

PRETTY OWL POETRY



A black silhouette of an owl perched on a branch, facing right. The owl's body and tail feathers are visible, and it appears to be holding a small object in its beak.

PRETTY OWL
POETRY

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Harvest

Marie Mcgrath

It costs a small fortune to have your eggs removed,
I read somewhere. With a needle they take them
tenderly as combs by their honeybee man.
It's similar, really. White coat, gloves and covered face.

They say you can tell the age of the fruit
by its weight. Would I feel lighter after
two required days of rest, after hollowing to a
naked corn cob or gums whose teeth have dropped?

I imagine their vitrified sides clicking together, a chatter
of marbles pinging in their nitrogen bath. Catseyes,
sulfides, chinas, alleys, onion skins, all ripe
with prisms of color, cytoplasm and chilled optimism.

The Seagulls Scream Like People

Marie Mcgrath

Outside the police station
we wait for Sarah, cross-legged like children

picking at patchy grass.
The lady cop takes us aside

one at a time like the principal.
We are close enough

to the ocean to hear the slap of surf.
I call my mother after.

I want her not to cry
but she cries. We are shredded

at the seams. Ripped from yesterday
like Sarah's favorite pants

gaping as the fatherly detective
slips them into the brown paper bag.

I apologized. For what—I couldn't say.
He says: "I have a daughter," and

leads me out the door to rejoin
the lopsided circle, all risen

to standing, leaning shoulder to shoulder.
Sarah goes with the detective, tells us

to go home, not to worry, not to call her parents.
The car pulls away and we say nothing.

Above, the seagulls scream like people,
and I wonder how no one heard her.

How Big Is Baby?

Amy Lee Heinlen

Google the phrase, how big is baby, and the top search results are websites designed for pregnant women to compare the size of the embryo (baby, they all call it) growing inside her to seeds, beans, fruits, and vegetables, as well as document fetal development.

1.
Mustard seed moves mountains,
begins the fleshy avalanche.
2.
Poppy seed wakes up to pee.
3.
Blood begins to circulate through a single lentil.
4.
Blow raspberries, turn propellers like arms
and legs through vast pink,
bump into the edges.
5.
Cherry is long gone and now everyone knows it.
6.
Heartbeat of a red grape, minor storm seed on Doppler.
Champagne grapes are eyes fully formed behind fused eyelids.
7.
The circles you mowed around the crabapple tree
in your father's front yard.
8.
When was the last time you
saw a kumquat, let alone swallowed one
whole, all elbows and shoulder joints?
9.
Little lime-sized pond frog jumps,
parts algae on the surface like fingers
and toes dissolving their webbing.
10.
A regular apple from a regular store

with a star in the center if you cut it
just right.

11.

Peel back the navel skin to find another
smaller fruit.

12.

A spoon with tiny teeth at the point
to dig out the Ruby Red flesh, but not this one.

Tell everyone:

You are fruit, vine, and soil.

One-Act Play in Which Grief Is the Only Person Without Dialogue

Dalton Day

[Bird skeletons are scattered across the stage. They are all the skeletons of tiny birds: Bluejays, Robins, Sparrows, etc., but this differentiation doesn't matter. You walk onstage & pick one up. You hold it in your hands, like a cup you have been waiting to drink out of for a very long time. You carry it into the center of the stage & put it down. You proceed to do this with all the other bird skeletons. The holding, the wishing, the placing. When you are done, there is a pile of bird skeletons. But it no longer looks like a pile of bird skeletons. The bones are all entwined together, blurring the individuals in such a way that the pile has taken the shape of a mountain. There is only one thing left to do. You push your own body inside the mountain, disappearing in a mass of bone & illusory dirt. Someone will step out of the mountain, eventually. It could even be you. It probably will be.]

One-Act Play in Which Catcalling Is No Longer a Problem

Dalton Day

[A man is standing on stage. His mouth opens, as if he is about to say something, but there is a pause. Out of his mouth, tinier versions of himself start falling out, by the hundreds. Each tiny man has claws & is growling & is crying. They pool around the man's feet, & slowly start clawing. As more & more tiny men fall out, less & less of the man can be seen. Eventually, of course, the entire man is swarmed with these tiny versions of himself. They are shredding him apart. But there is no visible blood, muscle, bone. No screams of agony. Just the tiny growls & tiny whimpers of the tiny men. Eventually, of course, there is no more man on stage. Just a pile of tiny men. This pile goes out into the empty theater, each one finding a seat of his own. When all of them are seated, a silence comes, as they eagerly watch the now-empty stage. It's almost peaceful.]

One-Act Play in Which No Knives Are Used

Dalton Day

[All of the dialogue in this play is carved into an oak tree onstage. The audience members must come up one at a time, read the next line out loud, & then return to their seat.]

1: Do you remember the first time you became aware of your skeleton?

2: Was it made of glass?

3: Or dust?

4: Or bone?

5: You knew you were breakable.

6: But were unsure of what would break you.

7: If the thing that would break you even had a shape.

8: Or name.

9: But what if you were the thing that would break you?

10: What if by breaking you just meant freeing a thing that was previously trapped?

11: Nobody has said the word *love* yet.

12: What if by breakable you just meant possible?

13: *Love* isn't a word.

14: What if your skeleton wasn't made of anything?

15: *Love* is an action.

16: A room.

17: A safety.

18: A weapon.

19: A presence felt & then forgotten.

20: & then remembered.

21: & then remembered.

22: & then remembered.

23: Not a thing which can save you.

24: Not a thing which can be saved from anything else.

25: Do you remember the first time you lasted forever?

26: It's still happening.

27: It's happening still.

[At this point in the play, the play starts over. The play continues to be repeated until every audience member has gone through & read their line. When every audience member has read, the play ends. When the play ends, the theater is emptied. When the theater is emptied, the tree stays onstage, until it dies, or is chopped down to be made into something else entirely.]

One-Act Play in Which a Decision Is Made, But It Is Unclear By & For Whom

Dalton Day

[A car. All of the members of the audience are also passengers in a car. The interior of the theater is the interior of a car. The sense of scale isn't important here. What's important here is that the audience keeps their eyes on the road. The car is going forward. To either side are trees. But to the passengers, they look like one long swath of a singular tree, stretched out until the end of time, or, at least the end of this journey. & then all of a sudden, a deer steps out of one swath of tree into the road. This is what could happen: the car hits the deer, killing it. The passengers are each horrified, & guilty, having taken part in killing something so gentle, even if it was completely unavoidable. This is what could happen: the deer hits the car. It turns to face the passengers & put its head down, its antlers forward. The car is crushed by this, every passenger a victim of their own disbelief, however natural it is for an animal to do what it must to stay alive. But this is what does happen: the car stops in time. The deer stops. The deer listens to its heart beat one more time than it expected to. Then the deer keeps going, disappearing into the other swath of tree. The car could keep going, too. But it doesn't. The passengers each decide to stop being passengers. They exit the car, one by one, becoming audience members once again, briefly, following the deer into the swath, which is becoming more & more like a forest of individual trees. The audience members disappear, feeling the tops of their heads, their fresh antlers beginning to poke out. They have never been so close to death.]

Painfeel

Ryan Downum

it's the painfeel. you can't tell me how to pulse sad!

have you ever forgotten what water is?
i am lost within humming strung syllables.

what in the forgotten blood peel?
looking & feeling too many lung spurts.
nothing in the softer shoulder nightmouth.
pine tongue every feeling.

get haunted in the mouth pull.

lower fever fieldbloom.

panic or don't.

& this is what shows in the painfeel,
how it opens soft & still & sad.
some quiet rope hums the painfeel.
tree thrash the open night jar lid.
feeling in a painfeel cauliflower.
erasure of an open bloom.
cold breath the shaking languagefeel.
pull from two dandelions in the painfeel,
how it follows lung births.

tonguepray. showerwilt. handsomedance. quietlush. sadswell.

new words found in the laugh shaking teeth.
this is where i hang dye sleep pills.

barrel built of the sand washed painfeel.
listen up.
listen to the wearing of bed sheets.
the crawl of pushed feelings.

(more poured coffee or...)

i am discrete shoulder hangovers,
softened wilt in a painfeel ribcage.
of what? of abdomen feel?

you're now in the coiled lush of a tonguefeel.
i am looking out into tiny opened painfeels.

my first tarot card reading in the quiet of wept.
how rambled in an open blush ocean.

in my tongue names.
the over painfeel in twisted lungholes.

what do you now know?

i have forgotten what the turned over sip is.
this is a quiet only from hopecleansed firewood,
peeled off spilled spoke laughter.

i am open. parted body in a howl root.

where it's lost & pulled.
where the yodel hoots & hollers ready.

NEW PAINFEEL /ghost.

have you ever seen the underside of bloodloom?

look & look.
listen & listen.
how in these hands
are painfeel calmed.
it's looking & feeling.
it's hearing
in the painfeel here.
quiet in an open feeling
of here & here.

lifted & the soil & the bones & the hold.

this is everything to do with a lily pad spit. of grasshopper lungs.

reaching for the reachpulse.
i am barreled in some loose spite.
the quicker wear of a painfeel over.
i love in the painvase.
the quiet. the haunted. the after.
i wish to tongue scrape the land,
find peace in an earful valley.

this is something much more than breath.
something much more than a polite oversized t-shirt.

every flower is an ocean glass plate.
licked sunder sweet windowpane
held onto holdings of matchstick bibles in painfeel sermons.

Straight-Acting

Dakota R. Garilli

Men in New Jersey hide from their mothers,
sneak out in muscle tees. Italian gold horns
drip from their clavicles. Down
shame with the next redbull/vodka.
Their rage at their fathers caught up in fists
pumped over a bass line.
Men in New Jersey make eyes in silence,
fluent in the language of luring
new young strangers to blow them
in bathrooms, from passenger seats.
Men everywhere, masc, straight-acting, white
seeking same, fit for fit, muscle/
muscle—no offense, bro, just a preference.
Nick, outside Flowers by Chuck, spits on the sidewalk.
Jeff in the locker room, meaty thighs spilling
from mesh maroon shorts.
All hard lines and fantasy. Tonight, they line up.
My phone a firing squad
sent to kill faggots—but not before we're fucked.
Straight-acting, masculine frat boys of Grindr,
the ones I laugh at with friends
over hummus and pita chips. Tonight, I'm hungry.
This is a call to them all, to whomever.
Let's smoke cigarettes and skirt
the issue. Let's get drunk at straight bars
off bottom-shelf gin. Let's hide in back alleys,
figure out what to do with these hands.
Devour me. Sneak me at night
past your parents' bedroom.
Fuck me like you fuck your girlfriend
so we don't wake the house,
pillow in my mouth.

Magic

Laura Cesarco Eglin

At night use two drops to have a dead body
in the light of the candle. Potions
are just not made to drink in torrents.
One little jar and you will not
know your initials. Faltering words
make syllables easier to catch and hold
in one spoon. Open wide to be a cave away
from breaking the glass of the lantern—
they don't go well with a mouthful of afternoons.
Three drops onto five o'clock and if you lie down
spiders will bloom you into safety. Let that announce
fear. Let yourself feel wet at the shore.

I Sometimes Think What Saved Me

Joan E. Bauer

were those years in Alamogordo when I was nine
& ten, almost a boy, unfettered, unsupervised,
so I could build wooden carts, play with bows

& arrows, roam empty lots & half-framed houses
with my buddies Mike & Greg—in the desert
boomtown near Holloman where Col John Stapp,

Fastest Man in the World, on the rocket sled
630 miles an hour, then stopped. 46 g's.
Glad we didn't stay, but returned in '57 to L.A.

Could've been one more Alamo teen so bored
I turned to Jimson weed, eating spiky seed pods
for escape in a blur of delirium & amnesia.

*

A flat-roofed ranch house. Thin walls, dirt yard,
scorpions, brackish water. Creosote, cottonwoods,
mesquite, saltbush & every kind of cactus.

A blistering July, but night so cool & the sky so dark.
Who knew there were so many stars? By fall,
I'm walking a mile to school through dust storms.

My mother put aside her reading to gussy up,
black cocktail dress & heels, to help my dad
entertain 'the brass.' Best memory: watching

my mother's friend Verna howl & gyrate in a plaid
house dress. September 1956, just like Elvis.
You ain't nothing but a hound dog, crying all the time.

*

In the 1870's, Ukrainian farmers bringing flaxseed
to South Dakota, brought Russian thistle as well.
Now it's everywhere in the Southwest.

Thorny water hogs, tasty to mice & bighorn sheep.
Remember the Sons of the Pioneers? *I know when day
has gone that a new world's born at dawn*

Back in LA just months, my father's assigned to Edwards
in the Mojave. This time my mother says:
I didn't raise my daughters—to be tumbleweeds.

Every Man Is a Year Younger Than You

Laura Brun

that low snort and drag from upstairs
is someone snoring; it's 3pm and it's

snoring. that ticking in the next room will
never be a grandfather clock; the rumble,

shouts outside will never not be construction
men in their hard hats. that's the sound of

snow dripping off the trees and gutters, not
rain. this morning it's just sweat between

your legs, not blood; that's the slugging
of blood in your temples, not a fist on

the door, not a palm on the floor above
you, no one needing you up. the hair

in the drain is yours; the body next to yours
never is, never could be. steady gasp, whistle

above you, easy clockwork above your
ceiling. no one's needing you out just yet.

Arguing Over the Definition of “Several”

Kevin Casey

The dictionary is shut with a thud
you can feel in your chest:

*As far as etymology goes, it doesn't mean
a certain number—it just means 'separate...'*

And so the past has turned its back
on our dispute, and with no antecedent
to act as guide, to arbitrate, take sides,

the word's significance is now a matter
of compromise, its meaning something shared.

Sheared off from some unassailable past,
kite string cut, we float adrift—two seeking

precision beyond just “more than two,”
and something more than simply “separate.”

Poem in Which My Neighbors Have to Rake All My Leaves

Kevin Casey

The oranges, the reds and browns,
and the unconsumed greens
of those ragged sails are lost
in the midnight wind that drives them—
unmoored, chartless and erratic—
tacking across my field
to the neighbors' leeward lawn.

The dawn finds them foundered
and stacked against their fence lines
and garage foundations,
with my own yard free of autumn's flotsam—
the ruffled banner of my coffee's steam
hoisted above my deck in victory.

Bronxville, NY

Caitlin Thomson

from a notebook found on the corner of Beechmont Avenue and Cedar Lane

June 6th

My husband wakes me, grabbing
my body as if it was new to his hands,
verifying bone and ear lobe.
What happened? I ask, did something
go wrong at work?

June 7th

Arthur and I call in sick and spend a day
hiking up north. A deer crosses our path.

June 12th

Last day of class, teens restless
wrap my car in toilet paper.
A bow of white over the trunk.

July 17th

My tulips unfurl months too late,
black from leaf to petal.

August 1st

My new hobby, running, seems natural now that the gym
is closed. I try to make it around the lake twice a day,
counting the animals to pass time. Yesterday I saw ducks
on the pond, stopped breathless, bent,
before I realized they were decoys.

August 10th

I found Arthur's food stockpile
in our basement. Beans for years,
plenty of lentils, stacks of pasta.
Even bread, round in cans,
the thought of it leaves
a metallic taste in my mouth.

August 24th

Three women from our street
run with me most days now.
I bike everywhere else, cautious

about wasting gas. My muscles
are becoming wider, skin
tightening around them.

August 28th

All of Mrs. Petteril's garden gnomes
are missing. She blames God.
I found them in my basement.

September 2nd

The first day of school is postponed. No alternative
start date has been suggested.

September 12th

We have our neighbors over for a dinner
of early garden squash. Everyone crowds
around our table, each having brought
their own preferred drink.

September 18th

A tree fell, covering the street.
Kids crawled all over it the next morning,
straddling their way up oddly angled branches.

September 21st

I am canning the remains of our gardens.

September 28th

Arthur's work has shut their doors.
They seem hopeful that this is just
for the interim. My husband
could not be more pleased,
doodling was slowly becoming
the only engaging part of his job.

October 2nd

The air has become chilly.
On my daily run, I spotted
former students swimming
in the lake. Steam rose from
their bodies when they emerged.

October 5th

On the news they have started to talk about
houses being vandalized, but it looks more like
organized destruction to me. Splintered ruins,
barely higher than the reporter's knees.

October 12th

The O'Malley's stockpiled gas
for weeks and left. Their children,
separated by a pile of bedding,
waved at us from the backseat.

October 15th

The first house in our neighborhood
was destroyed, five blocks over.
The garden around it was unharmed.

October 30th

In the park I see five tanned bodies
barely clothed, in the chilled air,
sprawled on the grass by the lake.
As I approach, they get up,
disappear into the woods.

November 1st

On my run, in less than a minute.
I witness a house becoming
wood scraps and roofing,

November 5th

We go days now without
Seeing anyone.



St. Theresa of Pierce County, Nebraska

Chauna Craig

Some nights on the prairie when a thunderstorm seizes the house in its teeth and shakes, I go outside. Pelted to a sopping mess in seconds, I lay down in the open yard. I finger the tiny silver cross at my throat and I pray for God to strike. I'm not a saint. I'm an atheist, a woman for whom God deflated like a helium balloon. Tied to the post of my double bed, He sunk day by day until finally I threw the wrinkled skin away.

But a storm will splash light into dark corners and show you how empty and dusty they've become. It will make you shudder and wish for something to rise again.

If that something is airy, insubstantial, the very thing that could rise, like a ghost, I can't cling. Faith is my problem. Where is the tentacle of the unseen by which I can hook a hand around the impossible? Invisible.

And so I want to be struck.

Don't get me wrong—I'm not one of those women who'd take a mortal man's fist for love. My husband never raised his hands against me; they were buried in soil all his life and now in death. But God. If God is going to love you, it better be more than a whispered sweet nothing, more than the easy escape of air.

I lay there those rare, spectacular nights, and as I sputter for breath, blind and cold, my lids light up pink and I imagine that blazing spear piercing my heart. The electric motion of creation searing through my blood and singing my nerves. And I know I'd be a monster ever after. But some moments are worth their ever after.

This is not about my husband. I miss him less than I miss God, though I believed in him more. But one night in July when the air smelled burnt and the storm was more bark than bite, I lay motionless, eyes wide. I saw the white-hot cracks sawing the clouds, the branches of my weeping willow sweeping restlessly. And I thought how if I were tall as a tree, I could bring down one of those bolts. Then I could see and feel God again.

I rose slowly to my feet. A long flash suspended the sky and my breath, and that's when I saw them: a pair of pheasant huddled in a thicket of raspberry bushes I never harvested anymore. I rushed them, flushed them out like the storm couldn't. Panicked flaps against the wind, soft bodies battered by forces that never mean harm. I hooked my heart to the smallest one and sent it like a love note to any god with true aim.

Ossifying

Chauna Craig

An oyster bar in the desert. This desert the sea abandoned thousands of years ago, but we are still here, tight-chested, ossifying, our hearts curled tight like future fossils some amateur will mistake for a snail's coil. But here. We are here—still—where a slip of a girl tunes her guitar in the corner. Above her the halo of a green beer sign flickers with the strained heartbeat of the air-conditioner.

You on a wobbly bar stool: *We're too old for this.*

I could argue—*we are glorious*—but the gin in my mouth tastes like the ghost of Christmas past. Soft pine in a desert that cradles cactus spines, my lips so dry they crack and bleed at night.

A girl tunes her guitar in the corner and this note flattens under her calloused fingers: *We're too old for this.*

I could argue, but then the door opens like a rent veil. Comes the blinding sun and the baked wind swirling with sweet traces of bougainvillea and blood oranges. An evening cocktail to numb our tongues and break our hearts and lay us out for tears to pelt our bodies like castaway peanut shells or the hard rain that brings back the sea.

Sacred Dark

James Claffey

A gas meter by the hall door was raided on those weeks he didn't bring home enough money to keep the lights on and the gas burning. Shame, a handy bedfellow; nights ran on a timetable as rigid as the trains out of Heuston Station. At 6:30 the news ended and the weather decreed, my ma would click off the old Ferguson television and produce the Rosary beads. Pale mother-of-pearl, handed down by her mother who'd had them brought back blessed at Lourdes. In line we'd face the wall, kneeling in front of my aunt's unfinished pastels of swans in reeds by some unnamed lake. The prayers dropped from our lips, thick as a swarm of bees about the pollen-heavy flowers in the back garden.

Joyful.

Sorrowful.

Glorious.

Luminous.

Kitchens

Abigail Lalonde

It's like when they say lovers die within days, weeks, months of each other if they're really in love. If they've been together for sixty years, high school sweethearts. The ones who made it to the diamond anniversary. But she lived. Kept living every day, screaming for relief, release. Just like her little teapot. She kept her routines the same. Toddled around in her outdated yellow kitchen. The color they once marketed as cheerful, then ten years later said causes aggression. She let the steam fill the air. She was always cold even when the sun exaggerated those jaundice walls. Nicotine stains. Shadows. She put the kettle on, out of habit, out of need. Cut the lemons. Rationed the cubes of sugar. Two cups. Always two cups of that raspberry tea with its fake fruitiness. Chemically induced pink water. I remember when my mother used to placate me with two cereal bowls at breakfast. One for me. One for my imaginary friend. And then I thought, maybe that's why she's still alive. Because they were in love. They really were.

I Give You, the Mother-of-the-Bride

Katie Cortese

After the vows, the dancing, the cake. After Darren's brother drove the Volvo to the front of the VFW and we piled in, my new husband and I, after we kissed every face that pushed into our open windows and drove off in a cloud of bubbles that jostled for space in the rear-view—and after we pulled over in the MacDonald's parking lot to cut the cans off the fishing line attached to the rear bumper because of the racket, we went home. No one was there. Snips of ribbon and construction paper from the programs drifted like tumbleweeds across the hardwood floor. Darren pulled the car in the garage. I drew the curtains. D locked the door. I stripped and left my dress in a pile of its own plumage, the bodice still upright, holding my shape.

“Shall we?” Darren said, raising the basket of cards.

“You choose the order,” I said. “Booty first, or booty first?”

I loosened his tie and used both ends to guide him and the cards to our unmade bed. The day had begun in a swirl of phone calls and blaring alarm clocks, caterer's emergencies and one groomsman no-show, a fight with my mother followed by a teary reconciliation, her arms around me thin enough to cut like wire. D had spent the night at his parents' place. My underwear from last night lay crumpled on the floor where I'd shed them. I tasted wine on my breath and knew my teeth were red.

The light was the heather of twilight when we lay down on top of the wrinkled coverlet, then the deep purple of a bruise after he'd made his choice, and after our first married romp we lay side-by-side, sweating in the heat of June, the fan overhead sending lazy ripples of air onto our slick bodies. In the morning we would board a plane to Greece.

By the time Darren lifted the basket to the bed, we were only shadows to each other, cutouts against the dark. “Ready?” he said, rasping his hands like a boy scout making a fire.

I licked the tip of a ballpoint pen and hovered it over a yellow legal pad. “And go,” I said.

He slit the envelopes with a pocketknife fished from a pair of jeans on the floor. I read each message out loud, even the factory-stamped cursive, and totaled the figures by hand. The stack grew. The light failed. We opened the curtains for moonlight. The total came to \$6,545. A small fortune, never mind that the wedding cost ten thousand. That was on credit cards. Out of sight, especially now, in the dark.

“What kind of motorcycle did you want again?” D asked.

“Ha, ha,” I said. “We agreed. This goes straight into the House Fund.”

He lay back against the pillow, arms straight by his side. I knew he'd be rigid to the touch, so I didn't reach for him. "I still don't know what's so terrible about renting," he said.

I began to gather the empty envelopes in soft pinks, blues, greens. "Don't you want to give our children someplace safe for always?"

"I thought we said one. One child. Someday."

"Why don't we just see what happens?" We still had to pack for Greece. I stacked the cards on the dresser, the checks next to them, cash next to that, arranged by denomination.

He sat up then, elbows hooked on knees, hands dangling between like fat pigeons, twitching, flightless. "I need a shower," he said.

On our first date, women, he'd told me, women found him hard to love long-term. Said it like a dare. I'd told him women in my family didn't live long, so he didn't have to worry. It was true. My grandmother passed at fifty-eight, and both of my maternal aunts were already gone. My mother was the baby. When she hugged me at the reception, her wig smelled of vanilla and scorched plastic. Our screechy morning tangle seemed a lifetime away. She'd whispered the latest estimate. Two years at the most. After a decade of chemo, her doctors were finally speaking truth. "Thank you for this," she added. "You are a good girl. My girl. My baby."

I watched Darren cross the silvered room, listened for the water's hiss, heard him sigh through the paper-thin door. We would last for a handful of Christmases, long enough to learn each other's patterns, to get in one serious wreck, to bury his father, to buy a two-bedroom cottage and start a garden that would fail, to fail to conceive a child, which we both agreed at the end was our one stroke of luck. Even when it was bad, I insisted on yearly portraits. My mother kept one from each year on her bureau, close to hand. She liked to touch them long after her sight failed and limbs shriveled—turning her half marionette, long after the frames were just shapes in her hands, smooth rectangles cool beneath her fingers, long after she forgot my name.

Ironing Day

Janice D. Soderling

It was quiet in the house, no sound except her own breathing and the thud of the tepid iron coming down hard on the ironing board.

He was not home, he was never at home, whatever home meant. She had not expected much, but certainly more than an old iron that would hardly heat up and a washing board in a tub of hot water. His grimy shirts, shorts, the snotty handkerchiefs he emptied his nose into each day as he emptied his other slime into her each night. Maybe he would soon leave her alone; she was starting to show. But it was her duty, wasn't it, now that she was a married woman? No one said so straight out, but she knew. She stared at the wall, unseeing.

Her hand registered a small tug at the iron. She looked down to see a field mouse climbing the cord like a circus acrobat. When she screamed, it frantically scampered under the baseboard. She sat down at the kitchen table and began to cry. She shuddered at the thought of its claws scurrying up her arm; she shuddered to think of her husband's hard, callused fingers darting contemptuously over her thin, exposed body. Poor stupid mouse, it should have had better sense than to seek winter shelter in this house. And so should she have, but it was too late now. Tomorrow she would ask him to buy mousetraps and she would set them everywhere.

CONTRIBUTORS

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