



Spring 2003

### The Canon, Spring 2003

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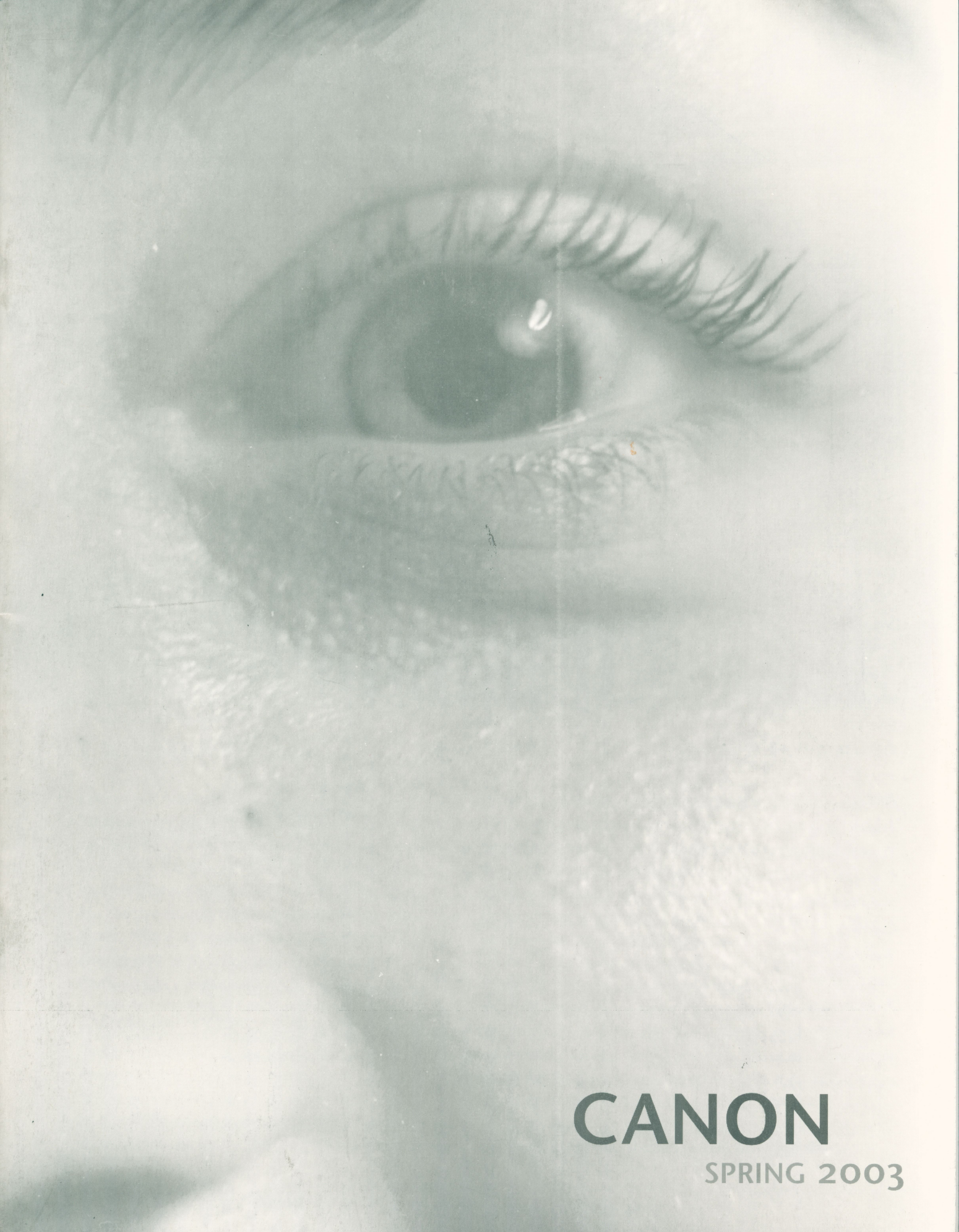
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**CANON**

SPRING 2003



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**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

Open your eyes.

Don't miss the details. It is through the details that we have opportunity to see, sense, enjoy and interact with this world, these people, this God we belong to. The offerings of art and literature in Canon 2003 expand on some details of our world, and we hope they alert you to details and ideas you have not observed or thought about before. If they do – if you touch life a bit more joyfully or thoughtfully or sensitively because of these works – then you will have seen what you needed to see. We, the artists, writers and staff, will have created a publication worth looking into – and looking through. So stay awake for it.

**EDITORIAL POLICY STATEMENT:**

The CANON accepts works from Dordt College students, faculty, and staff.

Every published piece should reflect the author's fleshing out of his or her Christian worldview. This does not mean, however, that the pieces should be only about God or should reflect a narrow definition of Christianity, for "the earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Ps. 24:1).

In adhering to the broad guideline above and in sensitivity to those who may be adversely affected by excessive violence, vulgar language, or sexually explicit content, the CANON will publish no piece containing such material, nor will it publish material that advocates illegal activities or promotes bigotry toward any race, sex, ethnic group, age group, or religion.

The CANON will also refuse any factual material that slanders a member of the Dordt community or is libelous.

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"steady" | Ann DuMez

## I WENT OUT WALKING

Jeremy D. Hummel

I went out walking tonight, and I saw a strange grey glow in the clouds, as if the stars and the moon behind those clouds were seeking to spy me walking below. The clouds looked like an endless quilt, wrapping this Midwest winter's night in their soft, warm glow. They were enveloping, all around above, and unmoving motionless, simply there.

Intermittently a light would pass over my head - street lamps along the glum-grey roadway. Beneath each, surrounding me now, above and below as I stood for a second in their brilliance, a tiny world of reality would gleam with frosty colours. The grey-black pavement

shimmered white-gold beneath clear patches of ice; brown grass lawns, crowned in tiny pale flake-lets of snow were dazzling within this little halo of luminescence against the shadowed backdrop of houses and yards. Beyond the streetlight's sight, as I continued on, the shadows themselves became alive with shades of browns and blacks. There was a dusky radiance in the world round about. The gnarled shape of an age-old tree, its branches reaching up into the darkness above, embraced a sun and moon it could not see. Its coal-black knots, like eyes, stared back at me, an intruder in this strange shade dream world.

I'd passed beyond the town and now the shad-



ows shrank to mimic corn stumps and ditch grass that lived here in the daylight. A gentle white drift reached into the open field, then passed into obscurity. As far as the horizon stretched, out to the strange union of grey-glow sky and shade-black earth, small couplets of white and yellow watched me walk. At times they would hide behind something unseen, only to reappear again to continue their watch. In a string like pearls around a smooth dark neck, these shimmering pairs of lights moved along in the distance, cars with their people, hurrying to their own time in this timeless night.

I turned again to the looming town shadows and reentered the maze. A podded vine tried to climb a pole to reach the light above; its dried leaves waved in the breeze. Beneath one halo danced a cast of shadow puppets, as the branches of an old tree played tricks with the lamplight.

As I had walked a fog had set in, the very slightest of mists, more a haze than a cloud. Now it spread the streetlights into wide yellow-orange orbs and projected sparkling slivers down to the ground and into the shadows. Amidst the dazzling nightlife, the shade was less sombre, more happily still. It smiled, and so I returned the favour.

I went out walking tonight, and I felt the chilled laugh of some winter wind spirit wafting into my face. Her frozen lips met mine, and for one long moment we stood there, joined in a strange, cold passion, until her restlessness pushed my warmth away. I licked my lips to fight the dryness she had left. Then for a while I walked alone, past comfortably warm-looking houses under the comfortably warm-looking sky. I sampled the air; I smelled it, and I tasted it on my tongue, but I could not say there was anything.

The wind returned as I moved along a treeless field road, and now it had with it an anger, perhaps enraged that I had forgotten so quick-

ly the moments we'd shared. Its nips, while cold, were soft at first, as if the wind spirit was teasing me to return to her. The frost struck against my cheeks and my nose and my ears, reminding me that I was mere man in this strange, chill realm. The wind grew colder still, and now it bit at my exposed skin and clawed through my protective jeans. Cutting through my coat, or perhaps under it or around it, the frozen air sent my arms and body into shivers. I could feel my own breath blowing back into my face, frosted and abrasive. For a moment, as the wind and the cold gained control, an ominous fear descended.

Even as I returned to the town, the winter spirit followed. Beyond the darkened panes of window glass was, I knew, a warmth unfelt to me. Did other men fear the cold as it sapped life and heat and hope? Did others of my kind understand this jealous lover that now assaulted me?

Yet suddenly something changed. For a moment the wind seemed to ebb, then blasted, as if trying to stop a new, earthy fragrance from reaching me. But the fragrance came, like the smell of a thick mat of grasses in the morning, or of a forest after a fresh rain, and with it came a strange warmth. My fear retreated and comfort enveloped, as if some fairer, more genuine being had wrapped its arms around me to shield me from the lustful wind. And while I still felt that wind throwing her fury against me, I also felt the peace growing deeper. I felt a stillness, an inescapable joy, and I knew that while the wind might taunt me with her false prospects, this feeling above all others was real.

I went out walking tonight, and I heard the smooth stillness of a land at cautious rest. A quiet permeated everything around me, yet it screamed out in this absence of sound. It seemed to wait, as if in expectation of something yet to come.

Off to the side a tree full of leaves clattered in a dried-out anthem. With each wind-inspired



moment it rustled and rattled, not to offend but to delight, or perhaps in delight - a phrase or a chorus. Another rattle sounded beyond me. It was a locust tree playing its pods in what breeze may have been blowing at that moment. To what the songs were singing, I have no knowledge. But maybe I do.

I strolled along without a sound, afraid to break the hush that was so pervasive here. The songs of the trees had been left for the silence of the fields, a barren nothingness; and yet there was something. I could not pinpoint what it was or from where it was coming, but it was there. A barely audible drone skipped across the frozen cornstalks, a hum which was the offspring of the field's weeds and the wind. As it reached me - almost nothing, and yet nearly more than my senses could accept - it searched me, coursing around and entering into my flesh until it pulsed within my blood and being. Before I realized it, my own voice tumbled back in reply across the noiseless field, to the source of the still earth's hum. I sang something then, I don't remember what it was, but I sang. It blended with the scuttling leaf along the road. Above me, as if joining what I had so infantly become a member of, tree branches clacked together, a measured rhythm in all the times and tempos our simple musics can relate, and then much more. We were as much a grand choir as any I have ever heard.

But then I stopped. While my voice melted, the flap of my shoes on the pavement ended, and the trees hushed their percussion melody, a new sound struck me. It was not a noise or a song but a voice, whispering in low tones that slowed my heart and softened my soul. The sound was like the wind as it spoke through the branches, not the branches responding in rustlings or clatter, but the wind's very voice. And yet I was keenly aware that it was not a wind, but another, whispering to me and to the sleeping world around, calling, "Listen to my choruses, my hums, and my anthems, that I give to this

dimly-lit, frozen world. I," its voice was peace; it was sound and volume and calm, focused by the darkness, by the silence, by the chill wind spirit biting at my skin. "I am making everything new."

I went out walking tonight, and as I moved, I became a living part of the ancient ritual that this place has played with men for countless generations. Around me darkness and mist blurred my vision, the winter wind kissed me with her bitter cold, and nothingness filled my ears with soundless music. I peered into the shadows and stood dazzled by the light as arbours embraced the grey-glowing sky and fogs sparkled star-like against the shaded townscape. I walked against the wind and felt her icy fingers tussle my hair, while the scents of renewal pressed all around me. I stopped along the road and heard the whispers of the fields as the trees clapped their hands and clattered in the unseen breeze, and amidst it all, I heard the voice of one far greater than it all.

I wondered why so many of my kind abhor that whispered voice that confided its mystery to me, its strange and raptured mystery of peace. Do they not hear the voice for all the darkness, cold, and clamour of the winter's night? Or do they hear and simply choose to let it pass? Do they hate the voice because it chose to reveal its peace to us despite our sad and weather-blown condition?

I went out walking, and I wondered why I am. What roles have I to play in the timeless rituals of this place? Who am I but dust, that I should live within a world alive with colour, music, warmth; that such a splendid, common grace should be gifted to me?

And while I walked I wondered how long my lease on this plot of dust would last; and where it would go; and what it would do; who it would meet, and love, and lose; and where, as the breath last left its lips, it would rest. And I prayed, and knew that all this nonsense was not just simply in my head. ~



I was halfway home last night  
when suddenly I stopped  
and turned.  
(I don't know why;  
it wasn't the stars, they weren't shining  
nor something i forgot and needed to go back for.  
Perhaps some rogue drop of Gypsy blood  
had infiltrated my veins  
and set my lust to wandering  
or perhaps just wondering what might lay  
on the other side of darkness  
or maybe it was just the thought of you  
perhaps walking next to me)  
but I stopped, and turned,  
and found myself in the middle of a field  
alone  
surrounded by the night



You said, "Don't look into it.  
It was necessary."  
Small Navajo children with dark skin and black  
hair  
washed clean of braids and velveteen,  
born again  
into curls and lace.  
And what else lived in that age  
of cultural envelopment?  
Chains in the basement?  
Soap in the mouth  
For one stolen moment of native tongue  
At school?

And you said, "Don't look into it.  
What can you do but drag  
your grandfather's name through the  
dust?"  
My grandfather  
brought his family from the northern ever-  
greens  
to the southern desert to serve the word of God,  
to pull a few from the drought of poverty and  
despair  
and the slough of sin.  
His whorled hand  
carried hammer, wrench, and mop  
to keep this school, this home  
a church.  
Mean well, love hard, Christianity.  
Conform, comply Christianity.  
Come out, come here Christianity.  
White, white Christianity.

You said, "Don't look into it.  
These people exaggerate."  
But how far can they exaggerate  
without the mustard seed of  
Truth?  
Jesus aiyo ashod neh.  
Ayoowante Nadaweeni. Nadaweeni Doole. \*  
Is truth confined to English?  
To curled hair and make up,  
Anglo names,  
and high schools?

Go out, transform, Christianity.  
Draw in, draw in, Christianity.  
Red, red Christianity.

Did you really think you could learn  
nothing of the Shepherd  
from men who spent their whole lives  
tending sheep?

\* "Jesus loves me. This I know." "Hallelujah, thine the  
glory. Hallelujah, Amen."



Some stripped by fall,  
others still clothed in summer's green garments,  
all stretch tall  
reaching to the sky,  
drinking in sunlight,  
swaying in the breeze,  
praising the One who is more faithful  
than the seasons.

Sometimes stripped by sin's devious schemes,  
other times remembering Christ's cleansing  
blood,  
always I stretch tall  
receiving God's endless grace,  
basking in Sonlight,  
overflowing with Spirit power,  
praising the One who is faithful  
through the seasons.



A small shrub  
Wildly growing  
Along the shores of the Mediterranean  
Like the Clover, Queen Anne's Lace, and Cattails  
Of a country road.  
The fragrant leaves and bark  
Captured in a bottle  
To perfume my hands  
Making Aphrodite jealous.  
I eat the rich blue black  
Berries from the bough,  
Their juice kissing my lips  
In a wild dance in the moonlight.







and so this dormancy  
awaits me,  
puckered skin settling  
into folds, years  
pressing down on a body,  
crumpling it to the ground.

in the eye of my memory  
you are ever the same,  
blue liquid-sparkle eyes,  
pumppernickel crumbs,  
a slippered shuffle down the walk,  
kerchief notted at the chin,  
tracing-paper skin, and  
walnut knuckles  
folding then unfolding  
in restless industry.

how long a road  
'til i settle into  
long brow-furrows,  
wrinkle-etched eyes and face?  
i waver with my fear and  
tremble for the joy of your turning  
the last fallow ground,  
readying the coming fall,  
eyes fixed on solace  
and promised company.



Across the field from where I stood, the man ran.

He was the enemy, one of them,  
yet a husband, and a father of perhaps three or four  
small blond children like my own.  
He may have been a simple farmer,  
a good man, like my neighbours  
who stood about me now in the constricted silence.  
Like myself, he may have been a baker,  
boasting the most masterful loaf in the countryside.  
Certainly, he was respected, honoured, and loved,  
but none of those things mattered  
as he ran from the gathered posse.

Scoping him down my barrel,  
Even my tears could not cloud the resolve  
that they  
must never learn about the Jews.  
So he fell.

Mystery:

How knots of yarn can single, double, triple  
hook you to me.

When you are gone

I'll remember your easy grace of hand  
and mimic the even links—  
if not their tightness.

I already copy your patterns  
the favorites also durable.

Corrugated colors in seemingly random dashes.  
Different skeins combined in rows of chain.

This exchange of knowledge is not easy to  
watch.

Your 80 single, 60 double-knotted years  
once greens and browns, now silver  
merging with my single chain  
in blue.



"and I put childish things away"

I put love away,  
Wrapped it up tight in faded  
Memories.  
It is snuggled in between  
The cracked jewelry box, and  
Dried, crumbling rose petals.  
It belongs with the forgotten  
Fantasies of childhood,  
The make-believe, dress up,  
The fairy tales that turned to ash  
in the harsh light of day.  
Let the yellow gown never worn  
be the keeper of this broken promise.  
And the jagged edges of this defeated  
Heart be the new guardians.





I eat this fruit:  
Succulent life breathing life  
from the creator-synchronized creation in the  
splendor  
of that first light  
In the cool of the night  
His goodness I taste and see.  
I eat this fruit:  
Blinding pride poison clouds my eyes  
Naked to the core  
dying I die  
Now rising, now rotten, red sun  
peeling in pain, uncovers my shame.  
I eat this fruit:  
Communion of the body, shed scarlet skin  
Battered and bruised to breathe new life in my  
soul,  
His white flesh rots,  
while turning raw red flesh  
unblemished as lamb's wool.  
I eat this fruit:  
Sweet inheritance of grace,  
plucked from undying branches,  
an enveloping, enthralling taste  
Eating, I stand with the throng inside the gates  
As the Creator smiles, and chews, and waits.



You can tell a lot about a person by what they eat, more than you can tell by looking, for example, at what they wear. They say that you “can’t judge a book by its cover,” and you “shouldn’t believe everything you read,” but no one ever warns against looking at food tendencies, and rightly so.

Bertram sat down at his table in the Curb-Run Diner. He pushed his glasses further up on his ample nose and wriggled far down on the seat so he could cross his ankles in front of himself. If he wasn’t leaning far enough back at the outset of the operation, his ankles, attached to a pair of very short, wildly bowed legs, evaded each other clumsily and his feet sprawled about haphazardly. Then there was that hot afternoon sun that flooded most of the diner from 1 ‘til 5 and made sweat beads pop-out all over Bertram’s face. Bertram carefully wedged his body close to the wall so that the stream of sunlight would bypass his shoulder and he could be cool while he enjoyed his meal.

When he was comfortable, he looked up expectantly for the waiter whom he knew would be standing there waiting to take his order. It seemed silly to Bertram that the waiter came to take his order at all, for he always ordered the same thing. Day in and day out, at 1:30 in the afternoon, when he knew the lunch rush had ebbed out, Bertram came to this out-of-the-way little diner and sat in this out-of-the-way little booth and ordered his lunch of grilled cheese and tomato-sauce with extra meatballs.

At first the waiter had cocked his eyebrow and asked Bertram to repeat the order, but Bertram, who hated repeating simple instructions, cured him of asking stupid questions very quickly. Now, in a manner that was half wariness and half hope for renovation in a strange, sorry little man, he stood to take the order of the aforesaid with pen in hand.

“I’ll have my usual,” Bertram waved

him off and opened his newest Stephen King novel. He’d read this one already, but he didn’t mind re-reading them.

The waiter’s shoulders drooped notably, like one whose fondest dreams are dashed in pieces, and he turned slowly to place the order at the kitchen. He walked away shaking his head and muttering something about crazy bachelors.

Bertram was unaware of any of the waiter’s mumblings, so absorbed was he in his novel. As a matter of fact, as long as Bertram had a Stephen King in his hand, it was virtually impossible to get his attention. If Bertram hadn’t read this particular story at least once before, and had he thus been more involved in the plot than he happened to be, the whole situation might have been very different; but on this particular day, at just the right moment, Bertram glanced up over the crest of his book.

Ordinarily, Bertram’s world remained relatively limited. It gyrated predictably between his job at the factory checking soda-bottle labels and his horror novels with intense exclusiveness. But here he chanced to look up at the table next to him and his gaze fastened on the prettiest thing he’d ever seen.

She was thin, almost wiry, and tall with short brown hair parted slightly to one side and tucked neatly behind her ears. Two large blue eyes peered out from behind a pair of wire-rimmed glasses that perched on a narrow nose that was strongly reminiscent of a beak. She was looking at him out of the corner of her eye every few moments as if trying to decide whether she wanted him to know that she was watching him, but now he knew, and he looked impressed.

Bertram lowered his book so that there could be no mistake that he was watching her now too, and a shy smile crept over his face. “Hello,” he ventured somewhat uninventively.



"Hi," she answered quickly, "I've been watching you."

"I know," Bertram smiled broadly then added by way of explanation, "that's why I started watching you back."

"I see..." the girl nodded. "Do you...do you watch girls back often?" She inquired tentatively.

"I don't often get the chance," Bertram answered with painful honesty. She was the neatest thing he'd seen since...well, truthfully, since ever. It was somewhat self-sacrificing to put himself forward the way he had done, but he never lied about anything so complex as flirtation. He was afraid that, if once he lied about his social experience, he would have to go on lying to cover his lie, and he so disliked complex situations. He was even about to go on and tell her that he scarcely spoke to anyone at all when the waiter came with their food. He set before Bertram the aforementioned grilled cheese sandwich and tomato-sauce with extra meatballs, but it was what he set before the girl that changed the whole interaction.

As the waiter was placing the food, the girl introduced herself as Guenevere. Bertram cringed at the thought of referring to anyone by such a flighty sounding name, but he resolved that it couldn't be all that bad. He even thought that he might learn to like it. Then the waiter stepped aside and Bertram's hopes burst.

There in front of the girl was a plate of vegetarian pasta primavera sprinkled with Parmesan cheese. Please understand that the diner was not at all in the habit of offering vegetarian pasta primavera on the menu. The pasta they had, for it was meant to be served with the sauce of which Bertram had grown so fond; the cheese they had for the same reason. But the primavera part would have been quite out of their league if not for a little coaxing. The fact is that this diner, quiet, unassuming, struggling along on very little business, existed almost entirely on repeat

customers just like Bertram. The kitchen staff was willing to humor any queer appetites if tolerance meant another regular customer. When the girl, Guenevere, had come in and handed the waiter a bag of broccoli, mushrooms, onion and garlic and asked him to throw it on the griddle with a little butter and toss it on a plate of pasta, he had done so without a second thought. The Parmesan was his own idea for added panache; it isn't often that a diner waiter gets a chance to be creative.

Bertram stared at the horrible concoction in front of his supposed darling with obvious dismay. "What is that?" he exclaimed.

Guenevere explained her meal to him with gusto. As a matter of fact, she spoke for a good five minutes about her love of travel and taste for interesting foods from different cultures. Her meal today, she explained, was rather ordinary for her tastes, but you can't very well carry a curried chicken in your knapsack, can you?

Bertram's head began to swim as she spoke and he rose to leave in the middle of her oration. The poor girl was left stunned in her seat wondering what had chased him off.

Bertram, for his part, was halfway back to the factory at a clip as close to a jog as his bowed little legs would tolerate. He should have known better than to get involved with a girl named Guenevere, but something told him that a name was only a handle. For that matter, he could have been right and she might have been perfect, he would have liked to know her better, but he'd seen enough to warn him off; the relationship couldn't work. He could forgive the name and her talkative nature, he could even cherish hopes of taming that traveling notion of hers, but the food problem was a different matter. After all, a man can only put up with just so much, and only a saint could bear the burden of vegetarian primavera with Parmesan cheese.





"Postcard from Hiroshima 1" | David Versluis



Could that first forbidden fruit have been an orange?  
A little world, golden on the Tree,  
a burnished ball on a filigree stem  
dangling from leafy heaven?  
the peel, full of bursting pores of promised life,  
bitter upon teeth and tongue  
as it splits, protesting  
this invasion like pages of a book newly bound  
or root-ridden toil of later earth,  
the fruit, a pulsing globe, coursed with living veins,  
glowing jewel encased in golden packaging,  
fitting for the kiss of Knowledge on the tongue  
and the ice in the throat?

How right it was to wrap the prize  
And thus make sin deliberate.

The post office beckons – a hard pedal down the busy street,  
our bikes leaning and twisting through small cracks not owned by  
cars, motorbikes, rushing pedestrians, street vendors.

Once inside, we weave through the nuances of a strange language.  
A shaky “Shir liu” trips out my mouth,  
and we start to count on our fingers.  
The petite postlady shakes her short black hair, smiles at our attempts,  
and proceeds to count the pile of postcards herself.

The stack of stamps slowly widens on the countertop  
until the postlady pushes them toward us  
and sends us shuffling over to the wooden table.

Four stamps per postcard and a bucket of glue  
feed my desire to run from the impossible, but  
I sigh, pick up the stick, and begin the slathering process  
with clumsy hands and little hope.

Postcard images of the Great Wall and the Forbidden City  
gush with color and captivate memories, distracting our tired eyes  
from the ugly glue bubbling from underneath the stamps.

Sixty-four stamps later, we slop sticky fingers  
back on bike handles, euphoric with our victory,  
a glue-stained triumph.



You speak of an ethereal ocean,  
Of twirling with fish that dazzle the eye,  
Of vast stretches of sand, and the potion  
Of sun with a wayfarer's languid sigh.  
The sway of sea and salty air throbs in  
Your trembling limbs. Exhilaration twists  
Your tongue and glows in your golden skin.  
As your memory of radiant hues persists,  
My wistful gaze wanders to the nearing night:  
Trees' shadows fall blue on far-flung drifts,  
And wind whirls flares beneath a faint street-  
light.  
I smile, then speak, my wavering chin uplift,  
"Your sun flees the frost, but the furtive moon  
Flings numinous diamonds on our pale dunes."

The lights are low and flashing slowly down  
on scattered conversations off the beat.  
They're fighting to be heard above the sound

of bodies moving, people turn around  
but no one moves, afraid to lose their seat.  
The lights are low and flashing slowly down.

Tomorrow night the people will be gone;  
to home, to bed they beat a fast retreat  
they're fighting to be heard above the sound.

No more silent stillness can be found  
or lonely corners dark and bittersweet.  
The lights are low and flashing slowly down

on heads now heavy, eyes bent to the ground,  
their sunken gazes giving off no heat,  
they're fighting to be heard above the sound.

For soon the lights will send them homeward  
bound  
but still they fill the silence of the street.  
The lights are low and flashing slowly down,  
They're trying to be heard above the sound.





**"Chicago" | John Hansen**

Five robins.  
Still covered in their embryotic-egg slime  
Peep incessantly  
From their nest perched  
on the rafters of our car garage.

I climb up, grab the nest, pull it down.  
My friends sputter and cackle  
egging me on.  
Laughing, I spill the birds on the cement and call the cat.  
It comes, eyes them, gulps one down, and  
Demolishes the rest, filling its stomach, while  
With a sudden violence, I empty mine.

A circle of ashen eyes around me  
Stare dumbly at the nest still clutched  
in my callow hands:  
a mess of sticks, twigs, and red string  
Not unlike the red yarn knitted into a blanket  
that had enclosed me warm in my bed  
as my mother called me awake.



Is this what Christmas should feel like?  
A kiss loses its meaning.  
Intimacy lost between friends.  
All hope loosing against the flicker of  
This fluorescent world.  
Nothing sacred anymore,  
Nothing to claim and hold on to and work for:  
The newspaper proclaims  
INNOCENCE LOST  
While the world turns eighteen.  
A dirty sock on a sled  
A winter embrace  
A yearbook reputation  
Another year to face  
Alone?  
Destination  
Restoration  
Contemplation  
Christmas bells are ringing.  
Innocence made flesh.



*"Watching In Reverse" | John Hansen*

## FRIENDSHIP, MAINE

Bethany Meservey

It was hot. Middle of August, so that was normal. Three men—one wrinkled and small, browned by the harsh sun; one younger and burly with corded muscles; and finally, a boy. Just a boy.

They crunched through the coarse sand and sun baked seaweed and up to the creaking slats. They stood quietly on the gray weathered boards of the dock.

"Smell that?" The big man asked as he spit out a piss brown stream of tobacco. Some

of it dribbled into his dark beard.

"Shit," he muttered without vehemence.

"Ayuh," replied the slouching old man.

The boy dangled his feet over the end of the dock.

"Fishing ain't been good," the man said matter-of-factly. "And then you got them damn, fancy shmucks from Boston comin' up and interferin' with our business. Damn tree-huggin' hippies." His gravelly voice ended on a snarl.



"Ayuh." But he trembled on the word.

"Bank foreclosed on Wilson yestiddy, and him with 4 young'uns. Second one this month."

"Ayuh," the old man barely whispered, as he shifted his slight body in the salty breeze. "He's gotta feed 'em somehow." He kicked at the broken slats of the dock with his big booted feet. Arms trembled slightly with the effort not to swing at something. Anything.

"Heard the sirens agin last night. Went on down to Simmon's place."

"Ayuh."

"They won't stop. Them's Simmons and Thompsons just won't stop, not even after that there incident with the lil girl."

The boy turned to the old man, an unasked question on his parted lips. But the old man said nothing, just looked out over the harbor.

His companion muttered quietly, "Someone's goin' to die, that right! Someone's gonna die. Why I heard tell that young Tommy Thompson's cousin attacked Wade Simmons at his home. But then the lil girl was Wade's." He spoke as if that explained it all.

The old man dug around in his canvas pant's pocket 'till he found the pack of gum and tossed it to the boy. He remained quiet.

"They's been jokin' about us, them townies have, saying our blood down here is un-naturally thick." He spit out the "un" as if he were afraid it would make him sick.

"Ayuh," whispered the old man as he fiddled with his jackknife.

"But well, Parker was over to the general store yestiddy buyin' three sixers. Told me that young William John, he a Simmon's cousin, I guess. Well he and his girl got a

phone call 'round 'bout midnight from a friend- a girl I heard it was-saying she was stranded out on the point," he paused-the old man continued looking out at the harbor, his body hanging loosely off his joints, seemingly indifferent. But his lips tightened.

"Asked if they'd come get her. Well off they went, 'cept she wasn't there, and five big boys-Thompsons and their gang of hoodlums prolly-jumped out and beat the shit out of 'em. Even the girl," he whispered it. Like a prayer. A small sigh escaped past the old man's lips in a single puff. The boy popped his gum.

"Ya, know that preacher's boy from up Thomaston way?"

"Ayuh."

"He was down here last week- good kid- attacked by some big, strange boys. Cops out here every night."

"Ayuh."

"Someone's gonna die," he said without qualm. "They's angry, they desperate." His voice shook. "It's jist so hard these here days."

"Ayuh," and the old man's shoulders sagged under his thin, red flannel shirt.

"What started it?" asked the boy.

"The ocean," breathed the old man. His knarled fingers trembled lightly as he raised them to his lips, in a seeming effort to stop the tide of words that would never come.

"The ocean?" Confusion etched his young voice.

"Ayuh." The old man lifted his head into the cool breeze blowing across the waves, turned, and walked back to his old diesel truck.

"The ocean," murmured the boy thoughtfully as he stood on the end of the dock. Thousands of fish floated on the surface of the water.

After the January slump  
that follows the scramble for tinsel and trees  
swarms of wary men  
wander into our shop  
below suspended paper hearts  
to fumble greetings cards and fresh flowers  
with tense fingers.  
I maneuver among them  
to the rap of the register  
and the hiss of helium.

Valentine, they say you were a martyr  
beheaded by Claudius for the Christian faith.  
On the eve of your death,  
you sent the jailer's blind daughter a yellow cro-  
cus so bright it penetrated the lock that barred her  
sightless eyes.

What do you make of this, your namesake,  
this red day  
of overpriced roses,  
candy hearts,  
stiff, stuffed bears,  
limousines,  
champagne,  
and discount diamonds?



Across a cup of conversation  
I laugh to you and you laugh back.  
You are my drug of choice  
    My feast of Kings  
Laughter and conversation...  
    Musical twenty questions  
You take my tempo  
    You temper mine  
Until we dance in couple time.

Across a tango at the masquerade ball  
You step to me and I step back.  
Forgive my two left brains  
    My two left lips  
Say that step again...  
    Hold on and don't lose count.  
I bend your way,  
    You beckon mine  
Until we dance in couple time







Great-uncle Frank, when I think of you  
I see your eternally dark blue bibs -  
the hot orange tag at the junction of the straps in back,  
the hearing-aid cord sneaking inside your shirt in front.  
While other old farmers live in denial inside their overalls,  
hoping their growing paunch will go unnoticed,  
you rest your unneeded cane, when standing,  
against a stomach as flat – or flatter – than any boy's.  
When crowded rooms become too loud for your hearing-aid to sort  
you sit with a dormant smile in your smile lines,  
your ready laugh singing out your location  
when a humorous tidbit penetrates your stodgy ear drums.  
I wonder, when you sit silent,  
Are you remembering the thick life behind you?  
-Experiences caught and ground in like the black grime under your fingernails?  
You, who somehow got my wispy, mouse-like great-aunt  
on a motorcycle (and other things she refused to admit to her offspring) –  
but that was in another era, when you had slicked-back hair and a world to conquer;  
You, who frightened nine-year-old me with visions of heart attacks  
by giving my brother a bucking bronco ride –  
when he was five and you were eighty-three – and winning;  
You, who lived solid and well  
in a world that shrank more away from you every day –  
and even then, you did not let growing old age you.  
Everyone left you behind, but you were still all here, for ninety-six years.  
Perhaps you were not the vestige  
but the gift of an era.  
While you lived among us, yesteryear was within reach.  
Now, too late, we miss what we did not know was ours.

this morning,  
as so many before,  
I twisted awake,  
thrashing aside  
my thin, too-often-washed quilt,  
stretch-testing my limbs  
and half-expecting  
to float  
up, into,  
through,  
the moist steam air  
of the shower.

this evening,  
as so many before,  
I slump into a bed of  
rumpled bed-sheet wrappings,  
twist myself round  
in a cocoon and  
imagine the day that  
I'll shuffle awake to find  
my wings.





**"Random Morning" | Beka Schreur**

Alone and occupied, I looked up,  
And in wonder realized his gaze.  
Strong and regal, he too stood alone,  
Wild master in his own domain.

Perhaps he had made a sound,  
Or perhaps our souls had touched and exchanged good greetings,  
But now we two creatures stood  
And held each other's eyes, motionless.  
Time and times passed, and our spirits together  
Spoke thanks to the greater Being,  
That despite our many pains  
Upon this shifting, broken earth,  
There in the waving maize we could find  
A tiny map of calm.

Then, still in silence,  
We parted, and he slowly turned  
And stepped over the horizon,  
As I returned to my preoccupations.



On winter nights my brother and I would follow Grandma  
Through the heavily varnished door into the little-used frontroom  
With the organ, stiff couches, and golden floral walls.  
We would take our shoes off like her  
And slide cold toes into slippers while she started to play  
Hymns first.  
Her little bootied feet moving as quickly as her hands.  
We would stand at her side.  
Child footmen singing treble to her melody.  
She would play from memory Grandpa's favorite,  
And then our favorite:  
The itsy bitsy bikini song.  
My brother and I would dancing whirl around the coffee table  
Doilies on our heads.  
A couple of wild Indians she said playing faster  
Until we gasped for breath  
And laughed and laughed  
Like the girls in pale photographs we would look through later.  
Young girls with arms linked and hearts easy  
When my Grandma was still Winnie  
And her bare feet ran fast in  
Yellow polka-dotted fields of daisies.



**"Spec-ulation" | Carol Hiner**



She -- the girlwoman -- is like an echo  
as she bounces phrases from ear to mouth  
tongues the words as seeds  
fills them, rounds them out  
'til, reshaped, they fly free  
new whispers in a listening fervor.  
Lovers discover each other  
Schoolmates become enemies  
Friends are reconciled.  
So she sounds her world  
For she is the echo.







Tonight I know I will not fall asleep  
Before bright waking dreams have filled my brain.  
My heart and mind have promises to keep.  
The promises in deeds I'll never reap  
Come dripping in relentless as the rain.  
Tonight I know I will not fall asleep  
Without hard victory and sweet defeat.  
I am a rebel, lover, servant, bane  
While heart and mind have promises to keep.  
The edges of my mind can feel rest creep  
But darkness will not penetrate my veins.  
Tonight I know I will not fall asleep  
Until my pilgrim stories are complete.  
My dreams of glory are my wakeful chain  
As heart and mind have promises to keep.  
My bedspread tangled in forsaken heap.  
I toss and turn with tales I can't restrain.  
Tonight I know I will not fall asleep  
For heart and mind have promises to keep.



