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Wind

Softly, sweetly,
blowing across the land.
The wind,
 hindered by the trees,
flowing across the sand.
Wildly, whirling,
free as a bird.
Instantaneously deadly,
without a word.
Never to be seen,
except with the rain or snow.
You can never leave it behind,
for the wind is everywhere you go.
I want to be like the wind,
free without a care.
Flowing with the breeze,
going everywhere.
The beauty,
is seeing the beauty,
in something so timid, so fierce.
Being one with nature is rare.

L.M.L.

Fall

The time of the year
When the ground is orange-yellow-brown
Fall paints a picture of
Contentment all over the town.
It is a warm, glowing fireplace
Smelling of hickory smoke-
It is a spry little deer
Running from the folk.
Homemade soup and Ah! steaming coffee
Help to warm Fall’s breath
As it whispers outside to the leaves
Coaxing them out of the trees.
Fall’s bright metamorphosis
Of tumbling, restling colors
always inspires the time in me
To turn over my own different leaf.

J. H.

Sombre

inner conflicts abound
Inner conflicts all around
in your heart and
In your mind
some seem necessary
Most unwarranted
They are what one must do
To get a piece of mind
too many conflicts to sort out
But enough to make one sleep
why so many inner conflicts
Why
Why no clue to the solutions
conflicts can lead to
A parting of the mind
conflicts can lead to
A deep and peaceful sleep

What’s wrong with sleeping?
It relieves the pain and
Makes whole the mind
It takes time but it is safe

Inner conflicts resolve with time.
Dead Dawn

by Linda Bennett

It felt as if the planet had cracked open to
the core and the great vacuum of the abyss
sucked me out of my sleepy cloud and into the
treachery of Hell when the alarm clock dutifully
and persistently rang at 5:30 A.M. Waking was
like a high-speed, head-on collision with the
freight train called reality. It was my Saturday
to work the early shift. I slowly became con-
scious of the wind screaming and crashing at the
window panes, and impaling itself on the frames
and awnings, where it thrashed and moaned and
bled great blue-white globs of ice and snow.

Reluctantly, but reasonable, I threw back
the thermal quilts and surfed out of my water
bed with one burst of insincere energy, only to
be greeted by the stillborn offspring of the wind,
lying dead cold all over my bedroom floor.
Before I could reach the radio across the room
to choke away the interloping noise, the chill from
the floor had rocketed to my eyes and brain and
snatched away all remnants of sleep. I moved
like a cyborg out of the bedroom and through the
carpeted hall, avoiding the waffle-patterned
metal ventilating grate in the floor, and contin-
ued into the kitchen.

Anticipating the morning events, I had
prepared my morning coffee the previous night,
so I hit the brew switch with a resentful slap and
proceeded to the bathroom to purge my mouth of
the foul taste of sleep. With robotic motion I
went about brushing my teeth and taking my
usual inventory of the face reflected in the
mirror. She had the same puffy lower eyelids
that I felt, but that frumpy aura had to be an
early morning delusion caused by the absence of
caffeine and nicotine in my blood. Hence, I
quickly finished brushing and flossing and
returned to the kitchen for my dual transfusion.

With coffee cup in hand, I went about my
morning reading to generate the spiritual energy
that I would require to execute my functions
during the day. Today the defiant pages spoke of
self acceptance and the benefits of cultivating an
attitude of gratitude in order to fully experience
humility. I sighed and dropped the book back on
the shelf above the table with a feeble promise to
myself to try. Gratitude though, was the last
thing on my mind as I glanced up at the kitchen
clock.

It was a quick and uncomfortable shower
as the battle in my mind, high above the mere
mortal world on my martyr's cross raged on.
"Screw it. Call in sick and go back to bed.
You've worked hard this week. But if you stay
home, you'll probably just scrub the bathroom
tile, so if you're going to work, you may as well
go to work and at least get paid." A raging sense
of duty, and the ticking of the countdown clock
in my head drove me from my moist cocoon and
gave me feather light feet to speed my final
preparations.

As I stood at the front door putting on
my coat, scarf, and gloves, I stared out at the
dim still morning. The sky was close and heavy
with grey clouds, suspended lifelessly, as if by
the cynical, cyanotic fingers of the Grim Reaper.
I shivered, then sighed, then threw open the front
door to greet this dead dawn, only to be cata-
pulted in an alarmed state of awakening as the
Reaper sent a clammy handful of wind instantly
under my ribs, up through my chest, and yanked
it out my mouth. The crushing cold pummeled
my body as I scurried down the driveway, but as
I rounded the corner, I was consumed by the
scalding heat of impatient anger. A thick frost
had collected on my car windows, and I just
didn't have the time or the inclination to scrape
them. Damn, I'd rather eat worms than scrape
windows, and I thought God knew that! Why
had I not pulled my car into the garage last
night? I could have avoided this entire mali-
gnant morning if I had! My mind raced as I
plowed and hacked away at the frozen formula.
I just can’t believe this. I don’t understand how the weatherman keeps his job. I’m not even going to have time to have coffee and shoot the breeze in the cafeteria and get warmed up before I have to clock in. Good God, thanks a lot! My face was flushed and my fingers near numb when I jumped in, buckled up, and took off. My mind still muttered as I zoomed up the street. It did remind me, though, as I approached the curve, that the local police usually gather there on the weekends to gossip and inhale donuts, so I slowed down as I rounded the corner. It wasn’t a gaggle of police cars that prompted me to romp on the brake pedal with both feet, though. There was a man, or at least a man’s body, lying face down in the gutter. My heart pounded in my throat as I knelt beside him. How had I gotten out of my car?

I would faint if he was dead. I thought I would anyway as I bolted upright. Where were those damn police now? Weren’t they done with their donuts yet this morning? If I blasted my car horn, would someone come outside to help me? Oh God, it’s almost 6:30 A.M. They’d think I was some kind of nut and just pull their blankets back up over their heads and wish me away. I would if I was still home in bed. I rushed back to my car to turn on the flashers, deciding that it would be safest to leave my car there to shield him against any other drivers. I ran to the bottom of the hill to the gas station to call the police. With each thundering stride pounding in my temples like a great brass hammer, and tears in frozen streams down each cheek, I raced on. My lungs ached as I sucked in the icy air. I cursed the two drivers who had chugged down the street as I had been scraping my windows. They had to have passed this lifeless form in the road just moments before I came upon him. My instantaneous contempt for them kept my feet moving and my knees from collapsing.

I thought I’d vomit as I skidded to a stop and grabbed the front door and ran inside the station. The Cupie doll clerk bid me a good morning and teased about my hurry. My mind and stomach screamed, “Vomit, Vomit, Breath, Vomit,” but my mouth blurted out, “Give me the phone. I need the police.” The clerk asked me no questions; she just reached under the counter and produced a weightless receiver and thrust it at me. Oh God, I couldn’t see it to dial. I was terrified at my blindness. Was it shock, hysteria, or was I fainting and my body just didn’t have the good sense to lie down? Only a second after I threw my glasses on the counter and blinked feverishly, did I realize that it was the condensation on my glasses from the temperature change that had blinded me. I was not conscious of any relief, but a warm feeling began to fill my head. Someone, was it me, used my frozen finger to dial the phone, and my shallow breathless voice related my discovery to the emergency operator who was whining stifly in my ear. I snatched up my glasses, tossed the phone back to the clerk, and hit the front door at top speed on the way out.

My single reason for life in that 150 yard run back up the hill was to be with the man until the police arrived. He had been alone in the gutter long enough, and he deserved not to be alone. I stumbled, and the lunge brought the vomit to my throat. The impact of the fall sucked it back down into my sloshing stomach. My subconscious screamed, “Get up damn it! Move Linda! Move!” As I struggled to my feet, there was only me and the man on Earth, and surely it would explode if I did not reach him soon. My pace quickened as I rolled my chest and chin forward in a frenzied effort to get to him. Just as I planted my feet like brakes, I had used up the very last lone of air in the entire atmosphere, and every muscle I had screamed in pain. But, someone else’s ears were listening, because I was alert, physically numb, waiting, looking down over him; on guard.

My mind catalogued every detail about him, and so many questions were forming that some spilled out over my cracked, stinging, and bleeding lips. He’s clean, too clean to be a street
person. His camel colored, slightly outdated overcoat had all the buttons. They all matched and were sewn on with heavy thread by competent and caring hands. His trousers were dark grey corduroy and cuffed. One leg of the trousers was crowded up about midcalf revealing a heavy white cotton sock with the elastic still intact. His boots were ankle high, lace-up with steel toes. I knew them well. They were the same as my grandfather had worn when I was a small girl. The man’s boots were well broken in, but no more badly scuffed than my grandfather’s would have been after he let me stand on his feet to dance for awhile. One shoe lace was tied in a knot at the third eyelet. Had it broken long ago, and could he not afford new ones? Did someone at home have a replacement waiting for that overworked lace? Was anyone waiting at home? Was there a home?

He lay perfectly still, dead still on his belly with his left arm raised above his head. His left hand was clutched in a tight and defiant fist. Had he raised it against an attacker as he fell? It was a strong hand, large and meaty, like a catcher’s mitt, with plump short fingers, white hairy knuckles, and his thumbnail was quite purple at the nail bed. Dad’s had looked like that when he mistakenly hit it with a hammer. He had to have the nail removed, and it had been painful. I felt tremendous sorrow for this old man. His right arm and hand were twisted around backwards at the elbow and wrist. I was sure that a well executed hammer lock had made them snap before the old man had been pushed, or dropped there in the street. His hands were blue, and I wondered if it was because of the cold, or was it just the color of death taking over. He wore a silver band on the third finger of his right hand, and the indentations of time told me it had been there a good many years. It carried an insignia, and I needed desperately to know how it represented the wearer. Had he been a fraternity man long ago? To what organization, union, team, club, or group had he belonged? Would his constituents miss him? Did they know where he was, or had they put him here?

Was the same someone who had sewn on the buttons waiting at home for him now, tired and restless from a sleepless night of waiting and wondering where he was?

Questions, questions wouldn’t stop, so I looked to his face for answers. He wore his hair in a flat top. It was mostly dark grey, but white at the temples and in need of trimming. His shaggy sideburns curled slightly in his bulbous ears. They could have used a scrubbing. His face was well stubbled, and needed to be shaved. The scraggly white bristles covered his chin and grew well onto his cheeks. It was the type of facial hair like my grandad’s. Only a straight razor and a good lather could cut through it. His thick bushy eyebrows grew down into his eye sockets. The lids were folded with wrinkles and swollen, and there was a thin trail of dried blood on the outer corner of his left eye. It trailed down his cheek, toward his chin, and diffused into the whiskers, so it must have flowed before he fell to the ground, or it would have dripped down onto the pavement. He had been injured while he was upright, but when, and why, and by whom? His skin was generally fuddy and mottled, like copper waiting to be polished. His nose was thin at the bridge, but greatly swollen at the tip and crisscrossed with thin, broken purple blood vessels. These effused across both cheeks in a characteristic alcoholic mask. He had full loose lips with little color except blue.

I stared at his mouth and nose, watching intently for the tell-tale omission of white for that would confirm his worldly presence. There was none. But there was a faint wail of sirens lofting on the bitter winter wind. My brain tossed around, and I saw spots as I jumped to my feet and spun on my heel to greet the patrolman. I backed away from the crowd as policemen gathered by the car loads. The chaos and the din of slamming doors, stamping snow crunching feet, barking orders, and radio transmission static evaporated slowly. I stumbled backwards, as if I had been pushed by the hand of God, and I landed on the foot of a naked yet regal old
maple tree. The few remaining leaves rustled and whispered in my ear with reminders of the daily meditations I had read not an hour ago.

I was ashamed as I remembered my attitude upon rising. I had so much to be grateful for. Even at work, I know someone would be waiting for me, and I was cold, but I wasn’t blue. I may not have been anxious to leave my bed, but I had not lain in the gutter for my last rest. Tears came. At first I thought they were for the man, but then I knew they were to wash away my shame for it had been quite a lesson. A policeman yelled to another, “Call the coroner.”

Red Hair

The red hair
like a flame of red glory,
Left me entranced
as if in a fairy tale story.
Just as quickly as she came,
she soon was gone,
As a leaf in the wind
that disappears beyond.
I never know
if I shall see her again,
But as a memory,
she will be with me till the end.

-B.L.R.-

The Bag Lady

The day begins
she sits there; quietly,
desperately praying
her thoughts
are not of selfishness,
but of wondering.
Wondering how long she
will last, or
if she even wants to.
Her clothes; rags,
other people’s left overs.
Found by rubbing through trash.
As people go by, they see her,
and laugh
not noticing the pain.
The pain foreshadowing over
this poor innocent lady.
She is not ashamed,
but insecure.
It is nightfall;
a new day will soon begin.
She will not make plans
for this new day,
but she will just hope
to be there.

-V.E.M.-

Grownup

The eyes don’t laugh anymore.
The lips don’t smile.
You’re a grownup.
The hands don’t play with toys anymore.
The legs don’t run, skip, or hop.
You’re a grownup.
Your life doesn’t seem as simple anymore.
The pressure crushes what you once were.
You’re a grownup.
I wish your eyes did laugh.
I wish your lips did smile,
but you’re a grownup.
I wish your life was simple now.
I wish you’d go back to what you were...
when you weren’t a grownup.
The Heart of the Matter
by Mike Jobe

I once lived in a small town which had a square at its center. The square was not large. It covered just one block. In the square there were many trees, picnic tables, and benches. There was also a swing and a sliding board for children to play on. Early in the spring people would start coming to the square to enjoy the outdoors. And in the late fall, you could still find them there, taking in the beauty of the season. Most of all, the people came to the square to fellowship with other people from the town.

As the years passed and the town grew, traffic around the square became a problem. You could only travel around the square in one direction and anyone who came to town had to go around the square. This caused many back-ups on the street surrounding the square. The town council decided something had to be done. They decided to make the street around the square two-way. But, in order to do so, they would have to widen the street that was already there. The widening of the street would cause almost all of the square to be destroyed.

The townspeople were very upset with the traffic problem, so they all believed that widening the street would be a good idea, even though they were sad to see the square destroyed. There was, however, a group of three old gentlemen who were very upset with the council's decision. Every day, for many years, these old men had gone to the park to sit on the benches and talk about how things used to be. This is how they spent their time.

After talking about the council's plan, the old men decided something had to be done. So, at the next meeting of the town council, the old men showed up to voice their concerns. It was the policy of the council that if any members of the town were concerned with a decision it had made, a town meeting should be held to discuss the subject. So, the council set a town meeting for the following week.

At the meeting members of the council presented facts and figures supporting their decision. They stressed the point that fixing the road would help the town immensely. The people who were at the meeting became even more convinced that the council's was the right decision. The old men were not convinced.

When the council was done with its rumblings and opened the floor for discussion a number of people stood up and gave their support to the street widening plan. Finally, the old men were given a chance to speak. They didn't say much. Their arguments were not full of facts and figures like the council's. But, what they did say was heard by everyone there.

One of the men, the spokesman for the group, stepped forward and began to speak. He spoke of how as young boys he and others had played in the square, of how as parents they had brought their children to the square to play and for picnics, and of how as grandparents they had brought their children's children to the square, and as old men, they now came to the park every day to see one another and talk of how things used to be. The old man told the townspeople of how every time he and his friends went to the park they felt young again. He then asked the council to please change its decision. They then sat down.

A few days passed before the council's decision on the matter was issued. It was printed in an article in the weekly newspaper. The street was to be widened and the square destroyed.

Every day, until the park was destroyed, you could still find the three old men sitting on their bench, talking not about how things used to be, but about how things would never be the same again.

In the months after the square was swallowed up by the construction the three old
men became ill, and in less than a year all of them were dead.

With the square gone the community also began to fade away. Without a square as a central point of recreation and fellowship among the townspeople, they spent their time alone in their houses, their sense of togetherness and community slowly fading away.

Now, many years after the destruction of the square, the town no longer exists. All that is left is a general store with a desolate, two-lane street running in front of it.

**In My Dream World**

One night I had a dream, and it was greater than it seemed. It was of you, and of me, and we were together by the sea. The moon was out, and so were the stars; You had my heart, and the night was ours. We walked along the shore, you held my hand; You’re the one I adore—it was so grand. But then I awoke, and my dream world dispersed. Once again my heart you broke as my day began. I couldn’t wait till night, for my dream world would open and the stars would light. Because then you are mine, and I am yours. Everything is fine... tonight in the English moors.

-Jennifer A. Swearingian

**Untitled**

As I drove home tonight in the moonlight all I could think of was you. I thought of how it used to be—when you and I were known as “we.” I know this last year has been hard—for you, for me, and for “we.” I was so far away during school, but we kept in touch just the same. Somehow, though, things changed: some for the better, some for the worse. We both grew up a little, but in different ways. While being away I learned three things: Cherish all friendships, Always keep in touch, And if you “love” someone— make it count. I’ve been trying to make my love for you count, but you won’t let me.

-Jennifer A. Swearingian

**Storm**

Sonja O’Bryan

The wind hissed like an angry cat. Thunder roared over grassy plains. Yet I sit in a calm dwelling In wonder of the future. Will forbids me to join In life’s stormy parade, But soul thrusts me daily into it.
Changes
by Stacy Koch

She stared at the yearbook picture, a shiny black and white reminder of what had been, a moment of time forever preserved. Was that really her in that picture...smiling from ear to ear? Could it be that it had been taken a mere six months ago? It seemed like a whole different lifetime.

She had arrived at school early that day to practice for that afternoon’s end-of-the-year pep rally. She was at her locker, adjusting her cheerleading sweater in the mirror, when a familiar arm wrapped around her waist. George had kissed her on the cheek and handed her a bouquet of roses. She had smiled and said, “What are these for?”

He playfully replied, “Do I need a reason to bring you flowers?”

“No I guess not, but you are just too sweet to me! I’m going to get spoiled if you keep bringing me flowers all the time!”

“That’s the point!” he had said, grinning, his blue eyes shining. He had been wearing a shirt and tie, which he often did for no reason. His buddies on the volleyball team often harassed him about it, but he claimed he was “dressing for success.” They were still at her locker with the flowers when the yearbook picture was taken. Underneath it, the caption read, “Cutest Couple.” Through a veil of tears, she laughed. That was pretty ironic.

If only the yearbook photographer had been there a few months later. When things weren’t very cute between them. What would the caption have read then? When neither one of them would be smiling. He would be angry, and she would be afraid. After they both started college, he was always raging against something, usually her. When would the next outburst occur? She lived in terror of his explosive temper.

He claimed she was doing well in school just to make him look bad. He constantly reminded her of how successful he had been in high school. His bitter words still rang in her head. “I was Homecoming King. You weren’t even nominated for queen!” “I was Student Leader of the Year, not you!”

When they met, he was the sweetest, most gentle guy she had ever met. He had the world in his grasp. He had swept her off her feet in a flurry of love notes, roses, and midnight phone calls. She fell in love almost instantaneously. If only she could have seen the future, maybe she could have saved herself a lot of heartbreak.

After graduation, everything had changed. He had turned cold and distant, and then resentful and infuriated. She had watched him deteriorate in front of her very eyes. He had flunked out of school, got fired from his job, and kicked out of his apartment. She wondered why things had to change so drastically; how he could change so completely. She wondered how kisses became bruises.

She suddenly closed the yearbook. There was no point in remembering the past. He had changed, and that’s all there was to it. She had gotten up enough courage to leave him, and this time she wasn’t going back. After all, she had changed too. She was no longer just his cheerleader. She had her own life and dreams to fulfill. She couldn’t let him drag her down with him. She sighed and put the yearbook in the box with all his pictures and love letter. Although all the changes in her life had been scary and confusing, she realized that without them she would still be the insecure person in the picture—not the strong person she had become.
The Situation: Burnout due to Crisis Management

by S. Amelia Goodwyn

It often seems I go through life one day at a time, head down, feet shuffling. I am carried through the hours from one “appointment” to another, hop-scotching down my daily planner’s list of “have to be’s” and “have to do’s.” Also, because I am interested in many pursuits and like to engage in a milieu of activities, this daily schedule is often overbooked...or packed so tightly with places I’m next expected and duties that I must perform that a circus juggler couldn’t be less proud.

Sometimes things work out the way I planned. More often, they do not. I cannot schedule for the “little things” that just seem to “happen” and which inevitably throw a monkey wrench in the works. Then someone gets let down. Something doesn’t get done. Efforts become half-hearted attempts as my energies spread increasingly thin over a stretching surface. Irresponsibility and undependability become trademarks.

Procrastination becomes an art, developed subconsciously as a device to allow me to rest from a never-ending list of things to do and places to be. I’ve hypothesized that constructive procrastination is a deceptive guise to convince the eternal Producer that he or she is still producing, (regardless of the fact that cleaning one’s desk drawers at two in the morning is not exactly the highest, most urgent priority). It seems I honestly do not know what to do with myself when I have nothing to do, nowhere I’m supposed to be next. Time to smell the flowers essentially does not exist in my average day. Yet I crave and enjoy relaxation and the pursuit of creative hobbies immensely.

Consequently I sequester my energies and activities. I have two speeds: fast and stop. I work until I drop, and then drop until I’m forced (due to deadlines) to get back to work. Note that “work” quickly becomes anything required or that others rely on, even if I normally would enjoy participating and sharing in them. And lethargy is just as dangerous to an over-achiever as going 110% all the time. So, while I’m not happy having to work or produce because I’ve drained my energies and my reserves and its all coming out of my hide, I’m not happy when I have a large block of time and decide to “crash” and do absolutely nothing the entire time either. Running hot and cold, polarizing life into extremes does nothing less that drain my emotions. Tolerance levels build up to what would be my natural reactions to situations. I respond in nondescript shades of gray to stimulus, whether unhappy or mirthful, panic ridden or easy going. I become “past feeling,” a hollow shell of disinterest and unmotivated effort.

Recognizing that my humor and self-esteem are inseparably connected to my energy level, do I have life snookered, or is it the other way around? Burnout is dangerous and they say it can last a lifetime. I refuse to go down with the ship. I know I can change, but how?
Sally and Nancy

by the Collaborative Creators
LK, JD, MF, CF, MC, and KF

Sally and Nancy were off on their way into the forest to look for berries for their mother. They took along their faithful companions Ruff the dog and Squeaky the cat. Sally carried the basket for the berries and Nancy carried the shears and some twine, just in case they might need them.

As they walked through the forest, they came upon a clearing. In the middle of this clearing stood a house. A large neon sign that said, “fresh berries for mother”, stood in front of the house. Sally and Nancy thought, “Hey, why not get the berries here instead of wasting time picking them.” The two girls walked up to the house and pulled on the big cowbell hanging from the door. After the third ring of the cowbell, a seven-foot tall man with a mohawk answered. The man proceeded to say, “Hello, my name is Gunther. May I help you?”

“How much are your fresh berries for Mother?” Nancy asked.

“Twenty-eight coppers per pound.”

“Oh, we don’t have nearly that much. Let’s go Nancy.”

“Wait, we can work something out. You can work for the berries. Come on in; we’ll talk about it.” Gunther held the door open wide.

Nancy skipped towards the door, but Sally said, “We can pick them ourselves. Come on, let’s go, Nancy.” Ruff started growling and nipping at Nancy’s skirt as if to pull her back from the door. But as Nancy stepped inside, Gunther kicked Ruff down the stairs. The hair stood straight up on Squeaky’s back and he hissed. Sally was worried about the two animals’ behavior. She didn’t know whether to follow Nancy or stay with the pets.

Despite her worry over the pets’ quick change in demeanor, Sally decided it would be best if she and Nancy stayed together. Reluctantly, Sally stepped inside as Gunther slammed the door behind her, nearly smashing Squeaky’s head. Once inside, Sally and Nancy cautiously looked around wondering what Gunther wanted them to do in order to earn their fresh berries for mother.

Sally asked questionably, “So Gunther, what do you want us to do for the berries? I’m sure it mustn’t be too hard.”

Gunther grinned sheepishly, “I’d like for you young, nice ladies to help me cook my supper.”

“That doesn’t sound hard at all; Sally and me are excellent cooks. Mother taught us all about
cooking.” Nancy burst out joyously.

“Well then, why don’t you two start the stove and fill that giant pot over in the corner with vegetables,” Gunther said while backing out of the room.

Nancy started the stove up and took some vegetables out of the cupboard, but Sally still felt insecure. Sally walked over to the window to see what Gunther was up to.

“Say Nancy, why do you think Gunther is outside sharpening an enormous axe?” Sally asked.

“Oh, he’s probably got a rabbit or something that he’s going to use for the vegetable stew,” Nancy answered confidently.

“But why does he need such an enormous pot?” Sally pleaded.

“Du, Sally, he is a very large man.”

Gunther came in the house with a look in his eyes like a man who hadn’t eaten in months. The newly sharpened edge of the axe gleamed with an evil glare at the young fresh meat of the girls. It was only then that Sally and Nancy realized that Gunther wasn’t having them for dinner as guests, but as the main course. They ran around the house but could not escape. Gunther quickly caught the girls and tied their heads to a stump to be used as a chopping block. They were close enough together so one swing of the axe would take both of their heads off. Gunther spit on his hands, took a good grip of the axe, and swung it over his head. The girls begged and screamed for mercy. Bang! The front door swung open. Everyone looked to see who it was. A strange figure in a dark cloak. Was this the one whom the girls were being prepared as dinner for? No. The person slowly took off the shrouded hood. “Mother!” the girls cried. They were saved. NOT!

“You see what happens when you forget to put a new roll of toilet paper in the out house. I was stuck in there for hours until your father came home,” the mother spoke firmly. She then pulled out a willow switch and beat the girls’ behinds. Mother then pulled 100 coppers out of the cloak and handed them to Gunther. “Very good job, young man,” she exclaimed.

Gunther took the 100 coppers and replied a thank you to Sally and Nancy’s mother. But he somehow felt that to go through all that trouble to teach them a lesson was a bit much. And for them to only get a beating with a switch wasn’t nearly enough punishment. Gunther then raised the axe and began to swing wildly until all were beheaded. Indeed, Gunther would have a good meal tonight. After all, he was a very big man.
The Punisher: A Sestina

Frank Castle wants to punish the entire crime world. With his gun he turned the streets into his shooting gallery. He fills the community with hot lead, and he always shoots to kill. It is his personal war.

Central Park is where the war started; he vowed revenge by punishing the mobsters that killed his family with their guns. It was their mistake which lead this man to a be a shooting madman, who shoots first and asks questions later. His war is against criminals, which lead to his family’s death. Innocent death turned him into the punisher. The .45 Smith and Wesson is his favorite gun, he uses to get information but mostly to kill.

Trained as a Marine, he’s a perfect killing machine, who can shoot or stab to incapacitate a man with knife or gun. His growing armory supports his war; he has many weapons he uses to punish, and most of his target die of lead poisoning. His guns are fast at throwing hot lead, and he’s happy if he gets the kill. His only goal is to administer punishment. Sometimes he doesn’t have to shoot the victim: he could break his neck in the silence of war and then turn around and rake the area with his gun.

Nothing can stop him and his gun while he’s blasting out lead. He will continue this war and will only kill the criminals who like to shoot innocent people. For this reason he must punish.

Frank Castle has vowed to punish the entire crime world with is gun. He will shoot his enemy and fill them full of lead, but he will only kill the enemies of his war.

Karl Ferry

Brown Sugar

They say you are not alive you are only material put together I know better you are alive! You have tasted my tears and held my broken heart you have felt pain within me no one else could I know there is magic within you you have made my eyes go dry and sewed my heart together you have taken the pain out that no one else could They said only flesh and blood makes you alive I say all you need is soul a soul can be in anything Yes, even in a small stuffed animal.

-Jill Romine
The Mage and His Apprentice
Mike Counts

I don’t remember what having fun is like anymore. All I can remember about my past is sitting at this old, worn, desk sifting through garbage for my master. What the heck does this shit do, anyway?

Garth, apprentice mage to Kalith, had not left this room for over a week.

It wouldn’t be so bad if there was anything remotely interesting to look at. For instance, why would you build a room with no windows or lamps to keep it lit?

The room consisted of four drab walls with a few shelves covered with jars full of awful looking and smelling substances. A musky, sulfurous, mist hovered in the air at all times. One lone candle on an old, charred, oak desk kept the room dimly lit.

“Garth! What do you think you’re doing? If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times, the sulfur goes with the bat guano, and the tiths root goes with the orc brains!” someone shouted as he barged into the room.

That’s Kalith, he thinks he is an all-powerful mage. Huh, all I’ve seen him do so far is yell a lot and eat too much food. He seems to think there is a purpose to putting this trash together. Purpose? The only purpose I can think of is that he loves to annoy me. I, Garth, soon to be the greatest mage that ever lived, what am I doing here with this simpleton?

“Okay, boy, that lesson is over, now run to the alchemist and get me some quick silver. And be quick about it!” Kalith then tossed a gold coin to Garth and turned to the desk while shaking his head.

Lesson? What lesson? Uh oh, Kalith is starting to look mad. I’d better get out of here right now. Last time I upset him, he threatened to turn me into a sea slug; plus I didn’t get any supper.

Garth then hurried out of the drab room and ran as fast as he could to Kibbleton, the closest town.

Garth was born in Kibbleton and knew exactly where the alchemist’s shop was. As a youth, his parents abandoned him, leaving him in a deserted alleyway to fend for himself. He used to beg for food and steal from unsuspecting travelers just outside the old alchemist’s store.

I wonder just what quibble suit is. Oh well, I’m sure the jar won’t be hard to find.

Garth then rushed into the shop and hurried to the jars of chemicals that started with “Q.”

Let’s see, we’ve got quackel meat, quoted dirt, quick silver, and quail scrotum. Looks like quail scrotum it is.

With that taken care of, Garth paid the alchemist and ran as quickly as his legs would carry him back to Kalith’s cottage.

As Garth scurried into the cottage, Kalith was lounging in an easy chair while chewing on a piece of chicken leg. “What took you so long, apprentice?” Kalith asked as Garth entered the room.

Like to see you get the quail scrotum any faster, you old fart.

Garth then handed the quail scrotum over to Kalith while panting noticeably.

“Quail scrotum! I said quick silver, you bumbling oaf! Lucky for you I’ve already got a jar of quick silver on the shelf here,” Kalith shouted annoyingly.
Quick silver, quail scrotum, what's the difference?

“Well, even though you screwed up, this is the point of the exercise. You need the quick silver to start you first spell. Quail scrotum, on the other hand, is used only for flavoring my chicken soup.”

Chicken soup? Figures, the old, over-stuffed cow.

“Now, take the quick silver, spread it over a feather and repeat these words, ‘Abi uba cocka mami.’”

Garth then said the magic words. A sudden surge of energy started flowing through him as the feather and quick silver dissolved into nothingness.

Now I know that I was meant for greatness. All the other lower wizards bow before me.

Garth’s body then started to raise into the air until the ceiling impeded his ascent.

“What the hell is happening?” Garth blurted out in surprise.

With a thunderous laugh, Kalith exclaimed, “Now you know what it is to be a mage, boy, so be a mage.”

With that, Kalith left the room to leave Garth alone to contemplate what being a mage really means.

The End.

Characterization of a Female Medieval Servant

S. Amelia Goodwyn

“Oh, that I could only break from work afore this work breaks me. I labor all the day, and when I reach my paltry home, I labor all the night.

“Sharing our quarters with all the other beasts of burden. Aye, and if only I could share their brainless existence as easily as I share their warmth in the winter.

“And if I pause in my hurry home to prepare what chance meager repast may be, I could verily gain that brainless state? For when my lord and master attains his drunken access home, I hope only to stave off his nightly round of beatings. Pissed before he crossed the threshold, he only pauses in his constant consumption to consume what is left of me.

“Married a fortnight shy my thirteenth year! A most cruel visit upon my face by the pox served to visit me with a most cruel husband. He is an idle, knavish, immaterial skin of sleeve-silk, green sarcenet flap for a sore eye, a tassel of a prodigal’s purse. A club-foot good for not much else than to muck out the stables. Aye, but lord and master is he when he enters his own castle!

“Once, in my youth, (foolishness!), I thought to explain the lot in life Dame Fortune had him dealt. ‘Asses are made to bear, and so are you,’ said I. He soundly clipped my ear and hotly answered, ‘Women are made to bear, and so are you.’ And aye I did.

“Countless were those who never gained full term, and those who never drew breath. Famine? Winter? Age? Labor? The pox? The beatings...? My second (oh, such sweet life)—five years I cared, protected, loved... and lost. So much loss. When shall I see them again? Who can number the sands of the sea, and the drops of rain, and the days of eternity?

“But two I kept, hid from the eyes and grasp of Death. For He is ever about, waiting with hourglass in hand, heady to swoop down and take. Death, the Great Equalizer, for all are born to die.

“My son, how proud he makes me! He is quick about the wits and makes good use of his hands. He will, no doubt, amount to more than his father ever bragged of in his sopplish stupors. But my daughter,... I have little emotion less than pity for her. For what is for her to become than the battered bedmate of another knavish fool? Nay, none but pity. For to be born of such low station binds her to life of pain and sorrow. A life where a woman’s only measure of success is the sons she bears.”
From Here to There
Deanna Douglass

Brrrinnnggg!!!!! Damn! I am late for the third time this week. And it is only Wednesday! Why do I hang around with these people? More importantly, why do they insist on waiting outside every morning until the very last boy has entered the building? I just don’t understand what the big deal is. I mean, they all look alike to me. They wear the same kind of shoes and dress in the same faded jeans. Not one of them seems to notice that my friends think they are worth a tardy for homeroom. I just wish that I could make my friends realize how ridiculous they are being. But, every time I try to reason with them, they say that, in time, I will understand their motive. I’m not so sure. I do keep hanging around with them, though. I guess that accounts for something.

Well, I finally made it to homeroom. Time to check out what everybody is wearing. Oh, I don’t really care. I just find some of the latest fads amusing. Like, Jennifer, for example, check out the tight jeans, short shirt, and to complete the outfit, white boots. Ha, I don’t know what possessed her to put that on this morning. She must have had some fruitloops for breakfast. I hope that I never wear something like that. I think that I will stick to my normal jeans, sweaters, and loafers. They were good enough for elementary school. Why should junior high school call for such a drastic change in my wardrobe? It is just another school.

Finally, it’s lunchtime. Here we go again. It is the same routine. We rush to the lunch line. We hurry to “our” table. My friends think that it is imperative that we sit in the same place every day. They believe that by doing this, if and when the boys do decide to ask them to go “steady,” they will have no trouble finding them. Surprisingly enough, that doesn’t amuse me as much as the going “steady” part. Think about it. Where exactly are they going? Nowhere, as best as I can figure. We are thirteen. There is no place to go. We don’t have a drivers license to get there anyway. My friends get a little irritated when I point these things out. They respond by saying that I just haven’t been in love yet. They think that I will understand then. We’ll see. I guess when I think about it, I am kind of like their project! Their mission is to mold me into their image. They think I have potential. They take into account that I came from one of the rural schools. They say I just have a little catching up in maturity to do.

Oh well, lunch is over. We clear our table and head for the ladies’ room. Before we can go to the gym for the remainder of lunch, we or they must first freshen up. This requires a little hair teasing, a little makeup, and a whole lot of hair spray. I just stand back and watch. Thank God, I don’t wear makeup and my straight hair remains secure in its ponytail. Wow, they’re ready. That was faster than usual. We have a whole ten minutes before the bell rings. We are off to the gym. It’s time to watch the boys on the other side and bad mouth the rival on our own side. Well, that’s over. There’s the bell. It’s time for the afternoon to begin.

Great, the ritual is finally over. I can’t wait to go home. Things are always the same there. Unlike my friends, my parents have remained sensible in my transition from elementary to junior high. Maybe I spoke too soon. I can’t believe it. My mother is losing it. She has this great idea. She wants us to go shopping. That isn’t a bad idea, until I realize her true motive. She wants to buy me makeup and new clothes. Even my mom is trying to change me. I’m really confused. Why all of a sudden is my clean skin and simple wardrobe inadequate? And, why is she asking me about the boys in my class? Of all people, I thought she should see the humor in my friends’ actions. After this, I have a feeling that she will encourage me to be more like them. I had no idea that moving from one school to another would be so much more than a physical relocation.
I humored my mother and went shopping with her. She bought me a lot of clothes and had me made over at the Clinique counter. I must admit that it was somewhat fun. I just hope she doesn’t expect me to wear all that stuff today. I only did it to make her happy. Maybe it will make her feel better. At least now she can tell the other mothers that she tried!

I went through my same morning preparations and headed for school. Today, I am not going to be late for homeroom. My friends are going to have to watch the boys without me after 8:08. Yes, today and from now on, I will be on time. It is now 8:07. I’m saying my goodbyes to the group. Hold on. Wait a minute. Something, no, someone, has just caught my eye. I have never noticed him before. Who is he? Should I ask? No, I couldn’t possibly. They would think that I was interested. They would probably even accuse me of liking him. I couldn’t take that humiliation. I will just keep my mouth shut. They would definitely look upon this situation as some kind of step toward submission to them.

What? Who? Oh, uh, that’s nice. You’re kidding, right? Maybe I could be interested. I can’t believe what Beth just told me. She says that this Matt guy likes me. It turns out that he is the same guy that just caught my eye. What a coincidence. Now, what do I do? Wait a minute. That was the bell. I am going to be late again! Nevermind that, though. I have a more important issue to deal with. What has just happened here? That Matt guy likes me. I am excited. I find myself needing or wanting my friends’ advice. I wish I would have worn some new stuff today. I must try some tomorrow. I can’t wait until lunchtime. I hope Matt knows which table I sit at everyday. I must pay close attention in the ladies’ room. I have to talk to the “group.” They’ll know what to do...........

Nothing but Trouble
by Karl Ferry

I thought that everything would be perfect after graduation; what a crock! Five years after graduation and things were going great. I had a good job, got married, bought a house and some lake property. Everything was finally falling into place, but that’s when my world fell apart. I started to notice discrepancies in the controlled drug order forms and mis-counted inventories. I brought it up to my superior, and he told me he would take care of things. A week later a state investigator came into the store and wanted to ask me some questions. He was trying to find me as the culprit of the missing drugs. He couldn’t find any evidence to prove anything, but he said the Department of Regulation would contact me. I had always been a straight pharmacist, so why was he trying to pin me with this? Maybe I know too much or I talked too much, but that only happens in gangster movies.

I called my friend Big D, an old college buddy. We kept in touch since graduation. I needed to tell him about my situation, and he was the only person I knew I could trust. We met at Ravage’s Bar and Grill, and I told him I was set up, and he said that the same thing had happened to him a month before. He didn’t say anything because he thought everybody was on the take. Meaning the Department of Regulation and State inspectors were running a controlled drug scam. We decided to pool our resources and present our information to the DEA together. Hopefully the Feds weren’t also on the take.

A week had passed, and I hadn’t heard from Big D. So I called his house, and his wife Joette answered, and she was crying. Big D had been shot as he was going out to his car after work. He was in critical condition but stable for now. I asked if he had left an envelope marked for me, but she had no clue of what I was talking about. I was in shock. Since my wife was visiting her relatives in Cincinnati, I didn’t have
to worry about her. But what about me?

I checked the mail before I went to work, and there was an envelope marked “Mile High Comics.” But I didn’t remember ordering anything. I hadn’t; it was from Big D. It was his information; he wrote that he thought that someone was on to him so he sent it all to me. What was I supposed to do now? I called the district attorney’s office and talked to Anderthorp Henton. He was a young aspiring lawyer, and I figured he could help me. We set up a meeting for the next morning. Now where could I hide the information in case someone was on to me? Well Big D had given me the answer. I hid the information in my comic book collection. I put it in my “Punisher 2099” issue #1.

Everything was fine and I went to work, but I was worried that someone would be waiting outside for me when I got off work. At 8:00 pm I took a look, and I didn’t see anything suspicious, but at 9:15 pm the manager came back to the pharmacy and said there were some strange looking men hanging around the front door. I asked him to check behind the store when he put out the trash, and he said there were two guys back there too. I wasn’t supposed to get off work until 10:00 pm, and I thought to myself, “they’re early.” Someone’s going through a lot of trouble to make sure I didn’t make it home from work. How could I leave the building without a problem?

I couldn’t call an ambulance; that would be too risky. But I could call my friend on the police force. I hoped I could trust him; I would soon find out. Officer Frank Fenton owed me a favor, and it was definitely time to collect. I told him to come and arrest me; that would look more natural since there had been so called “problems” with me in the pharmacy. I hoped that this phoney arrest would give me safe enough cover from the goons outside.

The plan went as hoped. I was arrested, and the goons had disappeared, but I expected them to follow us. They followed us all of the way down to the station, so Frank took me in, and we chatted for an hour to let the other guys think that I wasn’t going home that night. Frank then sneaked me out of the station and into his own car and took me over to his house. We tried to figure out who those guys worked for and who tipped them off. First I thought it was Henton, but then again the inspector had said that the Department would contact me. But I planned on men in suits not men with guns.

I asked Frank for a gun because I wasn’t going to be taken down easy. Then I took his car over to my place to pick up the information. My place was trashed, and everything had been gone through; even the box to the comics was opened. But since I had the information inside a comic book, it wasn’t found. I drove back to Frank’s house, and I found him shot in the back of the head. The bullet was probably meant for me since it was Frank’s car that left the house.

I had no where to go, but had to get there fast. So that whoever was trying to kill me couldn’t finish the job. There was one person left I could call, Jake Gallows, a DEA officer. He had lectured at my last continuing education seminar and told me to give him a call if I ever had any questions. Well, I finally had some, a lot. I found his card all mangled in my wallet, and I hoped it wasn’t too late to call him. I’d take my chances. I woke him up and told him my situation, and he wanted to meet with me. I didn’t know if he could be trusted, so I told him that if I didn’t return home, the evidence would be sent to the FBI building in Chicago. He tried to gain my trust, and slowly I began to trust him. I figured if I couldn’t trust the Feds, my fight would be useless anyway.
I told him about my meeting with Henton in the morning, and Jake told me to tell Henton the same story about the evidence being sent to Chicago if I didn’t come home from the meeting. Afterwards I could meet with Jake and his task force and crack down on the offenders. It all sounded on the level, but I couldn’t quite tell if he was lying or not. So I waited for him to drive away before I did, so that he didn’t follow me. Halfway home I pulled off of the main highway onto a country road to get some sleep. At the time it was the only place I knew that nobody else did. That made it the safest place to be.

The next morning I shook off the body aches and cramps from sleeping in Frank’s car and drove to the restaurant that Henton picked for our meeting. I was late because there was no alarm clock in the car. When I got there, the place was filled with the usual breakfast crowd. I felt pretty safe in such a crowded public place, but I was wrong. Henton wasn’t around, and some of the goons were waiting by the door, and there were two outside by the kitchen door.

I was taken to a warehouse near the YMCA. I guessed I would finally meet the leader of this crooked outfit. The goons stood behind me, and from behind a stack of crates I saw Jake come around. I knew it was stupid to trust him, but it was too late now. Just then his body fell face down on the ground, with a knife stuck in his back. Then who... Henton then came around the crates laughing at me and Jake. He was the one who set me up, and the goons, they were on loan from the Carbones, the biggest crime family in central Illinois. Henton had found the information in the car and laughed at me again for being so gullible. Just then the goons started dropping to the floor. I heard no shots fired; I thought to myself, “What have I gotten myself into?” Henton then pulled his gun on me, and I heard someone yell to get down. I dove to the ground, and a tall man in a suit drilled Henton in the forehead. “Great,” I thought, “out of the frying pan and into the fire.” There were about fifteen other guys in suits; were they more mobsters or Feds? Fortunately they were the latter. The tall man said he was Agent Walsh of the DEA. He said Jake and his men were an Internal Affair-like task force trying to break this drug ring wide open. Jake had told me the truth, and Henton was actually working for the Carbone family. He would tip off the Carbones when a pharmacist was gathering information to solve the case, and then the Carbones would make that pharmacist disappear. Jake had called Walsh after our meeting, and they were going to meet me at the restaurant to protect me. But Jake didn’t make the rendezvous, and when they reached the restaurant, I was being abducted. So they followed us here and took care of business.

Finally everything was worked out. Big D and his family and my family and I are currently in the Federal Witness Protection Plan awaiting the trial against the Carbone drug ring. We’re still working in pharmacy, but we are getting ready to open a bar as partners and naming it “Nothing But Trouble.”
Starlit Dreams

I was very thirsty
As I fell asleep in bed.
And as I slept, dreams of stars
Filled my resting head.
But my thirsty thoughts soon put me
On a ship and I the skipper!
So I quickly steered into the stars
To drink from the Big Dipper.
Before that, I has taken from
The Little Dipper first;
But because it was so little
It hadn't quenched my thirst.
Then I turned around, quite startled,
For I heard the Dragon's wail;
And right before he ate me up
I downed his mighty tail.
Where one finds a dragon
One may also find a queen.
I found Cassiopeia, her crown
Shone bright and keen.
Her husband, King Cepheus,
Looks like a funny clown;
With pointed hat and pigtail
He knows not how to frown!
Frighten once again, I turned--
But then began to laugh.
For the creature that had frightened me
Was only a Giraffe.
At every turn, more animals!
Surrounding me everywhere.
Face to face I stood trembling
At the paw of the Great Bear
But he paled in comparison
Next to the jungle king
For when the Lion began to roar,
His might made my ears ring.
The Lion's companion, the Little one,
Sat as still as a log
For fear he would be bitten
By a Hunting Dog.
Sitting watch o'er all of these,
Holding his pipe high,
Is the Heardsman of past eons;
Ancient friend of the night sky.
I then passed the Northern Crown
Desired by any princess.
Close by lay the hair of Bernice,
Noble Egyptian Empress.
My journey has brought me far
And I began to tire.
So, my restless thoughts and dreams
Were soothed by the sweet Lyre.

Ready to return home,
The Swan was a kind sight.
Climbing up onto her back,
I settled down for flight.
Nestled in her starlit down
All care did I release.
Even the fierce Hercules
Could not disturb my peace.
She carried me back to my home
Where I then rested mild and meek.

When I awoke, I first had a doubt

'Til I found stardust on my cheek.

-S. Amelia Goodwyn