the true, the good, the beautiful
canon

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to sue, with love

—Max Van Vuuren
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The Iowa Treadmill

i'm feeling depressed. i had just turned off lou reed's femme fatal and tuned into "thoughtful living" as the station was about to go off the air. listening to the seventh day adventist minister made me nauseous. it began to occur to me that i was living a life of sin, a licentious existence on kierkegaard's aesthetic level. i decided to do something about my predicament, i decided to call the suicide help-line. unfortunately, my phone had been disconnected 163 days ago, so i began to scrounge for the necessary change to call from the pay phone on main street. if it had been any other night but sunday night, i could have turned in some cans while getting cigarettes and had some money to make a call, but it was a sunday night and i had awakened after casey's and kum & go had closed. my search thru the apartment didn't yield any coins, except for a few pennies scavenged from the crack of the recliner, but i did find a cigarette under a stack of papers and proceeded to light it up. the paper was opened to the editorial page, and i read a one line reply to the editor: "hey editor, jump!" i dropped the paper to the floor, grabbed my black, full-length, wool coat, and went out thru the back door. it was another atypical april evening for northwest iowa; crystal clear, the temperature around twenty degrees judging from the frozen mud puddles and glazed trees which formed a platonic world of reflections from the remnants of the rainstorm that had passed thru at dusk. i stared down at my reflection, curious if the black, smoking shadow was actually connected to me in any way. i shattered the thin plane of ice covering the puddle as i resumed my stroll to the phone booth on main. as i sucked down another drag from my cigarette, i was suddenly overcome with a strange, almost insane feeling of uneasyness. my head felt like an egg in a microwave about to be cooked until it exploded and made a mess that would have to be cleaned up by someone else. the feeling was short-lived, broken by the shuffling of my feet in the gravel and dirt alleyway. within minutes i was cutting across the park, and after one last drag, i flicked my cigarette and watched it glance off the frozen puddle at the base of the slide. i continued walking, taking the deliberate steps that were bringing me to the phone booth. soon i found myself talking to the operator, pinning the phone between my head and right shoulder as i fumbled for another cigarette. as i lit the cigarette, i heard a voice, a voice that seemed to have come from a tremendous distance, perhaps it had traveled for light years across the solar system. i heard the voice of the operator ask if the stranger on the other end would accept the charges. the stranger replied: "no." so much for the suicide help-line. well, at least i had my cigarettes. i decided to take the sidewalk home for a change of pace. as i walked down the sidewalk i couldn't shake the feeling that i was on a treadmill; that despite all the movement, i wasn't making any progress; that i was trapped in some sort of strange loop called iowa. i can't make up my mind about anything. i just seem to drift on the sea of the "absolute relative," never knowing anything for certain. sometimes i get seasick. how can 1+1+1=1, as in the case of the trinity, yet normally it is 1+1+1=3? if 1+1+1 is no longer certain, what is? my existence? but i don't want to fall into descartes' trap, and besides my existence wouldn't amount to much anyway. perhaps i could combine kierkegaard's aesthetic life with descartes' reasoning. then i get "i drink, therefore i am." actually, i think it's more like "incognito, ergo sum," which is a problem because latin's a dead language and that means i'm probably dead with it. there i go again, using that d--- word, "probably." i must really be hung up on this undecidability thing. but what the h---, i mean if plato was busy with questions about what the true, the good, and the beautiful were, who am i to bitch about being lost in the 20th century world where 1+1 mayor may not = 2. but i digress. i should keep my mind on what i was going to say, but i have already forgotten what i was going to say, so i'll say something else. i'm feeling queasy again, like i'm suffering
from jet lag or am lost in a world that uses a different verb tense. it must've started this morning when i read the news that the russians have all those hitler clones.


**600 Hitlers cloned by Russians**

kind of scary, eh? but it could be worse, they could have cloned the bee gees; what an awful weapon that could be if it ever got in the wrong hands! but that isn't as terrible as the most depressing thought that entered my mind in eight years. can you say, "george bush?" well, i decided that taking the existential leap of faith wouldn't get me anywhere right now, except for a seven story fall into some very hard, concrete reality. and although i am condemned to be free, i think i'll procrastinate and postpone any big decisions until after election day.

"in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increases knowledge increases sorrow."
-ecclesiastes 1:18

a-non

—william meyerhoff
The Unshockable 80s

Not much shocks 80s people. As an 80s person who remembers the late 60s and early 70s, I can testify to that. Take hair, for instance. Any facial growth beyond eyebrows was a challenge to nervous officials in Christian colleges of the mid-60s.

As a reporter for my college paper in about 1967, I interviewed a visiting member of the college's board. After the interview, he asked me a question, "Why was I growing a beard?" Proud of my scraggle, but caught off guard, I mumbled something about being King John in the drama club's coming play. Which was true but was not the main reason I gave my own heart for growing a beard. Vaguely, at least, I saw it as a small way of breaking away from standards, standards that did not appear to have biblical foundations.

In the next few years, at Christian colleges as elsewhere, hair sprouted in all conceivable spots on the male face. It crept down along the ears, across the cheeks, slithered over the upper lip, and dropped over the chin to the neck. School officials who saw creeping facial hair as a slap at authority learned to relax. They had to.

Today, they or their successors, like most of us in the 80s, are not all that shocked even by today's "outrageous" haircuts. Yes, we live under a different order in the 80s at Dordt. Much of that order is in place because of the late 60s and early 70s.

What those years did for me and, I'd guess, for many others was to break the automatic connection between conservatism and Christianity, between middle-class mores and evangelical faith. It helped me see that, like conscientious newlyweds checking for dust in the house before mother visits, every corner of life should be checked for the fine powder of traditions that have settled and cover the real norms that should guide us. Some of us, sadly, broke a few valuable antiques in the process of dusting, but at least we dusted. We saw that we couldn't assume that because something was tradition it was also biblical.

But is the unshockable order of the 80s more biblical than the order that was shocked in the late 60s and early 70s? Before we answer that question, it would help to say what the character of the 80s is. If hairstyles are any indication, it's hard to pin down. Surveying the mug shots in my 1980s Signets, I'd say the 80s have only a thin character of their own. In 1982 when I first came to Dordt, a few males still had hair down to their flannel shirts. Lately those hairstyles are gone. Now many sport new wave cuts. A year or so ago, there were 50s flattops. Many women seem to go with the fashions of the local salons, and many men opt for the eternal non-fashions of the barbershops. Look at a Signet from, say 1965 or 1976, and notice how much like the others everyone's hair is. Maybe that is the 80s character: you wear what your subgroup likes. At least there is some freedom in the 80s.

I think that freedom is good. It gives everyone a portable easel for personal expression. Remember, Francis Schaeffer, who was in the older generation during the late 60s, showed he understood the cry for freedom in his time. He let his hair grow and wore Swiss knickers, besides.

My only concern here is that not being shocked by outrageous hair could allow some to drift into the anarchy of the age without anybody noticing. It could then be too late to catch their boat and pull it back. Is our liberty real Christian liberty, or are we letting some people drift? Christian liberty, remember, is not following your own personal disorder, rather it is enthusiastically following the order of God's new Kingdom—where there's room for differences, but not for faithlessness.

Another area where we in the 80s are more free is in the music we listen to. The music of the late 60s and early 70s seemed to nudge many Christian young people into a more serious consideration of pop music and especially rock and roll. They learned to really listen to music, instead of dismissing it or accepting it unthinkingy. The Beatles' Sgt. Pepper album arrived on our campus. My friend Rick Quinn, who
South Africans visit Dordt
was a cultural antenna (the first to buy new albums, the first to wear a Gene McCarthy button) had the album. Several of us sat down to study the cover and savor the music.

The sounds that threaded out of the speakers were glorious to us. The rhythms were glorious to us. The rhythms were new, and there were instruments (tubas), and sounds (a brass band), and topics for songs (getting old) that were not supposed to be used in rock. The sentimentality of much rock was missing, or buried. In spite of the references to LSD, the music seemed so fresh and wholesome it was like rolling out of bed after a sweaty summer night and having a shower.

If my experience was like other people's, the freshness and richness of this music made it not only attractive, but defensible. I often felt uneasy with the ultimate spirit of that music, but I argued that it had something undeniably good that praised the Creator in spite of itself.

That is partly why Christians began to make music in rock and other popular styles. They sensed that this music was not unredeemable. Its liveliness and energy could be infused with a Christian spirit that could speak to young people in the believing community and in the secular world.

Here we are in the 80s. We are more free than Christians were two decades ago in that we can listen to and make the music of our choice. We review rock records sensitively in college and church publications. We feel free to form Christian rock bands, some of which have done undeniably well. But again, with the freedom is danger. By domesticating rock in the Dordt community, have we stayed critical of it? Sometimes I wince when I catch a line blaring from a campus radio that's tuned to KG95.

A third area where we are more free in the the 80s is our social and political action. Here, too, the late 60s and early 70s opened us up to participation in our society. Until then, Christians weren't often heard from as a distinctive group, so people were sometimes amused and startled when Christians did begin to show up on the social scene. A friend of mine who went to an anti-war demonstration in 1970 carried a sign that read "a Calvinist for Peace." Several people he talked to thought it was a joke. One inquirer thought he had found the last of a species. "Are you really a Calvinist?" he said, "Are there any others?"

In the late 80s, after a rest probably due to exhaustion and skepticism, activism is back on campus. Here's where I see the most hope at Dordt in the 80s. Groups like Defenders of Life, Students Active in Christian Service, and the Community Outreach Program seem to be thriving. PLIA sent out over 70 students to work among the poor last spring. During my college years, it was thought that students should exercise their faith helping others, but it was done almost exclusively through established college programs. At Dordt recently, organizations have sprung up spontaneously and operate alongside the traditional programs. From my freshmen speech courses and private conversations with students, I sense that these campus programs thrive because of the faith and vision of those involved.

I do have one concern in this area, though, involving student activism. Much of the political activity I've watched in this Presidential campaign and the one in 1984 seems to be inspired by a different spirit than what inspires the social activism of Defenders of Life. For example, a year ago I spoke with a student no longer at Dordt who was an outspoken political conservative. When I asked how he related his politics and his faith, what I heard was anti-communism and faith in America rather than biblical principles. Maybe he isn't typical. I know there are some students here who have worked at thinking biblically. But they seem to be fewer than those who equate Christianity with conservatism or some other tradition.

I also wonder why so few students at Dordt seem interested in the Association for Public Justice, an organization which has worked hard to define political positions on the basis of the Bible, and which originates within our own Reformed tradition. APJ has articulated "public justice" as a biblical, governmental principle.

When I look at Dordt in the 80s, I see a melange of hairstyles, I hear both Christian and secular rock, and I feel the earth move a bit when I see students gleaning grain or marching for the unborn. The 80s at Dordt look to me like a time of more freedom. But they look more dangerous, too.

—David Campbell

canon 9
Quotable Quotes From Dordt's Silent Majority (from an article by James Schaap titled "The Church, The School, The Dance" circa 1970. The article was about square-skipping and the quotes were taken from a student poll).

"The feeling one gets from the 'feel' of modern dances and the movements of the body arouse physical urges and desires."
"...if it would cause a stumbling block for others it would be wrong."
"Modern dancing is suggestive and dirty."
"This thing should not exist at a Christian college if it is to retain that name."
"If one considers such passages as I Cor. 6:12...one cannot in good conscience square dance."
"But if you think that (square dancing) is Christian, other things in time become Christian as well. This is a modernist approach to things. Christians are permitted to get as close to the 'Downfall Peak' as possible, let's face it: Dordt College is getting more and more liberal every year. And if we keep the same rate, someday our Christian wonderful college will be just a regular, nothing special college, not Christian."
"...Typical secular infested thinking..."
"If the previous decision of Classis was based on Scripture, then why does the Bible now say something other than it said before? "Christian freedom isn't freedom of choice."
"Square dancing is fun for the old folks;"
"...they are trying desperately to be modern and they are 20 years behind."
"...the college is 80 years behind the times."
"i think the whole business is rather silly."
"How long would it take before the lights go out and the music gets faster."
"Next thing you know they'll ban dances at the Community Center."
"Dances could really be good here if everyone was Christian in their thinking and purpose."

The Bible didn't condone it then, it doesn't now!"
"First step toward the new attitude at Dordt."

of a typical Dordt student...
When Lightning Strikes

It's raining out now. The constant rumble seems to come from the blackening thunderheads at the place where the road touches the sky. It's coming down so hard I can see for only a quick second through a triangle the wiper makes as it whizzes across the glass.

I can't keep my mind on the radio anymore. I've been trying for the last two hours not to think of anything but the music, the road. There are still nine hours to go before I reach the home stretch, before I see my family, before I see my sister. I imagine I am driving past the garage just outside of town with its gas pumps that look like orange-eyed robots at night. I can see the steeple of the church across the street from our house. Soon I see the two pine trees that block the view from my bedroom window.

She'd called nearly a month ago—my sister. We didn't write much during the past few years, we called each other often. We had always gotten along remarkably well. Unless we were arguing about something silly like who forgot to turn the curling iron off, or who should get the shower first, we really got along extremely well. She's four years younger, just finishing her third year in high school. We aren't so close in age that we're competitive, and not so far apart that we can't communicate.

So when she called I knew something was wrong. She didn't call me Stanley, or any of my nicknames. In fact she asked for Susan even though I picked up the phone—who else would it be?

"Hi Sue, it's Carrie," she said.
"I know."
"Are you busy?" she asked quickly as if she hoped that I was.
"No, not really. How are you?"
"I don't know," she said and paused. "Not doing much, I guess."

I sat down in the easy chair next to the phone and folded my legs under me.

"You're not partying again?" I asked, and then felt like I had asked a "suspicious aunt" or "worried mother" question. She had called me a few months earlier when she was at a party with some of her classmates. She hadn't been having fun, had had too much vodka and orange juice, and called me long distance on someone else's phone.

"No," she said.
"Sue, I've got to know something...I just want to know what you think of me." I remembered my own skeptical glances into the mirror while standing sideways and pulling my stomach in—I still do it.
"What do I think of you?" I pulled my legs out from under me and crossed them, the telephone cord was cold on my arm.

"Well, you know. Like am I responsible—ugly—what do you think of me? No one ever tells me."

I guess she was right. I mean we're all pretty sensitive about hurting her. It's like this. If anyone else had asked me what I thought of Carrie, I would have told them right away that she's beautiful. She has thick blond hair that reaches her waist, and a nice figure—it made me envious sometimes. But she also had a hideous—no, too strong a word—an unpleasant disfigurement. The entire left side of her face and neck was severely burned. It made her left eye droop, and her skin pucker. When she smiles, the left side of her face pulls downward while the right side is a perfect profile with soft, smooth skin.

"That was a stupid question," she said, "I guess maybe I shouldn't have called."
"No, honey, no." I said. "Just hang on a second."

I've grown up with her this way—her scar—it bothers me after I haven't seen her for a long time. But she had a great attitude about it. I didn't really think it bothered her.

"Well," she said.
"I'm not sure how to say this."

"I suppose I'm biased because you're my sister," I said, "but I think you're super."

"That's okay."
"I suppose I'm biased because you're my sister," I said, "but I think you're super."

"Great. I'm super. What is that supposed to mean?"

The broken spring on the back of the chair began to jab below my left shoulder blade, and I laid down on the floor on my back and
thought of how to define super.
"What brought this on anyway?"
"Nothing, really. Just tell me. Please."
I could picture my sister lying on her bed, staring at the flecks in the stucco ceiling like I was; it looked like an ocean of cottage cheese.

"I think you know how to handle yourself well, you know what I mean. But sometimes, being so far away, I worry about you."
"You do?"
She sounded surprised, probably flipped onto her stomach and stared at the wood grain designs in the door. "Why are you surprised?" I said.
"I don't know."

When we were younger, kids used to ask me or Carrie about her scar. They'd stay just far enough away to get a good look but not be affected by the "monster" face. When she got a little older we forgot the hot water and invented stories about it. I would tell people that she had been hit by lightning as a special mark from God. She would say that she was born to a human mother and a father from outer space. "Don't put those stories into her head," my mother would scold, saying Carrie wouldn't be able to cope with the simple truth when she got older. With the simple truth. She was scarred for life. I never really thought that was such simple truth. Once, when she was about eight or something Carrie asked me if I remember ever seeing a spaceship, because after all, she might really have an alien father and she might be beautiful where he came from. Maybe my mother was right, but the truth just wasn't as hopeful.

There was a buzzing in the phone line, and I could hear another voice very faintly on another line, someone far away. I couldn't make out what they were saying. "Sue—oh shit: this is hard to do."

Carrie's voice came startlingly clear. "You'll probably hate me."

I listened and stared at the ticking second hand on the wall clock.

"I know you never thought it would happen to me, but I'm—I'm pregnant."

I pushed my free hand down hard over my mouth—I felt like I was hearing a bad joke from another room, and didn't know whether I should be laughing or not.

"Sue?" Carrie's voice seemed to jump into my ear.

"You are kidding." I said, then thought it might have been a stupid thing to say. I sat up and hugged my knees.

"I wish I were." There we sat on two ends of a wire. "I wish you were here," she said. I didn't know what to say and told her so.

"You're supposed to ask me who the father is," she said and, I think, she laughed. I really didn't know what to ask, I didn't know what to think. I snickered, too.

"Okay, who is he?" I asked. I couldn't believe I was asking her this, like I was asking her who was taking her bowling or to the prom.

"It doesn't matter—you wouldn't know him. We're not getting married, we're not—I don't know—in love."

It was strange. I couldn't feel any strong emotions at the time, but I felt as if I should have been crying or something for her sake. "This is kind of a shock," I said. "I wish I didn't have to hear it over the phone."

"I know, Sue, I am really sorry," she said. "I'll bet you are." I had meant that she was sincerely sorry, but it came out sounding sarcastic. We were both quiet for what seemed an unbearable time, as if we were watching a play in which the actor forgot his lines.

"He's not an alien, is he?" I asked, and heard in her voice that she was smiling.

"No, he's pretty human."

"How did you know, did you ask him? Did you check his head for antenae? He didn't have any weird things growing out of his back," I asked.

"As a matter of fact there was something wrong with this dude, he had three arms, funny I didn't think anything of that before." We laughed, then talked for a while longer. She said she didn't know yet what she was going to do, but that she thought about it every minute of the day. She said she didn't think she could have an abortion, and she was appalled that she had even considered it as an option. She said one night she'd thought of just packing up and leaving, but then she ended up setting Mom and Dad on the couch and telling them. I couldn't believe she'd done it—tell them. This was all so crazy.

But when I hung up the phone, I was angry. I kept walking around my kitchen table trying to imagine my sister in bed with anyone, anyone touching her where no-one
should get his slimy hands near. She was sixteen for God's sake. He probably, and I pounded the table with my fists, he probably turned off all of the lights so he couldn't see her face! I went into the bathroom, threw my clothes onto the floor, turned the shower on until it was just a little hotter than my hand could stand, and got in. She was probably flattered that someone was attracted to her. My back hurt where the water hit, and my legs and hands turned red. It wasn't right, it wasn't even normal. He used her, she didn't know any better. He took advantage of her low self esteem, which I didn't realize until now. He probably didn't even want to think about marrying the girl with the monster face, even though she had been pretty good in bed. What a jerk, I even knew exactly what he looked like. And now, somewhere inside her flat abdomen lay the beginnings of a baby, two dark eyeballs and translucent flesh like the fetus pictures anti-abortion pamphlets show. I picked up the soap and lathered my hands until they were white then scrubbed myself all over. Then I stood under the shower head, face first, and rinsed for about ten minutes. She was a child. I shouldn't have moved away. She's scarred for life. I turned off the water with my red, wrinkled hands.

My boyfriend Ron came over that night, and we ended up getting into a fight. I told him about Carrie and he said I should think more rationally, and yes he knew she was my sister and it would be difficult, but that maybe she was at fault as much as the guy. I told him to shut up, but later when we were sitting together on the couch and he was combing through my hair with his fingers, I thought that Carrie should have just as much right as anyone else to feel this much for someone. I even thought for a minute that maybe, and Ron kneaded my shoulders until I thought I would melt, if she kept the baby, she would be happy and have someone to feel real affection for. Then, after I'd convinced Ron to leave, I realized that nothing, and especially not love or affection, was that easy. I wished I didn't have to think about her anymore.

My mother wrote me a letter explaining everything. She said Carrie had been seeing a man she'd met in a bar "of all places, when she wasn't even old enough to drink legally" and she shouldn't be drinking at all." Mother said she hoped I hadn't given her any ideas—she said she was hurt and disappointed because Carrie had enough problems already. Mom said I had no idea how hard it had been for Carrie to feel accepted by her peers, and that she had obviously gotten in with the wrong people. She said she'd tried so hard to raise us as moral and Christian young ladies, and had always trusted both of us, although now she couldn't be sure anymore. I did feel bad after the letter. I hated the way my mother seemed to overreact, but I thought if I were in her shoes, I wouldn't have reacted any differently. I even felt like I had missed out on something in Carrie's life when I moved away, when I had always thought I had known her so well and that it would always be that way. Mom said that Carrie was planning to keep the baby—she thought it was foolish, and that Carrie should put it up for adoption. Mom said she hoped there wouldn't be two accidents in one family ("though I hope I don't even have to say that"), because she did not think she could handle this if it happened again. It wouldn't, I wrote back.

Then I decided to go home.

I don't want to think about it anymore. The road is dark except where the headlights reflect on the middle and side road markings. A blue sign looms beside the road with white restroom, telephone, and restaurant symbols in a neat row. I need to stretch my legs and use the bathroom. When I step into the long blue and white restroom, an enormously pregnant woman and a little pony-tailed child emerge from a stall. I stand and stare at her flower-printed stomach, and she gives me an odd sort of tired smile, then washes her child's hands under the faucet. The air is cool, and I stretch my legs and arms, touch my toes a few times. The air brakes of a semi-truck hiss. My car is dewy, and I write my name in the window just before slamming the door shut.

I remember what happened the morning my sister's life probably changed forever. It's not perfectly clear—I don't know what I remember, what has been told to me, or what I've invented.

There's a red tin kettle of hot water on the
kitchen table. Mom tells me not to touch it. She walks to the stove to turn off the burner. I check to see if she's watching. Then I grab the kettle with both hands. It's hot. I yelp and drop it. Carrie is sitting on the floor in a ruffly, pink baby dress. Her smooth little face, her lotion scented skin, her soft wispy hair. She doesn't make a sound when the water hits. Not a sound. She is holding her breath.

I had never heard my mother cry. She sobs, but I think she's laughing. "My baby, oh God, my baby!"

She grabs Carrie and runs into the bathroom. My hands hurt, they're red, red as the kettle. I hear water gushing into the bathtub and run to see what my mother is doing. She's laying my sister into the water. I can't see her. My mother's hair is covering her own face, and she's still making funny noises. I tell her my hands hurt. She looks at me and her eyes are red, her face is shaking.

"Get out of here," she says.
I don't think she can be my mother. Her voice sounds like no one I know. I cover my ears because Carrie starts screaming. I run outside and sit under the picnic table. There's a blanket there because I had made a fort earlier.

I must have fallen asleep. I hear someone calling my name.

"Honey, wake up." It's my father. He stretches his arms to me under the table. He picks me up and smells like tobacco and bedtime stories. I tell him my hands hurt, and he kisses them better.

When Carrie comes back from the hospital, she's wrapped in white cloths that the doctor has to change every day. When I asked my dad if she'd get better he said he didn't know, he hoped so, but he just didn't know. How could anyone have known? I wonder what my Dad thinks now?

I see the Phillips station lights. The sun is already streaking the horizon, and I feel tension somewhere below my stomach. My watch says 5:03 A.M. I can still crawl into my bed.

I stand on the lawn with two huge suitcases beside me. Home looks like I never left it, except the trees seem taller and leafier—my first grade Arbor Day saplings. I haul my things into the hallway where a dozen shoes stand beside the shoe rack. The cat peeks around the corner and I bring him upstairs to my room with me. I crawl into bed. The same solid mattress, the same flowered sheets. The cat curls up next to my ear, licks it, and rumbles.

I hear someone come into the room. My sister Carrie is standing next to the bed looking down at me. The scar doesn't look as bad as I had thought it might after so long. We look at each other's faces and she pulls her's into a lopsided grin.

"Can I sleep with you?" she asks. Her hair is tangled around her face, and with her long flannel pajamas she looks no more than thirteen. I move over and lift up the blankets. She slides next to me. "I'm glad you're home, Stanley," she says.

"How do you feel?"

"Better."

I move my pillow so we can share it. Then I rub her back, and she rubs mine.

—Angela Struyk
Prairie Wraith

Walk along an Iowa farm fence;
feel the ground give, receive,
support each planted step.
Measure five even strides
between each fence post;
remember how it was sweated
into the soil,
    long ago piercing, pinning—
solid, stiff, immobile—man's claim.
Trace with your finger the weather-warped wire;
the barbed net of the buffalo,
and the Indian's thorn crown,
weaving, winding the pikes together;
man signing her tomb.

As you walk within these web walls beware
open gates and gaps.

There
the prairie—waiting wraith—may stretch
wide her mouth and swallow
you whole;

or worse,
    she may seal for herself
your soul, and sentence it ever
through fences to roll
    with her searing breath north west wind.

—Susan Powell

The Wisdom of Trees

Foolish trees!
All the tedious summer you have toiled,
have trained your arms for this—
to receive your rightful crown.
How careless now!
To spill it down,
to shed that golden cloak
to the callous ground.

And now, now you stand,
shorn, shaken,
stark naked and stone dead,
bled,
a glazed network of veins raised
against a sun-forsaken sky.
Leaving only sparrows
asking why.

—Susan Powell
Amber

She lived in Biggs' thoughts now that she was dead. He hadn't visited the cemetery for two years, though he had thought of her constantly, a hovering vapor circling his memory. A broken gas pump after last fall's harvest prevented him from visiting her then, and he promised her he would not be caught unprepared again. A fortnight ago inspired by the wind and an unfocused longing, he had decided to make the trip. And with the harvest over for a month and the gas pump working, he had no excuses not to go.

The graveyard was 600 miles across the barren desert, located at the outskirts of a desolate ghost town. The town had been intended as a resort by a group of land speculators, but the war had ended their hopes and a number of their lives—two or three were in their own graveyard. Biggs had counted the stones once, recounting to make sure that there were 153. His wife was preserved in amber, and one of those marble gravestones paid her tribute. If she had been buried now, he wouldn't have had amber to capture her in.

He loaded up his '57 Ford pickup with a few weeks of food and an Army-issue sleeping bag, filled the two gas tanks with 40 gallons of gas, and turned off the electric generator that provided his house with energy. As he pulled on to the old highway, he watched the reddish dust diffuse across his rear view mirror until the dust cloud was all he could see.

Biggs was by no means a young man. He had stopped counting years after 75. The hair he had left was golden white. His eyes were also faded, registering only the palest blue. In his youth, he had bragged that his Roman nose was the only noble thing about him. His chin had about a week's stubble; it would be two weeks before there would be enough to be worth shaving again, and even then there was nobody to impress with a cleanshaven chin. He had been tall and lean all his life, the paunch never developing in middle age. He never had bulging muscles to speak of, but he accepted his body passively as he had accepted the loneliness of the desert after the war.

When the war had started over thirty years ago, he had moved to the desert to resume his quiet life. He had repaired the desert gas station that his father had bequeathed to him and that he now lived in. Biggs' father had built a bomb shelter under the gas station. And when Biggs had heard the news on his old Philco radio, he shut off his gas tanks and just as quietly moved into the shelter and lived off canned goods and read and reread dime novels that he found there. When he had reappeared three months later, he found he had few customers to sell gas to. He didn't expect to live much longer.

He took swallows out of a water bottle every few miles, but the heat of the day caused both he and his truck to overheat, so he pulled over to the side of the road in order to cool off. He wiped away the sweat from his forehead—perspiration is an indication that the atmosphere had changed since the war, he thought. Now to air dry meant to stand in the middle of the desert and let the water evaporate off his body. With his two wet handkerchiefs in his left hand, he jimmied the truck door open and stepped down onto the pavement.

He wrung the handkerchiefs out and watched the salty sweat puddle on the cement before disappearing. After tossing the hankies back into the truck from where he stood, he spread out his arms and formed a cross shape. His arms dropped when he tired of holding them up.

He forced himself to move back toward the Ford, but a few steps away, he stopped and slowly crouched into a sitting position. Sweat pricked through his skin as he listened to the wind, concentrating on its wavering. Having heard the sound before, he wasn't sure whether it was his mind imagining the wind music. His wife had always kept a wind chime hung on the ceiling of their front porch. He remembered that white house, sunbleached, vacant, confining in its thin walls. Then he heard the outbreak of gunfire, round after round, earsplitting, building to a crescendo as the noise drew closer.

canon 20
—Max Van Vuuren

canon 21
His mind cleared and he slowly stood, bending his body into correct posture. Moving again towards the truck, he pulled himself in by holding the steering wheel. Start over, he thought. The door closed and he twisted the ignition, pumping the gas pedal repeatedly. The engine finally sputtered to life, and once again he left a wave of dust covering the rear horizon. He gassed the truck and in moments drifted into a deliberate semiconsciousness.

Biggs had met the assistant at a travelling science side show in Santa Fe. The tent was dark, a single bulb the only light except for two rents in the canvas near the ceiling. Biggs said the atmosphere was perfect for a 1940s horror movie, and the assistant played the part, baring his teeth and laughing fiercely. The assistant then reached his hand out over the counter, and Biggs shook the man's hand although he had no desire to. Laughing, the assistant said, "How in the hell are you?"

Biggs didn't laugh, and he stared at the man. In the dim light, he saw the assistant was overdressed in his stained white scientist's smock over a fancy suit, his hair, brownish-red, long in the back. The man breathed with difficulty. His glasses, as thick and as large as two Petri dishes, convexed his eyes into little oval beads. A placard over his head read "King of the Jews." Biggs was about to ask this odd man what there was to see, but at that moment the man took his eyes off the book he had resumed reading and bent over to spit a mouthful of chewing tobacco into a spittoon. Biggs was close enough to barely read the faded gold lettering—The Book of Elektron.

Biggs decided against further conversation with the man and started a tour of the displays. He started with the stuffed alligator in the corner nearest him. He spent twenty minutes wandering around the folding tables looking at the various displays of butterflies, diseased human organs including a few phalluses, and a complete collection of preserved fetuses at various stages of development, labelled by month on the jars. Behind the last folding table a path led to two curtained boxes that resembled standing coffins. An "Adults Only" sign was posted on a front label at the top of each box. Biggs walked up to the box on the left and, pulling the curtain aside, stepped inside, the curtain falling closed behind him. His eyes took a few seconds to adjust. He flicked a glowing light switch. In front of him, an unclothed male—Gypsy: middle 20th century—floated in liquid. He turned off the light and backed out of the booth, shaking his head.

He stepped into the adjoining box out of the momentum of curiosity and turned on the light. A disfigured male was floating in the liquid, his half-bald head slumped to the side, his face a look of agony, his body short-limbed and harsh featured as if it had weathered. Homosexual—late 20th century—read the description. Quickly backing up, he ran into a card table he hadn't remembered seeing. On observing the hundreds of insects captured in amber on the table, his fascination grew and he started to finger the amber blocks. Now what if it were possible to preserve human beings in amber, he thought. The body could be preserved for an eternity. What then if in a few billion years the body could be resurrected? Biggs continued to wonder as he walked out of the tent and into the sunlight that caused him to squint and look away.

During the next two weeks, Biggs visited the sideshow numerous times. He discovered that the assistant, always reading the same book, had a loose tongue after all. To Biggs' questioning, the assistant had laughed about the placard "King of the Jews" being an irreligious jest. "God damn anyone who can't take a little humor, not that there ever was a God," the assistant had said. "I mean, hell, who can take a supreme being seriously? I might as well be God as anybody else."

After a few visits, he had discovered the assistant knew how to make amber from reading The Book of Elektron. He had explained to Biggs that "Elektron" was the Greek word for amber because rubbing a rag on amber created an electrical charge. The assistant had also said, "I can make amber so well that even those scientific supply outfits can't tell the difference. For every two amber specimens you see in a museum, I made one of them. In fact, my private collection is the biggest in the world. What I have here is only a mediocre sampling."

Biggs didn't know whether to believe the assistant's apparent lie, and so he asked
good-naturedly if he might borrow the book. The assistant's face turned angry and he refused with such a fierce "Go to hell!" that he couldn't catch his breath. His wheezing made Biggs nervous, and after the assistant's breathing became more regular, Biggs quickly left.

One evening against all his better reason, Biggs followed the assistant home, being careful not to let the assistant see him or suspect that he was being followed. A week later on a Thursday night, Biggs had decided that he must know what was in the book despite all the danger that stealing it might entail. After midnight, Biggs entered the apartment by forcing the door. He climbed the stairs to where he guessed the assistant's bedroom was. Only half way up the stairs, he could hear the man's loud, irregular snore. He walked through the open bedroom door and, with his eyes already accustomed to the dark, saw the book on the dresser. He didn't see the ashtray next to the book, though, so when he fumbled to reach for the book, he knocked the ashtray to the floor. The noise caused the assistant to turn over in his sleep but didn't wake him. Biggs had trouble calming himself.

With the weekend ahead of him, Biggs figured he would need until Monday to accomplish his plan. He didn't fear getting caught by the police before then. On Friday, he called in sick to his job at the pharmacy so he could read the book through. His wife was concerned since he hadn't missed a day of work in years. She asked him if he was okay, and he lied and said reading the book was important for his business. He hated to lie to her and he knew she could tell when he lied, but he didn't feel like making an elaborate defense.

His wife was a strong-willed but delicate woman. When they were dating, she would wear red lipstick to tease him into trying to kiss her. He played along well enough to eventually propose to her. She was the woman he loved despite her parents' objection to their marriage. Her parents had finally relented so their daughter could marry in the synagogue. As the agnostic son of an Italian father and a Polish mother, Biggs didn't see what religion had to do with their marriage, but he rode out the ordeal with the tenacity of a patient but committed lover. Only later did Biggs realize that he wasn't convinced that her parents were Jewish.

By Saturday afternoon, he had understood how to make amber, both from the notes the assistant had made in the margins and from his technical knowledge of chemistry learned from working at the drugstore.

After five years of marriage, Biggs was convinced that his wife was holding something back. Biggs considered that his wife was perhaps having an affair. But he could think of no other man except her rabbi that she saw frequently. She generally kept to herself, making intricate ceramic pots in the basement and writing a column on food preparation for their suburban newspaper. Mixed in with her cooking, she daily read the Talmud and the Torah, quoting her favorite passages of the day to him at their dinners which she prepared more often than he. Her favorites often spoke of "God's remembrance of His people" and of "Salvation coming from the Jews." He often found the words beautiful, even haunting, but didn't understand why she liked those passages best or why they even mattered to her. But the words comforted Biggs. He didn't believe her books, but if there was to be any salvation, he figured it would come through her.

When Biggs woke up mid-morning on Sunday, he found his wife staring at him. He returned her gaze, taking in her large blue eyes that always reminded him of the eyes in a Flemish painter's portrait of Christ. Turning her head, she smiled through the long, dark hair that covered half her face, quivered her lower lip, and leaned over and planted an uncentered kiss on his lips. If only your beauty could be as immortal as your soul, he thought.

His wife had recently talked of being honest with each other, and Biggs worried that his fears of her affair were about to be confirmed. She wasn't awkward with him, and this only convinced him further that she wasn't telling him the truth.

After an afternoon of leisurely reading through the paper and of watching Charleton Heston in Ben Hur, Biggs began to prepare the batch of amber in the basement. After nightfall, he climbed up the stairs and put a tea kettle on the stove. On Sunday evenings, he and his wife always had a cup of Pale Blue Ocean tea before going to bed. When pouring the tea, he

**canon 23**
slipped a heavy sedative into his wife's tea. After she fell asleep at the kitchen table, he retreated down the stairs and finished mixing the large vat of amber. He carried her downstairs, fearing she might wake despite the drug. He slowly submersed her in the sticky liquid, encasing his sleeping wife in the amber. He put her while still in the coffin-like vat into the kiln she used for firing her pots. He turned on the gas so the liquid could harden and went upstairs to pack. After four hours he went down to turn off the kiln so it could cool.

He took one last look at her in the kiln before he left their white house. I have now given you immortality, he said. Your body can now match the immortality of the gods. Whatever the secret you held from me, may it preserve your soul as well. As he walked to his car, he tried to understand what he had said.

About 100 miles from the cemetery, he saw the trees, motionless from that distance, the greenness still discernable, beautiful remnants of an age that had left few memories. His stomach began to cramp. The road was as straight as the line from his eyes to the trees. He took his hands off the wheel, bending over to raid his knapsack for a peanut butter sandwich. In years past, he always had jelly on his sandwiches, but now he was lucky if he could get a few peanut plants to grow in his greenhouse.

He moved his hands back to the wheel, taking his time, eating his sandwich, and squinting in the near blinding sunlight. His sunglasses didn't help much; ritual accounted for their use, and carelessness accounted for their abuse. They had been soldered so many times that their existence, like the old man's, was an anomaly. Out of a growing reluctance to be there again, he slowed the truck's speed as he got closer to the town.

He arrived about an hour before dusk, the buildings along First as he had remembered them, large, foreboding, and decayed. All of the town lay on one side of the highway because of an old territorial ruling that had used the road as a border. The business district had been destroyed before the war, and all that remained was Meyer's Gas. Biggs shut off his engine and coasted to a stop in front of the gas station. The pumps were old, but they had worked the last time Biggs had visited the town.

Meyer was one of the few who had survived, having died only a few years before. A short, astute man, Meyer when alive had had the wizened look of shriveled old age. His remaining hair had formed a horseshoe around his head, and his black eyes had the effect of looking in a mirror. He had been Biggs' friend, meeting him the first time Biggs had come to visit his wife's gravestone a few years after the war. That had been almost thirty years ago.

The first time Meyer had met Biggs, Meyer had told him, "I've survived two holocausts, despite being a Jew. It can always get worse, though. Most people forget that Hitler hated gypsies and homosexuals more than the Jews. The Jews just got the publicity." Biggs remembered thinking of Meyer as a survivor preparing for a third holocaust.

One of the last times Meyer had talked to Biggs, Meyer had asked Biggs his wife's name. Biggs had answered, "Her name was Evelyn." Meyer had smiled and said, "You haven't recognized me, but I was the rabbi she often came to see. She knew that you were always suspicious of her, though you probably thought she was committing adultery or some similarly carnal sin. It was really rather simple. She wanted to live forever, and she thought being Jewish would help. But it isn't that simple."

Biggs had found Meyer dead two years ago during his last visit. Years ago Meyer had told him to cremate his body. "I don't want to sentimentalize death," Meyer had said, "but I'd rather be a living memory than a decomposing body." So Biggs had done it, constructing a pyre of old boards Meyer had saved for the purpose.

He went over now to the side of the gas station where he had made the fire. Only a scattering of blackened wood remained, Meyer's body now enveloped by the wind. Biggs walked back around to the gas pumps. He noticed the sun low in the sky. After filling the two tanks of his truck, a slow process with the old pumps, he climbed in and headed toward the cemetery at the East end of town.

He pulled off the highway at the gravel side road, a half mile from the gravesites, deciding he would walk the remaining distance rather then testing the unpaved side road. The road to the gravesites was gravel,
its surface determined by the shortage of petroleum at the time of its construction. He grabbed his coat when he got out because the sky was darkening and the wind was picking up. He kicked some of the gravel to watch it scatter and see a plume of dust to rise. Just as he started walking down the path, he saw the moon had come up, a reddish-yellow light casting its pallor on the surrounding clouds. He would pass the unfinished foundations the developers had started but never finished. Illuminated by the moon, his watch read a quarter to nine.

Scraggly grass on the side of the road indicated he was getting closer to the abandoned settlement near the graveyard. The grass was long, but it was scattered in sparse chunks and in a few more years it would be gone; a stranger not realizing grass had ever been there would deny the possibility. Within five minutes, he came to the three basements. In the half light, they looked like archaeological digs, cautiously excavated and hastily retreated from, left for silt, sand, and dust to fill. From where he stood, he could see the grove of trees and he moved towards them.

The oak grove stood in front of him like guardians to a kingdom. His mouth was dry as he surveyed the cemetery from the outskirts. A grid link fence encompassed the graveyard, so badly rusted in places that a swift kick would knock it over. Biggs walked the few yards to the gate, and twisting his ankle on a broken bottle, he misstepped and fell. When his eyes focused again, he saw a shard of a green-colored glass with blood on it near his face. He felt little pain, but he decided not to get up until he had rested awhile.

He listened to the labored breathing of the wind. He tried to calm himself while he cautiously lifted himself to his feet and moved behind an oak tree. He listened for the wind again but could only hear his heart racing.

When he approached her gravestone, he could see it was leaning to the right. The land must be shifting, he thought. He stared at the name inscribed in the marble: "Evelyn Mariya. Born 1949... Died...." Meyer had died before he finished cutting it. Biggs began to weep as he bent down to touch the tombstone. Hearing the sound of troubled breathing interrupted his mourning. He looked up and saw the sideshow assistant, albeit stooped and a good deal older.

"I hope you've captured a fine specimen, Mr. Biggs," said the assistant. "I've been a very patient man."

"My God, I thought you were dead," Biggs stammered.

The assistant coughed, cleared his throat, and with a theatrical flourish said, "I believe you have something of mine."

"I don't have the book. I... I burned it."

"The book has its importance, but I wasn't referring to it," continued the assistant, stifling a cough. "It wasn't easy pretending to be disinterested and basically a nice guy. I'm not either, thank you. I wanted the woman. Both Jewish and female, she will be a great addition to my private collection. Now that you've led me to the specimen, she belongs to me. I finally know which stone she's buried under. As the saying goes, it's been good doing business with you. Perhaps you'd like a last request?"

Biggs watched the assistant take a pistol from the back of his pants. "You don't understand," Biggs said, almost choking on the words.

"No, you don't understand," said the assistant laughing. "You're going to die, and I'm going to have a new amber specimen. And if you do well in formaldehyde, I'll even consider keeping you."

Biggs appearance looked like that of a cornered animal. Angrily he said, "But... but, my wife isn't even here. This is a big mistake. I... I plead guilty of encasing my wife in amber. But what you intend to do is ludicrous."

"Don't exaggerate," the assistant smiled as he cocked the gun. "Still no last requests? Perhaps you'd like to quote a platitude or a favorite quote. How about one on saving yourself?"

Biggs didn't answer. His tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth, his side cramped, and his temples ached because of the pounding blood.

"Still no answer? It's just as well," said the assistant. "Hell, I'm not one to do favors."

Biggs heard the shot, and before death washed over him, he closed his eyes and saw indeed that immortality was no simple task.

—Kurt Hoeksema

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Kurt Hoeksema

canon 25
In his work *Walden*, Thoreau wrote "He goes thither at first as a hunter and fisher, until at least, if he has the seeds of a better life in him, he distinguishes his proper objects, as a poet or naturalist it may be, and leaves the gun and fish-pole behind."

When I was a child, our family used to do a lot of hunting. I have many memories of those times, but one incident in particular stands out in my mind from my eighth grade year.

It took place on a Saturday, the opening day of deer season and my birthday. Opening day of deer season is steeped in ritual and tradition for the Sawtelle family, and that year we were in top form.

I awoke to the gurgling and spitting of the Mr. Coffee Maker at 4 a.m., but I had to lie there until Dad brought me a cup of coffee. "Happy Birthday," he whispered, "up and at 'em." I continued to lie there until he'd thoroughly roused my siblings, at which point I began dressing while I sipped my coffee.

Dressing for the Opener is exacting: thermal underwear, old jeans, a flannel shirt, a belt with a hunting knife, and hunting boots. After gathering my license, tags, rifle, shells, binoculars, and billed cap, I went to the living room where everyone congregated for a breakfast roll. While we ate our rolls, Dad fired up the old Green Machine—our four wheel drive Chevy carry all—and with that unspoken signal we would load the car. Once we and our gear were aboard, Dad would go through the liturgy.

"Everyone have license and tags?"
"Extra shells? Shells in the magazine—not in the barrel."
"Strings to tie the tags on?"
"Binoculars?"
"Heart and liver bag?"
"Anybody remember to bring a deer bag?"

At that question, we'd all give the obligatory "no" answer so that Dad could remind us it was a good thing he had an elk bag which could hold two deer or we'd be in trouble. Dad always tried to teach us to think ahead.

Then we'd set out—a family, united in a common cause, an almost holy mission to shoot Bambi and Lightfoot the Deer.

On the drive up we talked about past hunting expeditions, about the deer that got away, and about the ones that hadn't, and speculated on the morning facing us. We also discussed where to start first, Buckeye Ridge or Buckhorn Mountain; that year we chose to road hunt Buckeye Ridge. The last ten minutes of the drive passed in silence. I stared out the window, thinking how the glare of the headlights off the heavy dew made the pines and brush seem frosted with snow.

When we arrived at our turnoff, Dad pulled over to wait for more daylight. We all coffeed up and Dad had to take his traditional walk over the precipice to relieve himself. We waited, talking in low, not quite whispered tones to keep from scaring the deer. Then Dad returned with a big grin on his face and his World War II style rifle in his hands, "just in case I stumble over a big buck." At last our wise leader would declare that we had prime hunting conditions. We set out once more.

"Look for deer, kids," Dad said.

We weren't on the road five minutes before the fog came, whirling about us, enveloping the mountains. Though we cussed it for the secrets it kept from us, we were touched by its beauty. It rose from the bottoms of the canyons and low lying valleys whirling and swirling among the trees, taunting and teasing us with glimpses of the treasures it concealed. As it caressed the landscape, it flirted with our imaginations, giving us a glimpse of a tree stump, a flash of a brush patch, always just enough to make us wonder if it was a deer's head peering around that stump, a flick of an ear, or a quail playing in a bush. Then, tiring, it moved on.

Once again, the sun was shining brightly, and the landscape had that clear quality one finds only in the mountains. Seven pairs of eyes watched with an intensity and concentration rarely seen even in church. Half my mind registered what I was seeing,
the other half constantly asked if today would be the day I finally kill a deer and join the ranks of the true hunters. I thought of how proud Dad would be, how my friends would envy me. Dad exhorted us constantly. "This is prime deer country kids," he'd say. "You could see a deer anywhere around here."

When I finally saw the deer I was almost startled. His shiny, silky-looking, reddish brown coat was so perfectly camouflaged against the manzanita and buck brush that it took a moment for my mind to register what I'd seen. "Stop," I said in a loud whisper. He stood broadside to me as if to show off his deep chest and long body. When he reached up to scratch his ear with his hind hoof, the muscles in his haunch bulged; his head was crowned with glistening antlers. I raised my gun, put a shell in the chamber, centered the cross hairs of my scope at the base of his neck and squeezed the trigger. I felt a slight kick from the recoil, heard a muffled noise from the explosion, and saw the deer go down. It gave a few feeble kicks and lay still. When I got to the deer, I was surprised at how small he looked against the dark hillside. Not only that, but his coat was dull looking and dirty and crawling with ticks; his antlers had dirt clogs on them where they were plunged into the ground. His brisket was soaking in a puddle of blood from his neck wound, a long dry weed was sticking into his unblinking eyeball.

Now the final ritual took place. I cleaned it. Dad always insisted that if you were going to shoot it you should have to clean it. He allowed no prima donnas. Then Dad anointed my cheeks with blood, and in his excitement anointed everyone else as well. Someone produced a heart and liver bag while I filled out my tags and tied them on. Then we threw the deer in the Green Machine and went in search of a Forest Ranger's validation. Because Grampa wasn't there, somebody had to say, "You didn't need to shoot it, the fall would have killed it," and "You just have to be lucky enough to see 'em and lucky enough to hit 'em."

With that said, the ceremony ended, and I was officially a member of the body of the Great White Hunters and we rejoiced with bread and drink.

As we headed back home everyone was talking excitedly, and I remember Dad saying, "No matter how many times I shoot a deer or see one shot, I never lose the thrill."

All my life I believed that was how I would feel too, but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't manufacture any excitement, there was no buck fever. Instead, my actions were quite mechanical, but nonetheless final for the deer. The fact that my relatively small gun could kill something of that size with such ease was impressive to me.

I have killed quite a few deer since the first one, and there is always the same coldness and awe I felt then—a fact which compelled me to stop hunting large animals since I left home. For a long time I've wondered why I quit when it meant so much to me. However, Thoreau answered that for me, and I now realize that my reason for hunting is quite different from my Dad's and possibly the rest of the family's. For me, it was the covenantal unity I felt with the family that was stronger when hunting than at any other time.

—Jim Sawtelle
Changes

A rush of warm air would greet me as I stepped out of the bone-chilling night air of a Minnesota winter, into the tiny foyer of her house. Grandma would answer my knock. "Oh, land sakes, kid," she'd exclaim when she saw my red nose and bundled-up body at her door. She'd hurry me inside the house and help me out of my coat, hat, scarf, and mittens. Then we'd sit down together and have tea—mine mixed liberally with milk and sugar—and we'd chat. Grandma would inquire about how my piano lessons had gone and about the health of my piano teacher, Deda. We'd play games and laugh and giggle, as if we were both young girls. It was always a disappointment when Mom would come to take me home. I can still see Grandma waving furiously in the kitchen window of her pale green house as we drove off.

Grandma was lonely living in that house after Grandpa died. She liked nothing better than getting the whole family—children, grandchildren, and all—together in her little house in Raymond. Every Sunday after church services, a bunch of the family would go to Grandma's for tea, coffee, and ginger snaps. Grandma Grace would flutter to and from the kitchen, trying to do ten things at one time. She would come back time and again with a tray of cookies or a pot of coffee, just to ensure that no one left feeling less than satisfied. On Thanksgiving and Christmas, she would serve the entire family turkey dinner with all the trimmings in the cramped quarters of her basement.

After her eighty-fourth birthday, Grandma Grace was forced to move into a nursing home because she was losing her hearing and becoming very forgetful. None of us looked forward to visiting her there. She'd always beg us to take her back to her "old home."

"But we sold your house," my dad would patiently explain.

"Well, there's got to be other houses in Raymond where I could live," she'd argue.

I could never imagine how Dad really felt about putting Grandma in the nursing home, and he wouldn't talk about it. After all, this was the same woman that nursed him, read him stories, and helped him with his homework. Sometimes I think it was difficult for him to understand what had happened to make his mother this wrinkled, stooped, forgetful lady.

After a visit with her at the nursing home, Grandma would give us all a tearful good-bye kiss and hug, and then follow us to the door and stand there. We'd turn around as we walked to the parking lot, and she'd smile and wave. As we got into the car and drove away, Grandma would stand at the door and wave and wave until we were out of sight. We'd all be really quiet in the car, each of us in our minds picturing Grandma waving, feeling a little guilty, even though we knew it was for her best.

That was quite a few years ago. I'm attending college now, but I go home as often as I can to visit my family. I can't visit Grandma Grace on Sundays anymore because she passed away this fall. It seems that each time I go home I notice other changes as well—little changes. My younger sister grows an inch or my brother gets a haircut. My parents seem to change the most, though. It's probably all my imagination, but they seem a little more practical and wise than they did when I was younger and living at home. My dad seems to lose a few more hairs every time I see him, and my mom is gaining a few gray ones.

Each time I leave home to return to college, mom and dad stand by our kitchen window and wave and wave as I drive off. I don't know why, but seeing them wave like that just gives me a lump in my throat.

—Jean Zondervan
Lawnmower

It was a bright and sunny day as I pushed the lawn mower over the grass, and my body itched all over from the dust sticking to every inch of my exposed flesh.

Suddenly, before I had time to react, I ran over a nest of rabbits. I stopped the lawn mower abruptly, and turned back toward the nest. I stooped my head to have a peak at the nest to see if there were any rabbits left. And much to my surprise, I saw three, teeny, weeny rabbits.

I was so delighted to see that the rabbits had survived the lawn mower, that I decided to leave the rest of the lawn uncut so as not to disturb them.

When daddy came home and noticed that the lawn was only one third done, he hunted me down and started to yell at me. When I finally got a chance to tell him why I did what I did, he settled down and said, "That's my boy!"

At the dinner table, daddy retold the story about how the rabbits survived the horror of the lawn mower. Then he gave thanks to God for the food and for saving the little bunny rabbits.

The next day was rainy and gloomy. A typical lake-effect fog had rolled in from Lake Michigan and shrouded everything in a somber, grey mist. As I stared out the back porch window, towards the lake, I saw three crows on the ground in the back yard. They were eating the baby rabbits.

—William Meyerhoff

The Baptism

you ask me
to walk you to the water's edge.
Nothing more.

silently
we await the nearing storm.

your eyes swallow me
as our feet sink
in the inky water,

you eyes beg
during our silent vigil.

no moon, only stars,
virgin snowflakes
cast across the obsidian sky,

the milky way is bold,
a white collar
against the priestly nocturnal ephod.

your catholic fingers
gently caress
my protestant...

feel the mourning
loon's wail,
taste the metallic lightening forks,

empathize with the widowed swan

like a portamento in the black water.

a spider piques
as we enter the water.
deep and deeper

until we are one,
believing only
in the night, in the dark

—William Meyerhoff
Old Loves for the Old Year

Mr. Carson has gained weight since his divorce. He learned to cook on a grill, and now he eats steak four times a week. Living alone in an exclusive apartment, he must make love to women on this couch I sit on. Does he enjoy it? Living alone, I mean.

Mr. Carson's daughter happens to be my ex-girlfriend. The three of us are here to celebrate her birthday. Her hands fumble to open one of her father's gifts. The yellow-specked sweater tumbles out, and she holds it at arm's length. Isn't it beautiful her father asks. She answers yes but you shouldn't have bought such an expensive one. As I feel the sweater she has put on, I run my hand across her back along the lines of her bra straps. Does she still love this? The sweater, I mean.

Mr. Carson, his daughter, and I sit around watching an old John Wayne movie. Over the spatter of gunfire, we talk about charades, dancing, sun tans, and graduation. We avoid the subject on all of our minds. After midnight, Mr. Carson walks her and me to our separate but adjacent cars. Wishing father and daughter well, I get into my car and turn the ignition. I don't want to leave. I don't want to leave old loves, I mean.

—Kurt Hoeksema
Several years ago, I as a young man found myself in circumstances which, although could not be avoided, were certainly not to my liking. My father, a struggling silversmith, greatly desired that I should continue my education at the esteemed university of Oxford. For myself, I could fathom no other course for my future than college. The dismal idea of silversmithing the rest of my life chilled my soul.

But, at the time, my father's financial situation was not sufficient to send me to Oxford. So we investigated various schools of reputable names but with more modest tuitions. The one we settled on was located far on the north side of Edinburg. To my distaste, it was far from any society suitable for a young college man, but my great uncle Eliot lived very nearby in our family's ancestral castle—a place willingly left by the family to Uncle Eliot because of its desolate environment and pervasive gloom.

To save my father further financial stress I was to stay with great uncle Eliot during school, my board and room free in return for sharing my company each night with Uncle Eliot. As I had not seen him since I was barely ten years old, I accepted the terms somewhat nervously.

I remembered him as a squat, bulky man, with a fringe of grizzled black hair encircling his squarish skull. A red complexion and a perpetually frowning countenance suited his dour personality. He had smoked a pipe when he visited, and the peculiar sweet scent of the tobacco remained as a memory of my great uncle.

A tedious bumpy carriage ride along the rocky coast, we arrived at the threshold of the castle that had been in our family for over two centuries. There at the massive granite doors stood great Uncle Eliot, and I took my first glimpse of the man in over eight years.

He stood at the door waiting as I pulled my sparse baggage from the carriage. As I thanked the driver, I glanced sideways at my great uncle for he made no move to welcome me. His face was as scarlet and dour as I remembered when a boy. But, wonder of wonders, his hair! Where once was bald, shiny pate, a thick thatch of black hair seemingly flourished. I gaped open-mouthed at him for an amazed instant before realizing that, indeed, great uncle Eliot wore a toupee. But what a toupee! It struck me as the worst-fitted, ugliest toupee I'd yet laid eyes on. The individual strands seemed coarse as pig's hair and dank and greasy as a beggar's scalp. To my shame, my great uncle's toupee repulsed me as soon as I glimpsed it.

Great Uncle Eliot stretched out his hand and beckoned me to him. As the coach rolled away, I gazed at the forbidding grey walls of the castle and nearly stumbled over a black cat that dashed through the massive front doors and disappeared into the gloomy darkness within. Something shivered in my soul as the wet wind blew me against my great uncle. He welcomed me with a gruff voice and we entered the castle.

The night passed pleasantly enough. After feasting on the roast grouse great uncle's servants had prepared, and downing a considerable amount of his excellent brandy, we sat by a marble fireplace nearly two times my height in the vast library. I brought him news of the family and we discussed the college I was to attend, the brandy tingling and warming my fatigued body until I could no longer control my yawning. Great Uncle escorted me to my bedroom door, bade me good-night, and walked up the vast, dim hallway to his own room. His toupee gleamed in the half-light of the candles and seemed to move a life of its own. I shuddered at the sight of it in spite of myself.

Once in bed, I drifted quickly off to sleep, exhausted by the day's events. But a chilling nightmare arose to interrupt my stupor. I was strolling near the edge of the castle property, along the periphery of a dense forest. Great Uncle Eliot appeared through the trees, smiling and gesturing. He was in hunting attire, a pheasant slung around his neck. The sun glinted off his hairless scalp. I looked at him, bemused that he'd forgotten his toupee and was about

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to make bold to jest of it to him, when in my dream I saw it. There, bounding behind great uncle Eliot like some tiny faithful hunting hound, came Great Uncle Eliot's toupee, glistening and pulsing with its own hideous life. I screamed aloud as the repellent thing writhed, slug-like, towards me. In the background, the sun glared on great uncle's teeth, bared in a dreadful parody of a gleeful smile.

I awoke, panting and tangled in my bed sheets. Silence reigned in the huge bedchamber. The fire crackled quietly, soothing my jangled nerves. Breathing deeply and dismissing the nonsense of my nightmare, I rolled over and attempted to fall into the comforting arms of Morpheus again. As I lay in the helpless state of sleep another dream came upon me.

I was alone in the library, studying my textbook by the ancient fireplace. Great Uncle was returning from a trip to town for business purposes. I stretched comfortably in my chair and glanced at the portrait of my great great grandfather over the hearth. Suddenly my breath caught in my throat. A greasy black wad of hair nestled on the open right palm of the portrait.

It loosed itself and fell to the hearth with a sickening moist sound. As I sat rooted with terror to my seat, unable to utter a cry for help, the grotesque object pushed its unspeakable form forwards. It clung to the edge of the hearth for a second, then plunged off the side, falling onto my cringing chest. The horror came over me in waves. I thought my heart would burst forth from my body as the long strands of lank, oily hair crept towards my chin.

Once again, I awoke, my throat pained from a lingering shout, my nightclothes soaked with perspiration. The fire had burned down to embers. I could barely make out the dim forms of the furniture in the room. My breath came in ragged gasps as I attempted to calm myself from this second terrifying nightmare. Why was I dreaming of my great uncle's horrid toupee? Gaudy and grotesque, it still represented no real horror to me. I shook my head, perhaps imbibing a great quantity of brandy had more of an effect on me than I realized.

I swung my legs out of the bed and was about to stand when I heard a faint noise near the door. I froze and strained to see into the dark corner. Suddenly, behind me I heard a soft thump. My heart pounding, I crept forwards to the fireplace and firmly grasped the poker. There came another soft noise near my bed. I waited in unparalleled terror as the thing appeared from behind the bed. My horrified eyes barely made out a black lump of greasy hair—my great uncle's toupee was slowly crawling towards me! The blood swam to my temples and with might made stronger by fear I rushed forwards and slammed the poker into the seething mass. It squalled, to my utter horror, and tried still to creep towards me. I hit it again and again till it no longer moved.

The poker dropped from my nerveless hands. I went to my bedstand and lit the oil lamp. Lifting it, I shone the light onto the hideous nightmare I had just fought. There in the glow of the lamp lay a bloody black mass of hair. I wiped the sweat from my brow and cautiously stooped closer to it. Then to my utter chagrin and alarm, I saw what lay before me.

I had just pulped my great uncle's black cat!

—Glenda Brandes

canon 33
Eve waved to her parents as she started her car. She stayed with them on the weekends when she was off-duty at the hospital. It seemed like every time she came back they looked older, more worn. Dad's hair grew more grizzled and grey, and Mom's skin seemed to sag from her bones. Eve cringed at her habit of noticing how her parents aged each time she visited, there was something cold-blooded about it. She wondered how they would look if she moved farther away and only visited once a month. She didn't want to think of her parents as old—Dad, too creaky to work, sitting in his easychair reading *National Geographic*; Mom forgetting simple things, with her hair, white and sparse, floating around her head. There was nothing she could do to stop the process, even as a nurse she couldn't keep her folks from growing old.

She turned her car out onto the rural highway she usually took for the hour-long drive home. No police patrolled it so she stepped on the gas to make it home before dark. Maybe she'd drop in on Mark. She thought about their semi-turbulent six months together. Their relationship had started off so seriously, each probing into the other's minds, that it seemed to Eve they'd forgotten to have fun. But now things were starting to relax between them, and Eve was really beginning to admire Mark's ability to spread himself out over so many different interests, which included horseback riding and photography.

She was singing to herself as she raced down the highway when two dots appeared on the road in front of her. Two brown starlings were sitting in the middle of her lane. Accustomed to birds being stupid and sitting in the middle of the road until the last possible second, Eve expected they would flap wildly to safety in the ditch as soon as she got close. But as the car sped towards them only one bird flew away. The other sat on the asphalt. She yelled at it in the millisecond before it disappeared under the fender, as if they were eye to beady eye in a dimension where humans and nature understood each other.

"No, no, get out of there!"

The bird blinked and vanished.

Hearing no dismal thump against the car, Eve hoped the starling had escaped. But she glanced back into the rearview mirror to see a small feathered body flopping and rolling over into the other lane. Its companion swooped down over the body in a movement like the rush of a mother to her child killed in a catastrophe or in a hit-and-run accident.

Later, along the same highway, Eve saw the red-spattered corpse of a deer sprawled along the side of the road, its wet entrails lying in the weeds, a crow guarding it from the fence. Another hit-and-run victim, she thought; we all have to die, it's just a matter of when and where.

She flipped on the headlights as she reached town. Mark would be home by now, probably putting the engine into his Corvette. He was a full-time mechanic and worked at it as a hobby at home. Of course, Mark seemed to succeed at anything he put his mind to, she thought. She turned down the narrow street where he lived and saw him out in the driveway bent over the hood of his silver car. The garage floodlights revealed a heap of tools and greasy rags next to him. He was lucky to have a landlady who rarely complained about her driveway looking like a scrapyard.

She was just beginning to get used to his permanently black nails and scraped knuckles. He looked up as she parked along the curb, and waved a blackened hand at her. His curly brown hair was damp with sweat. She got out, stretched, and walked over to him. "Hey, about time you got back," he said, hugging her with his elbows.

"Hi," she said, wishing he'd shave a little more often, as his stubble grazed her cheek.

"How were your folks?" he asked, leaning over the car's engine again.

"Ok." Her mood suddenly dropped—her parents were old.

Mark looked up at her. "What's the matter, babe?"

Oh no, not again, there's always something the matter with her.
"I hit a bird on the way home," she said tersely.
"Hey, don't snap," he said, giving her a long look. She sighed and kicked a tire.
He put down the wrench he'd been holding and wiped his hands on a rag. "Let's go for a walk."
What would a walk do, she thought. She said, "Maybe I should just go home." She could feel herself poised over a black mood and let herself fall into it. Why not? Her life was going nowhere, and she had nothing to contribute to Mark, or the world for that matter. Just the queen of mediocrity. She walked angrily down the driveway after Mark.
"Don't even want to hold my hand?" he asked reaching out to her, "Totally greaseless."
In a quick, childish gesture, she folded her arms across her chest.
"Eve," Mark said, stopping in front of her so she banged into him, "What's wrong?" His eyebrows met at a tilt over his nose.
"There was a dead deer on the road too," she replied. Now he sighed and tilted her chin up, forcing her to look in his eyes. She hated that. She hated being forced to do anything, and Mark did an awful lot of that.
He said it was good for her to be forced to broaden her world if she wouldn't do it herself, and sometimes she agreed. Small town life didn't lend itself to worlds of experience. When she went with him to his parent's home in Washington, he had taken every moment to show her all the state had to offer. It had made her feel slightly defensive for her simple Midwestern lifestyle.
"Stop it!" She jerked her head away.
"Don't be this way, talk to me. What's wrong?"
She cleared her throat and wondered why she could never fight a bad mood. "I don't know, I'm just in a rotten mood."
"Yes you do, come on."
He was pushing again. Irritated, she scuffed her foot against the curb as they walked. She felt like an emotional, unstable, useless boob next to Mark. If he got interested in something he could usually do it. Like the time they played golf together—it had been Mark's first time golfing and he'd really beaten her. She had been the best golfer in her club. "Why do you want me around? I don't do you any good." I don't do anyone any good, I even kill innocent birds, she added to herself.
Mark looked harassed, "Of course you're good for me. You don't know what you do for me."
"Yes I do—I complain, I hurt you, and I cramp your style." He tried to force her to look in his eyes again, but she stared at his mouth, watching his chipped bottom tooth flash as he talked.
"That's not true," he started. But she cut him off.
"What good am I? Look at all you do, I feel narrow and boring next to you. Not to compare you to me, but I feel like such a lukewarm failure. I don't fit in, not even you can understand. When I try to set goals for myself, they're too high to reach and I always end up falling on my face. I'm sick of it, life sucks, I want to go home." Her voice trailed off.
Mark stared at her and began walking away without a word. She clenched her arms against herself, turned off the road, and sat in the ditch, rocking back and forth. She could feel control leaking from her, rising off her like steam.
She saw a piece of glass in the dirt next to her and picked it up. Mark turned suddenly and came to her. His face was set and angry, "Why don't you just quit then? Why don't you just call it all off if I make you feel like such a failure?"
No, it's not you, Mark, she thought. I'm the one who can't do anything right, I'll never succeed, I'm not meant to be here.
He was waiting for a reply, but Eve couldn't think of anything to say. She rocked back and forth on the ground as he looked at her. "Why'd you even come over tonight?" he demanded.
She looked at him, "I came to say goodbye." There wasn't anything more she could say to make him understand. The piece of glass stuck her finger as she wrung her hands together. Maybe pain could be her penance for the hurt she caused everyone, everything, even flea-ridden birds.
Mark was walking to the other side of the road, muttering to himself. She thought he was leaving. Another failure to add to her life's collection. She scraped the glass against her palms, imagining the sharpness slicing through her skin, cutting barely visible lines in her flesh that turned to red in
a second. She gently prodded her fingertip
with the shard. It wasn't sharp enough.
There wasn't enough pain, not enough
penance. She stood up.

Mark looked back at her, shaking his head,
"I don't understand why you feel like a
failure, you've got so much going for you if
you'd just stop being so hard on yourself," his
voice cracked, "But what I say doesn't
matter, you won't believe me anyway." He
threw up his hands.

She looked down into the ditch at a beer
bottle. She slid down the bank, picked up
the bottle, stared at it as if it were a
talisman, and smashed it against a rock. She
didn't care if Mark heard the crash. She was
about to set him free. She held a shard in
her hand. Then she pressed the point of the
glass against her skin, cutting her hands
until the surge of blood split open the flaps
of skin, pulsed over her wrists, and dripped
on the grass. She raised them out over the
glass as if offering a sacrifice to a silent
god. Mark came running and sliding down
the ditch next to her.

"What'd you do? Oh, God, no. What'd
you do?" He grabbed her wrists and wiped
at the blood on her hands.

She felt the slow pump of blood from her
hands and started shaking.

"Why?"

"Why?" he asked again.

"I want to go home," she couldn't hold
them back; large tears fell on her and Mark's
clasped hands, diluting the blood. "I want to
go home."

He made her stand and examined her hands
under the streetlight. She remembered him
telling her once that he had a girl who cut
her wrists because he told her he couldn't go
out with her anymore. He ended up taking
that girl to the hospital himself. She, Eve,
hadn't cut her wrists. She hadn't really
meant to. Mark put his coat around her and
put his fingers over her wrists to slow the
bleeding.

"No" she pulled them away and looked at
the stars. Nothing had changed. The pain
absolved nothing. He knelt on his knees in
front of her. "No!" She pushed him away,
apalled at his lowering himself to her.

"Why won't you let me love you?" he
asked. She finally looked at him, his eyes
were swollen.

"I don't deserve love," she said after
clearing her throat.

"Who does?" He stood up and hugged her.
She held her hands in the air to avoid
bleeding on him. She felt tired, dulled, and
incomprehensive of Mark's calmness. "Let's
go home so I can take care of your hands," Mark said, pulling her up the ditch. She
wandered behind him on the road, looking
at the dark stains on her hands and
wondered what it proved. She snuck a
shamed glance at Mark. He smiled at her.

"I don't understand you," she said.

"Then we're even," he replied.

"You don't think I need help?" She
stressed the last word.

"No."

They reached his house and he took her
into the bathroom to wash her hands. The
cuts were long but not deep. She watched
the blood swirl down the drain He carefully
held her hands and looked in her eyes,
"We'll talk about it tomorrow, ok? Get
some sleep now."

She frowned but realized she was empty of
words. "All right." She caught his eye, "I'll
be ok." He nodded.

Back in her car, on the way to her
apartment, she knew why she had done what
she did. She hoped she wouldn't repeat it.
But she just wasn't sure. She was still, like
everything else on earth, born to die.

—Glenda Brandes

—Kris Van Zee

canon 37
Benediction

Tomorrow when you leave
and I go off to Moscow, or
to Austria and Washington, D.C.
or up the halleluia
street please forget
what we said
we might do when we
grew up because now we are
grown up and
not doing it

And before you shut the door
with the grace and peace of our Lord
remember to dust off your
shelf and vacuum under
your bed
because I don't want to
find something you forgot
and I will have to keep
forever and ever
tomorrow when you amen leave

—Angela Struyk