’s eyes pop wide, and she’s on her feet again. We’re Methodists, for God’s sake! Let me see that piece of paper.” She snatches the document right out of the judge’s hands. “Oh, hell, no! Mama ain’t giving away her hard-earned money to them greedy Baptists taking vows of prosperity. You can just start packing your bags, April. I don’t give a damn what the rest of the will has to say, I’m ready to sign on the dotted line here. Ardell, you and Gray can have it. I’m keeping the house and staying put till they haul me out to Hasley Cemetery next to mama.”

”But we have to go over the rest of the terms and details,” Judge Lally says, knowing full well it’s futile. In truth, the matter has already been settled – just the way Grace Whittaker wanted it. The will keeps everything intact – for at least another generation.

“Just sign the damn papers, everybody,” Catt orders. “And don’t think you’re getting that front bedroom, April dear, because I’ve got squatter’s rights. Ain’t there something in the law about that, judge? The very idea of giving the family fortune to them Bible-bending hypocrites. Everybody knows they ain’t got grace nor pedigree.”

Better Days Gone By

- Anita Soupir



Visiting the Farm in Otisville at Seven
- Mike Finley

I was struck by the animalness of everything,
the smell of the pigs, the taste of uncured milk,
the sweetness of hay drying in the loft,
the float of feathers in the henhouse after a squabble.
I made special note of the horses' asses,
kind of amazing, with their tails switching the flies.
I was a city boy tiptoeing in the country,
and sometimes I was afraid.
I was afraid herding the cows at nightfall,
leading their enormous backsides back to the barn.
And I was afraid when my cousin Billy Springer,
seeing what a rube I was, stepped barefoot into a fresh cow pie
in the milking barn and let the sauce rise up between his toes,
me certain he would be consumed by worms,
if not immediately, then in a month or two,
him grinning because he wouldn't.

We Sang Dark Songs in Grade School
- Al Ortolani

All through John
Brown's illness
there was nothing
in the color of his face
but bone, even his tall
sons were scrimshawed
crow's feet.
He rested all winter
in a narrow rope bed
below the stairs, pushed
against the roughhewn
timbers. He must have
cursed the chill
from the river, the lack
of sun in the window.
Under the stairs
that led to the loft, he
listened to the wind,
the ice and snow
creeping into the walls –
the adze edges still
visible today, blades
hacked too deep. Even
years later, long past
his *a-mouldering*, no
softening smooths
the cuts, scars deep
in the white-
washed logs, nothing now
but the song book
and children's voices.

Aurorae

- Len Kazmer



THE AURORA BOREALIS

Northern lights



STAR TRAILS AROUND THE NORTH STAR (POLARIS)

Due to the Earth's rotation

The Forecaster
- Paul Bernstein

Poor Cassandra prophesied
the fall of Troy, global warming,
and the housing bubble,
so everybody hates her,
she hasn't been kissed
in 2,000 years, and scratches
for bread pitching forecasts
to the Weather Channel.
Now she's predicting
40 days and nights of rain,
and hangs out hopeless
on the corner crying,
offering umbrellas,
grace, and meteorology
to heedless pilgrims blinded
by the faithless sun
that shines before the storm.

Destruction
- Nancy McIlvaine

Reality

I am a veteran of two wars and a woman. I left behind my young son with my mom's family so the extra money could help with the bills. I felt it was also a great way to show the neighbors that I am an American who believes in the freedom we are really supposed to enjoy. My training said we were all equal in spirit and duty.
I've come home.

Rage

I live in an alien place now far from my kid.
I know deep inside that my life's on the skids.
How did I get here when I passed every test?
Like too many women, I'm just like the rest.
I take all those pills 'cause I've lived through abuse.
My doctor is weary but that's no excuse.
The sarge in my unit said, "She will survive.
Get her feet wet and teach her to drive.
If we keep her embedded, there's not much to harm her.
Her chances are better surrounded in armor."
So we went through damn mountains, and I steered the humvee.
Always aware of a hidden IED.
I followed my orders, those men got me riled.
And then someone shouted, "Ahead there's a child.
Just run him over, he's enemy bait".
So I cried when I killed him, by then much too late.
No IED noise just a bump as he fell.
He was my son, now locked in its cell, my brain is imprisoned.
I'm feeling like hell.

Emotion

There are no more tears. Gone are those salty drops that flow silently down my cheek alighting onto a sleeve or moistening a pillow. Where did they go? Did they evaporate with the love that was once the unqualified emotion in raising a child?
Did those salty tears become arid and dry up when the heart became distant, the blood sucked dry by frustration and rages from within, not unlike sandstorms that sweep the deserts of the world? I HAVE BEEN THERE.
Nothing is left but air that is stale and heavy. Vanished are the tears that flow as a natural part of our being, the pear-shaped drops that contain the elixir of emotions.

Rise Above

- Flo Hayes



I Can't Find the Ketchup!
- Lois Greene Stone

"Set the table. Why do I have to ask every night for some help." Cindy spoke in sing-song tones imitating her mother. "Help me. I don't ask for much."

"Cindy? If you're talking, I can't hear you with the faucet running." Mrs. Rose stood in front of the white porcelain basin rinsing, then scrubbing with a coarse brush, Idaho potatoes.

"Nothing." Cindy screamed as loudly as she could. "I didn't say anything. I was singing."

"Okay, honey." Mrs. Rose lowered the water pressure. "Set the table."

"I am!" Cindy was sharp in tone. In her pockets, she carried silverware so she wouldn't have to make too many trips to the kitchen cabinets. She placed plates on the dinette table then moved them into position. "Beverly sits with her back to the window. Yeah. She picked that place 'cause it's the hardest one to get out of to help clear or get anything that's been forgotten."

"Oh, Cindy," Mrs. Rose responded. She lay the peeler on the countertop, picked up a linen dishtowel with a red border and wiped her hands.

"What?" Cindy continued pushing plates around. Her pocket jingled with the flatware.

"Beverly picked that seat when we first moved in. She picked the bedroom with the window box, and linoleum floor that had game boards impressed into its design; it wasn't the biggest bedroom either. It's almost 1950 now, so that was quite some time ago." Mrs. Rose moved her exposed arm over her forehead as if to wipe away moisture but there wasn't any. "What's the matter with you tonight?"

"I hate being the youngest!"

Mrs. Rose bit her lower lip to steady it from breaking into a smile.

"I go to bed first. I get all the hand-me-downs. I'm always the last to do anything special. No one takes me seriously. Everyone else here whispers about periods and bras and hickeys like I'm too young to know what they are. I wear ugly shoes and socks. And I hear 'I'm too busy, Cindy, so could you do my chores since you're only a little kid?'"

"Well, let's take these one at a time."

"I don't need a lecture. Save that for Beverly." Cindy grabbed the silverware from her pocket and put in on the table. She wanted to have a monologue not a conversation.

Mrs. Rose persisted. "You'll be with me the longest, honey. You and I will have special times that your sister can't ever have."

"Swell." Cindy shoved knives and spoons to the right of each plate, forks to the left.

"Yippie." The sarcasm was obvious.

"You also have more playthings because they've been handed down. And, unlike Beverly, my firstborn, you've always had someone to play with and show you how to do whatever..."

"You should have had three children! The middle is best. Middle kids have everything. They sometimes say they get the least because parents start from the top or bottom but that's not true. Can't you see you'll always think of me as the baby!" Cindy seemed exhausted from this small outburst and sat down. The wooden back of the chair was curved and jabbed her shoulder as she sat at an angle. "Darn chair!"

Mrs. Rose tossed the towel she was still holding onto her shoulder. Cindy noticed the border and muttered "meat". Aloud she stated, "Goulash, I'll bet."

"You used to say goolish-goulash. I guess you're growing up." Mrs. Rose stroked Cindy's head. Cindy wiggled it, wanting her to stop.

"Oh. You don't understand. You just don't. Why am I setting up the table all by myself!"

Cindy tried to move out of the chair but her mother and the back's angle prevented it.

"You won't be doing the dishes. This is your job tonight. Tomorrow you'll dry and not set up. It's called division of labor. Equal." Mrs. Rose knew Cindy was trapped in the chair but wanted to touch her and show caring.

"Yeah. Division until a boyfriend comes over, or too much homework, or no other time to practice the piano. Then it's 'Cindy, please do this or that because I just can't tonight.'" Cindy kept squirming until, finally, her mother moved aside. Cindy got up quickly and walked into the kitchen, opened the painted wooden cabinet that contained glasses, and removed three.

Another pre-teen girl, Mrs. Rose realized. Hormones. Handle it, there's years of experience. But then the awareness that this pre-teen child is fatherless caused a sigh to emit from her nostrils as she smothered its release from her own mouth. Inside her head she spoke to her cherished, deceased husband and asked him for guidance, told him she missed him every day she's faced without him.

Beverly came into the dinette. "When's dinner?" Her hair was in metal rollers, and she was wearing a cotton duster since her shower and hair-washing.

"Cover your rollers during dinner, Beverly," Mrs. Rose instructed, then answered the question, "soon." She walked to the sink, lifted a potato then cut it into sections on a wooden board. Dropping it into the pot of cubed meat, sauce, onions, green peppers, and carrots which had simmered for an hour, then repeated the procedure for three more potatoes. "You've complained about soggy potatoes from cooking too long. These won't be soggy."

"Who's complained?" Cindy defended. "I don't even know any better yet. I'm not old enough to ever have eaten a potato that wasn't mushy or goopy from either being cooked in chicken soup, or goulash, or pot roast, or brisket, or anything." She pulled her arms around her chest and swayed.

Mrs. Rose's head shook back and forth, back and forth. She pursed her lips. "Just get the ketchup from the pantry," she tried to keep the disgust out of her voice but it crept into the tone anyway.

Beverly quickly left the room. "Not my set-up."

Cindy went to the pantry. It was a double-door closet that reached to the ceiling and was built next to a hallway wall between the kitchen and dining room. She opened it. On its very top shelf was a trophy engraved "Miss Pitkin Avenue;" it was hard for her to believe that this woman, her mother, with functional clothing and pinned-back hair was once beautiful and lithe enough to have won a bathing beauty contest. Mothers could never have been young and pretty, and she certainly couldn't imagine her own being the best of an entire group of hopefuls.

"I can't find any ketchup," Cindy called.

"I bought five jars. It's right in front of your nose." Mrs. Rose's voice vibrated from behind the open refrigerator door.

Cindy looked again at the trophy shaped like a goblet with two handles. Her mother called it a loving cup. Dumb name, she thought, then her eyes went down to shelves with canned goods and jars. Aloud she said, "Soup, pickles, beans, corn, mayonnaise, beets – yuk, peas, cocoa, castor oil – double yuk, Crisco, vinegar. Mom. We're out of ketchup."

"Follow your nose, or your eyes, or whatever. It's in there, Cindy." Mrs. Rose was pulling a seltzer bottle from the back hall.

Cindy touched her nose, made an imaginary line from it to a shelf. "Toilet paper," she yelled. "We can have goulash and toilet paper." She went to her eyes and made the same line. "I see, right before my eyes, black olives. Yes. I love black olives. Can we have black olives?"

Mrs. Rose, feeling that Cindy was just amusing herself in order to annoy, went to the pantry. "Here. Right in front. If it were any closer, it would bite you. Ketchup. More ketchup. Where were you looking? Nothing was hiding it. Big, red bottles, right in front. Stop being annoying already."

"I didn't see it." First Cindy was defensive. Then she stared at the line of red bottles and repeated, quietly, "I really didn't see it." Her eyes moved to the top shelf and the 'loving cup'; she felt unlovable at the moment but she also felt her mother's sarcasm about a bottle biting her was uncalled for so, for her, the woman who received that prize was unlovable for the time being.

"At least with milk meals, there are noodles with butter, milk, cheese, and we don't need ketchup." Mrs. Rose stated in exasperation as she was tired.

Cindy carried the bottle as if it was a treasured possession. "Right before my eyes, and I didn't see it," she spoke to herself in muted words. "Will life go by this way? Will opportunity go by this way? Did daddy's being alive once go by this way?" She burst into tears as she placed the full bottle on the dinette table.

Mrs. Rose wrinkled her forehead, mumbled, "adolescence," turned her head from right to left, then pretended to be cheerful as she walked to Cindy and embraced the child. "I didn't mean to be harsh, honey."

Cindy sobbed until tears were spent.

It isn't the way we began, but
- Tasha Graff

The bowl is washed, the counter wiped
clean and your mother's wooden spoon
rests in the drying rack. The oven is cold
now, the honey re-shelved. Traces of dough
sit on the backs of your hands, flour lingers
under your fingernails. We're out of butter.

It isn't the way we began, but we wake up,
often with silence, often with spaces between.
We shower. We drink the coffee we make.
When we're quiet enough, and phrases of our
neighbors climb through the kitchen window,
when the bread has risen, again, and
Terry Gross says *This is Fresh Air*, when

the compost is stirred, the recycling sorted,
the trash tied up, the floors swept, when what
we own is being washed, and our apartment
shakes to the rhythm of the dryer, as the candles
burn: Sit with me, here, on the coral tiles
of the bathroom floor. Don't wear any jewelry.
Look at me, watching you, stripped down,

cross legged, pale-skinned. Let there be
goose bumps. Tell me where we go from here.

Creeping In

- Joe Simchak



Sleeping With a Woman
- Shanti Weiland

is a prayer. The first
night of an arranged
marriage. A bright
cloak in the woods,
a silver moon.

A snow globe city,
tiny painted lights. People
inside houses, saying
prayers. The woods line
the bend. A moon against
the glass.

Sitting Apart
- Hillel Broder

between a chair and damp hair:
tea breathes, steaming smooth
curved backs and wrinkled palms
becoming your mother and –
first, my son, you pulled back
our shoulders and opened
our hearts. Of course, a father's
wish: rustle ancient leaves as
leaves, but your smooth spine is
far closer, than I will ever
know, now I notice how your
eyes follow mine to
breathe your belly, with mine and
shift a foot in our chair, pulling
back, only a hair's breadth apart,
you scratch inscriptions, veins,
into my palms and bones.

Who Will Buy My Wonderful Things?

- Joseph Glaser





Comrades in Arms
- Terri Watrous Berry

It was not our time. We know that now.
Though our short legs daily pumped the muddy
sod, tracking it cross shiny speckled kitchens,
those were not our kitchens and we know that
now – aqua’s not a color we would choose.

Bombs bursting in air had brought and
bought the shell-shocked fallout we fell in –
new neighborhoods, old dreams had kept
our fathers alive, our mothers faithful
when the men were half a globe away,
tracking through other mud and sick for home.

They saved the world then needed to see
a reason or two for having saved it.
It was you. It was me.
We were the unborn reason for The War –
we were the victory! – still, it was not our time.

Yet we too then served, our very carefree
presence the pomp and circumstance
confirming all had not been in vain, still
their eyes had seen the glory of their story,
with us, at best, supporting cast
on a hard-won shingled stage,
built for us but not by us, it was not our time.



“Don't worry, be”
- Lois Greene Stone

Don't you hate this cliché: youth is wasted on the young? As teens, this phrase was annoying to hear since we certainly didn't think appreciation for being alive was only reserved for adults. Why didn't someone tell us exactly what was implied?

Youth has the luxury of wasting time; it's ahead and seemingly endless. The aged or ill can sense that time is precious and cannot be extended by just wishing it so. Coping is work and can't be made easier with a magic wand sprinkling sparkle dust.

But this is not a piece to depress you! How can you minimize worry and spend more time feeling happy?

Ecclesiastes' poetic lines "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance" (3:1-4) are a warning to appreciate time for it is limited, and life is fragile. Certainly, with the current terrorist situation, and shootings of people doing ordinary things such as pumping gasoline, waving goodbye to a parent before school, mowing the lawn, we realize that living without agitation is difficult.

Well, getting up each morning and savoring the day sounds good but doesn't generally happen. Sure, a particularly beautiful sunrise, or snowfall, or cloud pattern catches our attention and “I'm glad to be alive” passes through our consciousness but we just don't leap out of bed daily and sing, “Hello, world”

Okay. **What can we do to change futility to something positive?**

Accept life being unfair and unpredictable and allow relationships to have pain. Simon and Garfunkel wrote a song in the 60s: "I am a rock, I am an island...and a rock feels no pain, and an island never cries." If one accepts pain, its opposite, pleasure, is also possible.

Author Harold Kushner wrote: “Make a list of...the things you absolutely must have and do so that you can feel that you have lived your life and not wasted it." Although this list should probably have been started years before, none of us is too old to still have wants and dreams.

There's often frustration, feelings of inadequacy and rejection, withdrawal. How to overcome these? You can't but friendships with contemporaries help as you usually have similar viewpoints and pasts. Sharing, being a listener as well as a speaker, offering and also accepting, takes effort and emotional energy. Worth it? Of course.

While our concept of self has had years developing from what others have thought of us, how about concentrating on what you think of yourself? Is there a constructive way rather than whining, complaining, and trying to get pity? We already whined, complained, and tried to get attention and sympathy when we were teenagers. So we're not always wanted or welcome; this didn't suddenly happen. Were we always wanted or welcome during schooldays?

Boredom at any age is unpleasant so let's not blame life style depression on that. Having interests, money, reasonable health, friendships also has no calendar limits. So successes from our past help make successes in present and future adjustments.

When we were teens, happiness, as an example, implied a freedom from responsibility. Okay. Happiness's meaning changed with the years. Contentment, security, self-esteem replaced some of the freedom-from-care definition.

But happiness exists even as its dictionary meaning changes. We can be as active as health allows, of value to other people, interesting, and like our own selves. We are able to think about the future no matter how short it may be, and should have the liberty to be sad when

moments call for it. We may be enthusiastic and vital without becoming defensive and aware that solitude is not the same as isolation. Being sensitive and caring, but also selfish and insistent of our individual rights, actually can bring satisfaction. We're all able to use personal adjustment experiences to cope.

Was your youth wasted on yourself? Well, don't let responsibility damper the enthusiasm for living. Each sunrise is lovely...just look up and notice.

Double Play
- Joe Glaser

Man

the old man outside
awakening
the boy inside

the boy inside
rejuvenating
the man outside

doppelgangers fused
now and then becoming now
myriad machoselves deep
stir and rise expectantly

seeking comeback....competition....conquest

Woman

the old woman without
awakening
the girl within

the girl within
refreshing
the woman without

two yet one
now and then becoming now
napping sibiliselves
luxuriantly stir and stretch

dreaming of arousal....revision....rebirth

Faith

- Jo Stewart

Delusions provided moments
of comfort for me
they moved
without substance
habits of mind
planted deeply
at birth
seeping into the breath of life
sacramental lilies of the valley
nourished by
stories and song.

At dusk
in the afterglow
of a ravishing sun
bathed in memory
poised naked on a diving board
over the abyss
there is only room for me.
No insubstantial phantasm
to buoy me up
I close my eyes
I know
I know nothing.

Grace

- Alison Gustafson



Fathering
- Alan Swyer

“Think you and I could maybe kind of talk?” Ray Icely – *The Iceman* in the automotive world but *Raymond* when addressed by his ex-wife – heard his older daughter Julie whisper to him over the phone.

“Sure, sweetie. What's on your mind?”

“Like face-to-face? Without Mom and Lizzie around?”

“Any time you want.”

“Saturday? For lunch?”

“Sounds good to me!”

For Icely, unhappily ensconced in a childhood home that never went on the market because of divorce proceedings elongated by his ex-s lawyers and forensic accountants, such a call was a ray of hope.

Though he had custody on alternate weekends of Julie, who was nearing fourteen, and Lizzie who had just turned eleven, their time together, which generally began with a strained Friday dinner in Chinatown and then a too-silent drive through the Holland Tunnel, was often awkward and frustrating. Try as he might to organize outings – to the shore, different parks, museums, ice skating, miniature golf, and virtually every mall from Hackensack to Asbury Park – the girls simply had zero resources in New Jersey. Instead of freedom and spontaneity, plus friends with whom they could travel by foot, bus, subway or taxi, in Icely's world they had only each other plus him, and no means of transportation if not chauffeured.

So for Julie to request time, especially on one of her mother's designated days, was potentially a breakthrough.

In the circle in which they had been known – first as a couple, then as a family – as *The Icelys*, much to the chagrin of his then-wife, who referred to herself almost belligerently as Mimi Resnick, divorce was associated with transgression: infidelity, drug abuse, alcoholism, or, in the case of glib Gary Goldfarb, insider trading. Since invariably it was the husband at fault, when word got out that another marriage had crumbled, Icely, with no hearing or chance to tell his side of the story, became a pariah. Yet if he was guilty of anything, it was of having the temerity to say *No*.

It was Mimi who had campaigned incessantly until they moved to a fashionable Upper East Side address that upped the Iceman's daily commute to Rahway, New Jersey from tolerable to nightmare. And she who badgered relentlessly until they bought a getaway upstate, plus a Lexus SUV to transport them, as well as their newly acquired toy poodle, there and back.

Together with private school tuition for both girls, Icely, who was a success by the standards of his old neighborhood, but significantly less so by those of Mimi's social whirl, found himself awake far too many nights, worrying about ever-mounting bills. And still the demands kept coming.

To Mimi's suggestion that they put in a pool at their property in the Catskills, Icely simply said, on several occasions, “One of these days.” To her request that they build a tennis court there, he took to replying, “In due time.” But when Mimi demanded that he drop his procrastination so that they could immediately buy the girls a horse stabled in Central Park, sarcasm crept into Icely's response. “Why not one for each kid while we're at it?” he asked. “Or for you as well? Or maybe for all four of us?”

“You think that's funny!” Mimi snarled.

“No,” Icely muttered. “It's my life that's funny.”

To Mimi, that was a declaration of war, and she was ready. First came griping about the boyfriends and suitors she had mistakenly turned down: a singer-songwriter with three platinum albums, an actor starring in a Lifetime series, an investment banker, even the Liposuction King of Scarsdale. Then sniping about the *Who's-Who* of spectacularly generous husbands her BFF's had snared: a rock star, a producer of buddy comedies, the CEO of a Fortune 500 company, the heir to a kosher salami empire.

More painful for Icely was Mimi's non-stop recitation of what she considered his many flaws, foremost among them slovenliness, lack of ambition, plus a pig-headed refusal to trade playground basketball for country club sports. But the worst sin of all was what she termed Icely's *Unwillingness to take her tennis playing seriously*.

“Tell you what,” Icely responded when he reached a boiling point. “I'll chuck the job that's supporting us so shabbily so that you can provide us with the fortune you'll make at Wimbledon.”

Mimi, who had not played competitively since high school, stared daggers, then stormed away, iPhone in hand. The next day Icely was served with divorce papers.

Despite Mimi's repeated dismissal of his achievements, Icely had long surpassed all early projections, prognostications, and expectations regarding a career. As a motorhead whose teenage obsession with transmissions, carburetors, and brake linings far exceeded any non-mechanical interest in school, the presumption on the part of his parents and teachers was that his future was dim. If drag racing, which kept him in constant trouble with the law, failed to leave him incapacitated or put him behind bars, then it seemed he would wind up a grease monkey, or toil in some auto parts store.

But the Iceman fooled everyone. Talking his way into a management training position with a Jersey-based firm that manufactured automotive air filters, he suddenly found his calling. With a love and knowledge of cars that gave him an edge over the MBA's from Harvard and Wharton, he rose rapidly. He, not the guys in Armani suits, was the salesman most buyers, especially the aging motorheads, wanted by their side.

He wasn't an egghead with palaver about *market share*, *profit margins*, and *efficiency*. He was a guy's guy with whom they could hang. And go to the Indy 500. And go scuba diving. And spend a night on the town.

Then came the biggest coup of all: Ray persuaded the brass at Flow-Thru Filters that instead of simply *advertising* on the NASCAR circuit, they should actually *sponsor* a team. Once that notion went from dream to reality, then became a resounding success, the Iceman skyrocketed to the position of Senior VP of Marketing.

As he headed to meet Julie, Icely's mind sped from zero to sixty faster than the Flow-Thru race car on its best day. With ideas and possibilities asserting themselves, he tried not to give in to the best – that Julie might want to move in with him full-time – or the worst – that she, despite being shy, bookish, and socially awkward, could somehow be pregnant or, unlikely as it seemed, spaced out on drugs.

Ray rendezvoused with Julie at her favorite burger joint; Icely arriving ten minutes early, his daughter, who looked ill-at-ease, fifteen minutes later.

“I'm starved!” Julie announced as she gave her father a hug.

“Good, 'cause I ordered us fish lips, squirrel snouts, and a side of eel elbows.”

“That's a joke from when I was five,” Julie replied, forcing a frown which quickly

morphed into a smile. “But I'm glad you drove in.”

“Me, too.”

Without the need for menus, they ordered when a waitress approached, then made small talk until their food made an appearance.

“Better than a kale salad and a tempeh burger?” Icely asked as he glanced at a month's worth of carbs, sugar, and cholesterol.

“Lizzie told you about Mom's health kick?”

“Your Mom means well.”

“Somebody's being diplomatic.” Julie mentioned before diving into her cheeseburger, “You're not eating?” she asked a moment later with her mouth full, looking at Icely's untouched food.

“I like watching you have fun. So what's on your mind?”

“You won't tell Mom?”

“Me?”

“Promise?”

“Cross my heart and hope to die.”

So as not to appear too impatient, Icely took a sip of his vanilla milkshake.

“What's your feeling –?” Julie began hesitantly.

“About?”

“Head.”

Fearful of spewing milkshake, Icely maintained a semblance of calm.

“I-I bet some boy's been on you about it,” he heard himself say.

“Well --”

“Telling you how much it would mean to him.”

“Kind of --”

“And that it would always stay just between the two of you.”

Seeing Julie nod, Icely searched for the right words to say in an age when, thanks to the Internet, kids seemed to know far more than he ever did. “Want to know what I bet would happen?” he asked, struggling not to betray the pain he was experiencing.

Julie squirmed and pushed back a loose strand of hair. “What?”

Icely studied Julie, who, having clearly hoped for some sort of approval, was now clearly apprehensive. “Sure you're ready?”

“Dad, I'm not a little kid – ”

“The minute he's away from you –” Icely said.

“Yeah?”

“He'll be texting everyone about the bimbo who gave him a blowjob.”

“That's horrible!”

“Welcome to the wonderful world of guys.”

“B-but why?” Julie asked, clearly crestfallen.

Icely took a deep breath. “Because they're dogs.”

“Even you?”

It was Icely's turn to nod, which he did sheepishly.

“Dad --” Julie mumbled, her face ashen.

“And, unfortunately, the whole thing won't stop there.”

“What's that mean?”

“Let's say years from now you're strolling down the street with your husband and a couple of kids. With me?”

Another even less happy nod from Julie.

“Suddenly you hear somebody call your name. So you turn and see a face from the past, bopping along with some buddies. After a moment of recognition, the two of you hug and reminisce for a moment or two, then promise to get together some time for coffee. And as he's walking away, one of his friends asks, *Who's that?* And you tell me, what does he reply?”

“I give up.”

“*Some sword swallower from when I was a kid!*” Seeing tears well up in Julie's eyes, Icely put his right hand on hers. “Nobody said that growing up's easy,” he said softly. “Or that life is fair.”

“But you –”

“What about me?”

“You were really rotten?”

“Before I met your Mom? I was the original big bad wolf,” Icely answered, thinking about his behavior with girls and women he had known. Maryann Strano, Cindy Hammer, and Joyce Moore came to mind from high school. Angie Dudek, Charlene What's-Her-Face, and Erin Something-Or-Other from college. Plus far too many one-night-stands and flings around the race car circuit – cuties whose names had receded despite his pronouncements of undying affection and promises to see them again.

Father and daughter sat in uneasy silence for a moment until Icely finally shrugged. “Sorry to be the bearer of such tidings,” he said.

“I-I'm just glad we can talk,” Julie replied, wiping her eyes, then dipping some fries into a mound of ketchup.

Stepping out onto the sidewalk, lunch over, Julie started to walk with her father, then suddenly faced him.

“You and Mom – ” she mumbled.

“What about us?”

“Was it a mistake?”

“Nothing that brought you and your sister into the world could ever be a mistake.”

“But the two of you are so different.”

“And at the beginning, that's what was so exciting. Two different worlds, two different kinds of interests – ”

“But – ”

“For a while, that was the charge.”

“And then?”

“You came along, which was the best thing that ever happened.”

“But did it help?”

“At last we had something in common.”

“And then?”

“More good news.”

“Lizzie?”

“The second happiest day of my life,” Icely said with a smile. “You and Lizzie made me the proudest guy on earth.”

Walking Julie home on streets that not long ago had also been his, Icely felt closer to his daughter than he had in ages. He was proud of her for broaching what was clearly such a difficult subject. And grateful for their chance to communicate in a new and different, albeit painful, way.

“All the time you were with Mom – ” Julie said after peering into the window of a

bakery with an astonishing array of cheesecakes.

“Yeah?”

“Did you run around and cheat?”

“Truthfully?” Icely asked.

“Yes.”

“Not even once.”

“Really?”

“Scout's honor.”

“How come?”

“Because it didn't seem right.”

Julie studied her father carefully then resumed walking without another word.

When they approached the apartment building that for Icely was once home, Julie again broke her silence. “Think you'll ever do it again?” she asked.

“Do what?”

“Get married.”

“Depends on two things.”

“Okay – ”

“Finding the right person.”

“And?”

“Making sure you and your sister approve.”

Julie smiled with more than a measure of regret. “Sorry I'm such a pain sometimes.”

“You're never a pain.”

“When I bugged you about the horse?”

“Well – ” acknowledged Icely with a shrug.

“And when I agreed with Mom that you're sloppy and stingy.”

“We all have our days.”

“Including you?”

“Especially me. Hey, who's the one who used to nibble on your ear lobes even after you told me to stop.”

“I was four-years-old.”

“What if there's a part of me that still wants to do it?”

“You're silly.”

“And you only just found that out?”

Julie studied Icely before speaking. “Can I ask a favor?”

“Anything.”

“When it's time for me to go looking at colleges?”

“Yeah?”

“Will you take me?”

“Be my pleasure.”

As Julie leaned toward him to plant a kiss on his cheek, Icely made no effort to mask his delight.

“I love you, sweetie,” he said.

“And I love you.”

Then, as the doorman opened the door, Icely watched Julie disappear from view.

Though hardly given to introspection, the Iceman, on his trip back to Jersey, found

himself in a reflective mode. It was clear he would never find a cure for cancer. Nor was he likely to bring peace to the world's trouble spots. Plus there was little chance he would be enshrined in any meaningful Hall of Fame. He was someone who, minus some sort of epiphany or revelation, would never come close to understanding how or why most things in life happened. But he could take some measure of comfort in the knowledge that he had done the best he could as a father. And, on good days, even as a human being. It wasn't earth-shattering. Nor in any way monumental. But it was something he could accept.

First Date
- Jerome Long

It had been years since Henry had taken a woman out to dinner. Marianne and he used to eat out three or four times a week. That was after Katie and Peter went off to college, married and started their own families. Peter now lived in Oregon, and Katie had moved back to the neighborhood, just the other side of Clark Street. With their children gone and grown, Marianne had felt that preparing meals for just the two of them was too much bother. In fact, she said she would just as soon not cook at all, but she felt obliged to prepare a few dinners each week. She considered that part of the marriage contract. She had been old-fashioned that way.

Those dinners weren't anything special. Pasta, perhaps, over at Alberto's or a little curry dish at the nearby Indian place. A glass of wine. A slice of cheese. Perhaps some melon for dessert or gelato if they had a taste for sweets that night. But now, it seemed, going out to dinner was a momentous occasion. Just yesterday, Katie called. "Hi, Dad. Hear you're taking out Celeste. I think that's great."

Henry had frowned. How the hell did his daughter know about his dinner plans?

"I was talking to Helen down at the club," she said. "You're not the only one who plays tennis in this family, you know. And Helen said you were having a date with Celeste."

He tried to tell her that it was hardly a date. They were just going out to dinner. Of course, he would pay for it. That was expected.

"Sounds like a date to me. You take somebody out, you pay the bill. I call that a date. At least it was when I was growing up. I don't suppose things have changed that much."

Harry supposed she was right. But he didn't like the idea of his children checking up on him.

A few hours later, Peter e-mailed him on the same topic. "Have fun, Pops. It's about time you started going out."

Everybody seemed to be keeping tabs on his social life. At first he thought "love life," but corrected himself because that wasn't quite right. It was simply a quiet dinner with someone whom he saw regularly in the course of normal events.

He had met Celeste at the tennis club. He still played doubles every Wednesday with the same group of guys he had been playing with long before he retired. It was a way of keeping his life on course after Marianne died, a routine that grounded him, like eating at IHOP every Sunday after Mass.

Anyway, Alfie couldn't show up one Wednesday – his wife was in the hospital – and asked Celeste to take his place. She didn't seem to mind playing with men. She had a strong game, especially her backhand, which Henry greatly admired. His was erratic, no matter how many lessons he took. Every now and then, she invited him to her mixed doubles group when a male partner had to miss.

So that's how they met. Then last week Henry got the urge to invite her to dinner. It was an impulse. Something that he had not been particularly thinking about. Their talk on court was mostly about trivial things. A good or bad shot or a comment about the short shorts that Grace was wearing on the next court – perhaps not entirely suitable for a woman her age.

So he had asked Celeste out and now was at sixes and sevens.

Henry fussed over selecting a tie. Would the red stripes go well with his blue blazer? What about the paisley? He hadn't worn that since the last wedding anniversary before Marianne's death. He went back and forth before the mirror, various ties in hand, before he

decided that the occasion was definitely informal and chose to go tieless with his collar open. Besides, he looked younger that way.

When the time finally came to pick up Celeste, he walked over to Iggy's car wash where he had earlier dropped off the Chevrolet. He had purchased the detailing package, although at first he didn't know what that entailed. The young man behind the counter – not Iggy, but one of the regulars – had told him it meant a very thorough washing and cleaning, far beyond the normal fifteen-dollar wash and hand-dry that he had had in the past. They even used Q-tips to clean in the dashboard crannies and other hard-to-reach places. At first, Henry flinched at the thought of forty dollars, but he let himself be persuaded. His car was pretty dirty, he reasoned, and it smelled awful.

When he got in, he marveled at how fresh it smelled, at how clean and tidy everything was. Even the maps were arranged neatly in the glove compartment. He felt like a young man going to a prom in his father's immaculately scrubbed car.

Celeste was standing inside the front door of her condo building. When she saw him pull up, she waved and came outside. She was wearing a sleeveless green dress with a floral design. Lightweight. Some thin material appropriate for summer. It was the first time that Henry saw her in a dress. He had seen her only in tennis shorts and T's. On the court, her hair was held back with a sweat band. Now, her red hair, refusing to be tied down, fluffed around her head. Dyed, he supposed, but that would be understandable for a sixty-some-old woman. "You look wonderful," he said as he opened the car door for her. She smiled, said thank you and smoothed the dress down over her knees before fastening her seat belt.

During the drive to Little Louie's – Henry deliberately chose not to go to one of Marianne's favorite places – he tried to keep up a normal conversation. Something about the matches at the French Open. He was sure she had watched them on television. A question about a movie she had seen but he had not. That led to observations about a book that he had just put down. He had become an avid reader since Marianne's death. There always seemed to be a book on the kitchen table or on the living room coffee table or on the nightstand in his bedroom. However, as the conversation moved along, he felt the twinge of nervousness. Every remark seemed predictable, the response perhaps a bit too quick.

Little Louie's was a bistro café whose dishes occupied a borderland between French-inspired cuisine and American home cooking. Henry chose to sit outside instead of going inside to the more formal dining area. He thought dining *al fresco* was more in keeping with the casualness of the occasion. The summer night was fresh and clean. It had rained earlier in the day, and the humidity, once noticeably high, had fallen. The stars were coming out and could be seen once their eyes got used to the fading light. A waitress lit a candle enclosed in a red glass globe and placed it on the table and asked if they wanted to order drinks. Celeste inquired if Henry wanted wine, and he said perhaps later. She said she would start with an old-fashioned, and he chose the same for himself.

As he held the squat old-fashioned glass in his hand, Henry felt more at ease. The first sips placed him in a comfort zone, though he was not prone to drinking to excess. Oh, no. He was a model of decorum. No sense of wildness about him. But sitting there in the darkening space, the candlelight flickering on Celeste's face, calmed whatever anxiety he had been feeling. That fussiness about the ties had been silly of him. It was the most natural thing in the world to sit opposite a woman under a darkening sky, talking about the various pleasures that mature men and women had in common. He had had similar times of repose with Marianne. Now he was finding similar moments with Celeste.

The menus came, and they deliberated about the entrées. Was the beef any good here, she wondered, and Henry had to admit he didn't know. He decided against the chicken Kiev. He was sick of chicken in whatever form. Chicken was what he most often prepared for himself at home. She finally decided on the shrimp creole, and he chose lamb chops. After much discussion with the waitress, Henry ordered a bottle of an Alsatian wine, which the charming young lady said was medium sweet and absolutely delicious.

The meal proceeded slowly and pleasantly and their conversation became more relaxed. They even laughed. Still, every so often, Henry detected a degree of anxiety in himself. Perhaps it had to do with what was expected. What was expected? He was puzzled with what to do on a date at his age, exacerbated perhaps by the great interest his children had shown. Was a kiss expected? He puzzled over the thought. Not that it wouldn't be nice, but was it expected? That depended upon circumstances, he supposed. How well they got along, the mood that developed, what he felt like at the time. He decided to let nature take its course.

As he reached across to pour the last of the wine into Celeste's glass, he accidentally spilled some of it. It splashed on the table and some of it reached her dress. Goddamn old age creeping up, he complained to himself. Trying to make things right, he quickly dabbed his napkin into his unused water glass and extended his hand toward her chest. Celeste smiled and took the linen from his hand, now dangerously close to her bra, and dabbed at the few wet specks.

"It'll come out at home," she said. "I have a new washday product that... O, God, I sound like one of those TV commercials. It will come out just fine. It's not a red, after all." And she dabbed another couple of times and reached for his hand and held it lightly to comfort him.

"I'm just clumsy."

"Maybe just a little bit uptight." she said. "Relax."

As the end of their meal, Celeste leaned back and extended her legs under the table, as though she were on a beach, stretching her legs in the sun instead of watching the dark evening sky. "Henry," she said. "Dear, Henry. It's so nice out here. I'm having a wonderful time. Even though you're intent on splashing me with Riesling."

For his part, Henry forgot about the wine. He was concentrating on the dear Henry part. He felt his face shine. He, too, felt wonderful and wondered why it had taken him so long to take this step. His remembrance of Marianne – smiling, content, peaceful over a glass of Merlot at Alberto's – still remained an image in his mind. He supposed it would always be with him. But there was another woman with him now – smiling, happy, equally content.

"Celeste," he began but stopped because he didn't know exactly what he wanted to say. So instead of fumbling for words, he motioned to the passing flower girl, who was making her way from table to table with an armful of roses. Henry took a single stem from her and placed it before Celeste. He fished in his pocket for his wallet and paid the flower girl, including a generous tip. Then he saw that Celeste was crying.

"Celeste," he managed to say but then turned mute, puzzled.

"Poor Henry," she said after she had found a handkerchief tucked beneath her thin belt and dabbed at her eyes the way she had dabbed at the spots on her dress. "Here I've gone and spoiled things." She sniffled and tended to her handkerchief again. "You must think I'm a nutcase. I'm sorry, but it's just that... it's just that Bernie never passed up flowers. He was so romantic about flowers."

Her hands sought out his, the handkerchief still wound around her fingers. Henry could feel the wadded-up token of sadness as she held his hands. "I do miss my husband so. Please

understand. There's not a day goes by that I don't think of him."

Henry saw genuine love in her watery gaze. He admired her for honoring her husband's memory but he felt like a fool. A teenage boy on his first date who didn't know what to do. He dreaded the ride home. The strange silence that would surely engulf them. He cringed at the thought of their saying goodbye – no kiss, only a soft handshake and an indulgent smile – and wondered if she would be calling to play tennis anytime soon.

Celeste tucked the handkerchief back behind the belt of her dress and gave a little shrug of her shoulders. "Well," she said, "what do you say we go to my place for dessert? I've got some leftover coffee cake from a Swedish bakery and a bag of Starbucks coffee. And if I'm not mistaken, there's some Drambuie in an old bottle."

As Henry held open the car door for her, she bestowed a kiss upon his surprised lips. "There," she said, "everything's going to be all right. Don't you think?"

Henry ran to his side of the car. He felt energized. Once inside, he couldn't help notice the new car smell and, floating on top of it, the scent that Celeste was wearing, something flowery. He hadn't noticed it before. He relished the new world of sensation that was opening up to him – smell, sound, surroundings – something, he realized, he had been missing. Then he started the car and drove toward Celeste's.

Like It Never Happened
- B.C. Villalona

“Come over. You know I want to be the first to see you before the party, and it's so damn lonely here.”

Those were John's husky words, the sensual growl between the sentences still resonating, as I stood in front of his dented apartment door. Strange how the tone seemed to make the hairs on my arms stand, how the intent became less desirable, more menacing. There was no “I'll meet you at the party.” There was only “I'll be there in an hour.”

And I was.

All in red, cherry red, gorgeous to the young and scandalous to the old. The kind of color I would normally scoff at. And I would've kept searching for something different if the saleswoman at Forever 21 hadn't convinced me otherwise. All she needed to say was that it would treat my significant other nicely. I gave in. As I prepared to go to checkout, she said it also came in white. I told her no thanks.

The hem sat a generous inch above the comfort line on my thigh, far enough into the zone my parents forbade. I regretted the outfit choice immediately. And yet? No stockings? Was I crazy? It was early November, and New York was not mercifully past October's warm grace period. The fresh goose bumps along my naked skin reminded me of the chill. But a little voice insisted that stockings would take away from the effect.

I stood awkwardly in front of his apartment door. His parents weren't home; they left him the apartment while they went to visit relatives in Georgia. He explained over the phone that there was nothing to worry about. I bit my lip and knocked.

The hallway smelled like the exhale of a smoked blunt. I wrinkled my nose and looked around awkwardly, a baby's cries from some floor above like distant music. His door was tar black and glossy, as though polished; I could see my reflection in its shine. I scrutinized the doppelganger, questioning who she was. Thick eyeliner, skin clear and desirable with just the right splashes of blush. I was proud back at my apartment – I had created a masterpiece and now was able to broadcast it to the world. Now I wanted to look away but I saw, a smudge just above my lined eyelid. While I leaned forward for a better view, I began to rub the area. Suddenly, the door swung open, and I gasped, throwing myself backward.

He stood where my reflection had been. It was strange comparing how he looked with how I dressed. He looked like he did any other day: button-up shirt which he wore on Tuesday, a cross with a bend in the lower half, and that damn cologne he practically bathed in twice a day. At least it drowned out the weed stench.

“John,” I said, and he grinned at the mention of his name, as if he recognized me based on my voice and not as how I appeared.

I came over for that time before when we filled ourselves with alcohol. John stood differently then. He held himself with a strength that made me want to see how he would look after five years in the army. He looked me in the eyes, not the chest, and he rubbed my ear lobes as if he was observing a rare thing only he possessed. He talked differently, too. It's not just about how much he wanted to just drive somewhere, doing as close to one-fifty as possible without breaking down. I never knew if he was talking about the car or himself. He always wanted to be lost on a stretch of highway in the dessert, letting God decide how He would punish him now that he was finally alone.

I came over another time. He talked about wanting to make his father proud, and that's

something I can sit down to and understand. At least the part about not wanting them to sneak into his bedroom, look at his old little league photos and wonder where they went wrong. Not wanting to disappoint them.

But now I should have known he would all but skip the listening part of our time together, immediately swinging me into his arms and telling me my dress looked amazing. I knew how it went from there. Grab me. Grab a bottle. It's a party, why would we need to leave?

We drank from a bottle of Dragonberry Bacardi, one he was supposed to save as a party favor, but which he thought was better to share with just me. Two dusty glass cups, cheers.

We promised each other to never get old and something else. I think it was about love.

We'll do it straight, chasers are for the weak, he said. I smiled and agreed.

I always hated clear liquor. It somehow pulled a quick one on your mind, disguising itself as a fashionable bottle of water and making you want to quench your thirst with it. Then it would hit the tongue like a biting flame and chase the fire down your throat until it was deep within you, then smothered to embers. At least with dark liquor, you were prepared to awaken the following day with regrets.

John cheered through the first shot. He said he was going to miss this when he went into the army. I asked him why he thought that would make him stop drinking. He said it didn't; he just assumed they would have better, more potent stuff out in Iraq or something. Alcohol really would be like water for him in four years' time.

Clear through the handle, we were flushed in the cheeks. A fourth down, we were giggling at each other. Halfway through, he was singing his favorite songs off-pitch, his baritone voice countering my alto cheers. The other half of the bottle, spilled out of his mouth, as he missed his throat. Some hit me, dousing the front of my dress and my neck. We laughed it off. We always did. What was a party without a spilled drink? Not a party at all.

He went to the kitchen and brought back a rag. He patted my dress until the rag was soaked but the dress wasn't better off. That's when he sought to apologize with kisses. They were big, wet ones, like he was really just trying to lick the excess liquor from my chin and the creases of my neck. But I knew better.

I tried to throw the emergency brake on the whirling car as I felt his damp, clammy fingerprints leaving an invisible trail up my thigh and disappearing beneath my dress.

"But the party –"

"They can wait."

"I don't want to mess up my make-up."

"You look beautiful without it."

"Can we wait until after?"

"I'd rather not kill the moment."

He was a well-sized man, chiseled compared to my thin frame. The right amount of pressure, some weight on my hips, and he was on top of me on his sofa. Dirty leather was in my nose, his tongue was in my mouth, and I kept my eyes open. I stared at the ceiling, the dim light making it just as dark as the back of my eyelids.

I forced myself to think about something else and allowed the smacking of lips and the tugging of my hair to be TV white noise. I was five years old, and I collected all of the decorative balloons off of the tables at my cousin's birthday party. I thought if I had enough, they would carry me away, just start drifting me through the wind, and I would land somewhere I was supposed to be. I remembered wishing it would be by the ocean, or, at the very least, Disneyland. But as the winds pulled, the waters of spring falling upon my face, the balloons were tugged

from my grasp with every gust. It poured when the final balloon was stolen by the spirits of Nature.

I felt that last balloon slide from between my fingers as the last string holding the back of my dress came undone and fell loose. I knew he was excited, the heat radiated off of him like a concentration of light that only fell upon me. But it had happened before; I knew what to expect.

I began to push him off, and he playfully hit the side of my head, saying, “Snap out of it, we're just having fun.” My cheeks were scorched, my dignity screamed not to let him do this.

He let his weight anchor him to my body but his legs were spread. Instinct commanded my leg to lift, and I felt the shiver run through him as I connected with his groin. He weakened, and I threw him off, not seeing the small side-table he was headed for. The table didn't have a chance; it was crushed beneath his body. The splintering made me realize my terrible mistake.

It took him a few moments to recover, and when he did, I heard his voice before I saw him rise up from the damaged table. “Why did you do that?” With his teeth gritted, eyes wild with a familiar passion, his ferocity awakened for the third time that month. I waited just a millisecond to receive the retaliation I knew was coming, but it was just enough time to breathe a forced breath and to stack every muscle I could call upon, in preparation for his blow.

It was harder than all its older brothers. It demanded my attention, and rejected my inattention. It needed to be known; it needed to be remembered. The blow was a mushroom cloud, the pain centered on my right ribcage and floating lesser pain outward toward the top of my hip and the base of my shoulder. But it didn't stop there. Force greater than resistance, I skirted off of my heels, and my body slammed into the corner of the living room, meeting the wall with the side of my head and my entire left side receiving a shock of blunt knives that left an acute numbness.

I crumbled to the floor, a gasp escaping my bitten lips, and although the pain made all of the nerves burrowed in my skin shriek to be known, I knew the worst would be his following move. It was always the worst part.

He was a child, incapable of conceiving how something came about because of his actions. If I press this button, the monkey will fall apart? If I release the pressure on the button, the monkey will pull itself together again? It's like it never happened!

Except he was staring at me, and I was trying not to look hurt even though the warmth by my eye and the throb on my side said otherwise. I couldn't pull myself together, no matter how hard I tried, and I began to feel a choking sensation in my throat and tears working their way up. I don't know if he saw this but I could see him pacing, and I heard him cursing under his breath, whispering, “I didn't mean for it to get this bad. This is bad. This is bad.”

A few moments of this, a battle between his wounded conscious and his torn heart, and he finally approached me. But as he did so, my body gained control and ignored my mind's pleas to accept his hug. I recoiled instead. He recoiled, too.

“Vallie, I'm sorry.”

“Shut up.”

“Come on.”

“Leave me alone.”

He went to hug me again. I smacked his hands away and ran from his touch. My mind blurred with my will, I was on overdrive. I knew I had to grab my shoes and my bag. I swooped them up. Before I could respond to his questions, where are you going? Aren't you gonna forgive me? I left.

I sprinted down the hallway, took the stairs not the elevator, and I ran outside. The

clanking of the heels dangling from my hand was the only thing I could hear. I caught my breath for a moment but didn't let my heart catch up. As my breath slowed, my surroundings pushed their way into my perception, and I saw my escape lifting up from the curb, double-doors swinging close, the machine ready to trudge along downtown without me.

I sprinted to the bus, with it already a foot away from the curb, and smacked my hands and my heels against the glass. The driver could have been in an awake, dream-like state, induced by mundane regularity from stopping, unloading, and receiving all night. Brows furrowed and pointed like arrows, he looked down at me from his seat. Then he let the doors open.

“Thank you. Thank you,” I repeated as I searched the abyss hanging over my shoulder for my metro. I grabbed it three times but the trembling of my hands kept it just out of reach. It only made it worse that the driver still hadn't moved the bus; John's place was half a block away. The driver must have caught me glancing to my left repeatedly, the fear written in every thrown stare, or maybe he was tired of watching a potential junkie look for a metro he knew she didn't have. Either way, he sighed and said, “Never mind, just go sit down.”

Managing to deliver a few more stuttered thank-yous, I couldn't help but gasp as he grasped my arm before I could walk to the back.

“Were you running from the police?”

I couldn't say no. I could only shake my head. I don't think he believed me but his bus route needed him, and the shaking girl with the alcohol-stained dress, stumbling barefoot on his bus, didn't. I sat by the window opposite of the block we pulled out from. I didn't need to see him running after me. I didn't need him to change my mind.

The bus sped me away. Breathing came easier. My hands still shook. Lights blurred the seams between the blocks, the temporarily closed stores, and the parked cars left alone for the night. They all meshed into one continuous scene, like a reel from an old movie without a title worth remembering, but you find yourself staring at it when no one else is awake and scrutinizing every second of silence. Darkness, divine in its simplicity, and captivating in its danger. It was a nostalgic kind of view that made me think of its opposite. Of sunshine-dipped beaches, the satisfying pain of sunburns, of a summer gone too soon. I soaked in the view and let it numb me. Time passed. I wanted to stay listless and adrift, but I realized my stop was coming.

The bus pulled near a block with a bodega with attention-grabbing bright lights. The lights let me see the street number, East 20th street. Somehow, I still wanted to attend. I wanted to do something, anything, except go home. I lifted my arm up to tug on the lax yellow wire that would signal the driver to stop. I ignored the subdued pain at my side. I put my heels on before getting off, aware of the stare reflected in the rear view mirror as the bus continued on its journey.

Instead of heading straight to the party, the presence obvious from the flashing lights and loud music just a block ahead, I went into a McDonalds. I ignored the stare of the teenage boy with overactive acne and looked him straight in the eyes. I ordered a large fries to have an excuse to use their bathroom. When I got in, I locked the door behind me. A part of me wondered why I didn't get a small fries but I reasoned that it only cost an extra dollar.

I lifted the flap of my dress and saw that a few strings were torn at their stitching, as if John was tired of untying and decided ripping would be more efficient. I ignored it, and let the fabric fall passed my breast to reveal my ribcage. Purple, defeated bruising that deepened around my hidden ribs, like an abused and forgotten fossil uncovered too late. Imprints eased and ebbed with my lungs. I blinked, like I was snapping a memory of this moment. Then I lifted my dress back over the mark, and tied the back as best I could, vowing never to look beneath the ruins

again.

It was hard staring at myself in the mirror, to see the makeup smudged along one side. Sore skin above my eye where my temple had met the wall. I massaged the area. It throbbed with the slightest pressure, so I left it alone.

Get a grip. Steady now. It's over. But the tears were done hearing my justifications. They came as I reapplied my lipstick, my hand swerving off course. I managed to make it look half as good as it did when I left my apartment a few hours ago, smiling with anticipation and shaking from the cold then. I tried to smile as I did, and the corners of my lips tugged away, shunning the lie I was trying to believe. I moved onto the mascara, and the eyeliner, and then the blush. I saved the dried blood by my temple for last, careful not to induce the bleeding again.

Again I found my reflection. And I cried harder as I took her in. Tears trembled, and the corners of my lip fell with tremors. Quickly, I wiped the tears away and told myself to smile. I did. And when I thought the smile would stay in place, I left.

Beside the entrance, I almost tripped over a bum with an oversized Los Angeles jacket, half-asleep and piss drunk. Remembering the orphan fries I was still carrying, I placed them by his feet. He mumbled something, but I didn't stick around to see if it was a thank you.

Misshapen stride and limping strut, I must have looked like I was dumped on that street, wandering toward the loudest destination. The party pulsed with a life controlled by pleasure, breeding excitement, but I was disconnected. I stumbled up the stoop and straightened up. The bouncer smiled at my cleavage. I smiled back. I didn't want to cause a scene.

Inside, John's friends saw me. They asked where he was. I said he was going to be late.

Couples were encased within themselves, as if they were the only two at their own personal party. Hookups acted like they were couples except, secretly, everyone knew that they wanted the rest of the party to notice their superficial chemistry. And then there was me, a flickering light dying out while the forest blazed on without me.

Someone passed me alcohol. I drank. The buzz became a roar, the numbness returned, and I no longer had to force myself to smile. Then, as I observed everyone, a face appeared in front of me and blocked out the rest of the world. John's sad, honey eyes beamed and collapsed any defense a drunken, exhausted girl could muster. I accepted his kisses this time. He didn't even have to speak.

He pulled me up, gentle and without tugging, and lifted me to the dance floor. I tried to resist but I was lost. I never escaped his eyes. We danced until the music faded into an unknown song, and we danced in each other's arms as the guests poured back out from the party and into the streets. It wasn't long before the beat ceased, and I decided to make our escape by taking his hat and sprinting from his reach. He chased me outside, and the chill of the November air made me cold with happiness. And when he caught me, he tickled my ribs because he forgot. I didn't blame him for that; I wouldn't let him see me wince from the laughter that could do nothing to drown the pain. We walked the side streets, their loneliness something we could mock, as we held hands and avoided the sidewalks.

It was then that he made me promise again, and I recalled the cheers we made just a few breakdowns ago. It was an echo, but this time it reached me, perfectly preserved, like we had rewound to that lovely snapshot before the liquor kissed our lips.

"Promise me we'll never get old and stop loving each other?"

"I promise."

"Even if it hurts?"

"Even if it hurts."

Because in the end, I would rebound from the pieces on the floor and rebuild into the girl he loved. And it would always seem like it never happened.

Lost

- Joseph F. Lynch

I'm goin' to the Flyers game. I could drive down but I like to take the el and subway. It's easier than drivin' and besides I always get a seat on the el 'cause I get on at the first stop. It's all part of it. I mean ridin' the train from one end of Philly to the other, gettin' off, followin' the rest of the crowd and watchin' the game. It's all part of the whole thing.

So, I'm sittin' there dressed in my orange and black. I lean back and become part of the rocking rhythm of the train. The drone of the train blocks everything out. The drone is wonderful; it keeps time with the rockin' of the train and the flicker of the lights. I know it sounds weird because you hear so many things happen on the el, like guys getting' stabbed but it feels safe and warm. I don't mean warm on the outside. I mean safe and warm on the inside. It's like you just drank a shot of really good whiskey, like Jack, and washed it down with a beer. But not like drunk. Too much would spoil the whole thing. Just enough for that numb glow on the inside. I guess that's what I mean by it bein' part of the whole thing.

I'm sittin' on the inside seat, and there's a young guy next to me, and I guess it's his wife and kid sittin' in front of us because they're talkin' among themselves. They look like they're goin' to the game because they got Flyers's jackets on, too. I'm so into listenin' to the drone that I don't see the family leave. I can't figure where they got to. Maybe they got better seats on the el but I don't see them. Maybe they got off and somebody picked them up. It kind of messes things up because the kid looked happy and excited and of course kids always add to the whole thing.

But before you know it there's this other guy sittin' next to me. He's got orange and black on, too, but I can't figure this guy out. He's kinda strange. For one thing, it's cold, and he's only wearing a jersey not a jacket, and it's a Lindros jersey, and it's old and worn. Hey, I liked Lindros, too, but the guy's been retired for a long time. The other thing is, he ain't wearing a ball cap or a Jeff like a normal person. The jerkoff's got a fedora on top of his curly black hair. I'm five-eleven and he's a little taller than me, and he's put together pretty well. He's got a dark complexion like Mario from work who comes from Sicily but I got the feeling this guy ain't Italian. He didn't scare me or anything. He just seemed to be a little weird.

In Philly we don't usually make small talk, especially not on the el but he keeps lookin' over at me with those sad, dark brown eyes like he wants to ask me somethin'.

So, I say, "Hey, ya think they're going to win tonight?" Okay I know it sounds kinda jerked-off but I had to say something; the guy was startin' to creep me out. He stares at me for a second like I'm from a different planet, and his eyes fill up, and he say's "I'm lost". I notice a thick accent but I can't place it. It sounds like South American or somethin'. I'm tryin' to figure out what he means when he says, "I'm lost" but before I can think of anything to say the el shrieks and the lights blink a few times which always scares me but it scares me in a kind of a good excitin' way cause you know nothin' really bad is happenin'. Anyway, by the time the rhythm returns, his tears are gone but he's eyes are still looking at me and pleadin'.

I'm feelin' sorry for the guy. "Hey, man," I keep my voice calm, "its okay. Just stay on the el to city hall and then transfer to the subway and take it all the way to the end of the line and by that time it's going to be all orange and black. You just follow the crowd to the game."

He gives me a vacant look. "I'm lost". He says it again. He sounds like a little puppy with an accent.

"Hey, just stay with me" I say. The guy is making me a little nuts. "If we get split up,

just get on the subway and stay until the end of the line and follow the crowd to the game.” He starts to say something else but if he says, “I’m lost” again I might crack him. He’s in the right place. He just don’t know it. So, I cut him off and pat his arm and tell him again to just stay with me. I try to be reassuring. He seems to calm down with that.

I try to explain to him about listenin’ to the train. I don’t know if he knows what I am talkin’ about or even if understands English, but he follows my lead. I sit back and simply start listenin’ to the train, and he seems to do the same. I love just listenin’. Sometimes it seems that you’re livin’ your whole life right there on the train.

I must’ve fell asleep because the guy standin’ up wakes me. He starts to get off but we ain’t at city hall. We’re in the badlands. I grab the guy’s sleeve. “Where ya goin’?” I ask him. He motions his head towards the door.

“No!” I yell. I guess I feel responsible for the guy. This area is one of the worst in the country for drugs and crime. If he gets off here, God only knows what’ll happen to him. This guy wouldn’t stand a chance. Not too many people would. The guy’s an idiot, but I don’t want to see him get hurt. “Don’t get off. Stay on the train. It’s not safe out there.” I get a little loud with him, and somehow I convince him to stay.

I realize I don’t even know if he’s goin’ to the game. So I ask, “You got a ticket?” He gives me a blank stare and shrugs his shoulders. I pull out my own ticket and a few bucks comes out with it. He reaches into his pocket, and I don’t see a ticket but he holds up a wad of cash. Man, this guy is a mess! I push his hand back down towards his pocket before he gets us both killed. I should probably take him to the cops but they make me nervous. I just want to get down to the game, and I figure, worse case, he can buy a ticket. I know he’ll be safe there.

I like the train better when I’m not sittin’ with anybody but at least the guy stopped talkin’. Sittin’ with the guy reminds me of when I used to take my kid with me down to the games. When Joey was little he would talk your ear off. His curly hair would be stickin’ out of his ball cap. I always thought he was the cutest kid at the game. For a little while Lisa came with us but she didn’t really like the fightin’ that much. She never comes now. I think it would help her if she came.

I gotta listen to the drone. This guy got me thinkin’ of things I shouldn’t be thinkin’ about. Maybe I should cut him loose but I just don’t know how. I feel responsible somehow. Maybe we’re all responsible for each other. The least I can do is get him to the game. He’ll be safe there.

Well, we switch at city hall and get on the subway. By then the whole crowd is nothin’ but orange and black. It just feels good to be part of somethin’. I’m really getting’ back into the whole thing when I see the jerkoff is heading the wrong way. I grab him by the shoulder and pull. He turns like he’s goin’ to clock me and then recognizes me and starts with that “I’m lost” shit but I ignore it and get him to follow me. It’s the same thing when we get off at the stadium. I have to grab him again. I lead him to the ticket booth and then he gets ahead of me in the stadium. I can see his fedora. He’s moving along, lost in the crowd. Headed to the game. He’ll be okay now.

Not Recommended for Full Sun
- William Greenfield

It was in the middle of spring when I concluded that sunshine alone was not enough. Should I be a beachcomber or a Virgin Mary's flower, perhaps it would be sufficient. But I am not. The sun must fall below a line of Ash and Maple and lay down bars of shadow across an expanse of green or paint something from an artist's rendition; a farmhouse where a rocking chair sits unoccupied but so very inviting. There must be contrast, like a tan line across an expanse of supple skin. There must be a single point of dazzling light in a half full glass of Chardonnay. There must be hummingbirds that I hear before I see and shadows that I see before the darkness takes it all away.

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-
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