

Westland Writes 2011: On Time

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Poems

Regan Byers

committed

Got me a good woman?
Of course I do.
She makes me dinner
cleans my ashtrays
washes my clothes
buys my smokes
gives me whatever I want

She never questions anything
says "ok" to everything
cause she loves me.

She needs me
I'm a truth teller
I told those kids
what she's worth
what they're worth
she heard that truth and she still came back.

Hell yeah, I'm that good.

I'm teaching those boys
how to be men
I'm showing that girl
how she's supposed to act...

My woman
knows respect
She knows
to get exactly what I want
from the store
to kiss me
the minute she walks in from work
to answer my questions
Why are you late?
Why'd you have to stay?
It shouldn't take that long
to get home

make me something
I'm hungry
I don't fucking care
what time it is.
She says she's always there for me.

Damn straight you are.

premature expectation

Angry
little
online warrior
brandishing
your keyboard mace
and your screen shield
you rant
and spew
and snarl
and splatter
clichéd-filled hate bombs
across the digital universe.

You think yourself
mighty
with the help of
a mouse.
It's too easy
to let your mouth run
when your feet don't have to do the same.
Your false bravery
eclipsed only
by your charade of intelligence.

Big fighter
in a little ring
it takes little effort to declare victory.
Credibility

is not achieved
through an endless tirade
and those limitless keystrokes
will only increase
the size of your
...ego.

Lay down your weapons
and walk away.
You defeat
no one but yourself.
Your mouth
and brain are
hopelessly
disconnected.

Patrick Franks

GET IT DONE

IF YOU DON'T FINISH ANYTHING
WHAT HAVE YOU STARTED?

Work and play

Most of the day
All week
Present your
Tidy thoughts
And tidy sums

Half the night
One day a week

A present of
Tight beats
And tidy rhythms
On sturdy tight skins
Of rhythmic drums

Abby Gail

FRIENDSHIPS

A friend sticks closer than a brother,
Acquaintances will come and go,
During times when you need emotional lifts,
True friends will prove their worth in gold.

Man is not an island unto himself,
We depend on others each day,
Friends are near in the good and bad times,
And will honor you along life's way.

To have friends you must be gracious,
Consideration and hospitality goes far,
And making deposits by being good listeners,
True friends will be honest when you call.

Forgiveness is a gift to friendships,
Sometimes trial and error gets in the way,
When willing to forgive and listen to each other,
Friends support you when no one else will stay.

Friends, you are a joy to talk to,
Acquaintances, it was nice to see you smile,
Trials are the test friendships are made of,
And love's the glue that goes the extra mile.

Eve Hall

So Much Hate

Whites against Blacks
Daughters against mothers
Sons against fathers
Brothers against sisters.

Why so much hate?

Where is the love for one another
Where the morals and the guidance?
Where is the unity and peace?
Where is the security and brotherhood?

Where is this nation headed?

When will we be united as one family
When will prejudice and racism be erased?
When will neighbor truly love his neighbor?
When will Martin L. King Jr.'s dream come true?

It starts with the golden rule,

"Loving others as you love yourself."

Remembrance

Your loved one is gone,
but we won't forget.
Their smile, their laugh
Their face, their grace.

Your loved one is gone,
But we won't forget
The good times, the bad times
The fears, the tears.

James Jeziorowski

Depression

Someone once told me depression is all in my head
So I thought, what now, more things to dread?
Depression is not how you act but more how you feel
Happiness, laughter, confidence is just some of what it can steal
Depression is sneaky, like a thief in the night
Challenging your feelings confused of what's wrong and what's
right
Depression is an illness believed by quite a few
Some say it's a heavy feeling others just say they have the blues
Whatever it is it does not have to be
Depression can be cured just come and ask me

Sickness

Being sick drags you down; there is no energy
Not feeling like eating or playing
When sickness strikes, it comes power packed
And it somehow stays and stays and leaves you lying on your back
Your nose runs, your eyes water and you sniffle 837 times a
minute
And you think to yourself—how did I get it?

Being sick throws you for a loop when all you want is a hot bowl
of soup

Being sick is no fun—you can't go outside, ride your bike or run
With medicine you try to get better, why, you don't even have the
strength to write a letter

But, you rest, take it easy and do your best to get that yuck out of you
Because you don't want to be blue—all you want is for the sun to
shine through

John Kelly

Happiness

Losing yourself in a single drop of calming water
Following the brightest color of a rainbow and finding your dream
Losing yourself in a river of infinity
Bathing in a pool of shimmering, blue, radiant sapphires
Traveling instantaneously to a place of sheer bliss on a single
soundwave
Smelling the scent of a thousand acres of blooming, healthy,
vibrant red roses
Happiness

The Birth of Venus

Inspired by "The Birth of Venus" by Sandro Botticelli

Born out of the depths of the giving sea
Is where fair Venus will surely be

The emerald sea turns blue and clear
Joyous harps is what we'll hear.

The waters foam with utmost drive
For dearest Venus is now alive.

Golden hair flows endlessly
Like a gentle eternity.

Faith filled eyes gaze far away
Where giving rays will shine all day.

The Zephyrs cause the breeze to flow
For off to Cyprus is where she'll go.

Where the Seasons will receive
There only purpose is to please

To clothe the wondrous newborn force.
To change the world's historic course.

Ralph Koschnitzke

Thoughts

Of nothing, but everything

A hum of a distant fixture
Transcends, fluoresces

Then drones out of sight, but within the rang
Of my embattled hearing
Staring up at my ceiling only makes it worse
The critical moments of realization
Where my efforts,
Gone.
Not unnoticed...but unanswered
Leave me laying semi-conscious
In just one hell of a lonely world
Where I walk with my heart six feet under
Such superficial issues.
Caught just inside what I know,
And what I believe.
Faith is proven by a simple fact;
I worry it will leave me.
Compassion is wielded
With every word I try to speak
And I still think
About the words
I need
To face you with
A final point in a direction
That always led me to where you are
And I still discover
There is more on this path.
Paved in states of
Shock and Awe

Love and Faith
With the bricks
Laid by both of our hand
Pulled from our shoulders
My friend
With every simple conversation
Shared.
It's all there
Over me,
Inside of you.
In this twilight haze
Directions changed...
I guess liberty wasn't the last wall
Built on foundations
There with you.
I try and rest,
My hope,
Waiting again for the first songs of Spring
"I'll sing them with you further down this road."
Until then happy or never, ever after,
Stilled, but a distant hum resonates
From your light too.

A Perfect Conversation

Pouring out another conversation
Shared over a table of sacrificial intent,
We struggle to imagine, just holding
Each other's attention,
Only to hope
For what is left of our pretensions.

Rings of coffee stains fade away slowly
On paper napkins
Your pursed lips pushing
Unlinked chains of smoke through the air
Between you and me in our exchange
Rising above words exhaled in distress.

We take another sip from our cups
Full of stimulated life and share
Another saccharine secret of our sins.
We take another breath and sense
Our place in time, full of stale possibilities,
Air more than words alone can describe.

We stare into each other's bloodshot eyes, and wonder...

What is perfection?

Jenn Miller

The Lover

Lost in the blue ocean of his eyes
her heart swims again
An old fire rekindled
bright flames bursting from
the charred embers of their love.

His tender lips on hers,
whispering old promises
she knows he will not keep.
His strong hands
caressing wounds that still won't heal

She cannot help herself,
their bodies entwine
Dizzy, her head reels with pleasure
and the knowledge that it is fleeting.
Soon he will be gone
and she will be left
with only her memories
once more.

A master at piecing together
her broken heart,
she cries no tears of regret.
Even if only for a moment,
he was hers again
and she would always love him.

The Butterfly

One cannot understand
the butterfly's rare beauty
by pinning it to a board
and inspecting or dissecting.

To truly experience
its rare magnificence
one needs only
to set it free
and watch it fly.

Julie Moffitt

A Hollow Shell

A hollow shell of the past gone for good
Change, changing
Changing as the seasons
Surviving each day not to wave a white flag and surrender
Frightened of the unknown
Irrational moments in a blender of insanity
Life hurts sometimes
Pick up the pieces one at a time
Clouds linger, slowly fade
As disappointments do
feeling blah is ok
Almost overwhelming at time
Having the patience to overcome muscle building obstacles
Leads to a road of wisdom
Fear is the enemy
love just keeps giving.....

Emily in My Dreams

I walk the halls of an old Victorian home
A flame from a candle I'm holding flickers
Each corner I turn seems a little darker than the last
There is a chill in the air but I do not feel cold

There is a warm and inviting presence here that inspires me
A woman dressed in white that keeps poems tucked away
from the world and sews them into books
Tends to her beautiful garden of flowers
With her beloved dog Carlos at her side
The nature around her makes her feel secure
As Emily plans out her next verse,
I plan mine in my dreams.....

Toni Moore-Jackson

The Two Seated Room

There's this room with 2 chairs
And in one chair is a girl with dark brown eyes and as
You look in her eyes you see fear
When you look at her heart you see that it's broken
But it's one more seat.
In that seat is a girl with dirt all over her
And as you take a rag and rub it on her arms
You see bruises, when you rub her chest there's nothing
No heart no nothing once you rub her forehead
You see it, you see it all, and it makes you
Want to cry then this girl looks up at me

And says, "The only reason you can't see my heart
Is because it's been broken and when
I put it back together I took it away and
What you see in my head is what happened
To me—I was raped, touched and beaten I keep
Myself dirty because if I clean myself
And take myself out of the dark
No one will believe me just like my dad," all I did
Was ask her what was her name, she said, "child of pain"

Sever Pederson

March leaves a zigzag in my heart

A smooth March has never been for this old man
because he knows he will remember again, March one
was moving day bringing change in life that came to stay,
it also was on that first day my oldest grandchild was born.

On March eleven and twenty-one two other grandchildren
were born, one to each family of each son, such joy, such
fun, to welcome each little one, a boy, a girl, to cause the
family tree to grow and make grandfather's face to glow

March fifteen is the day that almost took my life away
by an auto crash, then the silence still in my head as
sure as life ends was my thought – I'm dead – but no, a
new start, because now March leaves a zigzag in my heart.

The joys of birth, the real nearness of death, and 2002 the
day of March twenty-five one year in a crash our family
lost five, the grief and pain was everywhere, and we did
recall on that same date in 1999 my oldest brother died.

Spring is on time

Waiting for spring this year has been like
waiting for a bus
that is broken down
stalled on its normal route
delayed because of mechanical problem
needing major repair
before it is up and running
at full speed
filling with passengers
like yards filling with gardeners
who have been
waiting inside all winter
now longing to enjoy the sun

in the yard
working hard
enjoying spring
and the grass turning green
hearing birds sing
viewing beautiful lilacs
watching tulips open and close
smelling the first rose
finding many new baby plant
turning over rocks to see the scurrying ants
clearing flower beds of much debris
pulling weeds on bended knees
and finding now
the bus and spring are both on time.

Andy Schuck

beyond oak leaves

At the end, I'll get beyond oak leaves. Hem and creak with my own beat and reactions in an institution, in my arrogance and reticence. I will forget to sniff for directions and talk to the dead, my mouth fast and blurred and expendable. Moved by my dad mostly to wobble in the drain, to make myself gravel in the aegis which will be disseminated into the soggy litter. His retreat refueling mother's ornate labyrinth with each succeeding door

shut through pictured forests. Which come to mind when you retrace habits we grew like a little Russian doll crawling from the city. Tangled in adult games and childhood insensitivity.

we dare hide

I don't know if I drove wearing that lull. Fallen to gurgles and sheens in Texas. He didn't show that full weight or fortitude or whacked nerve. That will stick. When I sit wishing, I watch golf on TV. Rorschach dots all over clothes I'd been wearing that want more out of me, wishing that women hung tightly around the work they've done. Tanned Marlboro cowboy kept a diary that could have saved you. Its fire and finality a sun-drop petrified. Bilious victuals which you still have on the plate. Drink another beer in the garage. I can't stand it. Let me cut open the lock and push through perfection I'd been wearing since I was nine. Cover your smile in the light. We dare hide all of that with the jean jacket and more.

Matthew Slauter

The king of souls

Faint cries of man
His majestic art

A wish for wonder's sorrow
From a young girls hear
The love and destiny few may see
Alone in the dark with passion believed
I know the secret of a woman's mind
The mistakes along our romantic ride
True to nature I bear this sight
As heaven falls softly in the early light
The closeness I seek and will always belie
A comfort you bring
Lying next to me

Of Shiloh

Wake wisdom dear father
For my conscious waits the dawn
From the vestige of our sin
Crickets sing the morn
Cry out sweet anger
When musket shot rings the day
Mere boys are cut to pieces
To a nation's downcast and dismay
For Shiloh bears the mournful meaning
Of the Hebrew word for a place of peace
The reload and volleys distant
Often claim what morals we see

An unfortunate decision of our sanity left aside
The misplaced ravings of immature political pride
Leaving us cannons rarely silent
Hearts never granted

A. Supreme

For a day

God let me run things
for just one day
And She said
"Handle it, come what may"
So I sat at the desk
in front of the computer
And scanned through prayer
from Botswana to Bermuda.

The first was from a little girl
who lives in Rome (NY)
She prayed that her father
would come back home
from a war she can't understand
why he's fighting
and if he could hug her tight
that would be so exciting

So I clicked the mouse
to send a reply
and the dialogue box said
Accept or Deny

And since in my hands
there was so much power
I decided to give all
the deserts a shower

And because of a friend
who's from there named Sadie
I fixed all the stuff
that was going wrong in Haiti

But then things started
to get complicated
A group prayed to wipe out
another group they hated
They said that the only
way that they could be free
was if they got this divine
blessing from me

And then there's the thing
with the Ozone layer
500 million people
praying that prayer

And hundreds of thousand
of folks in jail
just praying that somehow
they can make bail

And oh yeah the one from the CEO
who's praying to find a way
to steal more dough

Even the whales and sea lions
troubled and toiled
praying to learn how
to swim in crude oil

By that time I needed
to take a break
and get some fresh air
for Heaven's sake
So I rose from the chair
got out of the seat
and walked to the window
to take a peek

But just then God appeared
inside the room
and saw that my face
was drenched in gloom
"The task at hand"

She asked
"Did you begin it?"
I said "I'm answering prayers Ma'am
I'm all up in it"

She said
"Then what are you doing
away from your station,
are you taking some kind
of mental vacation?"

I said
"I'm doing this job
I've answered a bunch
and now I am thinking
it's time for lunch"

She said
"You used the phrase
You're all up in it,
but you've only been at it
for 17 minutes"

It certainly seemed like
a lot longer was my plea
Then She raised an eyebrow you see
And asked why I hadn't prayed
for anything for me

It's true...
I could have had it all
love, happiness and wealth
But today the last person
I was thinking about ...
was myself.

Jayez Ward

My heart belongs to you

My heart belongs to you
And only you baby
My heart aches
When we are apart
My day
Doesn't start
Until I get
A call from you
Oh how
I long
To see your face
To hold your hand
To walk in the park
Strolling arm and arm
A kiss on the lips to steal a kiss
While no one is looking
Sweet
Oh how sweet
My heart belongs to you
And only you baby
My heart aches
When we're apart
Why must love
Hurt so bad
Why must we
Break each other's hearts?
When my heart
Belongs to you
And no one else
That makes me say ooh
Ooh la, la
Oh my my
My heart belongs to you
And only you baby
My heart aches
When we are apart
My heart belongs to you

My heart belongs to you
My heart belongs to you

I'm remembering love

I'm remembering love
I'm remembering love
I'm remembering you
I remember all the good times
We spent
Together
Together
Together
I dream of you
I dream of you
I remember
The good times
The times
Way outweigh
The bad times
Remembering you
I remember you
I'm remembering love
I'm remembering you
All the special time
We spent together
Days and nights together
Just thinking of you
Girl you the one
The one for me
The one
That made me
A better man
I remember
That day spent
Hanging out
With the fellows
In cars

Girl watching
Then I'm remembering
When I spotted
You girl
Your eyes
I remember
Your face
I remember
Your lips
I remember
Your body
I remember
Oh what a body
The way you walk
I remember
The way you talk
I remember
Each & every part
Of you girl
I remember
Remembering love
Remembering love
Remembering love
Remembering you
I dream of you
I dream of us
You are my girl
Oh how I
Remember
Remembering love
Remembering you

Shari Welch

Hello (The dawn of a friend)

The initiation of hello has such
meaning
A smile projects an introduction
greeting
How are you? It's a beautiful
day
Those words of acknowledgment lead the
way
Conversing into social joys of
pleasure
Interactive communication skills are
treasure
That can be unwrapped time and
again
Hello is the beginning to
friend

By the water

Listen to flowing water
over the rocks
continuous movement
harmonizing with the win
always in motion

We flock to the Ocean
can't wait to see the Lake
obsess about fishing on the rive
lounging with a good book by the pound

Circulation throughout the body
necessitates human function
harmonizing with the heart
Internal and external flowing comes
full circle with aquatic identity
by the water

Richard Zerndt

untitled

Her power lies in her presence
as she turns oceans into deserts

and babies into old men

We greet her, and fear her coming

We try to change her, but she remains the same

We wait for her, but she never waits for us.
We try to save her, but she must be spent

We analyze and measure her,
yet she remains elusive.

We never change he
She changes us.....

"Time".....

STORIES

Jackie Bonett

A Day in the Life

Wake up to your alarm. Hit snooze. Hit it again. Do it again once more. Drag yourself out of bed. Do it by necessity only. Relieve your bladder. Make yourself presentable. Get dressed using only that guideline - but remember to be in dress code. Pour your coffee - it's the only good thing about the morning. Pack the same old lunch. Leave your house at least 5 minutes later than you intended to initially. Try to persuade the traffic lights to stay green. Mentally high-five them when they oblige. Punch in - fake pleasantries - always answer "fine". Exchange friendly banter with the few you don't hate. Listen with baited breath as people unload their woes. Heave your own heavy sigh after they heave theirs. Check e-mail. Check paperwork. Check Check Check. Check the clock. Notice that time is apparently moving backwards. Look again. Confirm that yes, it is. Think about how much this sucks. Eat a mundane meal. Make small talk at lunch. Feed other people's laziness and incompetence by cleaning up their messes time and time again. Do this at least twice a day. Avoid the boss - feel panicked when he beckons you. Learn to loathe the "New Message" pop-up. Battle with the printer for hours on end. Load paper - ok. Clear the paper jam - ok. Clear the paper jam - ok. Clear the paper jam - ok. Threaten to dropkick the printer into next Tuesday if it doesn't stop jamming. Feel a slow burning rage when it doesn't respond to your threats. Turn the printer off and count to ten. Turn it back

on. Hit print. Wait for it. Clear the paper jam - ok. Take your anger out on an innocent tape dispenser. Try a new approach. Baby talk to the printer. Offer the printer a hug. Tell the printer it's the greatest printer that ever was. Clear the paper jam - ok. Feel yourself about to bust under the weight of the workload. Do a half-ass job because you don't have time for anything else. Clear the paper jam - ok. Fantasize about quitting. Dream up illogical scenarios in which you would get to go home early. Scold yourself for considering arson. Wish that someone else would commit arson. Stop thinking about arson. Seriously consider finding a different busted printer to use. Clear the paper jam - ok. Feel simultaneously relieved and annoyed at any and all interruptions. Be happy to help those that you like no matter how backed up you are. Plot the death of anybody else who dares have the audacity to ask anything of you - don't they know you have better things to do with your time? Be annoyed at the rudeness of it. Complain about those in charge even if you know that they are making a valid point. Be excited half an hour before you get to go home, and delirious with joy when it's time to punch out and go home. Punch out.

Andy Dubyckyj

The Atlantic is vicious

The Atlantic is vicious this time of year. Like a terrible Witch she

casts her spell. Captain Pete knew this as he scratched his scraggly beard. He mended his massive tall ship, which had a sail as wide as a whale's tail. The sail was made of the finest linens, the wood was sturdy and enough to house a thousand men.

Captain Pete had ventured to the sea when he was a wee lad and knew he had to prepare his men well before the Queen would send them off to battle the Spanish Armada in order to hold claim to the New World and her treasures. "Yawr I must head to the pub to get me men ready," said the Captain in a deep scratchy voice.

Born from a noble family in Wales, young and bored Pete had always been enchanted by the sea. Yet his parents, like most of the people at the time, felt that the world was a flat place, and that seamen would plunge from the edge of the Earth, or be eaten alive by Sea Monsters. But soon news had traveled that a young Christopher Columbus had sailed to a New World, and since then Pete always imagined being in a tall ship and sailing the other side of the world, so much so that the young Pete ran off with a band of Pirates. The group would sail through the Atlantic, and all ships trembled before their presence.

A life of piracy was not something that Pete imagined, and yet the excitement of sailing the seas and the life had consumed Pete, and soon he took to life at sea. Pillaging ships, meeting enchanting temptresses, and finding some of the finest treasures of the world, Pete became a notorious Pirate. When the Captain of the ship met Davey Jones Locker, he handed the Captaincy to

the young Pete.

As Captain, Pete was a tough and fair man, taking care of his men and making sure they were taken care of well. Still remembering his noble tree, he was able to use diplomacy and ten cannons to settle any dispute a rival ship may have with him and his men, and should a crew attack his ship, he and his men were well skilled with their swords and pistols. Their reputation had not gone unnoticed, and now the Queen had given him and his men a tall task: to take down the Spanish Armada, a powerful force of the seas like a powerful sea dragon to settle claim to the new world.

So Pete, with his scurvy ravaged back, walked down the streets of the London shore heading to the Pub. The Pub was small and had dirt floors, but the men entered in droves to have a jolly time and good drink, and thus it was where his men were staying. There he drank with his men and sang with their grainy voices, "All hail England and let her rule the seas. Let us raise our mugs and give a toast to thee."

The Ale united the men in the quest that lay ahead. All of a sudden, one of Pete's men grabbed a squeeze box—it was Jim Jack a tall and tout fellow. When he began to play, the Captain and the entire crew all joined together in the swanky Pub and danced a jig. The men were laughing and enjoying their time before they head out to sea to battle the Spanish.

Then the Captain raised his hand to prepare a last voyage speech: "Drink up and dance, me hearties, for soon we head out to sea to do battle with our enemies. When we have our victories, we shall. Drink up and Dance in the New World.

Blair Miller

Rage of angels

I gaze at the doors of the church and inhale the crisp clean scent. Winter's first breath blowing across the dry brown grass of the lawn. No leaves adorn the ground where I step only the concrete blocks leading up to the large brass double doors. A solitary pine tree near the playground equipment is the only green in the otherwise barren churchyard. As I approach the doors I know without having to test them that they are locked, but I am always welcome in God's home, and with a single whisper the doors swing open for me. I close the doors behind me and I see them.

The priest standing over the boy, as he speaks to him, I begin to approach them slowly walking up the aisle. My presence within this place is necessary. I can feel the weight of oppression that has haunted these once sanctified walls. Rose vines begin to grow and flow over the floor and pews, trailing behind me as I walk closer to the two figures at the end of the aisle. They are

standing a few feet from the black clouded altar and the weeping cross, I have found that which taints this church. The boy appears to be no older than perhaps ten clutches his shirt at his breast as the priest talks to him.

" Look Danny, I know that you don't really care for the purification ritual, but you don't want your soul to be damned do you? " The priest lays his hand on the boy's shoulder and tries to calm him as he starts to unzip his pants with his other hand.

My time is now..

"It's time to go home Daniel, " I say to the pair at the altar. They are both frightened and the priest pulls the boy in front of him and puts both hands on the boys' shoulders. " I don't know who you are, " he says, " But you are trespassing in this church, we are closed for the day and you can not be here." He trembles as he tries to use the boy as a shield for his own fears. I simply stare, for long enough to make them uncomfortable.

"Daniel Oliver Golds, I said GO HOME. " My voice thunders throughout the church, shaking pews from their position and knocking over votive candles that have been lit. The boy is shaken from his fear and he hears the truth in my voice and he begins to cry as he walks away from the priest. He walks towards me and I lay my hand upon his forehead, without saying a word I speak to his mind, " Break the cycle Daniel, you are judged by the Lord, God loves you, but break the cycle or I may

come looking for you. Now go, your parents are at the gates coming to take you home. I have told them nothing. It is your job to tell them all that has happened within this church so that you can begin to heal.

Daniel looked up at me with his tear filled brown eyes as he nods his head and whispers a thank you as he runs towards the now open doors and a better tomorrow. I turn my attention back to the defiler trying to seek an escape route out of the church and away from me. This will not happen. " I have come for you priest. " He began to back away from me as I walked up the three steps to reach the raised dais next to the pulpit from where he spit forth his lies to the congregation.

"I am here to extract payment for the sins you have committed on that boy, " I say as I backhand him knocking him down to his knees. I grab the collar of his shirt and lift him into the air. Held aloft I throw him into the altar that collapses on impact, "I am here to extract payment for the sins you have committed to this church and its parishioners. "

He tries to stand but a well placed kick to his ribs sends him reeling over the back of the dais and onto the rose bed of thorns waiting to catch his fall. " And priest, I am here to extract payment for the sins that you have committed against God Almighty.

His voice trembling he tries to gather conviction with

the words he speaks... " Who are you that comes into my church and beats me and then tells me about sin? Christ died for my sins, so you can just go ahead and do your worst because I am going to Heaven. Nothing you say can change that. I AM a MAN of GOD. WHO are YOU?" He says, as he tries to untangle his limbs from the thorns that now cut into his struggling body.

"I have been called many things priest, demon, angel, slayer, and djinn. It matters not what you call me; all you need know is my Father's name is Vengeance. "

"But the Bible says that I am forgiven I just have to ask for it. So you can't do any of this, it goes against the very nature of angels, you are a messenger then, sent to tell me of how I may redeem myself, right? "

"No, priest, I am not a messenger of God bringing you news of salvation, I bring only retribution for the sins you have committed. You see, all of us have sins priest, and today you shall choke on yours. " The priest is on hands and knees begging me to forgive him. I take a step forward and begin to reign blow after blow upon his body as I unleash a verbal fury of the pent up anger from the many victims whose innocence he has taken. Anger at the church and this so called man of God. The cold fire begins to burn beneath the shadow of my eyes. Flowing to my hands as I strike with fists and chide with words.

"I cannot grant you forgiveness or absolution, only

punishment. Punishment for Daniel and Jacob, Michael, Edward and Darnell take this punishment, " My fist encased in the white hot power of God's sun slams into his cheek, crushing his bones and making his jaw slack open. " For the rape of Timothy, Jude and Gregory, " I reel back and smash his chest hearing the loud crack of his collarbone breaking through his skin. He struggles to wipe the blood from his face as I take his arm and snap it back at the elbow. "That is for the lies that you have told all of those young men, the ones mentioned and those that you have forgotten. I have not forgotten them, their pain cries out to me, their pain makes me weep with empathy for the sins you have wrought upon these boys and this town.

I can hear him praying within, praying for mercy at any cost. He begs the Lord to release him from this suffering, to grant his some stay of execution.

"I do not enjoy having to do this to you priest, but it is my punishment. For I stayed neutral in the war in Heaven, and the Lord bade me to do his bidding with the knowledge that I would never descend into Hell, but God made me no promises that I would be allowed back into Heaven. So I destroy the sinners that God sets before me."

The priest tries to stand and he is met with another fist shattering his shoulder as I connect with the back of his arm. "That is for James, who died in this church because of your sick tormented lusts." I lift his body and toss him over my head at the

wall that the weeping cross hangs upon. He hits the wall with such force that the stained glass window depicting ST. Thomas slaying a dragon shatters just like his spine.

Once again I hear him pleading from within, begging to pass out or die...wondering how much more pain he can stand. " How much more can you take priest, for I have a lifetime of pain awaiting you. But first I will allow you to view me for what I truly am. " Broken and beaten he weeps as his eyes focus on all the glory that he has forfeited to his lust. I grant him a brief glimpse of what awaits those faithful who follow the Lords path.

His eyes descend from the Heavenly viewing behind me to rest upon my visage. He now knows the truth. With all of the strength he can call upon, he reaches out to touch me.. I bring him back to reality with a crushing blow to his nose, blood spatters the floor by my feet.

"For the sins against this church, for the sins against the town that trusted you, for the lies you have spread and the seed of hate that you have sown, I consign you to burn in hell, " as I say this I take the priest's head and hold it in my hand. " Lie no more, " I whisper, as the priest begins to choke and spit out the dust that once was his tongue.

"Try asking the Lord for His forgiveness without a tongue, over the eons that await you in hell, you may be able to form some speech but not likely. " I drop him back onto the

thorny rose covered floor and extend my arms to Heaven. " In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti, Amen, " I speak, as a hole opens underneath the priest and hells fires raise up to claim another I have sent to damnation. They emerge from the flames. The gatherers as I've come to call them. They lean over the broken body of this once useful tool of God, and as if embracing a long lost love, they cradle the twisted remains and grant the priest his final kiss.

His soul is now theirs.

I then turn to look at the broken bits of stained glass that lie scattered about the floor, with a word " Reform, " They reappear in the window, now in the image of a red rose-covered vine growing in the sunlight of the Lord.

I turn and begin to walk down the aisle exiting the church. A fine snow has started to fall painting the lonely pine and empty churchyard with a soft coating of white, making me smile. "It is done."

Joseph Phillips

The Systemis of Procyon

The eastern sky at night and the smaller of the dog stars,

Procyon twinkles with gold and white lights. I invite you to stand outside and gaze for a long time at Procyon. This star is in Canis Minor in the Gemini constellation. See it yet? It is the seventh brightest star in your night sky.

Now see if you can travel by yourself to the solar system of Procyon. You can, if you stare at the stars long enough. Stare, think, visualize...and go. Are you leaving your corporeal body? Isn't it freeing? An ultimate experience of serenity all to satisfy curiosity. How does it feel to travel through space as a disembodied spirit? You no longer behold space as black and barren, but you may be experiencing space astrally, as a vacuum of active, luminescent variations of the colors you know.

See how the star Procyon in the East becomes two? Procyon is a binary star; Procyon A is a yellow giant like your star Sol, while Procyon B is a white dwarf due to explode. No need to worry about that, though. Procyon B should not detonate anytime soon, plus, you are observing the volatile white star in spirit. M-m-m-my name is Aus Mae. Welcome to the Systemis of Procyon. The Systemis is a self-recognizing solar system divided into three Minor and three Major Worlds. Depending on the elliptic of those planets, some worlds bask in the light of Procyon A, others in the sun-rays of Procyon B. Sometimes a planet can enjoy the lights of both stars

The first of Procyon's six populated planets is small and colored half a searing red when in the light of A, and a stark orange when in the rays of B. Orbiting at three million miles away from the two stars, this smaller world has a large atmosphere of hydrogen and nitrogen. Thick clouds roll across the sky or shoot up like giant mushrooms, depending on the weather, which is almost always cloudy, but occasionally active. Thunderstorms like heat waves do happen on this planet, whose name is Ynopsi, meaning 'from the surface to the air'.

The burgundy red surface of Ynopsi is completely parched by the proximity to the Procyons and was fully desolate for some time. It was underneath this dry, rocky surface that life on this world first originated. Down here, amphibious quadrupeds crawled out of fertile lake beds first adapting their consumption cycle from water-based to air-based. These amphibians learned to inhale and metabolically process the nitrogen in the sub terrain, along with developing an erect vertebrae and two frontal appendages with the back appendages growing into legs.

The Ynopsians discovered how to use their front appendages to dig into the surfaces and mine metal ores. This led to a period where Ynopsians learned to fashion out tools including picks, spades and hammers, all which the Ynopsians attached to their hand-appendages using clamps.

Through the use of these claw-tools, Ynopsians were

able to excavate larger metals. These bigger metals, in the tradition of their claw-tools, were used by the Ynopsians to create advanced exoskeletons, complete with helmets having antennae. These helmeted antennae enabled the Ynopsians to communicate by telepathic waves, and the exoskeletons empowered them to levitate off Ynopsi's surface. This began the Ynopsian's mass integration from surface-dwelling to air-dwelling. First, with their exoskeletal flight powers, the Ynopsians flew and flocked all throughout their planet's sky. Amidst the clouds, Ynopsians worked to build floating, globular colony-stations out of thinner metalloid deposits. These colony-stations proved so light they could float in the clouds, while kept within the skies by weights placed at the end of extensions under the colony-stations. The colony-stations served as ports where the Ynopsians could fly into at random and congregate. The Ynopsians became like birds enjoying a newfound habitat in the sky which everyone could share and enjoy.

The second of the Minor Worlds, Ixote (quest-world), is larger in diameter than Ynopsi, though it once contained a smaller atmosphere mainly of hydrogen, nitrogen, and oxygen. Ixote's topography was once richer, since its hydrogen and oxygen air-compounds, in concert with water from the planet's four equilateral massive water-bodies, permitted vegetation and forestry to grow in valleys and near mountains. The humanoid of Ixote also sprang first as amphibians, crawling out of the water depositories, through adaptation became erectile in their spines, and developed frontal appendages with tentacle-like digits at the

end, having pores used for copulation between the male and female Ixotes.

Land variation was followed by territorialism, tribes in the valleys would war over land with the tribes from the forests and from the mountains. One tribal leader (the Ixote communicate through breathing and the sounds they make from exhaling) discovered what was truly making the peoples of his world have savage battles: They had no understanding of themselves or the planet they originated on. There never came a deity revealing itself on Ixote, so one tribal leader, his name like a voice canal song, later became, in translation, the Ixitive ('Lord of the Quest'). This Ixitive described through breath-songs and strange theatrics his vision for the whole planet to seek out their purpose and the Purpose of the Planet.

Over a millennium and longer, the Ixitive moved the men and women Ixote to over-multiply, so after three generations there would be an absolute army-society. These became the Ixote ('questionauts') who would be assigned to mine and restructure the planet. The Ixitive himself entered into a gradual experiment in immortality. His own thinking power, ideas and dramatics led him to remake himself into one who would not seem to die. The Ixitive lived through those first three generations of the Ixitive, this lord of the quest who described himself as his own vision made manifest.

The Ixitive, a duality of its author and his initiative for the planet, led first to the Ixote grotesquely removing their trees and the first surface of their planet's crust. In their place, the Ixitive demanded four great walls serving also as factories-geo-works. These geo-works expanded slowly over time into an entire mass-networking, inside of which the Ixote, under instruction by the Ixitive, constructed and occupied. Inside the geo-works, research and experiments on planetary restructuring were conducted. Several spaces not yet consumed by geo-work expansion were filled with towering structures, whose engine-like components were dug deep into the crust of Ixote. These structures became shift-generators, harnessing magma from beneath the crust to allow for the planet Ixote to be moved in its axis and to leave its orbit.

The Ixitive was the one who controlled the shift-generators. By sitting atop his throne, located at the top of the prime shift-generator, the Ixitive was now able to manipulate the position of the planet Ixote using a glove with wires linked to the shift-generators. This metallic glove hung atop the Ixitive's shift-generator throne, and whenever the Ixitive desired to move Ixote, he announced this by shouting thunderously across all Ixote: "OFF WITH THE QUEST!" To this day, the Ixote freely move throughout the Systemis trying to learn the origin of all life and all worlds suitable for life within and beyond the Systemis. The third planet and Minor World in the Systemis is my home world, Macron - 'the Favored World.' Macron is the Favored World as assigned by the Most Holy Triangle, who, for a time,

was the only revealed deity in all of Procyon. Ages ago, the Spirit of the Most Holy Triangle looked down upon Macron while the other planets were generating life, and He created a number of prototype creatures out of the mud of Macron, then breathed the life of His Spirit into them.

These alien golems populated the forests and coasts of the TransWaters, a great tributary base set near the Universal Seas, Macron's primary body of water. The animated golems, now fully developed humanoids, built shacks in the TransWaters. They were tribes like on primeval Ixote. A number of males in these tribes were called by the Spirit of the Triangle to a great mountain set between the TransWaters and the other terrains of Macron; the icy Polar Crests, the scorching Solar Regions, and the dim and dry-crusted Darkne Desert populated by the Darkne, Macron's populace of nocturnal nomads who lived in the crust of their desert. The men who went to the mountain, a very torrential mountain called the Mountain of Undying Winds, were anointed as Consecrates by the Spirit of the Triangle. The Spirit also revealed the origin of Macron and the other planets, as well as his creation of Macronians and a set of living laws which the Consecrates compiled into a living holy text called the Everlastis. The Consecra became the leading body of influence on Macron. Upon embarking on a planet-wide tour by foot, sharing the Everlastis with all they met, the Consecrates established a city near the TransWaters, which grew to become the universal capital of Macron. This Macrot was developed over time by native

Macronians, who built their businesses around the Xzom, the Consecra's holy city-state, which is modeled in architecture after the stars and planets in Procyon. Macron has a single moon, one eclipsed from the binary Procyon light by Macron. Memnis - 'mystery-moon' - was presumed to be desolate and uninhabited until the beginning of the Age of the Alignment.

The Age of Alignment ushered in concurring space explorations, first by the Ixote near the orbit of Ynopsi. This was followed by Ynopsians flying out to Ixote to stop further invasiveness by the Ixitive. At around the same time, a prophetic figure from Memnis named Amaden, was able to travel by astral projection from Memnis to the Consecra on Macron. The Consecrates were not impressed with Amaden, nor his mystical powers, nor his doctrine on a deity. The Consecrates embraced the truth that the Creator was a tri-personage, the Most Holy Triangle, and shunned Amaden. He returned to Memnis and has been leading the Memnisians, a primitive humanoid race who have embraced living in darkness and living underground, on preparing for a Great Invasion of Macron. In preparing for this invasion, Memnisians had flown their big, crude Rebolith moon-rock ships to Macron, only to have two crash into skyscrapers in Macrot. These incidents, plus the ill-fated crashing of a Ynopsian colony-station in the Universal Seas, and the untimely visitation by the Ixitive and the Ixote, resulted in my home world Macron rejecting travel by spaceships and forbidding all off-world spacecraft from coming onto Macron.

This no off-planetary policy, a Macroxx - 'Favor the Future' - led to the establishment of a space-based 'shield force' of astronaut spies, and weapon-equipped space stations called the Etsasi. The Etsasi especially monitor a sector between Memnis and Macron called the Stellar Gulf. It was this tension between my home world and its eclipsed moon that resulted in the establishment of the Systemis - 'peace to all planets.' The Systemis was first started when ambassadors from Macron, Ynopsi, Memnis, Ixote, and the Three Major Worlds met together on a Ynopsian colony-station to discuss ways of resolving the Macron-Memnis conflict and other possible conflicts between Ynopsi and Ixote, and some of the Major Worlds. The ambassadors agreed that interstellar peace could be achieved with time and patience, and that such peace would be a process that could culminate in interplanetary peace by the time of the next stellar alignment, due to come this decade.

The Major Worlds in Procyon are considered major because they are bigger than the three Minor Worlds. Beyond Macron, at some twenty billion miles away from the Two Stars, Egeph orbits. Egeph is like Macron in that it has bodies of water, though Egeph has more water-depositories than almost all the other planets. Egeph has a unique atmosphere in that the mists, the clouds, and the storms therein are alive and exist to protect the natives of Egeph from alien invaders. This was demonstrated when the Ixote flew into Egeph trying to explore the fourth world. In the Systemis, Memnis is yet to be counted as a planet. This is

also a difficult issue for Memnisians.

Egepha - 'the all-there' - is populated by wild primates, who are aware that they will change and adapt over time. For now, the Egepha swing from the vines of ultra-towering trees and fly insanely through their skies, landing on any random body of water on the surface, or grasping the branch of a high surface tree while diving. The Egepha have massive forearms, immensely strong backs. The Egephas can thrust themselves and command the open air, flying with the friendly animate clouds, winds, and storms, then find they can swim madly through huge rivers and lakes. The Egepha have no deity. They also have no need for the Systemis, though some Egepha agreed in building the Systemate, the satellite center for the Systemis. Wearing Ynopsi-based space-suits, strong, fearless Egepha were employed to assist in constructing the orb-shaped monitoring satellite base, with its propulsion weight, a square-like extension under the hull of the Systemate. This is where the Systemate is piloted, by turns taken from its ambassadors solely from Ynopsi, no one active from Ixote, one ambassador from Macron, a temporal representative from Memnis, but no one from the fifth and first Major World Yadon.

Yadon - 'mystery-world' - is the largest planet in the Systemis. I can see it sometimes from my world Macron. It was once referred to by Macronians as 'mystery-moon,' because Yadon was like a big, uninhabited world that all in the Age of the Alignment thought was never home to any life. Three centuries

ago, a comet collided with Yadon, causing a chain reaction covering the whole planet. The crust and the mantle were re-shaped by seismic forces set in eruption and soon out of the over sphere of explosions, the Yadoc, a people dormant in their home world for millions of years, were born anew. The Yadoc are like giants who inhabit and fly around their home world like the Ynopians, and like the Ixote, the Yadoc study the origins of their creation by examining the impact crater from the comet that brought their emerging. This geo-mysticism also allows the Yadoc to pilot their mountain-temples that intricately roam their planet-in-puzzle.

The Systemis was founded by the sixth planet and third Major World. This smallest of the Major Worlds is also out farthest from the light of the Procyons, yet its ice-saturated surfaces are still reflective in gold and especially white. Tpedet is the coldest planet here, yet its populace, like many of the other worlds, are the products of a water-based manifesting. Tpedet, who share their home world's name with themselves and with the ocean that networks between glaciers and ice-sheets, migrated in masses out of the oceans as amphibians whose life-force grew to adjust its heat to the warmer upper world, the one above the ocean filled with rich subzero life. These amphibians changed, becoming erect in their backs and digital with their frontal limbs.

Soon, Tpedet became explorers of the ice-sheets and the glaciers throughout the home world. Their skin remained impervious to hyper-frigid air but more so, Tpedet learned to use

movement while sliding and slipping across ice to be a foundation for culture; one based on spontaneity. The people of Tpedet enjoy leaping and skating and singing and dancing to express themselves. They wear symbolic markings on their bodies and wear crystals in ways allowing for each one to have their own language. Tpedet is a cool planet I hope to visit one day. Maybe I will.

The Tpedet proposed a peace-to-all-planets after the Macronian Etsasi fired a deadly solar missile at the Memnisians, forcing them to evacuate seemingly forever within the holes of their moon. I was too young to remember all that, the first stel-war between Macron and Memnis. I hope there is not another one. I do not think the Systemate and its members who think they can negotiate for all the planets will bring peace, even if the Consecra agreed to instill the Systemis. Hopefully, by the next alignment and before the white Procyon explodes, there will be a peace everywhere.

I am happy to have shown you my home system and shared with you its wonders. I hope there is peace in your solar system, and I hope your home world is in view of an prosperous future. All of us need that.

Cheryl Vatcher-Martin

Kingsley House Ghost Story

"Look at this house. I've never seen a green colored mansion like this," John said

"No, I haven't ever noticed a house that looks like this either. It is two pieces of a house put together," Sam said.

"The front door is slightly open. Perhaps we can get inside," John said.

The wind whipped up its own brew flinging it open as the brothers flew up the creaking wooden gray stairs

"Watch out, John, the door is swinging shut now," Sam said.

They barely missed being squished inside the door wall as the high-speed gust of wind slammed the door shut behind them.

"That was too close," John said.

"Yeah, I agree; we'll run up those stairs that mirror each other and get out of here," Sam said.

"Do you see the stairs and how narrow they are?" John asked.

Sam raced up the one side of the stairway and hollered, "John come see this quick, I think there's a ghost wearing a civil war uniform. He's moving around in the parlor," he said.

"No, he isn't," John said.

The mannequin stopped cold in front of John.

At that moment the house turned icy and foggy, limiting the sight of the boys.

"I know what I saw. I'm going over there," Sam said.

"Fine, I'm going into the bedroom where there is a rope bed," John said.

Sam, unfazed, tiptoed into the parlor where the civil war ghost was quiet for a moment. Sam sat down into the rocking chair, and all of a sudden was being rocked by the ghost.

"It is the 8th of August of 1862, and I'm an original member of the 24th Michigan of the Iron Brigade. I just enlisted today here in Romulus, Michigan," Kingsley ghost said.

"What? No way, It is 2010. I don't know what the Iron Brigade is!" Sam hollered. He ran to find John and got caught in the fog, and the house transformed him back to 1862, filled with screaming children and smells he didn't recognize

"John, where are you?" Sam bellowed.

Silence. Then footsteps behind him. He sighed with relief because he knew John had found him. Turning around he screamed, "Leave me alone! It's not 1862, and I want to find my brother John and get out of here!"

"But son, you live here with me. I'm your father and I'm off to fight in the Civil War because we are tired of hiding slaves that have run away and have no chance to start a new life, unless we rid the world of slave hunters, and slave holders," the ghost of the Kingsley house said.

"I am not your son! John, where are you?" Sam screamed as loud as he could.

"Over here, Sam."

With the frigid air inside of the house and deep fog he hoped to find his brother.

"Where are you?", Sam asked again.

Right then, he felt the Civil War Ghost, gently take his cold hand and pointed him towards John. Then, he simply vanished into the air.

"I'm in this room near the door way, and under a rope bed," he said.

"I am crawling towards you John. Did you hear that noise?"

"No Sam, please cut it out. I've found something interesting here under the bed.

"What is it?" Sam said

"I don't know. It's like a big bowl and it has a lid on it and it's towards the foot of the bed," John said.

"Hey, do you see the bedspread? It's made of silk and was made in the 1800's," Sam said.

"Help!! I just got stuck in the rope bed!! My arm is all twisted and I'm afraid to get my head stuck in it too. I was looking for the straw mattress and I pulled my arm into different directions," John said.

"Okay, I will try to come help. By the way, John, do you smell something like baking bread somewhere in this cold house?" Sam said.

"Yeah. Why?"

"Never mind. I'll tell you later," Sam said.

Sam helped untangle his brother from the rope bed and was astounded to see his reflection in the bedroom mirror. He was wearing clothes that didn't belong to him. Yikes

"John, do I look different to you?"

"Nope. Wearing your usual jeans and cap and jacket."

John said.

Sam was so spooked he didn't know what to do or say.

"I'm going to look for some baking bread, John," he said.

Sam ran blindly towards the sweet smell and couldn't recall if he'd ever smelt fresh bread before, but he had read about it in school as many farmer's wives would bake their own bread as it was a necessity to feed their families.

On his way towards the smell, he felt a firm grip on his shoulder, "Son, you need to go finish your chores and help your mother. She'll even give you a slice of the warm bread if you ask nicely," the ghost said.

Sam didn't answer him, just ran, and ran, and there she was! It was his mother, but she had on farmer's clothes and looked weary.

"Sam where on earth have you been? Where's John?" she asked.

Sam turned around and ran towards the rope bed bedroom to find John.

"Well I've had enough of this. Let's get out of here as mom will be worried about us," John said.

"John I am going to show you that mom is baking bread

for us right now inside of this house," Sam said.

He grabbed John's hand and ran into the direction of the scent of the baking bread which now had evaporated into thin air.

"Sam, mother isn't in this house. You are imagining ghosts!"

"I'll see you both when the War is over," the ghost said.

"No!" John exclaimed.

"Now do you believe me?," Sam said.

"Yes! Let's leave this haunted house!" John said.

Imelda Zamora

For my eyes only

I felt a hand on my forehead. Still drowsy with sleep, I opened one eye and then the other. He was kneeling on the floor by my side of the bed, stroking my hair and kissing me all over my face. I turned to him and smiled, keeping my mouth closed for I had yet to brush my teeth. He looked at me lovingly, and as I gazed back at him, a fervid glow coursed through my veins. I decided that his was the love I wanted to keep. After all, didn't I just marry him? He was smiling at me now, his thumb still playing on my forehead, his hand resting on my head.

I woke up with a start. I was shivering. The room was cold and dark. I should turn the thermostat up or get another blanket, I thought. Before I could stop myself, I had flung my right arm out to the empty space beside me. Tears welled and began to burn my eyes. How long had it been? Could I count in years, months, days, hours and minutes? No, as anyone who had lost a loved one knew, calendars and clocks were of no use.

Hi, Happy Anniversary again!

It was three p.m. and he was calling from work

Happy Anniversary again to you, too, I replied

So, what are you doing? he asked.

Oh, I'm just tidying up around the house.

Are we still going out to dinner tonight?

But of course! I'll be ready by five-thirty. Are you on coffee break?

I have to go, bye, he said and hung up.

About fifteen minutes later the doorbell rang. Because I was not expecting anyone, I hesitated for a few minutes before

cautiously going to the door. Then I peeked through the curtain. There he was standing outside with a goofy smile on his face and clutching a bunch of long stemmed red roses in his chest.

I finally got up and adjusted the thermostat. No use going back to bed, I thought, now that I am fully awake. It would be daylight soon anyway, time to face another day again.

Do you think there are surveillance cameras around?

I don't know, he said, looking up scanning the ceiling. I don't see any.

He went back to his Nachos, dipped one into the hot cheese sauce and put it in his mouth. I heard it crunch. We were waiting outside the door of a movie theater in one of those multi-movie complexes, where the doors are all lined up one after the other along the corridors. There was no one else around.

Once, a while back, I commented to him how easy it was for anyone to just enter another movie again, as long as one knew the screening schedules between the shows. Do you want to try it sometime? I teased him, getting excited. Sure, he said, my friends and I used to do that when we were young boys. But then, that was another time and another place.

So, anyway, there we were outside the door of movie theater number 5, waiting for the cleaning crew to finish so that

we could sneak in to see our second movie of the night.

What do you think they will do to us if we get caught? I whispered.

Nobody would suspect an older couple like us to be doing this, he said softly, but if someone stops us, then we'll just pay, that's all.

But no one stopped us, so we did it again. After the third time, I said, I think we should stop now. This life of crime does not hold well with my conscience.

And we burst out laughing.

I dragged myself to the bathroom and washed my face. As I was brushing my teeth, I looked in the mirror and saw a woman, somewhat different and yet very familiar. Years had added character to her face, welcoming some well earned wrinkles, thinning white hair, and what do they call those little brown spots?

I have a problem, he said calmly, his face graven.

We were sitting on a bench at the mall, the bench where we usually meet up after walking around, and where we sometimes sit and eat our frozen yogurt

What is it? I asked with an equally calm voice, bracing myself for what I would hear next.

Well, I have this problem, you see, he started. My problem is that I cannot control myself anymore. I cannot wait any longer. I need to give this to you right now.

He took something from a bag behind him and handed me a small blue velvet box, his lips cracking into a smile. Oh, was all I could say. I gingerly opened it and inside was a gold ring set with three diamonds, the middle larger than the one on each side of it. I had seen it in diamond commercials and it was called a forever ring, or was it an eternity ring?

Happy Anniversary in advance, he said. It was October. Our anniversary was December. Forty-three years.

Downstairs in the kitchen, I turned the stove on, put a small pot of water to boil and stirred in two heaping tablespoons of oatmeal. Then I went to the sink to wash the spoon.

We were standing side by side facing the kitchen sink one morning. He was having trouble breathing and was holding on to the counter for support. Suddenly, he turned and hugged me. I love you, he said. I love you, I replied, we will get through this, we will fight this, you will get better. He did not say

anything. We stood there holding each other in silence.

After breakfast, I went back upstairs. From the bedroom closet, I pulled out a pair of black pants and a black blouse. I stopped. Wait a minute, what, black again? I looked and all I had was black, grey, white and an occasional brown and navy. I need to add something a little cheerful to this wardrobe, I murmured to myself, shaking my head, my hands on my hips. Tomorrow, I will go to the mall and buy myself something bright. No, I am not ready for red yet, but yes, maybe a pastel shade. Lime green would be nice.