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The Fioretti (2000)

Marian University - Indianapolis

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Fioretti

Volume 59
Fioretti

A Literary Anthology

Marian College
Indianapolis, Indiana
Works of more than 60 years have been represented in the *Fioretti*. The name was given to the works of and about St. Francis. *Fioretti* means "little leaves" which is the same word as "anthology," as in, *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman.

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Non-Fiction

AWARDS

Tangibles
1st prize, Mid-West Regional Sigma Tau Delta Conference

My Cosmopolitan Education
1st Prize, Non-Fiction, English Club

Hero or Zero
2nd prize, Non-Fiction, English Club
I unpacked a few more boxes yesterday. I cleaned the glass, lemon oiled the frames, and hung a few pictures on the walls. A select, few trinkets and knickknacks have been lovingly placed about. Photographs adorn the buffet. Trying to match the traffic pattern of my tiny kitchen, I rearranged the cabinets for the third time this week. Before I can complete my exodus from "the marital residence," I need to move another ton of books and keepsakes, finish unpacking the boxes already here, call the Salvation Army to haul away the discards, and move the items for saving to my mother’s basement. As I sit here writing, trying to settle my thoughts into the space of my head, I ponder over what to do about the pile of perfectly good junk in the middle of the living room floor. I have a problem with tangibles.

I did not know the extent of my problem until moving after seventeen years in one place, and twenty years of marriage. That I had not been able to park in the garage for four years, every closet was packed brim-full, and the hall was lined with boxes should have been clues, but so far I had chosen to ignore them. The only time I was reminded of the multitude of my possessions was my yearly quest to locate every box of Christmas tree ornaments. I have a multitude of those, too. And every year, after the tree ornaments were put away, I would vow to myself that I would sort through the junk in the garage and closets, and have a garage sale. I never did.

I learned to be a great keeper from my grandmothers. Both grew up during the Great Depression. A time when my maternal great-grandmother sold quilts she had made for her daughters to pay the rent. A time when every piece of garbage was evaluated for possible future use, and saved accordingly. Nothing was thrown away, ever. My grandmother would crochet fine lace with cotton twine the cleaners used to bound grandfather’s shirts. She saved every piece of aluminum foil to use again to catch future spills in the bottom of the oven. Old, threadbare blankets were used as batting for comforters, the tops pieced with squares of fabric from my mother’s school dresses, my uncle’s pajamas, and grandpa’s shirts.
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Grandma would recite the story behind each patch as I traced the patterns with my finger.

My other Grandmother, my father’s mother, saved memories, not foil and twine. She saved pieces of lace sent to her by her aunt who lived in the Philippines. Her aunt had a servant boy, and a little pug dog whose name escapes my memory now. Pictures of her handsome, dashing father when he went to Philadelphia. His nickname was “Red” after his hair, and he was a butcher who buried his wife when Grandma was three. Plates belonging to her mother “made in France, of bone china,” she would tell me as she dusted them. How I loved all of those old shiny plates and pictures, and the stories. I have them now.

Of course, being the keeper they taught me to be, I took their belongings, gratefully, when they gave them to me. I bought the belongings of other women, the items they no longer needed or wanted. Most of them were cheap, a dollar or two, and I bought them by the sack-full at garage sales and flea markets. At antique shows and shops, especially the ones with a lay-a-way plan, I was much more selective. And I placed every precious treasure throughout my house, little piles and stacks, and baskets, and boxes of tangibles.

Now that I am moving, I am at the mercy of my tangibles. I am torn between what to keep and what to save. I love and want all of it, and that is now impossible. So I write, and sift through the mementos of my life’s journey and regroup it into the practical and the impractical, the needed and the not needed, the wanted and the not wanted, and it is hard.

What is it about four yards of sage green corduroy that makes me keep it? After nine years I haven’t made a thing with it. Why do I have thirteen boxes of Christmas tree ornaments? The blue jeans from high school have to go. I’ll never wear them again and why would I want to. I have a petticoat made of linen and hand-tatted lace, and the collected recipes of a stranger. In a bushel basket, with the name of the orchard printed on it, is my collection of dolly clothes made by the mothers and grandmothers of girls I have never known. Girls so much like me.

I have seen the pictures of the precious treasures that littered the Oregon Trail. Chiffarobes made by husbands for a wedding gift.
The chairs that rocked babies to sleep. Clocks from the stairway at home in the east. The graves of loved ones. Boxes of carefully chosen books to bring some culture to a rough and unknown place, and dishes “made in France, of bone china” once belonging to grandmothers. I know they grieved when they had to leave these items behind on the trail, when weight became the enemy of survival. I know why Lodisa Frizzel recorded in her diary in 1852, “… the heart has a thousand misgivings,” because my heart does. The weight of my tangibles has nearly destroyed me.

I watched my grandmother pack away, give away, and throw away a lifetime of memories when she had to move after grandpa died. I know why she asked, “Why doesn’t anyone want my beautiful things?” I watched her cry and cry her heart out. Piece by piece, we appraised her identity as a daughter, wife, a mother, a woman. Much to her dismay, we dismissed most of her possessions as junk. I took her spare knitting needles, an old olive jar of crochet hooks, pattern books that contained the baby bonnets and booties she made for me and my babies. I took her recipe box. She was the one who taught me to sew and cook.

I unpack my wedding album from a box, and placed the smiling, young faces in a bottom drawer. I will save the box of my son’s baby shoes for his wife someday. I will send my brother the cigar box full of grandpa’s drafting supplies. The outfits my five babies wore home from the hospital are in my closet, in a box, under old sweaters too precious to throw away. My collection of antique children’s books is on my bookshelf, with rocks and shells and feathers. The picture of “Red” Hanen, now framed, is on the buffet. Some of these are gifts, the others, my burdens.

Every time a woman is uprooted, she fades and unravels like calico curtains. She becomes smaller, becomes less than she has ever been. So, in spite, we kick from our wagons all the tangibles we can no longer carry, or want. We give or sell, to other women, all that needs saving when we no longer have the room. And in layer after layer of tissue paper, we wrap the most precious of treasures, the memories, the intangibles, to keep them from shattering in our hearts.

Sometimes, I can hear the click, click, click of grandmother’s knitting needles as I type my stories late in the night.
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The patterned squeak of her rocking chair, and her near-silent counting of stitches enter my memory. I wish I could crawl up on her lap and smell her soft, sweet neck. Some of her ashes were sprinkled over grandpa’s grave. Some were caught in the prairie wind. I left her a pair of scissors, there beneath the ashes, as an offering to the past. The rest of her ashes are in a plastic margarine tub, in a box, with my mismatched plates, “made in France, of bone china.” I think she likes it here.

I keep writing to remember who I am.
My Cosmopolitan Education
Brian DeRouen

I consider myself to be a lady’s man. I think of myself this way not because I get all the ladies (because I do not) and not because I am a smooth talking, Abercrombie wearing, popular college guy. I am a different style of lady’s man and the qualities inherent in my style have been a long time coming. It all started with my mother, the woman who is my best friend in the world. We tell each other everything and I could not hide a secret from her if I tried. Next comes my sister. Growing up, my sister and I were inseparable. One would be hard pressed to find two siblings more different from each other than Nina and I. However, it would be even harder to find a brother and sister who were closer than the two of us. When it comes to my education, in the world of women, these two have been my most influential teachers.

Thanks to their tutelage, I do not blush when I pass through the lingerie department, and I do not feel uncomfortable as I stand alone at the checkout line waiting to purchase the economy sized Tampax Multipack. I understand that shaving is a pain in the ass and prickly legs and underarms do not gross me out. I would rather watch a “chick flick” than football, and I am more than willing to share the remote control. I have even learned the most important lesson of all: a female does not always have a reason for crying. I learned that one over and over again during my high school years as my mom and I went through her menopause together.

I am proud of my skills as a non-traditional lady’s man and I am constantly looking for ways to improve them. Not long ago I believed that one of the best ways to ascertain how much I knew was to study the pages of men’s magazines. The other day as I was standing in a particularly slow checkout line at Meijer, I picked up the latest issue of GQ. As I flipped through the magazine my pride got a lift as so many of the “Insider tips that will make her lover you” were part of my basic education. Riding on the high resulting from my perfect score on the “Are you boyfriend material” quiz, I decided to go where I had never gone before. I wanted to put my knowledge up against the ultimate test!
So I took a deep breath, looked around to see who was watching, and picked up the bright pink October issue of *Cosmopolitan*. Everything about this magazine shouted, “If you are male, STAY AWAY!” Well, almost everything (the cover had a scantily clad Lisa Kudrow staring into my eyes). Everything else from the headline that shouted “Gyno Horrors” to the next which whined “I Said Her Butt Was Too Big and She Heard Me,” warned me that any guy who was reading the cover should let better judgement prevail by opting for the newest *Sports Illustrated* which was right there on the next rack. But I was above these warnings. I knew women, I knew myself and I honestly thought that I was ready. Without consulting the table of contents, I let providence be my guide as I opened the 352-page bastion of femininity. I was greeted instantly by a full-page add for a wonder-bra out of which a luscious seductive perfect pair of eyes stared out at me. As interesting as this vision of cleavage was, I could have found it in any of the men’s magazines, so I quickly began flipping the pages.

Finally I found what I was looking for, the signals from the opposing team’s dugout, the little secrets about me that I with (according to *Cosmo*) my girlfriend knew, and how any girl can get what they want from me. Seeing as how I had earned a perfect score on my *GQ* test, I thought this little cheat sheet for the ladies would be pretty accurate so I quickly dove in. Tip number one, “Kiss first, talk later. A bad girl knows it’s her right and privilege to sample, taste-test, and compare kisses before committing to a date.” At first I thought this was a joke, but reading on, I realized that it was not. *Cosmo* was actually telling each woman out there that if she wants to win me over, she needs to follow precise directions. “Point your finger provocatively at the lucky man. Then, in a clear, loud, and sexy voice, say ‘I want you! I want you! You! You! You!’...With the crowd cheering you on, no self-respecting straight man will deny you at least one smooch.” STRIKE ONE! If a girl ever tried this approach on me, I would run as fast as I could in the other direction after refusing her demand. That is, if I wasn’t pulling my girlfriend off her as she proceeded to kick that “bad girl’s” ass.

So, I quickly realized that like everything else in this world, *Cosmopolitan* magazine was not perfect, but everything and everyone makes mistakes, so I continued reading.
I expected a more subtle approach to come next, but once again, I was wrong. Immediately after the kissing pickup routine tips came the moves to get me from the bar into my bedroom. “Let’s say you’ve sampled your share of kisses on your night out and you’re ready to play hard ball, so to speak. Here are the three bad-girl maneuvers designed for your desires. If you want to get lucky…” STRIKE TWO! Everyday all I hear about is girls complaining that guys just want to get laid. While some guys do fit this description, I always wondered how all of us males got thrown into the category of lust-crazed penis-toting animals? If women’s magazines are telling their readers that they should go to a bar, kiss five guys, pick the best kisser, then head back to the apartment for some “hard ball,” why should guys get a bad wrap for doing the same thing? Another of my questions was why is this magazine encouraging women to attract the wrong kind of guy? Some guys I know do like women who are recklessly forward in their sexuality, and they would go home with a girl employing this tactic. But after the home-run was scored, they would be out of there as quickly as possible and, except for story-telling purposes, they would not even want to know the girl’s name. While at the same time, the “bad girl” would be asking her friends, “I wonder if he’s going to call?” I had realized at this point that this article was not composed during Cosmopolitan’s finest hour and I was ready to leave it behind. So in search of the greener pastures which must be found in the best selling magazine, I forged on.

In order to get a fresh start, I closed up the magazine and attempted another random opening that I hoped would enlighten me into the world of women’s secrets and tips. So I took another deep breath, told myself that I had stumbled across the worst article in the magazine, and gave it another try. Page 178 greeted me with “Use Your Sex Appeal to Get Ahead: These days, if you want to snag a high-profile position, you have to pull out all the stops. Here, we explain how flirting can fuel your career.” STRIKE THREE! In this age of feminist thought and corporate progress, I expected to find an article about women who have moved beyond the stereotypes and achieved success despite all the obstacles still in place.
However, *Cosmo* finds it more appropriate to give women tips such as “slip into sexy sling-backs instead of sensible stacked-heel loafers or swap your tailored shirts for some super femme body-conscious blouses.” I thought that tips on negotiating and maybe business strategy would help women get promotions but *Cosmopolitan* argues, “If your sex appeal gets you into a closed meeting or near a hard-to-reach client, then more power to you. Then you can show them that you have the goods behind the, well, goods.”

So let’s see what countless women have learned about me from this latest issue of *Cosmopolitan* magazine? If a lady had her eye on me, the best tactic is straight up lust appeal. Let the other girls use conversation, personality, and intelligence to work on a guy. The women that get what they want go directly for what the guys want and according to this source, that thing is sex. The same is true in the business world. If a female coworker wants to get a promotion over me or from me, she should use sexy shoes and form-fitting blouses to prove her worth to the company. Who needs business skills? Where do they get this stuff and what self-respecting woman would buy this magazine? My hope is that *Cosmo* is a guilty pleasure like WWF wrestling for guys and that everyone involved realized that it is not real.

I have subsequently come to the conclusion that the writers at *Cosmo* were not joking around. They really were trying to give women good advice. However, they have misinterpreted some of the progress women have made. The proliferation of effective and affordable birth control has given women the freedom, which once belonged only to men. Women are no longer told by society that they must bridle their sexuality and have gained equal footing with men in the sexual arena. All of these changes are improvements in my opinion. However, *Cosmopolitan*’s writers have missed the point. They are encouraging women to play the game according to men’s rules in the hopes that they will win, rather than changing the way the game is played. In some cases, their suggestions will work. A business woman may be able to secure a promotion by showing off her cleavage in a meeting and a young single woman may feel empowered by treating a man like a piece of meat. Unfortunately, these successes will be short term and they will eventually lead women in the wrong direction.
Following the advice given in this issue of Cosmo will not help women get a good guy, get a good job, or get ahead in any significant fashion. It will simply create a generation of women behaving like the male jerks they once despised and hated. Perhaps I am the backward one and the advice Cosmo provides is right on. I am willing to admit that this is a possibility, however, if this is the case, our future as a society does not look very bright.

In the end, my first experience of Cosmopolitan was disappointing to say the least. I was let down by the fact that Cosmopolitan did not help to improve my lady’s man skills but this was hardly the biggest blow. I now realize that I should be wary of the fact that according to GQ, I am excellent “Boyfriend material.” Of course I aced the test in GQ, but I don’t want to imagine what kind of girl would score highly on Cosmo’s perfect girlfriend quiz. Perhaps, I should give Cosmopolitan and GQ another chance as two subjects would not be an appropriate sample size in any accurate study. Unfortunately for Editor-in-Chief, Kate White, and GQ’s respective top man (I assume it is a man), I am not interested in an accurate study. I am going to stick with the basics, the lessons I learned from the two top ladies in my life, my mom and my sis. I am sure my current leading lady has a few lessons in store for me as well. Of course none of these ladies is Lisa Kudrow and none of them captured my faith and adoration with their score on the boyfriend test. I am not a Johnny Depp or an Antonio Banderas, so tips from the real world from real women will be just fine.
Could I be a super hero? Would I want to be? What if I was bitten by a radioactive spider or caught in the heart of a gamma bomb explosion, or exposed to cosmic radiation? (Does every superhero origin involve radiation?) Maybe I could have been born with superhuman powers. (Maybe radiation isn’t the only source of empowerment after all.) Maybe I am really an alien from another planet. (That would help explain my family.) Could all the amazing things that occur in the life of a superhero (as reported by numerous comic books) really happen or would something less than spectacular occur to this wondering Joe Normal?

Maybe I could be Spider-man. Bitten by a radioactive spider and gaining the proportionate strength and speed of his namesake, normal nerd Peter Parker went on to become a superhero. Using his brilliant scientific mind, he even developed his own formula and design for a pair of synthetic web shooters to aid in his battle against evil.

A spider bit me once. My hand kind of puffed up in the spot where it bit me, but in a few days it went away. I don’t think it was radioactive though, which is probably a good thing. I can just see it now. Given the proportionate strength and speed of a bedridden invalid and the power of projectile vomiting, normal nerd Thomas Weldon goes on to strike fear and terror into the hearts of evil doers everywhere by puking on their shoes. I guess I could even try to develop my own web shooters, but then again the last time I played with the chemistry set, my friend’s garage was accidentally set on fire. Thank God they kept their dog’s water bowl close to the garage.

Well, there is always The Incredible Hulk. Bruce Banner was a man who kept all of his emotions bottled up inside. All the fear and all the anger he ever felt was locked up and tuck away into the recesses of his mind. One day though, he was caught in the heart of a gamma bomb explosion of his own design, and instead of being torn apart physically, the locked-up emotion was torn open and the Hulk, a green-skinned behemoth of near limitless strength and raging emotion, was born.
Like Banner, do I bottle up all of my emotion? Is there a raging beast locked away inside of me waiting to burst forth with the proper catalyst? I was once caught in the blast of a firecracker explosion, but I have never been caught in a bomb explosion, and I bet the results would be quite different. Just picture it, waking up in a hospital room covered in green bandages I would shout, “Hulk smash puny bedpan!” as the scent of burnt hair and fried skin assaulted my nose.

Then how about Thor, got of thunder. I know that Thor is a mythological figure, but he also has his own Marvel comic book. Thor is a Norse god. Being a god means that he was born superhumanly strong and nearly invulnerable. He also has a mystical hammer given to him by his all-knowing daddy, Odin. Now this isn’t your typical hardware store hammer. This thing can generate powerful thunder and lightning filled storms with but a command, can transport its wielder to other planes of existence (Thor is from the realm of Asgard after all), and when hurled properly can even give its possessor the power of flight. It even has a nifty inscription on it that states; “Whomever is worthy to lift this hammer shall possess the power of Thor.”

My father gave me a hammer once. All it could do was pound nails into wood. My father wasn’t exactly all knowing either. The only thing he really knew was the fastest way to the bottom of a bottle of Jack Daniels. I tried to use my hammer to fly once, just like Thor, but all I managed to accomplish was to break a window and give myself a mild concussion. My hammer did have an inscription on it though, but all it said was “Craftsman.”

Maybe I am really like Superman. An alien from the planet Krypton, young Kal-El crash-landed here as a baby and was adopted by loving parents and renamed Clark Kent. As he grows up he finds that he is empowered by our yellow sun and has been gifted with the powers of strength, speed, invulnerability, flight, and numerous visions. Using these powers for the betterment of mankind he becomes the hero, Superman, and preserves peace, justice, and the human way.

Although I feel alien sometimes, I think that I am a native of Earth. The only thing the sun gives me is a sunburn.
I have crash landed once but it was in a red Dodge Omni, not a spaceship, and it was after my friend slid on the ice, hit a boulder dead on, and sent us airborne right into someone’s front yard. Like Superman, I survived the crash but didn’t gain new parents, just nausea and a fear of driving with my friend. The whole experience was kind of exhilarating though. Look it’s a bird...it’s a plane...it’s a red Dodge Omni?

If I am not an alien then maybe I am a mutant like Wolverine of X-Men. Born with an amazing healing factor that can almost instantaneously heal any injury, the man named Logan was kidnapped by a government agency, had his memories tampered with, and had an unbreakable adamantium skeleton complete with claws grafted to his bones. Eventually breaking free from his government abusers, he joined the X-Men to fight for a dream of peaceful coexistence between humans and mutants.

While I sometimes feel like a mutant, I know for a fact that I only have a normal healing ability. While I have never broken a bone, I have had numerous cuts and bruises, an eye injury that did not heal instantaneously, a dented skull (which proved my bones aren’t laced with metal), and a serious knee injury that put me on crutches. That’s not to say that I am nothing like Wolverine. Like him, I am kind of hairy in spots, and I can have claws if I don’t trim my fingernails. I also have trouble remembering things sometimes, but I only blame the government for messing with my head as an excuse. It didn’t really happen; at least I don’t think so. I can’t remember.

Maybe I could be the Thing from the Fantastic Four. Exposed to cosmic radiation in a premature space flight, Ben Grimm discovered that like his three friends and copilots he was granted amazing abilities by the unshielded exposure. Now with skin transformed into an orange rock-like substance and superhuman strength, he adopts the name the Thing and defends the world alongside his friends, the Fantastic Four.

While I have been told my head is as hard as a rock (except that time I dented it), my skin is soft and kind of a pasty off-white pinkish color. My hands have turned orange before, but it was after eating Cheetos and not after being exposed to cosmic radiation.
I have been exposed to microwave radiation, but that stuff is supposed to be shielded and safe.

As a culture we create our own heroes in the forms of celebrities and sports figures. We make our own real-life cultural superheroes.

If I can’t be a comic book superhero, maybe I could be a sports hero like Michael Jordan. A basketball Superstar, multiple championship winner, endorser of everything under the sun, and able to leap from half court and sill slam-dunk the ball. I don’t think so though. The last two time I have played basketball, I have broken my glasses after being hit in the head with the ball. And the last time I jumped through the air with my tongue hanging out, I was reaching for a doughnut, not a basket. Plus I don’t have shoes with my name on them unless I endorse them with permanent marker myself.

If I can’t be a superhero, then who could I be? Could I just be Joe Normal? Would that satisfy me? I enjoy reading the exploits of superheroes but would I really want to be one? Getting into life and death situations, supervillians trying to kick my ass constantly, having to save humanity continuously...is that a life I would want? I don’t think so. It’s fun to read about these things in comic books because the writer controls the situations. The heroes always come out on top, and death never seems to be permanent because it’s written that way. In the real world there isn’t this safety net. If people die, they can’t just be written back into existence. If I was to fail as a superhero in the real world, that failure would forever be on my conscience, and I would have to live with the consequences. Spider-man’s catch phrase has always been that, “With great power there must be great responsibility.” Even cultural superheroes like Michael Jordan do not have it easy. Always being in the limelight, pressure to always win and be the best, and being looked up to as role models by youngsters everywhere also carries with it great responsibility. That is a responsibility I do not think I want.

I think I can be happy just being me. Thomas Arthur Weldon, college student with the tendency to procrastinate and the power to hardly ever participate in class, who reads way too many comic books and watches too much TV. It may not seem glamorous, but it works for me.
Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte
Lauren Stiener

I am the tiny girl in white holding my mother’s hand. We are out of balance with our world, the only people looking out of the picture. I look forward to our destination. Mother’s head is turned slightly, reluctant to leave a canvas place so full of one-dimensional charm. I know that I need to move ahead and stay focused on my plans, while my mother holds me back with memories of the past.

In the distance, an ambulance’s droning wail cuts through the air as my father lies motionless on the family room floor. I am lost in the fog frantically searching for the lights to save my beloved father’s life. The fog is too thick for the driver to discern the addresses on the mailboxes, and it is my job to lead the ambulance into our driveway. I have no shoes on and can hear the slapping of my feet on the hard pavement. There is no feeling in my feet, even though my soft pads are already bleeding and full of sharp rocks from the gnarled concrete at the end of my driveway. During this late January afternoon, I feel trapped underwater, unable to breathe. I keep asking myself, “Why is this happening to me?” Other fourteen-year-olds are coming home from school, watching television or talking to their friends on the phone now. I want the world to freeze so that I can make sense of my situation but know it is impossible. I am vulnerable and left by myself with these haunting thoughts, secretly knowing the ambulance is too late. My world and childhood are now behind me as I stare into the fog of my future.

I am twenty now and still look back on that painful day. Always affected by the sound of an ambulance’s siren, I freeze in the car when I am supposed to pull over to let it pass. That night when we returned from the hospital the only thing my family could do without falling apart was to clean the house. We cleaned for three hours until we collapsed on the floor in front of my father’s favorite chair.

I have learned to move on in life and have made his presence an important part of my future.
When a random phone solicitor calls and asks to speak with Robert F. Stiener, I no longer explode into a rage, screaming, “He is GONE you idiot!” I can now smile a soft, understanding smile and catch them off guard by saying that he has passed away. I am sorry that I make people uncomfortable. I wish my father had survived to share my joy.

He was a strong and silent man that took his pleasures through the happiness of others and lived for his children. Dad was my catcher in softball and would patiently sit on a bucket or crouch down for hours in order to help me progress as a pitcher. I can still hear him brag to his friends how he needed to buy extra padding for his mitt because I burned a hole in it with my fastball.

Experiences trigger happy memories of my father: the smell of his cologne, my expensive softball mitt he bought me when I was twelve years old, decorating Christmas cookies, and walking barefoot on beaches while collecting glass rocks. Even though I can never thank him enough for the things that he did for me while he was alive, I will always remember how his large, callused hand pat me on the back after we finished throwing together in the park or in the pole barn.

I know, as does that little girl in the Seurat painting, that I must go forward. I hope that my mother, too, will come with me. We will let cheerful family times spent playing in the park be a springboard for future happiness and allow our tomorrows to be fed by our yesterdays.
Fear gnawed at my newly exposed entrails, slashed open by an animal that I had eluded for almost three years. The beast has already snagged me once, my sophomore year, dragging my ravaged carcass to the field once again. However, my body could not take the abuse so I quit. It didn't sink its claws into me again until my senior year. Though the beast had hunted me and tried to drag me back in, I resisted until the second game of the season. Only then, when it has ceased to pursue me, did the fear start of subside. I watched the brutal science of the game unfold before me from the stands and realized that I actually wanted to be on the field. I could see the fun again, and the next day I found myself on the football field ready to practice.

For me football had been a friend that slowly transformed into an enemy. The first year I played, in fifth grade, it was fun. By sixth grade, the fun had all but disappeared. Weight limits went into effect and a hefty sixth grader soon found himself among the giants of the seventh and eighth grade team. No longer surrounded by friends, I could feel the fear gnaw at my stomach for the first time. As the fear clawed at my guts, I damned grade school football and its weight limits. I had been prepared to play with my sixth grade friends, but I was forced into a situation of strangers. Too afraid to act and too stupid to quit, I accepted my fate and suffered in silence.

Football is a game that follows the laws of physics. The law of force pairs states that all forces come in pairs and that when a body exerts a force on another body, the other body also exerts a force on the first. These forces are both equal in strength but opposite in direction. So what was the problem? If I hit someone, they would hit me back but the force would be the same so we would come out even. Unfortunately, this isn't the case. Since the forces are always the same, mass and acceleration are the deciding outcome for who gets plowed and who does the plowing. Among these giants I was nothing more than a human tackling dummy, and football and its physics had become my enemy.

Even though football was now an enemy, I toughed it out for the remainder of grade school.
Not only had I grown a bit, but the giants that had kicked the crap out of me my sixth grade year eventually graduated. By high school I had decided to call it quits, but I could still hear the howling beast calling to me. When it attacked my sophomore year, I was in bad shape physically. I had only recently started weight lifting, and running was a mystery I had yet to solve. I could still feel the old fear from grade school, and I could not see the fun. So I quit.

By my senior year, I had some physical conditioning under my belt. Three years of track and field and a weight lifting class had greatly improved a still flabby frame. I wasn’t going to win any best body contests, but at least now running was less of a puzzle, and I could do it without dying or at least wishing I had. Watching the team play, I was starting to see the fun in football again, and with the fear starting to shrink, I joined the team willingly.

On the field, I realized the physics of the brutal sport had finally started to shift into my favor. There were not many 6'1" tall guys that weighed 300 pounds. I now had mass on my side, so the main thing to work against me was acceleration. Work is equal to force times distance. To perform work, an object must exert a force on another object and move it some distance. Since force is tied into mass and acceleration, to perform work successfully one must either possess a greater mass when exerting the force or a great enough acceleration to move the mass. That is why linemen are typically large individuals. The bigger they are the harder they are to move, so the better they are for blocking or breaking through the line. I was still as slow as a glacier, but my mass helped even out the playing field.

Practice was easy enough that first day. I couldn’t suit up in full pads yet because they had to special order a helmet big enough for my substantial melon (too bad there is no law of physics or any other science that states that intelligence is directly proportional to cranial size). Until my helmet arrived, I was sidelined.

A week went by and still no helmet. I had started to suit up in full pads minus the helmet, but I still could not engage in any contact for fear of cracking my skull open like a ripe watermelon. So while the others practiced plays, I stood on the sidelines and sweated with the extra bulk.
The law of conservation of energy states that the total energy of all participants in any process must remain unchanged throughout the process. In other words, energy cannot be created or destroyed. It can only be transformed from one form to another or transferred from one place to another. As I stood on the sidelines, my potential energy was screaming to be transformed into kinetic energy and then transferred into opponents as we slammed into each other. But without a helmet this exchange of energy on the field could not take place, so the only energy transference I experienced took place between me and the sun. As the blazing sun transferred down its solar energy upon my helmetless head, the solar energy was transformed into heat upon contact with me and the only response I could garner was sweat. After all, I could not tackle the sun.

After a week of waiting, my helmet finally arrived that Friday. Being a game day, we were already at our home field warming up as evening crept upon us bringing with it not only dark, but also the chill of rain. As the field got damper and the warm earth slowly changed to mud, my helmet finally arrived as so did our opponents. “Just great.” I thought to myself, “My helmet would arrive the day we play Cathedral.” Tonight would be a messy game and not just because of the mud. Cathedral was a 5-A school and went pretty much undefeated about every year. Cardinal Ritter, on the other hand, was a 1-A school and we lost a lot when I was there. The first contact I could engage in would be against the toughest team we would play.

I went through warm-up drills without getting my head, helmet and all, taken off. This was the first time I had hit anybody in three years. It was more fun than I had remembered. The rain continued to pour as Cathedral stomped us into the muddy earth. We held our own the best we could, but victory slid further and further out of reach every time Cathedral scored. We lost that evening, but not before I got a chance to actually play in the game. Having just received a helmet, they weren’t inclined to rush me into the game, but my time came when Cathedral attempted a field goal. I marched out dripping wet onto the field and crouched in the mud at the line. It was time to put football physics into practice. Potential energy at the line transformed into kinetic energy with the snap of the ball. I burst through the line overthrowing their puny lineman and accelerated towards the ball only to slip in the mud,
gravity's pull calling me back down to the soggy earth. Kinetic energy of motion switched to gravitational energy with the fall and finally returned to potential energy as I lay in the damp mud. The physics had worked, but so did Mother Nature's mud covered monkey wrench.
They start arriving in February, right before Lent, right when Catholics all over the world begin to declare their Lenten resolutions. I will give up cookies, I will clean my room twice a week, I will not hit Sarah I will say the rosary every night and go to confession. When I was small giving up those cookies in the rainbow colored boxes was the biggest sacrifice imaginable, and therefore, the one that would have me in a continual state of tempting for forty days and forty nights. Those Tag-a-longs would just stare and stare at me. Their peanut-butter-patty eyes would plead with me to reach into the freezer and rip the corner of the box a little, just enough to gaze at the tempting circles of perfect, rich chocolate smothering pools of peanut butter, all on top of a crisp, cookie wafer. These enticing tidbits of sweetness were just a little bit bigger than the communion I would no doubt receive four times a week. Going to mass every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday during Lent was typical. Pairing it with the Stations of the Cross, every Tuesday and Thursday meant the only day during Lent I was not in church as a child was Saturday. By the time I was twelve, my Saturdays were hacked into two groups: those I spent with my mother, and those I spent with my father. Sundays obviously followed suit, but Sundays began with mass. Mass, which was fraught with ancient rituals, demanding priests, and droning hymns that threatened to either suck all my imagination away forever, or to instill me with enough to last the rest of my eternal life.

We adore you oh Christ and we praise you...because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

I tried tremendously hard to be a good and faithful Catholic. I was never very good at going to confession as often as I should, and tried to make up for it by saying the rosary every night before I went to bed. Usually, this was accompanied by munching on the forbidden cookies, a whirl of hypocrisy that filled me with guilt when mom shook the crumbs out on sheet days. The Monday, Wednesday and Friday morning school masses began my days with an overwhelming sense of urgency to give financially to the church.
I remember being handed miniature milk cartons with slits on the top just the size of a quarter. They were always red and white and had goals written on the side: One dollar provides rice for a starving child for a week. Five dollars provides medicine for a family for a month. Ten dollars will feed a village community for a dozen days. Countless nickels and dimes were slid through the slots throughout my nine years in a Catholic grade school. We reserved quarters for the family folder with the blank cylinders whispering my name every time I tried to buy a coke out of a vending machine after school. Beth...that fifty cents could buy books for an African library...So the quarters were slid back into the lips of my skinny coin purse to dutifully force into the vacant holes in the folders. The folders were given to the church at the end of Lent, heavy folders weighing down the baskets the poor ushers passed throughout the church. By the time I was twelve, the “family” folders represented four—instead of our previously accustomed five. I remember mom saying once: Beth, I wanted to have another child before he left. I wanted you all to have a brother.

Peace be with you...

In church I would pray serenely for dad to come back and for mom to stop crying, feeling responsible of course. I thought that Mary was looking down and blessing me for about half of the service. The other half I would rate the cute boys and try desperately to lock eyes with the cutest ones. This caused a “scandal” when one of the more observant girls in my class happened to see me batting my eyelashes at a short stubby fellow who happened to be walking home from school with her at the time. I was banned from all recess games and ignored in the cafeteria for the extent of twenty-four hours. No amount of Girl Scout Cookie bribes would bend them my way. So snubbed was I that I decided to ignore those girls right back. I quit talking for an entire week. I didn’t answer teachers’ questions, I ignored my best friends, I learned how to read a book under my desk without anyone seeing it and I learned how to make up my own friends. I also learned to ignore the things I heard from the teachers, who talked about me in hushed reverent whispers in the office, as if I wasn’t standing there, waiting for them to get a hold of my mother...
"It must be because of the divorce,"
"You know its final next week."
"And they were just a perfect family,"
"Oh yes, Rebecca is now a freshman in high school."
"And there's Little Sarah down with the fourth graders."
"She's so sweet and smart and all three of those girls will make something of themselves despite it you just wait and see."

By the time I was twelve, I was tired of waiting and seeing. I waited almost every day for mass to be over with, I waited for weekends and dinners out with my father, I waited for mom to stop crying. I remember mom saying once: A divorce is much harder to deal with than death, girls. I wish your father had died instead.

Remember oh most gracious Virgin Mary...

I was an absolute shit during the time the divorce was being finalized. By this I mean the actual moments when papers were being drawn up and I had nightmares of appearing in court. By this I mean the conversations mom had about annulments, strange Catholic documents that would prove that my parents should never have been married; documents that would somehow prove my sisters and I to be mistakes: David and Barbara's mistakes. Mistake One, Rebecca Regina Marie; Mistake Two, Elizabeth Ann Teresa; Mistake Three, Sarah Louise Cecilia. Mistakes. I went through several bouts of not depression really, but more like a deep-rooted confusion, when I wouldn't talk to anyone. I made up imaginary friends. I refused counseling from the bizarre social worker at school, the one my classmates and I all called Miss Scary Perry. By the time I was twelve, mom was sick and tired of dealing with my random moods. I remember mom saying once: If you ever want to talk about any of this, I can make arrangements with my therapist to see you.

The Lord be with you...

I never asked Mom about when Dad was coming back, I asked my older sister Rebecca. She would always say, well, wait and see, or we'll see, or sometimes she'd really go out on a limb and say be patient, these things can't be decided in a month, or six months, or two years...

"Can you believe it Becca, it's been two years since Dad left."
"It has not, you be quiet."
"Yes it has, I wrote it down in my diary, two years ago yesterday."
“You’re lying and I hate you!”
“What did I do?”
“You were born now go away and quit shoving your diary in my face!”

And more often than not, I would wait and see somewhere other than around my sister, usually with a book. By the time I was twelve, my mother was getting pretty tired of telling me to go outside and play instead of spending every waking moment not spent at church or school, reading. I guess she didn’t understand that the characters in the books had beginning, middles, and ends—this divorce never had an end. I remember mom saying once: I love you, you know that right? I’m not mad at you, I’m mad at the situation.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit…

Books have the amazing quality of containing entire worlds where families have brothers; parents are either intact, or happily dead, always dying when the hero “was too young to remember;” and children have amazing adventures with friends who love and adore them. I was one of those kids who was always hearing, get your nose out of that book and go fly a kite, or climb a tree, or try to bake a cake, or try a new stroke in the pool. I walked back and forth from my neighborhood library at least twice a week, feeling like Francie every time, and toting a bag containing at least five young adult novels. I flew through chunks of books, mourning when I reached the end of a series, or read the very last book a favorite author wrote. I almost cried one “mom Saturday” when I was standing in my favorite spot in our little branch library, looking at the Lois Lowery section and realizing that I had read every single one of the books on the shelf. By the time I was twelve, I was asking for recommendations in the adult section. I always needed a book for the twenty-minute car ride to dad’s. I remember mom saying once: Why don’t you tell him you want him to come home. I can’t do anything about it; he’ll listen to you.

I believe in God the Father almighty…

There were times when I felt lost and trapped. Mom would cry and what was I supposed to do about it? Reading seemed like an escape, and when paired with a pocket full of Tag-a-longs, an afternoon could never seem better.
I read in trees, on various porches, in the bath, on top of the monkey bars, in the back seat of Dad's car during our rides to his one room apartment and of course, in bed at night before I prayed the rosary. 

_Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death amen._

After the divorce was finally final, I fell into a funk, a rut, a deep depression, and couldn't read anymore. The characters I once found entertaining and important, only seemed contrived, fake, and all too perfect. To cure myself I found cereal boxes and read all six sides, including the nutrition facts. I read the manual that went with our TV, the warning labels on the cleaners under the sink, the "begats" in the bible. Then I read my diary from cover to cover, my parents old yearbooks, Rebecca's stupid teen magazines with all their beauty facts. And then I read pickle jars and captions on the frozen dinners and while I was in the freezer I found a box of Girl Scout Cookies. On their backs they have little letters to make-believe girls, my favorite kind. Once I read these things over and over again, I found that I starved myself for Dahl, Streatfield, Webster, Smith, and Bellairs, my favorite authors as a child. The cookie box letters usually start something like this: "I just love water sports! Our teachers are complete pros! Jamila and I actually synchronized our strokes..." and on and on in a washing of growing girlness... Sometimes I don't listen to what mom says.

_Thanks be to God._
Fiction

AWARDS

Immigrant Medley
1st Prize, Fiction, English Club

Dad
2nd Prize, Fiction, English Club
Fioretti

Immigrant Medley
Alex Gouty

The casting agent rolled her eyes skyward as the man on stage droned on about his excellent Polish cooking, listing all of the recipes that he could prepare. She swung around to the producer, “This is going to be a long day.”

The producer’s head snapped back up, bleary eyes attempting to focus on her. “What? I’m sorry, I dozed off.” He looked up at the stage, blinking slowly. “Where did the Chinese guy go?”

She snorted, “That was five people ago. Since him, we’ve had a Frenchman, a German, a Brit, a Russian and a Canadian.”

The producer frowned, “They have Canadian cooking?”

Glancing at her list of candidates, she muttered, “You’ve got me. I have no clue.” Looking up, she called out, “Thank you sir, we’ll be giving you a call.”

He looked up, lower lip quivering, “But, you haven’t tried my sausages yet I…”

She cut him off, “We’ll try them later! We just need to move on to the next person in the list!”

The cook slowly trumped off stage. The casting director turned around, looked at the producer. “Where do we get these people? We advertised for a local cook, and we get some sort of immigrant medley.”

He shrugged, and she went back to her clipboard. “Ok, next, Juan Pedro Velasquez.” An olive skinned man stood up a few rows in front of her, and walked up to the stage. She shook her head in frustration.

The producer stood up, muttering, “Ok, I’m putting a stop to this.” He called out to Velasquez. “Excuse me, Mr. Velasquez, but we advertised for a local cook, and we just don’t think you’re what we’re looking for. Next please.”

Velasquez, stopped, slowly turned around, shook his head and laughed. “I am a local. I was born in this little piss-ant town, and I put up with this shit all of the time. You know the big orchards east of town?” Not waiting for a nod, he pushed on. “I own those, and have for twenty-five years. Just because you think I’m some migrant tomato picker doesn’t mean I am.
Now, I’m going to go up here on stage and audition, and then you can dismiss me, should you still feel like it.”

The producer blanched, sat slowly, coughed and started to blush when the casting director looked at him and laughed.

Velasquez began, and astonished them all with the flair and exuberance with which he attacked his cooking. He created aromas that wafted through the studio, tantalizing the senses. As he finished, he gave samples to the stage crew, as well as the producer and the casting agent.

The producer wolfed his down, exclaiming, “You’ve got the job! I’ll be giving you a call in a few days to set up the contracts.” The casting agent agreed silently, nodding with her mouth full.

Velasquez merely smiled slowly and nodded, shook hands with them and said good-bye. The casting director watched him amble through the door; his face briefly lit by the green glow of the exit sign, highlighting an odd smile. She finished her sample and looked at the producer. “Do you have the feeling that he was laughing at us there at the end?”

The producer seemed perturbed by the question, wrinkling his brow, “Not really, why?”

“Oh, I don’t know, it just seemed like he knew something that we didn’t.” She shrugged and began to work out the contract details.

As Velasquez strutted out of the building, he couldn’t help but continue to laugh as he played with the empty box of laxatives in his coat pocket.
Looking at dad now, you would never recognize the man that used to sit contentedly behind his big, mahogany desk, spectacles resting on the end of his nose, disturbed only when he heard the rap of one of his many children on his office door. His would always lay aside whatever book, paper, or research he was so involved in, rising slowly form his chair, making his way to the door. He would open it and as soon as he did he scooped the child up in his arms asking the cause of their visit, reassuring them that he loved them, and if he had to, he would leave his office momentarily, rolling up his shirt sleeves to ward off an evil enemy that was after his son’s favorite toy. He never let his job or his research interfere with his children. I can remember many times he would return home from a busy day at the hospital, his smocks wrinkled and his hair receding into at least five different styles. For a month he replaced a doctor on medical leave who worked in the ER unit, and he fell greatly behind in research, but every night without fail he came home with a smile on his face, and a hug and kiss for each of his children. That month he stayed awake late hours into the night, researching and pondering. He never told us, but we found out later he was working on a retardation for cancer, which he hoped would lead him to the theory of a cure. He was an intelligent man, with five degrees to prove it. At first when he started his medical practice he had materialistic dreams of rising to the upper class of the capitalist system. However, after ten years of working as a doctor, he realized that money was not what propelled his heart rate, or kept him awake at night, nor was it the nicer house next door. He began to question his life, his purpose, and his addition to the human race and every time he mused over this, he came up with an empty slate. He couldn’t be here on this earth he felt, from deep within, without a reason, and he was determined to change the fate of many. He opened a new medical practice which would be strictly for low-income families, single mothers, and those destitute individuals he saw filthy and hurting each day as he walked through the town streets of Washington D.C.
He never charged a fee, but he knew he was doing what he was meant to do when he saw the face of a tiny child get formula and diapers, and perhaps clean clothes, or when he saw the drug addicts look at him for the first time without their glassy, stunned stare. When he gave those little babies their vaccinations, he knew they were given a chance at health, which otherwise might not be afforded to them. Daddy believed in God too. He went to church every Sunday morning and evening. He sang so loud, sometimes he embarrassed me, but he never seemed to notice my discomfort. I thought church was boring, too routine and predictable. I did enjoy putting money in the plate when it was passed. Dad knew how much I liked doing this so he always gave me a little more money than the other kids so I could drop each coin in slowly, one at a time. When I got married, it was the first time I had seen Dad cry, but he did. When he gave me to my new husband, Dad squeezed my hand so hard I thought I would be permanently paralyzed. I may still have a thumb print. He couldn't stop grinning the day I received my Ph.D., even if it wasn't in medicine; he said English was a good choice, "Just not as good as medicine." That was how I remember my dad, in all his pomp and circumstance: the father who at times had more patience than I thought possible of a human being; the doctor whose fee never really covered the cost of one of his ball-point pens; the researcher who listened to Vivaldi as he looked at red and white blood cells, mutations, and chemical reaction until his eyes grew so tired he fell into bed exhausted, without being seemingly a step closer to his desired destination. Aside from all this, he was one of the most brilliant men I have ever been fortunate enough to meet, let alone have as my biological father.

Today I went to visit Dad and I left his residence with a sick, horrid, empty feeling pervading my mind and body. I pounded my chest into the steering wheel of my car, which remained placid. Looking up, through the sunroof in my car at the sky, I shook my head, trying to fathom God, my father, this life. This universe had to be erected according to some equation, some formulation, but it must be badly off, because look at my father, his life, and everything he did for everyone but himself and tell me where the justice of creation lies. I hear echoing in the confines of my mind, those awful words, "Who are you? I said, who are you and what are you doing in my home?" Stunned, I bit my lip so hard I tasted blood.
“I’m your daughter and today is your birthday! I brought you a cake and a card and I thought we could catch up on the news.” “You stupid fool,” he cried. “I never had any children, I never even married, and you come in here, in my bathroom of all places to bring me a bottle of ketchup. Are you a lunatic, woman?” I wasn’t even in the bathroom. I was standing in his nursing home room, at the end of his bed, with a cake in my hand, not a ketchup bottle. That’s how the rest of the visit went. I asked him to count for me and he couldn’t even get past two. This had to be some bad dream, the product of that pizza I had eaten at lunch. But no, it was all too real, a vivid pattern on the canvas before me. Dad didn’t even know his name. As I was making my way solemnly through the hallway, the nurse who checked on dad several times while I was visiting tapped me on the shoulder. She said she had noticed my shock and hurt, and explained to me that they had finally diagnosed Dad’s problem: he was in the final stage of Alzheimer’s Disease. She went through what seemed like a memorized, verbatim speech about how I should feel free to contact her if I had any questions or concerns. I kindly thanked her and made my way out of the home.

As I flopped into the car seat, hot from the scorching sun, tears even hotter pelted down my cheeks. It didn’t seem fair that my father should have to suffer such a painful, disorienting death, and he didn’t even have his own children there to help him through it and to ease his hands as he slowly faded into the ominous arms of death. Oh, we were there in body, but in his mind we were strangers who had invaded the privacy of his invalid seclusion. He looked at us like one foreigner looks at another. We must have been blurry, images whom he sensed were unreal, because he never spoke to us, not even to mom who had loved him for fifty years. She kept saying his name, “Harold, Harold, Harold,” over and over but he was deafened to our voices, and he died in a world of confusion, where words sing and music reads and doctors don’t exist and there is no discretion between just and unjust, or good and evil.

I wonder today as I read the results of my AD testing, what difference did Dad really make?
I had never intended to have such a boring job. Today is one of those days when it gets to me more than most days. My prim little shoes are choking my feet. My smile feels ready to break into a thousand pieces and fall off. And if I have to say, “Yes, Sir,” once more, I think I shall scream.

“Yes, Sir.” I did not scream. I can’t. I need this job. It’s not so bad most of the time. I have to make the required amount of coffee each day, give the bosses the required smile, speak in the required polite office voice, do the required amount of running around... Today, however, the office is preparing for a Board Meeting. What this means is that I am doing an inhuman amount of work. I had to run off so many printouts and make even more copies then I had to refill the toner in both machines. The printer is not so bad; it has those new cartridges that slip in nice and easy. The copier is another story altogether. I have to pull the cartridge out and then refill the toner into the cartridge with... Great! Nothing better than having inky black toner all over my hands and cuffs. There goes my presentable appearance. It did not spill on my shoes. I wish it had. I would grab almost any excuse to free my captive feet.

“Yes, Sir.” More typing. I’ve typed so much all day that I am just an automaton now, typing mindlessly. Of course, I do have breaks every half-hour during which Mr. Cartwright, the Boss, expects me to make enough coffee to water a small country. I hate the smell of coffee today. I hate the way they are chugging it down. I despise them. I despise every one of those gluttonous coffee-drinkers. But the clock is my friend. Almost time for me to rescue myself. A few minutes more and I can escape into my life.

“Yes, Sir.” I cannot believe I had to say that again. And what have I done now? I’ve gone and committed myself to a game of tennis with the Boss. I adore the game. I’d rather not have to take my job into my life, but the Boss must be kept happy. I need this job. Look! Time to go, except not really. I have to run to my car to grab my gear and return to the game.
It is warm outside and I wish I could stay and watch the sun set behind the tall buildings. But the Boss likes folk to be punctual. I free my sore feet from their office shoes only to straitjacket them into my tennis shoes. I can just imagine that I hear them protesting. Carrying my gear, I walk to the courts trying to muster some enthusiasm, but I have none left. Even, my plastic smile refuses to perform. All I want to do is to soak in a tub, eating crisps and watching Star Trek. I can only console myself with the thought that each moment into the game is a moment closer to my nice, warm bath.

The Boss is not a terrible player. He has been getting better, but my feet do not seem to care too much about that. I am trying, despite the feet, not to let the Boss score. I think I owe myself some satisfaction out of this day. It is almost the end of the day and I am glad. I shall finish this off nicely. I pull my arm back and hit him a smash so hard that my tired racquet lets a few strings snap. But I’ve won.

“Good game, Miss Banks,” the Boss says. He does not look as impressive now that he has lost the game. “Yes, Sir,” I say smiling at him. This time it needs no effort.

I always give the Boss a good game but it is pleasant to allow him to lose every so often. I watch him haul his sweaty carcass off the court. With the remnants of a smile on my face, I sit down and pluck out a tuneless song on the strings of my racquet.
Along the beach laid seemingly endless pieces of trash. Broken shell pieces were scattered everywhere. Coke cans from many picnics were also in the sand. Daredevil surfers were in the water, catching every possible wave. Everyone on the beach was watching them to make sure that they did not fall in. Fearless of the water, the surfers continued to put on their little show. Giant waves appeared out of nowhere, sending some of the surfers to the water's edge, sending the surfers under the currents.

Hurriedly, worried observers rushed to the injured surfers to see if they were all right. It was decided that most of the injuries were not life threatening. Just to be sure, though, the surfers were taken to a nearby hospital for further examination. Keeping the loved ones who had witnessed the accident calm was a difficult task. Lots of them wanted to go to the hospital to see if their loved ones were all right. Many were allowed to go because they were the parents of injured surfers. No one expected what happened next. One of the surfers who was injured broke his collarbone and was taken into surgery right away. People rushed to say a final good-bye as the young man was admitted to surgery. Quietly, family and friends walked away and went to the waiting room. Rain had started to fall about the time they returned to the waiting room. Several hours passed as the young surfer went through surgery.

Three hours later, the surgeon came out and said that the surgery had gone well and that the young man would be in intensive care for the next 24 hours. Upon leaving the waiting room the mother of the young surfer began to cry. Very happy to hear that her son had made it through the surgery, she went to the ICU and gave her son a hug and a kiss. "We love you," she told her sleeping son. Xavier, the name of the injured surfer was in the hospital six weeks longer to go through many intensive hours of physical therapy. "You are truly lucky," his mother told him the day after he woke up, "truly lucky." Zero is the number of times he has been surfing since the accident and his mother is very pleased with that number.
Three Conversations
Earl Carrender

In a coffee shop in a city, which is every coffee shop in every city, on a day which is every day.
—Little Plastic Castle
Ani Difranco

“You gentlemen sit here and your server will be with you soon to take your order.”
“Thank you,” said the first man politely. “And what can I get you to drink while you’re waiting?”
“I’ll have iced tea,” the other one said. “The same here,” said the first, “Thank you.”
“Thank you,” said the young waiter and walked away. “You know, I look forward to this every week. I really enjoy it,” said the first man. “So do I,” the other one smiled.

The older man opened his menu, knowing already what he wanted, glanced at its contents then set it aside. When the waiter came he ordered the chicken that he always ordered and a glass of chilled Chardonnay. When the wine arrived he sipped it slowly. “Katherine...” he said as he saw the woman walk through the door, the man following behind her.

“Good evening,” said the maitre’d, “Smoking or non?” “It doesn’t matter,” said the man. “Follow me then,” he said and they followed him, the man putting his hand around the woman’s waist and guiding her step as if she were blind.

“Her hair was soft and smelled of lilacs,” the old man remembered, “I loved the smell of it whenever she would greet me when I came through door. Worried because I was late. ‘Where were you?’ she always asked.
'Worried about me?' I'd say. 'No,' she'd say, 'Just wanna know.' I could never resist teasing her. 'Well,' I'd begin, 'Me and Miss Hobbs next...' 'Oh, spare me,' she'd say. She always said, 'The only thing that keeps you faithful is a lack of opportunity.' But she knew she didn't have to worry."

"Well, I got the letter from Connecticut," the first man said.
"What does that mean?"
"Well, I'll finish up things here," said the first, "That'll take at least a year. Then we'll have to see."
"I'd hate to have to move to a strange place," said the other one.
"I'm looking forward to it," said the first.
"I've got people who depend on me," the other man said, "I couldn't just up and leave."

"Brothers," the old man thought as he noticed the two men seated at the table across from him. "Mine's condemned," he thought bitterly, "but no more so than I, I suppose. No more than I. I could never abide what he did. Never! It's a sin! And he would never change. Never! And now he's gone. And I can't seem to forget. Forgive, but not forget."

The waiter brought the old man his dinner and poured him another glass of wine.
"Leave the bottle," the old man said.
"Yes, sir," replied the waiter.

The old man began to smell, the slight scent of rosemary wafting to his nostrils. "Rosemary, that's for..."

"Where were you last night?" the woman asked innocently.
"Working," said the man, somewhat annoyed, "and I fell asleep."
"Of course you did," she smiled, teasing.
"You don't have to worry," he said.
"I know I don't," she lied.
"I've been trying to put in more hours. The bills are piling up again."
"Speaking of which," she said cautiously, "I saw the doctor today. He's decided to try Repronex."
"You know I don’t feel comfortable with that," he said.
"I know, I know, but..."
"Let’s just wait and see."

"‘Men have died because of this,’ he tried to tell me. ‘No one’s ever died of a broken heart’ I had said, condescendingly. What a fool I was,” thought the old man. “Katherine, she tried to reason with me. ‘He’s your brother,’ she reminded me. She’s the one who saved his letters. She’s the one who answered his calls. Until the day they stopped coming that is. Until the day they stopped...”

“Did I show you this?” the first man asked, pulling an envelope from his pocket.
“I don’t think so,” said the other one.
“It’s a letter from Tia’s teacher,” said the first.
“Problems?” asked the second, not yet reading the letter.
“No, I think we’re over that. This is good news.”
The second man read the letter softly to himself, then looked to the first man with sheer surprise. “A scholarship!”
“Yeah, imagine that. Susan was so proud she cried.”
“We need to celebrate,” said the second man, “When will she be home?”
“Susan’s bringing her next week,” said the first, “but we’ll be pretty busy. I don’t know...”

Disappointed and hurt, the second man said nothing. His eyes lowered then and he looked around the room.
“It’s just that Susan still...” the first man tried to explain.
“I know,” said the second one, “It’s not a problem. Really.”
Back in the days when gold was the only form of currency, there lived a brilliant old scientist, who many people despised and looked down upon. He was not your average man and did not blend in well with society. As a child and a young man, he was often ridiculed for his "crazy" scientific ideas and his wild plans. Because of this verbal abuse, he became withdrawn and isolated. The majority of his life, he spent locked up in his laboratory, where he slaved day in and day out in pursuit of a magic formula. The people of his town made fun of him and called him the "mad scientist." But the old man preferred the title of The Alchemist. His life dream was to turn lead into gold, to rule the world, and to get back at the people that had hurt him over the course of his life.

Finally after years and years of tedious labor, his dream came true. He finally achieved the brilliant transformation of changing lead to gold. He originally planned to keep his discovery secret and simply mass-produce gold in his basement and slowly take over the world. However, his ego got the best of him, and he went straight to the newspaper to brag about his discovery and to shove his brilliance in the faces of all the people who had hurt him. The people scoffed at him and called him a lunatic. The word psychotic was mumbled under their breath when talking about him. "I'll prove it! I'll prove it!" He screamed to the public. And just for sport, the people agreed to set up a demonstration. The date was set for a month later.

By the time of the demonstration, all the major newspapers and television shows were interested. They showed up on the site with their cameras and recorders. The crowd was huge; people flew in from all corners of the country to see the "mad scientist" in action. The Alchemist was a little nervous but confident in himself. He had repeated his procedure many times before the demonstration just to make sure he was right. Every time he was successful. He set up his table with is potions, concoctions, and instruments and got to work. The camera crew was not allowed too close, because he did not want his secret to get out. He began with a chunk of lead and added a little of this and a little if that. He heated his blend, then stirred in a little bit of this and a little more of that.
Fioretti

Followed by more heating and more of this and more of that. Until finally after two hours of concentrated work, he produced a beautiful block of gold. The material was tested and confirmed. The crowd went wild!

From that point on, he became a celebrity. He wrote books, gave lectures and appeared on talk shows. However, he was careful to keep his magic formula a secret. He was enjoying his life and newfound popularity, until tragedy struck. He had just finished a lecture at the local university and was on his way home. Instead of his friendly house to greet him upon his return, he was met by seven men all dressed in black. They knocked him out and dragged him inside and down to his basement. Here the old man underwent hours of terrible and painful torture. His attackers wanted the Alchemist's secret formula. After about five hours of torture and to spare his life, he finally gave in and forked over his secret formula. They disappeared into the black night. The old man was left battered, bruised and bleeding on the floor of his beloved laboratory. The alchemist died a lonely death among his precious chemicals.

The events that occurred next happened so quickly that it almost seemed like a dream. The seven men went public about their new "discovery." This initiated a chain reaction of beatings and killings; everyone was desperate to obtain the formula themselves and willing to do anything to get it. The secret formula was no longer sacred as it fell into the hands of many people, all interested in their selfish pursuits. Friends and family members turned on each other and began killing the people they loved to get the gold wealth. The country became so chaotic that the Alchemist's absence was barely noticed. The murders continued to rise and so did the production of gold. All the while as the world fell, gold became so common that it was useless.

In the end after all the murders, only a small number of people remained. They came together to make a pact to get rid of all the gold, which they threw into the ocean and to start over. They vowed never to mention the name of the Alchemist or the destruction he caused. In place of gold, they turned to very detailed pieces of paper to use as currency. They felt these could not be very easily duplicated. And so the people lived on and reproduced, and the population was renewed. And the dollar became the only form of currency.
Poetry

AWARDS

Tinfoil and Plastic Wrap
1st prize, Poetry, English Club

Terra Firma
2nd Prize, Poetry, English Club
A tin foil world
Shiny, silver, impenetrable
Where no one can see through to the inside
How I long to go back
To escape from this
Plastic wrap world
Where everyone sees
And everyone knows
Where I can’t hide anymore
This plastic wrap world
Where people poke and prod
Until I’m black and blue and broken
And then laugh at me while I cry
What happened to the security
Of my tin foil world
The one that seemed to keep me safe as a little girl
The tin foil world
Where I curled up in a ball and hid
And why can’t I get back
To my shiny, silver, impenetrable
Tin foil world
Terra Firma  
Lori Voorhis

Maybe the wind will blow my thoughts,  
or my heart  
Somewhere you are not, cut  
Clean through me  
You.  
Such a surprise.  

A nor’easter,  
Alberta clipper,  
Melting Chinook  
A spicy trade wind.  

I will not need a sextant,  
when traveling the secrets of the moon  
the stars  
roaring through tree branches,  
the doors of houses  
rattling your sashes  
and wind-chimes  
sucking doors shut,  
‘till you crash against my beaches.
The door sealed shut,  
musky light dwindling down—  
two fingers, a hair, nothing.  
A moldy doorman poked his  
mushroom face out—  
"Patience... You'll be next."  
The door thumped shut before  
I could sputter the words of entrance.

Time passed while  
I studied ancient spells  
and counter spells  
in the oubliette.

Grey warm red light shines alluringly in the corners:  
a space filled with all the intrigue of a waiting room.

Less than a fortnight, less than a night,  
about a quarter of an hour passed.  
When the mushroom man appeared,  
longer than before, I pushed through  
the crowded room of people like me and rushed  
through the stacks, columns, and glass cases  
and didn't even look at the Book of Kells.

I pushed through the wall and emerged in a  
corridor, streaming with golden strands of sunshine,  
webby fingers clinging to my hair.  
I lengthened my steps to the end of the nave  
to find you, intent, studying a book about the  
Book of Kells. Your hands were impatient,  
but your mouth was amused, and no surprise  
in your eyes as I arched my back and stretched  
my limbs and joined you in your mockery  
of all those people like me.
They say they like the way I’ve changed them.
I’ve changed them for the better.
They thank me for being there and they love how things are so much
different since we first met.
I’m the outsider who worked her way in.
I’m here, part of the posse.
I’m the right hand man.
I’m the leader.
Then the real changes begin.

They thank me for the changes, but wish things never did.
They look back fondly on times before I entered their lives.
The gleam in their eyes is there, and the memories come out like
fantastic stories.
They’re just out of reach from their hearts.
I’m not there, not part of the flock.
Not involved.
Not important.
Then the dreaming ends.

What do they want? What do they see?
Through the tears in their eyes. Through the smiles across their face.
In the midst of laughter. In spite of anger.
It’s a puzzle I can’t figure out.
I saw it put together just as I came in. Everything fit, everyone was
content.
I see what it is now.
I’ve figured it out.
I just don’t fit.
Then the tears come streaming.
The pain in my chest. The fury in my heart.
The regret I simply won’t acknowledge. It lies beyond my grasp
and it’s luck it does.
It wouldn’t survive. Survival is ironic.
I’ve survived all my life, from things they couldn’t imagine.
In their perfect world, things like my past don’t happen.
Aren’t thought of.
Looked down upon.
Then the elimination continues.

The door is shut. It’s not locked but may as well be.
Her heart is. The fallen leader.
Leading her troops away from me.
She once told me of Jesus. “Turn the other cheek,” He said and she did.
No one speaks of the cold shoulder just south of that cheek.
What did I do?
Why am I wrong?
Why am I the abandoned one?
Then the loneliness sets in.
Where Was He
Raenisha Karim

When I was young, it was my mother’s face I saw
I heard her speak of him rarely
I saw him once or twice as I remember
When I was young, it was my mother’s face I saw
I smelled her perfume, not his cologne
I wondered if I would ever see him again
When I was young, it was my mother’s face I saw
Where was he?
The Pain
Sharon Wells

I’m known as “Pain,” as you can tell,
I move through your body and do my job well.

I make you cry and I make you weep.
At times, I even keep you from your sleep.

My favorite place to attack is the depth of your heart,
To me it’s your most vulnerable part.

I wear a disguise, to let you think that life is grand.
I allow you love, trusting over and over again.

When the time is right, I step right in.
That is when all of your anguish begins.

All humanity is basically alike!
Enjoying what love brings, but daring to put up the fight.

With all things in life, there is a price to pay.
So with love comes the hurt, today and always.
The Un-Welcomed Guest
Ryan Kreicker

It takes you in the night you know,
When you are least expecting attack.
Creeping around corners, in the breeze it does blow.
It's just waiting for you to turn your back.

When you think you have it you don't,
When you feel you're safe you aren't.
It's right there beside your head,
Can't you feel it, see it, catch to.
But that is not what you do,
It Catches you.

Now that you have it,
Your pals will too.
You pass it from friend to friend,
This cycle never ends.

It has you in its grip now,
From this you can't be free.
And this you wonder how,
Can it be happening to me?

It's like an annoying friend,
That just won't go away.
For this intruding thing
That has decided to unpack his bags and stay.
Too Much Green
Lisa Rosenfeld

Too much green
There is so much to name

Too much green
My room is full of green
Comforter, curtains and my rugs

Too much green
I think I am on a roll
Pickles, spinach and cucumbers

Too much green
Still moving along
Christmas trees and wreaths
Shamrocks on St. Patrick’s Day

Too much green
Still more to name
The green of Astroturf that football players play on
Including the Green Bay Packers

Too much green
Let’s keep the ball rolling
Trees, grass, leaves and bushes
Are all seen at best in the summer
Too much green
Looks like it will never end
"Green Eggs and Ham"
Greenday and "Greensleeves"
Even that gross song about
"Great Green Globs of Greasy, Grimy Gopher Guts"
And let us not forget the movie "Fried Green Tomatoes"

Too much green
Let's try not to go overboard
Skittles, M&M's and jelly beans too
But not the green Jelly Belly jelly beans
For those are the ones I despise most

Too much green
Let's not forget money
Which most college students can only dream of

Too much green
I think we get the idea
That there is just
Too much green
In this world we live in
Be True
Brandi Eversman

Be true to yourself, create in your own image
and you have just begun to live.
Stretch, yawn, savor the delicacy that is the essence of your own true
being.
Light up and smoke the shreds of tears that once streamed down your
face.
Collect the shatter pieces of your soul,
    polish them until they reflect your true identity.
Bitch and shout
Laugh and love
Live all emotion with depth and intensity
Never settle for less.
One minute lived . . . one moment to remain unchanged for eternity.
Value yourself, all relationships
Discover that misery resides inside you.
Kick its ass out.
Be True.
Live.
Watermelon Days
Suzanne Walker

Watermelon. Red, juicy, sustaining.
Janey and I ran through the fields of
my uncle’s farm, our braids tangling in the wheat
of his crop, our hands sticky with the fruit.
The sun, always in the west, always
two hands away from setting, casts a glow
across his land casting my aunts and uncles
in rich light and shadows. They discussed
recipes and priests. Mother was there
with her salad and her cookies waiting to help
my aunt feed this brood.

Days filled with flowers
and walks down lanes, conversations
about who kissed who and how it felt.
Lots of conversations about older
sisters and what they did.
Dad was always laughing
and pointing his camera, making memories of
his laughing girls and their mother, she was with the aunts.
Still, I’m not surprised that it didn’t last.
Things change and watermelon is
Sticky and messy. The juice runs down my chin.
My tongue has gotten out of the habit of licking
up the juice—it has dried up to nothing.
The Child
Elizabeth Kreicker

Rainbow, shooting stars and small dreams
Make you think there is more to reality than what it seems
A white unicorn or a four leaf clover to pick
Make the days go by faster with each "tick"
A wishing well full of happy prayers
Helps you take the next set of stairs
A happy child full of make believe can be
more wise than a wise man, a teacher, and me
You smile, all sorrel teeth,  
All cozy in white layers and alien.  
I suggest we share lunch over outlooks,  
Turkey sandwich triangles and couscous.

You allude to your birthplace,  
A poor isle where you found yourself  
Slipping from the gung-ho of innocence,  
Biting your lip at the tabloid covers  
On display in the express lane.

So now you’re here.  
You ask if I could swallow my elation.  
I ask if you find winks degrading.
The wooden bridge rose over the crowd.
Waves of frustration roll slowly down the street.
The heart of the jungle stirs with strange life
Every horn and flying bird a beat.

Gray sidewalks border the pitch black rivers
Trees of concrete tower over everything.
Busy footsteps are heard along these paths.
Voices of those who dare to speak echo and ring.

Steam rises from cavernous depths unseen
No buzzards or ravens regale us with their song.
Jackhammers and engines fill the air with noise.
Nothing here remains silent or still for long.

A dull brown tinge fills the once blue sky
Night comes and the bridge is bathed in neon light
Smokestacks belch smoke and flame, the city lives
No longer wooden, the bridge is silver steel so bright.
i glance up
from my own little world
and follow your eyes up to mine
and i smile
just 'cause its you
and in a way you bring me back to reality
and again
i am reminded why i am so happy
and just how perfect this feels
Leaving but not Forgetting
Elizabeth Kreicker

One step closer to our dreams
One step farther and our future seems
to have us fearing tomorrow
as leaving fills us with so much sorrow
We cannot help to wish time away
Wanting so much for our lives today
Then also wanting to move ahead
Trying to remember all we learned, all we said
Keeping the memories closest to our heart
We leave, to have a new life, target a new start
Although we may never be the same
We will never forget from where we came
And the people that touched our lives so,
We want them to know
We will never forget how they made
us into who we are today,
and who we will be tomorrow
You soar. Teasing the birds and
the people below with your long whipping
tail, made of old cheerleading ribbons
knotted tightly on.

Those old memories fly through the air,
growing pale in the afternoon sun
bleaching out into nothing.

I’m holding you by a thread and watching you sail,
back and forth, carried by a wind stronger than me.

Beautiful, but old.
Part of a life that’s flown away.
Eichhörnchen
Alex Gouty

Chittering at his assailants
He defends his treasure.
The cold winter is coming
And he will need it to feed his family.

The giant birds swoop at him
He scratches one with his paw
With movements almost human
He jubilates at his victory

And cracks open a nut with his teeth
To celebrate.
Special Thanks to Duplicating Office:
Larry Steeb

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