



SPRING 2004
VOLUME 13

Apostrophe





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Volume 13 of *Apostrophe*, the University of Saint Francis literary magazine, contains eighteen poems, five prose works, and three pieces of art from our thirteen student and alumni contributors, representing a wide range of subjects, styles, and forms.

The title, *Apostrophe*, refers to a figure of speech in which a person or object is directly addressed as if present. In a sense, then, each of the following pieces is an “address” to the university community and to its many friends and benefactors.

We extend our sincere congratulations to those students and alumni whose creative efforts are displayed in the following pages and our thanks to all who have helped in any way to make this year’s volume possible.

Dr. Jim Pictor, Editor
USF Department of English



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Country Dance

hate and fear

dance hand in hand

down and across

the social lines

allemande anger

in counterpoint

bows become blows

bump begets bruise

violence velvet

or corduroy

swings sharply

shattering

bone or glass



Tide

Tide saunters out with minimum slosh

or rushes back, billowing, a-hiss.

I prefer lovely languid lapping

lake placid and genial

while light layers the ceiling

silver and smiling.



The Night Before

What does one do the night before a war?

Breathe – long and deep
Ease the fear
Gather strength
Calm the storm within

What does one do the night before a war?

Pray – simple and sincere
God – Our Protector
Jesus – Our Redeemer
Spirit – Our Counselor

What does one do the night before a war?

Listen – intently and continuously
Quiet conversations
Boots on sand
Pounding of many hearts

What does one do the night before a war?

Write – words and feelings
Thoughts of family and friends
Descriptions of foreign lands
Sanity within a pen

What does one do the night before a war?

Pack – body and soul
Priceless pictures safely hidden
Talismans put in place
Emotions secured with the gear



Two Keys

The young woman sat quietly in the pew, listening to the priest. Sitting in the back with a tall young man directly in front of her, she found it difficult to see the front of the church. Tired of straining her neck, she gazed down at her lap.

The priest's voice began to grow distant and the young woman forgot about all the people around her. She was staring at the keys in her hand—two simple keys—yet somehow they seemed symbolic.

One key was to her room in a college dormitory. A temporary possession, which she would turn in at the end of the year. She was sure that once she turned the key in, she would never need it again.

The other key was her house key. It was permanent. Even if her family moved, or if she got married, she would always have a key to her family's house. Not so with the dorm key. Once she finished school, she would probably never use a dormitory key again.

The young woman liked the permanence of her house key. It meant she was always welcome at home. She could go home anytime and always get in.

The priest's words drifted into the young woman's mind. He was talking about how God would always welcome us as part of his family. Suddenly the symbolism of the keys became clear.

The dormitory key was like a key to earth. She was here on earth now, but not forever. She was here for a period of growth and learning. When she had grown to her full earthy potential, she would go to God's other world in Heaven. There she would find a new purpose for her new life.

The house key was like a key to heaven. That was where she would rejoin God's family. Of course, they weren't totally separated, no more than she was separated from her earthly family while she was away at college. She could visit both families—either by going to church or finding a ride home for a weekend. The house key not only welcomed her to a home on earth, but also to God's home in heaven.

The young woman fingered the keys. Two simple keys...



Non-Lethal Neck Ties

It happened again, respond and sound the fool.
My son asked me what kind of job I would look for after graduation.
I said truck driver and he said what the hell.

After trying for thirty years, I'll soon finish college.
No explanation is necessary.
I used to climb cliffs and ride motorcycles to wheel wobbling speeds.
Some things demand attention by their mere existence.

My son thinks I could do better than truck driving.
Maybe, maybe not: better being relative.

I've never cared much about unaffordable luxury.
A small screen is bad enough.
Ostentatious cars look like caricatures of near defeat.
My dirty little pick-up manages to get me there and back, mostly.

Another consideration is the uniform of compromise.
Neckties just seem silly
All that evolution and the results are the necktie?
Am I the only one who sees this as a cause for alarm?
I guess I'm over reacting, at least they don't explode.

I've been told that I'm an anomaly; misanthropic.
Hopefully not, but I can't be sure.
Unless I can find work as a hermit or a lighthouse keeper,
Truck driving will probably have to do.



Dressing for Success

The color from my neck stains shirt collars
It's kind of a rusty red reminder
Where I'm from and where I'm going
Dark blue shirts with my name over the pocket
Seemed to last the longest in the past

The heat from welding set the color, fast
Aiming a semi-truck over the next hill did likewise
Dress shirts make the process evident, unacceptable
Button-down collars are the worst of the bunch

Ties concentrate the effect,
Trapping the color just above the choke line
I could go in for cosmetic surgery,
Physical alteration to match the paradigm shift
Not so easily accomplished

My exterior doesn't match;
the polish on the academic still reflects red
There are puddles of red all around me,
no matter what

The calluses have softened, sinking deep inside
Pumped throughout by nicotine clogged arteries
Lubricated by strong black coffee and roadside diner grease

My soul has a leather-like exterior, resilient but strong
It too is red, filled with curses and ambivalent musing
Hard scabble labor bends backs permanently,
A mistaken bow to industry; a lock of submission

Whatever, there's no way to hide the past
Grizzled survival shows itself as faded red



My Muse

My Muse has flown from my realm
For she no longer perches upon my mind
I no longer feel the breath upon my shoulder
of her whisperings to my soul before sunrise;
Yet as the day breaks, I see her as she rises!
But no, I am mistaken for 'tis just the sun,
A flame in the sky where she once shone.
Now I lie here, as empty as the words
that drop from my lifeless hand
As it mechanically carves the last of her
Existence upon the grave I leave
For she, my muse.



And All The World's...

The sweet intrusion
Of the filigreed rain
Entangled itself
In her delicate eyelashes
As she blinked away
The Northern Lights that
Danced across her moon-lit eyes,
Falling to the ground
Like tiny flashbulbs,
Illuminating the grass
That was her stage,
The moon, her gentle,
Luminous spotlight,
And the eyes of
The million stars as they looked on
As she danced,
The patter of the rain,
Nature's applause



Ice Cream

Ambrosial sweetness,
Nipping with your icy
Breath at my taste buds!
Must you tease me with
This delectable sapor
That flutters gently
Upon my tongue, only
To evanesce into air
At a touch of warmth



Meeting Miss Antrope

The real problem with people is that they judge you all the time.. You can see it in their faces, not just the little peeved expressions when they don't like you, but that look when they think you're so unfortunate for being the way you are, when they look so saddened.. Even worse than that is when they think they're somehow preordained to know, just know, what's best for you and what information they will and will not share, no matter how urgently it may pertain to you. I don't know about you, but that always pisses me off. In my book, that's taunting, and taunting pisses me off.

I'll give you an idea of what I mean about judgmental people.

Yesterday, I was walking along the path to the dorm when I passed a flock of cheerleader types coming the other way. At least I think they were cheerleaders—jump suits, hair pulled back-I don't really know. But anyway, as they passed, I could just see in their faces how much they were judging me. I was a social leper in their book. It's almost against the law for cheerleaders ever to go for the nice guy. I was told that years and years ago-that I was a nice guy.

Anyway, I just looked away and kept on walking. I stepped around a puddle, looked up, and the next person I saw on the path was Chip Grant. Chip's a classmate of mine. I can't stand that asshole. He saw me coming and got this real self-satisfied smirk on his face, like he thinks he has me figured out and knows exactly how to handle me. That's another thing I can't stand-self satisfaction.

"Hey, Max," he said. His voice has always made me sick.

"Hey," I said, barely looking at him. I prayed that weasel would just keep walking, but instead he stopped, smirked at me again, and started talking.

"Did you hear about the guest speaker the ministry department's bringing in next month? We just got confirmation today. She's coming to give a talk on virginity."

"Wonderful," my smile must have rivaled deep space in its emptiness. Virginity. Who was he kidding? He was the biggest hypocrite the ministry department had seen since some of the Renaissance popes. Now, I don't doubt he's a virgin. I mean, girls aren't dumb. It's just that that's probably about *all* he is.

"Yeah, I think it will be great," he nodded coolly. "It will be a great opportunity for some of the students here to hear the truth about how they should be living their lives,



you know, with better morals....”

Like you, yeah, yeah, I thought. Judge away, buddy. Judge away. One, like the student body cares, and two, like they can actually go back to being virgins. Wonderful. I smiled, nodded, and kept walking as he leered at me and said a few more things—the pious cock.

The sky overhead was hazy and gray, and the breeze that blew wasn't as cold as it had been in recent weeks. It sort of kept you alert instead of cutting right through you. The sides of the path were lined with ever-shrinking piles of black snow, and the path itself had a layer of goop that had once been last fall's fallen leaves. Now a soggy amalgamation of brown and black with a few stems here and there, they were not an uplifting sight.

Raising my eyes up from the ground, I saw Miss Brooke Antrope off in the distance, walking toward me like the others. Oh boy, I thought.. I really wasn't ready for this one.

Brooke is a year or two ahead of me in school. She's pretty cute, actually. I don't know her really well, but I've seen her through clubs that have tried to get me to join, that sort of thing. Nothing sour's ever happened between the two of us—not much of anything's ever happened, but I do know I've seen her hanging around with people I'm pretty sure don't like me, so I'm sure whatever she's heard has probably turned her off.

As we drew closer to where we could see each other's faces, Brooke stared, smiling a little, being polite, I figured—that, or thinking about her plot to bring me down. I tried to look nonchalant and glanced from her to the bare tree limbs twisting over the path above us and back to her. We were really close now. She was slowing to a stop.

“Hi, Max,” she said. Her voice was so pleasant. How could she stand to keep up a charade like that?

“Hi,” I echoed. The lilt in my voice surprised me. She spoke again.

“I haven't seen you in a while.”

And I bet you enjoyed every minute of it, I thought, shrugging and pursing my lips in non-verbal reply.



“So, what have you been up to?” She didn’t really care. Why did she have to be so friendly?

“Oh, not much,” my voice had a rasp to it.

“That’s nice,” she chirped. My eyes told her to say what she was going to say.

“Hey, listen,” she said. “Were you planning to go to the Charlie Chaplin film festival they’re holding at the art building this weekend?”

All the while she talked to me, her eyes kept darting from side to side. I gave her offer some thought. Charlie Chaplin—I love that guy. His stuff has always cracked me up-genius. All of that, and you never had to listen to anybody say a word.

“No, I think I’m busy this weekend,” I lied. “Were you planning on going?”

She bit her lip and nodded. Just as I thought. No, it would be too uncomfortable going to a day-long event like that with a girl I knew disliked me as much as she did—especially sitting in the dark like that. Her eyes had trailed down to the ground now. God, couldn’t she even bear to look at me? I mean, I’m not that bad.

“Those movies are pretty darn funny,” I nodded with a half-smile. “I’m sure you’ll have a nice time.” I shifted my feet like I wanted to keep walking.

Brooke looked up at me, blinked, and nodded in a fluttery sort of way. Her cheeks were slightly flushed. She squeaked, “Thanks,” and walked on by.

I couldn’t believe that a girl who barely knew me could disdain me enough to actually go red with scorn while talking to me. All I can say is it’s a good thing I turned her down. She can’t go out and make me look bad. I want no part of it. That’s not what I’m about. They told me years ago—that I was a nice guy.





Morning

At last,
Beam atop brilliant beam,
Ray upon golden ray,
Sun coaxes me from dreary dream,
And kisses me soft— oh soft.

Succeeding streaks like arrows fall,
Into darkness crouched behind hilltops.
It is Apollo's gentle crawl,
Over lands of outstretched palms.

Now Sun has come to play his light
Into each crack and hollow,
Though simple vision rests with night,
I will come... I will follow.



Morning After Dawn

Winter—a greedy child—
Never suffers such splendid scenes,
And with stabbing savage squalls
She kicks the crutch where my hope leans.

She is more marked for what she's not
Than what she is,
At best a bitter backdrop
For autumn's dying vestiges.

For when these trees are dressed
In sleeves of fallow snow,
Though Sun still shines above,
My heart sinks far below.



Meditation

A mammal sits cross-legged in a fragile, air-thin bubble floating through space. He hovers alone, eyes closed. He imagines what lies outside his own little sphere. Cold vacuum? Another bubble of a different shape? Glorious light? Starlit space? He sits alone and spins, transfixed by possibility. He waits for the filmy womb to breach, tumbling him into the unknown, the unfathomable “it” beyond the walls of his seemingly opaque world. Were he to open his eyes, he would discover that the walls are in fact transparent, that he could gaze beyond his own fragile existence. The once unseen would be known. Yet, he remains seated, eyes closed.





The Girl Who Stole the Stars

And she plucked them, one by one, from amidst their garden
In all their radiant color and grandeur
And the piano played on with the lone violin dipped in darkness
How the music filled her ears with the soft melody
And her fingers, like the violin, plucked them in rhythm
Her hand sweeping 'cross the sky like a shadowed bow
And her world echoed the night—she,
The girl who stole the stars



Tomorrow

Tomorrow I'm going to throw away
My eyes and see through the fog;
Images might be blurred, but emotions—
Those are what I strive to see;
To feel—sandpaper words,

Trying to burst the tender outline
Of the heart;
Icy silence, and the warmth of your
Soothing voice:
Blind to the outer shells,
But so in-tune with the
Inner strings -
Plink.





A Letter From the Neighbor

To the ancient man with fallen cheeks and furrowed front,
Surely blind, deaf, and dumb, who stands—or stoops—
Too close to the passing cars
Of Spring Street
And fumbles about for the afternoon paper,
Before retiring to a squeaky porch rocker:

This disobedient conduct has:
Made the doctor late,
Upset the puppy,
Provoked the lawyer,
And offended all of us
Too concerned with life spent going through the motions
For silly old men, and their silly old notions.



Balancing Act

joy replaces desperation
overwhelming the dark forecast

it rises from my interior
inside and outside
meeting at the crossroads
love and understanding prevail
against the odds

movement is unceasing
so times will come
embracing the unwilling
with whisper and caress

above or below is tiresome drama
except when contrasts meet
transient—sparkling—reassuring
alive



Parenting on the Fly

There are several small figures of Buddha sitting around the house.
Peacefully posed; some smile.
Hindu music is playing to the uncomfortable silence of this Saturday.

My children present me with the figurines and music,
having finally accepted my eccentric habits.
My son is a Buddha-like salesman.
My daughter is a Buddha-like student.

When they visit, they sometime bring their lovers,
to help decipher my rambling observations.
I wonder how they really see me,
impractical dreamer or source of some small truth.

I decided sometime ago not to yell at them,
after all, my past doesn't reflect much wisdom.
They seem to need small advice occasionally,
the big things having already been put in motion.

My daughter tells men that I won't tolerate abuse.
She warns them, ruining the element of surprise.
The men look at me and wonder what I would do.

My son pursued a dangerous life of nihilism and guns.
When he lived with me, an adversary came calling
clad in black leather, he broke in at night.
I hit him with a softball bat and he moaned defeat.

Buddha may not have approved, but it worked.
Whatever happens, my children are me and I them.



Unguent You

you unguent you

smoothing over rough spots

evading snags

with elusive grace

and sliding speed

5.9 for fancy footwork

and slick escapes

0 for commitment



Trees Do Not Need Band-aids

Even though eyes they did not have, it felt as if each one of them had ten-hundred apiece; all of them staring, staring right at me. They stood in a line about two-hundred feet from me. I wondered to myself “why, why me?” Now I was only a hundred feet away. My curiosity obviously was getting the better of me. In the distance, I could hear Zach calling me back to the soccer field. I ignored his exclams and walked on... only twenty feet away. I checked over my shoulder to see if Mrs. Shaffer or Ms. Trotter were anywhere to be seen. Neither was paying any attention to my disappearance. I casually stopped by the swing set so as to look like I was going to start swinging in case anyone else was watching. Knowing then that I was in the clear, I jumped at the chance and took off towards the eye-less wonders.

Back in our third grade classroom, I found myself in a bittersweet mood. I was overwhelmed that I was able to “escape” for part of our recess, but troubled at the same time because I seemed to be the only one who knew about the abuse. I was so confused and mystified about the whole thing that I barely was able to function in class. At home, I lay on my bed staring at the ceiling, even through dinner. My mom, always on top of things, brought some supper to my room while asking if I was feeling all right. “How could mom be so silly and ask such a thing?” I inquired to myself. I concluded that she must be unaware, as I was once some few hours ago, of the horror happening on the playground. In turn, I replied that I was feeling a little sick but believed that sleep would bring me peace. My mother, a little worried but trusting, left it at that. Just as my dreams were starting to take over, I promised myself that I would try to gather up some others in my classroom and see what we could do to stop the hurt and the pain that I saw.

Today is a new day. It is Tuesday—yet, it is unlike any Tuesday that has preceded or that will come for the eight of us: Shane, Sara, Amber, Rhoda, Mark, Dustin, Trevor, and myself. Today marks the day that we took a vow in hopes of protecting the innocent, stopping abuse, and saving lives. It was a vow that made us proud to be human beings. A vow that we hoped would not be broken. A vow that I desperately desired would ease the tension in those staring eyes—the eyes of the silent pine tree from this Tuesday on the eight of us would meet at recess. We would congregate in the log cabin near the school building and hold meetings to decide what would be our next course of action. Throughout the week, the lot of us would collect supplies: gauze, band-aids, different types of tape, and so forth. On days when the playground supervisors were preoccupied, we would slip into the branches of the pine trees along the edge of the school’s property. One person would stand guard watching for any signs of our discovery, (this usually ended up being Sara because she didn’t like to touch the sap, let alone look at it,) while the rest of us would find and bandage up the wounds brought upon unjustly to the growing trees. Inquisitiveness led me to the questions as to who was doing this? Who felt the need to cut off the limbs of growing, defenseless trees that caused no harm, but rather were creating air for us to breathe and a place for animals to live? Why does the school approve of such actions? Do they even know? The last question hit home for me as I realized this issue needed to be presented to the teachers. I brought my idea before the group who in



turn thought it rather risky to chance exposing our efforts in a public manner. Realizing, too, the consequences it would bring upon the group if the authoritative figures did not see eye-to-eye with us, I decided to wait and think it over more.

A month has gone by and the weather is getting colder. Most trees have lost their leaves to the coming winter season; but alas, the pine trees hold strong, green with spirit and full to the brim with secrets. I have noticed a few more limbs have disappeared mysteriously within that time. Overall, though, the group has seemed to have successfully pulled off maintaining positive recoveries with what little resources we possessed. I could not be any prouder of my fellow classmates, or myself. What a feat we have accomplished. It takes love, dedication, and hope to stick to a project like ours; especially when any one of us could have chosen to play soccer every recess; chosen to climb upon the jungle gym; or spin in circles on the merry-go-round until blue in the face. But rather, we stuck together for one another and for ourselves—to beat the odds, just as we felt the pine trees were doing.

This entire time, we have not mentioned anything to anyone, nor has anyone questioned about their missing tape or band-aids. It was as if our parents and the rest of the people subconsciously knew what we were trying to do and did not want to ruin it for us. Now, however, I felt was the perfect time to bring to light the truth. To let the world see not only what was happening to the pine trees, but what was most likely happening in the same methodic, destructive manner to other types of trees. I was going to bring my decision before the rest of the group, but hesitated, thinking that they may still be fearful of the outcome. Instead, I approached Ms. Trotter on the subject. Ms. Trotter had always been kind to students and had a peaceful, helping nature about her. I thought her to be the perfect candidate in supporting our cause. Once I had her attention, I looked right into Ms. Trotter's eyes and spoke of the tragedy that revealed itself to me in regards to the pine trees. Ms. Trotter took a deep breath, glanced to her side, and then back at me. When she spoke, I was ready to hear the words that I had been waiting for—the words of understanding, consensus, and approved action. I heard the words slip from her mouth and imagined them floating up into the air to the heavens above. Then, I realized what she was really saying.

Ms. Trotter did not feel that the trees were really being hurt in any way. That, in fact, it was necessary and a part of caring for the trees to cut away a couple branches every now and then. Her words that had been transcending upwards rapidly fell like dark, gray concrete bricks back to the earth creating a division between Ms. Trotter and me. I stared in disbelief, confused and speechless. Questions raced in my head, each one competing to come out first like horses in a derby. How could such a positive person become so cold and ruthless? How can it be that such violence does not even raise the hair on the back of her neck? Bring sickness to her stomach? How can she have not remorse whatsoever? I wanted to turn and run away, but my feet had become one with the ground. I wanted to scream, to yell at the top of my lungs, but I could not find the voice. I wanted to inform Ms. Trotter that I was not alone in



my thinking—that there were others that I had just not mentioned, but I would not let myself say such. Ms. Trotter waited for me to say something. Realizing that I had nothing more, she shushed my away to play among the toys, even suggesting the monkey bars. When I found my feet again and turned to move away, she put in two last cents and warned me to stay away from the trees or be prepared for the consequences.

Before we left school that day, I wrote a little note to everybody asking to meet back among the trees one last time the day to come. I wanted to get a picture of everybody as a keepsake. That evening, my mother took me to the store so that I could buy a disposable camera.

Even today, I have the picture I took of the eight of us hanging on a wall in my bedroom. Whenever I glance at it, I think back to that particular time in elementary school. I think of the pine trees, those seven special classmates, and the conversation that changed my outlook on the opinions of others. I realized that not everyone would feel as deeply as we did for trees—that for some, trees are just another resource to be used up and not respected. I was also able to identify with the concept between us and the pine trees. The relationship between us, (person and tree, tree and person,) was not based on really “saving the trees,” even though that is what we led ourselves to believe. Instead, it was focused on how trees and people alike can show character (strength, pride, truthfulness) on the outside, but how on the inside those characters may not be as strong as they appear—because they are lacking and are kept hidden secretively. Outside and inside, I find that I am stronger, and that I am as tough as the pines trees were—independently surviving among many. I too do not need band-aids every time I have been hurt: hope and encouragement will do wonders.



Unprepared

For some, death is like the falling of dusk
On a summer's eve.
One minute basking in the light,
Living, loving, laughing—
Unprepared for the darkness that is ready to fall.
The next moment it envelopes you, leaving you
Wondering where it came from—with no warning.

For others, death is like a neighbor
Who moves in next door when no one is
Paying attention.
You never meet,
You just know it's there
Watching you, waiting...waiting,
Waiting for introductions.
Its presence looming over day by day until
Gradually you become accustomed
And think you are prepared for the moment
When death comes knocking on your door.

("Only..., you never are.")





Under the Midnight Sun

In those days Cail was young among his people, though that was not the only reason they thought him foolish. He lay, soft and dark, as a perfect mimicry of the figure standing above him, anchoring the young tree to the ground. It was the dew that woke him on the first day, a gentle moisture blanketed by folding breezes that called him from the sleep of nativity. He awoke, small and fragile, birthed by the rising dawn. The world seemed at once tall and ancient; Cail, slight and jejune. Whispers fluttered anxiously as the woods called his name for the first time and gave the wind a new song to caress the leaves. The forest's reflection, cast upon the lively ground, greeted his senses instantly. He knew that the sights and scents and voices he found had always been waiting for him, and he for them. Elation, so long repressed, burst from him, and for an instant all of nature celebrated his birth. Jubilation had barely escaped when it fell short upon his lips in favor of a greater awe. A deeper urge had silenced his ardor, stifled the calls of his brethren to his ears. Looking up, he saw a small sapling, and recognized it as his tree. But about the edges of the tiny tree came a flickering glow, a halo that called Cail to come and meet it. Only a glimmer presented itself, but in that sparkle were the lives and dreams of shadowkind. Desperate for understanding, his attention returned to the requisition of greeting the creaks and groans.

"Brother, speak to us!" the other shadows called.

"The most beautiful light shines before me!"

"It is called the Sun," and a gentle pity hung heavy in their voices. "But you will never see it."

"How do you know?"

"We have tried. Every shadow since the first dawn has tried. Some came very close, but no one has ever seen the sun. No one ever will."

"I will."

"I said the same thing," every shadow whispered back.

Felicity diffused, then, and their attention returned to comfortable conversation. Above them stood great trees, stretching far above the shadows. Cail searched the depths of persons, all shapes and sizes, some stark, some soft, and all quietly content in the despondency of their collective dream. The glimmer still shone around the edges of his own silhouetted monolith. Cail knew then he would be the first.

His goal in sight, Cail stretched himself out, reaching for the Sun. The glimmer of light shone above the tree in front over him, beckoning. If he could only stretch a little farther, he would be able to see it! So close to his dream already, Cail strained, stretching and pulling, desperate for a glimpse of the prize forbidden to so many before him. Too soon the strain overcame his ambition. Just as he nearly caught sight of the lofty brilliance, exhaustion took hold and he started to sink back down to rest.



When Cail finally felt rejuvenated, he found the Sun on the other side of his tree. Moving quickly had not worked, so Cail decided to try to slowly build himself up. He gathered his strength and slowly stood tall again, reaching as far as he could, little by little. Soon he could catch a faint shimmering above the tree, but as he did, the Sun began to disappear. It shrank on the horizon as Cail pushed himself harder, needing to absorb its glory before it vanished. He stretched his hardest, but no matter his effort the Sun was still slowly shrinking.

Frightened, Cail frantically looked to the other shadows. To his surprise, they were also stretched out, fighting to see the Sun. “Where is it going?” Cail cried. “What is happening to the Sun?”

“Like us, he must rest,” they explained.

“Why do you all try so hard to see him if you say no one ever will?”

“We all thought we would see the Sun the first time we tried, just like you.”

“He’s coming back again?” Cail asked.

“Of course—he will be back in the morning.”

“Then good night, everyone! I will see him in the morning!”

The others shared smiles for his naiveté and settled down to rest. They knew he would fail, as they all had, but it made them happy to remember honest hope.

Morning, and as the faintest dawn cracked, Cail began his task. He pulled and stretched with all his might, but again just as he dared hope he might succeed, his exhaustion consumed him, and he slowly retreated. Consoling himself in his defeat, he rested for another attempt. As the Sun began to fall, Cail began building up his strength and slowly reaching to see over his tree. As the Sun sank further down, he tried harder, longing for a glimpse before the Sun started to disappear for another night. Still unnerved by the shrinking presence of his hope, Cail looked to his companions for assurance. To his surprise, they again sought their own unattainable goal.

“I don’t understand why you still reach for the Sun when you when you say it can’t be done,” Cail questioned.

The other shadows looked at him. They paused before speaking, as one who contemplates admitting a newly realized fault. “At first, we all knew we would see the Sun,” they said together. “Every morning we tried and failed; every evening we tried and failed. We tried and we failed for one day, then ten days, then a hundred days, and then a thousand days. But every time, just as we could almost see it, the Sun escaped.” They looked at each other sadly. “We dreamed of seeing the Sun one day, but, after a hundred thousand dawns, we finally awoke from that dream. Now we don’t know how to do anything else.” With that, they looked back at their trees and tried one last time before sunset.

Hearing this filled Cail with great sadness, like the death of someone he had forgotten he knew. Still, in a way their vague embitterment strengthened him, and cemented in him the



knowledge that one day he could be their emissary of hope. He would give them back their dream. Cail awaited the mornings, eager to try again. Each time he nearly accomplished his goal, but always his exhaustion forced him to stop. Every evening Cail would try again, saving himself and slowly advancing, but always missing his aspiration by seconds. Alone at the end of the night, small and fragile, Cail rediscovered his resolve, for with every failure he felt himself draw closer to some ubiquitous truth.

And so it went, and one day became ten, and ten became a hundred. With the dawn of the hundredth day came a horrible noise. Somewhere in the distance Cail could hear a great racket, clanking and wheezing and screaming. The others were already awake, frantic.

“Men!” they said. “Men have come!” The open terror they displayed shook Cail. All his life he admired their immutable strength and wisdom, and could not imagine a calamity so dire as to frighten them.

“Is a man a kind of tree?”

“No!” the others shouted in their panic. “Men came from shadows who became scornful when they could not see the Sun. They decided to make sure no shadow ever sees it.”

Cail was horrified. “How can they?”

“Men kill shadows by cutting down their trees. They think they can use the trees to make new shadows, shadows of their own. They do not know that all the shadows built of man are dead.”

“And the forests?”

“They build forests of their own, full of monstrous towers. Men are full of cynicism and hate, and have made a word for their abominations: they are called cities. They mock the forests of shadows by filling their cities with ten thousand other men, and think that their creation will never be alive.

“Will we become a city?”

The others were so busy talking they could not hear Cail’s question.

The next morning Cail heard the cacophony of nature as never before. The breezes, always soft and embracing, now unleashed a torrential stranglehold upon his ears. Cail could hear the sound of men, louder now, even over their voices.

“They are coming towards us,” Cail admitted, for all of them. He said it quietly, but his truthful despondence told them to stop and listen.

“Yes,” they said, softly.

“I will never see the sun.”

“No,” they whispered. Cail tried to look at the Sun that morning, but he knew he wouldn’t make it even before he started. That evening, the sound of the men was all he could hear. He reached for the Sun once more, but like always, he could not do it.



When Cail awoke, he could see the men. They cut at trees with no remorse, killing shadows as quickly as possible. He looked up at the Sun. He knew today would be his final chance. As he looked out, he could see the men getting closer to him, and strained himself harder. As he could almost see it, the Sun was blocked out and a cold feeling washed over Cail. He saw a man standing between him and the Sun, the chilling shadow falling over him. Cail looked away, hoping the man would pass. When the man moved, Cail realized he did not have the strength to look at the Sun again.

Cail tried to rest, but could not ignore what was happening around him. Everywhere he saw men cutting at trees, destroying the shadows he had known for all of his short life. One by one they fell. Many of them were saying goodbye to the others, wishing they only had a little while more, perhaps one more chance. Some could do nothing but cry until their sobs were silenced. A few didn't say anything, carrying a silent lamentation until the end. One thread bound the shadows to their companions. At the moment of expiration, each took one last look at the Sun, reliving the dream they once shared.

When Cail looked back at the Sun, it had nearly begun to pass over the horizon. The shadows around him were all silent now, cold, evacuated from the forest with their trees. He knew his turn would be soon, so he looked out one last time, remembering the vow he made the first time he saw that glimmer before him. A man spoke.

“One more.”

As he felt the cold shadows fall around him, Cail watched the Sun sink down. Next to that first morning, it was the most beautiful sight he had ever seen. The red circle peeked over the horizon, splaying orange and pink and yellow across the sky. Cail knew he would die just like the others, chasing the dream to the end. As the last rays began to disappear, Cail felt the first axe hit his tree.

The blow hit his tree with such force that even Cail shook. The hit rattled him, blurred his vision. For an instant he thought he saw the Sun again, standing in the sky. He berated himself for his sanguine hallucination. His Sun had fallen for the last time. He felt another axe hit his tree, this one even more powerful than before. Again his vision jarred, and again he thought he descried unattainable redemption. Defeated, he looked to the horizon. Cail took one last look at the Sun's dying light, one final glimpse at the pipedream of shadows. Twilight falling, he turned away from the Sun.

When Cail turned, he felt the harsh cold lift and a softness fall on him. He looked up from the ground and saw the barren landscape, the cold shadows that would never dream of the Sun again. Overcome with anguish, Cail looked up to the sky and cried out to his absent dream for all the dawns and sunsets of struggle and failure. He cried for the shadows who would wake in the morning and try again. He even cried for the lost hope of the shadows of men.



Cail's cries fell silent as his gaze lifted skyward. Poised silently above him, a great yellow orb stood against the blackness, surrounded by a hundred thousand tiny Suns splashed across the heavens. They did not have the same beauty as his Sun; this orb possessed a pale brilliance, and the tiny Suns did not at once shine with the magnificence of Cail's dream. Their own beauty Cail found more wondrous than all his hundred dawns.

He barely felt the axes now. He knew his tree would soon fall, and he would join the others. He cried out: "Is there anyone left to dream?"

For long moments silence assaulted him, and he heard only the sound of metal against bark.

"I will try again in the morning!" came back a small cry, suddenly, "I will see the Sun!" Cail looked out and found a tiny sapling that he had not seen before.

"Try!" Cail said. "And try again!" His voice was a whisper now. "But if you are ever lost, remember there is a Sun always at your back."

An axe fell, and the men took Cail's tree to make shadows of their own.



Flight of an Antique Beauty Queen

Passenger 5B flutters into her seat,
A waft of Shalimar, smoke and age.
Her crow-like munchkin voice
Faintly chirps for a drink.

Painted nails like autumn leaves
Curl over each finger's tip.
These talons clasp her diet 7UP
In twiggy, cold embrace.

Swathed in a black feathery jacket,
She hovers in her seat,
Rustling stillness in the air,
An artifact of mummified grace.

Mary Kay ash tones line
Her pristine paraffin features;
The profile of a plastic goddess,
Everything shellacked in place.

Her bent black skeleton legs hang
Into tiny pointed shoes,
Which tap an impossible tempo,
Into air-conditioned space.

A claustrophobic centerfold,
An austere bird in an airplane,
An antique beauty queen,
Withered by her race.