



**INK
WAVES**

SPRING 2003

Ink Waves

A Collection of MSOE Student Creative Writing

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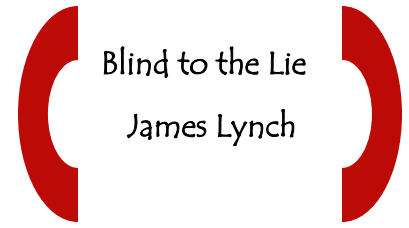
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Blind to the Lie
James Lynch

Are we blind to that which consumes us?
Our ignorance, our hate, our love.
All can spell our end.
So why do we persist?
Is it some vain glory
That we seek for ourselves?
Or is it a show for
All our worst critics to see?
Society draws the lines,
We stay behind them, afraid.
Afraid to think outside the box
Afraid to lose our place,
The place society has given us.
We get angered when someone does think,
Words fly like fists, and violence spawns.
All for what?
Can a man not be a man
Because of his skin?
Because of his customs?
Because of his beliefs?
We are all hypocrites then
With our freedom of speech
And our violent dispositions.
We abuse our power
And life becomes stained.
No glory comes from that
The lie consumes us.





Cruel Thing
Gregory McDonald

From my arm take leave, oh thing
Pain and pus you're known to bring
I curse your damned creator
that bloody radiator
when passed out I learned that eve
Positions matter when you sleep
One's flesh upon a source of heat
May cause a burn of high degree

Your birth is two months passed, oh thing
Heal and end my suffering
Vanish, peel
New skin reveal
Go find another him to harm
Find another skin to scar
Like the rust upon my car
Eat away their perfect arm

Why art thou cruel and mean? oh thing
why to my arm thou wish to cling?
Stubborn sore
I hate thee more
No matter when I ask quite kindly
Sadistically you stay and spite me
On my arm I always find thee
So feel the wrath I bring thee finely

You wished to be my foe, oh thing
You brought upon a painful sting
A war of medication
United dedication
I'll finely rid thee from your throne
The skin and hair I lost will grow
And back again to peace I'll go
Healed and better than before.





Hey there...excuse me, this is so hard to say
I probably should have said this the other day, but
I was quiet, reserved, and yes, even nervous
To say "Hey, hello," or let alone look at you

What I wanted to say was "You look very nice today,"
Black hat on, looked perfect with your 'fit
I admit that I was jealous when my cousin hugged you
Although I thought "He's married, and why should I hate and bug you."

Telling someone else right then? How they could relate?
Unless they had a real feeling like this before
Many, many things were running through my mind
As the minutes turned to hours, and all of the hours I would find...

....That then, thereafter and later I found out that I shouldn't have
I realized how strong my feelings really are
How they made me sad, and how they affected me
Thinking of only you, and me, yes we!

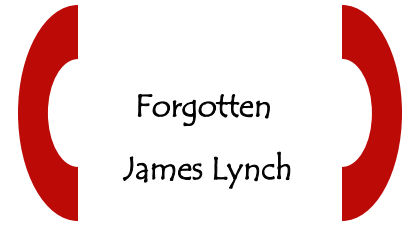
Thinking, dreaming, hoping, breaking the wishbone
Thinking about how everyone else might have known
When you walked closer, I would walk the other way
Thinking "Why won't she turn around and come my way?"

I hope you take time to read this, 'cause I just want you to know
I think about you a lot since I don't date that often
I'm not a fake, unlike other boys you probably dated
Hate to be cocky, for I'm the one you have been waiting on

Frankly, I'm just me, strictly, one and only
With vivid imaginations and many goals, can you see?
A one of a kind personality, and a poem like this here
Those so called "men" would have talked dirty and smacked your rear

But me, personally, I want to tell you how I feel
I shouldn't be scared of you, having this sick fear
Why you might ask? Here I go, right now, right here
On 1-1-03, my first love on New Year's





Forgotten
James Lynch

On my bedroom floor I write this rhyme,
It will be forgotten in due time,
Just like little parts of life
That shine and die and fade away.
We miss out on so much life
And never see the end
Until the day we're broken
And useless to amend.
Because we all know we can't go back,
We'll never get our way,
And so our dreams and hopes go fleeting
To be forgotten another day.
No one is safe from life's strange twists.
And really it's just hit and miss.
We grant ourselves security but
Yet these lies don't set us free.
We lose so much to our selfish pride
And crush each other in a violent tide.
But little do we see our faults
Until it's us that takes the fall.
Then all the wrongs come rushing back,
And there we sit,
Alone in the black.





Freedom
Carl Brienen

Soaring above the trees,
Gracefully I fly.
With the greatest of ease,
The earth passes by.

I'm king of my domain. I whisper to myself.
I'm master of my kingdom, I've acquired such wealth.

Not in gold or jewels or herbs or spice.
But living the freedom to fly anywhere nice.

I've been everywhere from the Nile to the Rio Grand,
To Tianamen Square, New York, and Japan.

I cordially shimmer through the ravaging skies.
God's wonderful earth is a delight to mine eyes.

I float at the base of the mountainous range.
The Alps are enormous but I see something strange.

High above the clouds where no normal bird goes.
I see such a creature; such a wonderful show.

He thinks he's greater than I, but the notion is absurd.
For I am king of my domain, I am the humming bird.

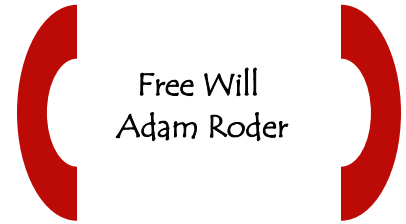
I climb and climb with all of my might.
But I would never get that high, even if I flew all night.

I land on a tree and I weep with grin.
For I realize that he's probably never been where I've been.

I am king of my domain and I live my life free.
The eagle can fly high, but he'll never be me.

Soaring between the trees,
Gracefully I fly.
With the greatest of ease,
The earth passes by.





Free Will
Adam Roder

In finely knit dreams,
That burst at the seams,
Thoughts are glowing so bright.
Twisting in streams,
And shining in beams,
Bringing hope in a lifelong fight.

That is blasting eruptions,
Clouding every perception,
Blurring what's wrong from what's right.
Making reflections,
In every direction,
Can't trust any being in sight.

While tragically,
It's the visions we see,
Just riddles of forests and fright.
So hear it from me,
Let it all be,
And I hope this doesn't sound trite.

Take what you know,
Let everything go,
Cast off in the middle of night.
Think real slow,
Let creative winds blow,
And return in the soft morning light.

Perhaps you will find,
You were always so blind,
Not seeing your personal might.
Loving so kind,
Believing your mind,
Tools to start a new height.

So learn all you can,
Become a new man,
Keep relationships tight.
What I'm getting to and,
The matter at hand,
Exceed beyond a birth rite.





All alone I searched for love.
I thank God he was listening above,
Listening to all of my begs and prayers
To help me find the one who cares.
The one who cares about my dreams,
My thoughts, hopes, and it seems
That God created an angel, named her Traci
And she is the love that he gave me.

I dream of the days that I am with her.
I have been certain of nothing, but of this I'm sure
I have found the one who completes me.
I am on the highest cloud and all I can see
Is her angelic face smiling with love.
Always on my mind, she's all I can think of.
At times my heart burns with such passion
That my tears gather in an affectionate fashion.

She is a special gift like no other.
As this angel became mine, I vowed to smother
Her with love and tenderness for the rest of my life.
I will cherish her as though she is my wife.
And if the feeling is the same,
I shall offer her my name,
Then our hearts will lovingly unite
In a brilliant fire of eternal light.

As I gaze into your sparkling eyes,
I'm reminded of stars luminating the night skies.
I am at peace when you whisper in my ear
Because the promising voice of angels is what I hear.
I can't get enough of those cute little baby hairs,
The faint freckles on your nose and even the way it flares.
I guess I love those little things that you do.
And most importantly, I love that I will always love you.





pages piled like a pyre
of dried autumn leaves.

leaves of every colour wait
as they are bathed in kerosene.

they light the fire to change
leaves of colour to ash.

from wood or leaf a scream cries
out like a thought's dying plea -

my tears reflect the flame
their cause is not the heat.

i know - with every fall will come
flame till a spring brings

...no leaves.





Hollywood Shmollywood
Gregory McDonald

Money for nothing, it's the "American Dream"
My life is a nightmare of effort it seems
Where is my check for sleeping and eating?
Where is my car for watching the game?
Where are the models that I should be meeting?
since all of my comrades are promised the same

Instead I am given a challenged existence
And all my endeavors are met with resistance
Despite all the ads that are watched on TV's
Despite all the Movies and Sitcoms endured
Despite what we're told by any of these
To an obstacle course our journey's deferred

And all of the issues I've seen on these shows
Off camera they're problems that nobody knows
What does it matter that people are dying?
What does it matter that I am in debt?
What does it matter that children are crying
because they are victims of child neglect?

Instead of the stress from my lack of employment
Or the fact that my life is void of enjoyment
I'll shift all my worries to something that matters
I'll worry about how I look everyday
I'll care if a dress might make her look fatter
or if wearing yellow will make him seem gay

Hollywood heroes who have all the money
Try to relate to my life and it's funny
When was I paid to stand and look pretty?
When was I worshipped by beautiful women?
When was a writer the one that was witty?
never, not ever. Not now... and not then.





I Don't Know Why (or Euler's Haiku)
Joshua Jorenby

e to the power
of i times pi is zero
when added to 1

I, now
Crystal Vertz

i am lost in my aloneness in the world that hates me and all i love
no one wishes my life from my past
they only wish my spirit dead and my body back for them to toy with
i have tried to move on with some of my past
i have tried for some time now
i wish i had life to put the good in
i wish i could get rid of the bad that slices across my neck
i am slowly wasting away inside
few people care...why should they?
i'm no good to anybody, aren't i?
i'm just a slut to my new love, aren't i?
not to me
i love him with much of what i have
i wish to be with him for the life that was screwed up before
i want happiness for just a day, care-free and full of love
but not possible in my environment
there are always raiders trying to kill that spirit, that one soul
it's working...i hope they are happy
i could have been something great with the time i was not
they tore me down when i could have made myself better
but getting out to do so is no option to them
oh sweet death!...delight thyself in my existence!
do away with all that kills me
do away with all that pains me
do your worst to do your best
i wish love for what i have now
will the raiders leave me?
will i live in peace?
no one knows...but my defenses are down and my heart is bleeding

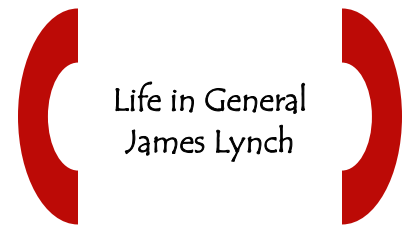




Life
Mark Frankowski

I've still got forever and a day
To walk down the path of destiny
I've still got time to regain
The lost pieces of my shattered remains
I've still got time to walk alone
To reach in my skin to feel my bones
I've got to know that I am alive
I've got to know that I can survive
It's going to take some time for me
To heal these wounds that you've laid in me
It's not easy but it's all I've got
If I can heal these wounds maybe I've got a shot
At this life
I'll give it a try
I can't promise that I will survive
Cause I've lived before
And I almost died
Suicide was the answer before
But now I don't know what to do anymore
Should I try
Should I lay down and cry
Or should I pull myself up
And maybe try to survive
This life





As time goes by we all get old,
Our thoughts and feelings seem less bold.
We wish, and want, and fantasize.
The little worlds we keep inside.
Life moves on, and sometimes we lose track
When wanting to move forward, we're always looking back
Back to perfect memories
Back to better times.
We miss out on the moments that make our lives sublime.
We neglect our happiness
Our souls scream out for answers, we yearn for the truth.
And yet we cannot answer
We forget the good times
And dwell on heartache, break, and sadness.
Our minds yell out "be happy,"
But all we get is madness.
The lives we lead should be our own,
Our dreams and goals set high.
And even with our fleeting lives,
We must not lose our faith.
For life moves on and we must be strong
To face each day anew.
So be bold and humble
And give each day a chance
Don't just take your life,
For a passing glance.





Love
James Lynch

What is it that makes the strongest weak,
The smartest fall to idiocy,
It makes the blind see and
The deaf hear with the greatest clarity?
Love has a power to give strength and weakness,
It is its own hypocrisy.
It gives you hope and yet still makes you doubt.
Love ends all wars but starts thousands more.
It leaves a poor man happy while a rich man begs.
At times it has given me great content and joy
While at others has left me bruised and behind.
Am I looking in the right places?
I just don't know, love's so confusing
And just leaves me in a funk, a mist, a bind.
An unending summer, a lost season of heartache.
Who am I to deserve better?
But what have I done, wherein lies my fault?
What did I do to stop my heart?
A brick to block my happiness stands.
Where are the moments, the memories?
The ones to grant the sweet, unaltered slumbers of peace.
The smiles don't come as easy anymore.
Am I broke, lost forever?
I think not, but where's my jumpstart, my bleeding heart needs more.
I don't have all the answers
I doubt I ever will
Too tired to sleep I trudge on in a sea of questions
Love defies the logic and reason is second-hand.
But time gives hope and there I stand,
Lost in my thoughts of love.



Four college students in this dwelling
dirty, smelling
Our living room is quite disgusting
week old soup neglected crusting
An alcoholic cemetery
nothing buried
just empty bottles around the floor
the garbage barricades my door

But nothing in the rooms and halls
Can rival the grunge in the bathroom at all
There's layers of film on the toilet and sink
We're all on the brink
Of finding a way to ignore nature's needs
The mildew and mold on our tub seems to feed
But who is to clean it?
Come on... we've all seen it

No person we'd wish that duty upon
We know that the challenge to clean up our "john"
Is beyond just a chore
No, now it's much more
It's more of a project, a problem we fear
that can only be solved by four engineers
Our power combined along with solutions
Chemicals banned because of pollution
Only with this can the piss
that remains from the times when the toilet was missed
Be removed in a way that we feel is ok
And another eight months will be ignored till the day
where we clean it again
Us four college men





Every morning I Open the cabinet
Options of boxes, but Only one that satisfies
The habit is one for the Original
Consider the assortment, but that's not how I operate

I sit down at Oval table with
Milk, sugar, and box of bleached wheat donuts
I dump, pour and spoon them into an Orange bowl

Before I begin I must Organize
Crescents and crumbs are Ostracized to the rim
As for floaters too buoyant
Pressed to the bottom by my spoon the O-presser

It ruins a bowl
When they're so unsaturated and crunchy
Undying Opposers are unavoidable facts
I locate them on the outside
And eat them when I'm through

I can't stand for the soggy mash of dregs
Overdosed on sugar Opiate
They go down the drain

Some folks ask me
Why not try granola or some flakes?
They just don't see
The Os' inborn equality is what makes my system great





My Advice to You
Crystal Vertz

Whatever you do, remember to stay true.
Stay true to yourself, or you may fall blue.
Stay true to the ones whom you hold dear,
'less some evil shall cause you to tear.

Take help from your friends when you can,
Sometimes they can take the world off your shoulders.
Don't stay calm all of the time, be free when it counts.
Try your best at all you do, even if its effects seem little.
Smile, though the world might be dragging you down,
Smile to a smile cannot equal a frown.
If you feel you can't make it; you need someone to lean on,
Count on me as a friend to help you out.
I'll try my best, remember that;
For you are my friend whom I cherish most.
If you be ill trodden, call out to me!
I'll lift you to a better place.
If ever you feel you need to escape,
Come on over, my house is safe.
But most of all, my dearest friend,
Count on me to be there for you 'til the end.





No Longer
Paul Kufahl

My weekends are few and far between
Life without rest is my life at all
I live for the day of Redemption
When I take the world by surprise
The palm of my hand holds all
Living and nonliving break for me
No longer will my growth stall

My weekends are filled with experience
No regrets are necessary none at all
I need the day when it becomes clear
Life, Love, Faith, experience in one
The world cannot wait for the fall
But wait it must for me
No longer will my growth stall

My weekends are meant to explore
The path is unknown but I will follow
I want the day which love is mine
Needing only one to be proud
The fall is far but strength will follow
No more will my weight bury me
No longer will my growth swallow.





No One to Share the Stars With
James Lynch

A cry of loneliness echoes through me as I sit here tonight.
The world around me moves as the wind blows across my body.
Points of light puncture the sky as if some greater force were trying to destroy the darkness,
the lie, that we all seem so unaware of.
The moon is full, illuminating the earth.
It's much like my life, full and bright, but all is not well.
The moon, even in its greatest glory, cannot hide its scars.
The dark spots of the moon remind me of my deep losses and defeats,
ever-present throughout every victory.
Why, even the moon is a lie, with a fake glow, dependent on another.
Sitting here, I know no one is alone, and yet,
I feel as alone as the moon, in its fake glory.





The Remote
Gregory McDonald

I lost the remote again my friend
I lost the remote again

Is it under the cushion?
Is it tucked in the seat?
Is it by the TV?
Is it under your feet?
I know it was here but when my friend?
I lost the remote again

I can't change the station
The tint is too green
The sound is too loud
The picture's unclear
They make 'em too small and thin my friend
I lost the remote again

Stop being lazy and look under the chair
It couldn't have vanished
Is it lost in your hair?
My favorite show's on at ten my friend
I lost the remote again

Some thief must have stole it
I'll just have to settle
for whatever is playing
...It's "American Idol"
Go get me a bottle of gin, my friend
I lost the remote again





A Tribute to My Calculator
Gregory McDonald

Casio, my savior
the greatest calculator
Your FX series one fifteen
no one's seen
the beauty that's within you

I tell all of my friends
My day begins and ends
with me stroking all your keys
as you please
and when I turn you on
my problems are all gone
you can calculate the world anew

The challenges set forth
by my teachers and the earth
cannot withstand the power you possess
And nothing in the text
can get me very vexed
No matter what the problem
your magic always solves them
the answer you have always confessed

Oh you integrate
and calculate
the most difficult equations
It's such a simple thing
and it makes me want to sing
your praise throughout all the nations

Oh Casio, for years
You've felt my joyful tears
As you fearlessly computed my tests
Your solar cell is grand
For you never leave my hand
Yet your battery has stayed
as juiced as when 'twas made
Oh Casio, you really are the best

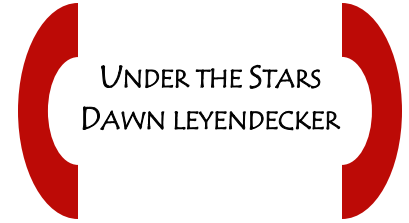




To My Influences, Thank You
Crystal Vertz

I just want to thank you for opening my eyes
And showing me what I will face in my future.
You helped me prepare for the best and worst
So that in the real world, life will be easier for me.
I just want to thank you for opening my mind
And teaching me what I will face in my future.
You taught me the ways of the world, today,
So that I may make a better world for tomorrow.
I just want to thank you for opening my heart
And helping me out by doing your part.
This wasn't forced—you chose this path on your own.
It is that effort that makes the better people of today.
Though many of your efforts seem to go unnoticed,
Realize that I do appreciate all you have done for me.
Remember, you may not have made a difference to the whole world,
But you have made a difference in the world of my heart.
Thank you again for all the smiles, lessons, talks, and laughs.
I have learned from them; I will learn from them; and I will use them.
Thank you again—with all that I am—because of you.





In our bed of the truck
Under the stars
I felt so protected
Being held in your arms

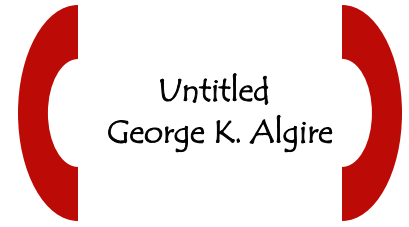
In our bed of the truck
Under the stars
We watched them fly
From near to far

In our bed of the truck
Under the stars
We kissed so softly
Never wanting to part

In our bed of the truck
Under the stars
Falling asleep was perfect
The whole night was ours

With the way we looked at each other
And a feeling in my heart
I knew I fell in love with you again
Right there under the stars





Untitled
George K. Algire

Hands diverge twenty-four times a day
On the outside of the clock tower
Wherein I've been locked for countless days,
And on the land I've forgotten, chimes bay
Sixty-two times as the face glowers.

The steep, crumbling staircase leads down
To chambers and halls used as a dump,
And upward where my boots often pound
Under the clock room's trapdoor I found.
There I fall twelve flights each time I jump.

Bruises and scrapes do not help my sleep,
Though chimes are mute on the bottom stair.
How I huddle in absence of heat!
But with plenty rat poison to eat,
I dream of the clock room high up there.

I'd not comprehend that mass of gears:
Grinding no end throughout existence,
Sounding twenty-thousand times a year.
Throw myself to the cogs with no fear—
Might find silence or indifference.





Untitled
Leland Baker

I see how short the time we spend
To give mankind our hand to lend
We only care about possessions
And turn our heads to life's great lessons

I see how fraudulent we plan
To deceive others when we can
We have it all but ask for more
And all this stealing keeps us poor

I see how small the price we pay
To make our way each passing day
We do not learn from when we fall
And forget names etched in the wall

I see how voiceless the words we speak
To make us louder than the meek
We whine about a trivial thing
And silence voices when they sing

I see how shameful we achieve
To fight for what we don't believe
We say one thing and mean another
And won't think twice to kill a brother

I see how dull the gold we hoard
To purchase things that keep us bored
We are wealthy with all that's not
Except in our hearts, the tiniest spot...





Wither
Eric Jacob

A flower
i can hold it in my hand
i can see it with my eyes
it is perfect
it is beautiful
i want to tell it that
but it cannot hear me
my soul cries out
my heart screams in agony
but it still cannot hear me
it withers away with time
and slowly dies
A flower
it is beautiful
it is perfect
it is gone

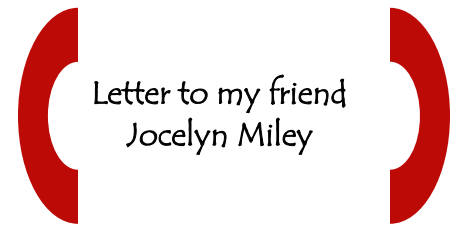




The Boy with the Dark Eyes
Jocelyn Miley

The boy with the dark eyes stopped blinking. His soul with artistic beauty has turned black. The season spent with poetry, love, and color, its leaves have turned. The world is mindless, functioning without him. I told the moon how friends loved, how we filled of color and music. How our beings were rhythmic. We were water, streams of notes, Jazz in a smoky room. We, together made the ocean part, despite the world. But is there a loss? Is there an empty? The clock still ticks, my heart still beats. His blood is still warm. In my grasp is the dark eyed boy with artistic beauty. It's almost winter. It's always cold in winter, but maybe I'll be able to make a fire where there was once one.

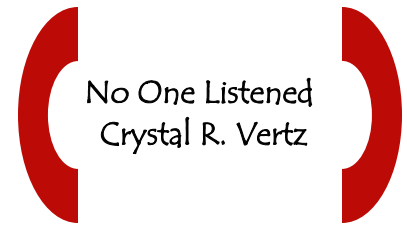




Letter to my friend
Jocelyn Miley

In my dream we walked together on the beach. The sun's warmth embraced us and the ocean was calm. You held my hand and we laughed about your pink hairstreaks and how the color never really took. We ran in the sand and said that we were rock stars. We stopped running, found a place to sit and we talked. We talked about how I was doing and we let the sand warm our feet. I told you that I missed you and I asked you why you left. You looked away towards the sky that looked like a magazine ad at a bus station that I had seen one day. As you looked up, you asked me if I understood how sad you were in life. You said it wasn't because you weren't loved, you were loved by everyone. I looked down at my hands and began to cry. I told you how I cried when they found you and how I still cry. I told you how I wanted to go with you and I asked if you were lonely. You cried and you told me that you were sorry that you made me cry. You said that dying didn't provide the answers you wanted, it only gave you truth that you refused to see in life. I asked you if you thought about me before you took the pills. You said you thought about everyone even your cat. Then we laughed, and I still cried. We stood up and walked towards the water that was now frozen in place. You grabbed my hand, kissed my eyes and told me it was time for me to go. I told you I didn't want to because when I'm awake your gone and I'm alone again. You said being alone is okay; we can't live in our dreams. You told me that you were okay and that it wasn't my fault. You told me that I could not have saved you, and if I did you would've tried again. I told you I still didn't understand and you said the tide was coming in and the sun is rising, its time to go. The air changed and it the sand became cold. I hugged you once more and I kissed your forehead and told you we are sisters even beyond death. We said goodbye and I woke up. I still dream about you and I try to understand. In my heart I know you're okay and that it's not time yet for me to sleep.





No One Listened
Crystal R. Vertz

A breath of warning came that day. No one took heed of it at all. It came and went with saddened eyes. She told them all of what she'd seen in a dream she had had. The events within the dream were occurring as of that day. She told of what would happen next, yet no one believed her. When the event she foresaw happened, no one took note of it. She cried and begged for others to hear her, yet no one would listen as the turmoil stirred.

It all began with a beautiful dawn, which she awoke to see, since she rose to see the dawn every day. Little white clouds began to form around the fireball in the sky. It appeared as a nice scene with a calming feel to its sight. She cocked her head confused, wondering why this was so much like her dream. She hoped the day wouldn't end the same way.

She took to her garden in the warmth of the late summer sun. She hoed and raked, watered and weeded. The day was running quite smoothly.

When the sun was high, at the time of noon, the time had come for the disaster. She was nearly done watering her cucumbers, when it began to get dark, very fast. She no longer had a shadow—a shadow shadowed her. The fluffy white clouds had metamorphosed into gigantic black wool. At the sight of it all, she widened her eyes and began spreading the word of what was to come. She told the police, and they didn't listen. She told the local news, but they didn't listen. She told her friends, neighbors, and family, but even they did not listen.

Panic struck her for fear of what was to be. She called her town together to prove what she had dreamed was coming true. She foretold of a downpour that would flood their town, of hail that would severely damage anything it touched, and of lightning that would burn even the wettest thing.



Yet no one believed her. They thought it could never be. They hardly had any rain. They never had any storms that would cause great harm. Lightning? Flood? Hail? How could this be? They thought they were safe, but she knew they were wrong.

She stood there, surrounded by the doubt of all. The downpour had come and still no one believed her. She cried several tears, wishing they would listen. Still, no one cared. Still, no one listened.

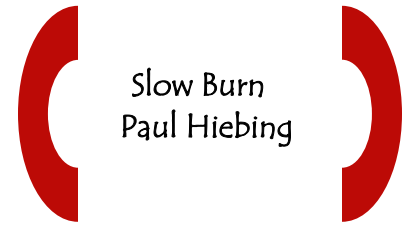
She became desperate and didn't know what to do. She went indoors to escape the monsoon, flopped down on her bed, and continued to cry. The hail had started and several doubts had drowned. The hail hit her roof with increasing force. It sounded like bowling balls being dropped on cement. A small leak began from the middle of the room. She knew the time had come. Her dream would come true. The whole town would be swept away in a dark and sudden doom.

Her basement was flooded and her first floor was getting there. The leak didn't help any as the water slowly poured in from above. She looked dismally down at the floor, her eyes red from tears. The fear had overtaken her—she had lost. She was trapped in her room, with no escape at all—just like she was trapped in the crowd, with no believers at all.

The roof was now full of leaks and waterfalls. Her room filled with water and drained her of hope. She knew her fate: she had seen it in her dream. She heard thunder. It was the last thing she heard as she took her last breath.

The authorities from a nearby town heard all of the commotion from that fatal storm. Rescue parties arrived to the city limits to find only rubble...nothing taller than two and a half feet. Bodies were everywhere, none of them alive. There was evidence of extreme fire, yet evidence of a flood. Huge holes in various things indicated massive hail. They wondered why no one had escaped or tried to when conditions grew worse. Someone had to have had knowledge that something was wrong. Why did no one listen? Why did everyone fall?





The flicker of flint and steel, and the Zippo's wick was burning. Kyle brought the flame to the cigarette dangling from his lips and blew whispery smoke out through his nose and mouth. He hoped the nicotine would slow his nervousness.

"So," affirmed Virginia, "your pick up line dealt with how fierce yet attractively confident I look, eh?" That wasn't exactly what he said, albeit her paraphrasing had the general idea down. She tossed her head back to glance out the coffee shop window, throwing some of her black hair across her brown eyes. She started to give him a stinging look of rejection, but halfway through, her eyes crinkled upward as a delightful idea crossed her mind. Wisps of smoke from his cigarette danced across the table to her, which she brushed away with a casual shake.

"I'll tell you what," slightly acidic words came from her mouth. "You have to impress me."

Kyle glanced at her, returning eye contact. Consciously, he was fighting his body to keep his pose natural, calm, slightly excited – up to a challenge. Inside, Kyle was doing his best not to flood his shoes with sweat. Virginia was indeed more beautiful than any other girl he had approached in the past month, or year, or ever. He hadn't expected her to be so damn *confident*, though.

"And how would that be?" asked Kyle, exhaling a plume of smoke slightly above her head, out of politeness. "Do magic tricks? Juggle?"

"Before you've finished smoking, I want you to balance 50 sugar packets on top of one another. If you do it, I'll go have some drinks with you tonight. If not, the conversation doesn't get beyond me shrugging off your attempt with this bet." Kyle visibly mulled this



over, as he stared at the remaining three-quarters of his cigarette and mentally imagined a small tower of sugar packets.

"Okay, but one question. Real or fake sugar?"

"Cane sugar. It's clumpier. By the way, you have to smoke that thing, too. You can't just let it do a slow burn." Pleased with herself, Virginia smugly sat back in her seat, took out a cigarette herself, while Kyle dashed to the "fix it yourself" counter to retrieve fifty brown raw sugar packets.

"Excuse me," said Kyle to the kid jockeying the register, "do you have any more raw sugar packets?" He anxiously positioned himself between the kid and the pile of packets behind him, hoping to trick the soft-eyed cashier.

"Here," he said, as he handed Kyle a handful of sugar packets. "That should make it about fifty total, I think," he said with a cloy, knowing smile. Had his cigarette not already dwindled dangerously close to the fifty per cent mark, Kyle would have questioned his smile.

Smoke streaking behind him, Kyle raced back to his seat and began construction. All around, the sounds of sipping coffee and dull conversation slowly eased to nothing in Kyle's ears; the pile of packets began to grow in front of him, and he became elated with the ease of the task. The smoke poured from his mouth, and his eyes darted up quickly to Virginia, her eyes also intent on his progress. Kyle's glasses started to slide down his nose, so he moved his hand to push them back up. His forearm brushed the table, causing the mini-tower of 23 packets to sway left to right, undulating with his quickening pulse.

"Boom." The word rolled out of Virginia's mouth like an avalanche, sending the pile into chaos.

"And," she added, "your smoke is looking awfully short." Kyle glanced down and saw that his situation was becoming more and more precarious.

To Kyle, no longer was this a battle with an attractive girl over a date; with her cocky certainty of his failure, this time-limited bet was now a matter of pride. His forehead furrowed deeper as he retrieved the fallen packets, his comrades – his enemies.

Kyle started to smoke more furtively, to gain control of his anxiety. Puff after puff, he felt the worries drain away from his mind, his whole body. He looked at his new pile of ten packets and thought that forty more would be no problem, as long as he could retain his composure. The more intensely he worked in those next seconds, carefully stacking the



packets in two's and three's, the more he became aware of Virginia's warming interest in his intensity. He thought he was connecting with her, as the smoke poured through his nose and open mouth.

Maybe, he thought, maybe her widening eyes and slightly open mouth are telling me that it doesn't matter if I do this or not. Kyle's face began to lighten as he thought more about this, watching his stack approach the thirty mark. As if she knew what he was thinking, Virginia spoke.

"Fortune favors fools," she said, with a grin, "usually. But in this case, I have to wonder how good that filter of yours is going to taste." She pointed to his cigarette, precariously held in his fingertips. Kyle looked down, and realized there was less than one drag left. Dismay left him almost as quickly as it had crept upon him, for he suddenly remembered the rules.

Kyle reached in his pocket, and pulled out his pack. As he pulled out a second cigarette, Virginia realized she had minced words to her disadvantage. She saw his move coming, and anticipated it with a tug on his stack of sugar packets.

"Hey, I need this for my next cup. I hope you don't mind," she remarked, rather warmly, as his tower of sugar collapsed about him. "And by the way, keep it up. As long as you are able."

And as he lit his next cigarette with the burning cherry of his faltering first smoke, and then stamped the near-dead butt out, Kyle thought, just for a moment, for the first time, that Virginia smiled. At him. With him.





Mark pushed his way through the automatic doors and was flooded with the mixed smells of refrozen, reheated cafeteria offerings. The pit in his stomach satisfyingly deepened. Retinal mosaic shimmered away, now out of the pale parking lot and in windowless florescent bath of rattling, squeaking shopping cart derby. An elderly man urged him a cart and some coupons, but he had only come to this Mart for one thing.

He whisked by appliances, women's and children's clothing, the pharmacy, and electronics. To the glass counter under a hanging sign, "Sporting Goods," Mark stepped up quickly and close. With gaped mouth, he was going to speak.

"—", started Mark when the balding flannelled man was through acknowledging a fellow employee.

"Well. What can I help you with, sir?" said the man, slowly, after some look of amused surprise.

"I need a—some bullet—bullets."

The man stared straight into Mark's eyes, sighing cautiously through his teeth, "Ammunition. What caliber?" he asked, and laid one elbow on the glass.

"I don't know, what do you have?"

The man in flannel took this opportunity to show just how he had become manager of the sporting goods department and was allowed to dress as he pleased amidst the others in blue stickered vests. He casually listed casing alloys, the differences in hollowpoint and standard bullets, and mentioned the assortment of shotgun shells in case that was what he was looking for.

Mark looked down into the case, hoping one of the small boxes would stand out.

"Are you a hunter? What kind of gun do you have?" questioned the man interestedly.

Mark reached into his sweatshirt and clumsily dropped a shining chrome handgun on the glass, which caught a few nervous glances from passing shoppers. The man's tone dropped to that of a fireman presented with a Coke bottle full of gasoline and a cloth wick, "Ah. We don't



have the bullets for that," a pause, "House of Guns might have it, I used to work there—Wait they've shut down. I don't know. Sorry, sir, I can't help you. You will probably have to order it."

The Magnum's chamber stayed empty. Mark walked back, through silent rows of telephones and blank videocassettes. He was nearly lost, not sure from which direction he entered, when he came upon a wall of television sets. All mumbled something at once, except one. In its gray convex display, Mark saw himself featureless behind raining glare. The dead cell held his attention, as would a black orchid in a field of hybrid carnations. He stared straight ahead like he had several hours earlier in his evacuated studio apartment.

Furniture and framed prints were gone from Mark's small cubic home. As well as these, waffle irons, indoor grills, toaster ovens, blenders and food processors sat with their extended families, waiting to be claimed at second-hand stores. Mark had viewed, before the cable was disconnected for tardy payment, a network documentary on Eastern religion. Between five-minute breaks for sponsorship messages from businesses with dwindling warehouse supplies and full call-reception centers, words such as "fasting," and "nothing," and phrases such as, "no possessions," and, "attaining zero," rang like the call he'd been waiting for, before the telephone service was also disconnected because of mounting late fees. When an eviction notice came the next day, Mark saw it as nothing less than a sign from "the universal oneness," and remembered the word "reincarnation" in the documentary's conclusion.

His indiscernible face vanished from the gray glass with a click and cathode tube squeal. A voice cracked next to him, "This is what Zenith just put out." Bright bleeding images flipped on the screen behind a superimposed menu. The young blonde-haired employee asked after an uncomfortable wait for reaction, "Are you looking for a TV today, sir?"

Mark thought of the installations in his apartment he had found no way to remove. The electric range had been there before he moved in, and the same was true of the vintage refrigerator. The wooden cabinet television set was now the only thing that provided light economically.

"No," and Mark walked blindly into housewares.

He found himself walled in by one hundred shades of off-white table lamps. One was marked, "Zero Mark-Up From Wholesale." Mark checked the tag, and saw the modest lamp as a new light. The price was almost nothing, but alas, he had no table with which to grace it. Mark focused on getting out of the Mart, but ended up in a fabricated family room complete with cardboard electronics. A blue stickered end table nearly tripped him when he thought he saw a



checkout counter in the distance and began to jog. The table fell with a crack well in earshot of a permed blue vest in her thirties.

"Sir! Sir! Come back here please!" she waddled briskly after him. Mark turned with wide eyes at the approaching face.

"You're going to have to buy that table and the thing that was sitting on top of it."

"What thing?"

"Come with me," she turned her back, and relaxed in some slow walking back to the family room.

Mark followed at seven paces.

"See? The table's broken. You can't run in... the...."

"Living room," said Mark.

"And this is broken, too."

"What is it?"

"It's a... I don't know. Just take these to the checkout."

"How do you know it's broken?"

"Look at it. Now, you have to pay for these."

Mark loaded up his arms with his the things he did not want to possess and could disown, swung by housewares for that priceless lamp, and followed his nose to the front of the store.

In the opposite bench of his red cafeteria booth sat cheap enlightenment, a weak device for suspension and something that might be broken. Disappearing on the styrene plate in front of Mark were a shapeless gelatin dessert, several soggy wings and, beside the plate, a generic caffeinated beverage. The lights buzzed, and the shuffling voices of the night's final shoppers grew faint. Mark was sure he felt the eternal present, the "heavenly moment."





The Sun, the Sandwich, and the Samaritan
George K. Algire

“Oh nice. The sun is showing itself today.”

In half stride he prepared to quicken his pace and soak in some of the welcome shine of the sun. He looked down at the cracked sidewalk and admired the sparkling sand and intense glow of the reflection and refraction. The warmth overwhelmed his until recently chilled body. The hairs on his exposed arms raised and relaxed. Shivers raced down his back. Spring must surely be on its way.

If he wasn't on his way to the bus stop at this time like every other day of the workweek, he thought he might call that long brunette who worked in receiving. A sunny day would be just the alibi to put an end to the long-range admiration of the creature and take her to the park for an ice cream cone, corn dog or some other food of the junk genre. He envisioned a peeling bench, a shady oak. Perhaps there would be music from a street performer, or one of those people who cover themselves in reflective paint and stand perfectly still while people stare and giggle. They would throw some money in his hat, and talk about how they hated their boss. She'd laugh at his imitations of the man. He smiled at these thoughts, but stopped short of accusing himself of daydreaming.

He lifted his lagging foot and shut his eyes. He turned his head in the direction of the intense light. He resolved to make plans with the woman in receiving while this weather lasted. He was one half of a block from the bus stop. The paisley behind his closed eyes became bright red. His hair caught fire, and a fraction of a second later he was no more than a sooty shadow on the adjacent building to his path.

~



"This sandwich is almost too big for my mouth."

The things we do for discounted fries, he thought. The smooth jazz reached a climactic tenor sax solo. A dollop of mayonnaise-drenched iceberg lettuce fell out of the sandwich, but was caught by the napkin in his lap. Good table manners pay off even while eating alone, he decided. This sandwich really was too much. And it's not as if the picture on the menu board was painting a bloated image of its immensity. Though, the pictures are always a more pristine version of the end product. The ham or roast beef is perfectly folded. The bacon layered in the most pleasing way. Ketchup and mustard just barely peeks out from the bun, and always reflecting light.

He reached for the uncovered drink of Coca-Cola to his right. He despised straws. They were so childish. "Maybe I should have ordered onion rings." He ate this way so much, he needed to mix it up once in a while. But he always entered the food court ravenous, and had meant to, but never had ventured to try the veggie burger. As the grease bubble expanded in his belly after each meal, he vowed to try it the next time, but never succeeded in ignoring the pangs for something more beefy. Even the slightly more health conscious hot ham and cheese or, proclaimed lean, roast beef were crossed off by the time he made it to the cash register.

Coca-cola dribbled down from the corner of his mouth onto his lapel. "Damn." he cursed, and felt the urge to clear a great deal of phlegm from his chest. He heard a rumbling, but had not begun to release his cough. The rumbling grew louder, faster. The enormous shopping mall that housed the restaurant he sat in was sent tumbling like a castle of dominos. He was luckily killed in the collapse and did not suffer under meters of rubble, like many others did.

~

"Oh dear!"

She ran over to the boy, dropped her purse, and knelt down beside him. She asked if it felt broken. She remembered to do nothing but make him feel comfortable. She had seen him fly off his skateboard, still rolling down the middle of the street. She looked around for

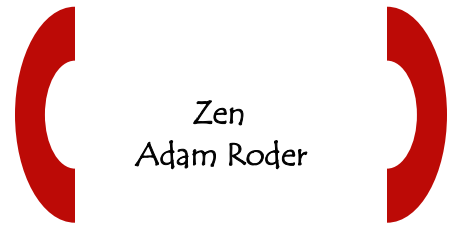


help. She saw no one. She told him it was going to be all right, and looked for an open shop with a telephone. She started across the street.

The redness in his face was a combination of embarrassment for falling the way he did, this middle-age woman coming to his rescue, blood rushing around from the injury, and the red that was usually showing on his face. He was beginning to go into shock. He looked at his arm and threw up.

The woman rushed out of the corner store, and shook her head thinking about the way the board had flown out from under the boy. He must have been four feet in the air. The street was a bit of a corridor. Before the woman was halfway across it, a plume of atomic fire sent her, the boy, the cars, and everything else that littered the street flying like toys for several tens of blocks. The city, as well as the boy, now had more dire problems.





Zen
Adam Roder

Any physicist could tell you how much quantitative energy a several thousand ton train has while moving at fifty-seven miles per hour, but to qualitatively experience this energy from just a few feet above, and to be able to absorb the raw power of such a miniscule yet overwhelming event is certainly a life-changing experience. As the giant steel beast rears its head from underneath you, shaking the ground in a fueled statement of might, each gear of your mind vibrates into its perfect place, thus creating an internal aura of enlightenment for just a few moments. Answers to even life's most complex questions are simply, and toyishly dangled in front of your eyes: the impossible seems possible, you see the light, and you feel content. But sadly, with every climax, comes a resolution. Mental machinery returns to its everyday state of chaos, now abandoned in a daze of wonder. The tracks lay silent, waiting as you are, for something to roll along and show you your purpose. After all, trains would go nowhere if they had nothing to follow. So what are we here to guide? Or perhaps, what are we here to follow?

Sitting alone, legs crossed in front, staring west over a perfectly straight river of rock, wood, and steel, possibilities seem endless. Running side-by-side, pieces of track run right over the horizon, seemingly getting closer and closer together as they go, coming together someplace unseen. You know in the back of your mind they don't, but you still desire to reach the unseen land over the horizon and see the two finally unite.

Reality comes back again; the rush of seeing the meaning of life dart before your eyes is gone, and the domineering sense of wonder makes you look around. On the banks of the



river rise walls of trees on steep slopes, secluding it from any pollution that may infiltrate the divine environment from either side. The bridge is the only way across. Having only one lane to share, cars on either side wait their turn, going a few at a time over the bridge's sharp hump to pass from one world to the next. Interestingly enough, from a vantage point inside a car come to rest at the stoplight, you cannot see over to the other side, neither can you see what will come to your own side any time in advance, so you are forced, by a system incapable of understanding raw human emotion, to wait in a constant state of anticipation, not knowing what will happen next. The sun has now set, everything moves up a notch, as all things around you acquire in the newborn night an eerie quality of mystery. The unseen land has moved closer, until piercing out of the still darkness, as an innocently thrown rock shatters the calm of a motionless pond, a light creeps up from afar. It alone seizes control of your vision.

Within minutes, the moment you've been waiting for will arrive, bringing the rush that keeps luring you back to the place you now sit. Tension builds as your heart beats faster and faster, preparing to channel in your arteries the incredible energy that is about to envelop your heart and soul, so that every part of your body can truly feel and be touched by the unbelievable force making its way toward you. The light becomes brighter and brighter, until it is so blinding and so thick you can almost swim in it, yet your focus trains tighter and tighter on its origin. Louder and louder it gets, shaking the ground once more. And when the vibrations quake harder and harder, everything falls into place like before. Your eyes close instinctually—

Zen. Gone.
—only to open again. All is dark, quiet, in peace as it was before. Each steel track is lying next to another, connected together, and resting on a solid foundation made of an unfathomable amount of members. Both wait to hear their time be called, a time to guide a machine with great capability, made of the same material they are, along its uncertain journey into the unknown. And what of the faraway land, the place of mystery where the two tracks appear to join; all that can be hoped for is that someday we actually meet.

Someday.





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