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CONTENTS

POETRY

The Cynic,  Andrea Lupica  1
Just Beyond My Window,  Henry A. Washington  4
Winter Solstice,  Elaine Reisman  5
Sweet Ignorance,  Sandra Florent  6
First and Last Born,  Willis D. Dunbar  7
We’re All Lost,  Christine Fargnoli  8
To Be A Kid Again,  Jennifer Bertolini  12
The Fallen Leaves,  Christine Fargnoli  13
My Ocean Soul,  Frances C. O’Neill  14
Morning’s Promise,  Elaine Reisman  15
The Winter Thaw,  Elaine Reisman  16
Barbershop,  Willis D. Dunbar  17
Into My Dreams,  Loriann R. Bespalko  18
Letter to My First,  Kelley Kramer  19
Till Death Do Us Part,  Michael N. Mwangi  21
The Heart is Where Pain Lurks,  Loriann R. Bespalko  23
Pride the Beast,  Andrea Lupica  25
Where Light Can Be Found,  Elaine Reisman  26
This Is True,  Erika Tilotta  27
Walk a Day in my Shoes,  Camille Clarke  30
Sweat Shop Sleep,  Willis D. Dunbar  31
Before I Die,  Erika Tilotta  32
Autumn,  Jessica Fargnoli  33
FICTION

Broken Doll,  *Erika Tilotta*  

The Secret in the Attic,  *Loriann R. Bespalko*  

Forgiving Tunnel,  *Erika Tilotta*  

2  

9  

28
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ANDREA LUPICA
The Cynic

This child’s heart once held a hope;
hope fueled by innocence.
A little girl’s dream unfulfilled.
Life will teach her differently.
Let it go! – Do not dream! – Be real!

Innocence fades replaced by cynicism.
The cynic does not dream – she’s real.
A life lived apart – never too close.
This cynic knows love is for dreamers,
but she’s not a dreamer – she’s real.

Out of the blue and into the light –
The views have changed.
An ironic twist of fate for this cynic;
Now she’s face to face with her child’s heart.
A girlhood crush, all grown up.

The cynic cannot say her dream came true.
He stayed that night and the cynic went.
She’s a dreamer now because there is
no room for a cynic living the dream.
ERIKA TILOTTA
Broken Doll

In the second bedroom of a white house on the corner, there is a porcelain doll. Sitting on dust-covered sheets, she watches the half-opened door. She cannot look anywhere else, not the walls of peeling, faded yellow flowers, the dirty ceiling, nor the floor that was littered with glass from a broken window. Her left eye fully open, a blue gaze waiting for those to lay their own eyes upon it. The other eye, half closed and broken.

The house was alive once. The sounds of a couple and their daughter of six continue to echo in the house. The cheerful girl that had played with the stuffed animals is gone. The animals are scattered on the floor, filthy with their cotton bleeding through open wounds that were self-inflicted by the only mind they had. The doll would move, but couldn't for her mind told her to do nothing but to sit and wait.

The girl was nice, polite, and curious. She had her own tea set, which now lay shattered in the closet. The doll house that she had housed small paper dolls in was currently occupied by spiders and some other insects. The costumes that used to hang in the closet were now faded and falling apart from their hangers. There is still water from the last rainfall in the left corner on the floor by the water-stained dresser, soaking whatever fabric was near it.

The wood is rotting under the bed and the doll knew that soon she would be gone. Then again, a part of her was. Her pure white face was covered with spots of dirt and a crack ran across the cheek to the painted mouth. Her left hand was cracked and useless. Her red and white dress was partly eaten by insects and moths. And yet despite losing her beautiful appearance, she was still hopeful as she waited for the girl.

Toys and dolls followed their "mind" very carefully. Whoever picked them up was part of them and told them what was right and what was wrong. If their owner was angry and hurt the doll or toy, the inanimate object would only allow the owner to continue. The toys believed that this is what is right even if it seems wrong. The last time, the couple came in that room and turned into the toys’ and dolls’ minds, the little girl was nowhere to be seen.

In fact, the little girl never returned to the room for the past few days. The stuffed animals and the porcelain doll listened to the wailing that came from the floor beneath them and from the bedroom down the hall. The little girl had told her toys and dolls before she left that she was going to return. She especially went to the doll and told her to
wait for the little girl to come into the bedroom. And the toys and dolls waited for days until the couple came in.

Crying and angry, they grabbed the stuffed animals one by one and threw them at the wall. The couple shouted, still crying, and began to rip the animals at the seams. The animals did not cry out for they were not told to. In the animal's "minds" this was supposed to happen and they followed their orders by not fighting back as they were being destroyed. This was for the love of their daughter and the toys allowed them to be sacrificed to their beloved owner.

One stuffed animal, a blue elephant, was thrown and it hit the porcelain doll. The doll fell and rolled until over the bed she went. That was how she broke her arm, eye, and face. It was not her fault that she fell, according to her "mind." It was no one's fault; the elephant was supposed to hit something and it hit the doll. The toys and dolls were doing the right thing. A few minutes later, she alone was picked up by the older woman, her face stained from crying. The woman neatly placed the doll back on the bed and said nothing to it, giving no new instructions.

Since then, no one returned to the room. Years passed, and the toys and dolls never learned that the house was abandoned. They stay in their current spots where they were left and they wait. Waiting to be picked up by the little girl with the brown hair and the smile that she always had. Waiting to be given a thought again and to go on new adventures. Waiting to be just held one more time by the sweet little girl.

But she would never return. Some of the stuffed animals had already died, like their beloved owner and soon, the house. The doll is the only one that can see past the door and with only that, she holds onto life. She waits for her owner just like the last command that the girl gave her. With arms still open, she will allow the girl to pick her up and hold her close. And in that, the doll would finally fall to rest in the warmth of being loved.

In the second bedroom of a white house at the corner, there is a porcelain doll. Beautiful like the little girl that lived there. Broken like the family that had the tragedy. Lost like the love and warmth that the house once held. The doll alone will wait, for her mind told her to do that and nothing else. She will wait with one blue, glossy eye open. For the other eye was half closed and broken.
HENRY A. WASHINGTON
Just Beyond My Window

There for an eternity and it never called my name
Just beyond my window and I failed to see it change
But today as I passed my window to glance

Upon the street, the snow is falling and cars slowly moving
I felt a joy and a happiness that came from the image just beyond my window

There she stood in a subdued green frolic that bushed and covered her from head to toe
Her arms brown and bare reached for the sky
As she was caught in dance by my eyes

Her long neck brought her head forward to worship the great God above
One foot firmly planted into the ground and her other foot stretched to the sky in leap

Such a pose to carry, so much flare to be still and caught right over there
Just beyond the frame of my window

For the sky I suppose she would soar
And to the sky assume she would leave
If it wasn’t for her being this joyful tree
ELAINE REISMAN
Winter Solstice

The way the empty branches of the trees silhouette the sky,
is very much like the way
a last hanging autumnal leaf suspends in space,
and cleaves the distance between seasons.
How a crow v’s winged circles in an open sky,
is the way his shadow unwillingly becomes
a mirror image of life,
as it darkens the surface
of a crumbling ivy covered wall.
How both wall and leaf are able to hold the pale, lingering light,
is the way the December sun
can still illuminate the ash colored bark,
on trees, aglow,
is this winter verge of diminished light:
reducing all that has come before it,
to shorter days with fewer hours to work and play.
The way a wind rattles the hollow reeds,
and lessens,
is repeated in the multiple rings
that ripple across the surface of a near-by-pond,
until they dissipate,
and all movement is arrested.
SANDRA FLORENT
Sweet Ignorance

SWEET IGNORANCE

OH! How lovely it is to be ignorant.
Not knowing the reality of things.
Making biased opinions of people.

OH! SWEET IGNORANCE

The inexperience of life allows the world to seem so small.
Only inane philosophies exist.

OH! SWEET IGNORANCE

dripping with your slander, hate, and hypocrisy.

OH! SWEET IGNORANCE

There is no inclination that you will end.
WILLIS D. DUNBAR
First and Last Born

I’m carrying those
rebellious
latenightdates out the window,
daddy’s disappointment,
and mother’s words of
“that skirt’s way too tight!”
in this nine-month-old
rounded nest. Sitting
on what was a little cute stomach,
just below my swollen breasts.
No support.
Because he left his baby and baby for
his queen of the prom. My ex-king of charm.
So I’m left with
his vacant promises and absent kisses.
Now my figure doesn’t move the crowd,
I can barely move it now.
I’m another neglected health education statistic,
preventing little boys and girls
from being swarmed by the birds
and stung by the bees.

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CHRISTINE FARGNOLI

We’re All Lost

We’re all lost.
Lost amidst others like ourselves. We’re lost within our own hearts, within our own minds. And you can’t blame me for admitting,

“It’s always going to be this way.”

When we’re looking for the same thing in all the wrong places. (The perfection of our dreams that will never turn into reality.) And you can’t blame me for saying,

“Nothing’s here, and nothing will remain.”

We’re all lost together, searching for the fountain of life to replenish our weakness. This oasis is a mirage. There is no way out of here.
We’re all lost.
LORIANN R. BESPALKO
The Secret in the Attic

Madelyn had found her mother's secret in the attic. She had not been looking for it. All she had wanted was a photo album, perhaps even a photo of her father. She had always wondered why her hair was red; after all, her mother and grandmother were both blondes. Now she knew that her father had not died. Her "grandmother" was not her grandmother at all. Madelyn's mother had been hiding her secret past in the attic, away from Madelyn, for fifteen years. Madelyn was distraught. She did not know who her mother was; she did not know who her grandmother was. She didn't even know who she was. All Madelyn had relied upon her entire life, as being true, was false.

Madelyn's mother, Michelle, had simply been trying to protect her daughter from the shocking truth of her past—their past. She had hidden the journals, the yearbooks, the photograph albums, the treasured jacket belonging to her first love, and everything that she had taken with her when she moved from a small, friendly town in New Jersey to the town in North Carolina where she had lived since Madelyn was born. She had desired to make it to Florida, but going into labor with Madelyn had stopped her halfway. She went into labor in a small diner owned by Rose, a woman, with creases in her forehead and thinning gray hair, who felt sympathy for this young mother. She called the ambulance to take Michelle to the hospital and decided that this young girl needed someone to rely upon. So did the baby girl she brought into the world. Fifteen years later, the warm-hearted woman was still in their lives, and Madelyn was introduced to her as "Grandma."

Michelle had never meant to escape from her past. Well, when she was running, it was her present; but she didn't have the courage to tell her family, friends, and neighbors that she, a recent college graduate, was pregnant, but not ready to begin her own life yet, nevertheless a life for her baby. Not in town, where everyone knew her; maybe she'd be able to raise a child somewhere else. Just as her pregnancy was beginning to show, she ran away. She took train after bus after train to Florida—a future in the sun, just her and her baby. But Madelyn, a full three months early, came when she was in North Carolina. Undersized, she was a reasonably healthy baby, at least Rose always said so. Oh, Rose, a saint, she was! Rose had taken Michelle and Madelyn in from day one and was still an integral part of their lives. "I've always wanted a daughter. And a granddaughter," Rose smiled at Michelle that fateful night in the delivery room.

For fifteen years, everything has been perfect for Rose, Michelle, and Madelyn.

Michelle's shameful running away was behind her, and she was never turning back to the people and places she left behind. She would never see Highland Falls, New Jersey again. "Maddie?" Michelle called to her daughter after coming from the diner late that evening. "Maddie?" She searched the house and had begun to become frantic. "MADDIE?" Maddie was gone.
Michelle called Rose in a frenzy and she came rushing over. "Where could she be?"
Rose asked.
Michelle looked at the woman she had adopted as her mother. Rose gazed back at her. Instantaneously, they whispered to each other, their eyes clouding up with tears. Michelle knew that the false walls in the attic could not conceal her secret forever. Sooner or later, Madelyn would walk up to the attic, and they both knew. "The attic," they whispered to each other, their eyes clouding up with tears. Michelle knew that the false walls in the attic could not conceal her secret forever. Sooner or later, Madelyn would find it. So was Madelyn. "We have to find her," Michelle whispered, her hand half covering her mouth in panic.

"No, Michelle, you need to let her find the past that you left behind. It's her past, too."
Madelyn took two trains and a bus to reach her final destination of Highland Falls. She could not understand why her mother ever left. It was a quiet town, so small that everyone knew each other. She walked down Busy Street—all the streets seemed to have cute names—passing the brick municipal building, the tiny fire department, and the foreboding police department. Further down the block was a grocery store—not a Super Stop and Shop or an A&P, but a "Highland Grocery." On the other side of the street, there was the Katherine Raymond Memorial Library, the doctor, the dentist, the Falls Diner, The Eatery, and Jack's Deli. She needed to ask for directions. Who was she supposed to ask? She decided to try Jack's Deli.

"Good morning, doll," a kind-faced matronly woman said from behind the counter. "What wouldya like?"
"Uhm," Madelyn sputtered, "uhm, I just need to know how to get to Summer Street."
The woman looked at her sternly. "You aren't from around here, are you? Or you would know where every street is here. At the intersection, make a left and go down about ten blocks. You'll see the street sign. Take care, doll." The woman smiled.
Madelyn started walking. She was glad that it was sunny. Only slightly chillier than at home, still Madelyn wrapped her denim jacket around herself more tightly. The leaves were beginning to change color. The sidewalks were lined with uneven rows of trees on each side of the asphalt-covered street. Green pine trees, red, orange, and yellow oaks and maples. They reminded her of the construction paper leaves that her elementary school teachers would tape to the classroom windows every fall. The houses were all of adequate size, similar yet different at the same time. She felt she would see mothers with aprons and fathers with briefcases and children with lunchboxes walk out of each door. Where were the white picket fences?
She saw crossing guards and children walking to school. Without knowing her, they all smiled or said hello or waved. Highland Falls was so friendly. Why would her mother ever want to leave?
Madelyn finally made it to Summer Street. She stared for a long time at number 44. She looked at the house, the windows, the backyard. She imagined her mother playing with her childhood friends in the yard, her mother whispering to her first love out of her bedroom window, her mother's parents cooking veal cutlets in the kitchen. She could almost hear the laughing, the whispering, and the soft conversation. Madelyn felt as if she belonged to this house, this place, this town.

A woman who had stepped out of the house broke Madelyn's thoughts. She had red hair. "May I help you?" she asked.

"H-hi. I'm Madelyn. I'm your granddaughter."
The days are long and hard.
Endless STRESS overtakes you.
Not knowing where to go or who to turn to.
You strive for an hour, a minute, or even a second to relax.
Looking back on your childhood,
wishing for those days back.
Trying to hide from this day,
and live for the next.
Wanting to feel relaxed.
Morning after morning,
Night after night.
When will it End?
Another day hits you.
Looking into the mirror realizing…
You are only still just a Kid!

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Morning after morning,
Night after night.
When will it End?
Another day hits you.
Looking into the mirror realizing…
You are only still just a Kid!
CHRISTINE FARGNOLI
The Fallen Leaves

The fallen leaves swallowed the Earth whole that autumn morning...
But the Ground welcomed that blanket of rust and bronze with delight,
hoping it would stay long past wintertime.
The warmth brought back memories of the summer past,
of all the joy and late night laughter the local children had while catching fireflies.
Or even the fishing trips to the pitiful pond with makeshift fishing poles,
followed by a mischievous adventure into some elderly person’s yard.
The Ground reveled in the thought.

But right now, all that could be is a memory, a splendid daydream.
The children were in school again,
and it wouldn't be until mid afternoon when they would return,
to kick the fallen leaves while they walked home.
And in that walk, the children would dream of summertime,
when there was no school to prevent them from having fun.
The sun was bright, the air warm and pleasant.
Now the children clutched their little jackets close to their bodies,
wrapping themselves tight with the warmth of their arms.
It would be almost a lifetime before the carefree days would return to them.
The children reveled in the thought.
FRANCES C. O’NEILL
My Ocean Soul

I take a walk along the shore
It soothes me as I go
I catch the waves upon my feet
They rock me to and fro

I swing and sway in rhythm
As the waves come rolling in
I’m lulled by steady movements
And transformed beneath my skin

The water draws me closer
I’m a child a sign of the sea
And I can feel the pull and tug
Of the tides that move in me

The sunshine bathes my heart and soul
I’m warmed down to the bone
I allow myself this time of rest
I feel that I’ve come home

I gather seashells as I go
Mementos I will treasure
And I’ll reflect upon this day
With memories and pleasure

I was born to be at the seashore
Though I’ve fought it all this time
I long for the ocean breezes
I crave the ocean brine

So let my soul be driven
By the forces that might be
I’ll never know fulfillment
Till I’m living by the sea
ELAINE REISMAN
Morning’s Promise

“The ripe hour came
and with it light,
and light engendering.”
Keats - “Hyperion”

The morning light shimmers and strokes
the leaves on mint, thyme, and basil,
where they root in rich loam,
and resolve to grow again.
The petals of pink periwinkle filter the light
on blossoms of large cruciferous leaves,
and the morning’s promise
unrequited, swells the bloated buds
on magnolia trees,
whose calyx cache already attracts
some pollinating bees.

The bees dance
defying circles around my limbs,
then disappear, and fade
into invisible currents.
ELAINE REISMAN

The Winter Thaw

“...beautiful as an archangel
and luminous as the sun”

The Temptation of St. Anthony

Though the ground was still covered with snow,
it had already begun to thaw,
and birds not seen all winter now,
clung to the branches of the holly
where they appeared to thrive on berries,
held by the hard-edged leaves of pointed debris
in the sun’s luminous gold.

Though the air is still weighted
like a solid cell, and cold,
it seems to carry sound differently now,
and where once darkly infused snow clouds
were allowed to shower their cruel lavender,
then and now, billow their boundless double
as puffs of white:

yet, they could not hinder this oncoming spring.
WILLIS D. DUNBAR
Barbershop

Man’s last haven. His Saturday sanctuary.
A hairy floor, mirrored walls, spinning chairs.
Conversation dressed in the periodic profanity,
For the sake of it. Why not indulge in masculinity?
    Mothers not here.
    Maybe baking a cake.
    Wives far away.
    Maybe on aisle ten, shopping.
    It’s just you and the barbaric boys.
    Exchanging empty opinions.
    Waiting for
A cut, a snip, a buzz, your personal precise perfection.

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LORIANN R. BESPALKO
Into My Dreams

I’m so in love with you

There’s nothing else I can do—
I can’t help but feel this way—
And I hope you’ll talk to me today.

Thinking of you makes me smile
Being with you makes my day worthwhile
Seeing you makes my heart skip a beat…
Something strange goes on whenever we meet.

Into love, I’ve fallen so deep
At night, I think of you and I can’t sleep.
When I finally close my eyes
Nothing comes as a surprise…

When right through the dreamy haze
I see the glowing smile upon your face,
Shining as brightly as the moon’s beams
Can it be that you’ve followed me into my dreams?

There’s nothing else I can do—
I can’t help but feel this way—
And I hope you’ll talk to me today.

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Can it be that you’ve followed me into my dreams?
KELLEY KRAMER
Letter to My First

You are my first
First breath of fresh air...first *everything*.
Broken hearted I came to you, restored I left
And everyday you restore me over and over because you know I need it
You fill every want, every void
With you, my soul, my innermost being is at ease – you completely sustain me
I need no validation from anyone but you
I do not seek the approval of anyone but you
I want to long for nothing but what you give
What good would it be if I gained everything but lost you?
When the world brings me down I turn to you and you paint it beautiful again
When others leave me in anguish I turn to you and you make me dance
When frustrations abound because I try to dig deep and all I get is surface
YOU take me where I need to go
I continually disappoint you
You welcome me back with open arms
You forgive and forget
I long to be in your presence like a deer longs for water
Quench me over and over again
And when it seems you're far way, you're as close as the next beat of my heart
Because that is where you live
Deep down in me is where you dwell
You know the real me
You love what everyone despises
You accept what I deny
You forgive what I cannot
You think my deepest darkest is beautiful and you appreciate what no one else sees
You are the loveliest of gentlemen
You give entirely, no strings attached
The most genuine of genuine
No such passion has ever consumed me; no such love will ever be shown to me
You are the standard all must reach for, although they could not possibly reach your greatness, your goodness, the essence of who you are
You have never ever failed me and you never will
I will see people come and go but you will stay
I must watch my tongue and how I speak for that is where life and death comes from
The power of the tongue is great
So let me say this

…To my dear first:

I Love You.
MICHAEL N. MWANGI
Till Death Do Us Part

The sturdy and the feeble I have wed
The paupers, bourgeoisie and affluent I have dwelled with
The black, white, brown and yellow I have all tainted pitch black
The old have aged in my grip. Those of tender years I hold by the neck
The far and near ends of the earth I have traversed-none too far for my
outstretched arms
Like a faithful spouse I cling on, till death do us part.

My onslaught is slow but sure
I watch and patiently wait for my spouse
I bid my time till they make a false step knowing full well they will
The urge within their souls, the fire that can't be doused their greatest folly
And when the time is right and they are possessed by a wicked passion I set my
hold
Like a faithful spouse I cling on, till death do us part.

Like an innocuous flu I set in
"Little flu, will be gone in no time," they sneer
I laugh at their naivety as they run around like they have all their lives to live
If only they knew the murk that had stuck in their veins and gashed within their
souls
If only they knew there lay no discharge of obligation from the contract sealed
Like a faithful wife I cling on till death do us part.

When I am through mending and fixing
When your frame can no longer contain me
When you stare in the mirror and don't recognize the face that stares back at you
When you appreciate that the three letters that represent me belie my potency
When you beg me to finish you off I simply turn a deaf ear and cling on even
tighter
Like a faithful spouse I cling on till death do us part
I sit back and watch you writhe in pain
You rue how a moment of pleasure got you into this bottomless pit
Your cries of pain music to my ears, a testimony of my genius as a mechanic,
But I also cry, for soon I shall have to send you away on a journey six feet under
Where only the worms can fix and mend the paltry morsels that I leave behind
A faithful wife I am I cling on till death do us part.
LORIANN R. BESPALKO
The Heart is Where Pain Lurks

It's what I really wanted then
It's what I really want now
I'm going to do this
Although I don't know how.

I'm going to lock up my heart
And throw away the key
Throw it far
To where he'll never see.

No, I think I'll keep the key
Because he found it
And opened my heart—
More willingly than I—

He crept inside
Not knowing that I'd find him there so soon.
I told him to go.
I told him to leave.
I told him he'd only get hurt,
But he didn't believe.

But it happened
Just like I said it would
It caused him pain
Just like I said it could.

But here he is again
Fighting to get back inside
But the door to my heart is closed
He's not getting in again as hard as he tries.

It's what I really wanted then
It's what I really want now
I'm going to do this
Although I don't know how.
I locked him out,
Because I love him true
If he got in, what would he do?
He'd only get hurt
Because the heart is where pain lurks.

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Because I love him true
If he got in, what would he do?
He'd only get hurt
Because the heart is where pain lurks.
ANDREA LUPICA
Pride the Beast

A lonely life ruled by fear,
no one to love, no one to hear
the cries of pain that echo aloud
of the pain of one that is too proud.

Fury rages from deep inside.
The eye of the storm, the beast that is Pride.
With ugly face, it snarls and drools;
the ugly truth, it's mission – to fool.

To hide away from true affection;
a misguided heart or real perfection?
A wounded soul cannot see
the joy that sharing love might be.

It boggles the mind and tricks the heart;
no physical life; a soul torn apart.
Safe within the embrace of lies,
afraid to speak; afraid to try.

Look in the mirror, what do you see?
The beast is there, in both you and me.
Love is its foe; Pride is its name,
pain or pleasure is the game.

You cannot win a war waged within.
A war of self; what is and has been;
it's useless to run; it's useless to hide,
because it's you – yourself who nurtures Pride.

Let go of the beast and soon you'll find
the single path from heart to mind.

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no one to love, no one to hear
the cries of pain that echo aloud
of the pain of one that is too proud.
ELAINE REISMAN
Where Light Can Be Found

“What if this present were the world’s last night”
John Donne, Holy Sonnet 13

At sunrise, when the frail light of early morning begins to get intense as the sun speeds seemingly toward the west, nothing seems to escape the unearthly grandeur of the sun as it bathes everything in its numinous light—illuminating even the dark recesses that you often forget—be it the pebbles covered with moss beneath the drain, the inside of last year’s sparrow’s nest, the weathered notches in trees, or the corners of eves, where bats fold into a crevasse to rest. Light can be found even in the diminutive world veiled cunningly by the blades of grass, and where spider webs intrude their webs of white upon the silence of the morning. It’s a vague, yet bright beginning of yet another merciless day: “How do the living forget the mournful night when hope is something arbitrary?”
ERIKA TILOTTA
This Is True

(Inspired by items from Vietnam veterans and
*The Things They Carried* by Tim O’Brien)

Two men, two stories, two items, one war
And only one poet to tell their tale.
Surviving through bombs, bullets, and the gore
Or taken prisoner and placed in jail.

This jacket was given to my mother.
Bought in Vietnam, she was his girlfriend.
To many, this war was like no other,
But he had a great country to defend.

This bracelet was given to me to tell.
His name was Buddy and he was taken.
Prisoner of war, for months spent in hell.
Hit with rice, humiliated, shaken.

I was never in a war, only knew
That everything that was said, it was true.
Ed McNeal was going to die. He knew he was going to die and it would be his fault. He had been throwing his life away at the bottle since he was fourteen. Now at forty, he knew the Devil would take him.

He awoke and found himself in darkness against a wall. He couldn't see anything around him and this confused him. He could feel loose rocks under his dirty shoes and the smooth stone on the walls with his bare hands.

Two words snapped into his mind: I'm dead. However, if he was dead shouldn't there be some sort of light from Heaven? Or even a flame from Hell? Confused, Ed kept one hand on the wall and began to walk. He didn't even bother questioning how he got there. He had been sleeping in other weird situations before: a butcher shop, a playground, the street.

Ed sighed. He would probably be better off in Hell with the Devil tormenting him for his drinking, he fell away to account for. His only memory was being led as a child into the large room with the stiff benches. The smell of incense and sight of small bright lights in the church always made him wonder if God was watching him. Unlike here, in the damp-smelling darkness, he prayed that God wasn't watching.

If he's dead, he would go to Hell. He broke the Ten Commandments, the ten laws of Heaven.

There was the honoring of parents that was hard. He remembered his thin-lipped mother, always turning up her nose to him and his hefty father, whose only interaction with his child was with a belt. Despite that, Ed tried really hard to honor them for giving him life. To be sure he did something right, his parents barely noticed. However, he was still thankful to his parents. Ed didn't break that commandment.

Swaying away from the wall, Ed tried to search for another path. At the same time, he remembered the commandment of the church. He admitted to that, but it was the liquor: he never knew what day it was. Was that a good excuse?

Something stubbed his toe. Swearing, Ed stumbled and caught his balance. That was another: swearing God's name in vain when he was frustrated. That he was guilty of.

He remembered blaming a friend for missing money. They found the money in a forgotten drawer where Ed had placed it a few hours ago. After that, his friend left him in anger. In fact, everyone left Ed because he blamed everyone but himself. Friends, family, no one wanted to be around him. He made himself into a liar and denied everything.

All this made him depressed. He wished he could ask for forgiveness for all ten.

He never killed or stole anything. Ed never believed in other gods. He never wanted anything that belonged to his friend. Nor did he ever commit adultery or think about people's wives or girlfriends in a sexual way.

No, that was a lie. He had had sex before, and he thought about other women. How could he forget that? Ed shook his head. He was just a no-good bum who was lost.

He could change. Ed knew he could clean himself up. He could get out of this darkness and change his life. He could find help for his drinking and go back to church on Sundays. He could stop lying and try not to swear. Ed could do this. He could do this...
as soon as he could get out of wherever he was. His spirit was soaring with these ideas that he had never had in the last thirty-something years.

In front of him was a light. It had to be a sign. He needed to ask for forgiveness from God himself. Smiling, Ed tried to run toward it. The light was getting bigger and closer.

"Forgive me!" he yelled. "I will change and be a better person! All I ask is forgiveness! And if not, I will work for it!" His voice echoed off the walls as the light was coming closer. This was it. A blaring noise filled the darkness as it sped toward him. Ed didn't know what happened, however, everyone in town only guessed. That damn Ed McNeal was drunk again and Train 47 ran him over in a tunnel.
CAMILLE CLARKE
Walk a Day in My Shoes

You say my life is simple
That I’m lazy and I never try
That I have it easy too many of the times

But have you ever truly seen my life?
No you most certainly have not—
And never will, unless you have taken a step in my shoes.

Sure I’m sometimes lazy—but what does that mean?
My life is anything but simple and I do my best every day though I almost
Always fail.

How dare you judge me without knowing any of the facts
I believe in working for whatever it is that I want, for nothing in life comes
Easy and I have the anxiety to prove it.

I want my life to be better, to succeed where others have failed.
My life has not been easy but I don’t plan on giving up just yet.
So unless you know where I have been, do not judge me unless you have
taken a walk in my shoes, for chances are you will likely fail where I have
Succeeded.
WILLIS D. DUNBAR
Sweat Shop Sleep

In dusty corners of tileless factory floors,
    nestled under tired machinery. Eyes
reflecting nightlight outside assembly line windows.
    Toes peek from stingy blankets
covering loud rumbling tummies.
The floor-bound mattresses seem abused,
    dented in the middle.
In the middle, bodies are curled like half moons.
    Stained teddy bears squeezed tight.
    Every bump and bang
pushing them deeper into the bed,
as their bodies drown in quiet.

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ERIKA TILOTTA

Before I Die

Before I die, I will show courage,
For it takes a strength to stand face to face with death.

Before I die, I will show friendship,
For it takes a friend to stand near someone till last breath.

Before I die, I will show love,
For it takes a heart to beat another while the other stops.

Before I die, I will show knowledge,
For it takes a mind to accept that life rises and then drops.

Before I die, I will show sincerity,
For it takes a truth that will bring everyone to rest.

Before I die, I will show reliability,
For it takes a person to be ready for the final test.

Before I die, I will show hope,
For it takes a thought to bring happiness that will mend.

Before I die, I will show light,
For it takes a candle to remold everyone’s life in the end.

Before I die, I will show kindness,
For it takes a word and smile that can make spirits high.

Before I die, I will show this all,
For it is everything we want at the moment before I die.
JESSICA FARGNOLI

Autumn

Red, yellow, orange
Twirling
Swirling colors,
Falling,
Falling,
To a graceful stop
Of their short but
Wondrous journey.

Each color unique
In every way
Still falling
Falling
To the cold, wet
Greenish ground.

Bending,
Curving,
Curling,
Twisting,
Touching,
Our hearts with
Magnified Beauty!