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Sunny Day in the Dark Ages

Her face
she is wreathed in smiles
greets the morning with
bright eyes
eagerly blinking sleep
away, away
out the heavy wooden door
swinging milk bucket
sweet timothy under her
bare feet
Bessie twitches her tail
in rhythm to the
swish, swish of warm
milk streaming into
the pail
and she laughs for no
apparent reason
muslin petticoat swirling
around her slender legs
wind whipping long
blonde strands in her
mouth and tangling
in eye lashes
causing her to trip
blithely
back to
waiting porridge
stopping only to
gather thistle and wild
roses, arranging
bright bouquets
to scatter round
the small hut
nodding welcome
to an
airy
day.

Stephanie Elizabeth Lewis
The Courtyard at Biltmore House

In the courtyard the gods never wavered
at the strong wind that blew across the layered
mountains, like millions of humming birds,
their mouths filled with the naming words.

Pan is at his zenith, clutching pipes to granular lips,
astride a planted pedestal in his own private Olympus.

For those who have passed, he must have sat
to remind them of their compounding fate

and this is why he was caste; to remind,
and why he will always last, as a rhyme

c caught in the middle of a stone swollen echo;
a familiar current from golden throats

as the water bends from Cupid’s moss-imbued mouth,
and spills to the basin below, that image of dearth.

Below the god’s infant form; those impossibly small wings,
the empty slip of eyes, miniscule phallus, cherub cheeks.

This fountain too, to remind; the youth of that common spring.
Here on this plain, this neo-stonehenge must have been

a bittersweet comfort to the master’s guests
as they played their games of wine and dress.

the fog napping the ground like Gorgon’s breath.
Now they’re donning the Goat's head of Bacchus

under a wide Carolina sky, one evening past,
when they danced the way we always have:

into the cool dominion of an Appalachian night.

John A. Pelot
Examples

There is a crowd gathered before my eyes.
Silken girls with meshy faces.
They know of me. I know of them.
I loved them all in my mind. They never loved.
Even though they were before me, I found myself being ignored.
Brown and blue eyes never met green.
I fell at their feet and begged for attention.
They stood expressionless.
I ripped out my tongue and threw it at them.
They scattered like disturbed ants.
A silent smile remained.

I walked by a girl nibbling on my heart.
There were crumbs in her lap and a glass of milk in her hand.
She noticed me and laughed.
I remember this girl. She's my sorrow.
She sat there chewing. I stood there babbling.
Nothing is as sweet as seeing her scowl at me.
I took out a tissue and blew my nose.
When I finished, I dunked it in her milk.
A bond remained.

I've been talking to myself and I don't like what I hear.
Women not existing. Nights alone.
I struggled with my appearance. They did not care.
Stirring speeches brushed my ears. I spoke inside.
I stood on a stool with a gun in my hand, pills in my mouth,
and a rope around my neck. Nobody knew.
Breaking out of my self-effacing shell wasn't easy, but it was done.
A life remained.

Peter Romanov
[Untitled]

When you look up into the heavens
And see the clouds cover the sky
Is it the sorrow that hides inside you
Which brings a tear to your eye?
I can understand your reticence
There's no need to speak at all
For silence becomes your best friend
When pain is all you know.

Time may pass like the sunset's glory
And fade to memories.

When all in life you had was death
It leaves little point in trying.

Doug Ciampaglione

Outside My Window

As I look outside my window, I see such a beautiful place
By doing this I can sometimes erase the tears on my face

I see a world full of color: the trees, the birds, the sky
Sometimes I can ease frustrations this way; I don't know why

The answer is not always clear but as the spring is almost near
I can almost always look for times of happiness and cheer

The pain and anguish that I feel only haunts me somehow
since the only thing I know is to let it. That's all I allow

As I look outside my window, I know peace can be found within
But in my heart I know that I will never be able to win

As I look outside my window, I look at a vast variety of things
One of them being my constant struggle in the wrestling ring

O'ni Tanesha J. Green
The Apogee

To a Deceased Colleague

John, eulogizing ministers made you mythic,
so I could not hear you troubled,
so I could not see you confused.

I remember you talking to me
and long Hutch Bearce one day
about poet’s corporeality.

Bearce said he was always amazed
that poets were all so concerned
with the body, with the flesh, the thing itself.

And I remem-
ber that you said
that you said the
same thing to your
brother who teach-
es poetry
in far Georgia,
argued about
Whitman, you said.

I thought how strange, then how ordinary
it was for a biologist, a son of Darwin,
to be reticent in that way

and keep the body at arm’s length—you,
who every day in the lab was up to your elbows
in flesh and fluids, saying, “Look again! Look!”

My answer now:
oh, John,
how we
and all
hurt things
are used
by all
of us.

Dr. Marion Hodge
I Have a Choice

I am
too weak and weary
to go on as life strikes
its finalizing chord, no
longer am I able to think clearly

I have a choice

I can
either take a bow
and leave feeling things
can change and there is
hope that they'll get better
somehow or I can go on feeling
out of control of my life.

I have a choice

O'ni Tanesha J. Green

[Untitled]

do you know what it feels like. to look at a person
and know that you can see more than the others.
do you know what it feels like. to hear your own
heart stop when you walk by him with a teacup in
your hand trying not to spill. do you know what
it feels like. to wake up in the morning knowing
he paid a visit to your dreams but about what you
can't remember but you have a pretty good idea. do
you know what it feels like. to not be able to
eat a whole turkey sandwich because you're too busy
zoning. do you know what it feels like. to spend
your time telling others about all the things you're
thinking and not doing. do you know what it feels
like. to ponder endlessly about the possibilities.
do you know what it feels like to tie your insides
in a knot every time you make eye contact and look
away. do you know what it feels like. to end the
wondering, the aching, the yearning, the wanting.
do you know what it feels like. to begin by waving.

Melanie Minior
What Is This Feeling?

What is this feeling?
What is this emotional barrier among me;
The wall which separates me from you,
Yet produces the temptation to climb over.

Though this wall stands between us,
You are not on either side,
For it seems you stand alone on top
Confused as to which way to go.

And as you are waiting and time is passing,
I will be climbing with the uttermost effort
To see your smile and hear your voice again,
To be with you again.

And if the worst should make me fall,
I feel you will reach out to stop me
From falling any further or harder;
You have become a valuable friend.

Shelli Crouse

You Often Seize My Gaze

You often seize my gaze,
corrupting my vision, overwhelming my thoughts,
with the silence you cry,
as you dream rather than stare.

The afternoon of my thoughts,
lay unmeasurable to the blinding flash
of your presence.
Shattered...

My body is left in the absence of reaction,
yet I feel you and am met in full,
Though still am starved and empty.
Yearning...
The Apogee

Your lesson is one of passion,
of a compelling need to be free,
from an aura I can not escape,
nor can I understand.

For this is a reminder,
Your countenance often so beautiful.
I need you and wish you life,
Beyond even these words.

As I live and die,
I will always cherish this memory,
From the beginning,
To the light at the end.

Kimberly Enuall

A Moment to Read

I want to crawl into your mind,
to experience thoughts
As they are born.
But eventually the gears catch them,
Turning uncontrollably.
The thoughts never escape.

The pictures electrify my heart.
Unconsciously it skips a beat,
Then another,
But must leave
When the hourglass empties.

I long to find my way inside,
And to wrap myself in your warmth.
This cold outside keeps me from you.
I am frozen in fear
Or just frozen.

My mind aches without you,
Miles and many hearts away.
I dance and pretend
you dance beside me,
Smiling, with eyes afire.
But a thousand flames burn
For someone other than me.

I hum a ditty
And hear your fingers slide across
The strings of an acoustic guitar.
When I open my eyes,
I find the guitar leaning
Against a wall near the door,
And you are gone.

Lori McBrayer

[Untitled]

You hear about it all the time
You read about it in the paper
hear it on the news
You see it on Oprah
    or Sally Jesse Raphael
    or Geraldo
So where are they? These victims of sexual abuse?

you wonder
    “I don’t know any. Besides, if it was that bad
    how could they make it this far?”
You don’t know any?
Are you sure?

What about the girl across the hall?
the one who sleeps around
who seems to believe that
her life
depends on having a man
in her bed
on Friday night
What about the girl in your class?
the one who stops taking notes
whose eyes cloud up
when child abuse is mentioned
What about that friend of a friend?
the one who seems so
withdrawn
who has never been on a date
and looks at men with
fear
in her eyes
Or the girl downstairs?
the one who looks at men
not with fear
but with
anger
and hate
What about the president of your sorority?
she seems perfectly well-balanced
and normal
her only care is
that the meeting goes well
Or maybe it is your friend
the one who is seeing a counselor
she hasn’t told you why
the one who seems to sink into
a deep depression
now and again
more often than not
What if she told you why she goes to the counselor?
What if she told you that she was
molested
by her brother
her father
her uncle

Would you listen?
Would you believe her?
Would you help her through this thing called “life”?

Or would you change the subject
Would you ask her “Are you sure?”
“Maybe it’s time to take a walk
get some ice cream”

Or would you just turn your head
and
walk away

Open your eyes
Open your hearts
Open your minds
Open your ears
Look at us! We are all around you!
We are the survivors of a silent crime!
We have made it this far out of sheer will and strength!
We have been robbed of our innocence
our trust
feelings of self-worth

Will you let it go on?
Or will you listen
believe
give us the chance to tell our story
and help make it so your children will not have a story to tell.

Jennifer Paulson

Dependency

Running
Faster
Running
Faster
Faster
It’s following
Chasing me
I can’t get away
Secrets
Pain
Guilt
Spinning
Dizziness
One word
Disaster
Why can’t I get away
Leave me alone
Wait a minute
Gripping
I’m holding on
Why can’t I let go
Why can’t I find peace
Familiarity
The Apogee

Breads security  
Secure my pain  
Peace breeds anxiety  
Suspicion  
So I run  
Knowing all along  
I’m not letting go

Bethany Johnson

[Untitled]

I walk through the house with silent footsteps,  
until I meet a creaky floorboard. they can be so  
damn nosiy when they are unwanted. no one is  
to know that I am here. I creep like a cat  
burglar from room to room. not knowing what  
I’m looking for. their eyelids are fluttering in  
their deep sleep. it is what I should be doing,  
they’ve told me. I won’t be here for long. as  
soon as I figure out what I’m looking for. I’ll  
be out as quickly as I came in. in the meantime  
I’m still wandering.

Melanie Minior

Vous et Nul Autre

Your French accent is tickling me again.  
I remember shuffling through moonlit  
grass sometimes, moccasins unseen. We’d giggle  
stories from our childhoods as your five o’clock  
shadow would swim around my face,  
leaving behind an odor of Obsession and fabric softener.  
Do you still sing to strangers, as I do?  
Gather some paint and leave your soul  
on this bridge, just a footprint or two.  
I taught you how to waltz upon this bridge,  
as you pronounced our eternity  
to a jury of objective stars.  
Will you sing to me across the bridge  
that spans across oceans and only
exists in my mind? I'll be sure to respond to the refrain. 
*Je te plumerais...*

Diana Kennedy

Sunday Afternoon

Too much

black. 
I think it's time for a change. I am going to rearrange the things that are strange.

you speak scream question 
and I listen
listen listen
listen until
I have listened.

But, 
I hear and I don't want to hear excuses! 
I see and I don't want to see your point!

It's personality attitude 
you not your color.

But you won't listen listen listen to me you say I am wrong.

And on a Sunday afternoon 
you call me a racist because 
I am white?

Peter Romanov
The Apogee

Cheated

You went through the motions of love
but not the emotions
lying here
you and I
listening for an answer
your resounding heartbeat the only
reply
from where my ear
is resting on your chest.

We were so close
(or so I thought)
My mind was reeling,
only sensing
(with some elation)
you lying next to me.
Your mind was a 5x7 portrait
of her
and you could not see past the
image
so you disentangled yourself
from my embrace
and turned away
leaving me
horribly disenchanted
And now

When you look at me
do you remember
gentle caresses and whispered sighs
or was it only obligatory
that you took me in
and gave me
nothing more concrete
than a memory.

rosemary is for remembrance

Stephanie Elizabeth Lewis
The Star Sapphire

In palaces of silver did my Lady find repose;
In halls of golden splendour did the lords of light reside.
Long before the feet of mortal men ere walked in this land
the ancient fires of Eden lost their flame and slowly died.
Now naught remains but stone and ash and sour open graves.
In arrogance, spirit turned from flesh; love was forced aside.

No army rose in hatred to cast down the halls of gold,
no evil human hand could ever dare to douse their glow;
but spirit turned away from flesh; love turned sour, even cold.
With no heat left to warm their hearts the gods died, long ago.
only one of their number ever lived to walk this land.
Olympus lies in ruins; she abides with us below.

She is the Queen of all that’s light, this Lady of the Void.
She is the Mistress of the Stars, the Emperess of Love,
the ever-pure white virgin Maid, the Mother of the Crone,
The Lady of all things divine: of eagle, hawk, and dove.
I lay before, adoring Her, this Princess of the Grail.
She begs me take Her sacrament and worship her thereof.

In the glades where once the towers stood,
In secret places now long unknown,
The Flower of Life still grows wild
Where the wise may seek, amongst the stones.
I taste of it and my Lady shows
A paradise within my mind
Even as, at last, I see Eden’s gates
The poison, the venom, tears my spine.
The curse of the ancients, is this seed.
It’s tortures are no false construction.
I know this is true as now I run
My headlong rush to self destruction.

Each silver tower must fall someday,
each golden fire must die.
No living thing escapes the gaze,
the all-destroying Eye.
Like the Beast I fall aside
and sleep beneath the sea.
Death, the greatest whore of all,
at last has come for me.
For seven days and seven nights
The Apogee

I languish under ebon skies
but then, as dawn will follow night,
I am reborn, and will arise.

Lady, Save me. Deliver me.
Lady, Save me. Deliver me.

Ian Lohr

[Untitled]

Forget his name; Forget his face
Forget his kiss and warm embrace
Forget this love that once was true
Remember now, there's someone new.

Forget the problems that you two shared
Forget the fact that he once cared
Forget the times that you spent together
Remember now He's gone forever.

Forget you cried the whole night long
Forget him when they play your song
Forget how close you two were
Remember now He's chosen Her.

Forget you've memorized his walk
Forget the way he used to talk
Forget the times when he was mad
Remember now, He's Happy not Sad

Forget the times he used to phone
Forget the times you were alone
Forget he made your dreams come true
Remember now, There's someone new.

Forget his gentle teasing way
Forget you see him every day
Forget the things you planned to do
Remember now, She loves Him, too.

Forget the thrills when he walked by
Forget the times he made you cry
Forget the way he said your name
Remember now Things aren't the same.

Jamie L. Frank
Amos’ View of Me at Sixteen

There is a black and white photograph on my mirror of a girl wearing black with a silver chain. Her head is turned left, towards the sun as it defines the tiny bump on her nose and her square jawline. Her hair however, can’t seem to find a definite part, causing a jagged line on the side of her head where tens of thousands of miniscule threads originate and extend past shoulders the camera lens decided to ignore.

It doesn’t look like me.

I can scarcely remember the boy who took that photograph. This was new for him since he had never taken “serious” photos of people before. Instead, he took pictures of cracks on sidewalks, showing “isolation in deformity.”

The work of a true artist is not a thing of beauty.

A teacher tried to prod him into new areas of interest (I guess cracks on sidewalks weren’t enough) and so he chose me, a girl he began kissing only the day before, and followed me as I attempted to read works of Shakespeare far too mature for my ability in a lawn outside a college quad.

He took the picture while I was at rest. We broke up four days later. But the photo has remained throughout my college years,
although it is fraying
at the corners
and yellowing in places.

Friends occasionally tell me that the picture
of my little sister is beautiful.

Diana Kennedy
Grease spattered in the black frying pan. Fried chicken. There would be company after Preaching. Granny Eula stood at the enamel sink, her nubby legs pressed against the flowered curtain strung across the cabinet base. Although the Thompson children were supposed to be eating breakfast, Sarah Ann purposely started an argument with Stephen.

“We went to the Square last Palm Sunday,” she insisted. “I know we did...don’t you remember?” She buttered toast.

“I thought that was year-before-last,” Stephen said politely.

“Pass the preserves, please.”

Sarah Ann crunched on her toast, chewing loudly. “You weren’t even here last year on Palm Sunday,” she informed him.

“How would you know?”

Stephen’s fork stopped in midair. “Where was I last year?”

“That,” Sarah Ann said with a knowledgeable air, “was when you went to Fairmont—"

Stephen rolled his eyes to the ceiling.

”—To spend the weekend with Auntie Mabel and Uncle Martin,” she continued. “Don’t you remember? You missed all the clowning around at the Square.”

“That’s right. I did,” Stephen agreed. “That’s the weekend,” he said, his finger pressed against his forehead, “that Jimmie Lee and Curtis Ray pitched their Boy Scout tent in the back field. We camped outside.”

Ethel slumped in her chair and slurped sugared milk from her cereal bowl. “I, for one,” she declared, “like to go to the Square. Sarah Ann’s too big for her britches. I ain’t like her.”

“Don’t say ain’t; how many times do I have to tell you that,” Sarah Ann commanded, her fingers pressed against her skull, protecting her brain from Ethel’s carelessness. “Besides,” she added with dramatized cheer, “I don’t like the smart alecky showoffs and big shots all gathered together, Miss Smart-Ass.”

“Ain’t ain’t no worse than ass,” insisted Ethel, running her tongue around the base of the cereal bowl.

“Of course, it is. Ass is in the Bible. Ain’t is not. That’s the difference.”

“Granny Eula,” Ethel asked, is ain’t worse than ass just because it’s in the Bible?”

Granny Eula stared at the dishes heaped in the enamel dish pan. “I reckon,” she said slowly, rubbing the rim of a drinking glass, “it’s the meaning in your heart—whenever you say either one—that counts.”
"What does that mean?"

"Well, Ethie," Granny Eula said, "now it looks like to me that ain't is not usually a word spoken in anger or haughtiness. Whereas ass can certainly be related to talking ugly." Granny Eula dropped a fistful of silverware into her rinse water.

"My point is—" explained Sarah Ann, "—if someone had culture...any culture, at all, they would not appreciate the tacky goings-on at the Square each and every Palm Sunday."

Stephen ran his napkin across his mouth. "Culture, my foot! Sarah Ann," he said, "why does everything in life have to have culture?"

"Okay," Sarah Ann answered, while pointing to a spot on his lip Stephen had missed, "we won't talk about culture. It's more like a bunch of blubbering fools, if you ask me. Trying to act uppity with everybody chanting and crying and marching. Doesn't make one bit of sense."

She dreaded the idea. Dreaded the precise moment of 11:30, the exact time each member of individual downtown congregations began their walk from home church to steps of the Fairfield County Court House. To make matters worse, each person was forced to clutch in his fist a palm branch provided by Edmond's Florist. After all congregations had gathered facing the Courthouse steps, the community program began. Last year Sarah Ann had stood across Main Street on one of the green bus-stop benches, right under the statue of the unknown Confederate Soldier.

The actual service officially started each year when three Fairfield High band students stood on a make-shift scaffold over the wide Court House steps and tooted trumpets. Down below, in front of the scaffold, one of the parishioners had parked an old red Ford pickup. Miss Opal sat perched on the truck bed, pedaling away on an old pump organ.

The Singing Saints, who in everyday life were the Webber family, always got the first spot on the program. Mr. Webber worked at the Post Office, and his wife ran Webber's Kut and Kurl out on Turner Road. One of the girls, Cynthia Webber, was in Sarah Ann's seventh grade, and the other two girls were in high school. Mrs. Webber, Cynthia, and her two sisters wore long, pink organdy evening dresses, and Mrs. Webber had made all their hairdos look alike—bangs and deep finger waves covered with sparkling hair nets that Sarah Ann could see shining all the way across Main. The Singing Saints wore pink velvet ribbons tied tight around their necks. A big rhinestone buckle slid across each pink ribbon and lodged in the small of each throat. Miss Opal sat on a stool in the pickup bed, pumping so hard the truck moved from side to side. All the while, in husky harmony the singing Saints proclaimed the gospel through song as they swayed on the top step of the Court
Sarah Ann really hated Palm Sunday at the Square. "I don't think I'll go this year," she said.

Granny Eula turned, her mouth open, her dishrag dribbling soapy water across the kitchen counter-top. "Ya'll go," she declared. A resounding benediction followed her edict. "Ya'll all go," she said. "And I don't want to hear no more of this tomfoolery." Her words popped like grease sputtering in the frying pan. "Ya'll hear me, now," Granny Eula concluded. "There's be no more of this devilish back talk."
There was a short pause.

"Oh, hi...Is this 723-0523?"

"Yes. May I help you?"

"Ah...I'm calling Bob Caldwell. I was given this number. Is he there?"

"Just a moment please."

As she waited she heard noises in the background. A rustling of cloth, the approaching sound of someone coughing. Yet the voice that at last did answer did not sound familiar. More like a pale imitation of the laughing baritone that she remembered.

"Yes. This is Bob Caldwell."

"Bob? Hi. It's Sally Griffin."

"Who?"

"Sally Griffin. Remember? From Roosevelt High?"

Silence for a moment.

"God, you're kidding! Sally? Sally Griffin? Jeez, Sally, how long has it been now?"

Hearing his voice again, she smiled in spite of herself.

"Class of '87. That would make it seven years, I guess. Doesn't seem that long already, does it?"

"No. Hell, no. God, how did you ever track me down, Sally?"

"Bob Thomas. He gave me your number. I hope you don't mind."

"Are you kidding? This is great. So how are you doing? Married?"
Kids? God, where do you begin after so long. Hey, did you ever make it to Vassar?"

"Yea. Law school, too. And no, I'm not married. Too busy, I guess. Was that your wife? The woman who answered?"

He gave a thin laugh.

"No. I'm not married, either. Divorced, actually." There was another pause. "I've had some health problems lately, Sally. Miss Sommers is a nurse."

"Oh, God no! Is it serious? Are you all right?"

"Sure, sure. I'll be fine. On my feet again in no time. So, tell me...what's the occasion? What made you think of me after all this time. Jeez, we're not due for a school reunion already, are we?"

"No. Nothing like that." It was her turn to pause. When she spoke again there was noticeable quiver to her voice.

"Bob, tell me the truth. Please. What exactly is the matter with you? Why do you have a nurse there?"

She heard the flare of a match being struck, then his breath as he drew in the smoke, then noisily exhaled.

"I think you had better tell me why it is you have called, Sally."

There was an edge to his voice now that scared her.

"Bob, I need to tell you something. Something important. And I'm just not certain how to do it."

There was a rumbling cough from the other end, but no reply.

"Bob, I've just come from my doctor's. He's told me that I've tested positive for HIV. I wanted you to know."

She awaited a reaction that never came. There was no startled outburst, no cry of disbelief. Instead, she heard a deep breath as he took another drag upon the cigarette.

"Well, God, Sally. That's terrible," he said slowly. "But, I'm confused. Why are you telling me this?"
Of all the possible replies she had imagined in the last few fretful hours, this one had not occurred to her.

“What do you mean, ‘Why am I telling you?’ God, Bob, why shouldn’t I be telling you? If I’m infected you might be as well.”

She abruptly stopped.

“Oh, God. You don’t even remember, do you? I knew I never meant anything to you, but it didn’t even register for you, did it? You forgot me entirely, didn’t you?”

“Look, Sally. I’m sorry. I did forget. But, God, it was only once. One night, a long, long time ago. What did you think, that I was making some sort of commitment? I’m sorry if I’ve disappointed you, but aren’t you expecting a bit much here?”

“It meant something to me. I even thought then that it might mean something to you.”

“It was just one of those things, Sally. God, we were up at the lake. You always did look great in a swimsuit. The beer and the grass. What did you expect? We had a good time.”

“A good time? A good time! God, didn’t you hear what I just said? I’ve tested positive for HIV. I wanted you to know because you’re in danger, now, too, Bob. They say you can have it for years before it’s apparent. Don’t you understand? I may have had it even then...”

Another deep drag. She could hear the rattle of an ashtray as the cigarette was stubbed out on the other end.

“Sally. Look...I’m sorry about your situation. And if you thought it was important to tell me, well all right, you told me. Duty done. You can sleep with a clear conscience. Let’s leave it at that.”

In the background a woman’s voice sounded. Sally thought she recognized the voice of the woman who had answered the phone.

“Look, Sally, I really have to go.”

“Wait! Bob. Tell me. What’s the matter with you? Why do you have a nurse there?”
“Good-bye, Sally. I'm sorry.”

“Bob!”

There was a click and the line went dead.
Apathy is the Best Policy

Diana Kennedy

Some of you may think that my wife is a bit eccentric, but that doesn’t bother me since I’ve learned to ignore her anyway. She’s as blind as a mole trapped in a molehill, and in the past this used to be the cause of a lot of embarrassment for me and my friends. Now they’ve all learned to ignore her, too. At least we don’t fight like people do in most marriages, we just leave each other alone, and I like the peace.

Tonight we’re in a greasy dining establishment in North Carolina shopping for furniture. Maisie is, anyway. She likes to read all the brochures she can get her hands on with a device she calls her light glass. She holds the cylindrical illuminated object to her eye, then the brochure to the glass so that it covers her face. I don’t understand why she insists upon doing this. The place is well lit, and the other customers are trying really hard not to stare. I nibble at my omelet while Maisie squeals over a dining room set.

She wants me to shop with her, I know it. She’ll tell me to get out my charge card, and won’t the house look perfect with this new addition? She knows as well as I that we can’t afford that sort of thing, and we live in a motor home anyway. Besides, she said she wouldn’t bother me tonight.

Here it comes. She is tugging on my sleeve. She asks me just to look at it, and isn’t it darling?

“Maisie, I don’t care about your god-awful furniture,” I reply a little more snippily than I had intended, but I’ve managed to shut her up.

I decide to order a refill for my iced tea when I notice that the other customers are trying hard not to stare at us again. Obviously Maisie is crying. She does this every night. It doesn’t bother me at all. I think I’ll ask for the check, too.
"Metamorphosis"

Melanie Minior

Gregor’s eyelids begin to flutter as he enters into the deepest slumber of his life span. Throughout his journey, Gregor is drawn into three tunnels.

The first of these tunnels is extremely cold, matching the emotional coldness he has received from his family since he has became a bug. The walls of the tunnel are oozing with a substance unknown to man, dripping down to the callous, damp ground. Gregor cannot see two feet in front of him because the tunnel is in a state of complete blackness. He can hear a family of rats scurrying in front of him. There is a faint stench in the air of rotting vegetables and decomposing animal carcasses.

The tunnel suddenly becomes engulfed in red light and the word “burden” is scrolled along both walls of the tunnel in black capital letters, like a short, cheaply made film, illuminating the walls the same way the sunlight shines through the ocean when you are underwater.

Gregor see people ahead of him in the tunnel and realizes that it is his father, sister, and mother. All three of them have aged by twenty years. His father is in a wheelchair. His sister is holding a heavy tray of uneaten food that is piled up to her chin. His mother is in the middle of knitting a sweater. Gregor recognizes it to be the sweater she made for him for his eighth birthday that he hated because it was itchy but always wore to make his mother happy. They have a mixed look of shallowness and disbelief on their sunken faces. They do not approach him, but watch every move he makes in passing by. Gregor is overcome by a feeling that he must move forward. The tunnel grows dark again and Gregor hears a rusty squeak coming from his father’s wheelchair behind him.

As Gregor moves forward slowly a new scene unfolds before him. The outside world surrounds him. The grass is a deep shade of green, the birds are serenading the public with their melodic song, and the children are exercising their right to play. People are everywhere. There is a paved walkway and a bike path that weaves through the park. Aged oak trees line the walkway, its branches shadowing the pavement. The sun could not possibly shine any brighter, and there is not a single cloud in the sky. Gregor has stopped in his tracks, absorbing the pleasantry on all sides of him. As he looks around, he notices that people are glaring at him. People are staring at him with such great intensity that he can feel their eyes on the outside of his body. Gregor was so preoccupied
with his surroundings that he forgot he may appear grotesque to the people around him.

Mothers are mortified, clutching their children closely to their bosoms. One curious child begins walking towards Gregor, and almost instantaneously snatched back by his mother. Gregor begins to move forward again through the second tunnel down the walkway. The people step off the walkway as he draws closer to where they are standing. The formation of a single file line has occurred amongst all the men, women, and children in the park, lining either side of the walkway. Every single person has the same expression on their faces, the same wide, gaping mouths. A number of jaws have dropped down to the pavement. Almost as if on cue, the entire mass of people erupt into loud shrieks of laughter. Gregor feels ringing inside his mind, as if he had been sitting in front of a loudspeaker for twenty-four hours straight. He had to push himself to keep going through the tunnel. He felt like he had to use all of his energy with each step: the people were sucking the life out of him. The sky was no longer bright with sunshine but filled with thick, black storm clouds. The oak trees were no longer covered with green leaves but were barren, like they had come from the dead of winter. The grass had collapsed and deteriorated into dust, being blown around by the gusty winds going against Gregor while he is proceeding to travel down the rest of the walkway. And the swings on which the children were playing have rusted and are no longer swinging.

Gregor is out of breath and shaking fiercely as he exits the second tunnel. As before, the tunnel grows dark and silence dominates his environment. Gregor is thankful for a moment of peace after the draining ordeal he has just gone through. Very faintly in the background, Gregor can hear a harp playing. An overwhelming sense of calmness comes over him. The ringing in his mind has been replaced by the gentle, delightful sounds of the harp and he feels there is no other place he would rather be than where he is right now, in the third and final tunnel.

The third tunnel is warm and dimly lit. When Gregor looks at the walls of the tunnel closely, they appear to be lined with white candles. When the flames grow brighter, the tunnel turns from black to a lighter almost transparent color. Down at the end of the tunnel, there is a very small outline, the figure of a small child. Gregor is afraid that this child will fear him, because of his abnormal appearance, and start shrieking like the others did. This particular child appears to be waiting for him, anticipating the moment when they are face to face.

When Gregor finally reaches the child, he discovers that it is a little girl. She has on a white dress with a trail that drags on the
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ground but never gets dirty. Her hair is golden blond and reaches down past her waist. In her left hand she is carrying the harp, her right hand reaches out and caresses Gregor on the head. She says that her name is Ariel, and she beckons Gregor to follow her. Gregor willingly travels in her footsteps.

Ariel pauses at the end of the tunnel where a doorway appears. She opens the door towards the inside. The doorway, however, is made for a small child, like Ariel, and Gregor’s body is unable to fit through it. Ariel has walked through this doorway, waiting patiently for Gregor on the other side, her hands folded gently across her chest. She tells him to walk through the doorway and join her, and that she will take care of him. Gregor tries to move through the doorway, but fails. He tries repeatedly for the next few minutes and gets increasingly frustrated and upset when he fails each time.

Gregor hears Ariel whisper goodbye as the door closes in front of him. He becomes very cold and begins to tremble. The candles are no longer lit and the tunnel has turned to black. Gregor’s sadness takes over the entirety of his body and he begins to cry. His sadness matures to anger and he starts to scream.

Gregor has woken himself screaming from the most disturbing and revealing dream he has ever had. He is lying on the floor in a puddle of sweat in his bedroom. Gregor sits up and looks for a tissue to wipe his eyes. Passing in front of the mirror, he notices something different but familiar about him. He looks at his hands and the dirt under his fingernails. He touches his hair. He wiggles his toes. He laughs out loud.

Realizing that he is completely naked and extremely cold, Gregor wraps a blanket around himself and searches for clothes to wear. There will be no more of the same. Gregor says to himself. I wish to be happy. He scans his room and reaches for the suitcase that is shoved in the corner of the room. What he wanted to take with him was essentials. What he wanted to leave behind was everything his life had been about before this dream. The chief clerk was left next to his desk. The picture of the woman he spent a number of evenings cutting out that he always carries with him was left propped on the wall. Gregor leaves his bedroom door wide open and says his last goodbyes. Grabbing a jacket, he exits the house he grew up in as if he were only a temporary tenant whose stay had come to a sudden, abrupt end.
Mrs. Douglas sat up in bed and looked at the Little Ben on the nightstand. Its glow-in-the-dark hands told her it was three in the morning. From near the window came grunting sounds punctuated by an occasional snort. She fumbled for the lamp switch and the room suddenly filled with light.

Getting out of bed, Mrs. Douglas tiptoed to the window and pulled the shade back a fraction of an inch. Outside, bathed in the light of a full moon, was Rochester, Mayor Richard Abbott's wife Dorothy's pet pig.

Sighing with irritation, Mrs. Douglas headed toward the telephone. "I don't care how early in the morning it is," she mumbled to herself. "Something must be done about that... that... SWINE!"

She picked up the receiver and began to dial. "Tearing up the flowers I worked so hard to cultivate," she continued. "Something must be done."

After several rings, the sleepy mayor answered. "Richard," Mrs. Douglass began, "this is Harriet." She continued without pausing: "Something must be done about Rochester... Indeed he is! He's rooting up my lilies as we speak... Yes, I know she does... Well, you do that then... Yes, goodbye." She replaced the receiver in its cradle and returned to the window.

Rochester was still hard at work in Mrs. Douglas' lilies. Mrs. Douglas stared at him intently, her eyes narrowed. "Doggone you, you filthy pig," she hissed through clenched teeth. Rochester, as if hearing her comment, turned and looked at her, snorted, then resumed his destruction. Mrs. Douglas walked back to the bed, sat down on the edge and waited for Mayor Abbott to come and get his wife's pig.

The next morning Mrs. Douglas went out to survey the damage done to her flowers and shrubbery. Her lilies were a total loss, but she might be able to salvage her marigolds. Just as she squatted down and began to replant some of the flowers that had roots, she heard a familiar grunting sound and turned to see Dorothy Abbott coming down the sidewalk with Rochester on a leash.
"Mornin' Harriet!" called Dorothy. "I'm so sorry about Rochester's little adventure last night." She turned to the pig and said in a syrupy voice, "You were a naughty boy, weren't you, sweetie?"

Mrs. Douglas rolled her eyes as she stood up. "Dorothy Abbott, that pig of yours has been wreaking havoc all over town for nearly three weeks now and I want to know what you're going to do about it."

"Oh Harriet, really!" said Dorothy. "He didn't do so very much damage, did you my precious baby?" She made kissing sounds toward Rochester.

Mrs. Douglas was annoyed. "All I have to say is this. That pig has been in my yard tearing up my plants three times now and if I catch him doing it just once more, I am going to take my husband's pistol out of the nightstand drawer and shoot him," she said calmly.

Dorothy immediately clapped her hands over Rochester's ears. "Why, Harriet! You don't mean that!"

"I most certainly do. Dorothy, we've know each other for twenty-eight years and it wasn't until the owner of that chain of barbeque restaurants gave you that piglet at the opening of one of his restaurants four years ago that you started acting so... so... strange," said Mrs. Douglas, concerned. "Why, no one thought you would keep that pig for a pet."

Tears began to well in Dorothy's eyes. "Oh, Harriet, everyone in town hates me," she began. "Richard and I haven't had a full night's sleep in weeks, with people calling and asking him to come get Rochester." She patted the pig's head. I know people must think I'm crazy, keeping a pig for a pet, but ever since Richard, Jr. got married and moved away I've been so lonely," she said, crying.

"I know dear, I know," said Mrs. Douglas, ushering her to the front porch. "And I have nothing against pigs. Lord knows that without them this county would be bankrupt." They sat down and Mrs. Douglas poured Dorothy some iced tea. Rochester contented himself with lying in a shady spot by the front steps.

"Before I got Rochester, I only thought of pigs as po-" Dorothy caught herself. "P-O-R-K. But now, I don't know, I've just gotten attached to him..." She looked at the sleeping pig.

Mrs. Douglas also looked down at Rochester and said, "You know, there is something rather sweet about him. When he's asleep, I mean."
“Harriet, you’re not really going to shoot him, are you?” asked Dorothy timidly.
“No, I was just angry, I suppose. He did root up some of my best lilies, you know.”
Dorothy brightened. “I’ll buy you some new flowers, Harriet. It’s my fault he keeps getting out. The fence around his little house just isn’t secure enough,” she said.
“It’s all right. But, please, try to make sure he doesn’t get out again, okay?” said Mrs. Douglas.
“I’ll do my best,” said Dorothy, who looked again at Rochester so lovingly that it broke Mrs. Douglas’ heart.

That night Mrs. Douglas was awakened by a noise outside. She opened her eyes slowly and listened. Grunting and snorting sounds came from outside. But this time she didn’t look at the clock, fumble for the light switch, or go to the window. She only lay in her bed and thought how many plants she would buy at the nursery tomorrow.

Dissonance
Doug Ciampaglione

Steven looked over the ledge to the street below him. It sure was a long way down. He found himself reflecting on what he’d done. Could it have been so extreme that he was going to throw himself from a five-story building? I mean, sometimes things seem real bad, but when you take a step back and look long and hard at what you’ve done, they aren’t as bad as you think. However, in his case, it was that bad.

It was quarter after seven when Steven left his house. He drove over to (insanity) the pool hall where he was supposed to meet Jill. He sat in his car for a moment, then decided to leave the .357 he was carrying in the glove box. He opened his car door and stepped out. It was a gorgeous night out. The stars hung low in the heavens, and it was just a perfect night (to die). He closed his car door and went into the pool hall. Jill was sitting at the table and stood up as she saw him walk in. She looked more beautiful than ever. She smiled at him, and he walked over to the table to meet her.

“Hey!” he said with a big smile.
“Hey, yourself, mister,” she replied as she threw her arms around him.
“You been waiting long?” he asked.
“No, I just got here about five minutes ago, actually,” she
Jill grabbed her jacket from the back of the chair and the two of them walked to (their death) Steven's car. It was now about quarter to eight and the sky was the limit. They decided on seeing a movie and getting dinner, not necessarily in that order. Steven pulled out of the parking lot and headed toward a nice little Chinese place he knew not too far from there. This was going to be one hell of a night.

On the way to the restaurant, Jill told Steven about her day, and all the assholes she had to deal with. Steven was going to interject with a few stories of his own, but he opted to let the subject drop. When they arrived at the restaurant, Steven was sure to park the car away from the street lamp. It just made him feel more comfortable, like he could hide in the shadows. They stepped out of the car and had begun walking into the restaurant when Steven felt extreme pressure to his sinus area. He collapsed to his knees and blood rushed from his nose. He pulled off the flannel shirt he'd been wearing as a light jacket and covered his nose and mouth to try and stop the bleeding. For a moment, Jill could do nothing, but then she quickly walked over to him and helped him up.

"Are you all right? Do you want to go to a hospital?" she asked as calmly as possible.

"No, no, I'm okay. I just need a second, that's all." he replied. Steven looked down at his T-shirt, and he began to laugh. Jill stood quietly, not sure what to make of it.

"Well, I guess we're not going anywhere fancy now," he said to her in a sort of casual, relieve the tension manner. Jill just smiled and helped him to the car.

Steven got to the passenger side and opened the door. He reached into his back seat, grabbed his gym bag, took off his blood-stained T-shirt, and threw on the button-down shirt he'd worn to work that day. He then climbed into the car and handed Jill his keys. They decided the best thing to do now was to get some fast food, rent the movie, and spend the rest of the night at home.

Most of the car ride was in silence. Then Steven began to speak.

"I've been thinking about a lot lately, Jill, he started. "I think I finally figured out the secret behind life, and living in general. Ya see, it doesn't really matter in the end what we've done or who we are, 'cause we'll all die sooner or later. We all lose in the end, you know? It just seems kinda useless, all this effort it takes to keep going. Yet, every one of us does—we all make up excuses to not give up. It's interesting, ya know?" he said.

"Well, that's very depressing. Thanks for the insight," she responded, and she smiled at him. However, he seemed to be in his
own little world. She didn’t bother trying to say anything else. Jill pulled into the movie rental parking lot and parked the car.

“Do you want to stay here?” she asked Steven.

“And let you choose the movie? Never!” he responded with a smile. They got out of the car and walked toward the door. Steven stopped for a second.

“Go on in, I gotta get my wallet from the car,” he said. He walked back to the car, opened the glove box, put the .357 in the small of his back and untucked his shirt. Then, he walked into the store.

He spotted Jill over by the comedy section and headed toward her. She noticed his shirt was untucked, but she said nothing about it.

“What do you think? A little laughter to finish the evening off with?” she asked him, holding up a movie.

“All I need to finish off the evening is to be with you,” he replied in a very suave, calm voice.

“Flattery will get you no where,” she stated, then laughed. Steven, however, didn’t laugh. In fact, he didn’t find it the least bit funny. A sudden rage overtook him, and he grabbed her by her shoulders.

“You listen to me! Nobody laughs at me! Nobody!” he screamed. He pushed her away from him and retrieved the gun from the small of his back. He pointed it at her and—

“Steven? Steven? Are you okay? I think I lost you there for a second. You looked pretty zoned-out to me. Maybe what you need is a good night’s sleep, huh?” she asked him.

“What? Oh, uh, no. I’ll be okay, really. I was just thinking about something for a second. What are we getting?” he replied. They went up to the counter to pay for the movie. Steven found himself suddenly angered, but for no apparent reason. The man behind the counter rang up the movie, and Jill paid him. Steven looked around the store (they’re all looking at me) and started to seriously become unhinged. The man behind the counter handed Jill the bag with the movie in it. Steven watched the man hand Jill the bag, and then as if a channel on a TV was being changed, everything became very dream-like. Steven grabbed the man behind the counter with his left hand and pulled the gun from the small of his back with his right hand. He pointed the barrel directly at the man’s head and pulled the trigger, and Jill could do nothing but scream. Somewhere in the distance a choir of angels is singing. He pivoted on his right foot and spun around. There’s evil all around. He began opening fire on anything that moved in the store. A young man tried running for the door, but his effort was in vain. Steven, with no hesitation, raised the gun and shot the guy in
his upper thigh. He fell forward through the glass door and to his death. Everyone else was on the floor, lying very still. Jill, at this point, was sitting on the floor with her back against the counter. Her arms covered her head, and her legs were drawn in close to her body. Steven looked at her and smiled.

“Ah bit of laughter to finish off the evening, eh?” he said, still smiling. He ran out of the store and across the street to an apartment complex. He shot the lock off the main door and ran down the hallway, laughing and screaming. He got to the stairwell and ran up the stairs until there was only a door. He shot that lock off, too. So now here he was. Police cars were in front of the video rental place, and Steven just looked over the ledge in satisfaction. You done good, Steven. Everything’s gonna be all right now. I’ll see you in Valhalla, eh?

“Yeah, Valhalla. Everything’s just dandy,” he whispered to himself. Steven fell into his dark abyss.

My Child
Todd Miller

The rain had just begun to sprinkle from the gray sky as I got into my car. “I’ll bet she never knew what a chance she missed when she left me,” I thought as my eyes glimpsed the three-pointed star on the hood of my new Benz. The entire day was an especially cold one for late October; “Halloween,” I thought, “is a great day for embalming my old flame.” I continued to think about my wealth and sophistication in this old town of 3,000 people. When I drove through, all of the people smiled and waved their hands at me; of course, to complete the part, I waved back and smiled with my “you can trust me with your loved one” look. Curiously, none of the plebeians were on the street; it must be that the sky was so bleak and the air was cold. “Wouldn’t want them to catch their deaths, “ I said aloud with a chuckle.

Soon I arrived. Ah, my crowning achievement looked as beautiful as ever. Naturally, I was referring to my brand new $700,000 funeral home, with its white brick and modern, cheery environs. With jaunty step, I entered with my fingers waiting to touch her again.

I unzipped the black body bag immediately. My ungloved hands wanted to feel her soft skin again. She lay before me as if she were napping; she was still the beautiful Camilla Needleseye that I loved dearly. I stroked her hair and looked at her face; she stared at me with gaping eyes and mouth as they all do. “Oh, you were
such a queen," I said to her still body. I felt her arms and caressed her lovely breasts; they were so soft in life to be so cold and hard now. I remembered the time she cursed me; we had made love in the cemetery, behind the stone angel, and she was with child as a result. We never spoke again, but her child became the priest in our parish; the little bastard amounted to something.

I soon recalled my business there; she wasn't getting any fresher, after all. I proceeded to glue her eyes and mouth shut, and cut her neck to let the machine do its work. My thoughts raced as I heard the embalming machine gurgling out her blood and replacing it with my watered-down chemicals. I knew I didn't want her like this, and I knew that I could change these circumstances.

I learned about raising the dead in mortuary school. Of course, it was not the textbook; I found out on my own. I came across the procedure while satisfying my inquisitive mind. Amongst the books of old myths and legends, I learned the necessary incantations and paraphernalia. Like any sane person, I yearned to try it on a real corpse. I got the chance while working for the McKenzie Home of Eternal Life. To my astonishment it worked, and I became addicted to my powers. The only flaw, though, was that the complete memory and reasoning ability of the brain was lost; my "children" were little more than well-behaved zombies. To cover up my hobby, I simply drove the zombies out of state, and left them at someone's door. After all, dead men tell no tales! I wanted this life for my beautiful Camilla; she would be mine to do with as I pleased. But first, I readied her for her family.

The viewing was a smashing success. All of the country bumpkins who knew her spoke for several minutes about the excellent job I had done with her corpse. "As beautiful as she was in life," said one woman. "You have such skill," said another. I thought, "Of course, I do, you tottery old bag! How do you think I became the richest man in the county?" They would have praised me for days if they knew how truly natural I could make a corpse look! Our little bastard, the priest, only glanced at his dear papa. We should have been closer; c'est la vie, I guessed.

After the viewing, I took the body from the casket. I filled the box with several cement blocks to provide weight, shut its heavy lid, and locked it. I returned to the embalming room to work my magic. She looked like such an angel on the stainless steel table; her beauty only served to convince me that bringing her back was the right thing to do.

I began my incantations, and soon the time was right to channel my energy through her body. Within seconds, her own blood flowed where the embalming fluid had been. Her eyes and mouth opened with the dry cracking sound of the glue being pulled
apart. She was mine forever! Unfortunately, I learned that I got the same result that I had in others.

As we lay in bed that night, as we had laid amongst the tombstones years ago, I knew that I was a fool. She despised me in life; why in her zombie-like state would she love me? As she slept, I strangled her until I felt her neck snap. “Good,” I thought, “it is over.” Her eyes still looked at me; her lips were quivering. I heard her say, “You evil child of Satan.” She commenced to scream the words until I left. I knew I had been wrong to play God, or did I know? I needed to confess my sins. I needed absolution.

“Bless me, Father, for I have sinned,” I said to my son upon entering the confessional.

“What do you need to confess, my child?” asked my son, the holy priest. It was not his voice. It was the voice of a woman. I soon heard, “Child of Satan! Child of Satan!” “My God,” I said, “It’s Camilla!”

I arrived this morning at the psychiatric hospital. Imagine me, a millionaire, being called criminally insane. I read in the newspapers that police had found a corpse with a broken neck in my bed. They called me a necrophile! The paper also said that my son, a priest, heard me screaming to myself in the confessional. He took me home and found his mother’s corpse there. They are all lying bastards! I’m rich! I’m a friend to everyone!

I screamed, “I’m a genius!” A nurse with an unusual look in her eyes came to help me. “Camilla, you’ve come back,” I said. “Child of Satan!”

Alexandra’s Adventure in Outerspace

Molly McBride

Some time late last night, I took a trip. My mother may have seen me sleeping soundly in my bed, with the covers tucked neatly under my chin; but I wasn’t really there. I was soaring through space in my very own rocket ship, I saw the tiny earth far below me and I watched the beautiful sparkling stars float past my window. I saw the woman in the moon up close and she smiled at me. She had a beautiful smile and it glowed even brighter when she laughed. She was laughing at the sleeping people down on Earth. “How silly they are to get upset over such trivial things as money. Beauty - beauty in all things; That’s important. Go, now, child. Have your fun, and tell the silly people what I have said.” Then she closed her eyes and turned away and slept.

I zoomed on, in my little rocket ship, until I saw a falling star. He paused in his flight to speak to me. He seemed very old to
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be a star. Not at all like you might think. His arms were weak and
his gentle eyes almost made me weep. His glow faded rapidly, and I
feared he might wither away to dust right before me. He did not.
Instead, he took a velvet pouch out of his pocket and looked inside.
Then, he sprinkled a handful of what was inside into the air. Right
away, I knew it was stardust, what else would stars keep in their
pockets?

I questioned the star, “Why are you leaving?”

In a low, hoarse voice, he answered me, “I am going to go
and sleep where the other old stars sleep - in the ocean. A star is
only good as long as it can make the evening bright. It is time for
me to go and be with the other old stars. But if you go back to the
seashore on earth you can find me in the water, clinging to a rock.”
Then he fell away, tumbling through space to the sea on Earth. I
was sad until I saw that it had sprinkled some stardust on my
rocket.

Again, I made my rocket’s engine roar. I sailed away in my
little spaceship made for one. Hurrying, I passed Mercury and I
almost passed Venus too. But then I saw her face. She was breath-
taking. Her expression was peaceful. She wasn’t particularly smil-
ing, just being. Venus reminded me of her patron Greek goddess -
turning her position ever so slowly. She was aloof - she certainly
had reason to be. I don’t know if she even saw me. In awe of her
ethereal glow, I cruised on.

Next, Saturn came into sight, and right away, I wanted to
stop. Saturn was an interesting character. He was covered with a
layer of gold that had collected over the years and then stuck. He
was large and round, you might say fat, if you could see him your-
self. He wore a giant belt around his waist. As for his expression,
well it was so jolly that he reminded me of Santa Claus. I stopped
and visited for just a short while. Saturn, like Venus and the moon
was inhabited by some sort of creatures. They looked to me like
fish, but they were nothing like the fish we know. They wore shoes
on their ears and on their tail fins; and instead of swimming, they
walked.

I stopped one peculiar looking fish and asked him why he
wore shoes on his tail fins and ears. He made a fish face at me!
Then a bubble appeared over his head (the way it does in comic
strips) and it read, “Well, I’d look pretty silly without them!” Then
he bubbled to himself, “Crazy Foreigners!”

The funky fish left me confused. When I first saw Saturn, I
thought that the people who lived there would probably be happy
and jolly since Saturn itself looked so content. Why, they had more
gold on their planet than anyone could ever ask for! What I had
found was definitely not what I had expected. I even began to doubt
whether or not I was really seeing fish walking around wearing
shoes on their tails and their scales - who could be sure?

Feeling quite hungry by that time, I stopped at a little diner. Its name was The Fish Free, Meat Free, Taste Free Eatery. It was quite charming. All of their regular dishes, that on earth would contain meat or poultry, were made with tofu. I went with the garden salad. They didn't seem to care about the feelings of poor little cucumbers.

My waiter's name was Floyd. I believe he was a flounder. He was done working when I finished my salad, so he offered to show me around.

I really wanted to see the Big Dipper, which happened to be right near Jupiter, Floyd's home. I followed him in my space mobile made for one.

While I drove, I thought about some of the comments and human jokes I heard at the diner. The things I heard really made me think, "Maybe here on Earth we really do treat our fish poorly." I thought about starting a campaign when I got home; a Be kind to fish week or something. Or maybe just an "Honor Your Goldfish" dinner. But people might get mixed up and eat the goldfish.

Then Floyd left me at the Big Dipper, and went home to his wife and three guppies.

I heard singing coming from the direction of the Big Dipper so I called out, "Who's that singing?" Well I shouldn't have been at all surprised at who answered. It was the Big Dipper himself - singing! "Hey there, Hi there, Ho there. What do ya know there?" I was taken aback. Fish who wear shoes on their fins and speak through cartoon bubbles, sure that's feasible, but a singing constellation? That's wacky.

I felt rude for not introducing myself, so I said, "Hi, I'm Alexandra, and I'm from Earth and I've never met a singing constellation." He answered me with a chorus of "Hello, Goodbye."

I stepped closer to the Dipper, (by the time I left, we were on a first-name basis.) I saw that he was not only a constellation, but he was made of soups, too. He chanted in his melodious voice, "Potatoes, tomatoes, carrots and peas. Your momma says you got to have a lot of these."

I tasted his soup. It was good, though it lacked salt. He said that that was because years and years ago, his rival, the Little Dipper, was making chicken noodle, and dropped the salt. Well that was the only can of salt left in space. When the Little Dipper dropped it, thousands of years ago, it fell into the sea. Big Dipper told me that is why the ocean is salty. I told him that it was a really interesting story, but I really had to be getting home.

I sped home from my adventure in my space car made just for me, but I was reluctant to leave the capsule. I guess I should not fret. After all, I can go back again another night.