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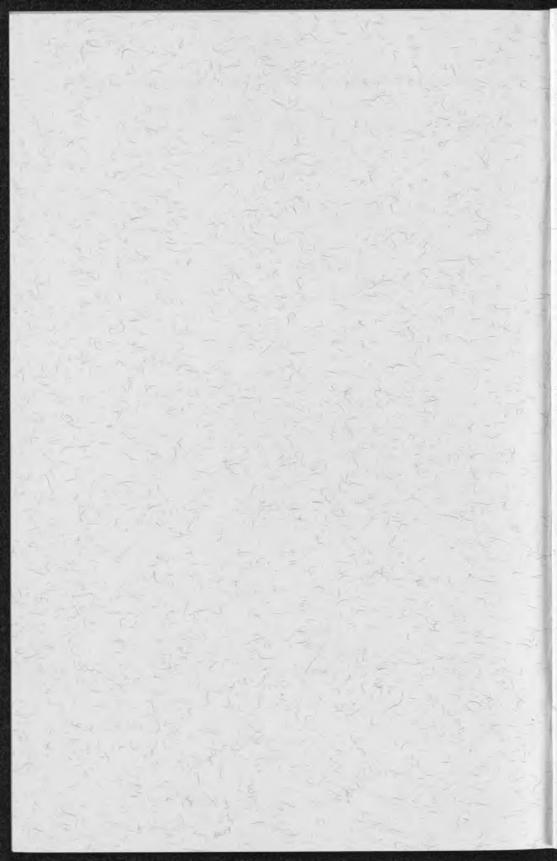


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The Jewelry Maker

from her book If you will give me your ears then I will give you my voice Leslie Floyd

My mother raised my sisters and me to remain virgins until we marry. It has not been easy. Yet I can always hear her voice say, "Men don't like damaged goods. They will respect you more if you wait."

Sometimes I wonder if men will truly respect me. When I tell people that I am a virgin, first their eyes widen as if they are waiting for me to say, "Sike, it was only a joke." Then they smirk and sometimes give a few comments, especially if they are not Christians.

Are you scared of sex?

Yes, because I may contract a venereal disease or become pregnant.

• Do you know that when you do have sex it is going to hurt? I will worry about that when I get to that point in my life.

· How about if the man you marry can't satisfy you?

I will love my husband and he will love me; with that love we will be able to learn from each other. Besides, he will be the only man I will be with for the rest of my life.

· Are you a lesbian?

No, but I am keeping a commitment to God and to my mother.I would like to be there with you on your wedding night.

Why? Perhaps you envy me because you won't experience a true wedding night.

However, I do receive some positive comments.

That is a good girl.

· You are not missing anything.

• God is going to give you a good husband, because we have some thirteen-year-olds that can't even say that.

I too have a question for all of the young people that are not virgins. Why don't you leave these men any type of imagination?

My friend Debbie, a co-worker at Food Lion, has often said, "I wish that I had a mother like you to give me some sort of direction." I respect Debbie's opinions because she is like a big sister to me.

I am glad that God has sent me a friend that believes that my wait is not in vain. She told me one day, "Leslie, don't you realize for a man you are a jewel — a precious jewel." That made me feel good because, having low self-esteem, I never thought of myself as being that valuable. Then I thought that in God's eyes we're all



jewels and He, being our creator, is the jewelry maker. In my shop I create a masterpiece for the world to see. One that you will look at and behold breathlessly. On my finger sits this ring that I created without a flaw. People have often said it is the most beautiful thing that they ever saw.

I have went to mines to find such a stone That, when perfected, I could call my own My enemies turn green with envy and cry Because they passed what I could never deny. They were fools not to appreciate something of such wealth. And now they can't blame no one but theirself But I the Lord, the Jewely Maker, am no dunimy.

And you could not buy this jewel with any amount of money. So, young people, hold on to your virginity. Remember that your body is a temple for God. Don't worry if these people don't appreciate you because someone's trash is always someone else's treasure. That is why we have garage sales and flea markets because something that you might throw away, I might decide I need for myself.

Falling in Love

Katrina Breitenbach

How do you know when you're in love? Is it when the touch of his hand sends shivers through you and makes your blood turn to fire? Is it when the rest of the world fades away and you have eyes for only him? Is it when you hang on his every word, cherish every glance?

Or is it when it hurts to see him hurt and you rejoice when he rejoices? Is it when your happiness ceases to be a selfish happiness and becomes selfless, wanting to give love, whether or not you receive? Is it trying to see things the way he does instead of always arguing?

Or is it just enjoying being around him — no matter what the reason? Is it the joy of studying the sculpture of his face, the glint of his eyes, the lift of his eyebrows? Is it learning to read the expressions of his face, getting to know him so well that you know what he'll say before he says it? Is it finding that you have picked up his mannerisms, his idiosynerasies, his pet expressions?

You are truly in love when your best friend becomes your



partner for life.

Two Lovers on a Dark Night

Maida Shore

Two stars shining on a dark sky, the only light to be seen. They are so bright.

Two small fires, alone, searching for a light in the darkness. Unity.

Each one, although similar, not sensing or seeing the likeness of their beings, as solitude overtakes them.

I view the two stars, alone, shining, and separated by a huge, black shroud.

Clothed in darkness, they search for their own love, but, also, without it, they are strong.

Backward Glances

Mandy Paugh

Staring at the blackness of the empty street I remember the past only to weep. Things of joy and friendships true are lost today, for pain and hurt mask the way. I do not know what went wrong or when, but I know I can't change the things that've already been. I wish I could find the words to speak to you, but the silence's been so long, I don't remember how to. So instead I say, "Goodbye." I'd rather let go than always cry.



True Friendship

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Katrina Breitenbach

What is friendship? What is true friendship? True friendship is doing things for each other Without keeping track Of who's done the most. True friendship is asking, "How are you really doing?" And carefully listening to the answer. True friendship is that unexpected hug For no reason at all. True friendship is offering Instead of being asked. True friendship is freely giving. True friendship is sacrifice. True friendship is a shoulder to cry on. True friendship is celebrating Even the little things As much as if you'd won the jackpot. True friendship is *making* the time To be with you. True friendship is watching your face light up When you're happy. True friendship is being there for you When you're hurting. True friendship is sticking together "Through thick and thin." True friendship is the hand on my shoulder During prayer time. True friendship is listening to you Instead of talking about myself. True friendship is being willing to share you With the rest of your friends. True friendship is not letting the fights Come between us. True friendship is caring. True friendship is understanding. True friendship is accepting our differences Instead of arguing about them.



True friendship is working out our problems Together. True friendship is quiet counsel And gentle criticism. True friendship is accepting that criticism Instead of becoming defensive. True friendship is patience. True friendship is humility. True friendship is recognizing, "I was at fault, too," And being willing to admit it. True friendship is love That never stops, never diminishes, And never gives up. True friendship is all this, And so much more. A true friend is what I've found in you. A true friend is what I'm trying hard to be.

My Destini

Mandy Paugh

Grow beyond set boundaries So Destini so loved cannot fall lost into the trials of life. Know security, but find experience to gain knowledge -Make dreams come true! Oh Destini, destiny is what you make it determined by your choices given in love from Him above. His will is your choice, but choose to grow beyond life's boundaries to learn that the trials of life are behind you - call it experience and your growth is knowledge. Destini — how beautiful! -dedicated to Destini Marie Arbogast



happiness

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Jennifer Gauntt

nothing is more important to me than your happiness if happiness for you is based on money, I will give you all that I have if happiness for you is based on love, I will be sure to oblige if happiness for you is being single, that is the way it will be, for your happiness is the world to me

Fear

Maida Shore

A feeling of dread creeps into the minds of beings, as darkness engulfs the world. A slow, dark mist overcomes light, no images to comfort me. _I feel afraid. vet excitement mingles with nauseating fear to form an emotion seeming, somewhat like exhilaration. I feel the hot breath of night, against my bare skin; and excitedly, I walk within the cursed atmosphere. A shivery breeze blows by, almost through my body. Dreading the emotion, I feel excitement. While I seem terrified of the dreadful night, I am in love,



with this sickening fear.

Thawing

Peter A. Romanov

The sky's dandruff has stopped cascading and I have started to appreciate the things that were given to me in June. Seven months this month and it's often that I wonder where all the time went. That late 80's relationship is becoming a blur and I stoop to see that eighth month taking its first steps. I'm not afraid to see the wall come crashing down. It spent its years being spit upon and drawn upon. It's even gained some height since its erection. When it tumbles, the noise has to be loud enough to reach the Forest because I'll know she'll come running and see that our link has been eliminated. Then she'll ask, "What have you done?" "I've grown!" I'll say. "I'm bigger than that humiliating wall." She'll stare with moist eyes and allow herself to be swallowed by the Forest. She'll mumble aloud, "I know his pain now." But no one will be present to hear it. It's time to sweep. It's time to dust.

Outside the snow sweats the ice cracks and the earth shivers, but inside there is a thawing going on that generates a smile.

Does Anyone Care Anymore?

O'ni Tanesha Green

- As I mope these lonely days away there is one question I feel compelled to ask
- As I look into the many faces day to day hiding that nagging thought becomes a difficult task
- At times I just want to scream and shout listen to me — I must ask — Does anyone care anymore?
- Does anyone care enough to know I feel left out so isolated I stay; locked behind this lonely door

Does anyone care enough to know how I feel



I'm living because I must yet I must also hide the pain -

The pain of survival, the pain of having wounds to heal yet it seems that no one cares — it's all about personal gain

To each his own — exactly what does that mean do we all live in that selfish of a world

Where everyone's struggles are left to be unseen Despite however many trials and tribulations were hurdled

Is there one who still accepts me in the human race or due to my many differences am I to become an outcast

An outcast from all the rest, left to feel out of place knowing that I will be one of those who always finishes last

Again, I'll ask does anyone care anymore?

Devotion

Melanie Minior

I came home today to find you Leaning up against the wooden beams of my porch. The sun was setting in your eyes And set fire to the auburn hair falling softly against your face. My bottom lip began to quiver when You smiled. You invited me to immerse myself Within your arms and I accepted. We stood together in silence Until the night sky bore its first Illuminated star, shining brightly upon The serene mountains in the west.

The night I realized that you were more important

Melanie Minior

I walked into the rain because I could Not sleep. Icy drops gliding down my cheeks,



Slowly dripping from the tips of my nose And falling to the motionless, damp ground. A sensuous wind whispers in my ear To echo thoughts remembered fondly Breathing deeply, tasting the minted air, I tilt my head back with gay contentment And start to smile at what we have become.

Feeling Feelings

Charles Arron Davis

I think I copped out there is definitely something that doesn't feel right like ripe tangerines on a frozen, snowy day blooming in a garden with tomatoes on the vine.

It seems different being here, trying to assign some kind of meaning to the fact that fourteen died.

Maybe there was some kind of meaning in the carnage. The red blood must have spoken mystery to someone,

But not to i. It just meant that fourteen died, and I still don't have a car and i still don't feel like I have a family.

Why does it happen this way, with this particular connotation, in this specific space... and no one...no one

I wish I knew I wish I could go back in time and ask if only i could...



Then I would see whales salty-sea-mist spraying, spouting wonders of the depths, riding into their affinity.

I would stand on tropic cliff tops, dizzy with the breeze of clipping gulls speaking in my ear telling me to jump...

Yet...i can do that already, and it doesn't change a thing i still don't understand

[untitled]

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Kate Mannion

She sweat. Beads of perspiration dripped from her face and underarms. With every step that she took, a sound was made as to resemble a clap of raging thunder. Her always-present smile was replaced with a straight face and a look of anger, hurt, and revenge. Her eyebrows, saturated with sweat, faced inwards towards her eyes. She was confused and disoriented in thought as her mind was overcome with pulsating rage. Her pace down the barren gray hallway quickened as her whole body shook with each step. Her long, lanky arms swayed such as a prehistoric man, but they only increased her voyage. She looked up suddenly and caught a glimpse of her target. He sat on the ground, alone and vulnerable, yet confident. His clothes were perfectly pressed and tailored to give him the look of a Saturday night heartthrob. He had an everlasting smirk that eluded to his awareness of his untouchable attitude he had tried so hard to perfect.

As she approached him, she began to remember all of the past. Her memories of feeling inferior, brainwashed to feel lucky being with "the most perfect human imaginable," or so he told her. As the past scanned through her mind, she became enraged to a more severe degree. A feeling that she could have only imagined in the past, she now felt. He looked up at her and their eyes locked. She never looked away, only stood in front of him. Feeling his disgusting presense just inches away, she opened her mouth to



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verbalize all the rage boiling inside of her like a witch's brew. Just before she could speak, he did. The boy apologized with words that meant nothing to him but only intensified her anger. All of the planning built up to this small but lasting moment in her life, he had ruined. Just as easily as he had squashed her confidence and self-esteem in the past, he did it again. While she once would have cowered and left the tense scene, her feet were instead firmly planted on the floor. She knew that she didn't have a choice; he didn't give her one.

Now, extraordinarily tempered, she channeled her rage, pain and abuse into the driving force behind her actions. Reacting with a mind of its own, her foot began to rise, followed by his eyes in disbelief and fear. She kicked him first in the knee, but as the power began to escalate, soon both of her legs and feet were flying. They kicked and bruised whatever they reached. His face, hidden between his knees, was awestruck and with his helpless limbs masking his weakness, he shook with fright and pain. He was unable to fight back. She was angered, excited, and exhilarated. Her arms were flailing around her like a wind doll caught up in a fall breeze. Her powerful legs bounced and hit the floor with every kick; the vibration merely echoing the endless sound of his head hitting the back of the wall — his dead end.

As tears flew out of his eyes, he pleaded for forgiveness and painless mercy. As abruptly as she had started, the girl stopped. She stared down at him as he peered up from his crouched position. Eyes bloodshot and puffy with a bruise on one ear and a stream of blood from his mouth, he seeked liberation. She longed to speak, but her thoughts were mixed up and contorted, such as her prim hair had become. She asked quietly and politely, however encompassing dangerous undertones, one question.

"Why did you apologize?"

She stared deep into her victim, once her "boyfriend," idol, admiration, lust, abuser, and enemy who didn't have an answer. He looked puzzled, confused, and misguided. What did she mean?

Pulsating muscles and a rapid heartbeat reminded her of the physical essence which had burned inside of her. She suddenly felt free and a smile of exhilarating independence crossed her face. "You'll never know," she laughed as a droplet of sweat escaped her brow and fell to the floor.

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mark allen

Charles Arron Davis

am a tormented soul

haunted every time the wind whispers hoo

> and i know who who else but myself and him

a brotherhood born not by blood but by the death of our living together

and in this game

someone always has to die

flesh (though weak compared to the spirit surrounding) is sloughed off and born again

with a face pock-swollen

and red-mouthed fury drained

bleeding in the twilight

by the smell of another's psychosis who could love him

standing in a fake wooden doorway glossy eyed and crying like the day of his origination

crying not because of a fist too broken to clench not because of a denim jacket torn in combat crying because of the nonelessness abandonment procures



a t.v. actor shines in the mirror next to my brother the actor gazes deep solitary confinement in those eyes

am a cuckold of the world and only watch as the man falls crashes lies maimed

and is enveloped by a great larvae

slime-suckled

erupting from the earth to take another prisoner

only watch

and cry tight-stomached at my surrender

> and if it is possible i am in love

Fairy Blood

Christopher Tate

Carl was a little boy when he first saw the fairies. He saw them on one of his many trips to his grandfather's isolated waterfront house. That night many years ago, Carl saw dancing lights emerge from the lake and fly in the air. The young Carl asked Grandfather what they were. That was when Grandfather told the legend of the fairies.

According to Grandfather, the fairies lived underwater and only came to the surface during the full moon to replenish their magical powers from the moon's light. Many people have hunted



the fairies for their blood. Supposedly, their blood had healing qualities. Many desperate people killed fairies and drank the blood to cure their ailments.

The legend of the fairies was one of the many stories that Grandfather told to Carl during his childhood. Now Carl was a grown man of twenty-five, and Grandfather was dying of cancer. It was so bad, the hospital sent Grandfather back to his secluded waterfront house because the doctors couldn't do anything for him. Family members now stay at the house to comfort the dying man.

Carl was the most upset person at the house. Grandfather practically helped raise Carl, because Carl lived only a few blocks away. He remembered the many visits he made to Grandfather's lake and the wonderful stories he told. Carl didn't want him to die. He couldn't accept it. He wouldn't.

One night Carl took his grandfather's boat out on the lake during sunset. There was supposed to be a full moon that night. According to the legend, the fairies were supposed to appear.

As night fell Carl waited with his butterfly net. The full moon was high in the sky, but the fairies had not appeared yet. Carl began to feel silly being in a boat, chasing after a legend. Those lights he saw years ago might have been a dream he once had. Carl had an active imagination when he was a kid.

As Carl began to start the motor, something incredible happened. The water began to glow dimly. Then balls of light shot out of the surface as if someone fired them out of a gun. The lights danced gracefully. It was truly beautiful and amazing. Carl regained control of his senses and captured one of the lights with his net.

Inside the net, the glow died to reveal a miniature woman with wings. Carl was amazed. Fairies did exist after all. Carl grabbed the fairy and took her out of the net. With his other hand he turned on his portable lamp and pulled out a knife.

The fairy's eyes widened with fear as the blade came closer. He was about to cut her head off when he noticed the look in her eyes. They were innocent, but filled with fear. He also felt her quivering in his hand. He couldn't kill her. Grandfather wouldn't approve of this. Carl put away his knife and released his grip on the fairy.

"I'm sorry," he whispered.

The fairy smiled and flew off. Carl started the motor and went back to the house.

There he was met by his mother. Her sad face told Carl that

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something had happened.

"Carl, Grandfather passed away fifteen minutes ago," she said. "I'm sorry."

Carl nodded and went outside to be alone. He began to cry. He had just captured a legend, but he couldn't kill it. Even if he had, it would have been too late anyway. Now he wished he would have stayed and spent those precious last moments with Grandfather so he could say...goodbye.

On a Donkey's Back

from her book If you will give me your ears then I will give you my voice

Leslie Floyd

My father and my relationship has greatly improved since I went away to college. I think he misses me, but he says that I have changed. Dad maintains a dignified manner. Sometimes he has a lot to say and sometimes he says nothing at all. The only time I remember my father crying is when his father died. He has only hugged me when I left for college and embraced me when I had my wisdom teeth extracted. Both of my parents are from the South, yet my father still calls us "colored." I told him, "Daddy, we are black now."

"In my day, to call another black person black was like starting a fight. So we are colored."

I often wonder if he feels isolated being the only man in the house. I don't worry anymore because he put my worries to rest when he said, "You know I am glad that I had all girls because I could keep up with y'all better."

He plays with church as if it were a game. He will go this Sunday and the next Sunday will not attend. I have expressed my concerns to him.

"You know, sometimes I cry myself to sleep at night because you are not saved," I said, wiping the tears from my face.

My father's lips became thin, his jaw tight. Then he said, "Don't worry about me, girl. Worry about yourself."

I don't know why my father is not more involved in the church. Out of anybody in my family, he can sing the best. When he plays his old gospel tapes, I can hear him singing and he sounds good.

Yet my father said something one night that made me realize that he is more religious than I thought.

It was my first night from college and my father and I talked.



We have never talked before because I never understood my father. We talked about classes, home, and church. He said, "I just don't know why pastors need to ride in Merecedes-Benzs."

I looked at my father and did not say anything. I knew what he was referring to — Pastor Stokes. The church in the summer of 1993 decided to bless the pastor with a Mercedes-Benz. I was happy for my pastor because he deserved it, but I think that my father thought that preachers should be poor.

"In my day it was Cadillacs. The pastor had to ride in a Cadillac, but now they want to ride in a Mercedes-Benz."

"Pastor Stokes is a blessed man," I proclaimed. "And maybe you need to be closer to God; that way you can be blessed too."

"Jesus never rode in a Mercedes-Benz. In his day they had buggy and horse."

"Yes, but Jesus don't want his children to suffer."

"I just don't understand why that pastor needs a Mercedes-Benz. He has two cars. I wonder if he's going to give one of them up to someone in the church that needs one."

"You know, Daddy, when Uget out of college, I might only make twenty-thousand dollars annually, but my pastor might make a million dollars, and I will be happy for him because he deserves it."

My father continued to win this argument. "Jesus told the rich man to give all of his wealth to the poor."

"You know, Daddy, if God gave you a Mercedes-Benz, you still would not be happy because you would always yearn for something more."

My father opened a calendar that his barber shop distributed yearly. He turned to a picture with Jesus on top of a donkey. "This is Jesus' Mercedes-Benz," he said.

What could I say? My father made a valid argument and he knew it. All I could do was pick up my pen and begin to write my poem.

My father once said to me, Why is it that we are so worldly? We like to ride in Mercedez-Benzs and Cadillacs When Jesus did not ride on anything like that Oh, but in his day they did have buggy and horse But my Savior rode on a different course Jesus rode on a donkey's back Not in some high-priced Pontiac And when he comes back he will not ride in a Volvo or Jaguar



He has no desire for any of those cars He will ride on a white steed And guide the flock he must feed.

A few days later I recited to my father my poem.

"Don't read that in church! That preacher will never let you say another thing."

I nodded my head because I believed he was right. Some members of the congregation might view this poem as a poem of spite.

LaFonda's

Alice Sink

By the time they've driven halfway to the beach, they are always tired of the scenery, weary of the music on the radio, and disgusted with traffic.

LaFonda's coffee shop is in the middle of a detour road that will, ultimately and in its own good time, take them to Highway 95.

The nondescript little cement building squats on the right side directly behind dirt piles and makeshift misguided driveways. A perpetual CLOSED sign stands propped in the front window. It doesn't matter what time they travel "LaFonda's" road. It can be eight o'clock A.M., noon, mid-afternoon, or late evening. LaFonda's plate glass always sports the same CLOSED sign.

Kathleen and her daughter Elizabeth play the LaFonda game: "LaFonda's not here. *Again*," one says, scoring mental points for being the first one to spy the sign. They'll talk for the next five or six boring miles about how lazy LaFonda must be. Just think of the killing she could make if she just had sense enough to open her establishment.

Last month Elizabeth made the beach trip alone. She came back home with a resounding, "Guess what, Mom. LaFonda's was opened and I stopped in for coffee. There really is a LaFonda, and she's just like we pictured her — big as the side of a barn with a beehive a foot high."

Elizabeth almost got away with the joke. Kathleen stood there, mouth opened, ready to ask questions. Then suddenly she knew. She was being duped.

"No, you didn't see LaFonda," Kathleen said matter-of-factly, disappointed but otherwise quite smug that Elizabeth had not gotten the first glance.



They went by LaFonda's again last Friday. The highway construction is almost completed. They won't have any more chances to crawl along the narrow little road that runs by LaFonda's coffee shop. They won't take time to get off the new highway.

LaFonda could care less.

Hope's Lost

O'ni Tanesha Green

"Hi there," she said.

"Hi," I mustered back, all the while wishing my father, my mother, no, I were dead.

After my pause and pacing walk

she looked at me and asked, "What's wrong?" "Nothing," I replied. "After all, who really cares?" "You're lying," she answered back. "Come inside. Let's talk."

Inside we went — I followed; she led "Now, I'll ask again," she said. "What's wrong?" trying not to lie, "Everything," I cried. "I've lost my smile, I've lost all hope, I've no reason to be strong, I'm better off dead."

"But sweet pea," she replied, "don't give up so soon. We'll find a way." "A way for what?" I yelled. "To make things better? I fhink not!" "Sugar," she said, "you're losing hope; have faith, all will be okay." "No," I said, "faith's lost, and so is hope. We've lost all we've got — Hope's Lost!"

She listened while I cried all the tears I could cry. No more pain and tears did I allow myself to hide.

And then, just before I was called to go she looked at me in the eyes and said "Welcome home, my child. It'll be better, I know." And with that she patted me on my head.



I left her at that moment still thinking that on the inside hope was lost. We're paying its high price. Yes, I suppose we've known it all along. But that feeling, we tried to dismiss or eventually hide because we all knew and felt that hope was lost.

Shuffled around from home to home, I had no other choice but to know that hope's lost.
My brother and I knew and believed that for us to live as a family Hope was Lost.
My mother knew too but was afraid to admit the fact that Hope was Lost.
Once again Hope's Lost.

Statement

Peter A. Romanov

ho hum love isn't dumb.

kiss kiss new lips and appreceiate the affection.

I have found like in the back of my university.

image of K?k?kay?ka? goin' away flowin' out of my colon.

trying hard not to poke or even probe a reflection.

nnnew love is here. it took about five years. sometimes I still linger on her faded face.



"stop it stupid!" She's got Jesussss and you've got HIS COMPENSATION.

An American Tradition

Jo Ann Hupperich

Travel west... "Little Red Corvette"

From Chicago

"Does anybody really know what time it is?"

to L.A.

"Ventura Highway in the sunshine ... "

2000 miles all the way... "Takin' it easy. Takin' it easy. Don't let the sound of your own wheels drive you crazy."

St. Louis

"Like a bridge over troubled waters ... "

Joplin, Missouri

"Whisper words of wisdom ... "

Oklahoma City

"As I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I take a look at my life...not much left."

Amarillo

"...by morning"

Gallup, New Mexico "Wild horses keep dragging me away..."

Flagstaff, Arizona "Reflections of the way life used to be."



Winona, Kingman, Barstow, San Bernadino "I stopped into a church. I crossed along the way..."

What a timely trip.

"I'm a 1000 miles from nowhere, and there's no place I wanna be."

Take a tip!

"Get your kicks on Route Sixty-Six!"

RAT

Kimberly Envall

Flat prism on the window Rainbows are not seen He's everywhere but not here He works to make his dark soul clean

