Dicta

University of Michigan Law School

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dicta
university of michigan law school
literary journal 2002
We are proud to present the 2002 edition of Dicta, the Law School Literary Journal. The literary journal was created in order to provide a forum for the creative talents that are sometimes overlooked in a rigorous academic environment. This journal reflects the richness and diversity of our Law School Community, students, faculty, and staff alike.

We would like to thank all those who submitted work and all those who contributed in any way to the publishing of this journal. We would also like to thank the Law School Student Senate for their support, especially David Singer and Joe Bernstein for their advocacy and parliamentarian efforts.

Dicta Editorial Board 2002

Emily Bateman
David Boyle
Shermin Izadpanah
Sara Klettke
Elizabeth Laughlin
Tim Martin
Lowell Mead
Marla Swartz
Stephanie Wang

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OPENING
Ben Eisman

Breath of spring in February
restaurant doors open to the street
old men sit up in their sickbeds

Women's faces lift as they pass today
And people carry their gloves.
The soles of my feet are ringing
with each step into the afternoon
they wait for the brown snow to firm and cool.
Breath of spring in February
restaurant doors open to the street
old men sit up in their sickbeds

Women's faces lift as they pass today
And people carry their gloves.
The soles of my feet are ringing
with each step into the afternoon
they wait for the brown snow to firm and cool.
MEMORIAL LIBRARY
EMILY BATEMAN

The interior gives the appearance of a ship:
narrow stairwells and walkways
painted olive green, gray shelves riveted
down as though
gusts of wind might blow
everything away.
I fell in love here once,
with the only man
I ever knew to use
the microfiche machines.
He used to come in
every day to look up
the statistics on our country’s blood
supply, dead now. Yesterday a student
came in looking for an article:
“How to Reconstruct the Face
from a Human Skull.” How curious
that work must be. My life is simple;
I live alone. But I had a man once,
and I often dream -- in the first stages
of sleep, he is crawling in
beside me, my hair spread on the pillow.
But he’s dead now,
and, feeling caught below
the waterline on an emigrant ship,
I reconstruct his face in my dreams,
my hands in the air, feeling for him:
eye-sockets, cheekbones, oversized teeth.

MISTRESS SPIDER
STEPHANIE WANG

she bound him with 3000 ties and asked him to stay
but when she turned her head, he broke the ties and ran
from the treetop in the forest
until rain found holes in the umbrella of leaves
until mud gave way to concrete
at the airport terminal, the dark sky
turned the windows into large black mirrors
like eyes with no irises, only pupils
staring, he realized that he had been lonely his entire life
and he was jealous of the men in orange coveralls
who walked in and out of the rain
moving baggage from the conveyor belt to the plane
so he waded through a curtain of plastic strips
labeled “EMPLOYEES ONLY”
and sauntered into the tempest, dreaming
of the warm cocoon of her arms
and the silken strands of her hair
MEMORIAL LIBRARY
EMILY BATEMAN

The interior gives the appearance of a ship: narrow stairwells and walkways painted olive green, gray shelves riveted down as though gusts of wind might blow everything away. I fell in love here once, with the only man I ever knew to use the microfiche machines. He used to come in every day to look up the statistics on our country’s blood supply, dead now. Yesterday a student came in looking for an article: “How to Reconstruct the Face from a Human Skull.” How curious that work must be. My life is simple; I live alone. But I had a man once, and I often dream — in the first stages of sleep, he is crawling in beside me, my hair spread on the pillow. But he’s dead now, and, feeling caught below the waterline on an emigrant ship, I reconstruct his face in my dreams, my hands in the air, feeling for him: eye-sockets, cheekbones, oversized teeth.

MISTRESS SPIDER
STEPHANIE WANG

she bound him with 3000 ties and asked him to stay but when she turned her head, he broke the ties and ran from the treetop in the forest until rain found holes in the umbrella of leaves until mud gave way to concrete at the airport terminal, the dark sky turned the windows into large black mirrors like eyes with no irises, only pupils staring, he realized that he had been lonely his entire life and he was jealous of the men in orange coveralls who walked in and out of the rain moving baggage from the conveyor belt to the plane so he waded through a curtain of plastic strips labeled “EMPLOYEES ONLY” and sauntered into the tempest, dreaming of the warm cocoon of her arms and the silken strands of her hair
was i really so arrogant that
i thought i could dictate the end to this story
simply because i wrote the beginning?
as if life was a fable
i could develop with Aesop-like coherency

it wasn't until driving home that i noticed
this plot had no purpose
plagued with circularity --
the story ended just where it began

was i really so arrogant that
i thought i could deliver the lines in this scene
simply because i wrote them?
as if life was a play
i could direct with Shakespeare-like grace

it wasn't until driving home that i noticed
this sequence had no purpose
plagued with pregnant pauses --
the soliloquy never became a dialogue

ironic plot twist:
the control freak catalogues his movie watching
and tries to direct where his ivy grows
but places his destiny in the hands of fate

dramatic climax:
and realizing that failure is better than no action at all
i forsake the status quo
and gently close the door behind me

was i really so arrogant that
i thought today was all about empowerment
and doing the "right thing"?

it wasn't until driving home that i noticed
far too gentle for january
lazy & hazy & cloudy & cold
the wind blows without hubris
let someone else huff & puff & blow the house down

there can be no confusion --
today (the wind) has no purpose
WITHOUT PURPOSE

MARLA SWARTZ

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today (the wind) has no purpose
**SPRING CLEANING**  
**JOHN W. URSU**

Cleaning the boxes out of my basement,  
I find with some distress  
I have never thrown anything out.  
A lifetime's worth of clutter.  
What am I going to do with it all?  
Old socks and magazines.  
A baseball glove and cleats.  
Report cards and school papers.  
All unsorted. All valued equally.  
And to read the letters! So labored!  
Lessons unlearnt. Advice ignored.  
Boxes and boxes stacked high with mistakes.

Thus the power of throwing things out.  
To say to this junk -- you think you know me,  
but you don't. I am cagier than you.  
I am more than the things I used.  
I do not want my children reading my old letters someday thinking -- that's so Dad! He never learned!  
I want to tell them now,  
you will not find me here.  
I am not in the laundry receipts  
or shopping bags. I am not in the old records  
or checking stubs. In all of these things,  
you will find me gone.

Picking through some old papers  
I found a nest of spiders, quite by accident.  
They must have been here for years.  
Tigers in their world. Several generations of kings.  
Who knows how many have lived  
in that banker's box? How many still will be?  
They neither read the letters nor sort through souvenirs.  
They do not paint with the brushes nor examine the photos.  
Instead, their use is utilitarian.  
As seen by the spiders, the letters neither move nor mollify.  
They are angles and edges, just that.  
Angles and edges. Good for building.

---

**SURREALITY**  
**TO SR. DALI**  
**TIM MARTIN**

I.

Her jaundiced hue arouses me,  
Golden from sun's burning pitch,  
And from behind I love her back  
-- Slim and strong. Scatological  
Minds embrace her young timidity,  
To pluck the rose from her sweet grasp  
And seize her with the care of great  
Cleopatra's most tender asp;  
The innocent stare into space  
Of a lamb hiding just beneath  
Its sexy-as-sin piety.

II.

You said "There will be time"  
But there is none.  
The purpled ants come swarming  
To bite away the flesh,  
To decay bones in nature's light,  
To take their place as time's high heir.  
Prescient black legs  
Tickle the dead man's skin,  
And herald the unkindest news:  
That time has conquered him.

(continued on next page)
SPRING CLEANING

JOHN W. URSU

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(continued on next page)
III.
In the luminescence of pre-dawn skies,
In the expectancy of golden days,
The sun's fiery onset one must premise
And stay to burn under its healthy weight.
The bodies melt in a hot plastic slush,
Into the phantasmagoric ghost-form;
Collapse the bones, and minds and souls crush
Beneath lava flow. The lovers torn,
Families parted, solitude can reign
Riding forever as Horsemen of Death
Through the brilliantly barren desert plane
-- No one to challenge His range nor His breadth.

IV.
on pinewood chair --
she sits and she knits
-- sun's high noon --
to strum the violin
of my heat.
the tressed locks spring down
in a viney boon
-- grapes to suck
and grapes to suckle;
and quiet hush
rushes through the room,
no need to argue anymore.
and in the silence
of grace's
awe-full presence
i cannot help but ponder:
who was it again
that invented monsters?

COMMUTER'S CONFESSION

JEFF ROUSH
i sometimes relish long,
alone commutes --
stretches of highway
between pressure points,
where i celebrate
anonymity.
here i belong to
no one,
owe nothing.
i am a silver Toyota
mingling amicably.
i laugh at red Pontiacs,
zipping right
only to get stuck
behind semi's
diesel and dust,
waiting for me to
pass again.
i glance sideways
at women in white Hondas,
flirting,
unpressured by
potential future
encounters.
i play music and
sing --
loudly, badly --
head-bobbing and
wiggle-dancing,
ignoring scoffs from
black Lincolns
as i dancingly
drive on...
III.

In the luminescence of pre-dawn skies,
In the expectancy of golden days,
The sun's fiery onset one must premise
And stay to burn under its healthy weight.
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black Lincolns
as i dancingly
drive on...
JACQUELINE PICASSO
MARLA SWARTZ

i am only a footnote to history
the world knows your name
    your hands
    your blues & reds

your lines describe what only
their minds can illustrate
and then so much more

you give them your colors, your angles
and in return you receive their immortal adulation
and with every palette you give them
a piece of your soul

only to have them quietly returned
in hushed corridors of learning worldwide

and the rest of yourself you keep for
    your eyes
    your sketches
    your paints

and what is left for me?

i am only a footnote to history
the world knows your name
    your hands
    your blues & reds

but only for me do you paint in your sleep

SPA WEEKEND
EMILY BATEMAN

Drunk and in the kitchen,
We threw handfuls of clean salt
Over our shoulders, for luck.
It stuck to our hands,

Was transferred to our hair
As we danced around
And around like careless bathers.
And it's no wonder, really,

That we found it in our bed
As we rolled around when we woke up --
Not at the beach for a vacation,
But just as good:

Loafing here with you.
i am only a footnote to history
the world knows your name
your hands
your blues & reds
your lines describe what only
their minds can illustrate
and then so much more
you give them your colors, your angles
and in return you receive their immortal adulation
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And it's no wonder, really,

That we found it in our bed
As we rolled around when we woke up --
Not at the beach for a vacation,
But just as good:

Loafing here with you.
MENTAL MEANDERINGS

JEFF ROUSH

class drags on.

mind,
cappuccino- and
chocolate-fed,
wanders in and
out of over-

explanations:

his hair can't be
real, but who would
wear THAT toupee...

("...rebuttable
presumption of
reliance...")

she's mangling her
highlighter again - cruel,
vicious woman...

(...balancing of
probability and
magnitude...")

"And tiiiiiiime
go-o-oes by
so slo-o-wly..."

("... nolo contendere
does not create
res judicata...")

i wonder if
she's smiling
right now...

("...coverage for
intentional
misconduct...")

why am i so...

i snap back,

quasi-focused on


tender offers and
proxy fights,
barely, temporarily saved from
dangerous reflections
class drags on.

mind, cappuccino- and chocolate-fed, wanders in and out of overexplanations:

his hair can't be real, but who would wear THAT toupee...

("...rebuttable presumption of reliance...")

she's mangling her highlighter again - cruel, vicious woman...

(...balancing of probability and magnitude...")

"And tiiiiiiime go-o-oes by so slo-owly...

("... nolo contendere does not create res judicata...")
PLEASE REPEAT THE QUESTION

Stephanie Wang

Caffeine screaming
in my eyelids
like a strobe light bulb flashing
image after image.
I hear you
through my clenched jaw head ache.
I hear you
through the crack of chairs & the swirling vortex
of air conditioning.

But I don’t understand a word.

MORE DETAILS LATER

W.N. Robbins

Notify the police --
WARNING, WARNING
Person caught daydreaming.

Doors slammed!
Lights came on!
Havoc was wreaked in nimble and powerful form!

The suspect apprehended
Monday at the counter of
A local coffeehouse.

When asked which type of beverage he fancied,
The suspect in question shot and fatally wounded
All aspects of villainy
And
Banished all shades of doubt
In his own personal excellence,
Innate intelligence
And connection to his divine Creator.

In a hail of emotional bullets,
Ignorance and pride
Defended themselves against the attackers --
Confidence, acceptance and love --
but they were simply outnumbered.
The ammunition dried up all too quickly.

(continued on next page)
PLEASE REPEAT THE QUESTION

Stephanie Wang

Caffeine screaming
in my eyelids
like a strobe light bulb flashing
image after image.
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Defended themselves against the attackers --
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The ammunition dried up all too quickly.
The cashier describes the scene vividly:

"Officer," he reports, "he just opened his mouth, and nothing came out except a single, perfectly pitched Middle C. His hand was in mid-air, and I thought he was having a seizure or something."

The suspect has not been identified, but has been taken into custody by his own self-recognition, and charged with using a dream with deadly force, first degree. And unsolicitously endangering the lives of nearby ghosts and demons who have been known to frequent the area.

Word says that he will plead guilty on all charges. More details later.

---

To the Brown-Haired Man With the Strut

Sara Klettke

She has the nose of a porn star
Only real, we used to dance
In her mom's tiny kitchen
Two blonde curves
One in jeans, one in G-strings
She saw you there
Tapping your fancy shoes
You were under her spell, soft voice
Soft, tight ass when you told her
You spend days at the law school.
Who is that guy on the $20
She was laughing because
You thought she liked you
I see you every day
What's two more songs
3 a.m. on my voice mail
Guess who else
Your height, your age, your name
Is a regular pervert
If you look at me like that
You came all over yourself
Again.
I'll talk.
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TO THE BROWN-HAIRED MAN WITH THE STRUT

SARA KLETTKE

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Only real, we used to dance
In her mom's tiny kitchen
Two blonde curves
One in jeans, one in G-strings
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Soft, tight ass when you told her
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3 a.m. on my voice mail
Guess who else
Your height, your age, your name
Is a regular pervert
If you look at me like that
You came all over yourself
Again.
I'll talk.
IN THE NIGHT
Tim Martin

You came to me dressed only in the night,
Rested your sweet head on my pillow's soft
And called to me through this silky dream land.
You called to me, inviting me to dance,
To tramp over the dream's Dali landscape,
Over the barren fields and fresh duned sands,
To unite and frolic and play and prance
Draped in the purpled silver of moonlight.

You came to me dressed only in the night,
Laid my hand upon your tidal chest
And pushed your neck up to my waiting lips.
You caught me in that fancy honey trap,
A bee stuck half-submerged in pear blossom,
And taunt me with your gently swaying hips
As you hover over me white as wan ghosts
Draped in the purpled silver of moonlight.

STATUE IN THE MARKET
Ben Eisman

Yesterday, a statue in the marketplace
reminded me of one of Michelangelo's slaves
Half-emerged:
that clinging dust and shoulders firm with burden,
face like a fallen temple.

My thoughts were drawn to my father
Who blows air between his teeth
and jingles his keys when he walks
and to my grandfather, who sold shoes:
Now dead -- but who, unlike his son, never knew
how it is to be crestfallen,
bemused, besotted, or dazed
by ocean in the afternoon,
the rock-salt and sulfur predicament
of three dust-bound souls.

There are things in our lives, I believe --
Setting soup on the stove to boil,
a sweating orgasm,
playing tennis,
dying,
blindly exiting our mothers' wombs,
fastening a necktie,
watching wind move the twigs
of the blueberry tree alone in April,
shudder-wince of all conceptions --
that are never transmitted,
but which stay in the stone.

I watched my father wade across the Deerfield once
It was January and my hands hook
when I saw myself in him for the first time,
fifty feet away and noiseless:
It was how your feet planted themselves
in the rock by the eddy;
how rooted you were in the inexorable water
that lapped and chopped,
rushed and rose at my knees.
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And pushed your neck up to my waiting lips.
You caught me in that fancy honey trap,
A bee stuck half-submerged in pear blossom,
And taunt me with your gently swaying hips
As you hover over me white as wan ghosts
Draped in the purpled silver of moonlight.

STATUE IN THE MARKET
Ben Eisman

Yesterday, a statue in the marketplace
reminded me of one of Michelangelo's slaves
Half-emerged:
that clinging dust and shoulders firm with burden,
face like a fallen temple.

My thoughts were drawn to my father
Who blows air between his teeth
and jingles his keys when he walks
and to my grandfather, who sold shoes:
Now dead -- but who, unlike his son, never knew
how it is to be crestfallen,
bemused, besotted, or dazed
by ocean in the afternoon,
the rock-salt and sulfur predicament
of three dust-bound souls.

There are things in our lives, I believe --
Setting soup on the stove to boil,
a sweating orgasm,
playing tennis,
dying,
blindly exiting our mothers' wombs,
fastening a necktie,
watching wind move the twigs
of the blueberry tree alone in April,
shudder-wince of all conceptions --
that are never transmitted,
but which stay in the stone.

I watched my father wade across the Deerfield once
It was January and my hands hook
when I saw myself in him for the first time,
fifty feet away and noiseless:
It was how your feet planted themselves
in the rock by the eddy;
how rooted you were in the inexorable water
that lapped and chopped,
rushed and rose at my knees.
GIRLS’ GRACE, AND BOYS’ DISGRACE, IN GREECE
DAVID BOYLE

Phaethon, Apollo’s son,
asked to take out the ol chariot of the Sun.
He ignored his luminous Dad’s warnings, let slip the reins,
the universe was about to burst in flames from the careening chariot; but Grandpa Zeus did the sad duty,
let his lightening bolt blow Phaethon out of the chariot:
everything was saved, at what terrible price.

Icarus, inventor Daedalus’ son,
mounted too close to the Mediterranean sun
on clever fathermade feathered wings glued by wax;
the wax of course melted from the Apollonian heat and Icarus swiftly kissed the sea.

Atalanta, faster runner than any man in human race,
would have beat suitor Hippomenes in the footrace.
But he threw out golden apples -- suspiciously like small suns, speaking of the Sun--
and she slowed down to pick them, and lost.

But Ariadne, not arrogant or over-swift, carefully unwound
her ball of thread, and her way through the sunless haunted Labyrinth found,
evading the man-bull Minotaur by following the string,
which showed her the way in and out.
She even saved Theseus, the Minotaur-slayer; he a helpless hero without her help.
Her path slow, and painstaking, but successfully safe and sure.

Sometimes the faster we go, the less far we travel,
a mystery less hard than a thread-ball to unravel?
No mystery that male perverse flighty ego, or male-seduced female undone
by nature, pride, and nemesis -- and glittery golden balls --, may slide fast away into nothingness.
But “ladies” can be their own light, needing no sun, and this is no myth, in ancient Greece or elsewhere.
Even readers not wise as Athena would be wise if this conclusion they drew;
Women can sometimes go farther without men, as even the ancients knew.
Girls' Grace, and Boys' Disgrace, in Greece

David Boyle

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ancients knew.
Haiku Quartet

ROBERTA J. MORRIS

Haiku 1 -- Greed: Injustice

I want more than I
deserve. I got it before.
Why can’t I again?

Haiku 2 -- for an Alumna

She was
out of practice at practice.
Another law school grad
turned Mom.

Haiku 3 -- Forced Simile
(or title for a country song,
or all the words to my next madrigal,
except for the Fa-la-la-la-la’s)

His mind was sharp as
the taste of metal
on a tongue that just
ate cake

Haiku 4 -- On receiving another
set of haikus by e-mail

The haiku craze con-
tinues. Don’t we all
have better things to
do? No.

Valentine's Day: An Extended Haiku

EMILY BATEMAN

You show me your heart
Like a shield, white teeth gnashing
A whole life passes
In probably two days, maybe three.

Seventeen-syllable Overdose

DAVID BOYLE

Too many haikus,
spoil the soup of poetry;
“5-7-5”, yawn.

Hike-oo

DAVID BOYLE

Thumb out for a ride;...
Seven cars pass; five; seven;
--Mobile haiku, gone.
HAIKU QUARTET
ROBERTA J. MORRIS

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Sol's Love
Elizabeth L. Carr

The jewel eternal lights an azure sky,
And sol's envoys, dispatched from awesome height,
To jagged mountains, clothed in splendid white,
With shining chastity do catch the eye.

His aching beauty stunning such as I
(Being mere mortal, awed by such a sight,
And welcoming the warmth of ardent light),
He bathes the peaks in vivid, gleaming dye.

From paradise he brings his glorious hues,
As quietly advances fragrant Nox
To unveil Evening by a slender thread.
The sun, majestic, since Creation woos
His bride, dusted in white, the regal rocks;
Her loves always, and when time ends will wed.

Vitamin Water Junkie
Shawn Peter DeLoach

I go to the fridge
in the middle of the night
I've got a need
That I can't fight

There's a last rescue
& I drink it down
I feel the power
& my head spins around

I'm a vitamin water junkie
all I drink is
vitamin water now
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Saturday:
The opera’s on the radio
And my nostrils fill
With the remembered smoke
Of my father’s cigars.

The weather was always raw and cold,
but afterwards, the music over,
he’d blow his nose
for Violetta or Butterfly
(he “loved a good cry,”
as he said of his mother
before him).
He’d put on his tweed jacket,
and don his fur hat.
He’d light another cigar
and go for a walk,
my sister and I
trotting beside him.

“How much is 6 times 9,
plus 12
divided by 11
plus 7
take away 3”
he’d ask.
And so we both
love numbers,
finding poetry
in a well-balanced
zip+4.

“He was a courtly man”
said a distant relative.
“You could never get close to him,”
said a closer one,
neither one blood kin.

But now, as I feel
his influence on my thoughts,
my joys, my disdains,
it is too late to say
“Thank you. For everything.”
A MEMORY OF MY FATHER
ROBERTA J. MORRIS

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MEEK AND SMALL-WITTED

JOHN W. URSU

Meek and small-witted,
under a newspaper umbrella,
he is blinded by an avalanche of color.
Ripe lime-green leaves,
mossy brown trunks,
and sudden frightening showers --
an architecture of contours and curves
unknown to this straight thinker.
Chipmunks dart and furrow.
Unnamed blackbirds chirp and cry Hail!

Hail to the man who flees the tyranny of doorways!
Hail to the man who flings caution aside
and walks where he is bidden!
Surprised to find that
the little man that lives
inside has crawled out.
Delighted to discover that the man
who carried him may now walk home
through blazing fields of rain soaked greens
unhindered by smallness.

FLAP BONES

CONNIE ESCOBAR

Miriam went to the carnival. She and her friends. She
had always been scared of heights, but today she told them she
was getting on a scary ride, a high one. “I promise. I’m for real
today.” As soon as the bus pulled in front of the fair, she got
out and ran to the first ride she saw. It was a high ride, a fast
one. Her friends stayed behind and said, “She scared. Watch
what I tell you.”

They had nicknamed her Flap Bones because of her lit­
tle, skinny legs, her narrow face, and long flappy feet. She
called to her friends, “Come, you all.”

“We’re coming. Go on ahead.”

“Not by myself I’m not!”

“I thought you wasn’t going to be afraid today, you
skinny scary liar.”

She looked back with a sad face and went and got on
the ride by herself anyway, with her bag of lunch and a peanut
butter jar full of juice. She looked down at her friends and
shouted, “Pray that I make it!” The ride took of re-e-e-e-a-a-l
slo-o-o-w. They could see the look on her narrow face, a look of
I’m going-to-die-today, her nose turned up and stretched
halfway up her face, her eyes lit like fireworks.

By now the ride was getting faster, faster, faster. Her entire
body was moving side to side in the seat. Then her lunch flew
out. The peanut butter jar of juice followed, and plopped on a
fat, bald, white head. “Stop this damn ride!” he shouted to the
ride operator. “What fucking bastard threw that shirt on my
brand new shirt?” The carnie stopped the ride and asked who
had the drink.

(continued on next page)
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John W. Ursu

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(continued on next page)
Flap Bones spoke out and said, “I did, sir. I’m very sorry if I wasted it on you.” The fat man walked up and said, “Come on you skinny scarecrow. I’m going to kill your ass today.” Flap Bones jumped out of the ride, down the stairs and, running as fast as she could, left her friends behind. The big wobbly man galloping like a horse saying, “If I catch you I’m going to kill you!” She kept running. He still galloping. She still running.

MIchigan Spring
Carl Carlson

Come love, sweet love, in spring; now shimmer forth
E’en with the crocuses, that all at once
Already are, flirtatiously. Is that
Old Winter’s breath, that threat of cold still cold,
Or is there warmth, and mirth, and smiles, and hope?

Are you here?
Or are you near?
   Eyes glance aside
   And lips may hide
   But I can guess:
   A certain yes.
Can it be true?
Can it be you?

Love make haste, appear in medias res,
The pretty springtime, ringtime will not wait:
Let not the quenchless songbird croon for naught --
Uncork your mad wild scent, let each one reel
And fall, swoop, swoon, invite, collapse in love.
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FLIGHT I
MADELEINE FINDLEY

A gift is revealed:
Balanced masses poised as a mast.
A column of swiftly traced strokes
Tending toward Flight -- so light
Even a breath might lift her.

Wedge-like and filigreed, her feet
Do not hold earth. Gently, so gently
This hand called her out, the
Curve of thigh, exaggerated bite of hip
Lending thrust to such graceless height.

The weight of this belly folds in on itself,
Leaving ridges of muscle
Cleaving to fat. It closes over its secrets
Like an eye looking inward, nightblind
These layers of tissue and trust.

Like steppes rise her ribs, each ossic
Slat leading, leaping. Flying buttresses
Jutting into formation, a prison
Gouged in great rage. And a dangerous
Shadow looms under this blade.

Two marble planes spread magnificently
Begging for touch, a lingering palm
Pressed to a miracle. Under shivering skin,
Something surges and quiets, soothed by the
Weight of this gaze. Still. It yearns

For the hot band of freedom clamped to
Her brow. For the airy suggestion each
Powdered breath brings. The irresistible
Need for green -- great gouts of green.
A violently silenced tremble.

Three lines of choking, the span of shoulder
A bone braceletled wrist. She has shed
Her plumage but blinds us anyway.
Lifting the tip of a wing, she bounces so
Slightly, testing for orbiting gusts.

What holds her is a mouthful of rain.
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Sitges
Ben Eisman

The women accept your gaze
and continue on;
husbands with February sweaters
tied responsibly about their shoulders;
promenade of young children,
and voices borne on wind;
their soft Mediterranean sighted between the hills.

Out to Sitges for a Sunday:
To see what narrow streets can do;
threaded precariously
through cloves of tight Catalan faces
-- such deeply scooped eyes;
skin pulled taut as land over the earth.

There, the crag of a twilit pier a mile off:
There, the lone man, the old woman --
she takes her last sun on the powdery rocks.

This water keeps the leaves green;
This self-same blood pumps the calves, arms, and heart.
Drink --
you have been walking long, now;
in rain-soaked smoke upon us rolls
our moon.

In Memoriam

Sounds Are Enlight’ning
Kim Heard

Sounds are enlight’ning:
Rattles and calls;
The teacher’s voice
Echoing through the halls,
Birds and people,
Cars in the street,
The train’s shrill voice
Bleating lonely beats.

And quiet is enlight’ning,
The silence of thought,
The far off call
Of our conscience caught,
The dream that ends,
The expression so bold,
the Love of ours
That has now grown cold.
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LADY IN A TRUCK
Sara Klettke

Grandma Violet came to me in a dream for the first time when I was 19. I had not seen her since she was a wrinkled 91-year-old with vibrant blue eyes and a hot-pink jumpsuit over a decade before. I'm not sure why she waited so long to come around, but perhaps I was not very interesting until I entered the drunken, hormone-drenched world of American universities. Her thick glasses were gone; she was sitting on my ceiling in a long brown dress, her ivory face framed with luxurious black curls that I would have liked to inherit. "You have my behind, child," she said, and that's how I knew it was her. She always said funny things like that.

I suppose you think I am making this up. My grandfather, who had a fifth grade education, always said that more schooling my dad got, the more time he spent questioning the obvious and accepting the absurd. "What do you need a weatherman for," he used to say. "It's January in Michigan. Give me ten dollars and I'll give you a forecast." I've met Grandpa, just once, 23 years after his death. Actually I never met him formally, but I felt his hand hold my landing steady on a balance beam, and he told my dad he had been there, who told me.

Growing up, I tried hard to reject this centuries-old family junk. Visits from dead Grandparents? Please. I got all my information from educated men with fancy titles and shiny leather shoes. Then Grandma Violet came to me during a Friday afternoon nap and told me I would be better off staying home that night. It was one of those eerily real dreams, where you can smell a strange candle burning and feel the wet grass staining your jeans. My head playing tricks on me, I figured. A boyfriend lost his temper that night and put me in the hospital. That was the last time I didn't mind.

My mother tells me that Grandma Violet quit the job she had kept for nearly 50 years to look after me. She was still quite healthy, but she would at times catch me by my ponytail instead of chasing after me, hanging on until my head jerked back. It didn't hurt, and sometimes I would run away, daring her to drop her cane and chase me.

My mother's mother tells me that Grandma Violet was born in 1892 on a small farm in Canada. She was the tenth of twelve children, and according to family lore, the most beautiful. Rural Canada bored her at that age, so when she was 16 she took off with a man a decade and a half her senior and crossed the border.

"I didn't marry him," Grandma Violet told me when I asked if that man was my great-grandfather. "That wasn't war time; people were taking lovers, waiting to marry. It's the war generations like my kids' that can't wait to breed." Even now, she has an old habit of tugging at her skirts when she's thinking and arching her back so her slender chest sticks out. I asked her once what sort of underwear she wore, and she laughed at me and said it was much more romantic than the ridiculous string things I wear.

She doesn't come around when she doesn't think I need advice. She isn't a ghost, mind you; it's not like I feel her presence hovering around at graduation ceremonies and funerals of relatives. She has better things to do than haunt about, though what those things are I don't image I'll fully understand until I'm an old grandma myself.

Even at 4'9", Grandma Violet always loved to drive trucks. People who didn't know her were often frightened to see a large yellow pickup apparently driving itself around town. She refused to sit on the phone books and other boosting tools her children put in her car. "My mother rode horses taller than this truck, and she was smaller than me," she would say as if that explained everything. It's possible that this love of trucks is what made her come after me instead of the other grandchildren, because I was the only one without a sensible little Toyota.

It was New Years Eve, and I had promised my poor mother would I be safe off the roads, but as young people will do, I lied and went to a party. Around 1:30 am, I got bored and walked alone to my '90 Wrangler. I was driving along, singing and dancing to the radio, when I lost control of the wheel and the Jeep began to spin. I tried to hang on to the steering wheel,
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Grandma Violet came to me in a dream for the first time when I was 19. I had not seen her since she was a wrinkled 91-year-old with vibrant blue eyes and a hot-pink jumpsuit over a decade before. I'm not sure why she waited so long to come around, but perhaps I was not very interesting until I entered the drunken, hormone-drenched world of American universities. Her thick glasses were gone; she was sitting on my ceiling in a long brown dress, her ivory face framed with luxurious black curls that I would have liked to inherit. “You have my behind, child,” she said, and that's how I knew it was her. She always said funny things like that.

I suppose you think I am making this up. My grandfather, who had a fifth grade education, always said that more schooling my dad got, the more time he spent questioning the obvious and accepting the absurd. “What do you need a weatherman for,” he used to say. “It's January in Michigan. Give me ten dollars and I'll give you a forecast.” I've met Grandpa, just once, 23 years after his death. Actually I never met him formally, but I felt his hand hold my landing steady on a balance beam, and he told my dad he had been there, who told me.

Growing up, I tried hard to reject this centuries-old family junk. Visits from dead Grandparents? Please. I got all my information from educated men with fancy titles and shiny leather shoes. Then Grandma Violet came to me during a Friday afternoon nap and told me I would be better off staying home that night. It was one of those eerily real dreams, where you can smell a strange candle burning and feel the wet grass staining your jeans. My head playing tricks on me, I figured. A boyfriend lost his temper that night and put me in the hospital. That was the last time I didn't mind.

My mother's mother tells me that Grandma Violet was born in 1892 on a small farm in Canada. She was the tenth of twelve children, and according to family lore, the most beautiful. Rural Canada bored her at that age, so when she was 16 she took off with a man a decade and a half her senior and crossed the border.

“I didn't marry him,” Grandma Violet told me when I asked if that man was my great-grandfather. “That wasn't war time; people were taking lovers, waiting to marry. It's the war generations like my kids' that can't wait to breed.” Even now, she has an old habit of tugging at her skirts when she's thinking and arching her back so her slender chest sticks out. I asked her once what sort of underwear she wore, and she laughed at me and said it was much more romantic than the ridiculous string things I wear.

She doesn't come around when she doesn't think I need advice. She isn't a ghost, mind you; it's not like I feel her presence hovering around at graduation ceremonies and funerals of relatives. She has better things to do than haunt about, though what those things are I don't image I'll fully understand until I'm an old grandma myself.

Even at 4'9”, Grandma Violet always loved to drive trucks. People who didn't know her were often frightened to see a large yellow pickup apparently driving itself around town. She refused to sit on the phone books and other boosting tools her children put in her car. “My mother rode horses taller than this truck, and she was smaller than me,” she would say as if that explained everything. It's possible that this love of trucks is what made her come after me instead of the other grandchildren, because I was the only one without a sensible little Toyota.

It was New Year's Eve, and I had promised my poor mother I would be safe off the roads, but as young people will do, I lied and went to a party. Around 1:30 am, I got bored and walked alone to my '90 Wrangler. I was driving along, singing and dancing to the radio, when I lost control of the wheel and the Jeep began to spin. I tried to hang on to the steering wheel,
keeping my foot off the brake, but the jeep just spun and spun like those cartoon devils. The right corner of the bumper smashed through a playground fence next to the road and I found myself stalled in the middle of an elementary playground just in time for a drunk man to smash into a tree, killing himself and his companions.

Grandma Violet was there as soon as I fell asleep that night. She looked tired, angry even. “You know I fell asleep at the wheel once,” she told me. “It was after the war. I fell asleep, almost ran myself right into Lake Huron, but there my Grandma Elsa was, smacking my face and setting the axle right.” She shook her head and brushed my hair away from my face. “She said the same thing I’m going to say to you, Child, if I ever catch you pulling such foolishness again, I will escort you straight to Lucifer’s evil escalator, I promise you.” She smiled. “But that is a very nice truck. I may want to drive it again. Best not when the drunks are out.”

She was always afraid of escalators. My mom told me that. So I guess you could argue that the meeting was really just a psychological trick. You could even explain that the Jeep spun on some ice, not all the ice is melted after they salt the roads, and maybe say that the heat of the engine melted all the ice before anyone else noticed it. Physics, logic, all sorts of things can explain away these meetings. You can even explain away love, trust, and faith, calling them old-fashioned fairy tales that the unenlightened take comfort in. You can explain away all the warnings your dead Grandmas bring. I just wouldn’t expect them to save you if you don’t mind.

This old woman I met about a year ago had dark black eyes that drew me in the most primitive way; it was a soul matching, if you believe in that sort of thing, which I don’t. She was 88 years old, nearing death, and feeling a drive to pass her story on. She invited me to sit on a small couch in the tiny nursing home room she called home. I barely understood her accent and she said I had the voice of a stupid child. We communicated without problems, however.

At one point in our long conversation, the old woman with a road-map face told me that her great-grandmother lived until her until she had her first daughter. “She would come to me in dreams,” she said, “telling me do this, don’t do this. Then I had my daughter, who is named after her, and I haven’t seen her since.

I asked her if she thought that her great-grandmother had been reincarnated in her daughter. She told me that was ridiculous; the woman had just moved on to protect the younger female, and she would protect the younger one after that, until she grew tired and retired to watch. Life moves in circles, she said. Like the Chinese say, male and female, old and young, strong and weak, black and white, balancing each other out in time.

On the front page of the Detroit Free Press today there was a story: people are marrying later. Later than what, I imagined Grandma Violet’s voice asking. The next generation will yearn for strong roots, putting all their cares into a nuclear family, forgetting that their great-grandparents did the same thing. I have always been one of those women who fall madly in love with intelligent men who take them seriously. I suppose it is that weakness that found me engaged at 21 to a very tall historian with a Swiss accent. He was broke and had no drive to speak of, but he could sit for hours with a book and a computer, not eating, not sleeping, producing masterpieces. Of course, few people save for myself and his mother ever really read them. But what did a modern woman like myself care?

Grandma Elsa invited me over exactly one month before the aisle walk date. She woke me up from a dream, and I found myself sitting on a beautifully carved, dark wooden bench with a child in my arms. I was too shocked to take in many surroundings at first, but the damp clay feel of the air was unmistakable. “Thank you for holding him,” a low German voice behind me said. I turned around, and as soon as I saw her padded hips swing toward me I knew, that’s my walk. She was wearing overalls several times too big with a funny hand-sewn camisole underneath. Her face was angular with dark Jewish coloring and her braid fell to her waist; other than the walk, there was little resemblance to myself.

She had a heavy iron tool in her hand that I guessed was not for cooking. “I haven’t had much time with you, child,
keeping my foot off the brake, but the jeep just spun and spun like those cartoon devils. The right corner of the bumper smashed through a playground fence next to the road and I found myself stalled in the middle of an elementary playground just in time for a drunk man to smash into a tree, killing himself and his companions.

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but I want you to look around here and tell me what you feel.”
I did so and felt an urge to run down the road until I collapsed
into a deep sleep. I glanced at open books on the table in front
of me filled with records in a woman’s hand and a pile of dirty
clothes near the door. “Your Swiss dreamer,” she said, “Is so
much like my own.” The sound of some heavy machinery in
the distance woke the baby, who cried in a steady, loud wail.
“Do you not remember,” she scolded me, and motioned for me
to get up and walk with her across the gray stone floor to a
small window made with yellowish glass. I could see her thin,
dark-haired husband in a small office, oblivious to the cries of
his son in my arms, his hands stained with ink.

I sold the ring and put it toward a new truck. I think
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