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a love that can't be told

John Savas

i will sing to you
in silence
of a love that can't be told

i will play for you
the lyrics
of a wordless ode of old

i will dazzle you
with music
as our soundless songs unfold

and we'll dance in light
and thunder
in the misty glitter-gold

we will laugh in snow
on sunshine;
we will swim the torrid cold

we'll make love beneath
the twilight
of the morning's moonrimmed mold

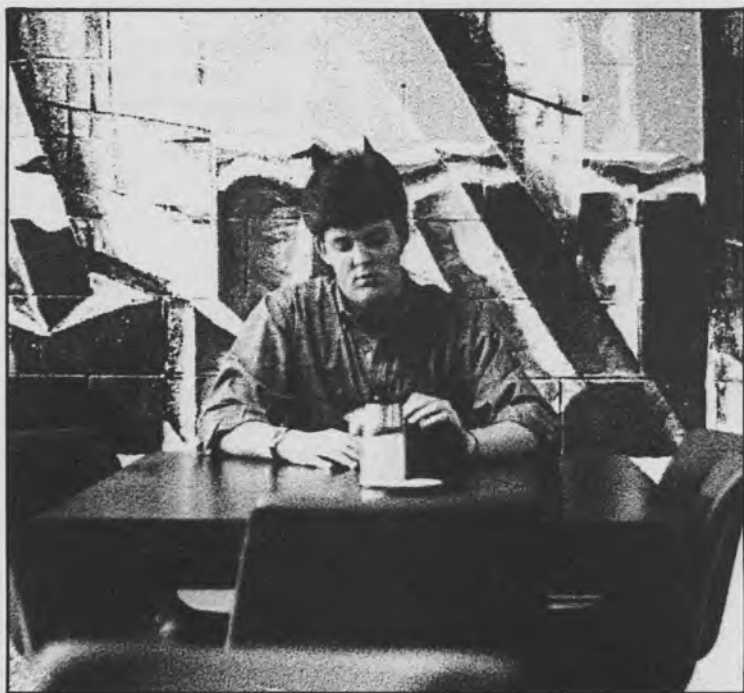
and we'll dream away
the eons
in this instant that we hold

as i sing to you
in silence
of a love that can't be told

Ten Flowers

Troy Anders

Ten flowers in a vase are dying
And no one mourns,
Their petals search for light
Stems caught in sleep
Struggle in death to grow
And no one mourns;
Who cut these flowers?
Severed them from roots
To die and fade?
See their stems are bending
To touch the table
While people marvel their beauty --
But no one mourns.



Paradise

Gregg S. Thompson

As morning fog lifts
A bass jumps for the cattails
The catch of the day



Award For Photographic Excellence

A Tall Tale

Keith Johnson

The year was 1894. People by the thousands were leaving their homes and heading to California. The gold rush was on. Most of the prospectors that struggled to reach their destination traveled in small groups. One of the groups involved in this westward journey was led by a man named Louie Grande. Louie was a rather small man and appeared to be about forty years of age. Despite his size, he was very powerful and a sharpshooter with a rifle. His skill with a rifle was about the only thing that kept his companions safe from savage Indian attacks on their journey west.

It was only a month after Louie's band of prospectors had left for California when five of them became ill. Louie decided they needed a short rest, so they set up a temporary camp on the plains of Arizona. The group decided they would stay two weeks or until everyone had recovered.

The following night Louie was sitting by himself in front of the campfire. He was thinking about the wealth that awaited him in California. He had heard the stories of men becoming rich upon unearthing a single gold nugget. This leads to the discovery of large gold fields. Louie realized it was getting late, so he began to put out the fire. With his boot he proceeded to kick dirt over the fire, but one of the hot coals wouldn't seem to go out. Upon closer inspection, Louie discovered it was not a coal at all, but a gleaming gold nugget.

"I've found me a gold nugget! I'm rich!" Louie quietly exclaimed to himself.

But he didn't want anyone to know about this for Louie was actually a greedy man. He immediately made plans to stay behind when the others left for California. But little did he know that there were only small amounts of gold in Arizona. The small nugget that he found was probably the only ounce of gold within a hundred miles.

The next week when everyone in the group was ready to go, Louie claimed he had been bitten by a rattlesnake and was slowly dying. The other prospectors decided that it would be best for him to stay behind, because he would only be a hindrance to them. The group then bid Louie farewell and left for California. Louie watched them leave and proceeded to dig in that very spot that he found the gold nugget.

After two days of digging, Louie had found nothing. He had thoughts of giving up on this field and going to California, but his wish to have an entire field for himself made him stay. He just knew there had to be gold there somewhere! His obsession to find gold, combined with his massive strength, led him to upturn huge masses of land a day. He still found nothing.

Many years later, the group of prospectors who had gone to California became rich. They were returning to the East to spend the final years of their prosperous lives there when they began to approach the area where they left Louie Grande. When they reached Arizona, they could not believe their eyes. Before them was the largest and deepest ravine they had ever seen! Everyone was spellbound until one of them noticed something at the bottom of a gully. Slowly they made their way to the bottom. There they discovered the skeletal remains of Louie Grande. In one hand he held a shovel and in the other there was a small gold nugget. The old prospectors immediately realized what had transpired years before. Louie Grande had died of exhaustion in his relentless search for gold. But his lust for gold had created a beautiful canyon. To this day that ravine is known as the Grand Canyon!

Four Walls

Wendy Tag

Four walls-green.
I sit here alone
Waiting

Love songs play-in stereo.
I sit here waiting
Alone.

My ashtray is full
-Cigarettes smoked in frustration
My heart is empty
-And cold from lack of use.

A look from you
Could change all this

Four walls turn colors-smile.
Love songs play-on my tongue
Ashtray emptied-room cleared
My heart beating warmly-waiting
-But no longer alone.

Untitled

Melissa Mize

Concentration
Too much for me
Radios
Voices
Tears of joy
It's hard
People complaining
Books closing
Papers rattling
Tears of sadness
Failing grades
College
Alcohol
Coffee
That's life
It'll all be over soon.

New York Times

Paula Reising

English majors
Flying saucers
Ballerinas
Darkened paths

English majors
Crusty brainstorm
Abstract deadends
Shriveled dreams

English majors
Murdered children
Women's rights
Cornered circles

English majors
Swollen ulcers
Loss of sleep
Life not unknown.

Hero

Susan Warrick

You sat on the cement steps
 leading to Apartment W
And told the neighborhood kids
 of your days in the Indian Ocean
How you fought pirates and sharks
 with a sword and a bottle of whiskey.

You described how those cannibals
 on that island in the Gulf of Guinea
Took your teeth and sacrificed them
 to their gods.
Your eyes darted from side-to-side
 as you made your way through the python-
 infested African jungle
Looking for Captain Hook's treasure
 which was guarded by an archangel.

You were the hero
 to the kids on our block.
They shouted you were the bravest man alive.

They didn't know you slept in the bus terminals
 and drank the cheapest liquor
That sometimes you forgot your name
 and where you lived
And sometimes you wished you would die
 so you could explore another land
West of the sun.

Jim Rivers Reads

John Moehlmann

Old man with gray beard
in straight-backed chair
reads poems about Culpepper and Alberta,
how they fished and made love.

Old man finishes.
Above his glasses
small eyes reel out
angled at our incompleted coupling.



Untitled

Lisa Mann

"May I take your order?"

"Um, Yeah," Kelli said, looking at the menu hanging above the cashier's head. "I'll take two cheeseburgers, a small fry, and a medium Coke."

"Is this for here or to go?" the cashier asked.

"I don't know, just a second. Michelle!" Kelli yelled to a girl coming out of the bathroom. "Are we eating here?"

"Yeah, Mary will be here in a minute. She's visiting Mother Nature, as she puts it."

"It's for here," Kelli said, turning to the cashier. She noticed the boy's name tag. "Nice name! My name's Kelly too, only with an i instead of a y."

"That's nice. That'll be one twenty-seven." He didn't seem amused. Kelli figured it was because of the afternoon rush. The first day of spring brings out the shoppers, she figured.

"Thank you very much," Kelli said, trying to sound pleasing. She knew a lot of the customers would complain about the slow service.

"Try to save us a seat before all these vicious customers grab them all, okay Kelli?" Michelle told Kelli as she passed her two friends waiting in line

"We'll probably end up spending the night here with this service!" complained Mary.

"That's what you get for going pee before eating," Kelli giggled. "Besides, only four people are ahead of you. You'll be out by nine at the latest."

"Yeah, well just remember whose car you're riding in," Michelle giggled back.

Kelli grabbed some napkins and headed for the table. Before reaching it a pregnant lady tossed her purse on the table and told her two children to sit quietly while she bought their lunch. Kelli sat in a booth next to the window instead

I can't believe how crowded McDonald's is, Kelli thought to herself. If I was pregnant and dragging two kids around, I sure wouldn't bother with this crowd. She smiled at the two children, who looked longingly at her food.

"Want a fry?" she asked them.

"No thank you," said the girl, who looked about five years old. "Mama's getting us some."

"I'm gettin' a Kiddie Meal!" boasted her younger brother.

"That's neat!"

Kelli remembered her mother treating her to McDonald's when she was in elementary school. Her father and two older brothers would go camping during the weekends, leaving her alone. Her mother always made sure she got a window seat to watch all the cars and people pass by. Once a clown gave her a big red balloon. He was going to the Valentine's Day Parade on Main Street and had a whole handful of balloons to give to children. Kelli smiled at the thought of the fun she had had with that balloon.

Where are Michelle and Mary? Kelli wondered, finishing one of her cheeseburgers. Turning toward the cash registers she saw them next in line. Man, it's taking them long, she thought. Since Mary was paying for Michelle's lunch, Michelle probably ordered a Big Mac without onions, which takes extra time to cook. Michelle never spends her money on food. She'd rather save it for clothes or beer.

As Kelli glanced out the window she noticed a bearded figure walking across the parking lot. Boy is he a hunk, she thought to herself sarcastically.

The old man was wearing gray fishing trousers torn around the knees, a red t-shirt with a faded decal across the back, and child-like tennis shoes with the rubber over the toes. His frizzy black hair was matted to his head and both arms were covered in dirt. Kelli noticed a slight limp in his left leg as he headed for a trash can hidden by a van. Kelli knew there was a trash can there because she and her friends always dumped their empty beer bottles there. One time a police car circled the parking lot just as they pulled out. Each one of their hearts stopped, wondering if the police man was going to follow them. That was the closest they had ever come to getting snagged for drinking beer.

Please don't do what I think you're going to do, Kelli thought. Too late. The man walked out from behind the van, munching on stale fries and carrying a half-eaten apple pie.

Oh God, Kelli thought, almost losing what she had just eaten. She wanted to turn away, but something made her keep staring at the old man.

Kelli wondered how anyone could live from trash can to trash can. Here I am pigging out on junk food and he's willing to eat anything left over, she thought to herself. It made her feel guilty and sick.

After gulping down the fries and pie, the old man headed for another trash can toward the back of the restaurant.

She couldn't take it. Before she realized what she was doing, Kelli grabbed her other cheeseburger and went outside, not hearing her friends calling after her. She rounded the back of McDonald's and found the man rummaging through another trash can.

Walking right up to him she asked, "Would...would you like this, sir?"

The old man looked up startled and replied, "I don't take handouts." His voice was harsh and weak, as if he had just woken from a deep coma. Kelli became nervous and wondered if she should throw the burger down and run. He could have a weapon for all she knew. What the hell was she doing out there anyway? Wasn't the famous rule never to talk to strangers? This guy was about as strange as one could get.

"It's not a handout," she said trying to keep her hand and voice from shaking.

"You paid for it. You eat it," the old man muttered as he kept searching the trash can.

"I bought two and could only eat one. I'd like for you to have this one."

"What'd ya do to it?" His suspicions startled Kelli. Who was he to question her? He's the one who needs help. Kelli recalled an incident a couple years ago when her brothers fed her a mud pie. They assured her it was Chocolate Cream pie. She swore she'd never trust them again. Wasn't this guy in the same situation, she reasoned to herself. After all, he had never seen her before.

"Nothing...really. I just saw you going though some trash can and want you to have this. It's a lot better for you."

"Yeah, I guess it is." For the first time he cracked a smile and Kelli saw his decayed teeth stick out between his lips.

"Are you sure you don't mind?" he asked.

Kelli smiled. "Not a bit."

"Thanks," he muttered as he took the cheeseburger from her hand. He gently squeezed her shoulder and walked toward the road.

Kelli couldn't wait to tell Michelle and Mary what she had just done. No, she thought, thinking about their reactions. They probably wouldn't believe me. Kelli felt too good inside to worry about telling others her story. So what if the old man acted snobby. Wouldn't she if some stranger offered her something? He probably felt an inch tall. At least she had put something half way decent in his stomach.

"Where the hell did you go?" Michelle asked as Kelli slid into the booth.

"Nowhere. I thought I saw someone from school but it wasn't him. What took you so long anyways?"

"Didn't you hear? They had to kill a herd of cows for Michelle's Big Mac with no onions," Mary said sarcastically.

"I knew that's what she'd order, especially with you payng, the cheap skate."

Michelle swallowed a bite and said, "Cheap skate? Well at least I ain't a whimp! We saw that fat pregnant bitch steal that table away from you. You could be hired here in a flash, you're so slow!"

"Yeah, well, I was afraid her two bratty kids would beat me up and steal my food that I graciously waited in line for."

They laughed hysterically, finishing their meal.

Kelli kept thinking about the old man behind McDonald's. I wonder if he has any family, she thought. She doubted it, or he wouldn't be roaming around like he was. She wished she had gotten him to talk more. She was curious to know what his life was like when he was her age.

"What do ya say, Kelli...Kelli!"

"Huh?"

"Wake up, Bimbo!" Mary said. "Wanna catch the one o'clock movie at the mall?"

"You paying, Mary?" Michelle joked.

"Ha ha!" was Mary's reply.

"What's playing?" Kelli asked, picking up her tray.

"Theif of Hearts, with that gorgeous Rob Lowe! What a hunk!" Mary answered.

"Hey, just leave the trays. Someone will pick them up. We'd better hurry. It's already twelve thirty."

Kelli dropped her tray on the table and followed the others through the restaurant.

As the girls pulled out of the parking lot, Mary said, "Make a left at the stop light, Michelle, so I can stop by the bank. I need to take out some money."

Waiting for the light to turn, Michelle noticed a bum in gray trousers and a red t-shirt crossing the street.

"That disgusts me," Michelle said making her face shrivel like a prune.

"What?" Mary asked.

"That dick crossing the street," Michelle answered. "People like that shouldn't be allowed on this earth."

"I know, man. They're the cause of this world's population problems," Mary said.

Michelle continued, "They walk around our streets sticking their nose in all the trash cans and lying on park benches as if they own them. Half of them aren't even friendly."

"No shit," Kelli added. "Who in their right mind would give them the time of day!"

The light turned green and the girls headed for the bank.

New Life

Gregg Thompson

Dark
Alone
Warm

Then pain
Walls crash in around you
You are moved
Contorted

You see bright lights
Silver and white
You feel hands
Fasten around your head
And pull
And hit
You begin to cry
You are scared
And hurt

You are laid on a pad
In a bubble
With large white creatures
Hovering over you
They wrap you in a cloth
And then leave you
Alone and cold

Perfect Silence

Lora Songster

There they are, lying together
in perfect silence.
They look as if they were born as one,
not two.
Nothing can be heard.
For they say nothing.
Words could only depreciate the time,
the moment and the feeling.
There are no two words that are adequate enough
to convey what is being felt by the two.
Their silence intensifies the thoughts,
and casts a spell over them.
The moment is committed to their individual memories
Only flashes of this moment will reappear.
Each will bring it forth and remember--
when they need to remember the friendship, trust,
compassion, passion and love that brought them
together a long time ago.
They will remember and smile.
The smile will be in remembrance of that one moment,
and in anticipation of the next time they will
be able to lie together in perfect silence.

Untitled

Andy Miller

The cold winds blow,
On my face.
Cooling,
Refreshing,
Blinding,
Cold.

tuesday afternoon

Seema Qubein

and then the emperor decided
he wasn't going to behead us after all
so we left the palace after he gave us lots of gold and stuff
and got on this ship that puts us off on some island.
(it wasn't a desert island or anything).
then after sunset the moon did this
backward somersault.

Tony Benjamin Baity

This play is dedicated to the late Jesse Carpenter and the remaining thirty-five million Americans who live in poverty. May their despair end in triumph.

Characters:

AN OLD MAN - fiftyish, street person
 TWO OTHER MEN - late twenties, street people
 A YOUNG WOMAN [Alice] - mid-twenties, middle class
 A YOUNG MAN [Curt] - late twenties, middle class
 A WAITER [Kyle] - early twenties
 A BARTENDER [Amanda] - female, fortyish

Scene: A YOUNG MAN and a YOUNG WOMAN [his wife] are having a dinner in the restaurant portion of a small pub. There is a small group of tables nestled in front of an L-shaped bar. The COUPLE is seated at one of the round tables [down stage-left] near the bar. The restaurant's decor is similar to that of a British Pub's. [The walls are decorated with memorabilia from the 1960's.] The only occupants of the restaurant are the COUPLE, a WAITER, and a female BARTENDER. The WAITER is busy looking out a window [middle stage-center]. The BARTENDER is behind the bar [up stage-left] cleaning glasses.

YOUNG MAN:

Now, what was so important for you to tell me? *[Pausing long enough to drink from his wine glass.]* Come on, spit it out. *[Leaning across the table towards his wife.]* No, let me guess. You overdrew the checking account again?

The YOUNG WOMAN smiles and looks down at her food.

YOUNG MAN:

If it's not the checking account then you must have bought new clothes. *[The YOUNG MAN becomes serious.]* It's not your mom or dad is it? *[Pausing.]* God! My mom or dad?

YOUNG WOMAN:

[Almost laughing.] No. *[Waving her hand.]* It's nothing like that at all. I...uh *[Pausing.]* never mind, it can wait. *[The YOUNG WOMAN looks towards the WAITER who is still looking out the restaurant's window.]*

YOUNG MAN:

[Staring at the woman in disbelief.] [Raising his voice.] It can wait! *[Lowering his voice.]* It can wait! What can wait? I want to know right now!

The WAITER turns from the window, pauses, then walks over to the couple's table.

WAITER:

Is everything okay? *[Pause.]* Might I get either of you anything else? *[Pause, waiting for couple to answer.]*

[Both the YOUNG MAN and YOUNG WOMAN decline any more food or drink. The WAITER places the check on the table and walks back to his former position at the front window.]

YOUNG MAN:

[Leaning towards his wife.] Are you going to tell me what was so important or not? *[Turns his head away from her.]* *[Softly.]* Damn it! *[Straightens up in his chair.]* To hell with it! *[He begins to eat.]*

YOUNG WOMAN:

[Speaking softly as she leans across the table towards her husband.] you always get mad. Alright, I'll tell you why I'm so excited if you will calm down and give me a chance. *[Pausing.]* I'm...*[smiling]* We are going to have a baby.

YOUNG MAN:

[Yelling.] A baby! *[Both the WAITER and the BARTENDER turn and take a quick glance at the couple. After a few seconds the WAITER turns back to the window. The BARTENDER stares in disbelief at the couple first and then the WAITER.]* How long have you known?

YOUNG WOMAN:

[Reaching out to hold the YOUNG MAN'S hand.] Since this afternoon. I had a check up last week and the doctor called this afternoon around four.

YOUNG MAN:

I'm going to be a father! *[Laughing.]* A father! We have to start thinking about names. Uh...*[Pausing.]* What about Zackary? No, no, what about... *[Pausing, staring at his wife.]* What if it's a girl? What then?

YOUNG WOMAN:

[Smiling.] 'Well, girls have to have names, too. Will you be upset if it's a girl?

YOUNG MAN:

Oh, honey. No way will I be upset if it's a girl. *[Pausing.]* Well, I might be a little disappointed but not upset. I will be upset, though, if it's a girl and she is either built like a truck or looks like your mother.

YOUNG WOMAN:

[Slaps her husband's arm playfully.] Will you be serious? We have to start planny a few things so that the stork doesn't arrive before we're ready.

[The lights on coupld go dim (very stark). Remain up on WAITER and BARTENDER. The WAITER moves (rear stage-left) away from the window to the bar.]

WAITER:

[Leaning against bar.] How have you been, Amanda?

BARTENDER:

[Sarcastically] I've been just fine, Kyle. Why all of the concern?
[Pausing.] You don't have to worry, you son of a bitch, I'm not going to make you pay for a damn thing.

WAITER:

[Softly.] Amanda, I didn't mean to upset you. *[Looking down at the bar.]* I...uh...I was just concerned about your health. Are you okay?

BARTENDER:

[Looking into the WAITER'S eyes.] Am I okay? *[Sarcastic laugh.]* I'm just fine Kyle except for one small detail. *[Pausing.]* I have to look at myself every morning in the bathroom mirror.

WAITER:

I know that, Amanda, and I'm truly sorry things didn't work out differently. *[Clearing his throat.]* You know I have to look at myself every morning, too. I just hope that this won't break up what we have going.

BARTENDER:

[Gasping.] Won't break up what we have going! Kyle, do you really believe that I could ever have any feeling other than hate for you?
[Pausing.] I hope that someday you hurt as bad as I do.

WAITER:

[Reaching across the bar to stroke the BARTENDER'S face.] Amanda, please try to understand.

BARTENDER:

[Quickly pushing the WAITER'S hand away.] Kyle, I understand completely. I love...I loved you. *[Beginning to choke up.]* You said that you just couldn't deal with the responsibility. *[Becoming angry.]* Now you're telling me you've all of a sudden decided that you can handle the responsibility. *[Pausing to wipe her eyes.]* Well, it's just a little too late, don't you think?

WAITER:

Amanda, please don't end it this way.

BARTENDER:

Don't you understand, Kyle? You didn't want the baby so I listened to you and had the abortion. I sacrificed my child because you were too damn selfish to face the responsibility of being a father! You had your chance. *[Pausing.]* Just one more thing Kyle; when we're in hell, I hope you burn beside me so I can see your face.

The WAITER starts to speak but after a couple of seconds he turns and walks (down stage to middle stage-center) back to the window. The BARTENDER (softly) begins to cry as she watches the WAITER walk to the window. (As the WAITER walks to the window the spot light on the BARTENDER fades dark. The lights in the alley and on the couple come up as the light on the BARTENDER fades. The BARTENDER exits rear stage-left.) While looking out the window the WAITER sees an OLD MAN enter rear stage-center. The OLD MAN is carrying his bottle in a torn, brown bag. The OLD MAN stumbles as he walks towards the alley. He occasionally stops to rummage through some trash cans as he walks along.

OLD MAN:

[Singing to himself.] Amazing grace how sweet you are...that...uh...that saved a...uh...*[Pauses, takes a drink from the bottle]* that saved a...uh...*[taking another drink]* that saved this bottle for me! *[Laughing]* It once was lost but now it's found, *[taking another drink]* was full *[drinking again]* but now it's empty! *[Laughing he turns the bottle upside down and shakes it. He tosses the empty bottle into the street and begins rummaging through the trash again.]*

YOUNG MAN:

[Looking at his wife.] Are you ready to go?

YOUNG WOMAN:

[Finishing the wine in her glass.] Yes, let's go.

[As the COUPLE walks to the door, the WAITER notices and moves to cash register.]

WAITER:

[To the COUPLE] I hope everything was okay. *[Pausing.]* That will be thirty-six fifty.

[As the YOUNG MAN is paying the bill, the YOUNG WOMAN stands, looking out the window at the OLD MAN. After about twenty seconds the TWO OTHER MEN enter rear stage-center and move methodically (down stage) towards the alley.]

YOUNG WOMAN:

[Looking over her shoulder towards her husband.] Curt, come look at this.

YOUNG MAN:

[Walking over to the window.] What is it?

YOUNG WOMAN:

[Pointing towards the OLD MAN.] That poor o'l man. Wouldn't it be awful to have to live like that? I wonder who he is? Where his family is? I wonder if any of his family even knows that he's alive?

YOUNG MAN:

[Putting his arm around his wife.] I'm sure that is he wants them to know then they know. Wouldn't it be horrible to know that that was the way you had to live everyday? *[Pausing.]* Alice...uh...nothing.

YOUNG WOMAN: *"[Turning her face towards her husband.]* What? Curt, what are you thinking about?

YOUNG MAN:

[Staring at the OLD MAN.] Alice, he is someone's son. *[Turning to face his wife.]* I don't want our child to end up like him. What if...

YOUNG WOMAN:

[Interrupting her husband.] Curt, *[Moving her fingers over his lips.]* it's not going to happen to our child. We won't let it.

[While the YOUNG WOMAN is speaking, the WAITER moves over next to the husband and begins looking out at the OLD MAN.]

WAITER:

[Looking out the window.] I seem to see more and more of his kind everyday. Now, everytime I see children I wonder if they are going to wind up like him.

YOUNG MAN:

[Turning towards the window.] Why? *[Turning to face the WAITER.]* It makes you wonder?

WAITER:

[Handing the YOUNG MAN his change.] Thank you sir. *[Softly]* Oh... congratulations on the baby.

YOUNG MAN:

[Opening the door for his wife.] Thank you. I hope you are blessed with kids someday, too. *[The lights in the restaurant fade except for the light over the cash register and the window.]*

[The COUPLE leaves the restaurant up stage-center. They move across the "street" to up stage center-right and begin to slowly walk downstage left towards the alley. After a few steps they stop, embrace, and kiss. At the same time the TWO OTHER MEN enter the alley and find the OLD MAN looking through some more trash cans.]

FIRST MAN:

[Smiles at the SECOND MAN when he sees the OLD MAN in the alley.] Well, what do we have here?

Mystic Rhythms

AB Billings

The dreams of drums
dance through the
children's heads;

The dance of life
spins whirling
'round the fire

The earth answers
the call,
a syncopated six/eight,
a complicated symphony

The drums control
the mood
speak in atonal
dead-beat sonority

To the tribes
in the distant lands

The sounds of war,
the sounds of peace,
the first newsbeat,
the first news service;

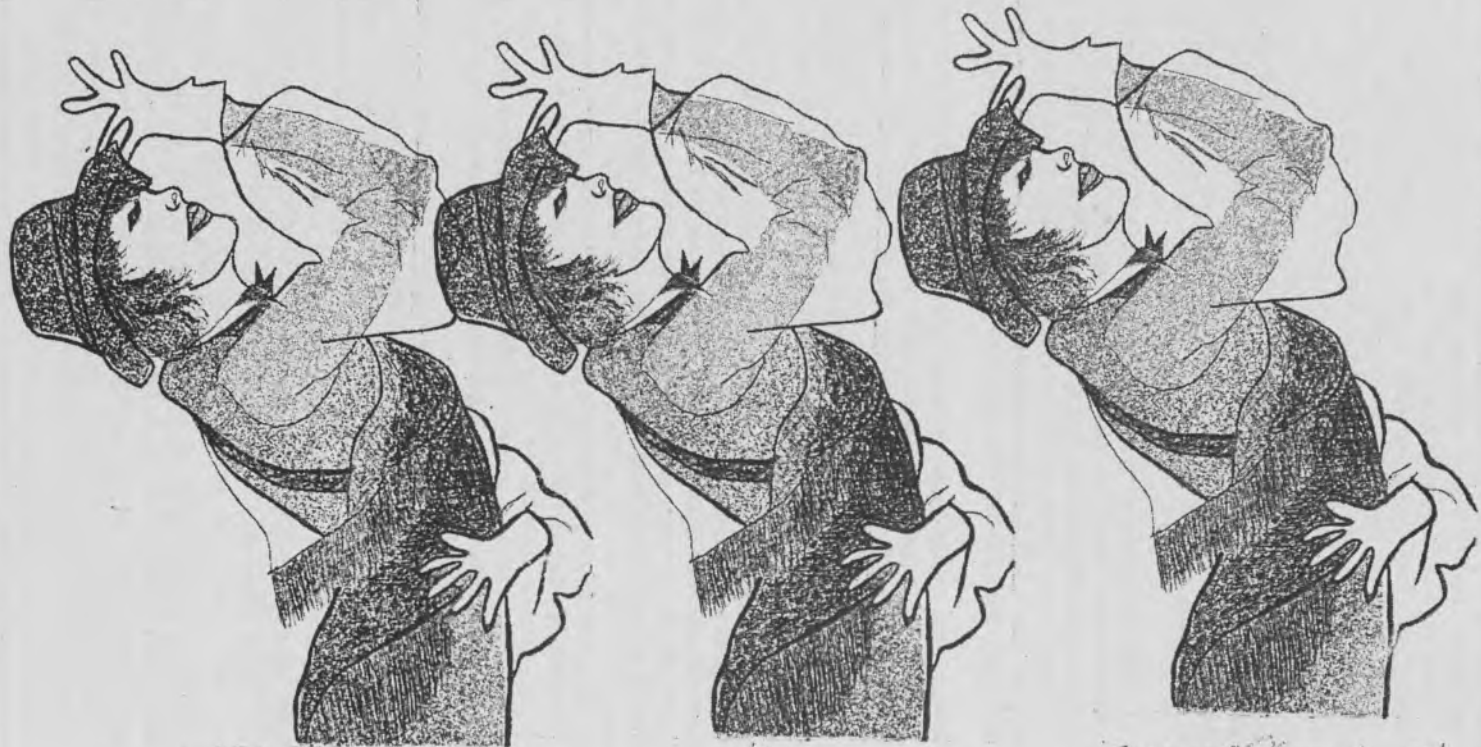
Mystic rhythms
on trees, trunks
and gourds;

Master Drummers,
exalted artists,
the nobles of their day

Mystic rhythms
the sun and moon obey;
the tide pummels beach,
and the drums control it all

Spring falls in time
to the drummer's
soul-wrenching, toe-tappin'
polyrhythms

The seasons all answer
to your thump and thunder



Japs

2/6

Bonnie G. Hannad 85'

Granny's Corn

Alice E. Sink

Picture Granny's kitchen in late October. An afternoon more than fifteen years ago--gone--except for the final sunbeams still playing on the marble mint slab. The wood stove boasts a five-gallon pot of stewed chicken and dumplings floating on globlets of chicken fat. The oblong oak table is set for supper. Three places, one for each of us--me, Granny, and my daddy, who will be home tonight and tomorrow night before he starts out on another selling trip.

Old Mutt, Granny's collie, meets my bus at the end of the dirt driveway and noses my hand as we walk together to the back door. I see the light from the bare bulb through the window and know Granny is in the kitchen. She is sitting on one of the kitchen chairs with her back to the door, and her left foot is bare and propped on the stubby green footstool we use as a stepladder in the pantry. She is working on her corn. "Billy Joe, close that door tight, you hear, boy," she says, "we ain't planning on heatin' the outside this winter." She doesn't look up.

"Yes-ma'am," I chant and stop to hand my jacket on the wooden peg beside the wood box. "That 'ol corn bothering you again, Granny?"

She looks at me. I can tell she hurts because her cheekbones shine with the tears. She looks back down at her toe and continues working on the corn. Her fingernails are broken and thick; with her right thumbnail, she gouges at the target on the inside of her little toe. "I ain't seeming to be doing no good with this confounded thing," she swears as she holds and digs and scrapes. "Mrs. Johnson says maybe it's what you call a soft corn 'cause once you get going good trying to get the gristle out, you run into soft tender skin." Stooped over the footstool, Granny stops only long enough to push back strands of reddish hair that fall from the knot on her neck.

"Ain't there some kind of medicine or salve you can put on them things to be rid of 'em?" I feel I must offer encouragement as long as I stand there and watch. Maybe something I say will stop her tears.

"Stand over this-a-way, Billy Joe," she says. "You're in my light."

"You know, like fatback on warts, or something like that," I volunteer, adjusting myself a few inches back so my shadow won't be on Granny's foot. "There must be something."

Granny props her foot at a different angle and starts to dig again with her nail. "That nice man down at the drugstore said white iodine might help, and it did seem to make the core somewhat harder--but it's the soft skin around the kernel that keeps giving me problems," she says, her lips forming a *I-really-don't-know-what-else-to-do* response. "If it wasn't for the softness, I'd have this jackleg out in no time a'tall, but don't you worry none, Billy Joe, you're too young to be a'fretin' over me.

I was nine years young that winter, and Granny was fifty-something. My mother had died of a heart attack and left me and my daddy to move in with Granny so she could look after me while my daddy travelled. And look after me, she did. School during the day was okay, but afternoons and evenings with Granny were soft and easy and warm.

We played Go Fishing in front of the blazing fire. Granny sat on one side of the little table, her foot soaking in the enamel pan of steaming boric acid water, while I sat on the side next to the radio so I could turn the dial to our favorite gospel music. Granny patted her lame foot, and the swish of the water lapping on the rim of the pan kept time with the tune coming from the radio shows. Many times, just as I was thinking hard about what to discard, Granny would let out a shrill cry, arch her back, and pat her foot even harder. "What's the matter, Granny?" I screamed, terrified that God was going to take Granny like He took my mother.

"Ain't nothing, son, but that dad-blamed, confounded pain shootin' through my toe," she spued with a vengence that I now associate with acquaintances' clinched-teeth *damn-it-to-hell's*. "I declare," Granny uttered, half in apology for the attention she had caused, "I do believe it couldn't hurt any more if somebody took an ice pick and gouged in that toe. Are you going to discard, or not?"

After the card games, we popped corn, using the wire popper with the extra long handle my daddy had made from an old fire poker. "Don't eat them kernels that ain't popped, Billy Joe," Granny scolded. "Them things'll lay in your stomach like bullets. Besides that, you'll break off your teeth trying to crunch 'em. Now stop it." So I'd sneak a pocketful of scorched half-cooked kernels for later when Granny wasn't looking.

Granny's health was unusually good for a fifty-year-old woman, and the only affliction she could boast was her corn. Mrs. Sadie Johnson and Granny would get on the telephone and talk for hours about their ailments, but Granny always refused to let Mrs. Johnson get the best of her. She would hang up the receiver, turn to me, and, hands on hips, the canvas bedroom shoes scuffing on the lineolium rug, demand, "Now, Billy Joe, what do you think of a woman who thinks she's got worse than this-here corn?" Before she gave me time to answer, she started in, "I ask you. In all honesty. Can anybody else predict when it's gonna rain? Can anybody else tell when we're gonna have day after day of snow? Of course not. Only me.

And snow it did. Granny could predict right down to the very day. When the drifts piled up against the back door, me and Granny would hook a thick cord to her aluminum roaster pan, which we filled with chicken feed. We'd get dressed up warm, with Granny pulling a pair of rubber boots over her canvas bedroom shoes, and go to the chicken lot to feed the hens and Rooster Red. On the way back to the house, we stopped at the wood pile and I'd load the roaster pan with firewood while Granny picked up kindling stored in the shed. Old Mutt sensed the frivolity of the evening and joined in when I dared roll down the snow-covered bank that in the summer housed Granny's blue-ribboned marigolds. "I'm goin' on in the house, Billy Joe," Granny shouted as I slid down the bank one last time. "Bring Mutt and put him on the back porch for the night. And don't forget that roaster pan." Her reminders echoed through the icy tree branches. I knew heaven must be like this.

But the first warm spring morning my daddy told Granny to be dressed and waiting at 2:30. He'd made her an appointment with the foot doctor in Galax to have her corn cut out. "I ain't going through another winter seeing you drag one half-naked foot around the house. We'll get that thing gone forever." Poking around on the sideboard for his wallet and keys, he turned and said to me, as if an afterthought: "And you can go, too, Billy Joe, if I need help getting Granny up and down any kind of steps."

I looked at Granny, who had stopped washing up the breakfast dishes in the enamel pan on the wood stove. Her face showed a mixture of relief and scaredness, like she was glad, on one hand to be getting rid of the menace, but terrified of the doctor's knife she had probably visualized a thousand times. All she said was, "Yes, I reckon it's about that time" and then went back to rinsing the silverware in a second pan of hot water.

So Granny and I were ready and waiting in the green rockers on the porch when Daddy drove up that afternoon. Granny hadn't said much all day, but the way she was dressed up in her Sunday dress and hat made her look like a queen getting ready for some important event. I tried not to look at her feet, but then my curiosity got the best of me and I glanced down when Granny was busy pulling dead leaves from her hanging begonia. On her right foot she wore her black leather walking shoes, as she always called the pair of them, but her left foot was covered with the plaid canvas bedroom shoe--complete with the little-toe part cut out. She saw me looking down and said, never skipping a beat getting rid of the begonia leaves, "Well, you know, Billy Joe, I ain't gonna be able to wear any type of regular-fitting shoe after my surgery." The words, "my surgery" were spoken with an importance Granny usually reserved for "my fruitcakes" or "my garden."

As it turned out, there weren't any steps to have to help Granny up and down. The foot doctor's office, out behind Memorial Hospital, was one of those modern buildings with no steps and no window panes. We didn't have to wait any time at all, and before Granny could get any more worked up than she was on the trip to Galax, a nurse told Granny to come on to the back, that the doctor was ready for her. Granny rose from the little settee, twisted her dress where it ought to be, and took off her hat, handing it to me. "Hold this for me please, Billy Joe," Granny said with a tone that was growing more and more important each time she said something. "And don't mash it, you hear."

Daddy and I waited, thumbing through magazines, and once Daddy went out in the hallway to catch a smoke. In about twenty minutes or so, the inner sanctum door opened, and the nurse was helping Granny by the arm. She still had the black walking shoe on her right foot, but on her left foot, the hole in the toe of her bedroom shoes had been cut out even more and a bump of white gauze and tape popped through the opening like a mummy at attention. "I'm just fine," Granny said just as soon as she looked at my face. "How 'bout you and your daddy taking me on home now."

As we rode back to Big Gap, Granny told me about how the doctor had tied a big rubber band around her little toe to cut off the blood circulation and then had given her a shot to kill the pain before he started cutting. "Law, it didn't take him no time a'tall," Granny said proudly, "and to think I been dreadin' this thing for so long. If I'd a-known about how painless it all was, well, I'd a'had this little surgery a long time ago."

Daddy was right about Granny being able to go and do. From that day on, she went and she did. Just about every afternoon she dressed herself up, put on her black walking shoes, and if she wasn't strutting somewhere, she was hitching a ride with Mrs. Johnson to Circle Meeting or a quilting party or the Home Demonstration Club. She never did light long enough after that to play me a decent game of Go Fishing or listen to the Lone Ranger on the radio or stand on the back porch and cheer me and Old Mutt as we rolled down the snow bank.

And so Granny was freed of her affliction then and there that May afternoon in the doctor's office behind Memorial Hospital in Galax. While she was gallivanting around town, I had to find something to do, so I began playing with the boys down the road and got a part-time job delivering groceries after school. Eventually I went away to college. Now it is years later when I realize that the foot doctor, carving out that callus bump from Granny's little toe, took the first real jab into the tender heart of my boyhood.

Fort Morgan Remembered On Armistice Day

Troy Anders

Wind and sea have tanned its walls
Sandy shades of brown,
Sands of centuries pave its streets
And covered a forgotten town.
Antique doors are dead with rust
Covered with wrinkled skins,
That creak and groan --
Above the gunmount no flag flies;
In empty rooms no life is seen
And every day the sun dies
Beyond the parade field - still green.
The grass was all the life remaining
Except the sand crabs, who were fighting
But they, in all the fights they fought
Would never kill a man. . . .



questionz

anonymous

where am i
where r u
what the hell is going on hear
where the hell am i
where the hell is the world
where the hell is hell
where the hell is heaven
r ther any ansrs?

I sit down to write
 Poetry, line after line,
 A wet-cold, forest-green bottle
 Of foamy beer
 Sitting near me --
 Waiting. Baiting my thirst.
 The bubbles, glassy and
 Perfectly round,
 Pop in the spritis stupor.
 The head, created when
 Beer met air,
 Inches farther down
 The glass
 Until meeting liquid once again.

A Beer, A Cigarette,

A long, white cigarette
 Smolders between my fingers,
 The now spent, grey ash
 Falling to the ground
 Or drifting on the breeze
 Onto my grey flannel, pleated pants,
 White flecks
 Against the darker grey of fashion,
 The embers
 Illuminate the green glass,
 Showing red, yellow,
 Orange and purple.
 The smoke trails the
 Movement of my hand,
 Enveloping it mystically
 When still.

And A Poem

AB Billings

Sitting on this park bench
 Of frozen cement,
 Felt even through the flannel
 And Jockey briefs,
 I see
 Through green green eyes,
 The veins visible --
 Crimson map lines,
 The mark of roads
 Both to and from
 The late nights
 Of too much beer and cigarettes,
 The anger and frustration
 Of writing poetry.
 Though the iris is green,
 The view is flower pink,
 Too much so for the times,
 Not enough for my age.

The world is darkening,
Freezing in its season --
Leaves drying, dye
Of life souring,
Yet becoming a bittersweet;
Reds, yellows,
Oranges, and finally,
Crispy, golden browns.
Soon the oaks will be bare,
Only giant stick figures
In the world of
Once-was.

I drink.
The cool meets my throat
Battling with
What the cigarette warmed.

Given a moment, fresh
Words bind and grind.
An autumn wind
Blows over the page.
The words scatter
Like so many raked leaves,
Destroying the pile,
The concentrated thought.

I drink again;
And drag,
Between each line.
The bottle empties,
The cigarette smolders to the filter,
And the poem blows to a close.

Sinners & Lovers

John Savas

Male and female,
eons ago,
found each other
in the afterglow.

Lovers, sinners,
then, damnation!

spring back to life
and yield CREATION!

All a-glow,
the silent flow,
never changing--

Let it go!

Live Love Laugh--Happy Day!
Who can last--any other way?

Untitled

Andy Miller

One of our battleships is missing.
We've looked for it everywhere,
You know.
But we can't find it.
Isn't the government running things well?

It was just off the coast of Lebanon
Yesterday,
You know.
It's not there now.
Isn't the government running things well?

If you happen to see it just floating around,
Somewhere,
You know.
It would be nice if you'd tell us.
Isn't the government running things well?

(in care of John F. Lehman Jr., Secretary of the Navy)

Frontier

Marion Hodge

I'm not an old man any longer
[I guess I'm shorter, truthfully]--
I play more now than ever
here on the edge of something--peak? precipice?

I write "flat as a panacea";
and I laugh til stars gleam on my teeth
I laugh till my sweater slides up my belly past the button of the world
til the sleeping rooms take shape from my silliness
["Shhh," they say, "listen to our father of darkness"]

My poems hopeless
on some periphery
trying to become trees, seas
punch through, into things, the beyond of beyonds
[settling on arthritic knees]

Frontiers, one, another, another, one--
appalachians of barriers to the center--
call for a Boone of a mystic

evil's a bit of meat between two molars
love's a borrowed coat
hate's a crooked mist-go 'way
lust's a sigh of concrete
fate's a wooden bridge: walk over frontiers on your hands

Jerks

John Moehlmann

For 47 minutes a digital clock has stared at me.
It is 2:04 a.m. and I know no ambiguity.

Each number surprises
like the snap
the executioner hears
when the trap is sprung,
a straight line
of sudden configuration.

I remember old times of sleepy, sweeping hands,
enriching circumferences, grace of curves,
rhythms inviting soft tomorrows,

but she sleeps on
estranged from me
to awaken untouched,
a sudden stick figure
blinking and bolting
from my bed.



