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Diane Wheeler cover: oil painting
Beth Baltes ink wash

"If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite."
-William Blake
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Brenda Smith watercolor
Burning Desires

As wispy vines of smoke climb from the end of a newly lit cigarette, curling about her head and blossoming near the ceiling, she is caught pondering something like a past life.

Each moment it burns away, stirred only by her gentle breath.

Now, finished and nothing but a cold filter that slips from her fingers, crushed, dying, fading from one last ember into extinction.

A new thought comes, and she lights another.

* Kevin Dodds

Wine in the Concrete Imagination

I know an old man with a scorched, sidewalk tongue who knows concrete wisdom.

His wife left him once And now I'm his son. He drinks too much and doesn't know why he's here either. He says he drinks to remember, but that's only for show.

Once he was a big man. The world was spare change in his hand. Now he's a street scholar. Yeah. He knows the price. He knows all the secrets if you believe him. And I agree with everything he says, Lean back, close my eyes, and drink.

* William D. Brown

The Great American Machine

Give me your tired, Give me your poor, Trade in your sorrows for a newer form.

Melting pot or tossed salad the world is mine to be devoured I am the great American Machine God's most perfect most beautiful thing.

Praise the Grand ole Stars and Stripes given to me in a vision of light I assure you what I say is just In Oppenheimer do we trust.

Red stripes pay honor to Negro backs the miner's caresses are the white The stars how they twinkle, like silver spurs to incite the greedy beast of labor.

I am the city upon the hill from which the acid rain spills I am Mother Nature's only heir She's still alive? What do I care?

Blessed be those of Manifest Destiny the will has been drawn, just kill two million indians genocide is all right if it's for a good cause and after all I deserve it all!

Why waste on savages things he can use when I know best how they're abused? The people, the land, I'll exploit Whatever's left I'll just destroy.

Give me your tired give me your crude I'll use what I can you can have the fumes.

They tell me I'm dying, killing myself they say that there's only so much left. But I can't be swayed by communist schemes I am the great American Machine.

* Katherine S. O'Neill

Death

Death came to my room Yesterday. He was in disguise; stole my lover's body, threw the sheets over my eyes and stole my socks. But all I wanted was another drink.

* William D. Brown

Oil

The oil at my feet glows with each movement of the wind. I sit and watch it for a moment All the colors blending together How beautiful I think As I began to walk away I see a very sad sight What I thought to be the wind moving the colors all around is really a small ant trying to survive But I slowly walk away.

* Ally Eidson
The Wicked Witch of North Avenue

At Halloween
She would give us
painted cat cookies with funny names,
like "clit" or "gonad",
we would make them fight until they were crumbs.
Her son would jump out from behind the mini-van,
and he'd scare us all away.

She'd take walks at night,
her blond hair glowing
like a hairnet of fireflies -
his boy would trail after her,
reading Nasaratus by the light of her head.

We'd hear her shouting magic spells
inside her house,
(perhaps changing the kids into turtles or frogs),
the china didn't survive the last argument.
The first-born would hang from the ceiling,
a shrieking, sightless bat.

We were kids and we would make fun of her -
the beautiful housewife who would never be a movie-star,
the Stephen King mother who
owned an extensive collection of pawns.

Her children were voo-doo dolls
and we'd see them at school,
sporting a pin in the head
or a noose around the neck.

We were afraid to look into
Junior's hazel eyes-
they pleaded too much
and were mirrors of maternal madness.

We are older now,
we are all ashamed.
The witch's son
never learned how to reverse the incantations.

Sometimes at midnight we see them
flying through the tepid air,
she,
cradling this dead man in her arms.

* Sheila Casper

Joanna Wallington graphite drawing
Never So Blessed

One was never so blessed
As I, by your Grace
Would have been enough
To give me life
Enough that if I
should praise your name one-thousand years
I would not have begun to express
the gratitude deserved.
But also to receive a family
who loves me with all their hearts
A world filled with Nature's beauty
And friends with which to pass the all-too-short time
Lord, my cup runneth over
please show me the way
That I may share my wealth.

*C Scott Bagwell

Cages and Categories

Cages and categories
are only temporary
confinements
For someone you want
to know better.
They are the holding places
for what cannot
be contained,
Until you real-eyes that.

*Sallee Jo Wade

Saying Grace at the Airport Coffee Shop

And why not?
Stale smoke acid brew limp fries
do not preclude prayer. Oh Lord
for what we are about to recieve
going up
staying there
getting there
going down
make us truly grateful.
When defying a law as serious as gravity
who would suggest
divine intervention
is ever out of the question?

*Sally Russell

Inspiration

Her kisses linger on the edge
of last Wednesday's coffee cup, unwashed
still and among other dishes.
My Muse leaves me
nothing else when she leaves me.

Pages spread before me
are an emptiness she fills
with my pen,
but not while she is away.

I speak her name to call
her home; she does not answer
when I need her most.
So I am left with nothing
when she leaves me.

*Kevin D. Dodds

To Sting

Swimming laps in the school's pool
my mind drifts out to sea
If I were ever washed overboard
How far could I swim to safety?
Would I know which way to go?

I fear the cold of darkness
She wraps her children in ice
just to leave them alone
I hide from the light of day
His hot eye scrutinizes,
a flush of red to my face

How long can I drift against probability
till thirst and fatigue drag me beneath
and the despair of circumstance
forces my breath to flee

Will you swap prayers with me?

*Katherine S. O'Neill

The Rose Bows

The rose is truly
a lovely flower.
It makes all others
bow before its throne.

There is only one
other however,
That can make the
rose bow.

And you are the one
that can make the rose
Bow its majestic head
at your throne.

*Butch Wilkie

-11-
Courage

Courage is living as an embryo in a world of pain and surviving.

Courage is breathing in air when death’s vapors attempt to choke.

Courage is a chick flying from the nest and no ground underneath.

Courage is waving the red flag in front of the charging bull and facing his deadly horn.

Courage is life itself. Small people live in fear, I will live in courage.

* Andrea Blachly

The Final Fall

Leaves released from trees like paratroopers from static lines, float toward the earth swaying, catching the wind, whirling, falling in gentle spirals to the ground.

Leaves once green, transformed overnight into amber, gold and crimson, now camouflaged in earth’s brown hues. Hundreds, no thousands sprint before the wind, glorious, free.

Leaves race across the open field, numbers checked midway, pinned down, compacted in shadowed trenches like troops stopped in battle stilled forever by brass death.

Leaves charge forward before the wind to a twisted wire fence in a frenzied dance until halted stopped short by the crooked barricade of man. They stir, restless, rustling, waiting.

Leaves feed a fire, omnivorous flames race with raging abandon along the tortured wire. Once living green shoots that waltzed in the spring rain, wither and vanish in a white hot fury.

Leaves, like soldiers, consumed.

* Joanne Martin

All That Matters

Anna called to see how you were. It doesn’t matter. Phone lines cannot connect two souls.

Mollie met you for lunch. It doesn’t matter. Breaking bread isn’t a sin.

Jenna helped you with physics. It doesn’t matter. Chemistry is what causes emotions to overflow.

You say I’m the one you dream about, and That’s all that matters. But your dream might turn into a nightmare.

* Lisa Roberts
Retrospective Loungers

I. Morning bed
An evening couch, when the draperies flames dripping,
the heat of day passes
reflected in your eyes.
One arm flung across the arm,
a hidden post beneath fine midnight strands.
You need not say you own me. I'd not soon
agree, for you've not ever bartered or sold,
but kept me near.
One hand beckons from your waist;
One hand of mine dissents.
You need me,
also, creating this meal matched by wine and candles.
We are sated for but a
moment, when you command
once more, leading with a fuller bottle.
Tiger. We laugh at the games we play
in night breezes,
blowing sheets and cooling
your dark skin that
warms me. Down in
down,
close and tight,
two silver faces
sleep is the order,
and I'll not worry the half-empty
glass beside our twilight bed.
In the dawn, sanguine streaks the walls.
I return to retrieve a forgotten tie;
you've awakened, lie silent, but the imp speaks in your eye,
smiling at me, neither the daylight or night master...
now, in our morning bed.

II. Intimate Strangers
Shy eyes lost, we need neither modesty
nor our wardrobe's hindrances.
So that with curtains drawn against the world, we bare
our souls and bodies nightly.
Coming together without forethought; love and lust are
rarely confusing to us...for the near-perfect union
we share is pure and remains
beyond compare to any baser couplings.

How she now slumbers in my arms so soundless...
I press the skin in gently, caress the arm, thigh, and breast.
She knows that I am pleased in all of her but little suspects
that I am disconsolate in the flesh.
We rest, two bodies run together but for the envelopes
of our skin's thin layers, preventing
the mingling I so desire, to be truly as one.
Before the night, will we never be more than intimate strangers,
worried lovers' wandering and empty thoughts,
fears of partings in years to come?

The Mirror
My life was a shiny mirror,
the reflection appeared unflawed;
But upon that crafty looking glass,
a million cracks were slowly shod.

If pain and fear were visible,
then as cracks they would appear;
They would scurry always closer,
but with love would disappear.

Each crack began so subtly,
as sand grains flying on the wind;
But as the time grows ever longer,
one of these cracks will unbend.

I am that cracked looking glass,
these cracks push me around the bend;
And soon this pretty glass will shatter,
a thousand pieces for me to mend.

Life was simpler as a mirror,
one whole piece reflecting the glare;
But I must live the broken life,
as bits of glass are easier to share.

* Andrea Blachly

Foiled

Foiled, that's what!
Foiled.
How did I get foiled?
By the years; they took their toll.
Merciless they passed.
They left no lasting memories,
no real sadness - nor gladness.
They just came and went each time,
They took a part of me.
I was so busy maturing,
Learning to assert myself.
Growing, it was so easy to let go
And let time take care of everything.
Time did, the mean old fellow that he is.
He filled the years as cleverly
And sprung his trap so unexpectedly.
And because I'm wound about
With so many encumbering situations,
I can't break loose.
And age is the biggest draw back.
First one's too young, then too old.
Time doesn't care,
He's too old to care.
But I'm not.
I care.
And I don't like being foiled.
I want to break loose.

* Desire Day Turner
Exercise

Ah,
You were the #1 Narcissist false god of the '80's,
When you reached your peak,
Maybe because all that left-over energy
from the '70's
Had to have another outlet
And you're doing well into the '90's

Ah,
You have many names and forms
There's aerobics, jazzercise, jogging, running, dancing,
walking, bicycling,
And you have many temples
There's La Spa, Holiday, Fitness,
And the list goes on

Ah,
You have many priestesses
With Jane Fonda being your primary
And then there's all the other nameless beauties
from every age and profession
Their robes are varied in color and form
From the skin-tight tights, in colors of black,
to purple passion, and hot pink
To short-shorts, with skin-tight tee shirts with
matching headbands

Ah,
The monotonic sounds to you are many and varied
From stretch it out
To get it down
And move it now
And then there are the Squats and all-powerful sit-ups

Ah,
When your followers speak of you
They do so with such interest and in such loving terms—whole conversations can be devoted solely to you—
From the intensity of their voices, such as
Ohhh, I'm so sore
Oooolllllld, my legs hurt, I can just barely walk
and can hardly raise my arms
Oh, I'm just sore all over,
It sounds as if they are mistresses in competition

Ah,
From listening to the cadences in their voices
one would think they have come from a night of passionate
love-making, where all was demanded
but then you accept only true followers
For you deal with the heart.
My Desert Storm

I lie in booming silence;
bathing in its fierceness, I dwell upon its peace.
Silver birds streak near the heavens;
they probe the earth searching.
These birds search for worms,
any worms.

Upon sight they lower their talons,
preparing to strike;
the birds draw near the earth,
seizing that targets are near.
I must not move;
I cannot move for I may become their target.

Over my head,
the silver birds streak;
they dropped no feathers,
still I must not move.
I cannot move for outstretched limbs hold me fast,
no matter.
I am safe,
safe from harm.

I lie in my hole,
safe from all harm.

Can this be?
Is it possible to be safe from all harm,
safe from the invisibles?
This question I cannot answer;
I must,
no,
I will just chance it.

It is hot;
I reek of the salty moisture;
it beards upon my face.

The wind swirls;
it brings and stirs unfinished,
unstarted glass.
The old and new glass rises
to dance with the wind,
resting at intervals,
placing itself all about me,
never forgetting to envelop me.

The glass surrounds me.
Forever.
I have no place to wander,
no place to run,
yet, everywhere to hide.

I am in a sea of glass,
an oblivion;
my oblivion.

I am scared; I am scared.

Though I hold up no daisies, my feelings are the like.
I am scared,
for I, too, am but a worm;
I could be plucked from my hole at any time.

Maybe I'll be plucked not at all.

Damn!

* Jason Rimeik

My Perfect World

A coasting two wheeled steel machine gathering space behind it.
The bearings in the hub twist and turn,
while the wheel spins at over 300 RPM's.
A simple concept.

Wind tickles the rider's earlobes and moistens the face.
The earth beneath seems a blur.
The patterns blend together.
The only constant object in sight is the bright form of a crescent hanging in front.

A sense of control and power suddenly hits.
A delirious view of the world sweeps me.
I and my alloy extension are all that matters at this moment.
Tonight is mine.
The perfect time.
The only perfect time.
Nothing else will be as it is tonight!!!
This is expectation.
This is the perfect time.

The only perfect time.

Tonight is mine.
The perfect time.

The earth beneath.

The bike working perfectly.
The adrenalin is flowing.
This is expectation.
The only perfect time.
The perfect time.
Tonight is mine.
This is the perfect time.
I and my alloy extension are all that matters at this moment.

Mirror

Second story rocking wood
Indian style
Seville behind barking at boats
arms neck head
hang out over.
Cussing, Cotton, curling intestines
shine up
a murky imitation of heavens.

GRRAHWK!
GRRAHWK!
say hawks.

Pop-eyed gills, scaled sheaths
the Hawk's demise, their slimy twins
but
Safe in womb of warm lake.

*Claire Porter

Accepting Responsibility

There was something in the drink you gave me.
I fell to my knees proclaiming
my lust and desires to touch
your hair.

Cly seductress. Wonderful witch.
Brewer of potions. Designer
of charms to trap me.

Morning tresses washed across a pillow
beside my head. Was it regret
or something warmer that choked me when I found
my smile upon your lips?
You slept.

The wind swirls;
it brings and stirs unfinished,
unstarted glass.
The old and new glass rises
to dance with the wind,
resting at intervals,
placing itself all about me,
never forgetting to envelop me.

The glass surrounds me.
Forever.
I have no place to wander,
no place to run,
yet, everywhere to hide.

I am in a sea of glass,
an oblivion;
my oblivion.

Kevin D. Dodds

Drums of War

The alarm clock rings
Morning begins as any other day
Men and women rush to work
Children go to school and play
Farmers get on their tractors
The street sweeper pushes his broom
Today, however, is different;
it holds a kind of gloom.

Truck, taxi, and bus drivers
Travel across the land
Shoppers crowd city streets
A vendor loads his stand
Nurses and doctors prepare for surgery
They don their masks and gowns
Today, however, is different;
Sadness blankets the town.

Salesmen, lawyers, and bankers
Begin their day
Meeting at McDonald's and Hardee's
And at the corner cafe

People dressed in casual wear and jeans
Will be eating there at noon
Today, however, is different;
They debate the shadowy doom.

Church bells chime,
Politicians ask for prayer
People pray
Who never prayed before;
America has mixed emotions as
She hears the drums of war.

* Elsie Nelson
Looking Past His Grave
In Memory of Paul Herman Duncan 1920-1990

I looked past his grave with eyes swollen from the sleepless night before. I tossed in my bed until my gown twisted. I did not mind the soft flannel wrapped tight that pinned my legs to each other. I saw peace among my restlessness because the hills we stood on awoke with others it seemed of Cherokee men slithering on clay feet to kill a deer for food and cloak for family. Nestled between rising clusters of earth a gathering of women and offspring listened in silence—onyx eyes conversed. Topaz like bronzed skin bathed our hills from fall as you became a part of the hills I saw.

Emily Duncan

Junk

Long days in this metal-plated hothouse with blood and wine and little white chips of freedom. You bake them well on your mother's spoon. It came from her wedding, you say Style. Yeah. The damnation of innocence was the bites on your arm that came so easily. No fear. And so we pass another hour here as dogs howl at the passing sirens. One...two...three. We hold our breath and then reach as one flesh for the cotton, rag, or lighter. This bathroom is too small for us all But we don't give a damn. I clenched my arm and closed my eyes... And a long, white casket drinking the sun mocked me with silence. One day. I only want to drown, but slowly.

William D. Brown

Acceptance

The night was foggy and empty. The atmosphere felt dank against my quivering denied flesh. I could hear the sound of my footsteps as they met the surface of the never ending bridge. I was alone, and the earth was a gray black destiny. I peered out from the rail of the bridge only to see the fog growing thicker. My vision getting weaker my pace became slow. Why was I out here alone? I forgot. But I was alone, and my seeming to be on an endless journey symbolized it. I looked down toward the waters beneath my path. It looked like a dreaded infinity that seemed to welcome me. Was I welcomed? Finally-somewhere It was meant to be or else it wouldn't have happened The frigid waters swallowed me, happily and wholly.

Garry Ke' Merritt

The Silent Blood of Poets

There is spread wide open nothingness deepness broken up by thin lines of blood; the only way the poet speaks. Misunderstood as quiet, introverted, eccentric, and sometimes down right insane, the poet talks loudest in silence. His words echo in your caverns: crisp, deep, and layered.

Listen. That is blood singing as it ripens on the page. Listen. The poet shows you his insides, at least listen and try to understand. You don't have the courage to do the same.

Ian E. Whitlaw

A Widow's Monday

He's so handsome in his Sunday suit I bought for him one Saturday afternoon.

Wednesday was our lunch date at Ruby Tuesday's. I'll go by myself, I guess.

Saturday I'll watch old movies. Joe Friday will be on at eight. Dragnet was his favorite show.

Thursday I'll visit the cemetery. His grave'll be ready then. Monday—what a way to start the week.
Returning The Gift

You CAN have it all.
You DO have it all,
ALREADY!

Will you RECEIVE it all?
Will you accept it all?
You are it all,
ALREADY!

Everything you thought
was "ELSE" was
only your MIRROR!

Now, will you look at
your SELF in the eyes
of your BROTHER?

In the face of your SISTER
And forgive your SELF
and each "OTHER"?

We are all going HOME
TOGETHER.

Trouble, Trouble Everywhere

I sit above Atlanta
The Sundial Restaurant rotating
Around the city
While I eat
The fine cuisine.

The lights below
illuminate people
Breaking into homes
Stealing cars
Raping women.

The homeless people
Look for shelter
Near barrels of fire,
Carrying paper sacks
Filled with liquor bottles.

I'm above all of that, though.
I'm not a part,
Just a witness;
I keep my distance,
And I am safe.

The bill arrives
And I dig for my wallet,
But it's gone.

* Sallee Jo Wade

Unconditional regard

Afraid to look beyond my wall
Where flowers may dwell.
Blinded antagonist,
Untold truths lie there about
Waiting for an explorer of a shallow mind.
Afraid perhaps to see a reflection of likeness
No reason yields righteousness.
Pick a flower
And accept me as I am.

* Garry Ke' Merritt

The Yellow Toothbrush

The television
mumbles about
a recession or a war or something.
I stand in front of
the mirrored medicine cabinet
brushing my teeth.
A commercial
reminds me to buy some tampons-
I rinse my toothbrush beneath the running water.
Channel five is experiencing technical difficulties,
I tap my toothbrush on the basin
and freeze
before the yellow Crayola toothbrush
you forgot to take with you.
And I can feel cavities in my future.

* Sheila Casper

Friend or Foe

Confusion Sux. Wait a minute, maybe not now here we go,
this is just a thought.
Confusion's good in a way, I guess.
Exhilaration is the reward, and confusion the test.
Without exhilaration there would be no drive to succeed.
This piece is turning into a big building block, don'tcha see!

Well now back to the poem, to see what I'm thinking. What can I
put here to rhyme, but shrinking.
Shrinking as in the world that's what I'm thinking about.
We can't let the world shrink, we gotta stay stout.
Very boring the world would be,
if confusion didn't succeed!

* Emily Duncan

A Definition of Love

My grandmother told me
that love is what you
feel when he is not there.
An emptiness

A pit with slick walls that
he cannot escape to join you.
A cavern that only echoes
his name when you call.

My grandmother showed me
that love is what you feel
when he is not there.
An emptiness

A grave of earthened walls
that he cannot escape to join her.
A house that only echoes
his name when she calls.

* Dennis Tinsley
Things That Last

A smile, a handshake, a morning in May
A walk with a friend at the close of day.
A pat on the back for a job well done
A gentle caress when heartaches come.

Candlelight, moonlight, eyes meeting across a room
Time spent together on a Sunday afternoon
Holidays, birthdays, a table for two
Weddings, reunions, and saying I love you!

The call of wild geese flying in V formation
A flag waving in the breeze, men dying for their nation.
Time and love, gifts that make life worth living.
Their value and worth come with the giving.

The things that last, joy, sorrow, pain and pleasure
They make the memories that we come to treasure.

* Elsie Nelson

Introspection

As the midnight sky approaches,
A cool breeze brushes across the fragile beach.
Granules of sand relocate.
Waves edge toward the earth
to greet a lone stranger.
He walks.
Visible pathway
Made possible by moonlight.

* Garry Ke' Merritt

Beth Baltes graphite drawing
A Mossy Creek Christmas

*By Emily Duncan*

Dad turned on the dirt road called Sanders Road in Mossy Creek. Dad’s family lives on this road and we were headed for Granny and Grandpa Sanders’ yellow and brown shuttered house to celebrate Christmas in the true Sanders’ tradition.

I looked forward to these visits like visits to the dentist’s office to get my teeth pulled. I dreaded these visits to Mossy Creek, and I especially dreaded visiting my relatives, the rednecks, who lived on Sanders Road.

I don’t know about other states, but my best friend, Mark, and I agree that nowhere but in Georgia can people that you would swear take up residence in Milledgeville mental hospital turn out to be your relatives; it makes me cringe to know that my cousin Melvin, who believes in polygamy, sex discrimination, and lives alone in a KV next to Alto State Prison, actually shares with me the same blood line and chromosomes. It turns me against having children in fear that the defective gene hibernating in me will become active and produce a kid with a strong resemblance to dear old cousin Melvin. My bloodline also raises questions in my mind such as “Who are these people like this?” or “How can I be related to them, and how come I turned out normal?”

Mark and I agree that this family gets together force you to act normal even when things going on around are anything but—like the times when my great-aunt Kerrie starts dancing in the aisle of her church shouting, “Glory! Lord Jesus you know that I love my family!” and then proceeds to kiss and hug every person in the church. It makes no difference to her whether he or she is related to her or not.

When I told Mark about her and Melvin, he shook his head like I was unteachable and said, “Jake, I thought I had a weird family, but I think yours is ranked in the top ten that takes the cake.”

I said, “But I don’t like them, and I don’t like to visit them, and I don’t claim them.”

Mark said, “Face it Jake, you’re one of them. I mean, you are related to them, you know.”

That remark really hurt, and I set out to prove that his assumption was way off base. I knew my family was weird or peculiar—peculiar is the word Mom uses instead of weird to describe Dad’s side of the family—it’s more polite than telling someone that these people scare the you-know-what out of you when you’re around them. I knew that my family was that way, but their lifestyle wasn’t mine, and I was going to make sure that only a few people would associate me with the Sandersons of Mossy Creek.

Sometimes I think that my relatives’ peculiarities don’t bother me as much as Duane’s presence at Granny’s house. Every time I go to her house, I steer clear of closets, beds, and opened doors because of the chance of Duane hiding in, under, or behind them waiting to grab any extremity of mine. He had a God-awful grip that could only be compared to a boa constrictor’s. Any attempt of mine to wrestle free failed and only resulted in Duane renaming me “Bitchface,” “Wimp,” or “Sissy,” for the rest of the day. If I complained or told him to stop, he’d say, “What are you going to do, yell for Evie?” Evie was our cousin, and she’d always taken up for me when I was younger, and Duane still teases me about it. I cringe at Duane’s insinuations that I hide behind a woman’s skirt.

Granny and Grandpa didn’t have a drive-in and so the road would not be blocked. I guess he looked at me through the thin wood. Then I saw Paul, who had chewed on the corners of his mouth and tried to stifle their laughs, but when they saw Dad coming, they disappeared into one of the rooms. I turned the light on for Paul, who strained a “thanks” through the thin wood. Then I walked into the den.

The heat from the wood stove burned my frozen nose and cheeks as I opened the hollow door of the den and shut it. I sat down on the ripped brown-leather love seat nearest the door, but not one redneck noticed me; they were either watching the football game on TV or sleeping with their heads propped back, roofs of their mouths exposed, snoring.

I was safe—no sign of Duane so far. Evie’s brother, Craig, noticed me, though. He was out on bail for robbing money and beef jerky sticks from a Starvin’ Marvin and claimed to be homosexual. He sat in a corner seat alone and stared at me through one eye—the other was covered by his hair. I said hey to him and tried to appear totally unused to the idea that he preferred women, and I wondered at how much pain he had to experience when he had his nose pierced with that stud earring. I prayed that he wouldn’t find me attractive. My nose started to run and I wiped it on the cuff of my sweatshirt.

A thin-limbed fir tree in front of the window was decorated in multicolored blinking lights, small crocheted doilies, and gold ball ornaments so old that furry gold threats were hanging in loops below. They were attached to the rubbery limbs by a piece of rust-colored twine. The trunk of the fir went down into a bucket of dirt. Granny tried to hide it under a faded, patchwork quilt, but it had fallen down into the green plastic cheese bucket. Wrapped gifts started from under the tree and spread—presents were stacked on top of each other and two pictures of topless women.

Granny had finally talked Grandpa into replacing the paneling, but the ceiling tiles still had small holes where rats from attic had chewed on the corners. She covered almost one wall of paneling with pictures of her ten children, twenty grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, her seven brothers and sisters, and Grandpa’s eight brothers. The frames varied from wooden to cheap rusting gold-plated metal. There were black and white pictures of teenagers and children with plaid shirts with the sleeves rolled up, dark-colored jeans, and white tube socks covered by penny loafers all standing in front of a wood house where the paint had peeled and was falling off.

Over the decades, these teenagers and children evolved into the redneck uncles and aunts, and Dad. Colored photographs with babies propped on carpet risers or blankets thrown over the crowns of their heads hung on the paneling. I spotted my baby picture. It was propped up on dirty yellow shag carpet. Below that picture was a graduation picture of me wearing a mock tuxedo, and most appropriately below that was a picture of topless women smiling and standing by the coffin and corpse of her father.
Evie walked into the room and looked out the window. Her breath fogged up the glass and she used the sleeve of her navy sweater to wipe it. She squinted her eyes as she peered out into the darkness.

"Swain's going to come down the road any minute," she hinted at Craig.

Craig, who had kept one eye trained on me for a while, rocketed out of the brown leather. He saw me for a moment, then jumped out of the bucket seat, grabbed a folding chair and hurried to the back window. Her breath fogged up the glass and she made the Levi's that had ridden up the block steps, and he then they followed him around like puppies. He never opened the doors for them. Most of the time the two of them followed me around like puppies. He went through a lot of girlfriends; I've met at least ten of them when he brought them to Granny's or when he tortured him at his pool. Every once in a while I'll meet one of the mall or the movies, and they'll say, "Jake, how's Duane doing?"

I usually say that he's about the same, whatever that is, or if I feel really bad about the way he treated me, I'll say something like, "Oh, he was just talking about the other day." I think it makes her day a little bit better if she believes the king of heartbreakers is thinking about her.

In seventh through twelfth grades, he won the title of Cutest and set a record for most consecutive wins of a student-choice award. He never went to college, but Mama told me that he was building a huge house in the Bluffs. Duane emerged in the den again with his hand wrapped around a chicken leg. He chewed the meat in his mouth, swallowed it, and burped loudly. He turned to a boy cousin, held out his index finger, and said, "Pull my finger."

Evie cried, "No, Benji, don't!" But Benji did and Duane stuck his butt out and farted. Evie walked out of the den, saying, "Duane, you are so disgusting."

Benji giggled at Duane mocking Evie by holding his nose and swinging his hips back and forth.

I started to walk to the kitchen, too, but Duane turned and looked at me. My feet froze on the carpet and I wiped my runny nose with the back of my hand. Duane smiled (I could sense the wolfish grin) and said, "Duane, you are so disgusting." Benji giggled at Duane mimicking Evie by holding his nose and swinging his hips back and forth.

I tried to open the trailer. I looked straight ahead and wouldn't move. The inside was littered with gun shells, camouflage clothing, hollow beer cans, and a half full jug of Southern Comfort which he was still open. The inside was littered with gun shells, camouflage clothing, hollow beer cans, and a half full jug of Southern Comfort which he was still open. The inside was littered with gun shells, camouflage clothing, hollow beer cans, and a half full jug of Southern Comfort which he was still open. The inside was littered with gun shells, camouflage clothing, hollow beer cans, and a half full jug of Southern Comfort which he was still open. The inside was littered with gun shells, camouflage clothing, hollow beer cans, and a half full jug of Southern Comfort which he was still open.

"Let's go," I said like it was no big deal. I climbed into Duane's Ford and we pulled out. The inside was littered with gun shells, camouflage clothing, hollow beer cans, and a half full jug of Southern Comfort which he was still open. The inside was littered with gun shells, camouflage clothing, hollow beer cans, and a half full jug of Southern Comfort which he was still open. The inside was littered with gun shells, camouflage clothing, hollow beer cans, and a half full jug of Southern Comfort which he was still open. The inside was littered with gun shells, camouflage clothing, hollow beer cans, and a half full jug of Southern Comfort which he was still open. The inside was littered with gun shells, camouflage clothing, hollow beer cans, and a half full jug of Southern Comfort which he was still open. The inside was littered with gun shells, camouflage clothing, hollow beer cans, and a half full jug of Southern Comfort which he was still open.
December. The Bronco sped down the steep road and pushed to make it up the other hill. The sky was gray and sad, and all I could see was the rolling hills and the lonely paved road that crossed them. Power lines crisscrossed over the road like fine threads of a spider’s web.

The land had been burned, reordered, and small pine trees colored the brown, brittle grass fine and green in the winter when everything else was dead and unfeeling. The pines’ color was more a muted green, but they were thriving and even more I and even the weeds. I felt eerie and grey and sad, and all I could see was Duane’s house was a hidden masterpiece in Mossy Creek—a diamond in the rough. Until I discovered it, I couldn’t fully appreciate the Mossy Creek area, the rednecks, the white trash and yes, even Duane.

I felt ashamed of my condescension to these people who simply lived day to day to the best of their abilities with the limited resources they had. I had to admit that it wasn’t a lifestyle I would envy, but they did live it honestly. They had never tried to hide the way they were. I dusted my hands and the knees of my jeans and walked to the Bronco wondering if one of my younger cousins had locked himself in a suitcase and drooled all over the insides before someone found him, or if Swain had performed a sex change with a shotgun on Craig. I knew I’d find out when we left the Bluffs and got back to our family in Mossy Creek.

***

Slowly and taller than the pines. The hardwoods would climb out of the Bronco. Its roof was long and pines tinted the hills muted green with spots of light brown undergrowth. No white trash trail

The inside wasn’t complete, but yellow wood formed the shell of a high cathedral ceiling. One entire wall in the great room was made of glass that stretched from the floor to the roof. I could see nothing but the Bluffs and far away the pines tinted green with spots of light brown undergrowth. No white trash trailers, trailers with scared children and lonesome wives could be seen. No rednecks homes on Sanders Road shown through the glass wall.

“Do you think Kelly will like this, Jake?”

Duane’s voice was soft when he mentioned Kelly’s name, and it made me nervous because Duane sounded so unsure of himself—a side of that I had never seen. I turned away from the glass wall and looked at Duane’s face and saw his brown eyes had dimmed. I turned back to the glass.

“Duane, Kelly’s crazier than she looks if she doesn’t want to marry you for this.”

That’s not it. She hasn’t even seen the house yet and I don’t want her to until she loves me as much as I love her.”

I couldn’t believe what Duane was saying and even more I couldn’t understand why he was telling me this. The king of heartbreakers had fallen in love, yet she was breaking his heart. At first the hallelujah chorus sang in my brain as I realized that Duane was finally getting a dose of his own medicine. I wanted to call him a big buffeted wuss for being so stupid to expose his weak side for me, his enemy, to attack.

I would have done it but Duane took away the thrill for me like killing an animal that limped and couldn’t run fast. I had waited so long for this day to prove to Duane that I was the better man. Sure, I didn’t have the muscles or the girls, but I had the brains to go to college and become more than just construction worker for the rest of my life. I couldn’t tell him that though; I couldn’t hurt him because he was family—he was part of what I belonged to.

My nose stung as the green and the brown I saw seemed to run together. I couldn’t believe that I even cared about Duane’s problem, but somehow I felt sympathy for him trying so hard to get Kelly. It dawned on me that whether or not my family succeeded at something mattered to me. When they fail, I feel the hurt they suffer—even if I can’t stand their ways. The rednecks from Mossy Creek were my family, and somewhere deep in me was a love for them that never tried to hide the way they were.

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“Smooth, Butthead.”

“Thanks Duane,” I moaned, rolling around in the dirt and wood.

“You ain’t hurt. Get up.” Duane was already climbing up into the Bronco.

I raised up on my hands and then straightened my body upright. I took a final look at the Duane’s house; it didn’t belong here so close to the white trash rednecks, yet it did in an odd sort of way. Duane’s house was a hidden masterpiece in Mossy Creek—an odd sort of way to prove to Duane that I couldn’t have it.

I felt for the thriving pines I saw knowing that they would soon be replaced by stronger relatives. It seemed unfair.

The Bronco turned on a gravel drive, and I saw Duane’s house facing me. It stood on the ground, noble and proud in its magnificence. The house was the largest I had ever seen in Mossy Creek and was even bigger than mine. I climbed out of the Bronco. Its roof was long and steep and the bricks were a rich hue of burnt red—even the cement still had the bluish tint of newness. The front porch was small but accentuated the impressive door with an oval stained glass panel. I rubbed the cold brass door knob before I opened it.

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Well I tell ya, he was just as dirty and lowdown as the rest of 'em. You'd see him up there in the pulpit with his stained-back hair and shiny, black polyester suit hemming and hawing about hellfire and damnation, but he was no better, no better at all. I'd see him, my brother Reginald, eyeing the little girls and their mothers as they pooled around after Reginald, eyeing the little girls and their mothers as they pooled around after the sermon at the Wauchula Baptist Church. There was no hope of slipping away. She'd whisper and I'd know.

"Don't see that peaceful look that the dead usually have when they held a nail in the casket funeral, and I guess she just never accepted his death. She didn't get the chance to see that peaceful look that the dead usually have before thay're put into the ground. No, all she saw was the rough brown box being lowered into the red clay.

For months after the funeral Momma would sit alone on the porch swing kneading the ball-up apron in her hands. Each day at dusk she held a vigil for Daddy, starting at the shadows of the silos as if he half expected his lanky figure to come out of the hill. She'd wait, swinging until the day was gone, and drag herself into the house, moving the place setting she had laid out for Daddy at supper. If as stranger had happened in, he would have thought there were four of us living in the house. She kept everything just as it had been before Daddy's death, fluffing his pillow and laying out his bed clothes each evening. A Lazy Boy recliner, Daddy's chair, sat in the corner of the room and beside it lay a newspaper, untouched since the morning Daddy thumbed through it.

I think she kind of wished she was back to read it, and there was nothing you could do or say to make her see otherwise. Reginald even played along with Momma at his funeral. "Goodnight, Momma," he'd say as he tucked her in, pulling covers right up to her neck. "Goodnight, son. . . . Reginald . . . be sure to tell your daddy goodnight and tell him to come up to bed. It's getting late, and you know how he is without his sleep."

"Well, they cut his nose off and used it as a flower pot . . . you just remember that the next time you get to feeling curious."

She had a lot of questions like that. I don't remember Momma ever answering me straight when it came to Reginald, or anything, for that matter. She was never quite the same after Daddy passed away. I was about seventeen when he was killed in a combine accident. We had a one-horse funeral, and she seemed about to change very much from generation to generation. The same names just kept popping up on the tombstones: Hedges, Brown, Cooley, Buford. No, we didn't have too many pilgrims call Wauchula their new-found home.

Church was a very important part of life, what with the pollucks, revivals, Bible School in the summertime, and an occasional wedding. Even the funerals were anticipated in a strange sort of way. Groups of old men, smoking and chewing tobacco, held court outside of Wauchula Baptist Church, relishing conversations about the weather while the busloads buzzed about with their gossip, straightening the dresses and the tiny bowties of all the children, so uncomfortable in this Sunday best. Around nine o'clock they'd close the bell doors and they'd all file in to soak up the words Reginald spat at them. Even while he was vomiting and convulsing so, they sat back and listened patiently, enjoying the fear he made them feel.

"Boy speaks with power and understand­ ing. You can see it in his eyes," Grandaddy used to say. Grandaddy was a good man who had long ago given up on trying to please the world. He was a stubborn old bugger who did as he saw fit. If he felt like going on a week-long drunk, he'd do it without regret. I remember him telling me stories as he sat back sipping on the rotgut, talking as much with his hands as he did with his mouth.

"Out there over yonder horizon there is a place... And he'd go on and on about the green fields and flowers and then he'd look me in the eye and say, "But it's kinda pretty here too, isn't it?" He was always talking about how there was beauty right under your nose and how you didn't have to run away to find it. He'd hold his hand up high like he was tossing and chuckle.

Grandaddy talked a lot about Reginald and what he called the preacherman's battle. He said we all had to balance between the good and the evil, but the preacherman had to do it in front of everyone, spotlighting, living his life under a microscope. He said if Reginald kept it up, he'd become either a saint or a loon. "All men are lustful," he'd say as he took a long, slow swallow of whatever poison he had in his brown bag.

"Years ago they would of taken the life of any preacher suspected of ungodliness, suspected of humanity . . . now they let him take his own life, slowly."

I remember every Wednesday night we'd all go down to Billy's to watch these stag movies he had hidden away in his cellar. Louise, his wife, had Bingo that night, so we had free reign over the place. Reginald would show up every Wednesday like clockwork, still just preaching and thumping that Bible. He was always beating on that Bible. He'd pace around the living room calling all of us heathens, but when the lights went down he'd sit on the oil seat in the back of the room with that Bible perched on his knee, justa thumping away on it like it was some big bug he was trying to kill. He'd still preach, but a little quieter, his voice almost a mumble—you could make out a "Christ our Lord" or an "oh, my Jesus" if you listened closely.

The movies considering we watched the same ones over and over, got a little boring in comparison to our man of the cloth in the back. So one evening I sat off to the side and watched Reginald spotlighted by the glare of the television. The rightious words that were coming out of his mouth didn't meet the man behind his face. His eyes had this strange look of moonshine madness, the same look Grandaddy had the day he'd run away through the thicket stark naked in the rain screaming, "I feel like a baby again," Every now and then he'd break away and wring his hands, scared, like Momma had just slapped them away from the cookie jar. He twisted and squirmed in his seat, but mostly
he thumped on that Bible. That Bible sure was a curious thing. By the end of the evening it had indented its way from his knee to his lap and he stood up holding it to his pelvis, insecure, as if hiding something. 

"Louise should be getting home soon. Right, Billy? Time to put all this craziness away. Wouldn't you say?" Reginald moved toward Billy. 

"I guess so, Reginald. . . I'm sure you've got to be somewhere this evening. Don't you have to go counsel some pagans or something?" They both laughed. There was a small distance between the two now. Reginald was the first to stop laughing. 

"I think I've counseled all the pagans I can counsel in one night," Reginald said in a serious tone. Billy fell silent. I could see the next comment coming into his head, his eyes moving back and forth as if scanning some imaginary script. "Yes, and I love your technique: infallulate, become one of the bastards, move up through the ranks, reach the position of high priest and then hit them with the word. I love it! Truly the work of a great clergyman." They were silent for a moment. Reginald walked to the mantelpiece. "Hit them with the word," Billy said. Reginald seemed happier than the two of them put together about the engagement. 

"He drove us all over and I never once caught him looking back into the bed of the truck," Billy joked. The three of them were inseparable up until Reginald started that preacherman's battle. There was a specter of uneasiness. It was as if he felt the eyes of God or Momma were always on him. 

Reginald received his calling from the Lord a few months after Daddy's death. Momma was still in black, moping around the house, spouting verse after verse with this cold look, like every nerve in her face had gone dead. He came down after supper one evening thumbing through his Bible, anxious. "Care for a little scripture?" He started circling my chair. "Nah, no thank you. Already had my verse for the day." Reginald stopped. "I had a dream last night." "Really," I said. He moved closer. "Really. I was walking on a dusty road and in the distance I could see a man walking towards me. The closer he got I could tell he was wearing these huge shoes that looked like the ones clowns wear in the circus... Well, ya know how in dreams you just know things?" Yeah, you make up your own rules." I moved up in my seat. I was interested. Reginald didn't usually volunteer information like this. Whatever it was, I was coming along for the ride. "Well, I just knew this man was Jesus. He had this look about him. Anyways, one of his shoelaces was untied and I could tell he was going to trip. He was walking like he had nowhere to go, a miracle or a crucifixion maybe. So I ran up to him and tied his shoe. Would you, Jesus Christ's shoes? I mean, if you knew he was going to trip and fall before he got a chance to save the world?

I sat back. "I guess I would, Reginald. I guess I would." After that night he started sporting the suit and carrying the Bible with him at all times. The preaching came slowly, but he soon worked through his shyness. Momma smiled a whole lot more, and she stopped wearing black so often. There was something very special about the two of them now. Momma was Reginald's security, but not like Reginald did. I was too busy watching his daily sacrifice. 

I noticed a change in Reginald around this time. The wrinkles were cutting their way onto his face and there was heaviness in his movement. He was carrying that load he often preached about: doing for Momma what Momma couldn't do for herself. He carried a grimace with him for the rest of his days, his face worm like the cover of that little Bible he thumped. 

When he was in the pulpit, he had the same look like it was Wednesday night back at Billy's. Hell, who knows what he saw as he stared out at us. Maybe the whole jumbled mess looked like a big ugly porno. Maybe he imagined us all in that world doing ungodly things. Things he wasn't sure about anymore, being Momma's only light and all. 

He was in the parlor with Momma when I left Wauchula for the last time. The two complemented each other well. They resembled an older couple. Momma was napping and Reginald sat in the Lazy Boy recliner, looking a lot like Daddy. "If I can be hard, living this sort of life," he said without moving from his seat. I was surprised at the words. Reginald was quite aware of his situation. "You mean with Momma?" I asked. "I mean with Momma, Billy, Louise, and all the people in this town." He stayed put, staring at me, waiting for a response. I stared back, dumb. All I could think about was what Grandaddy said about Reginald, his battle and the green fields with flowers. The room was quiet. Reginald smiled at Momma, lapped his Bible, and closed his eyes. Sleep erased the tension on his brow and for a moment he looked like a saint.  

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The sign is always lit, even in the brightest afternoon sunshine. And in the cold mist of the night, it is an unremovable halo, a beacon that shines up and down the silent streets after midnight. It calls to the hungry and the restless in three foot high yellow letters. Anyone glancing up over the door has it burned into their memories, Perkins' All-Nite Cafe.

Daniel leaned over and pressed his nose against the cold surface of the window. Outside, wet, grey fingers caressed the glass, and the city's orange glow reflected from the undersides of heavy, ashen clouds that kissed the dark treetops and moved swiftly on through the night sky. So little color, he thought of the scene through the window. He frowned. Nothing can penetrate the bleak shroud.

"Waitin' on someone or alone tonight, hon?" the waitress asked from behind him.

"All alone..." said Daniel. "Just me."

"Maybe we can fix that," she said, "I had the grin of a shark with bright red lipstick. "What can I getcha?"

She was just enough of the right kind of cute, sort of cheap, too. The kind of girl Daniel always found, even when he wasn't looking. The kind of girl who was probably so-so in the sack, maybe good, but more than likely not, and he never protested too loudly when he gave her cab fare and showed her the door at 3:00 a.m., explaining that he was sorry, but he simply could not sleep unless he was alone in bed.

He winked at the waitress. "Fetch me jest the ne'er endin' pot o' coffee, m'fine lassie," he said in his Irish brogue. She giggled again and hipswept over to another table. "Can I get y'all anything else?"

Daniel looked at his watch. 11:37. Two and a half hours to wait for another meaningless night of feigned affection I'll only regret for the rest of the week. He shrugged, poured himself a cup of the thick drink and turned the page in his book.

Sarah brushed by a moment later, heading back to the kitchen.

"Keep my pot full, Daniel called out to her retreating buttocks, and he heard her laughing out loud behind the swinging door.

The Bottomless Pot of Coffee is Perkins' most ordered beverage. Regular patrons of the cafe often come simply for this and, perhaps, a Danish. The coffee is served in tall, rust-colored urns. These are cool to the touch on the outside, but the coffee inside remains steaming hot for hours. This seeming defiance of the laws of thermodynamics is a sometimes popular topic of debate among some of Perkins' more inebriated customers.

Rachel stomped her feet in the doorway to shake loose the muddy leaves clinging to her boots. The young man in the booth across the
Frowning at Daniel, the waitress took Rachel's order, and with a derisive snort, she turned and disappeared back into the kitchen. "Bad night, I guess," said Rachel.

Daniel smiled. "Not for me.

Conversation came easily for both of them, and they quickly discovered many points of common interest. Their discourse sped through politics and art, local clubs and friends neither knew. Rachel told him of her job as assistant editor for a publishing firm, and Daniel nodded, "Uh-huh. Uh-huh," while trying to find something about her that was not appealing to him.

She was intrigued by Daniel's tastes in literature, and she glanced through the novel he had abandoned since her arrival. He spoke to her of what he read and what he wrote, punctuating his likes and dislikes with elaborate gestures that, once, upset the salt and pepper shakers. She found herself relaxed and laughing and thought, "Who is this man?"

But she pushed that question from her mind and allowed herself to be carried along in the current of his voice.

Twice as they talked, they were briefly interrupted by the waitress. Daniel fumbled with a cigarette and lighter, his eyes downcast, each time she appeared. To his relief, she did not speak but clanked the dishes on the table top, as she served Rachel and, later, carried away the empty plates. Rachel did not comment again on the waitress' surly disposition.

After an indeterminate amount of time spent drinking the coffee, smoking, and talking, Rachel excused herself and went to the bathroom. Alone, Daniel looked at his reflection in the window next to the table. He patted down a few stray hairs and smiled at himself.

"If she's not gonna order anything else, she needs to pay her bill before we leave." The waitress stood next to the table, her hands on her hips.

Startled by her voice and sudden appearance, Daniel looked toward the restroom doors, but Rachel had not yet emerged.

"Sarah, I'm sorry, but uh, I'm not going to be able to do it tonight." He reached for his wallet in his coat pocket.

"What the..."

"Look, I'm sorry," he handed her a twenty-dollar bill and saw Rachel coming out of the bathroom door. "Does this cover it? Keep the change."

...asshole...

Ignoring the stream of expletives the waitress hurled at him, Daniel hastily gathered his belongings, stood and reached across the table to grab Rachel's coat.

"Excuse me." He pushed past theirate woman.

"...I thought..."

"C'mon. I'll give you a ride home," Daniel said, catching Rachel on her way back to the table and handing her coat to her.

...son of a bitch...

"What's her problem?" Rachel asked, as Daniel pushed her through the door.

"I told her the service was pretty pathetic." Daniel stopped the car in front of the building Rachel indicated.

"Thank you for a great time and the ride. I really enjoyed it." She reached over and took his hand. "I'd invite you up, but it's so late..."

"I know..." Daniel paused. "Would you like to go out tomorrow night? A movie or dinner?"

She was silent for a moment. Then, she gave his hand a squeeze.

"Why don't you come up for a little bit and we can talk about it." Her voice had a husky, whispery quality that Daniel had not noticed earlier, and in the dim light from the street lamp, he thought he saw a tiny smile beginning at the corners of her mouth.

After they made love, they lay side by side, exhausted and breathing heavily, happily. Rachel thought she must be in from to, she was so warm and lightheaded, and she found herself saying sincerely words that she had rarely meant, when she had said them to others in the past.

Daniel stretched his entire body andiggled. He felt as if his body were melting, and he tickled. Rachel reached over and poked him in the side until he laughed out loud and begged her to stop.

She put an arm across his bare chest and snuggled up against him. In the quiet room, they began to drift away.

"You know, I can't usually sleep unless I'm alone..." Rachel murmured. But Daniel did not hear her; he was thinking of a land with warm, summer night breezes and a dark sky filled with stars.

...a loose black turtleneck.

Damn it, I should have called her at work and told her the plans, thou-ght Daniel. But, wanting her to be in the best of possible moods, he said, with only a touch of exasperation, "What would you like to do, then?"

"I thought maybe we could grab a bite at Perkins' and then sit around here...maybe make
some popcorn and curl up in front of the TV. You know, just relax tonight." Daniel was frustrated and confused. He wanted to tell her to get dressed for the night on the town that he had been anticipating. And Perkins', why Perkins? Daniel had avoided the cafe ever since the night he had met Rachel, afraid of another confrontation with thatwaitress.

In his mind, he weighed her present good mood against her potential demeanor. If he told her what it was that he really wanted to do. But aren't love and a relationship based partly on compromise? he wondered. Damning himself for his indecision, he bit his tongue and smiled. "Sounds like a great idea, dear."

They drove to Perkins' in Daniel's car; the only conversation was a statiscy interview on a radio talk show with the wife of a mass murderer facing execution. Do people like that really hate women? thought Rachel. She asked Daniel, but he wasn't paying attention to anything inside of the car and did not hear her.

Daniel was watching the sky as he drove, and he kept glancing up through the windshield of the car and did not hear her.

"What?"

"What? I said, do you want to go over to my place?" she screamed into her ear.

"Have you got something to drink over there?"

Daniel's car sailed through unreasonably cold mists all the way back to his apartment. He was alone, inside of himself, and only vaguely aware of the girl who babbled incessantly and played with the radio. Neither did she seem to notice that Daniel was not conscious of her presence. If she did, then she did not care to comment.

Stepping through the door at his apartment, she giggled, "Have you got a bathroom?"

Daniel pointed down the hallway and walked in the opposite direction, heading to the kitchen. He made a gin and tonic for himself, shrugged and made one for her, a bit stronger.

"Nice place you've got," she said, coming into the kitchen behind him.

He grunted something that he supposed sounded like "Thanks."

Drink in hand on the way to the living room, he noticed the light flashimg on his answering machine. When he pressed the message button, Rachel's voice came out of the speaker, sounding metallic and far away.

Bep, "I got the promotion. Daniel. I'm so happy! I just wanted to know if you wanted to celebrate with me. Love you. I'll call you tomorrow." Bep, Click.

"I'm already celebrating," thought Daniel. He took a sip of his gin and tonic, grimaced, and removed the telephone receiver from its cradle.

A favorite dinner at Perkins' is Sauced Quiche. The main ingredients of the dish are eggs and sour cream, of course, shrimp and crab meat, and some sort of fish. Though this is the least prevalent of the principal components. Many, trying the quiche for the first time, have remarked to their servers that, instead, the fish pleasantly underscores the overall flavor of the meal, rather than diminishing it.
Early on, Daniel realized the roles he was creating for himself to play, two distinct and separate parts in a small drama he imagined himself to be directing. This had all of the traces of being a comedy to him at first, trying to create for himself separate and in a way he had not before thought. Daniel, as he carefully concealed from her all evidence of what he was doing the evenings she stayed at the office.

But Daniel's own conscience exerted itself in a way he had not before experienced. He began to see that the stage was set for tragedy, and he could no longer delight in the secrecy of the intrigue he had initiated. He searched for solutions to these problems and concluded that he would have to return to the state of faithfulness he had known. To facilitate this, he deemed it necessary to tonight Rachel and hope that she found, as he, that it was now, more than ever, important to their relationship for them to be consummately together.

Staring out the window behind his desk one night, he saw the clouds as he could not remember having seen them since the night he and Rachel had first met. This vision startled him, and he thought that he could feel the happiness he had lost, hidden out there, somewhere behind the fat and dirty clouds that caused the night lights of the city and held them, so that the clouds seemed to burn from within.

Daniel called Rachel's office to ask her to meet him at Perkins'. He longed to tell her all and be free of the burden of his lies, yearned to beg for forgiveness and put an end to his solitary existence. Though it was not as late as she had told him she would be working, there was no answer at Rachel's office.

Confused, he dialed her apartment, and on the third ring, she answered.

"Hello?"

Daniel heard the rustle of...sheets? "Uh...Rachel...were you asleep? "I'm sorry to wake you."

"Daniel? No. I'm up. Just came home a little early...What's up? You sound like something's wrong."

"Can I see you? I mean, will you meet me at Perkins's? I need to talk to you...please?"

Again, Daniel heard a whisper of material and a sound like...bedsprings? "Darling, what time is it? Because I really have to get up early..."

"It's only 9:30. Please, I need to see you."

"O.K. I'll meet you there in an hour."

"Thank you... I love you."

But she had already hung up, and he spoke this last to a silent and empty line.

Daniel waved to Rachel from the booth when he saw her come in the door.

"Daniel..." she began angrily, but caught herself and finished, speaking in a more gentle tone. "What's wrong dear?"

"I've got something to tell you." He stared out the window.

Rachel clenchd and unclenched her hands beneath the table. Here it comes; it is finally here, she thought. I don't want to do this now; I will not be angry or upset. Over and over those words churned in her mind, a litany against frustration. Daniel reached for the coffee pot and refilled his cup, talking as he poured.

"Rachel, I want for us to move in together." He said this in as forceful a voice as he could muster. He turned to her and found that she was looking him directly in the eyes.

"I know you've been seeing other women..." She stated the words matter of factly.

"What? You know?" he sputtered.

"...and I can't live with you, while you've been sleeping around with countless sluts," she finished.

Daniel's confusion turned to anger as he realized, She knew. She knew. He shook his head, as if this physical action could clear his mind, could stop the spinning.

"Let me get this straight. You're saying that you will move in with me, if I stop seeing other women?" Brow furrowed, he looked up at her, but she just sat there, her face deadpan. Taking her silence as an affirmation of his having understood, he continued; words exploded from his mouth in a furious stream. "Where in the hell do you get off? All of your god-dammed nights at the office! You left me alone!"

He realized that he was shouting and glanced around the room. Several people were staring at him from nearby tables, but they quickly turned their attention back to their plates or unfinished cigarettes, embarrassed when Daniel flashed his rageful eyes at them.

He lowered his voice.

"I have waited months for you. Months!"

he hissed. His lower lip trembled, and he sobbed. "Shit...I'm so sorry...I love you...."

"Love me! If you loved me, you would never have slept with any of those whores!" She took a deep breath to calm her hands, still fumbling a napkin in her lap, and her eyes softened. "Oh, Daniel...we just can't do this. We can't expect to live together when we just do not trust each other."

Daniel was shocked. "But I trust you..." "I know you do," she sighed. Her hands were steady as she lit a cigarette.

And the wind blew the dead leaves away through the cold November darkness, uncovering the grassless, grey marl outside the windows of Perkins' All-Nite Cafe.

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Taff Stephens  graphite drawing
The Wasp  
*By Brad Strickland*

The nest was long gone, knocked out by one hissing stream of a super-powered insecticide that brought the red wasps tumbling to earth like bipedal swipes by King Kong’s hand. James and his father then used a bamboo pole to dislodge the nest itself, a cluster of flattened paper cells the size of both James’s fists clenched together. They tossed it in the trash and forgot it.

Ten days or two weeks later, further into the summer vacation that to a six-year-old stretched like an endless playground, James was beside the house tossing a tennis ball against the chimney and hustling back to catch it when he stepped on one of the dead wasps. A jolt like an electric shock, incredible in its intensity, ran through his bare left foot, instantly from the soft pad of flesh behind his little toe.

He collapsed onto the grass from the pain, a shriek already tearing through his throat. He grabbed his injured foot in both hands and looked at it, seeing to his horror the red wasp’s body, its body gone a dry, dusty brown, dangling from the sole by its stinger. He was afraid to touch it, to pull it free. “Daddy?” he shouted at the top of his lungs. “Help, Daddy?” James got up, standing only on his right foot, and started to hop around the house, shaking his left foot with the urgent need to dislodge the wasp. It dangled and twisted but hung on stubbornly.

James’s throat hurt almost as much as his foot did, but he could not stop himself from screaming. He lay on the table, feeling the cold air, trying to tell his father what had happened, to get his father to see.

“Forget it,” said his father. “It’ll be better in a minute.”

But it wasn’t. James felt his throat clogging, as if it were closing, and his arms began to look bumpy: raised red welts seemed to drain the color away from the rest of his skin. His father, looking worried, went to the phone. James gasped for air and heard one side of the conversation: this is Jim Farmer. I’m calling about my son. He got a wasp sting about half an hour ago, and now he’s having some kind of reaction. He says it’s hard for him to breathe, and he’s got a rash...that’s right, arms and face...No, on his foot...I’ve done that...Yes, thanks...Ten minutes.”

Everything came free, a wicked black stiletto. James heard his father curse softly. He raised up. His lungs heaving, Mr. Farmer ran a red light on the way to the doctor’s office. James tried to tell him, but it was too hard to speak and he didn’t have the wind.

James’s father fainted him, grave and worried. “Mama,” he said as his father lifted him out of the car in front of the pediatrician’s office. “Please, I want Mama.”

They went right to the examination room, and his father put him on an examination table covered with a long sheet of paper that pulled off his bare chest, arms and legs. James crossed over her breasts. He fainted again, this time less powerfully. James was still crying, the sobs clenching his larynx. “Did you get stung a lot, Daddy?”

“Don’t,” said his father. “It’s really not the same.”

“Okay,” said his father. “I’ll feed him.”

James lay on the table, feeling the cold ice on his chest.

“Daddy, I want Mama here,” he said. “Flush,” said his father. “It’ll be better in a minute.”

“I don’t think so. He’s already dead,” said his father. “But this one was already dead.”

Farmer got up, opened the refrigerator, and took out an ice cube. “Here, let’s try this.” He pressed the ice against the stung place, and the redness itself hurt, like a blade jabbed into flesh, before the ice began to numb the pain.

James’s voice became more petulant than hurt. “How could it sting me when it was already dead?”

“I guess the stinger still had some poison in it.”

James felt his heart thud. “Poison? Am I going to die?”

“No, of course not. It’s not that kind of poison.”

James began to cry again, this time less frantically. “Daddy, I want Mama here.”

“Hush,” said his father. “It’ll be better in a minute.”

“Sometimes after the nest is broken and they’re all dead they can still hurt you. Doesn’t seem right, does it?”

James lay on the table, feeling the cold paper against his bare back. The doctor talked to him, asking him about the sting. “Wasps can be mean things,” the doctor said. “Sometimes after the nest is broken and they’re all dead they can still hurt you. Doesn’t seem right, does it?”

James, foggy with exhaustion, shook his head. The paper rattled under him.

Mr. Farmer came back with word that James wasn’t allergic to anything. The doctor said, “I’m going to give him a couple of injections that should clear this up. We’ll keep him here for a half hour or so to make sure they’re working. I want you to get some Benadryl and give him one tablet every four hours through bedtime tonight. Tomorrow if he’s having any trouble, give me a call.”

The shots hurt, not as bad as the sting, but the needles felt cold and the pain went on for a long time. They made James sleepy, and he was barely aware of the doctor’s saying, “Take him at home now. I think he’s going to be fine. You’ll have to remember that he’s sensitive to stings, though. Keep him away from wasps.”

As the car turned onto their street, James heard his father curse softly. He raised up. His mother’s yellow car was in the driveway, and she stood beside it, a trim blonde woman in a pale green dress. She was scowling and held her arms crossed over her breasts.

Mr. Farmer had barely parked before James’s mother yanked open the passenger door and pulled James out. “Are you all right, baby?” she asked. “He’s fine,” James said. “I’m taking Jamie home.”

“Allice, don’t be—”

“Don’t take care of him. I’m going to keep him with me until he’s well—”

“Secondly, I don’t want to talk to you. I’m taking Jamie home.”

“Watch him.”

“Secondly, I don’t want to talk to you. I’m going to keep him with me until he’s well—”

“Mama,” he said as his father lifted him out of the car in front of the pediatrician’s office. “Please, I want Mama.”

“They’re going to the doctor now.”

Mr. Farmer picked him up again and carried him out to the car. The kids across the street, the Wilsons, were out shooting baskets. James buried his face in his father’s shoulder, ashamed of being carried like a baby.

He lay in the front seat, head thrown back, lungs heaving. Mr. Farmer ran a red light on the way to the doctor’s office. James tried to tell him, but it was too hard to speak and he didn’t have the wind.

As the car turned onto their street, James heard his father curse softly. He raised up. His mother’s yellow car was in the driveway, and she stood beside it, a trim blonde woman in a pale green dress. She was scowling and held her arms crossed over her breasts.

Mr. Far-
Convenience Store Play

*By Claire Porter

Characters:
Ellen, who works in the convenience store
Dan, her husband
A Man who comes in out of the storm

A Voice on the radio

Scene: A convenience store. Stage left up is a lunch counter which angles down to stage left down. At the stage left down end of counter there is a cash register. This allows for the cashier, Ellen, to take money for gas as well as fry burgers, pour coffee, etc. Stage right, there are rows of shelves with foodstuffs (pancake mixes, dehydrated milk, cans of pork and beans, and candy).

Ellen, the cashier/waitress is probably in her mid-thirties but may look older from stress. She is attractive but may have circles under her eyes, some crow's feet, and nice hair that has been badly treated.

As the scene opens, Ellen is testing the grease in the deep-fryer, etc. There is a radio playing country music softly behind her. The music is interrupted frequently by tornado warnings. Dan is dumping Fritos into his mouth right from the bag. Dan never takes his eyes off Ellen. Dan is not staring at Ellen in an obscene way. He stares at her with reverence. It is early evening. The sky is green-greyish and there are strong gusts of wind blowing at the doors.

Scene 1:

Dan: Creamed beef on toast.

Ellen: Storm's comin' up. Look at that sky, just look! Real pretty. He's angry with us.

Dan: Lotsa' trees'll be falling. Big grand-daddy trees.

Ellen: I was watching T.V. It was a wild life show and see, Dan you listening, there are these men that live in Finland, I think it was—

Dan: Sure are a lot of foreigners on T.V.

Ellen: And he must be angry because the Finlanders, I saw this on T.V., they come up to these fluffy white seals, these white baby seals that look like balls of yarn with black buttons for eyes, and they beat 'em to death. I saw one get beat, and they scream, too, Dan. He beat it, beat its head in. It just stopped trying to struggle. Lay there and let out a sigh. Its eyes stayed open. So he must hate us.

Dan: Now just hold the show! Just... Just... What are you talking about, Ellen?

Ellen: He wants revenge.

Dan: Who, for Christ's sake!
Ellen:
That's why He's sending this angry sky! Tonight's the night! (She runs to doors and flings them open, the wind nearly knocks her over.) I feel it! Oh God! It's been so long. (She runs out into the storm) Bash my skull in!

Dan:
Um...
Ellen:
Dan, I feel it!

Dan:
No, Ellen, no it's all done and past, years ago it seems.
Ellen:
Everything's gonna be set right, Dan. Tonight! I feel perfect! The same season! The same storm!

Dan:
No, Ellen, NO! (He slaps her)

Ellen:
You! You! Don't touch me! (The lights and radio flicker back on) I felt it that morning! I knew it when I woke and I turned to you under the quilt and I touched you and you knew I knew! You knew, but you couldn't believe. It didn't seem real, the next day, turning that corn crib away, that toppled corn crib and finding what I knew, what I dreaded finding.

Dan:
I don't think it's standing anymore. Always went fishing Sunday morning. I'd creep out of the house. Always took care to press my hand to the shingles above the door so they wouldn't shake and wake you when the door slammed. (He tries to come near to her but she moves away. It gets to be a chase between the aisles) Ell, Ell, I... want to believe you're right. Please— I—what's going to happen, Ell?

Ellen:
He's going to come.

Dan:
Damn! Ellen, what's going to happen to us? I didn't kill those seals!

Ellen:
You wouldn't believe me. You killed pieces of yourself.
Man: Do you know why they sent me to that prison? For reading too many books. Really. Can you believe that?

Ellen: I believe it.

Man: Hey, umm, Ellen, do you think I could get some food? (There is a crack of thunder) I haven't eaten anything but institution food for over two years, I guess it is.

Dan: I don't think so. Come with me. (Another crack of thunder)

Ellen: You can't go anywhere until this storm passes. What would you like?

Man: Oh wow, that's great, Ellen. Ellen, I can tell we'd make a great team. Ummm, I guess I'll have a double cheeseburger, oh! with extra pickles... if you don't mind, Ellen.

Ellen: Oh! Oh no....uh, what was your name?

Man: Some home fries, and a strawberry shake would be great, Ellen.

Dan: Make that to go, Ellen.

Ellen: I will not, Dan! The wind is going to start to pick up again soon, and then it's going to hit. So there's no sense in going anywhere. Dan, what do you want? We all have to eat good before the storm hits.

Man: Yeah, that's the truth, Ellen.

Ellen: We have to eat the way farmers do, before they go to harvest. Healthy.

Dan: (Sitting beside Man at counter) Did you ever work a farm? I can guess you probably haven't...judging from your hands.

(All three of them move in close to examine his hands)

Ellen: (Touches Man's hand) You have beautiful hands.

Dan: (Gripping her hand) Yeah, so do you, Ellen.

(They stare at each other for a moment. Dan looks from one to the other, as the grease continues to sizzle and the light fades down)

END SCENE 1

Scene 2:
The wind is ferocious outside the store. The walls are rattling. Ellen and the Man are sitting on stools, eating. Dan has obviously just gotten up from the counter and is hitting at the doors as he brings down the heavy bolts. He kicks the door a final time. Ellen and the Man could be at a Sunday picnic for the way they're behaving. They are both smiling serenely as they eat.

Ellen: Dan, you are going to crash that door in before the wind gets a chance! (She and the man laugh together as if it's a joke.) Besides, I don't know why you're bothering, the whole store's going to be taken up into that sky, anyway.
Ellen: Ellen, why would you say that?

Dan: He does, I think.

Ellen: Oh, Christ! Well Ellen, why don't you tell your crazy librarian boyfriend why you have this feeling!

Dan: Oh, Dan!

Ellen: Tell him why you work here, and tell him why you are my wife but you live in a house by yourself!

Stop!

Ellen: No!

Dan: Then I'll say it for you.

Ellen: Don't.

Dan: Then you have got to say it, Ellen. (Pause) Say it! Say it! Say it!

Ellen: We worked a farm... We worked hard...Our bodies were tan and hard by winter time, we could throw a stallion down in seconds. I'd ride them around the property, they smelled so fierce in spring, the mares. See, Dan and me, we were special...together. I couldn't sleep nights without his hand...his hands were thick, calloused, I'd put his little finger in my mouth. It was salty. That was why the horses loved licking his hands when he went into their stalls to give them feed. (Pause. Ellen and Dan look at each other) They were crushed, the horses. I walked stiff, the ground too hard. I had to climb over that huge oak that had fallen and I...it was quiet. That empty quiet.

Ellen: It was wrong, wrong, they should be puffing and nickering, stamping thier hooves when they smelled me coming. They weren't...see, the front of the barn, the part I was in right then, where all the tack was kept, it smelled like leather and saddle soap just like it always had. I thought, we better see if the Campbell's up over the hill are interested in buying these crops and saddles. I knew before I opened the stable door at the end of the tack room that they were gone. Then Dan came in, his face all puckered, and he said, "Oh, Ellen, I'm so sorry," and I said, "We can get them back! Don't worry Dan, they couldn't have gotten far." He looked at me a long time. He opened the stable doors and they were...they looked funny, not like horses. Oh, Oh! I knew that morning, Dan! I showed you, I showed you! (Pause)

Ellen: Ellen, why don't you tell your whole life is in this store now. (She looks up to God) Where did all our horses end up?

Dan: Oh, Ell, don't let him upset you. He's just a stupid old man.

Ellen: Ellen: Ellen, why don't you tell your whole life is in this store now. (She looks up to God) Where did all our horses end up?

Ellen: Oh, Ellen, we've got to get into the shelter.

Dan: (Pause) My whole life is in this store now. (She looks up to God) Where did all our horses end up?

Ellen: Ellen, why don't you tell your whole life is in this store now. (She looks up to God) Where did all our horses end up?

Dan: Ellen: Ellen, why don't you tell your whole life is in this store now. (She looks up to God) Where did all our horses end up?

Ellen: Oh, Ob! Mister librarian faggot!

Ellen: Ellen, why don't you tell your whole life is in this store now. (She looks up to God) Where did all our horses end up?

Dan: Ellen: Ellen, why don't you tell your whole life is in this store now. (She looks up to God) Where did all our horses end up?
...(They open the trap door)

Dan:
And mister, I reckon you'll have to come down too. Just because you try to steal my wife doesn't mean I want you to get squashed by a Coke machine or nothing.

Ellen:
(I want you to get squashed by a Coke machine) (They reckon open)

Man:

Ellen:

CURTAIN

Walking for Potatoes &
Prisoner of War
[Two stories my grandfather told]
*By Jason Rimeik*

The sky was overcast with war. The fighting was constant, as were the casualties. It was 1916 in a little town called Liepaja, known today as Liebow. The town, being in Latvia, was noted for its rough winters. This winter was rougher than I had experienced in quite a while, and the food was getting more and more scarce. My mother, Lantte, and brother, John, lived with me in an apartment. Our neighbors had told us that they had relatives who had a potato farm in the country. My mother sat John and me down and told us to go to this farm to beg for some food.

John and I started down the road that was the start to our twenty-five mile walk the next morning. John, who was thirteen, had a bad knee injury that occurred when he was younger, and when he walked great pain and his swollen knee gave him a noticeable limp. John, who was two years my senior, was only along to keep me company.

It took us all day to get to the farm, but it was worth it. Upon our arrival, the owners of the farm gave us about thirty pounds of potatoes, all I could carry. John, barely able to carry his own weight, couldn’t carry any potatoes. The owners were very nice to us and let us stay the night.

The next morning we again set out on a journey. This time the destination was home. It was early that evening when we reached the bridge that spanned the river near the town. There was a German sentry who met us on the bridge. After asking us who we were and where we were going, he inspected my sack. Upon seeing the potatoes, the sentry made us dump them over the edge of the bridge into the snow.

John and I continued our journey home, empty-handed and in tears.

I don’t know if the sentry ever picked the potatoes up for himself or if he left them there to freeze in the snow. My best guess is that he picked them up, after we were long gone, and kept them for himself. I do know that the Germans would store potatoes in the basement of the market. And since there was no heat, the potatoes froze. In the spring the potatoes would melt, and as they melted they rotted and stank. The Germans would get these rotten potatoes and sell them to those of us in the town.

It was the spring of 1914 when news of the German invasion reached our town. John and I were sent to work at some farms in the country. Though we didn’t work at the same farm, the owners of both our farms were relatives.

The owner of the farm that I worked on heard that the Germans had been moving toward this area and sent me to the other farm for news. I took a shortcut through a field of barley; since I was not quite nine years old, the barley encompassed me. I neared the end of the barley field and stepped out onto the road. On the road I saw that there were soldiers, but unfortunately they saw me at the same time.

I was captured, labeled as a spy. A nine-year-old spy. My brother, like all the others on the farm, was captured as well. The only ones who were not captured were the ones who owned the farm.

One day, the manager’s wife and I were feeding the animals when a fat German sergeant approached us. The sergeant’s intent was clear: to rape the woman. I grabbed the lady’s leg and began to yell and scream, pretending that she was my mother. This apparently worked because the sergeant became discouraged and left us alone.

We continued to work.

A few days later the news that we were to
be moved arrived, and we were all happy. I paced the floor constantly until the sentry at post grabbed my ear and slammed me against the wall; then he let me drop to the floor. Other than the very few instances of violence, the Germans treated us well. They gave us plenty to eat and a place to sleep.

The only movement on anyone's part was when my mother came to get me and John. I don't know how we were able to leave but we went home to the city.

David Lester  computer graphic  

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We salute all those who served and are still serving in Operation Desert Storm.

LCPL DAY, NATHAN E.
KEITH ADAMS LYNCH
U.S. ARMY WARRANT OFFICER
CPT BARRY F. LADD
SSGT JOSEPH H. CHITWOOD
CPL CODY BRYAN
GEORGE MARK ARNOLD
198TH M.P. CO.

L CPL EVANS, CHARLES D.
SPC ELVIN R. MCNEILL
SPC LISA RHINEHART
L CPL CONLEY, CHRISTOPHER E.
SKSR STEVEN DENNIS HOGAN
CPL KENT L. GRAVITT

Blake Wilkie  computer graphic
Who's Who in *Perceptions*

John B. Bailey has been teaching history at Gainesville College since 1967. He is retiring in June, and his students, colleagues, and friends wish him well. They will miss him.

Scott Bagwell, March 22, 1971 - August 19, 1990, had finished his freshman year at Gainesville College. He enjoyed playing in a band, writing songs and poetry.

Beth Baltes is a non-traditional student and a mother of three. She is an art major and this year's art editor for *Perceptions*.

Andrea Blachly is a sophomore at Gainesville College. She enjoys writing in her spare time. Her future plans include a career in advertising and a life filled with joy.

William D. Brown, who attended Gainesville College, is a writer whose interests include adventure.

Sandra Butler is a student at Gainesville College who enjoys drawing, especially pen and ink.

Sheila Casper is an English/psychology major and editor of *Perceptions*. She wants to live a simple life and be a professional student.

Kevin D. Dodds is an English major who will probably be attending Georgia State University. He hopes to teach English in the future.

Emily Duncan is an English major who will be attending Gainesville College this summer. Her future plans include transferring to the University of Georgia in the fall where she will major in Foreign Language Education.

Ally Eidson wants to be a successful and rich person. She is unsure of her future plans.

Garry Ke' Merritt desires to be a successful person, and would like to use his education to be a contributing member of society.

Gloria Kirby will be a fine arts major at Georgia State University after completing her business degree at Gainesville College. She plans to attend New York University to complete her master's studies. Her career objective is to be a gallery curator.

Chris Lambert is an English major with no definite plans for the future. He enjoys reading and conversation.

David Lester enjoys working with computers and creating computer graphics.

Richie McDowell loves working in the art field and plans to continue in the future.

Joanne Martin is an English major who will be attending Georgia State University this fall. She will continue her major and minor in journalism. She also plans to continue writing.

Bobby Nash is an art major who hopes to become a comic-book writer and artist.

Elsie Nelson is a Gainesville College psychology major who grew up in the North Georgia mountains and plans on writing a novel set in that location. In addition to being a student, she is a wife, mother and grandmother of seven.

Pam Niles is a journalism major. She enjoys reading and writing. She is a staff writer for the *Anchor and The Times.* She is in the process of writing a novel.

Leslie Ogino is majoring in graphic design. She will be transferring to the University of Georgia after the spring quarter.

Katherine S. O'Neill is a political science major at Gainesville College, where she is completing her last quarter. She enjoys writing poetry and has enjoyed the privilege of contributing to *Perceptions* for two years.

Claire Porter will be finishing at Gainesville College this spring and will be going to Brenau in the fall. Her future plans are to continue working in the theatre and to get a degree.

Joey Quillian is a former Gainesville College student who enjoys drawing with pen and ink.
Jason Rimeik is an engineering major who plans on working for NASA as an Aeronautical Engineer. He enjoys studying Kendo.

Lisa Roberts will be graduating from Gainesville College spring quarter. She plans to attend the University of Georgia and major in English.

Shannon Roberts plans to transfer this fall from Gainesville College to West Florida University in Pensacola to major in Marine Biology. He is a member of Phi Theta Kappa.

Sally Russell, who loves teaching, writing and riding horses, tries to remember daily, with joy, that "this too shall pass."

Brenda Smith is an art major who shares her love of art with a love of literature and psychology. She plans to somehow combine these subjects into a career.

Taff Stephens is a former Gainesville College student who enjoys drawing with graphite.

Brad Strickland teaches English, raises a family, and writes on the side. "The Wasp" is his 50th published story.

Barbara Thomas to understand the significance of the following lines from T.S. Eliot's poem "Little Gidding":

"There are three conditions which often look alike
Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow:
Attachment to self and to things and persons; detachment
From self and from things and persons; and, growing between
them indifference..."

Dennis Tinsley is a Journalism major who enjoys writing and riding his bike. He's a writer with the Anchor, and wants to go into the journalism field and make his living writing.

Devre Day Turner is a transient from the University of Georgia who is taking Spanish at Gainesville College. She is interested in writing and hopes to write a book of poetry.

Wayne Vinson is an art major at Gainesville College. He enjoys drawing during most of his daylight hours. His future plans are to become a prominent publisher and commercial artist.

Sallee Jo Wade likes to write and enjoys being outdoors with nature. She leads women's programs and does massage therapy. She has one manuscript at a publisher and another with an editor.

Joanna Wallington is an art major whose interests lie in the field of scientific illustrations. She plans to attend the University of Georgia after her tenure at Gainesville College.

Suzanne Watkins is an art major. She likes to draw and also makes a hobby out of dance. Although she is still undecided, she plans to pursue a career in art.

Lee Wells is an art major at Gainesville College who enjoys using his artistic ability. He plans on graduating from College one of these—?

Robert Westervelt, head of the Art Department, lives on Lake Lanier, and does much of his drawing on trips to the Smokey Mountains.

Dianne Wheeler attended Gainesville College as a non-traditional student and found time to paint in spite of working fulltime.

Ian E. Whitlaw finished his last quarter at Gainesville College this past fall. He is an English major.

Blake Wilkie is an art major who will be transferring to the University of Georgia. He plans to pursue a career in cartooning, and is currently working on a comic-book, "R. Kane at Midnight", with Dr. Strickland.

Butch Wilkie is a criminal justice major. His future plans are to become a federal prosecutor.
Dear Reader:

Athens, Georgia
1 April 1991

The staff of this magazine has kindly given me a bit of space to write a few sentences of farewell upon the occasion of my retirement from the Gainesville College faculty on 7 June of this year. When I came to this institution almost twenty-four years ago, I had no thought that I would stay so long, or grow so old.

Many friends ask me, "What will you do in retirement?" I hope to continue to learn - to learn how to grow old with some grace, but with some fight; to learn how to provide strength and stability for my family; to learn how to share with those less fortunate something of which it has been my good fortune to receive, and to do a bit of bird hunting and trout fishing.

St. Paul, in his letter to Timothy, said, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." I don't imagine that the sentiment of having fulfilled all one's plans and schemes could be better stated than that. Obviously, the best time for me to leave is when the institution is in good shape, when I still have most of my faculties, when my reputation is still mostly honorable, and when my lecture notes have fallen completely apart.

For me, this is not a time for any kind of sadness or regret. Rather, it is time to move on to the next phase of my education, and for someone younger, stronger, and much more enthusiastic to move into my place here. I would ask only that when my name comes up in conversation, you remember me fondly.

Sincerely,

John B. Bailey, Ph. D.
Professor of History
1967 - 1991