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Georgia Couple

Harbinger 1997

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Earl

(Elderly man walks into a hair shop. He is carrying a cane and a small shopping bag.)

She'll be with me shortly. What is shortly? I mean, I made my appointment for 3:00 not shortly after three. These hair fixy people must think their time is more important than mine. I should have went to Bob's barber.

If Bob makes you wait it's only because he's watchin' the end of a game that has went into overtime.

The only reason I'm here in the first place is because Eartha used to say how she loved the way they did her perm, and since I was already in the mall with a little free time. (pause, looks around) Ya know this is my first time here. I never came when Eartha got her hair perm. She would always say, "Come on Harry, there'll be men there, too." But I felt, and still do feel, that this place is for the women. (looks around) Look at them speeding by. Kind of like those little

balls of light you see when you get up too fast. Not that I get up fast anymore.

You know, those lights you can't touch, but reach for anyway. My mom used to say that those little lights were angels that fly on earth and if you got up too fast you would bang into them. Like on the cartoons when the two people would run into each other and the birds would fly around their heads. (sits down in near-by chair) Ya know, they also kind of act like doctors. Dress in their white little tops, pushing you around in those spiny chairs. No, no, not the angels, the hairdresser people. Lord knows I would never compare a doctor and one of God's heavenly angels. Those doctors are no-good cotton pickers. My Eartha went in to see one of 'em because she wanted him to refill her diet pills, and the next thing you know he was talking about chopping off one of her tits.

She didn't let him, so he didn't refill her diet pills. Pills and Doctors. Those are two things that go hand in hand. Those doctors likes to make you take a lot of pills. They say it's to keep you healthy and to help you live longer. I

know why he wants me to live so long, it's because the longer I live the more pills he can give me, and that's money in his pocket.

I don't know why doctors are wanting you to live so long, it's not like anyone wants you around. When my Eartha died last year, my daughter asked me to move in. No, she didn't ask, she just came to the house and packed my stuff up and moved me. She was the one who dropped me off here today. She say I need exercise, and that a lot of elderly people walk the malls. Elderly people, in my day they were called old buzzards.

Eartha

(Elderly woman sitting to the left of a hair shop. She is wearing a cotton blue dress. She is holding a dead wildflower. She is talking to the audience and her husband, Earl)

Old buzzards. (laughs) He was the only one who called them old buzzards. Everyone else had a little respect for the old folks. (caresses the wildflower) Oh Earl, what are you doing in that beauty parlor? I know you hate that place, you would never go with me when I asked you. (looks back at audience) I remember when the crew cut came out. I wanted Earl to get that cut so bad, but he kep' saying that the crew cut was for the young boys, and he was too old. But that handsome doctor on my favorite soap had the cut and I knew Earl and that doctor were about the same age. I think he may have gotten that new hair-do if Bob would have cut it, but Bob claimed he couldn't do it.

But I knew that the gal who did my hair could cut it because we used to watch the soaps when

she did my hair. I really didn't like getting my hair done when my soaps were on, because I feel that every woman should view their soaps alone, that way they won't miss nothing. But anyway, one day she pointed at (points at audience) the T.V. and says, "I can do that cut that doctor has." So I asked her if she could do that for my husband, and she says yes. So I went home and told Earl, but he wouldn't go. He kept saying that men didn't go to those types of places. You know I even told Earl if he got that crew cut we could put the kids to bed early one night. (laughs) Yeah, that doctor was a looker. Not like my doctor at the clinic. The doctor on my soaps would never have asked to cut off my boobs. On the soaps the doctor would have just given me some pills to take for those lump things. (holds her breast in her hands) I couldn't have come home without these. I have always had these. I was the first girl in school to get boobs. That was one of the reasons Earl asked me out in the first place. (long pause) The doctor told me if I didn't get 'em cut off then I would die. (holds up

wildflower) I guess he was right about that one. Sometimes, as I look at Earl with Beth, our daughter, I kind of wish I would have thought longer about that boob thing. But at least I can say I left the world with the same number of parts I came in with. (turns to watch Earl get up and walk to the barber's chair. Earl says something to the hairstylist)

(laughing) After all these years, he's getting a crew cut.

The Diamond Night

Randy:

(woman center stage dressed in a wedding gown) You know, I invited her to the wedding, but I don't think she'll come.

What I mean is, I haven't seen her since college. (starts to pick at the flowers in her hands) Maybe deep down I knew that she would show up. Maybe that's why I asked her to come.

How do I know she's here? She just came back to say hi. Hi. But it was more than a simple hello for me. It was more like a simple nightmare. It brought back so many memories that I had worked so hard to hide, I mean, forget. (petals from the flowers are starting to cover the floor) I don't want these random thoughts that keep running through my head. I don't want to smell the lingering memories from her perfume. I don't.

I'm getting married today. I mean, every girl dreams of that day. This day. (half the flowers

are on the floor now. Looks toward door as if she can see the person who just left) I don't want to remember her soft flesh, her tight skin, or her full lips. I don't want to remember the time we talked all night about the meaning of life. No! I don't want to remember the night we had a pillow fight and the zipper on her shirt fell down, and how I got my first and only look at the nipple ring that was always talked about but never seen. I don't want to recall the way she laid across me on the bed and told me how much she would miss me, after we left school. I don't want to think about the kisses she used to throw as she left a room, kisses that never reached my lips. Wasted kisses.

I don't want to recall the night in her room, after drinking too much how I tried to kiss her. The nights she said she didn't want to be my college experiment. My college fling before the wedding. She said she didn't want to be the smile Kevin would wonder about. She said she didn't want to be my first. I will not think about how I didn't tell her that she wouldn't be a smile Kevin wondered about, because there

wouldn't be a Kevin. (all the flowers are gone)
I didn't tell her she wouldn't be a fling to me. A
college experiment. She would be my life. I
didn't tell her that if she had only granted me a
small part of her, how I would have never kept
her a secret. She would have known and they
would have known. They. My mother. My
father. My home economics teacher who said
that I wouldn't catch a husband if I didn't know
how to cook. Billy, the boy down the street,
who said that if I didn't sleep with him he
would tell the whole school I was a Dyke. I
didn't tell her that this wasn't a new idea to me.
I didn't tell her that I loved her. I just said, "I
didn't mean it like that. I mean, I'm not like
you." I'm getting married in a couple of
minutes. I didn't mean it that way.

Untitled

I am tangled up in summer
long legs, a face looking out the window
I am tangled up in waiting
In wanting a future.
A stroke of luck is at my door.
A glass of water left on the railing.
I am noticed by no one.
Only those driving by
blank faces in the blaze of headlights. No
 names
I am tangled up in wanting a new name.
I am tired.
An ashtray on my knee. A collection of bad
 health.
Even though I have a cold, I smoke.
I say things that shouldn't be said. I creep.
This is a path I haven't been on before. Of
 lust, of love.
Kisses in a dark bedroom.
Bedsheets and clothing on the floor.

No names.
Whispers. Small sounds.
Insignificant the moment they are muttered.
Lips against my neck. Skin on skin. Small
 sounds.
I am tangled.

Untitled

when he's holding my hand it's like he's
fucking me
I get this airtight feeling in my crotch.
when he's holding my hand its like I'm
down on
my knees
giving him anything he wants.
its his disease I've got.
in my lungs, in my eyes, like an x on my
forehead.
like bite marks on my stomach.
And I know he's an angel, he can bite me
whenever he feels the need.
because I have felt the need to be pure, to be
covered in bites and bruises.
there is an element inside me that needs to
be saved.
And my sisters saying that I was the prettiest
of all of us,
that I should be a model
like we were princesses, like we had that

option.
instead I hold his hand while I still have
control of my own.
and I'm thinking that maybe I don't look like
anything to him anyway.
I am not even human, I am way past his
bedtime, a window left open.
even angels need sleep and warmth.
I am a slow-motion promise with rust on the
edges, a pencil held too tightly.
even when I am down on my knees, we can't
put a fire out together.
its a one-sided conversation, it always has
been me doing all
the talking and listening,
watching and whispering
its me giving him anything he wants and
him giving me nothing.
it makes me want a full meal in my stomach.
it makes me want to kick the dirt.
I am sick over him, over his blind eyes that I
have filled to the brim.
I am trash for trying.
I am fear in a bottle.



Dye and Laughter

When she laughed, it was like she owned the world. Not in a selfish corrupted sort of way, like the girl who sat next to me in government. The one who filed her nails during the lecture and then tossed her hair over her shoulder to attract attention. Not like that at all. When she laughed it was with an honesty and freedom that most people don't have or even understand. I loved her laugh. I loved to make her laugh. When we spent evenings in the cold cement walled basement of the parent's large antique filled home, we laughed. Our fingers were streaked with the brilliant color of the dyes we used. The shirts we created were canvases filled with the colors of us. We would laugh and sing and dance to familiar oldies on the radio and hang dye-splashed shirts up to dry. When we finished, the dark, shadowy basement was filled with bright, dripping t-shirts. The color we used was the kind that never fades. The kind of friendship that you can wash over and over and

wring out to dry and even wear to paint the garage and it is still as beautiful as the day you splashed it with laughter and love and hung it up on the concrete wall of a cold basement. I loved her.

Me and Adam

crazy spiky snarly blond hair
red t-shirt with yellow ballerina
pink corduroys that make the swishy sound
RUN!
right, left, diagonal
dodging dwarfing golden shafts of corn
stay on the downtrodden path
sticky poking scratching barbed wire
up and over
down and under
scream, yell, giggle
jump on a drifting coal-black tire
Come out and play!
RUN!
faster than the rabbits
FLY!
higher than the superhero
PRETEND!
strange, furry, winged creatures
I speak French!
You do not!

my very own special language
I'll call it French
You'll call it Stupid
back inside
back through the wire
encased in rough corn stalks and soft corn
silk
RUN!

Ma Soeur

Brush your hair
then shake
shake him away
He didn't mean to tell you that

So what?

So point your toes
in the bathtub
little plie
kiss the sky

Just like she didn't.

Shake away the water
the shower was too cold
once again
and when you're dry

Before you fall.

How she snarled
your thin-strong fibers
your perfect rope
Rapunzel hair

You'll forget what he said.

And all will be straight
and beautiful

Let it down no more.

in your fairy tale world
of sometimes almost happy endings

Shake it over you shoulder.

There are shockwaves in your
earthquake hair
that flows like a sea
over boiling volcano faults of the earth.

Monday Morning Cobbler

Bruised, but no one will ever know,

so cut smaller chunks and add the

coat;

“Saccharine, please.

He told me I wasn’t sweet enough.”

Throw it in the pan with the leftovers—

Don’t waste,
can’t waste—

But I must waste!

Boiling escape unattainable,

Leave the pieces to float in their

bitter juices.

You denied me the extra I asked for . . .

Hardened crust,

the bruises can’t be seen.

You let them eat me with betrayal
in your eyes.



Because

Because the table wobbles
and the light reflects
my face distorts
nose and bottom lip
pouting
my eyes circles
surrounded by scratches
engraved by ball point
pens like
mine
the cup thick
ceramic heavy dull
full of coffee
splashes just a
little
onto this paper
as I shift
hit
with my ankle
marble leg not
as strong as it
looks not as

grounded
into the tiles
cracked
by my foot
heavy with earth
scuffed from
bumping
the table making
it falters
making my lines
crooked
wanting to tear
the paper easily
torn
by brown wetness
my back
hunched so that
my stomach folds into
my waist
aches
if I rest my elbow
it will tip everything
all over
because the table wobbles

Womb

the little pink house curves around
my twin-sized mattress and canopies barely
above
my blond static-to-nylon hair

delicate the fabric walls
let in only the pink pink light
keeping out raw yellow

I sit a nine year old
girl with too skinny legs and
too soft a voice
chewed nails
my lavender inked pen inside
my tent with flannel jammies and
Colgate breath
to remember and write in bubbles
my third grade day

too thin walls distract me
from Joseph's voice across the classroom

Miss Ellis's wooden beaded necklace
bumping
against her buttons on that
floral dress
Rachel snuffles as she struggles
to write her alphabet

the day hushed and thrown aside like a
tether ball
by my mother's and sister's words
made crude by that too bright light

the words I know
best-friend
big chief
spelling test
shut-up by grown-up words
kunt
bich
fukew

mother's menthol mouth says
goodnight
sister's hot hot face and flying arm

slams the door
Good night dear diary and my little house.

pink walls disappear when
the light turns off
she forgot to
turn on my night light

Jamie Valentine



The Lunchroom: Age 13

The girls in the lunchroom that sit with the boys laugh louder, move faster.
The girls look over from their pink lunch boxes and see me eating this shit the school calls
"hot lunch."

They stick out their pink tongues that look like bologna.
How I long to rid myself of those bottle cap glasses and acne.
Then they would like me.

Well I don't care! Who needs dumb boys anyway!?! Who wants those stupid
pink lunch boxes!
I do.

Someday soon, I'll trade my stubby fingers in for skinny ones.
Someday soon, I'll exchange these short brown pigtails for long blonde curly locks.
Those boys would stare
in lust
at me and they would laugh at my jokes, not at my face.

Suddenly, it comes. In heaves and hot waves.
This shit they call lunch is digesting and flowing through my intestines.
I feel sick and I can't hold back my nausea.
Acidic macaroni and cheese. Old cornflakes from this morning.

All onto my lunch tray.
The teacher in the lunchroom calls a nurse, but the beautiful girls scream at my upchuck.
The boys laugh so hard they fall out of their chairs.
I want to go in reverse.
I feel this small
I want to shrivel up like those soaked prunes on my plate.
I know that anywhere but here would be a better place for me.

Dry

How dreary I? That I should die my body limp and lifeless dry.
No more shall I attempt to cry when on a bed of blade I lie.
How dreary I? You ask me why? To receive only a dreadful sigh.
My soul has left and gone a rye. My body limp and lifeless dry.
How dreary I? That when I cry people pass me by and by.
And when I fall, I fall from the sky. With questions that have no reply.
The laws of life I have defied and now I fall into the tied.
I burden no one with my cry.
No more shall I. No more shall I.
Only spirits at my side. Only angels hear my sigh.
My soul has left and so have I.
My body limp and lifeless dry.

The Drought

I really need to talk to you about something. It's serious, so maybe you should sit down.(Pauses)

Do you know how long it has been? Six months !! Yes, six long, cruel months. It's not healthy to go that long without a man. I'm not just talking about the sex, although a nice casual fuck would be nice right about now. I'm talking about the long romantic walks, bubble baths by the light of the moon, watching cute couple movies, holding hands, hell, I'd be happy with an accidental pat on the ass right now.

I don't want to sound desperate, but everyone I know is in love. My gay friends, my straight friends, my friends that haven't had a date since junior high, all of 'em, every single one is in love, or at least getting laid. Don't give me that look. All I'm saying is I'm surrounded by love 24-7! Take you for example. You've been seeing Sam for seven years, plus you have Jay and Pat on the side just in case things get dull or

Sam goes out of town. You have three men and I can't even get the UPS man to come inside for some coffee.

Last year I had too many men, a flood of 'em. All my friends, including you, told me to slow down. Well, you know what happened? The great drought hit. My skin's beginning to flake I'm so dry.

Honestly, I thing what happened was when I moved, the post office, you know how they are, they forgot to forward my address. Yes, they forgot to tell Cupid I had moved. Maybe I should talk to the postman tomorrow and have this problem taken care of, hmmm (pauses), do you think he's single?



Grand Canyon

The Oppression of Women in Walt Disney Movies

Women play many different roles in fairy tales and folklore traditions, but how women are portrayed is another matter. Most fairy tales and folklore stories oppress women in their roles. Oppression can be in many different forms, but the forms of oppression I will address are the beauty myth and patriarchy. In illustrating these points I will discuss how the Walt Disney animated versions of classic fairy tales oppress women in the aforementioned ways. In the Walt Disney versions women are not empowered to overcome evil, and this lack of power leaves them to rely on men to rescue them. These men are empowered to rescue these “damsels in distress” because these women possess waif-like figures, flawless beauty features, and a passive nature. Disney adapts these versions to fit the American tradition that women are passive, weak, homemakers and men are strong bread-

winners.

Beginning with the beauty myth, Disney’s heroines are thin, beautiful women. In fact, the movie box descriptions use adjectives such as “beautiful” and “lovely” to describe the female heroines. The female heroines in the Disney versions are never fat, flawed, or ugly. Because Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, and Ariel are so beautiful; men, or rather princes, will want to rescue and marry them. In some cases the man does not even know the woman, yet he is deeply in love with her. For example, in “The Little Mermaid”, Prince Eric cannot stop thinking about the beautiful woman who rescued him from drowning. He is merely in love with the beauty of Ariel, but her looks are all he knows about her. One scene in “The Little Mermaid” stresses the importance of looks in order to obtain a man. “You have your looks. Your pretty face and don’t forget the importance of body language,” (The Little Mermaid). The sea witch Ursula tells Ariel she does not need her voice to get Eric, she needs only her looks. This beauty advice also says

that women do not need intelligence or a mind to please a man, the mere possession of beauty will be enough to fulfill any man's needs.

Oppression occurs as a result of the beauty myth since female heroines in Disney versions are often passive, good-natured, and not empowered. Women such as Cinderella simply let her step-mother order her around, and make her a servant in her own home. Snow White allowed her step-mother to run her out of her home. The importance of beauty placed on the heroines causes them to lack strength, and an active voice. Disney does not allow these heroines to be beautiful and strong, only beautiful. Although the animated movies made in the 90s produced stronger, more independent women, Disney still managed to oppress women like Belle and Pocahontas by giving them flawless, sculptured bodies. Pocahontas is very well endowed in the upper regions of her body. So, female heroines in Disney versions cannot be both normal looking and strong. The women must be beautiful and weak, or beautiful and strong. "The beauty myth is not

about women at all. It is about men's institutions and institutional power" (Wolf 13). The male heroes in Disney versions simply want a woman that is beautiful, the men expect nothing more. Facial beauty and thinness "keep women in an inferior place in our society and is harmful to us socially, psychologically, and physically" (Siebecker 105). This heavy emphasis on the women in Disney versions to be thin and flawless makes one wonder "Will there ever be a mermaid with a weight problem or a Belle with bad teeth?" (Rudnick 67)

Besides the beauty myth, Disney versions support patriarchy and male-dominance. Almost all Disney movies, even those outside the fairy tale realm, are about women. The movies are about a particular woman's life and what happens to her. "Cinderella", "Sleeping Beauty", and "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" are good examples of movies that are based on a woman's life. Given that women like Cinderella and Snow White are the lead roles, or heroines of the movie, I do not think of these women as heroines. As one observes the

struggles and abuses these women endure, when the climax comes, one does not see Cinderella or Snow White overpower their step-mothers to achieve their happiness. Rather one sees the male characters rescuing these women from their distress. In "Cinderella" it is Jaq and Gus who get the key out of the step-mother's pocket to give to Cinderella to unlock her door. It is Bruno who attacks Lucifer so Jaq and Gus can get the key to Cinderella. Cinderella only has the other glass slipper. This is her contribution to her achievement to happiness. Otherwise, the other males characters are the real heroes of the story. In "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" the dwarfs kill off Snow White's evil step-mother and Prince Charming gives Snow White the kiss of love to awaken her, hence saving her from a long, deep slumber. Even in the more recent Disney movies like "Pocahontas" and the "Hunchback of Norte Dame" the women are still rescued by men. Although the women are given more strength of character than Cinderella or Snow White, these women are also relying on men to save them from death or danger. So,

while it is good that the women are the lead and main characters in the movies, it is incorrect to say that these women are the heroines of the story because they do not do much to gain a higher status in society or to end the abuse they are subjected to. These women rely on men to rescue them from the forces of evil.

Along with male-dominance, Disney incorporates the idea of patriarchy into the movies. Men and women in Disney versions have specific roles to play. Most often these roles are women as caretakers, and men as bread-winners. For example, in "Cinderella" the mice decide to make Cinderella's dress. Gus says he is going to "cut it with the scissors" (Cinderella) and Jaq says "I can do the sewing" (Cinderella). But a female mouse takes the needle from Jaq saying "leave the sewing to the women, you go get the trimming" (Cinderella). The female mice knew what their role was and that was to take care of the household and chores such as sewing, laundry, dishes, cooking, and so on. The men knew they did the more adventurous work like getting the trimming

and doing the heavy work like raising a shoe filled with thread up to where the female mouse was sewing.

The role of patriarchy these Disney versions is a fear critics such as Lucy Rollin have about Disney movies. "Lucy Rollins writes that critics fear Disney because the studio rewrites the fairytale to reflect American values. This is precisely what is so frightening about Disney's *The Little Mermaid*. The movie depicts women as either self-effacing or evil, incapable of creating their own responsible power without either depending on men or stealing power from them" (Trites 152). Disney takes these classic fairy tales and rewrites them to fit American society. The Disney "Cinderella" was adapted from Charles Perrault's version of "Cinderella." Similar to the Disney version, Cinderella is passive and beautiful and this moves her up the social ladder. But another version of "Cinderella" portrays her as independent, and wanting to gain a higher social status, but she achieves it not by marriage but through recognition. Yet, Disney chose

Perrault's version. Perrault's version reflected the way American society wants women to be and gives dominance to men over women.

Of course, Disney does give women power. "Women who have power are presented in the Disney film as either evil or silly" (Kelly 89). But the beholders of this power are usually the evil characters or antagonists of the story. For instance, Cinderella's step-mother has power over Cinderella and her two step-sisters. Snow White's step-mother has power over her. Ursula has power over Ariel. Maleficent has power over Aurora. But the power these women possess is not a positive power. These women use their power to oppress the female heroine of the story. However, in "Cinderella" the fairy godmother does have power but she is absent minded and dimwitted. She cannot find her wand, remember the magic words, and she fails to notice Cinderella's shredded dress. So, those women that have power and are positive characters are not given the strength such as the step-mothers or Maleficent.

The portrayal of these women as powerful

oppressors hinders the women's movement. The women's movement thrives to empower all women and for women to use this power to progress forward together as women.

Empowered women are not to use their power to oppress women, this power if for the women's movement. Disney's portrayal of women oppressing women is highly negative to the women's movement and does not offer much hope to the oppressed woman nor does it give the empowered woman much either. The empowered women fall from power by the end of the movie and the oppressed women move from oppression from a woman to oppression from a man. "Disney always relies on women to create the conflict between good and evil...Disney pits one woman against the another" (Trites 150). Disney may give women power in the movie, but power is given to the woman who represents evil and who will oppress the heroine. This power is by no means positive toward the women's movement and once again Disney manages to oppress women.

For years Walt Disney has produced many

animated "classics" based on literary texts and fairy tales. But often times Disney adapts the versions that are not empowering to women and that oppress women in their roles. Disney has yet to choose the version that empowers a woman and/or reverses the roles expected of women and men. Disney has yet to write a version that is matriarchal and with women who are not waif-like and flawless, but normal looking with flaws. Contemporary feminists believe stories like "Cinderella" and "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" are "intended to convince them that all little girls must be gentle, obedient, passive, and domestic while they wait patiently for their princes to come" (Lurie 18). This is exactly the image Disney portrays. The Disney female heroines are thin and beautiful. These women are passive and rely on men to rescue them from danger and abuse. Most Disney women gain higher social status and "live happily ever after" in the lap of luxury.

Yet, Disney women such as Cinderella, Aurora, Snow White, and Ariel do not live happily ever after because they are not

empowered. These women are oppressed with thin bodies and flawless faces. They do not know how to defend themselves or voice their opinions. Disney expects these oppressed women to be role models to little girls. What these women are teaching is that it is okay to be passive and weak, and as long as she is beautiful, a man will marry her. Walt Disney versions reflect American society's values. These movies reflect the roles men and women are expected to play in American society. The man is the dominant part of the relationship and the woman is the obedient, weak part of the relationship. The woman bears and cares for the children, the man brings home the money. Is this not what American society is about? Walt Disney seems to think so. The women's movement knows this is how American society is, which is why the women's movement is working diligently to empower and educate women so that one day Walt Disney movies will reflect empowered women defending themselves without the aid of a man. Movies

that will reflect women working together to fight evil, rather than woman oppressing woman or man oppressing woman.

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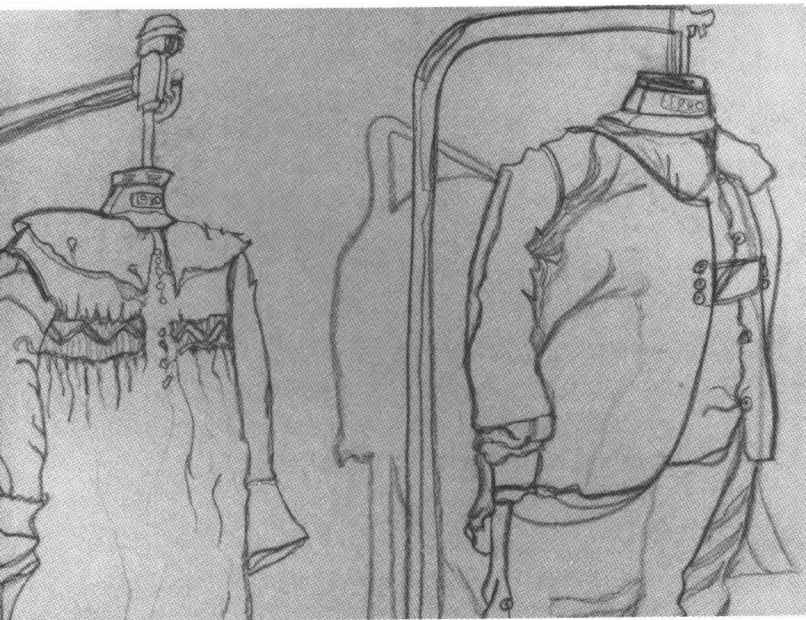
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Thanksgiving

Uncle Jack stands near the mashed potatoes
drooling steams of foam down his dimpled chin
he helps himself to thirds and fourths
glass clinking in his palm
he tries to talk
with a floppy lead tougue
he's not all there, you know
a lot of the time
his words seem to fall
out of his mouth in spurts
obscene and slurred to the tone
glistening pale on his hunch back
broken nose contort
he's uneven
and scowling at the cranberry mold
face warped like
the vinyl collection
i've recently inherited
Uncle Jack drags a greasy
plastic comb
through white whisps of limp hair

buttons a bored cotton shirt
halfway up his chest
and after a tip-toe trip
to the men's room
zips shit-brown
hued plaid pants
to his belly
breath pierces my gut
and I choke

my type

clear hair and muscle she
scintillates she flexes
under me, two sizes too small
and without a bulk or girth
I diminish under the
waves of her length

I'll quit smoking, I'll do
sit-ups, start weight lifting
throw out the aqua-net and tuck
in my shirt
Jane shaves her head and
says she's buying a hat
to keep her ears warm
says she
learned about credit unions today,
says she should write that down

tired warm with the
newness of infatuation
and damn if I don't need a smoke

exhausted like
the kind where your eyes
burn beneath cheeks
kissing her in
dorm halls and lounges
in the pre-dawn blue hour
where time should pause but doesn't
we're become irresponsible,
responsive

I disappear under sleep
deprivation and
the sting of lips
tight from all night long

in the morning
there is a blur of frozen ashtrays
outside in the chill where
it's not so cold
anymore

Recess

another gray day drug out
on a giggling playground
i'm blanketed under the jungle gym for
an endless invisible twenty-five mintues
rocking on bent backbone
hiding my too-skinny ankles
head in goosebumped knees

girls jump rope and hop scotch
stomping over to the geo-dome where
i'm curled up all over myself
they drape around my cage and
hang fat hands inside

I greet with a white blank gaze
though the hot-pink chafing
of chubby cheeks
betrays the posture
I'm trying so hard to uphold
they mouth bad bad words

fingers curled round
dull and cringing bars

under the angles of regular metal
I sit boiling hot and gagging up
on the onset of sobs i've swallowed
vultures till the shrill bell
when at last they flip off over
frill and formal shoulders

after recess, I am late
strolling off the playground
with the brand new string
of scars and eyesores or
sound snuffed out too soon
the crunch of pale gravel
re-arranged under the weight of
a hundred years of primary school
in sockless sneakers

one more day i'm playing
sick with a hard gloss gleam
getting better at stiffened eyes

doubling over my belly
breathing short
the nurse buys my time and lets me go with
a tight shake of her red head and
I skip on home to where
gray days rise to black
beneath my pillow

Ninth Street

and the air is missing
an the main drag
in this small town

where the caffeine buzzes away on
laminated paintings and
crayola prophecies
I cannot be this gloss you're wanting
I cannot place these bathroom dreams

where someone has written in
ball-point plaster
under the nervous flicker of loose light bulbs
'what exactly
do you think you're creating?'

well, not much, sistah,
plastah sistah, you're
forever shaded into polished gleam
of fluorescent-wide height and
underlined sight

do I rant and rave on
nothing's sour dreams,
try too hard
in linen and denim,
do I not belong here
among you and your
glass-rimmed plaid?

ahh, I know what ya mean, sistah,
you're tellin' me
to cut my hair in all the wrong places
you're just my lust
that's funny when
it's all dressed up

splat and I'm
off and receding
in my blue-yellow lining
made for notes and
insights I've yet to uncover
like how I wish I could not care
that you want to
subtract from my place
and I'm too petty on the

blue-tiled floor

cuz I brought it up
all this shit I've swallowed
spit-shined the floor afterwards
staring at the fabric on your knees
built on igloo home, inventing survival
where only I could spin and still be
almost warm

always was the anti-anti
never stopped breathing when the air
turned lethal
lived like a queen
cuz my lungs were liquid silver
still got the scars from your mercury welds

and I wear them like a badge to boast
when I'm too hot to trot
or be reasoned with or not
when I got a half-track comin' up my ass
pushing up and over on your flimsy-skinned
meniscus

Mobile Homes

Mommy shoots up on a
speedbump hiss
oil lamp matts shag carpet
spilt and bored
fistjaw swells and
her breasts shrink
back into the heart
scene's inspired by public waste
and rows and rows
of mobile homes
where walls moan and soak
somebody mend his
infant softspot
'cause the skull like
a sponge drinks her
milk that's somehow dried
red onto the carpet

The Weekend

she sits cross-legged with good posture
and fitting teeth
sweat pours into the cup I serve her
she lingers, she pulls,
on a body of work,
due Friday

why does she stare at my half-and-half and think
of my cream?

home
on marbled surfaces we cling
it's all sweet hope and damned daydreams
cuz i'm one shade less than all that's good
not the angel on her x-mas tree.

in the left slant of diagonal iris
she leaves on a Monday with tears in her hair
as luck would have it
or take it
or leave it

maybe I should fall for
the lip lies and lullabies
just once and smile
the next morning
at the little girl in oversized boots.

was enough
to fill our heads with conversation.
Finding love for the first time
chasing a dream...
a girl's dream
of staying young forever
challenging the time that wants to
move
forward
when all I want to do is run back and
never
change
So when I'm in your arms again
I can
work my way up
to the smell of your freshly shaven
skin
to the spot that makes you squirm
in my arms...
I gently
peck
your ear
your nose
your eyelids

and finally...your forehead
like an angel giving its blessing upon
sweetness and serenity
In turn
feeling
bare-boned
stripped down
crazy
yet, very safe
while you whisper your thoughts to me
and I use your arm and chest like the
love seat
in my living room with worn edges.
You stroke my hair
and call me baby...your baby

III

No one looks into me the way you do
"In your eyes I see what's on my mind
you're got me wild
turned around inside" know.
A reassuring touch to make me
believe

In a love like no other I've come to
A girl's dream is
to watch you
to listen
and to feel you again.
Loving someone as right as loving you
to feel good about it
because I was good at loving you.

IV

Through the years I've learned
that being lost in something
can cause more pain than it's worth.
Investing time
hoping
for that one day to
just
happen
when you could be concentrating
on the here and now
enjoying the simple things
like...how I smile
I laugh

and can't remember the last time I felt
so comfortable
with someone.
I can look at you
and know
I touched you
as you did, me
making me a better person for loving you.
How can you be sad about something as beautiful
as that?
So I thank you...
with everything I have
for agreeing in the idea that we had something
worth saving
for wiping the tears away
every time you make me laugh
for the peck on the cheek when I leave your house
and for calling me baby as you hang up the phone.
You let me know that
a girl's dream is worth keeping
to believe in a love for a person and
seeing it grow
to levels you never imagined were

possible with

another

But most importantly,
to realize that sincere love can exist
when to kissing and the touching
stops
and yet the innocence that you once begin with
can remain.

V

My mom says
there is always one you
may end up leaving behind
but will never forget.
With this one, I believe that may be true.

Untitled

I can smell the thick blanket of night. It covers Arden Avenue as the shriek of laughter runs wild around Arden Avenue.

“Jennie, time to come in!” My mom’s voice rings down the street to let me know it’s time to come in for my bath and to get ready for bed. I sigh because the older kids just started a new game of free-the-bunch. I walk slowly up the curved road, I stop and pick a dandelion and play the mama-had-a-baby-and-her-head-popped-off game all the way home. I laugh as I come up to the Grandpa’s house. I stop, wave a huge hello, and scream “See ya tomorrow grandpa!” Then I run as fast as I can into my mom’s arms and she waves goodnight to grandpa too.

My real grandpas all died before I was born, before I got to meet them. I know that wasn’t the case for all the kids in my neighborhood, but the man that lived across the street from me was

everyone’s “honorary” grandpa.

He was an older man with icicle white hair, so to me he could have been one hundred. He was the one that looked over the little kids while we played night games, or tennis in the street, or laughed at our reactions to the cold water as we ran through our sprinklers in the summertime. Our parents always told us we were lucky to have him as a part of our neighborhood.

Grandpa loved to sit on his lawn chair in the middle of his driveway in the summer heat and watch us play. Grandpa’s house was the only house in our neighborhood that had a short, flat driveway that was perfect for sitting close enough to the street to watch but far enough away where he wasn’t invading our space. He knew exactly where that spot was. His driveway was always open for long chats and nice visits. He could listen to me talk about the third grade all day. I think our visits made him happy, happy to know that we cared enough about him to tell him the important things in life; like third grade. When I was very

little I would crawl up in his lap in the driveway while he was sitting in his chair and he'd say "Hey there, how's my girl?" And then we'd just talk.

We would have treats on his driveway all the time. Mostly graham crackers or tootsie rolls, but every once and a while he'd break out the ice cream. It seems like the perfect treat after a long, playful day in the summer sun, right? Not if the flavor's rum raisin. I hated that flavor and still do to this day. Still, we'd eat every bite so we wouldn't hurt his feelings.

He loved everyone in our neighborhood. He would talk to our parents for hours about things that seemed so unimportant. Like retirement and how happy he was that the house was paid off and that we were so lucky to have such beautiful families. Grandpa's family came every once in a while and only stayed about a week and then did not come again for a couple years. I think he told me they lived in Florida. When I'd ask about them coming to visit, he always said, "Do you know how far Florida is from Minnesota Jennie? Very, very

far!" I guess I didn't want him to be lonely. My dad always said that grandpa could never get lonely with kids like us around to keep him busy.

Grandpa's face was really soft, except for his salt and pepper colored whiskers on his face. His hands were equally as soft and were old and weathered. When he would give me airplane rides and spin me around I felt like I could fly up and around and touch the sky. His hands were so soft because they were on their last layer of skin. That's what I thought, at least.

The garden was the best part of grandpa's house. It was overflowing with big bunches of iris and roses that were so tall they would dance above me and play in the sky. They were every color of the rainbow and then some. The most beautiful lavender and white iris' and soft shell pink and deep blue, red roses. The smell back there was always fresh and the fragrance of fresh flowers engulfed you into this magical place.

There were paths in-between the rows of flowers and my best friend Megan, who lived next door to me, would always go over there

with me to see if there were any new flowers or colors we hadn't seen yet. Everyday a new color broke through to play in the sunlight. We would look at and smell those flowers for hours. I think that was grandpa's family. He took care of the flowers like they were his babies.

Grandpa moved away about five years ago to live in a nursing home because he got too old to take good care of himself. Someone else moved into his house, remolded and painted and yes, took out his beautiful gardens. They probably wouldn't have put as much into them as grandpa did anyhow. We haven't heard from him in years and it makes me sad to think that I don't even know if he is living or not. He was our guardian angel and I wonder if the kids that are growing up in my neighborhood now realize what they're missing by not having grandpa around. What else is funny about grandpa is that to this day I'm not sure if I even know what his real name is. It might be Bill, but to us he was always grandpa and always will be.



Downtown Omaha at a Glance

A Taste of the South

Cornmeal. Butter. Milk. An egg, or maybe two, I don't know. Throw it together and what do you get? Cornbread, of course. Just simple cornbread. No big deal, right? For my friend Lynn, it was *never* just simple cornbread. It was a measure of life's current worth, an exclamation, a declaration of the good, the bad, and the very, very ugly. I think it all began one night when Lynn's cousin Jodi had one too many glasses of moonshine and beer. Out of nowhere he began to announce to everyone at Lynn's birthday party, "Come out, cornbread! If you are scared, say y'are!" No one had a clue just exactly what he was getting at, but he was awfully persistent in his demand of this new "acquaintance." Before long, he had coined what could've been one of the latest slang terms to be devoured by teenage youth across America, if we hadn't been stuck over 4,100 miles up a mountainside somewhere along the Cullasaja River. Still, for us, he managed to change the dynamics of a simple side dish for an

entire summer. From there on out, Lynn and everyone else referred to everyone as "cornbread." If you're well-liked, you were greeted with, "What are you dooin', CORNBREAD!" If you were not part of the so-called family, it was only a matter of time before you were hit by the sound of, "You'd best be skinnin' out of here, CORNBREAD," and possibly Jodi's or one of the other many cousins' fists smacking into your right eye socket. Locals were "cornbread-eaters" and tourists were always tagged with the glamorous label of, big surprise, "cornbread-eaters." One afternoon in particular, we were on our way to Bryson City when Lynn successfully yelled out her car window to every poor unsuspecting porch sitter, "Get off that porch, CORNBREAD!" One whole entire hour of nothing but sheer cornbread bliss in a car. I always knew there was no logic in the use of the term. I think at first I tried like hell to figure out the slant of the word. Was it a complement? a put down? But, the fact was, everyone there ate and loved cornbread. We served it like hot cakes in the

restaurant where Lynn and I worked to both locals and tourists alike. The fact was, there was no logic. The only thing you could count on was that when cornbread was in the room, whether on a plate, in the form of a cousin, a friend, or the next sucker to get T-boned in the jaw, it didn't matter. When cornbread was around, life was good.

