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### Dicta

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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 parliamentary efforts.

#### Dicta Editorial Board 2002

Emily Bateman  
David Boyle  
Shermin Izadpanah  
Sara Klettke  
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Tim Martin  
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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.



## 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

# WITHOUT PURPOSE

MARLA SWARTZ

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



# 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 unlearned. 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)

### 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...



# 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.

# 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 tiiiiiiiime  
go-o-oes by  
so slo-owly..."

("... 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



## 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)

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.

## 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.

## 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 conclu-  
sion

they drew;  
Women can sometimes go farther without men, as even the  
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.

## 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

# A MEMORY OF MY FATHER

ROBERTA J. MORRIS

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."

# 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 little, 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 off re-e-e-e-a-a-llo-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)

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.

# 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 braceleted 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.

## 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.

# 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,

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,

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 Grandma Violet would have been proud.





