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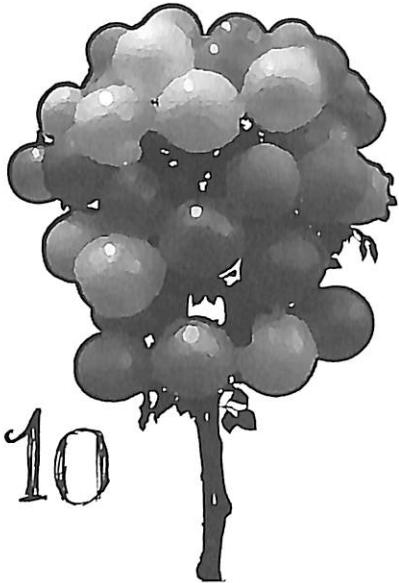
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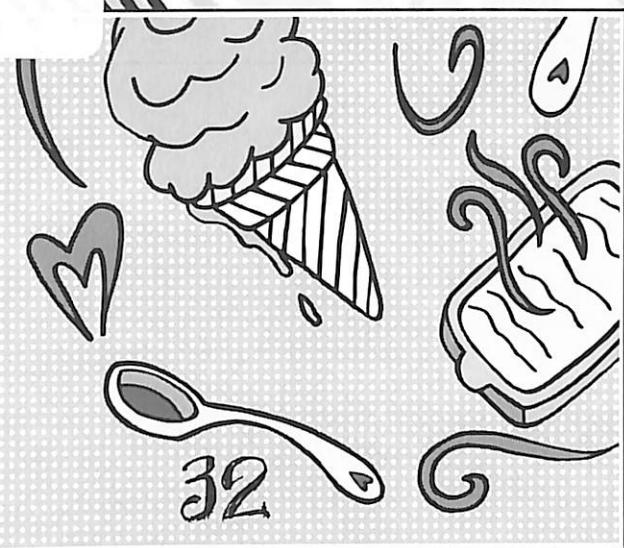


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M.D.

# The Fall Of...

She woke to the sight of rickety, dirty shack walls, the same sight she saw before falling asleep the night before. She could see dim rays of sunlight peeking through the cracks in the delicate walls and reckoned it was nearly six in the morning. She cursed herself for waking up so late. As she rolled off of her mat on the floor she glanced over at the old man who had been sharing her not so humble abode for the past few months. Actually it was his home not hers, but he insisted on letting her call it her own as well. The he in question was named Marcello and he was in his 70's, which was amazing considering the times, and almost completely blind. Almost, because he could see some fuzzy balls of light if it was bright enough outside. She had no idea how he has managed to stay alive this long with his near nonexistent eyesight. As she began slipping her clothes on, a thin black shirt and equally thin green pants, Marcello began to stir. Esther? Marcello called out. "Hm?" She replied, looking over at the old man. Have you gone out for breakfast yet? "No... I just woke up actually. I'll go now, be back soon." "Woke up late, huh? Well don't get lost out there," he replied, cracking a smile.

She responded with a grin, even though Marcello couldn't see it, and pushed back the thick blanket that served as the door. The dirt streets were relatively deserted with only a few women mingling around preparing to open their meager shops for the day. Esther waved at the women, a few of them waving back, but the most of them just ignored her. People were so unhappy these days. She walked down the path leading away from the residential area and towards the market street. The markets were pathetic things really, offering half rotted fruit and withering vegetables. People really did try to offer good quality food, but it was difficult when there was no rain for months on end. They also had a butcher shop which, if you were lucky, you could find a nice chunk of chicken. Though being able to afford that nice chunk of chicken was another thing. The small town's one lonely butcher shop, offered cheaper, ambiguous meats of questionable content, if you couldn't afford the chicken or dried beef.

Esther made her way towards the tiniest fruit stand near the middle of the strip. It was so small that it was sometimes overlooked, which meant that there was always some fruit left by the end of the day. The young woman who ran the stand always handed out the left over fruit to the lingering children in the alley ways. Esther greeted the woman and looked over what the stand had to offer: pears, apples, small peaches which weren't quite ripe, and even a few blue berries. After pondering over what she preferred at the moment she picked up a few apples for herself and two pears for Marcello. Esther dumped out her money and counted it to give to the woman. She had no coins left now. The woman gave a bright smile as she took the small coins. Esther loved this woman, this brave woman who dared to smile at everyone she came in contact with, no matter what her day was like. Esther left the market and headed home.

As Esther made her way back towards her dilapidated neighborhood she felt the presence of someone behind her. A quick glance confirmed it was a tiny child, no older than five years. She couldn't tell the child's gender, and she only noticed the wide hazel eyes watching her from underneath thick black hair. Esther knew what the child was planning beneath those dim eyes, for it was something she did often as a child: pick pocketing. Pick pocketing was more of a way of life around here, because most of the people who didn't own a shop had no other choice. Esther let children pick money off of her if she knew she only had a little left; she felt bad for those poor, hungry beings, especially if they were orphans. Remembering she had no money left, Esther turned around to face the child, who stopped dead in their tracks and those wide eyes got impossibly bigger with fear. "I don't have any money left, kid. I spent it all on these," she said to the child, holding up the fruit.

The child's eyes locked onto the fruit, practically begging with its gaze. Esther felt her chest tighten; she couldn't stand the thought of showing a starving child food and not sharing. After a quick debate with herself she gave in, and held out one of the apples to the child. Those dim, hazel eyes became brilliant and cheerful. The child grabbed the apple slowly, gently, as if to say "Can I really?" When the apple was firmly in the child's grip was when the child began to eat. Esther smiled and asked a question she might regret later. "What's your name?" The child looked up at her from beneath dark eyelashes and answered quietly between bites of the apple, "Alby." Alby; this was a boy then. "Well, Alby, I am going to leave now ok," Esther replied. "OK. Bye bye Miss. Thanks!"

With that Esther walked back home, a slight smile on her face, because she was proud of the boy. He had manners, which you never find these days. She tried not to think too much about Alby, even though his hungry face still haunted her. When Esther arrived back at her home she found Marcello outside playing his beloved sitar. At the sound of her approach he spoke up. "Well what took you so long?" he asked in a playful tone, "I was getting worried you actually got lost." Esther rolled her eyes and put the pear in his hand, making him smile yet again. He set down his strange instrument and began to munch on the pear. Esther took a seat next to him on the ground and watched as people began to wake up and come out of their homes. "So what took you so long then?" Marcello asked after a moment, still slowly eating his pear. "Well... I had a moment of weakness," she said with a hint of embarrassment behind her tone. "Oh?" "I... I stopped to give an apple to a little boy who was following me on the street." Tsk, tsk young Esther. What have I told you about feeding strays?" His words sounded cruel, but his tone was playful. "Esther simply sighed and grumbled, which made Marcello laugh. "You would make a good mother you know," Marcello mentioned after a moment. "I am not going to bring a child into this world," Esther spit back, her words laced with anger. The thought of her own flesh and blood having to endure starvation and an early death made her blood run cold. She hates the world she was born in, and wishes her childhood could have been like Marcello's.

When she first met Marcello she was simply asking for a place to stay for a night, and ended up staying for nearly four months. The first night she was there she asked him how old he was, because old age was a glorious thing after all. After responding he was in his early 70s, possibly 72 but he wasn't really too sure, Esther's eyes widened. 72! That meant he was alive before this ragged country went to hell in a handbag. She was so eager, so excited that she began to ask him numerous questions about his childhood, about a life without poverty, a life with rain every month, and a life without worrying about if you could eat the next day.

This story he told her: about 56 years ago, Marcello was 16 years old and enjoying his first car. He described his nights as a teenager: car rides, movies, and blaring music. All enjoyed with his many friends. He told about how his parents made him get a job because they couldn't afford to pay gas for his car anymore, because gas was now \$4.68 a gallon. He told about how he thought it was so unfair and how he complained about having to get a job. When he turned 18 he realized how stupid he had been, and he apologized to his parents for being so ignorant. Two months later gasoline skyrocketed to \$5.99 a gallon and Marcello began to take the bus to work. Conflict sprung up between oil rich countries and the United States; gas went up to \$6.75 and the busses started charging more. Things kept getting worse and worse. By the time Marcello was 24, gasoline was only purchased by the wealthy and the president. Public transportation was swamped and wages began to drop. Marcello made less money with his degree than he did as a high school student. Riots broke out in all major cities, and the news was crawling with death tolls and the rising dangers of the quality of water. At 25, Marcello lost his girl friend in a flash mob. In 4 years the United States was reduced to poverty and all the oil on Earth was gone. Other major countries began to fall apart as quickly as the U.S. did. China, the UK, Japan, and India, their governments crumbled, and millions died.

One lonely night in his small apartment, the power finally shut off. He had been without running water for seven weeks, and it was only a matter of time before electricity followed suit. He heard his neighbors yelling in frustration behind thin walls. Not long after that all hell broke loose. Marcello was awoken from his half sleep by the sound of gunfire. It wasn't the usual pistol shots he often heard down in the streets, but a more rapid shot. It was a machine gun. The door to Marcello's apartment was flung open and a heavily armored soldier ordered him out. As Marcello tried to grab his meager belongings he was roughly shoved out by the aforementioned soldier, without so much as another glance at his now former home. Once on the streets he saw thousands upon thousands of people being herded together in a large pen like structure. "They were treating us like animals now?" He thought. Marcello was shoved again in the direction of the massive pile of human beings. It took hours, but by three in the morning everyone was out of the building. Then they did the unexpected: they blew up the apartment complex. Explosion after explosion rocked the town. Not only were they destroying their apartment, but also the surrounding apartments as well. That night was filled with the cries of women and children and the shouts of the soldiers.

As Marcello later found out his entire hometown was being cleared of all human beings. The wealthy and the poor were all cast out to survive in surrounding small towns. Some people even went off into the forest to make a living. Marcello had no money, but a kind family took him in. They also took numerous other families, and barely managed to feed the nearly two dozen people who took refuge in their large home. Marcello and his former neighbors watched as an invisible barrier was built around the city. Then one night on the radio

everything was explained. The President's voice was heard throughout all the cities that night. He announced that he planned to build super cities, called Urban Domes, to help the society. These domes would hold what American life used to be like: cars, schools, jobs, and of course food. But there was the catch, the thing that made the new perfect future impossible for most to achieve. There were numerous requirements to get into these Urban Domes. You had to have a family of four or less; they didn't want large families eating all the food. You had to be a certain ethnicity: preferably white, but a few African Americans would be allowed, just so there would be some diversity. You and your entire family had to be completely healthy, not even something as simple as a cold; they didn't want anyone infecting their perfect society. And, here's the kicker, you had to be able to pay \$2000 to even past the gates. The entire room was filled with despair, for everyone in the room knew they didn't qualify. No jobs meant no money and none of them had a job except for the man who graciously let them all stay in his home. When the president was done talking, the radio shut off and everyone went to sleep.

Two years later most of the residents had left their host family, and Marcello was preparing to move out as well. After that Marcello's story was mostly about his travels and watching the world crumble. Twelve years after he left the caring family, he lost his eyesight after witnessing a nuclear bomb destroy a nearby town. He was miles away but he stared it in the face and he has paid for it. Ever since then he has been traveling, picking up acquaintances that help him because of his disability. At 68 years he settled down here, where someone graciously gave him this shack he called home.

He showed Esther his keepsakes: pictures of his mother and former friends, his favorite CDs that will never be played again, and most importantly the ring he was going to give his girlfriend. He saved up for years to get a ring, and he was never able to give it to her. Esther could hear the sadness in his voice when he spoke of his former lover. She tried to change the subject when it came to that.

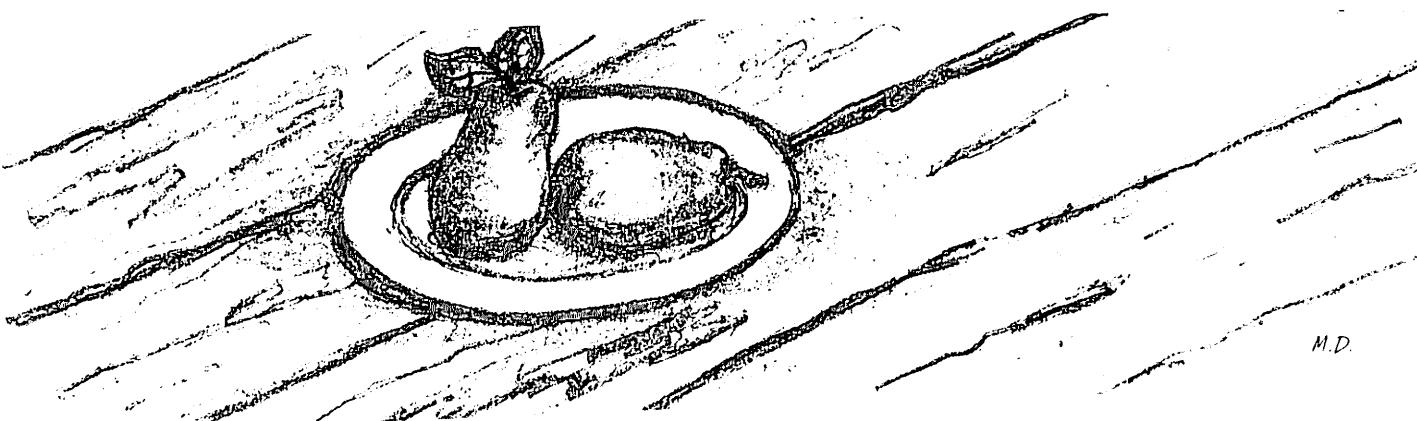
The rest of their afternoon was spent observing people and playing Marcello's sitar for a few coins. They did manage to scrape up three quarters, which could buy them another apple for tomorrow. Esther stripped out of her day clothes to her underwear and crawled under the thin blanket on the floor. She adjusted herself until she was comfortable and tried to sleep. Sleep, though, evaded her. It always does. Marcello on the other hand was sound asleep on his makeshift cot, snoring softly.

After much tossing and turning she drifted off to a dreamless sleep. She awoke to see the sunlight streaming through her thin curtains. She rubbed the sleep from her eyes and rolled out of bed. She heard her mother banging on the door, "Esther! Esther wake up you will be late!"

She moved slowly as if still in a dream, and in a way she was. The only thing on her mind was the fleeting memories of the dream she was roused from. Making her way into the shower she continued to think on her dream. She was still in a daze as she walked down the stairs to the kitchen to eat breakfast.

"Good morning, dear, I am glad you are finally up!" her mother exclaimed as she set her food in front of her. She stared at the food and thought of the little boy in her dream, Alby, who would have possibly killed for this meal. Esther switched on the TV and turned it to the morning news. She listened to the perfect blonde news caster prattle on about so-and-so who cheated on what's-his-face and how President Whatever has plans to travel to Japan. Then the news caster said something that made Esther instantly sick.

"New reports show that gas could get up to \$5 a gallon by this summer. Here are some tips to help you save." She said the last part with a disgusting smile. Esther pushed her food away; she had suddenly lost her appetite. She was assaulted by the memory of Marcello's tragic story and how it all started with the rise in gas prices.



# Life of a Dyslexic

**M**y mom knew something was wrong with me during my years at Highland Baptist Daycare. She tells me that the teachers kept sending notes home about me. Quite frankly I didn't believe her. Well, until two weeks ago she found the notes and showed them to me. You would not believe what they said, "Please go over with Fletcher the classroom rules, Fletcher is kicking, biting, punching, spitting, throwing food, but he takes a good nap and eats a good lunch." When I read what I had done, I thought my goodness I sure was bad. But I ate a good lunch and slept good and these are two things I still do really well.

Well my life continued to rock on thru elementary until the second grade. That was when my parents took me to be tested in Jackson. It was then my life with Dyslexia began and became a part of who I am today. I began to realize that this was the reason why I couldn't copy notes off the board and that I would leave words out of sentences when I read. I would leave out small words such as the, and, but, and has. When I did read to my mom the words would constantly move around and I would have to adjust my head, my eyes, the book and I would never remember what I had read.

My memory is blurry when it comes to thinking about how my parents told me about the Dyslexia and also the ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). My mom tells me they sat down with me one night and told me that God had given me a special gift and it was Dyslexia. She told me that when my brain was forming in her stomach that God decided then for me to be special. They told me that many people had this and they were very smart and able to do many things. I really didn't understand what this meant. I just knew that every night was miserable with doing homework and I just knew that this couldn't be the way it was going to be forever.

After this we went to a medical doctor and I was put on medication. I had to try multiple medications until we found the right one. I tried Straterra but it made me sick and have a really bad headache. We finally found the right medicine that helped me to stay calm and focus on the board, teachers and work to be done.

Second grade went on and I continued to improve somewhat until the fourth grade. My parents heard about a special school in Laurel, Mississippi. The teacher's name was Mrs. Billie Hill. She also had Dyslexia and had been taught a special way of learning, Orton Gillingham method of learning. So in the fourth grade I started going to school in Laurel four days a week; we traveled with 3 other friends. It was a tough year until I figured out how to learn my way. It was nice to be in school with other people that had the same problem.

After spending my fourth grade school year in Laurel, I came back to the fifth grade at Lamar. During that year it was easiest year that I had ever had. I had really great teachers and a lot of help from them. I had a science teacher who tutored me every day to help me with homework, study for tests and prepare for class the next day. I made straight A's that year, I had never made A's before, so it was good for me. I was still eating good and sleeping good.

Well we moved to West Lauderdale in the sixth grade second semester. It was a lot easier coming to the block system where we only had 4 classes to focus on. I am now a junior at West Lauderdale making A's and B's by myself. I also get help from my teachers. I don't have to take as much medicine as I did in my junior high years but still need a little help. My teachers at West Lauderdale are so helpful and are always willing to be there for me when I am struggling and in need of help.

Life with Dyslexia is a lot easier than it was when I was smaller. I can stay focused on what I am doing and feel that I can accomplish what I have started. I still work on my ADHD problems but it is easier now that I play football and put out as much effort at weight lifting and running. I still have troubles with my Dyslexia when trying to understand processes and words as well as my homework; I sometimes have trouble in football learning plays. I get them confused and backwards. I managed to do OK and want everyone to know that you can achieve anything even with special needs. God made me special for a reason, and I can't wait to find out what is next.

This is Fletcher McKee, and this is my story "Life of a Dyslexic." I hope everyone will enjoy it and realize that nothing is impossible. Remember "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."



WXVS

# the lost bubblegum trees

She was once the princess of what little remains of the land of bubblegum trees  
 But her reign was lost long ago to the wilds of her lost sanctuary  
 And in the end, she cried a river and flooded the seven seas,  
 And spent her youth piecing back the invisible towns she drowned.

On top the world, the princess's fairy wings sparkled in the sunlight  
 And caught the eye of the boy who would trap her in her own nets.  
 He shifted every gear in that little head till she couldn't tell between day and night.  
 With her world a jumble so, she shut it down to meet this one anew.

And with each sacrifice and toil, he ran a little further.  
 She let go of her fairy wings, plastic crowns, and glitter pens.  
 And with no defense, this world soon crushed her  
 As that little boy inched his way out the back door.

One day he let himself out to run after the riches of the next princess.  
 And I was left with the weeping of a heartbroken child  
 With whom the world she slipped into was only distress.  
 My fairy princess died that day to leave a frightened child in her place.

Storybooks, gumdrops, and teddy bears were no more  
 As she once again packed bags to find another world.  
 His picture with that cynical smile he always wore,  
 Was replaced with another's who'd soon walk out the same door.

She was once the princess of what little remains of the land of bubblegum trees  
 But her reign was lost long ago to the wilds of her lost sanctuary  
 And in the end, she cried a river and flooded the seven seas,  
 And spent her youth piecing back the invisible towns she drowned.



# A WORLD BORN OF FIRE

WILLIAM LEE DELINGER

Ignatius gazed over the barren wasteland, the falling sun casting strange shadows across the desert. Nightfall was fast approaching and with it would come the outlaws. Ignatius needed to get to higher ground and he needed to get there now. Peering through the scope of his rifle, he attempted to find a suitable place to bed down for the night. The land to the west was completely flat, no defensive ground to speak of at all. Damn.

Ignatius sat down the rifle, cursing. He hated to backtrack in the middle of a mission, but there was little choice. An extra day on the journey to Deseret would be exponentially safer than going to sleep with no cover. Outlaw bands raided and pillaged all across the land that had once been the United States of America. Leaving the safety of a city's walls was tantamount to asking for bandits to take whatever you owned. The only way to prevent a raid is to travel in large numbers with heavily armed men. A lone wanderer like Ignatius would be an easy target to even the most incompetent outlaw bands. Or so some had thought.

He had always buried the bodies afterwards.

He turned from his perch back to the east, once again peering through his scope. The magnification was only eight times normal human eyesight, but it was enough to see closely for a half mile or so. It was then that Ignatius noticed something that shouldn't have been there.

A small beacon of light illuminated the twilight almost four hundred meters from where Ignatius stood. It was a gasless lantern, one of the few surviving remnants of the times before Armageddon. None of the outlaw bands that roamed the Unclaimed Lands could have had that kind of technology. It could only mean one thing. Apparently, he hadn't been as careful as he had thought.

Ignatius ran as fast as he could through the sparse outgrowth of trees, desperately hoping the consuming darkness would hide his movements long enough to circle around behind his pursuer. Reaching a small ridge covered in trees, Ignatius stopped suddenly, trying to find the source of the light. It soon came into view, bouncing slightly. Rider on horseback, Ignatius thought. Not the best way to sneak up on someone, but a hell of a lot easier than walking.

The rider soon passed underneath the small ridge. Ignatius crouched down amongst the stunted undergrowth, steadying his rifle with his right hand and reaching for the trigger with his left. For just a moment he considered the possibility that this man was just a weary traveler and not an agent from one of the rival states. But a man in Ignatius' line of work didn't grow old by not being paranoid.

The last dying rays of the sun gave Ignatius just enough light to see the man through his scope. Breathing slowly, he moved the crosshairs over the man's right shoulder. The weapon fired with a loud crack that broke through the tranquil dusk like a bolt of lightning striking a tree. The man was thrown from his mount and hit the ground hard.

Ignatius broke from his covered vantage point, rifle still poised over the prone body of the man. The horse had turned and ran at the sound of the rifle shot, hooves clapping madly against the packed earth of the dusty trail. Ignatius approached the body cautiously, not wanting to be shot in the man's death throes. He flipped the body over with the toe of his boot. What he saw turned his blood colder than a desert night.

Stitched across the man's tunic was a large embroidered cross the color of blood. The symbol of the New Catholic Church.

Ignatius put his boot on the throat of the man, increasing his weight until he saw the man grimace.

"I know you can hear me, Sicarius. Do not pretend you do not." The man on the ground stirred.



When he looked at Ignatius it was with a hatred that was almost tangible.

"So. You are Ignatius Knight." His tone was conversational, despite the excruciating pain he must have been in from his wound. "The Fathers tell stories of you to scare the children."

"Perhaps you should have listened a bit closer, Sicarius. Now tell me why you were following me. What does the Church know of my mission to Deseret?"

The Church assassin laughed until a wave of pain overwhelmed him. "You should know better than that, infidel. I will die from blood loss in a few moments and there is nothing you can do in that time to make me talk."

Ignatius knew this to be true. Church agents were trained to withstand the most agonizing torture imaginable without divulging anything. They were legendary in that respect.

Ignatius' trained eyes searched over the body of the Church assassin, searching for any hidden weapons. The bulge under his vest meant a large caliber automatic. The thickened sides of his boots meant knives in ankle sheathes. The loose sleeves of the tunic meant a small caliber pistol in a wrist holster. Standard armament for any field agent.

The assassin coughed hard, blood leaking from his mouth. "You may leave me here to die, infidel. But there will be another to take my place, and another after that. One of us will succeed where so many have failed."

Ignatius smirked, rifle never wavering from the dying man's face. "I welcome the challenge, Sicarius." Ignatius began to back away, becoming just another shadow in the night. But the assassin was not done speaking.

"You were once one of us, Ignatius Knight. Yet now you carry out the Empire's orders. Come back into the light and the Church will receive you with open arms. Continue on your path to darkness and you will spend eternity in flames." Ignatius fixed the fallen agent with a murderous stare bordering on hatred.

"I was never one of you. Give my regards to the Devil."

Ignatius continued backing away for a hundred steps or so, stepping carefully over brush and under branches. He found a suitable place to bed down for the night atop a small hill covered in trees. Ignatius knew he could not risk a fire this deep into the Unclaimed Lands. It would draw outlaws like moths to a flame.

Unfurling a dirty brown blanket from his pack, he draped it over the ground. It was the only bed he had known for longer than he cared to remember. Pulling two pairs of claymore mines from his satchel, he placed them around his bedroll, stretching a tripwire between them. He then propped his rifle against a nearby tree, easily within arm's reach. Next came the forty-five caliber automatic hidden in a holster at his lower back. Keeping it in hand, safety off, he lay down on the blanket, using his pack of supplies as a prop for his head. Even in this relative safety, Ignatius was still restless, ears tuned to the slightest sound of a twig snapping underfoot, eyes searching the moonless night for any motion, reflexes ready to attack the moment something came into his field of vision. The world after Armageddon was one of harsh rules and paranoia; the only ones to prosper were the quickest and the most heavily armed.

Growing up in an orphanage inside the city walls of New Orleans, Ignatius had heard only tales of the Pre-Armageddon world, when America was a superpower, a land of opportunity. Over two hundred years ago, that changed when a coalition of Middle Eastern nations sent a nuclear weapon to each of the fifty most populated cities in America. Over two hundred and ten million died in the attack. Seventy-five million more died as a result of the fallout. Countless others died in the wave of barbarism that followed such a cataclysmic event. Bands of outlaws took to the remaining roads, stealing from others so that they may live.

Out of that chaos arose several fractious states. The state of New Orleans controlled most of the Mississippi Delta from the coast north to Memphis. The area once called New England had pulled together to form a collection of independent city-states based on ancient Greece. The west coast of California was ruled by nothing more than anarchy, new warlords popping up once or twice a week. The former states of Montana and Texas had broken away early after Armageddon, creating republics. And then there was the American Empire.

It was a small empire, composed of most of the southern and southeastern parts of the former United States of America. It was also Ignatius' new home.

The orphanage had served as a recruitment pool for the Church's espionage corps. From an early age, the Church Fathers had trained him in the arts of assassination and espionage, taught him languages, customs, and the martial arts. He had been well on his way to becoming the youngest full member of the feared Sicarii in the two hundred year history of the New Catholic Church. He had even been accepted into the presence of the Cardinal Gregory III himself. The Cardinal was the authority of the Church, wielding almost as much powers as Lord of New Orleans. But then seventeen year old Ignatius' world had come crashing down around him.

Public executions had been a major part of New Orleans society ever since Armegeddon. Ignatius had seen many murderers, rapists and thieves swing from the hangman's noose, but the day that Anton Harper died had been different.

Ignatius had watched the young man led to the gallows in chains, head bowed in silent fury. Anton Harper was young, only a few years older than Ignatius. They had played many times together at the orphanage until the Church had come for Ignatius. Anton's only crime had been angering one of the nobles of Lord James' court. The Duke of Natchez's daughter had fallen in love with Anton. When the Duke found out, he had Anton arrested for seducing a woman of noble birth, a death sentence for any commoner. It was then, as he watched his former friend slowly die from asphyxiation, that Ignatius decided that he could never willingly serve the Cardinal or Lord James again. He left the state of New Orleans in the dead of night and never looked back. The last eight years he had spent working against the state of New Orleans and the New Catholic Church as an agent of the American Empire.

Ignatius' musings brought him back to the present and his current mission, the journey to the state of Deseret. Deseret had been founded a few years after Armegeddon. Joseph Young, a descendant of Brigham Young, was allegedly visited by an angel the night before Armegeddon and was told to prepare to reform the nation of Deseret in its' aftermath. Prophet Young, as he came to be called, had ruled the territory harshly, and with no mercy for transgressors. There was one punishment in Deseret; death, for any and all crimes. The current Prophet, the Prophet Stevens, carried out Prophet Young's laws with a fervor that bordered on mass homicide.

The American Empire cared little if the Prophet chose to kill his subjects. It was the State of Deseret's nuclear program that interested the Emperor of the Senate. That was Ignatius' mission; to recover any files relating to Project Manhattan and sabotage the Deseretan endeavor.

And if he saw a chance to assassinate the Prophet, so be it.

Several restless hours later, Ignatius awoke with the breaking of the dawn, the reddish light of the sun cascading through the golden leaves of the trees. He rubbed his eyes with the heel of his hand, looking blearily toward the west. Ignatius had always been a light sleeper, the slightest sound causing him to wake immediately. Such a trait was useful in the field.

The sound of breaking twig grabbed Ignatius from his half-sleep to full combat readiness, pistol pointed steadily at the sound. For a full minute, he searched for the cause of the sound, eyes tracking the slightest movement. Ignatius dared not even blink. His fears were allayed moments later when a large rabbit crawled out of the undergrowth, nose twitching in the air. Ignatius sighed in relief, although his eyes still searched the surrounding area in case the rabbi's appearance had been only coincidence. Satisfied there were no assassins lurking in the nearby vicinity, Ignatius gathered his belongings and set out on the trail to Deseret.

The Unclaimed Lands were an anomaly in this post-apocalyptic America in that they were devoid of any permanent residents. The outlaw bands were mostly nomadic, traveling along the main trails, always in search of wealth-laden merchants. Only here you could see the ruins of the once great nation of America. Ignatius could see one such ruin a few hundred meters ahead of him, a massive city now nothing more than piles of broken rubble. Looking closely, one could see the cracked and broken black roads that had once covered this country. The almost-mythical lost technology of pre-Armageddon America had included the method of creating the mysterious hard black substance, along with the gasless lantern the Church assassin had been carrying and horseless wagons, among numerous other items. Projects to rediscover the lost technology had been started, but to no avail. Which was why Ignatius' current mission was so important.

The Deseretan Project Manhattan was an endeavor to recreate the massive weapons that had wrought such destruction upon the former United States of America. In the early years after Armageddon, the State of Deseret had expanded its territory south, towards the northern border of the Mexican States. In their conquest, they rediscovered a building called a Laboratory, a place where the Americans had built their weapons of destruction. Such weapons would go far in trying to unify the shattered states, which was the goal of the American Emperor and his law-making body, the Senate.

Ignatius broke from his reverie with a curse; he should be more aware and cautious on this journey, not drifting into deep thought like some elderly schoolteacher. Such lapses were dangerous; Ignatius recalled the Church Sicarius from the previous day. Perhaps the assassin had been in the middle of one such lapse when Ignatius' bullet had torn through his shoulder...

A strong western wind blew into Ignatius' face, carrying sand and grit with it. As he wiped his face clean, his trained ears caught the slight sound of voices, many voices, not trying to be unheard. Immediately, Ignatius threw himself flat against the earth and crawled to the top of a nearby hill. Careful to keep his rifle barrel clear of any debris, he came upon the crest, eyes weary for any danger. Ignatius did not see anything within a couple of miles, but that didn't mean danger wasn't there. Peering through his scope, Ignatius saw something strange on the horizon.

It was a small village, possibly two hundred people milling about in the middle of a market of sorts. Ignatius was confused for a moment; this far into the Unclaimed Lands, there were no permanent settlements. The outlaws made their living on attacking merchant caravans for that reason. Living more than five hundred miles into this barrenness was suicide; lengthy, protracted suicide.

Ignatius looked around at his surroundings. To avoid the detection of the village would take him miles out of his way and into harsh, unforgiving land. And with the position of the sun directly overhead, he also ran the risk of spending the night without the comfort of cover. Harsh land, Ignatius could handle. Sleeping in the open was a quick way to become dead. There was only one other option. By the time the sun was near to setting, Ignatius was among the hundreds of roaming market- goers, weapons stashed safely away from prying eyes. The rifle had been particularly hard to hide, but Ignatius' long, billowing black coat provided plenty of room to hide almost anything in.

Upon closer examination of the market stalls, Ignatius could see that they were mounted on wheels, able to be moved if the situation demanded it. They must be at least semi-nomadic then, Ian mused, eyes silently gathering intelligence to add to the Empire's already vast knowledge.

Some of the villagers sold meats, some sold livestock, some sold trinkets. Some sold themselves. A trio of half-starved prostitutes gazed at Ignatius through jaded, dead eyes. They made their half-hearted attempts to persuade him to part with whatever valuables he owned, attempts that Ignatius quietly but firmly denied. They were less than bothered by his rejection; they knew another would come along that was not as picky as Ignatius.

Ignatius could feel several pairs of eyes on him as he made his way through the crowded, makeshift street. In this environment it would be almost impossible to spot a tail and Ignatius didn't like that. Not a damn bit, he thought as he tried in vain to identify someone that didn't belong. There were so many different people here that everyone looked out of place.

Out of nowhere, a hand the size of a large bowl landed on Ignatius' shoulders, making his already on-edge nerves jump. The knife hidden at his lower back was half out of its sheath before Ignatius could stop himself.

The man either didn't notice Ignatius' reaction or did not recognize it for what it was. His broad face was split in two with the widest smile Ignatius had ever seen.

"Hello, friend! I bid you good even and welcome you to Lion's Den, our traveling village!" Ignatius was slightly taken aback at this display of friendliness. Growing up in the State of New Orleans, he had seen hidden animosity, paranoia, and shifting alliances but very little friendliness. Ignatius was about to answer when he finally realized the sheer size of the man before him. Ignatius was no small man, a few fingers under two meters and almost one across, but this man was a head and a half taller and twice as broad. This giant was the biggest man Ignatius had ever seen.

The giant's face fell slightly when Ignatius didn't respond. "Something wrong, friend? I can assure you we have almost anything you could imagine here in our stalls." He leaned in closer to Ignatius and lowered his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. "We even have a few American artifacts if you might be willing."

Ignatius' interest was indeed peaked, but wary of false artifacts. The American Empire was always keen to acquire new items related to the revered Americans. He knew he must play it slowly; appearing too eager would drive the price to a level Ignatius couldn't afford.

Ignatius smiled at the giant man and finally released his hold on the knife. "Very well, friend. If these artifacts prove to be genuine, I would gladly be willing to take them off your hands. For the right price, of course."

The giant laughed a laugh befitting his large girth. "I knew it! I knew you would be a shrewd negotiator the moment I saw you." He threw his arm around Ignatius' shoulder and led him to one of the open, multi-colored tents behind the stalls. "You may call me Ozymandias, by the way."



"And my name is Ignatius, good Ozymandias." Ignatius' paranoia level grew the moment he saw their destination. Being led into an unknown room by an over-friendly stranger was sending alarm bells ringing through Ignatius' head. His left hand inched toward the large pistol under his armpit and his right moved back to the knife hilt.

Ozymandias' face lost all pretense of joviality as soon as the tent flap was closed. Turning to a man behind a large glass case, he spoke a short command that Ignatius couldn't hear. The man pulled out a pistol with a black tube attached to the end only to be met by Ignatius' own pistol. The man stopped and spared a look at Ozymandias. Ozymandias stepped forward, dismissing the man's concern with a wave of his hand.

"You were followed here, Ignatius Knight. Randall is simply insuring we will have privacy. Please, allow him to do his job."

Ignatius lowered his weapon cautiously, but did not holster it. He was looking at Ozymandias with suspicion as Randall moved silently out of the tent. Ozymandias noticed his suspicion and smiled craftily.

"All will be explained in due time, Ignatius. For now, you will have to trust me." Ignatius nodded his head but still did not holster his pistol. A shift in the wind notified Ignatius that Randall had returned, presumably successful in his mission. Ozymandias smiled and turned his full attention to Ignatius.

"Do you wish to listen to me, Ignatius? Do you wish to know the truth behind everything I have ever known? If you do, please have a seat. If not, you may continue on your mission to Dese whenever you become ready, unhindered. I only ask that you allow me to finish completely once I begin." The giant fixed Ignatius with a hard stare. "It will not be easy. The truth hardly ever is. What say you, Ignatius Knight?"

Ignatius just nodded, his curiosity getting the better of him. If nothing else, such information could prove valuable. Ignatius took the only open seat under the tent, pistol still pointed indirectly at Ozymandias.

Several hours later, Ignatius walked out of the tent into the pitch blackness of a desert night. He looked to the east and to the west, thinking of the real American Empire that had not existed for more than two hundred years. A change was on the horizon, thundering through the air with all the devastating power of a fierce storm.

**AND IT WOULD BE HERE SOON.**



Well, my heart is all a glitter, for my girlfriend is on Twitter,  
And it's really quite insane.

And it really doesn't matter, if I'm madder than hatter,  
For love it has no brain.

Now, I'd travel every ocean, for a drop of her devotion,  
Just to hear her very name.

Yes, my heart's a ball of fire, full of wicked witch desire,  
Myself I can't contain.

We could lay amongst the flowers, for hours, on hours,  
I would shake the lion's mane.

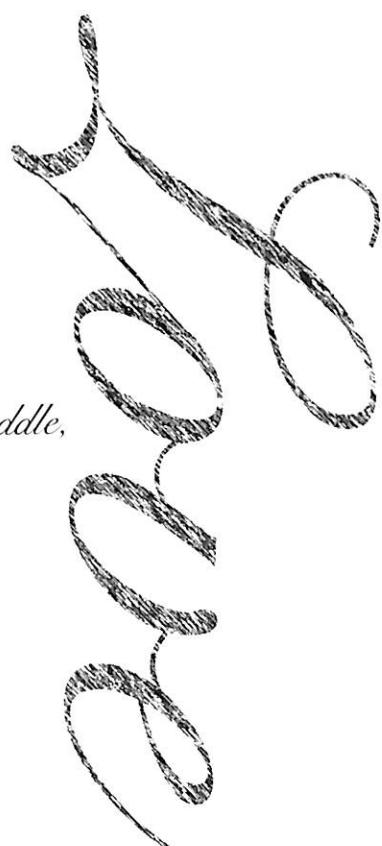
For every man must have his metal, with my oil can do not meddle,  
For love it is my name.

Yes, I really do relish, more than that, I embellish,  
Say my love is not in vain.

Oh, let's marry-marry-marry, in a hurry,hurry,hurry,  
Toto will tote the train.

Yes, my heart is all a glitter, for my girlfriend is on Twitter,  
And it's really quite insane.

But, it really doesn't matter, 'cause my heart's going pitter-patter,  
And, love it has no brain.



# My Three Poets

Margaret was my mother's oldest sister. Born amongst sprawling tobacco fields in La Plata, Maryland, on my grandfather's plantation. Momma described her as a "fish out of water," a city girl born in the country. And that was the way I remember her, in her downtown apartment in Washington, D.C.

Aunt Margaret never married. Daddy called her a spinster, though Margo, as she liked to call herself, thought of herself as a part of the avant garde. Through my teens and later in my twenties I came to regard her as truly Bohemian. She was much more at home with Henry Miller or Ogden Nash than she was at family get together during Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Nevertheless, she would usually show up at holidays with her steady boyfriend, Pete. "Uncle Pete," as we came to call him, worked at the United Nations as an envoy from Greece. He was a teetotaler, always dressed in a coat and tie, perhaps the original designated driver and always took care of Margo, who often imbibed as though still with Henry Miller or as they say in the common vernacular "partied with the best of them."

Margo wrote some—poetry and short stories—but, her main genre was the canvas—charcoal, oils and pallet knife. She would often lock herself away for days in her District apartment with her art and her alcohol.

She wouldn't answer the phone and when my parents would go check on her she would often be passed out with empty and partial bottles of bourbon and vodka strewn everywhere.

These were much more compassionate times, where alcoholics and drug addicts were committed to hospitals and asylums, rather than the prisons and penitentiaries we incarcerate them in today. Aunt Margaret, Margo, was committed to St. Elizabeth's Mental Hospital in Washington, D.C. in 1957.

At this time I was ten years old. We would often go visit Aunt Margaret at St. Elizabeth's on Sunday afternoons after church. Margo called me, "Butch," that was her nickname for me, and when she wanted to talk to my parents alone she would take me over to a scruffy looking fellow and say, "Butch, why don't you talk to Mr. Pound while I talk with your mom and dad."

I was in the fifth grade then and absolutely in love with a book called *A Dog Named Penny*. I constantly checked the book out of the elementary library and carried it with me everywhere. Being a presumptuous 10 year old I immediately began to tell Mr. Pound all about my book.

John Bonifant

I'm sure this was all prearranged by Margo, that I would be "dumped upon him," when she needed to talk to my parents alone.

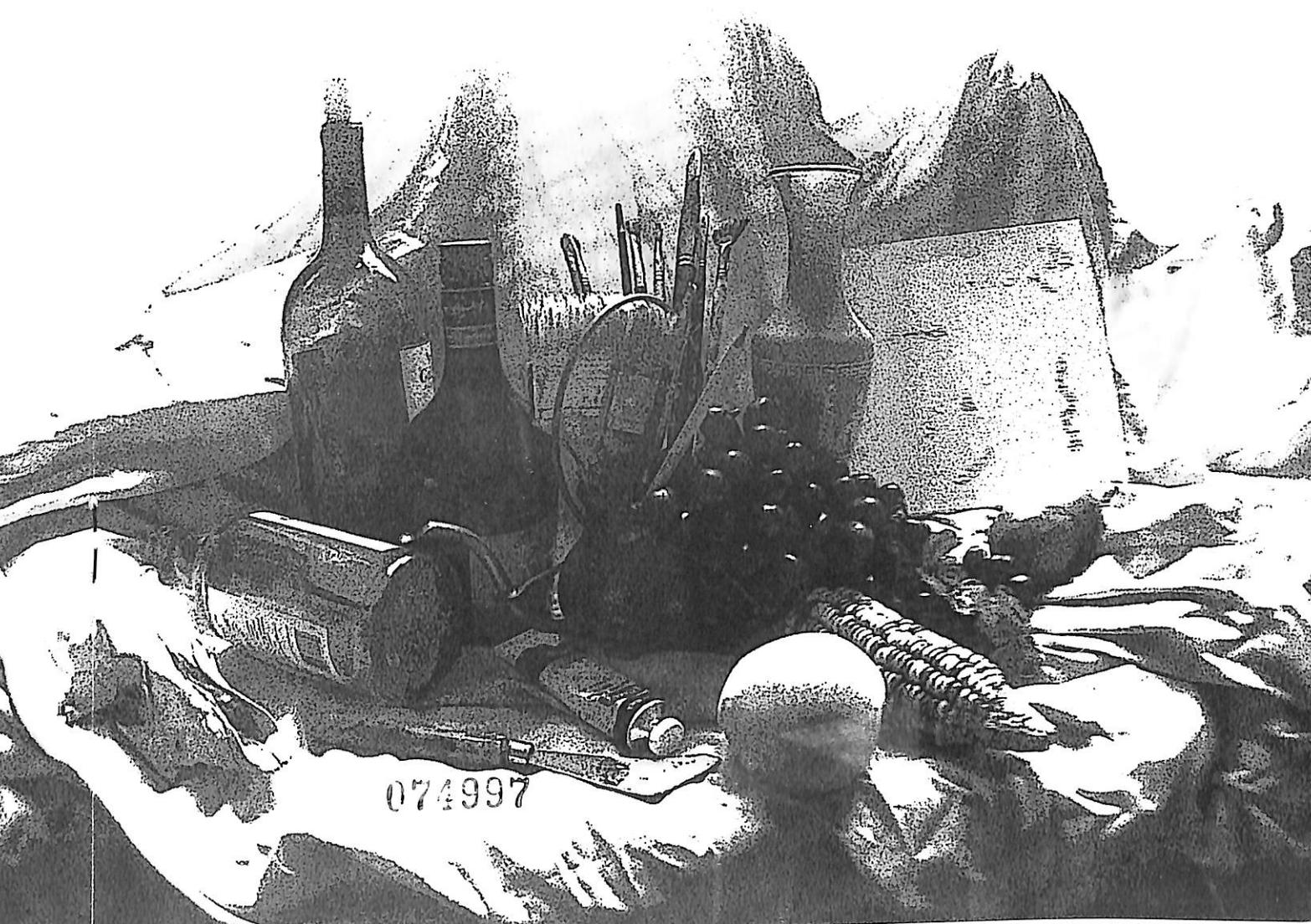
Mr. Pound was not known to be particularly fond of children, but the book saved me, for if it was one thing Ezra Pound loved it was books or anything with the printed word.

He asked if he could borrow the book and promised to give it back to me next Sunday when I returned. Reluctantly I agreed.

Can you imagine Ezra Pound reading a book written for a fifth grader locked up in a mental institution?

At that time I had a dog named Black-eyed Pete. Mr. Pound asked me to write him a story about Black-eyed Pete and to try and make it like *A Dog Named Penny*.

I asked him why. And he said, "Emulation is the highest form of flattery."



I didn't understand but I shook my head in confirmation and said, "Yes, sir."

Ezra Pound was released shortly after that and went to Italy to live his final days.

Now I am 15, it is 1962. I am disillusioned with high school. The teachers are going much too slow for me. I have just watched a very old Robert Frost fumble a poem at Kennedy's inauguration and then recover with another poem instead like Brett Favre picking up his own dropped ball and scrambling into the end zone.

My English teacher wants us to diagram sentences and memorize the definition of a dangling participle. I, on the other hand with teenage hormones surging, am much more interested in the poetry and semi-clandestine love affair of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes.

Now, spring of 1963, I'm having trouble making first squad on the high school baseball team and can't find a teacher anywhere in the high school to explain a Carl Sandburg poem.

The only logical thing is to pack my glove and head south to the Dodgers training camp in Dothan, Alabama. I am convinced Sandy Koufax and Don Drysdale need a third member on the staff to help them beat the Yankees at the end of the year. At the last minute I decide to drop by Flatrock, North Carolina on my way to spring training and have Mr. Sandburg explain his poem to me.

Arriving at Connemara, his new North Carolina home, I find him sitting in a white wooden lawn chair, the kind with the plank seat slanting to the rear and the six inch wide arm rests. Resting on an arm rest is a pad of paper, Mr. Sandburg, pen in hand, is writing though now in his mid eighties.

He does not get up. I introduce myself and explain I am on my way to Alabama to help the Dodgers win the World Series and just stopped by to get him to explain some of his poetry.

Still sitting in his chair he surveys my youthful enthusiasm and replies, "Ah, a real modern day Tom Sawyer. What may I help you with?"

"Well," I reply "I'm having trouble understanding some of your poetry and I can't seem to find any teachers at my high school who can interpret either."

It was from him that I learned that a poem didn't mean a single thing, but rather it could have myriad interpretations, connotations and denotations.

"Choose a poem that is giving you trouble Tom (that was his nickname for me) and I'll see if I can help you with it."

I chose "Mist Forms" and told him I thought it had a sexual theme.

His reply, "Very astute of you."

I hung my head in shame not understanding him and replied, "Just because I don't understand your poem is no reason to call me a stup." In the 60's calling someone a "stup" was like calling someone in the 90's a nerd.

"Young Tom I did not mean to offend you. You misunderstood me. I said you were 'astute'" and he spelled out the word "a-s-t-u-t-e." "It means you are very perceptive."

He was instantly again my hero. He went on to explain that "Mist Forms" was a metaphor for "fantasies" and that while on one level that "traveling the long valley" could be about a wonderful relationship with a young lady, it could just as well be like my trip to the Dodgers' spring training camp.

"Going to Dothan isn't a fantasy, Mr. Sandburg," I replied, "I'm on my way."

"Good luck, Tom," he smiled and I was on my way.

It's 1975 now, I had spent 1966 in college but ran into what I swear must have been the sister of my old high school English teacher. The very first day of freshman English and it was back to diagramming sentences. That was big back then. Kinda like memorizing the definition of a thesis statement is today. And, then along comes the Internet and you usually your words together with no spaces between the words and put a ".com" after them and that makes it alright. Go figure.

Anyway it's 1975, and after a year of college, and 8 years in the navy as a submarine I'm back in Meridian, MS. I say back because the Bureau of Naval Personnel, a department of the navy, had once sent me to Meridian Naval Air Station on assignment. Me a submarine sailor sent to a naval air station. Once again I say, "Go figure."

I decided or perhaps more correctly the U.S. government enticed me back into college with the G.I. Bill. It was over \$800 a month to go back to school and Mr. Johnson in the financial aid office of Meridian Junior College, back before it became Meridian Community College, found another financial assistance program for which I was eligible and between the two I was getting paid over \$1000 a month to go to school.

My first English teacher here was Buck Thomas and praise the Lord he never once mentioned diagramming sentences. I spent most of the time with Buck sharing Robert Penn Warren and up a tree with Faulkner's bear. It was such fun and I was getting paid \$1000 plus a month to boot.

Buck liked my writing and introduced me to Steve Owen, the head of the Meridian Junior College Poetry Club. I joined. There were only about 6 or 7 of us all together and we would get together every now and then and read our poetry and critique each other. It was here I met Mrs. Farrar.

It was also around this time I met Lisa. Lisa was a black girl who worked in a Meridian grocery store stocking shelves and as a cashier. We talked, kidded with each other and became friends.



**MERIDIAN  
JUNIOR  
COLLEGE**

One day an older man slipped in the store after checking out and his groceries went everywhere. The store manager rushed over to help him up and one of the boys working in the store helped him and his groceries to his car.

I was checking out at the cash register with Lisa and the store manager came over to help bag my groceries while the bag boy was in the parking lot helping the old man who had just slipped. I told the manger that if I ever slipped I wanted Lisa to help me to my car. Lisa smiled and blushed as only a black girl can.

Lisa and I continued to become friends and Mrs. Farrar and I would meet occasionally at the poetry club when she would make guest appearances. Then one Tuesday morning while at the grocery I ran into Mrs. Farrar during her weekly shopping.

I was working on a poem at the time titled "Anopheles" about how only the female mosquito bites and its analogy with a jealous woman, and was having trouble with the meter. She said she would look at it for me.

I let her check out first and told her I would meet her in the parking lot. Lisa was our cashier and when Mrs. Farrar left I asked Lisa if she knew who that was that she had just checked out. She said, "No, but she shops here every Tuesday morning."

I explained to her that she had just checked out the poet laureate of Mississippi. The number one poet in Mississippi, appointed by the governor. It was a very eventful meeting for both Lisa and myself. Lisa found out who and what the poet laureate of Mississippi was and I had learned her shopping day. I would finally have her all to myself once a week and not have to share her with the rest of the poetry club.

We were all becoming good friends. Lisa was reading Mrs. Farrar's poetry now and asking her questions about it at the checkout and other questions, like why cummings always wrote in small letters and no capitals.

Then one day Mrs. Winifred, as I called her now, and I were in aisle number three of what was then Sac 'n Save amongst the smoked oysters and Perrier water. Not the aisle number three of Piggly Wiggly which is chips and junk food. We were discussing the similarities of Joyce's "Ulysses" and Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner." Lisa walked by, stopped and listened for a few minutes, and then kept on.

The next thing we heard over the store's intercom was, "Shoppers there is a special! Now serving poetry in aisle number three. That's poetry in aisle number three."

The years passed. Lisa took off to have a baby. Mrs. Farrar disappeared for a while and I started to shop at Winn Dixie. Eros Turannos.

It is now November 2010. I remember it was the 14th. I usually check the obituaries every week but I had missed checking them the first week of November. When I finally got around to it my heart fell to the floor in front of my computer. There on the 6th of November was Mrs. Winifred Hamrick Farrar, Poet Laureate of Mississippi.

I had missed her wake and her funeral. I felt crushed. I didn't know what to do. It took a couple days but I finally decided to go see if I could find Lisa.

Back to Piggly Wiggly, I entered the grocery store like it was a church. Lisa was not at any of the cashier stations. I walked down the center aisle of the grocery store like a pall bearer escorting a casket. Looking first to the left, then to the right as I passed each row. Finally, I spotted her putting canned goods on a shelf.

She looked up and saw me. Instantly silver tears streamed down over her black cheeks. My eyes welled with tears also. It was our requiem. Lisa threw both arms around me and we hugged for the first time ever.

Then she whispered in my ear, "We've lost her, Mr. John. We have lost our Poet."



# The Third Floor



I would have never guessed that a building once so cheerful could hold such darkness. I spent a lot of my childhood in my grandfather's music store. As musicians and artists would routinely pass through, I would listen in awe at the beautiful music that would be played. Peavy Melody Music is where I built my roots for music and my passion for instruments. My grandfather owned the store for a very long time, and many people walked through its door. Today, the building is much different; its walls and floors lay bare. The lights are never turned on, and the sound of music no longer echoes throughout. When I walk through the store, memories plague me of how different it now seems. Instruments used to clank together in the back shop, but now the shop appears as a forgotten scrapyard. The ceiling is plagued with holes and water damage. Pianos sat on the floor where currently only dust dares to drift. It was truly upsetting to see, but this time my quest would venture past the all too familiar first floor. I opened the door to a set of stairs that rose on and on. I had never in all my days at the store explored past these stairs. The third floor was where we kept personal belongings in storage. My daunting task, easier said than done, was to retrieve a box and bring it downstairs. I had only heard stories of the third floor, all as eerie as the last. I would finally uncover if they were real. Alone, I began my trek to the top. Each step I took was carefully thought through, making sure not to disturb anything or anyone. One story in particular kept repeating through my head. My grandfather had told it in excess. He had to walk to the dance studio on the third floor. He climbed the tall stairs and turned in to a long hallway. Late in the day the studio was closed, so he stood alone. The hallway's end could not be seen due to a lack of light no matter how hard he glared, and this was the only way to the studio. He began to walk slowly towards the darkness when footsteps sounded out in front of him. He called out to them, "Who's there?" and received one unexpected immediate answer. A child's laugh echoed through the darkness. He pressed further restating, "Who's there? You shouldn't be here at this time of day" then froze. The sound of footsteps followed behind him. He turned and saw nothing. Suddenly, laughter ricocheted off the walls. Knees trembling, he ran back down the stairs, slamming the door behind him. He was convinced the floor was haunted and unsafe. Yet here I was, and this horrible story was the only thing I could think about. I reached the top of the stairs, and slowly caught my breath. I pressed forward into the chilly atmosphere. I entered room after room searching for my box. The floor layout was maze-like. At last, I found our things and let out a long sigh of relief. I heaved the box to my chest and carried it with me as I fled the room. I now searched for my way back down to safety. I began looking inside the box while walking. I gazed upon old childhood toys that reminded me of good memories. A sense of comfort swept through me, though it did not stay long. I looked up to gain my footing when my heart sank. The box fell from my hands with a loud thud. I stood paralyzed in fright. I knew exactly where I was, although I had never been before. I was standing halfway down the hallway from my grandfather's story. Looking back, I barely made out the shadowy figure of a light switch. I thrust it up with excessive force and heard only "click." I screamed inside; the light did not work. It was foolish for me to believe that it would. I knew the floor had been untraveled for decades before I was born. Cold wind engulfed me, and silence deafened me as I carefully stumbled back. I ran my hand along the cool walls, trying to keep my balance. I turned and prepared to sprint, but stopped short. I could faintly make out the sound of footsteps creeping behind me from the dark. I turned my head and peered back down the hallway. I stared in terror at shadowy figures cast evil by the darkness. My adrenaline pumped through me as I managed to run. Light crept past a doorway in front of me; it seemed so far away. I ran as if my life depended on it. I weaved through doorways and looked for the stairs. I finally found them and stumbled down. I escaped. I have not returned to the third floor alone, nor will I. The lower level will always remind me of joy and music, but directly above lies mystery and evil.

*directly above lies mystery and evil...*

## ONE OF MISSISSIPPI'S POOR FOLKS

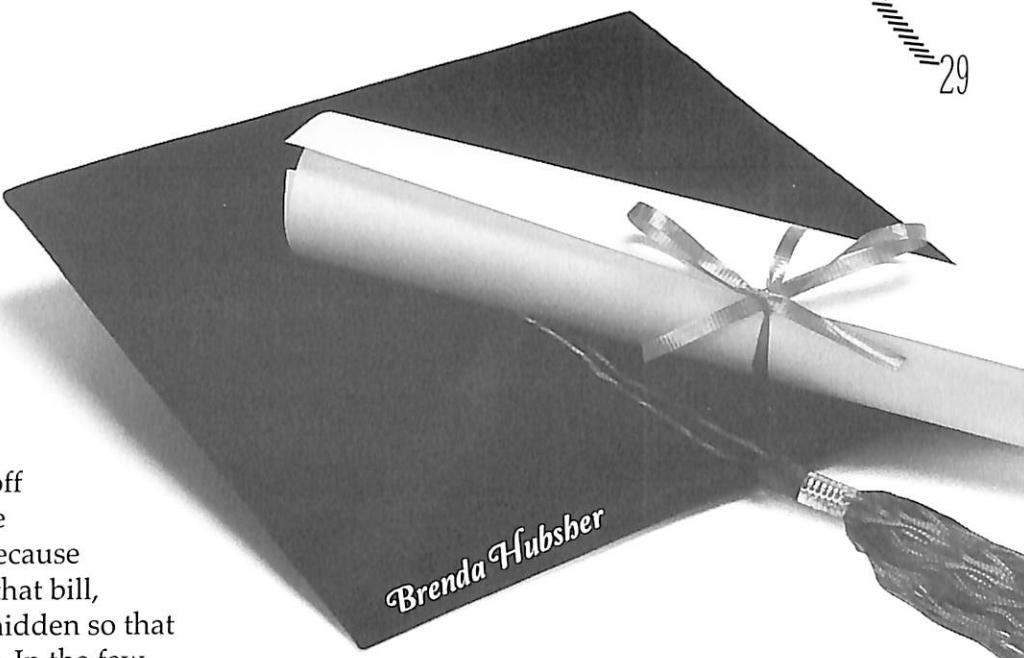
In the year 2006, several significant events happened in my life. The first was the discovery that my husband of nearly 30 years had been unfaithful to me, seeking the company of prostitutes instead of mine. The second, the corollary separation and divorce, led to the third and final event; I quit my job of 15 years and moved south to live near my mother. I have always been a child of the south but had not lived in it since I was small. I have always known that the region has more than its share of desperately poor denizens. Until these events changed my life, I had never expected to be one of Mississippi's poor.

As a 40 year resident of the suburbs of Philadelphia, I had become accustomed to certain luxuries. Jobs were relatively easy to come by in the area where I lived. I had been lucky enough to obtain a position as a school bus driver some 15 years prior. It was an easy job that paid well, and I loved it. I was paid more than \$15 an hour to drive children back and forth to school and was guaranteed to be paid for at least 6 hours a day, whether I worked every minute of those 6 hours or not. There were additional job opportunities within the same company, and after working for this company for a few years, I soon found myself taking advantage of every earning opportunity this company had to offer. Before my migration to the south, I was averaging working fifty hours a week on every paycheck. Now, I can't find a job anywhere.

My experiences since that phase of my life have shown me that my life, prior to moving to the Deep South, was indeed blessed. Jobs have been impossible to come by. The same school bus driving position in Mississippi pays much less than its counterpart in Pennsylvania. Any extracurricular work is done by teachers and coaches who hold CDL drivers licenses as well as teaching degrees. The criterion for hiring for any job seems to be quite different, contrasting this area to that with which I am familiar. Despite daily job searches, I have been without a job for almost a year, and it doesn't look like it's going to change today.

I have found that I don't know what employers are looking for anymore. The job market is a seller's market. For every job, there are probably many, many prospects. Employers can afford to be choosy while applicants have to be happy for whatever is offered. I am over 50 and have a long stable work history, with skills in many different areas. I don't seem to offer an attractive enough package to be considered for even the most menial of positions. If I, an experienced, well educated woman, cannot find a job in any market, I have to ask myself, who is taking the jobs I have been applying for, or are there just no job openings anywhere?



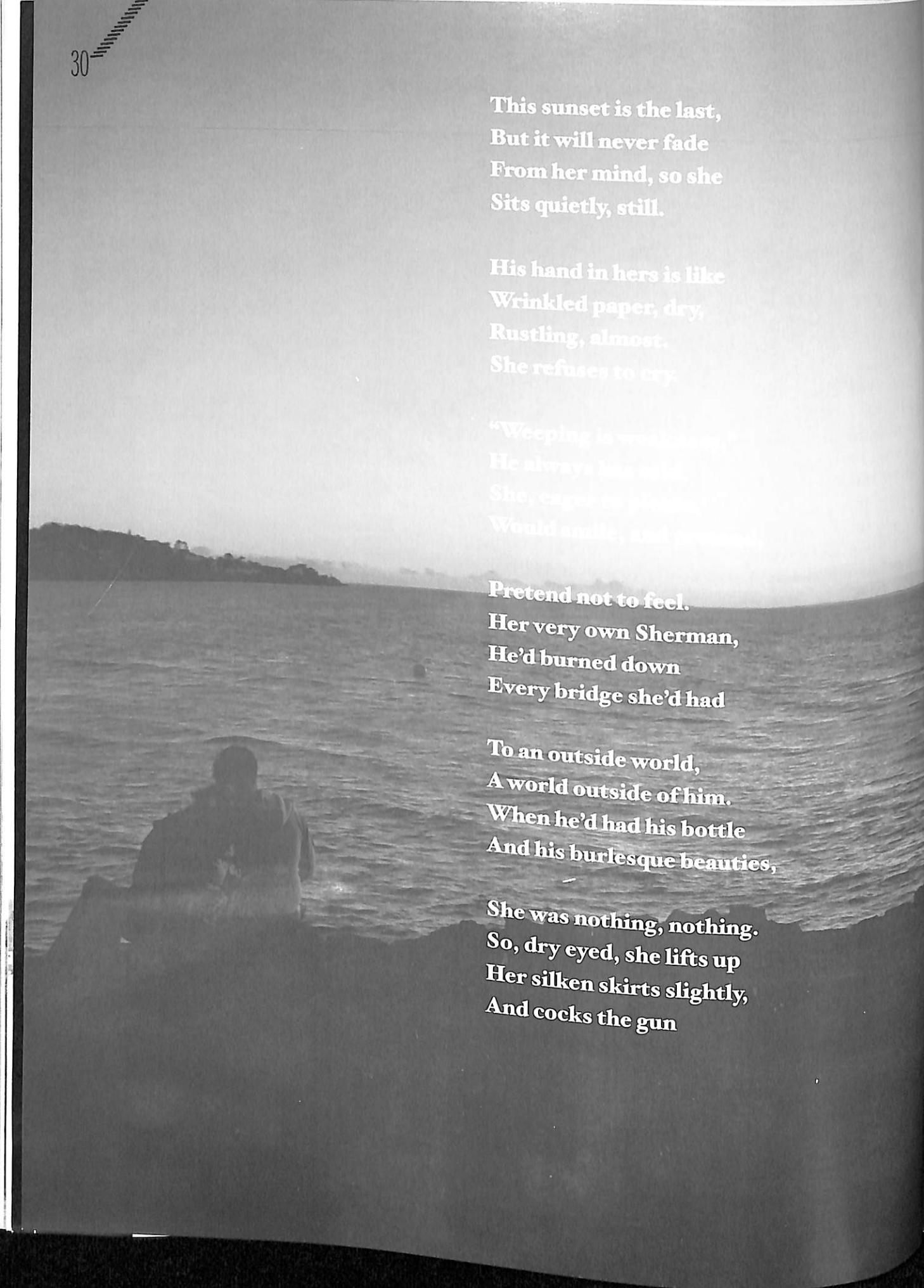


My daily existence begins with thoughts of money - where can I find a few dollars to buy the cats some food, or some milk so I can make cornbread, or to pay the light bill? My day is spent with anxieties about matters such as will the electricity be shut off today, or is there going to be internet for one more day because I'm two months behind on that bill, and is the car well enough hidden so that it won't be repossessed yet? In the few moments that aren't filled with anxiety about issues that I can't do anything about, I have school and hope that once I graduate in May, my situation will begin to improve. I have debased myself by going to food banks, applying for food stamps, asking agencies to pay my electric bill, and obtaining section 8 housing status. I have lived in my sister's home, rent free, and borrowed money from my 77 year old mother (who lives on a fixed income and is the sole, physical and financial, caretaker of my 58 year old autistic brother) because I cannot find a job.

There have been many days when I wanted to give up because the desperation of my situation just seems too great. I get knocked down and sometimes it's just hard to get back up again. I have my eye on a prize down the road - the prize is my diploma from this school which I hope will guarantee me a job, a future, and financial stability. There are days when I allow fear to take hold of me and the "what if's" creep in - what if I still can't find a job. What then? It's hard to keep my focus sometimes - my car was repossessed yesterday. I don't know what I'm going to do now, but I can't dwell on it. I'll just have to take each day as it comes and trust that things will work out as I have envisioned them.

I know firsthand what it is like to be one of the south's poor. I've lived this existence for almost 4 years. I have learned many lessons from my day to day life, but the greatest lesson is that you never know how strong you are until you are called upon to be strong. If will and determination mean anything at all, I will survive. I never expected that my life would ever be this way, just as I'm sure that others never expected it, but I'm doing my best to make sure that it doesn't stay this way. I'm ready to do whatever it takes to pull myself up out of this hole I've fallen into, and no matter how many times I slip and fall back down, I'm getting back up.

**"IF WILL AND DETERMINATION MEAN ANYTHING,  
I WILL SURVIVE."**



This sunset is the last,  
But it will never fade  
From her mind, so she  
Sits quietly, still.

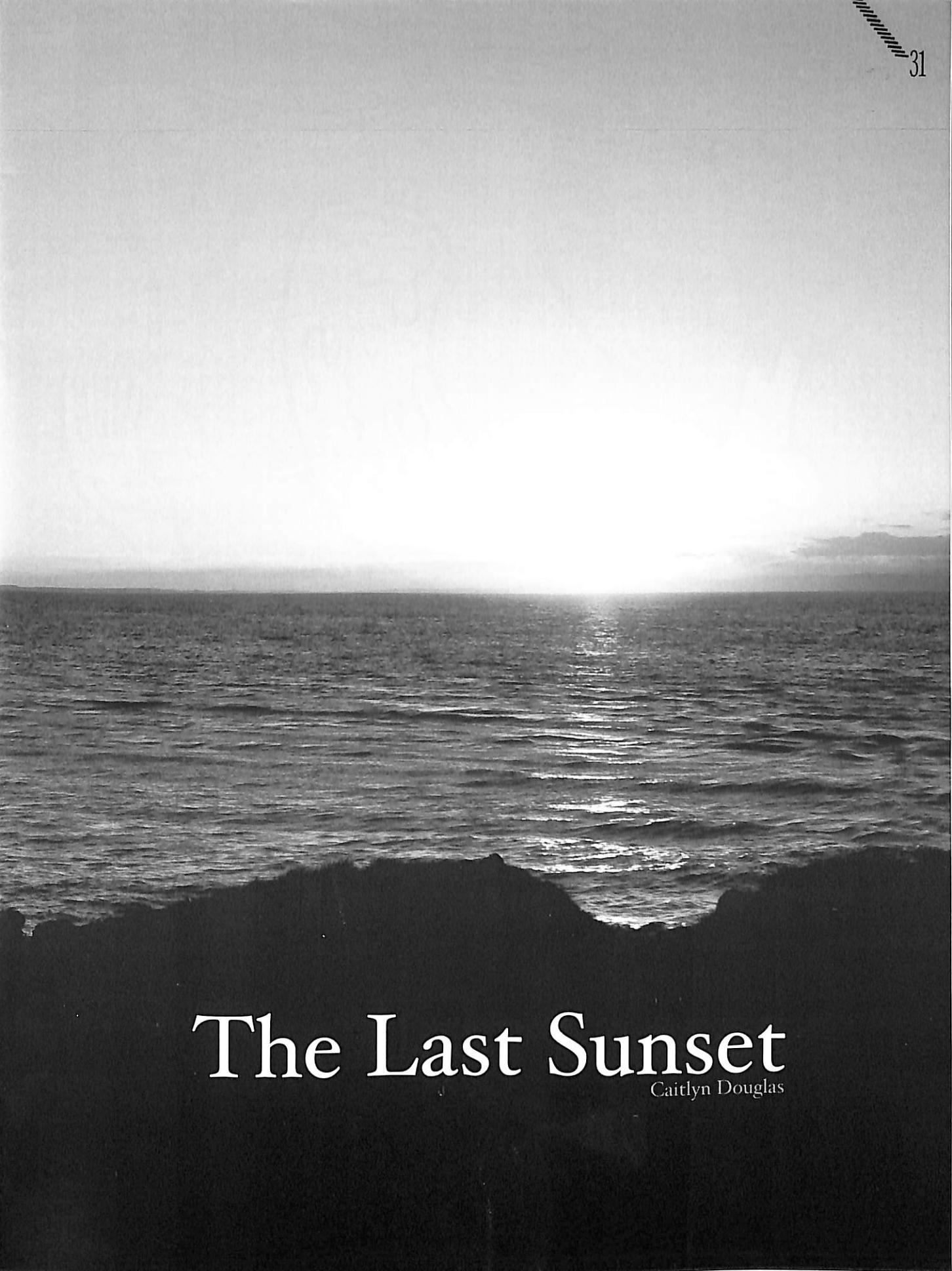
His hand in hers is like  
Wrinkled paper, dry,  
Rustling, almost.  
She refuses to cry.

"Weeping is weak,  
He always said.  
She can't weep.  
Would make him mad."

Pretend not to feel.  
Her very own Sherman,  
He'd burned down  
Every bridge she'd had

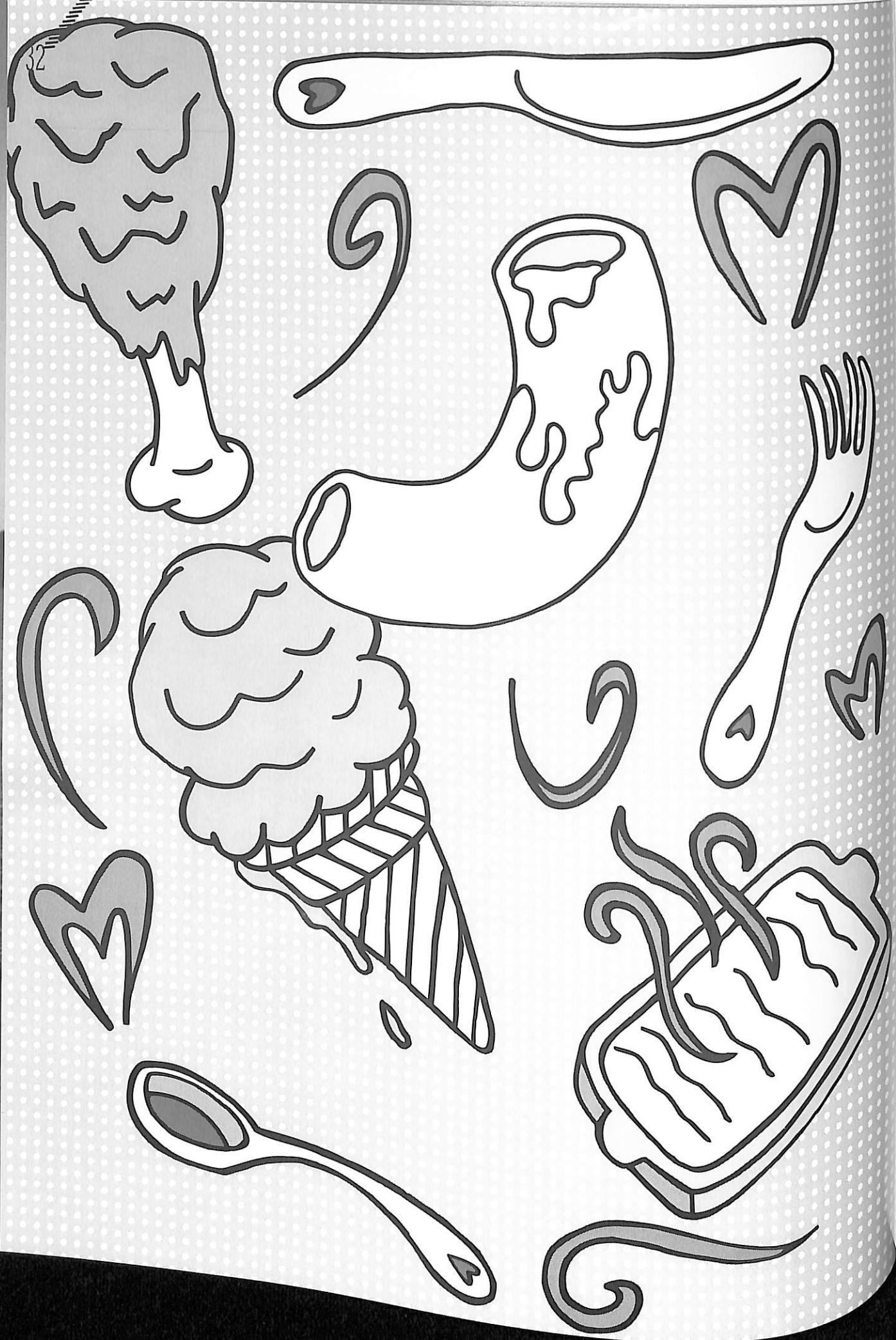
To an outside world,  
A world outside of him.  
When he'd had his bottle  
And his burlesque beauties,

She was nothing, nothing.  
So, dry eyed, she lifts up  
Her silken skirts slightly,  
And cocks the gun



# The Last Sunset

Caitlyn Douglas



# 33

# Sunday Dinner Love

## (For J.T.)

I want a Sunday dinner kinda' love

I want macaroni and cheese love with extra lovin' oozing over the side  
I want gooey, sticky, cheesy love that appreciates and works  
My macaroni curves

I want collard greens and smoked turkey wings love  
Eaten with your fingers, tasting hot sauce and  
Just enough grease to slide down, love

I want picnic ham with orange marmalade glaze love  
Salty and sweet at the same time  
Make you wanna lick your fingers and smack yo' lips love

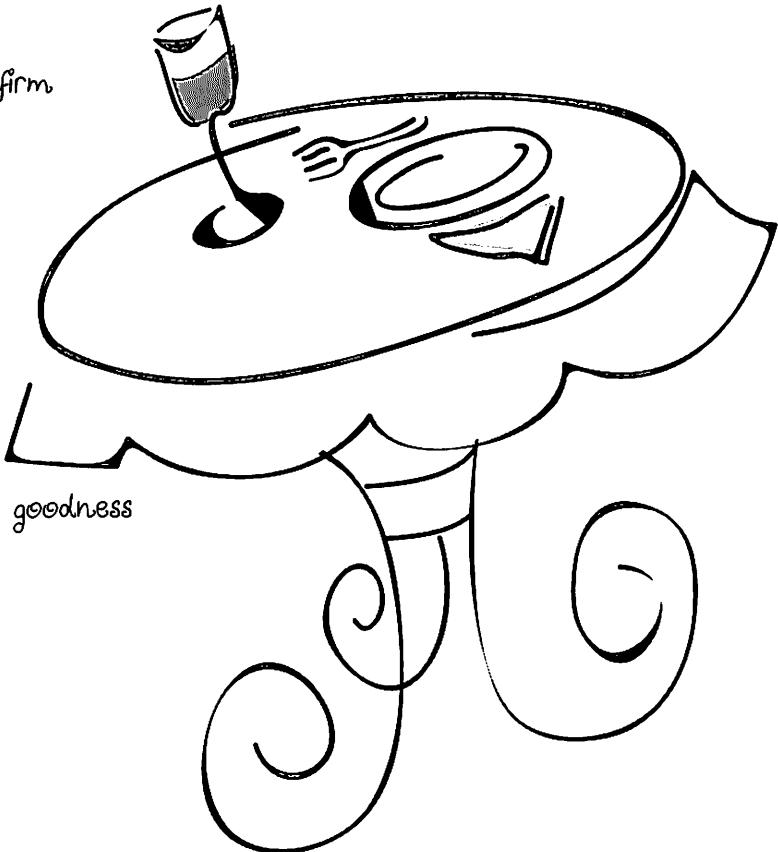
I want cornbread dressing love  
Sage spicy, hot and crispy, warm and firm  
Slightly mushy kinda' love

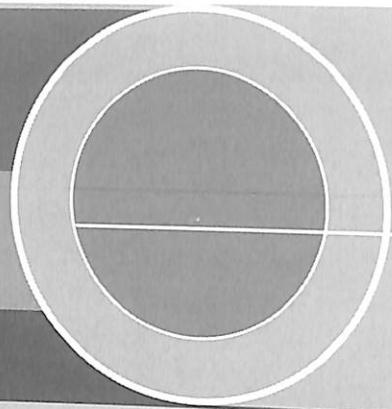
I want peach ice tea love  
Cool, sweet and tart  
Icy ecstasy slidin' down my  
Throat

And to top it off  
I want homemade ice cream love  
Soooooo sweet and creamy  
Let me indulge in all your home grown goodness

Are you full yet?!

I am





# MCC's 2012 Writing Contest

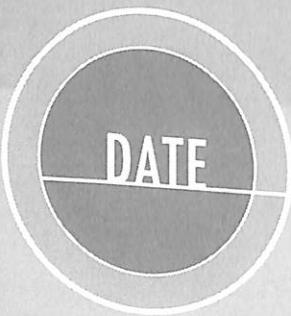
Enter your short stories, poems, and essays to win cash prizes.

1st place ~ \$75

2nd place ~ \$50

3rd place ~ \$25

Plus, winning entries will be published in MCC's *Literary Review* magazine.



(601) 484-8807

Entries are due by Feb. 10, 2012



kstewar1@meridiancc.edu

Or

Katharine Stewart  
910 Highway 19 North  
Meridian, MS 39307



# LITERARY CONTEST 2012

*Sponsored by Meridian Community College*

## Prizes

1<sup>st</sup> place--\$75 and publication in MCC's *Review* magazine  
2<sup>nd</sup> place--\$50 and publication in MCC's *Review* magazine  
3<sup>rd</sup> place--\$25 and publication in MCC's *Review* magazine  
Honorable mention

## Eligibility

**High School Division:** All high school students—  
Sophomores, Juniors & Seniors.

**\*Community & MCC Division:** Any MCC student enrolled in one or more classes / non-high school & non-MCC students / members of the community 18 years or older.

\*Area students attending other colleges are ineligible except for Mississippi State University-Meridian.

## Entry Deadline—Feb. 10, 2012

\*You will be notified as soon as the judges return the entries.

Find us on Facebook!

**Categories**—Each contestant can enter one or all categories.

### Short Story

Limit: Two entries. Must not exceed 10 typed, double-spaced pages with regular margins.

### Informal Essay

Limit, two entries. Must not exceed five typed, double-spaced pages with regular margins.

### Poetry

Limit: Three entries. Each poem must not exceed 50 typed lines.

## Submission

Put your name on the entry form NOT on the entries. Entries will only be used for the 2012 contest.

\*If you submit your entries by email, please attach a copy of this form.

Extra entries forms may be found at [www.meridiancc.edu/english](http://www.meridiancc.edu/english).

## Format

Each contestant should use this rule sheet for a title page. Be sure to fill out all necessary information.

All manuscripts must be original and typed on white 8 1/2 x 11 inch paper. Entries will NOT be returned. Be sure to include TWO copies of each entry.

## MCC LITERARY REVIEW ENTRY FORM

(Please clearly print or type on this entry form.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street/Apt/P.O. Box \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: Home \_\_\_\_\_ Work \_\_\_\_\_

Check one:  Soph.  Jr.  Sr. High School you attend: \_\_\_\_\_

MCC student  Community Member

Short Story Title(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Essay Title(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Poetry Title(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Please give a brief biography of yourself \_\_\_\_\_

**IMPORTANT:** Must be signed! By signing you agree to allow the *REVIEW* to publish your work if the staff votes to print it. For MCC entrants, we also reserve the right to submit your entry to the state competition. Not all contest winners and/or entries can be published due to printing expenses. Also, by signing you guarantee each submission is original and has not been previously published.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Deadline for Entries!

Entries must be submitted no later than  
**Feb. 10, 2012**

Mail entries to:  
The Review  
Literary Contest  
Attn: Katharine Stewart  
910 Hwy 19 North  
Meridian, MS 39307  
or  
kstewart@meridiancc.edu

# Winners

## high school

### short story

1st	Alex Tuberville	"The Fall Of..."	
2nd	Reid Johnson	"He's Not Coming Home"	WLHS
3rd	Brittany Harford	"Chicken"	WLHS
HM	Nicholas Buchanan	"Dagger One"	WLHS



### essay

1st	Fletcher McKee		
2nd	Seth Mitchell	"Life of a Dyslexic"	WLHS
3rd	Cecilia Lawn	"Liberty and Justice for All" "Who Are We Supposed to Listen To?"	WLHS WLHS



### Poetry

1st	Sarah Owen		
2nd	Taylor Huffman	"The Lost Bubblegum Trees"	MHS
3rd	Nicola Callahan	"The Mountaineer"	WLHS
HM	Tabitha Gibson	"Make the Way" "Puzzle Piece"	WLHS WLHS

# Winners

## short story

1st	William Lee Dellinger	"A World Born of Fire"
2nd	John Bonifant	"My Three Poets"
3rd	Vaughn Brown	"The Second Mouse"
HM	John Bonifant	"Fairy Tales Do Come True"

• • • • • • • •

## essay

1st	Brenda Hubsher	"One of Mississippi's Poor Folks"
2nd	David Dennis	"The 3rd Floor"
3rd	John Bonifant	"Where You At?"
HM	Jill Renee Walsh	"Imperfect Storms"

• • • • • • • •

## poetry

1st	Caitlyn Douglas	"The Last Sunset"
2nd	Lisa Brookins Mercer	"Sunday Dinner Love (For J.T.)"
3rd	John Bonifant	"Winifred Farrar"
HM	John Bonifant	"Scarecrow Love"

Congratulations  
2011

the c

**Brock Hughes**

“The Last Sunset”  
“Scarecrow Love”  
“Life of a Dyslexic”  
Winners Page

**Emmett C. Calvert**

“A World Born of Fire”

**Maxine Davis**

“The Fall of...”

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**Amy L. Baker**

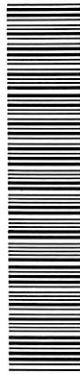
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Katharine Stewart

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Cassandra Spidle

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Fax 1.601.484.8635 Email [welden@meridianacc.edu](mailto:welden@meridianacc.edu)

Thank  
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