



Divine Muses

Volume 1, Issue 1: Stepping Stones

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Divine Muses

SLEEPING STONES

T a b l e o f c o n t e n t s

I: Fiction

II: Poetry

III: Reviews

IV: Creative
Non-Fiction

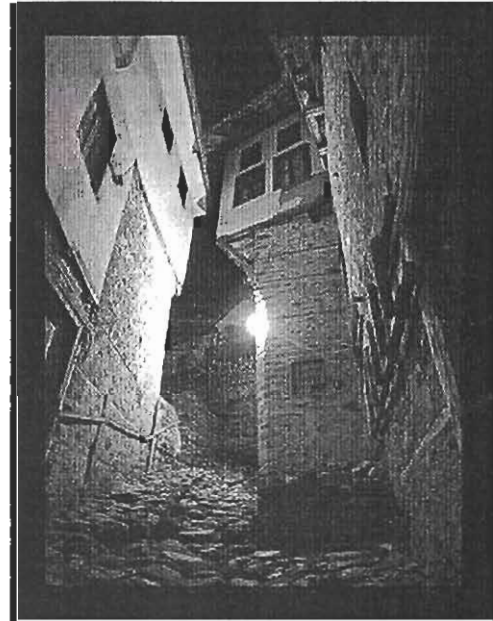
V: Editorials

The Ring Man

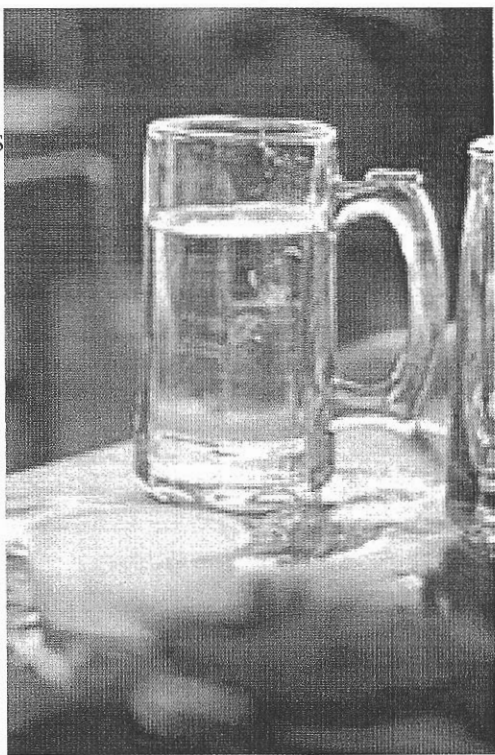
By Brad Weirbowski

A chill breeze wafts through the cobblestone street, past the row of crowded buildings and their silent, slumbering windows. The cool of early autumn is nestled amongst the dark homes, their inhabitants, more like than not, tucked beneath heavy covers, partaking in an early hibernation. As the darkness continues its domination of the night, a single rebel bursts forth to defy it; a dull light shines through a dirt-caked window: a window that has not felt the smooth caress of soap or water for many a year. Beside the window, a solitary door stands, its worn panels and tarnished knob naked to the night. A crooked slab of wood hangs above the door, held in place by a rusty chain. One can only assume it is a sign of some sort, as a few faded words remain carved into its dilapidated surface: *Wanderer's Welcome: Tavern & Inn*.

Inside the building, across from the door, past the old umbrella stand, coat rack, and scattered tables, the innkeeper stands behind the bar, nervously pacing, as he polishes the same dusty glass for the seventh time. He glances across the room, an open mass of creaky wooden floorboards and stone wall. The usual late-nighters are going about their business; Lord Archibald, suit and all, sits in the armchair by the fire, sipping his eleven o'clock tea, a tray of his favorite biscuits on the spindly table to his side. On a stool by the bar, Hank, in his torn jacket, gulps down his usual flagon, while the mysterious man in the corner, with his coffee mug in hand, shuffles through some dubious files from his briefcase. A few other twilight stragglers sit among the tables, chatting quietly, sharing a late meal, or else some bottles of whiskey, perhaps even a sophisticated glass of wine.



The anxious innkeeper eyes the old grandfather clock in the corner, appropriately named, as its ancient clockwork was by far the oldest thing in the pub. His eyes fixate upon the dial, its tired limbs outstretched in an awkward fashion. A terrible feeling grips the man. He can feel the inevitability of the event about to occur; the time is right, and the air outside tells him that it is that time of year again. He continues to rub the glass with the filthy rag, merely smearing more and more dust upon the antique trinket gripped tight in his tense hand. Then he hears it; the eerie, metallic moan of the bell, sounding as the door whines open. The innkeeper abruptly turns his head away, pretending to examine the plethora of alcohols in the rack behind the counter, rubbing the glass ever more fiercely with his sweating hands. He cringes, trying to close his ears, to blot out all sound, but with no avail; *Chunk... chunk... chunk...*



The sound of a heavy wooden object laboriously making its way across the room reaches his trembling ears. He freezes, as he hears a hand press against the countertop and that only-too-familiar wheeze behind him; the trembling hacking breath that passes through a dry gaping mouth, and toothless jaw. The entire room goes silent. Lord Archibald peeks out from behind his armchair, half-buttered biscuit in his left hand, knife in the other. He stares at the bar in disgust. The man in the corner looks up from his work, lowers his head again, and then picks up where he left off with his business report. Hank gawks, slack-jawed, at the newcomer, spilling a good deal of beer over his lap, as the other customers stare uneasily. The innkeeper holds his breath, and slowly turns around. With all of his courage, he forces open his eyes.

He finds himself facing a man, if he was really human enough to describe him as such. His pate was covered in a worn cap, a gross stain of grays and browns, impossible to tell of its original color.

His wispy white hair grew down past his twitching, widened eyes and his chunk of a nose, culminating in a short grizzled mane that extended around the raspy, panting mouth. One of the eyes was blind, a terrible clot of tissue. Around his hunchbacked torso was wrapped an untidy jacket, filled with pockets and tears. And, though the innkeeper could not see, it, he knew of the wooden leg that lay hidden behind the counter. But perhaps the most mystifying detail about this strange traveler was his hand. Upon his left hand he wore a single, torn black glove, and for good reason, as he had only one hand to wear it upon; his right arm bore no more than a stump: a misshapen mass of dried blood and dead skin, a scar of events long forgotten. But beyond this, upon the age-gnarled fingers which he did possess, he wore several rings. Wherever the glove's finger had frayed off and left no tip --- where his finger and its yellowed nail extended out from their woolen shelter --- tight golden bands could be seen. They came in

various shapes, sizes, and styles, some ranging from mere pawn-shop trinkets to ornate designs beyond the imagination of many of the customers.

In his own mind, the innkeeper called him the Ring Man. He didn't know who he was, or where he came from, only that he came back every year around this time with another crackpot story about his "collection": for that was what he called the many rings upon his weathered digits. In the innkeeper's opinion, the Ring Man wasn't quite "with it", so to speak; his rants lead the innkeeper to think that he was delusional. And yet, another part of his mind told him that there was something different about this man; he was no drunken hobo or wandering vagrant, merely continuing a nightly pub-hopping routine. No... intoxication was not the cause of the man's disturbing persona. His very presence sent a chill through his spine; a very part of the Ring Man's being was composed of this queerness.

But the innkeeper has no time to think all of these things, to ponder the man's mystery. The Ring Man stares him in the face, a crackling laughter rising from his throat. He extends his hand, which the innkeeper, retaining his disgust, takes, as the old man clasps his handless arm around his back, from anybody else, a warm and welcoming gesture. The innkeeper tries to suppress his cringe as the fleshless, bony stub touches his back.

"Welcome, welcome!" croaks the old man, already affirming his innate strangeness. "Thank you all for coming," he continues, as if making a speech to a large audience, or hosting a party. The Ring Man takes his arm off of the innkeeper's back, ends the handshake, and pulls up a stool to sit in front of him. The innkeeper nods, and the smallest of polite smiles forces its way across his face.

"Hello... w-would you like a drink tonight, sir?" the innkeeper stutters, as he continues to smother the drinking glass with the powdery rag.

"Whassat?" the Ring Man exclaims, as he puts his good hand to his ear.

"W-would you like a drink?" the innkeeper inquires again. He pleads to himself that the man will just say yes, and he can be rid of him all the sooner; one drink and he would surely be on his way.

The Ring Man laughs a dry wheeze, and claps, before gasping, "Certainly, my boy..." At this, a true smile flickers across the innkeeper's face: a brief and out of place image, almost frightening. "But first," he continues, as the innkeeper's face falls into a nervous frown again, "I must tell you of the most fascinating story."

The innkeeper's eyes flicker around the room, staring at the rest of the customers. Apparently over the shock of the Ring Man's disturbing appearance and frightening demeanor, they have returned to their own concerns, eating, drinking, and reading at will.





Lord Archibald reaches for another biscuit, and the man in the corner takes a small sip of his coffee.

“Listen... listen... listen to me,” croons the Ring Man in a haunting, mesmerizing tone. Shining beads of sweat begin to drip down the innkeeper’s pallid face; another deranged tale of adventure, curses, and other such nonsense was about to make its way out of the Ring Man’s parched maw. The Ring Man beckons to the innkeeper, the latter realizing what it is that he is asking.

“This one here,” he coughs, wagging his index finger, indicating the most hideously garish of the rings: a small and rather worthless looking trinket adorned with a single black gemstone. The innkeeper reluctantly puts down his glass, and places the rag on the bar’s top with utmost care. He then reaches forward, gluing his eyes shut, as he hesitantly finds the vagabond’s grimy

paw and removes the worthless piece of gold. Prying his eyes open, he takes the ring and places it on the counter. The innkeeper then picks up the glass and rag again, his nerves needing a source of diversion.

The Ring Man smiles, shaping his formless mouth into a crooked, toothless grin, as he picks the ring up in his hand and begins:

“Now this one here... my newest,” he adds, holding it above his head for all the world to see, “they call it the Eyestone: an ancient Aztec treasure. You couldn’t imagine how much trouble I had to go through to get my hand on this. Take a look,” he commands, placing it back on the wooden surface, and indicating the gemstone.

The innkeeper picks it up and stares at the tiny black gem, suddenly feeling a sense of utmost terror, as the Ring Man speaks again: “You see that?” he queries. “Right in the center...” The innkeeper feels his tongue fumble awkwardly in his mouth, as a sudden feeling of nakedness pierces his soul; “that tiny flaw. Looks like an eye, don’t it?” he asks, as the innkeeper feels the searching stare of the white slit of a pupil. The tiny eyeball feels suddenly alive, a sinister, sleepless presence. The innkeeper drops it to the countertop, anything to divert its horrible stare. The Ring Man cackles menacingly, his face contorting into a mysterious, knowing smile. The innkeeper opens his eyes again, only to see that the ring is back on the man’s index finger.

“Nobody can really be trusted anymore, so this ring is of great help to me. They say it can see things that even we humans can’t see: deep, dark things... secrets... and worse.” The innkeeper falters, his eyes dart to the cloth and glass, which he snatches up and begins rubbing again, heart pounding, the same feeling of exposure about him. He stares into the Ring Man’s twisted face, and gasps; the man’s right eye is black and dead, save for its milky-white center: a mirror image of the ring upon his finger. The innkeeper’s mind races. It had always been like that; the eye had always been blind: dead and shriveled. But why did it suddenly frighten him so much? Why

did it suddenly seem alive? How could this disgusting, sightless mass of flesh suddenly penetrate the walls of his heart, the locked doors of his soul? Was the Ring Man right? Could it truly possess such powers?

The innkeeper catches his breath, and calms his mind. He tries to think rationally, to dismiss the thought of the ring.

It was obviously some kind of trick of the light, or maybe fatigue was getting to him. The ring was no more than a coincidence of some sort. But if so... why did the old man collect them with such a strange passion.

As if he can read his mind, the Ring Man responds: "When you have lost as much as I have, it is nice to carry something that you know you won't lose." The innkeeper stares, puzzled by this odd statement. The man elaborates: "It almost makes me feel... like I have something again." With this statement, his blind eye is filled with a sudden light, and the innkeeper forgets rationality; the eye can see him. The stare burns away his flesh, revealing himself to the terrible sphere.

The innkeeper stutters, "Wouldn't you l-like a drink?" trying his hardest to find a way to distract the man, to turn away his horrible gaze.

The Ring Man laughs, a cruel and horrible cough of breath. "I would *love* to have a drink, but drink does me no good anymore," the man says. "I haven't felt the taste of a good draught in years," he cackles, his mouth opening wide, and revealing, to the innkeeper's horror, that his tongue is half-missing. The eye leers at him in a mocking laugh.

The innkeeper drops the rag and glass on the counter, wheels around, thrusts open a drawer beneath the alcohol rack, and begins digging through its contents. He throws aside random knickknacks, frantically searching for the object he knows can distract the man and his horrible eye. He yanks up a yellowed document of some sort, and gives a cry of satisfaction as he reaches down and grasps the object in his hand.

The innkeeper turns to face the Ring Man, slamming his hand down on the counter-top, as he cries, voice cracking with nervous distress, "Here! W-Would you look at this!" With difficulty, he forces open his sweating fist, and reveals a small, golden ring. The innkeeper is given a sudden respite, the Ring Man's focus now upon the tiny object. He picks it up in his hand, and scrutinizes it with a grumble of interest.

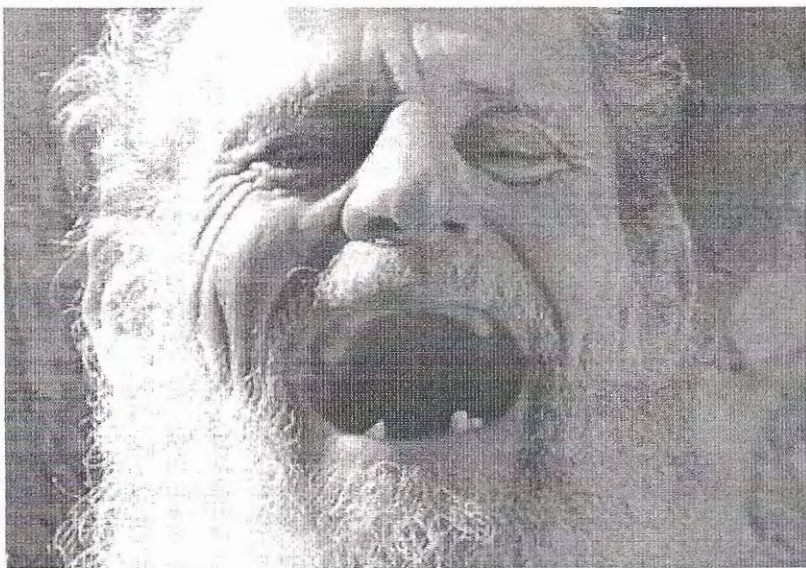
"If you look at the c-center, you will see the latch," says the innkeeper, beginning to calm, the sweat upon his head beginning to dry. "It's an old pillbox ring; you can put medication in it. They aren't really around much anymore, don't you think that's interesting?" he continues, trying to keep the man busy for as long as he can. He moves over to the rack, picks up a bottle of fine beer, and places it on the bar. "Now really, don't you think you ought to have a drink?" the innkeeper asks with a falsely sweet voice.

The Ring Man flicks open the latch on the pillbox ring, and with a horrible, malicious smile, he snickers, "Yesssss... A drink would be just... *PERFECT!*" he screams, and with a sudden lurch of agility, unthinkable for a man of his age, the Ring Man thrusts forth his stub of an arm, holding it in front of the innkeeper's throat.

The innkeeper gasps for air; he can't move; he can't breathe. An invisible force extending from the dead stub is crushing his windpipe. His head swims, trying to comprehend what is happening. His eyes suddenly catch a glimpse of the man's good hand. Upon one of his fingers, a ring is shining with an unnatural light; etched into its surface

is the image of a human hand. In a sudden realization, consciousness leaving him, the innkeeper sees a ghostly hand flicker before his eyes, strangling him. The Eyestone glimmers, and the Ring Man's dead eye bursts with an evil laughter.

"My tongue may be gone," he screams in a deranged shriek, "but you don't seem to use yours much, you stuttering moron!"



The inhabitants of the room jump up from their seats. Many run for the front door, leaving their coats and hats hanging limp on the rack. Lord Archibald falls out of the chair, knocking over the end table, the remainder of his precious biscuits spilling over the fireside rug. He sprints through an open doorway and up the stairs, heading for the old rotary phone in the hallway upstairs, ready to call in the authorities. Hank topples over in terror, his heavy glass flagon shattering into a multitude of tiny shards. The man in the corner sighs, and buries himself back in his reports.

The innkeeper shakes his head in terror, realizing what it is the Ring Man wants from him. The Ring Man snatches up a bottle-opener from the counter and brings it to the man's maw. With a final screech of insane malice, he cuts the innkeeper's tongue from his screaming mouth. With his other arm, he thrusts the innkeeper against the wall, bottles falling and smashing, wines and beers spewing out onto the cold floor. With his good hand, he flicks open the pillbox ring, takes the tongue, and squeezes it above the open talisman. A small droplet, a mixture of blood and saliva, falls inside the ring. With a scream of triumph, the Ring Man closes the ring and holds it aloft with his ghost hand. He places it upon his good hand; another ring added to his collection.

"*AT LAST!!!*" he screams, mouth watering in anticipation, "*I CAN TASTE AGAIN!!!*" He breaks up in ecstatic laughter, as he takes the bottle-opener and opens the beer left by the now-unconscious innkeeper. He pushes aside the dusty rag from the powder-smearred glass, and pours himself a drink. A puff of fog rises from the brew. Ignoring the small box at its side, he picks up the glass, and screams:

"*TO MY LONG LIFE!!!*" he screams in triumph, as he gulps down the bubbling liquid, tasting again for the first time in years. He laughs, eyes twitching: a horrible hacking cough that screeches with mirth. The Ring Man foams at the mouth in his deranged madness. He coughs again, a longer, drier, hacking noise. His eyes twitch uncontrollably. He drops the glass, its concoction splatters against the floor.

He collapses, face first, in the remaining puddle of poison. The box on the counter-top, unveiled by its victim in his hasty grab for the glass, lies innocently. The rag accompanies it, covered in its powdery contents; their purpose fulfilled. The man in the corner looks up from his work, checks his watch, closes his briefcase, and leaves. The room lay silent.

P o e t r y

Frozen

by Satya Tabachnick

As I walk through the city
in the dead of winter,

(on the way home she is giddy
for the world has taken her)

The ice and the snow and the sleet and the hail
cling to my skin, but I cannot care.

(all that you see is an angel of ice,
her hair covered in snow, you try rolling the dice)

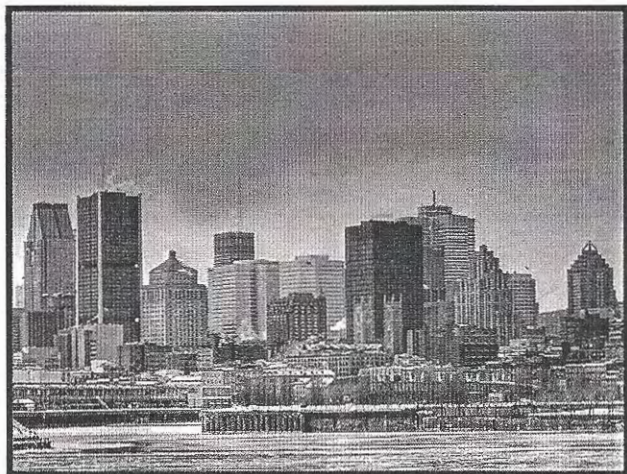
A boy walks towards me, but I barely see.
He starts to talk, I just take out my key.

(She offers a piece of lavender sweet,
then she turns away going on down the street)

He may not understand the gift that I've given him.
I don't know why, it's not worth much...my light is so dim.

(As the snow swirls around her you hear a small sound,
you blink and she's gone, never to be found)

I left him my heart and my soul, so frozen,
now I will return when the earth is golden.
The winter of my life will someday end,
but until that happens, I do have a friend.



Angel

by Anonymous

You think I am your angel
 I will never falter or fail
 Never hurt you
 Never break you
 Always keeping you
 You think I am too pure
 Never hurt broken or shattered
 That I am always strong
 Nothing will ever hurt me
 You will never see me cry
 But you are wrong
 You have it backwards
 I hide when I am with you
 And cry when i know you are not around
 I have been broken too many times to be mended
 I am only your angel because you are mine
 I am strong because of you
 Before I met you I had lost hope
 But when you came so did hope
 It came like the morning
 After the day that seemed would never end
 Your benevolent smile
 Reaching your gold green eyes
 Your angelic thoughts
 Of poise and style
 Never fading
 Like your bright blue sky
 I fear what life will be like without you
 Afraid of losing myself
 Yet again
 I will be lost in my tunnel
 Not remembering from which way I came
 Infinitesimal light
 All of it inadequate
 Just soft glows of memories
 I was your angel
 And you were mine
 But now you are someone else's
 Goodbye, sweet angel
 And watch over mc, dear
 As I lay my head
 And don't let malevolence approach near

**The Lonely Blackbird**

by Michael Harrison

I wonder, I wonder
 The blackbird sighs
 If I can have
 My heart's desire

I sit here and gaze
 Upon the flower
 The ultimate symbol
 Of beauty and grace

But I sit on this branch
 Not near the flower
 Because the flower is behind
 A harsh glass wall

The blackbird sits
 In a never-ending vigil
 Watching the flower
 Hoping still

Night

by John Stoddard

Night is a sheet of nothingness,
 decorated by speckles of light.
 Night forms pictures,
 of myths and legends,
 long ago,
 and of past heroes and creatures,
 never to return.
 These images light the Earth,
 but fade in day.
 Now it's night,
 a cool calm night,
 never to speak of day,
 until the rooster crows.
 Night is a sheet of nothingness,
 decorated by speckles of light.
 Then, from behind clouds,
 a yellow face emerges.
 It seems to have a story to tell,
 about life,
 and love,
 and all things hoped for.
 The yellow face, not disturbed,
 slips peacefully back into its bed of
 clouds,
 not to return.
 Night is a sheet of nothingness,
 decorated by speckles of light.

Untitled

by Joe Bobrowsky

Your troubles are coming
In no one can you confide
Don't waste your time running
You can run but you can't hide

You begin to lose your mind
A lunatic you might call it
The thought chokes you from behind
But there's no way to stall it

You turn to your father
But he shows no understanding
He tells you don't bother
And gives you another rough reprimanding

You want to leave home
But there's just so much confusion
So you keep to your own
There is no other solution

Day after day
These worries will eat you
People think you are okay
But you know deep down
Your stress will eventually defeat you

You wish for the end
Of this painfully distressing life
For you cannot mend
This everlasting strife

Endless

by Peter Kuechler

How long is the road of life?
Like a highway just going on and on
Are there any exits with side attractions?
Or just endless rows of blaspheming billboards?

Outsider

by Peter Kuechler

I don't see what others see,
I turn a corner and see something repulsive,
Something not fit for life as a human.
Out of curiosity I reach out in pity; it does the same,
when we touch, I find myself touching a mirror.

Jesus Sonnet

by Mike Mihalko, Pat Clancy,
Joe Davie, Brian Haas, Mike Young

There once was a man named Jesus
He was very good
He was sent down to save us
cuz he lived in the hood
He fought Satan
And didn't smoke weed
He said no to hatin'
cuz he wasn't a dweeb
Jesus loved everyone
He walked on water
And he had tons of fun
He even loved his fatha
Jesus gave us fish and bread
Then he rose from the dead
Amen.

Untitled

by Michael Harrison

There are things
They don't tell you
About life
And of love

There is heartache
And hatred
Passion in both

There is discovery
There is loss
And feelings for both

Burning passion
And cold darkness
Wage war in our soul
Fighting for a way
To express how we feel

But there is no right answer
And no one way to say
How to express the feelings
Or what is right
About how you do it



Change

by Marianna Wright

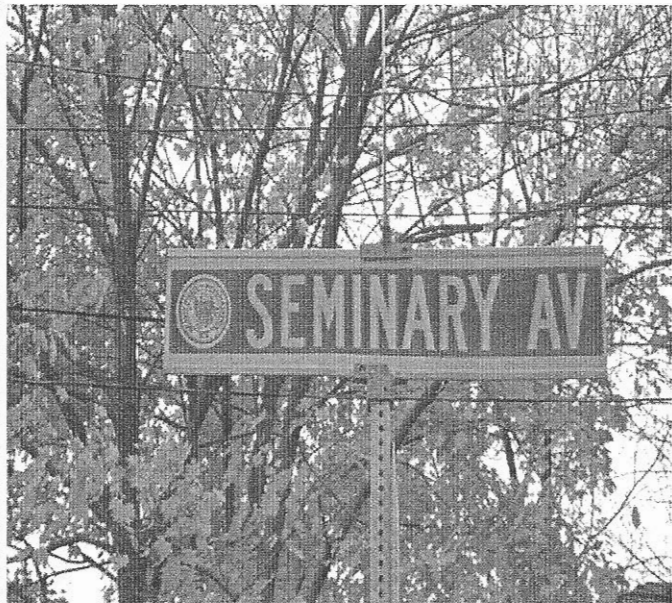
In life we have trouble
 We have grieves and woes
 We grumble and fumble
 That's when some of us let go.
 We drop support and love
 And turn ourselves away
 When push comes to shove
 We just want another day.
 We're all looking for a difference
 We all dream a new world
 We want to make a sequence
 But right now it's just a swirl.
 We live in this world, so big, so bad, so strange.
 But we can do something, you and me; it starts
 with one word- Change.



Overcoming WB

by Patrick Hart

As I stare at the vast expanse
 Stretched out before me, I begin to consider
 Where to start.
 Not even a whisper of an idea
 Flits within my mind.
 Silence fills the page.
 But,
 It needs to shout,
 To laugh, to cry, even to wail in pain.
 Yet, nothingness.
 Like the Arctic tundra
 Stretched across the barren wasteland
 The nothingness, empty space
 Taunts my soul.
 This monster, this demon,
 Stays one step ahead, erasing all before I arrive.
 Suddenly, out of the darkness, a whisper.
 As it grows, the page loses shrivels
 And,
 When this whisper grows, to a word, a shout, a scream
 Jack hammering at my mind
 Smashing its way out, in any way that it can,
 When I begin to feel the pain
 The seams of my consciousness
 Beginning to tear;
 I pick up my pen and begin to write . . .
 And defeat the Grendel of writer's block.



Triptych: As Love Fades

by Anonymous

I waited in vain
For the most wretched of truths
To become a dream.

I waited in vain
For the moon of a past night
To kill present doubts.

Can't wait anymore
While you try to spin a truth
Out of this charade.

Why War

by Satya Tabachnick

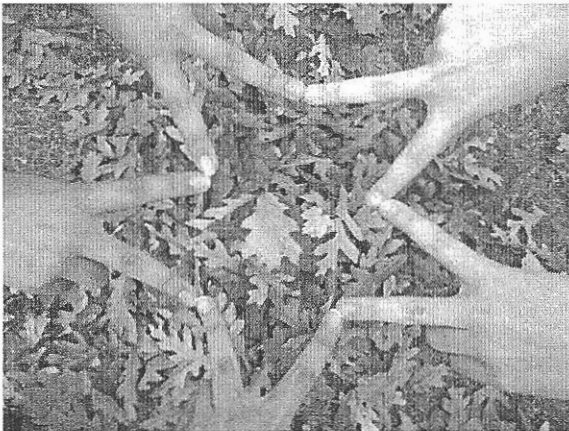
Bombs and death and nature destroyed,
is this why we came into being?

War over pride, money, and oil,
all our innocence shattered by seeing.

The reasons are noble or so they may seem
like spreading freedom and democracy,
But how many people are killed for the aid that
Was never wanted by the people who paid?

Then at the end when we count the dead
and see the blood and gore
the people who were safe and warm in their beds say
"This was a glorious war!"

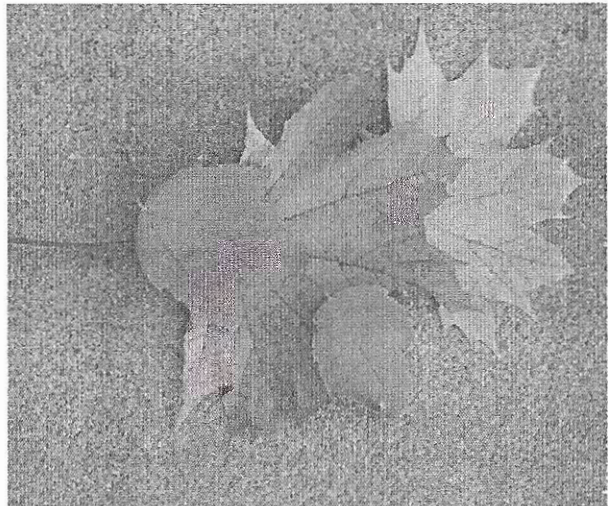
In this silence I ask you, those of future days,
to stop the cycle of suffering and moral decay.

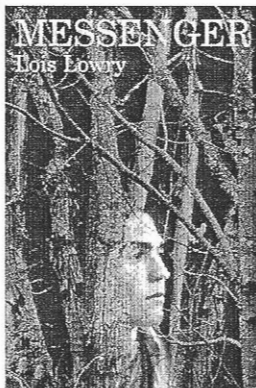


Sunsets

by Anonymous

I see the sun suspended in the sky,
Between the clouds, above the quiet lake.
While sitting on a cliff that's closest by,
Of lovely scenery I can partake.
The sky is purple, orange, pink, and red,
All blended in a spectrum by the sun,
All lying on their multicolor bed.
My day eventually became outdone.
I'd hate to go back home and not return,
And leave the cliff to go far, far away.
But one thing out here that you have to learn
Is sunsets don't last an entire day.
So I will leave and I will come back soon,
Until that time will come, I'll watch the moon.





Just For Adventure by Marianna Wright

Imagine living in a place where no one is rejected, turned away, or ridiculed. Food is plentiful and nothing could go wrong. Sounds nice, right? Welcome to The Messenger.

Lois Lowry sees potential with this kind of society, so she creates it. (Other books with similar settings are Gathering Blue and The Giver, both by Lowry). The main character, Matty, lives in a village that is constantly welcoming more and more people in need.

But something has happened to the village, and many of the villagers are working toward closing it off to all other places. Matty, being the usual messenger between his village and other surrounding places, is chosen to spread the word to all the other villages. Before he departs, his mentor, Seer, asks Matty to bring back his daughter from another village. Along the way, Matty notices a change in everything, and it's not for the better. He knows he must heal the world that helped him so much, and with an unexpected secret power he mysteriously acquires, he is willing to make the ultimate sacrifice.

Everyone loves a good adventure, right? With excitement, danger, and secrets? Yeah, I thought so. Be prepared to be on the edge of your seat, thrilled, nervous, and anxious, waiting for the next move to be made. And this isn't one of those frilly fantasy novels, despite what you think, with fairies, sorcerers, and magic wands. It's about perseverance, determination, and the power of making the right choice. If you are one of those kinds of readers who can't stand a sappy story, then this book is for you. Teens who crave those adventure and spur of the moment books can definitely relate to this book. Overall, this is a book worth reading.

Do you ever have one of those moments when you're staring at a book and you're not sure if it's for you? Send me an e-mail with a description of what you like to read at:

dream_reader93@yahoo.com.



Geeky Lovin' Fun by Mr. Lucia

Laura Preble's second novel is as enjoyable as the first, providing many humorous, entertaining moments.

The narrative is witty, lively, maybe just a tad outrageous -- but that's part of the fun. Regardless, "Queen Geeks in Love" continues the saga of Geek Extraordi-

naire Shelby Chapelle, while leaving plenty of room for further geek adventures.

Last year, loner Shelby met the indefatigable Becca Gallagher and their lives were changed forever. Not content to hide in the cultural elite's shadows, Becca inspired and formed the "Queen Geek Social Club" to advance the cause of geeks everywhere. Now, a smashing school dance and summer vacation later, the girls enter 10th grade and face the only thing powerful enough to threaten their solidarity: boys.

Suddenly, things are thrown awry as Shelby grapples with conflicting feelings for new boyfriend Fletcher, Amber and Becca fight over a sullen goth-comic-book artist, and a goon in a rabbit suit leaves Becca love notes.

To further complicate matters, Becca plans (much to Shelby's horror) to expand the Queen Geek mandate to include a Web site, an appearance at the local ComicCon as the "Geektastic Four," and a first annual "GeekFest" -- a talent show of geeky proportions.

Preble loses none of her steam in this story. The characters are realistic, making them easy to sympathize with, and there are plenty of laugh-aloud moments in this extremely fun read. Proving she has her finger on the pulse of what it means to be human and a teenager, Preble has a bright Young Adult literary future ahead.

Visit www.laurapreble.com and www.myspace.com/queengeeksocialclub

Perfect Cure

by Tom Kline

TRAIN MAN

A SHOUJO MANGA



Manga by Machiko Ohta / Original story by Hitori Nakano

I'm not a fan of love stories; in general, they're either too fake or too depressing. I usually like to partake in stories with suspense, explosions, and, occasionally, giant robots. Knowing that, you might understand my surprise when I discovered this fantastic novel in the manga section (an odd place for it to be, since it is a regular novel).

Train Man is the true story of a timid geek in his early twenties who ends up saving a girl from a drunk on the train. The girl then asks for his address, as she would like to send him a gift to show her gratitude. The gift turns out to be a pair of Hermes teacups. Being the nervous geek that he is, he turns to the users of the world's biggest BBS (bulletin board system), 2channel, for advice. With their help, Train Man, as he calls himself, asks the young lady (nicknamed "Hermes" for the brand of cups she sent) out to dinner multiple times, asking for help from "2channelers" each time.

It is important to note the style in which this novel is presented: The story is shown entirely as forum threads. This is because the novel is an archive of actual conversations posted on 2channel, sorted and edited by the author, Hitori Nakano. It is also important to note that the users of 2channel are anonymous (with some exceptions). This is because 2channel is an anonymous message board (in other words, you don't need a user name and password to post). The novel's style, along with its "anything-is-possible" moral, was an instant bestseller in Japan, and has been adapted into a movie, a TV series, and multiple manga stories. If you're looking for a love story for the Internet generation, look no further: Train Man is the perfect cure for that itch.

Editorials

Disconnected Thoughts: An Open Letter to the World

Dear World,

It's time you and I had a talk. No, I'm not here to lecture you about starting wars, or killing trees, or doing drugs, or anything like that. I'm here because I have some questions I need answered.

The first question: Who the heck am I? A computer nerd? A comedian? An actor? A freak of nature? Ruler of the world? A scientific experiment gone wrong? Why in the world was I created this way?

The second question: Who the heck are you? Are you my audience? My servant? Are you my friend, or my enemy? Will you help me, or hurt me? Am I your plaything? Your punching bag? Does watching me stumble bring you laughter? How does it feel, watching me struggle just to get through a day of high school, facing all the pain that comes from just getting out of bed in the morning?

The third and final question is this: What's my destiny? Will I be famous? Rich? Will I solve world hunger? Will I live the American dream (complete with wife, three children, and a picket fence)? Will I die young? Will I live forever? And finally, will any of these questions be answered?

I'll give you plenty of time to think about these questions. You know where to reach me, after all.

I Dwell In Possibilities Of Fairytales And Prose

By Robert Sanchez

From childhood it is no secret that we tend to dwell in the possibilities of things other than what this world holds. Be it the imaginative things we create inside ourselves or the worlds we live in just inside our head. Our lives are a constant struggle for something more, a constant struggle for escape, and none of us are sure what there is on the other side.

The best example for this theory on life is a jumping bean. As silly as it sounds, we are not that different from the larvae inside of a jumping bean. Spending our entire lives trying to get out into a world we know next to nothing about and then to end up dying two days later. Maybe we do not end life so harshly, but I cannot help but think that the death of the larvae is due to disappointment. Just like the little creature inside our little world of a bean, it gets out into this world just to be disappointed. There are not any fairytales or prose in a world like this. A world we have created.

In this great big world - where to put it simply, everyone is the same - everyone strives to be different, which in such an ironic turn makes them all the same. Just like in this big world, where because of everything, no matter how special we are, we are nothing. We are just another individual.

I cannot quite categorize this theory, it is not as much morbid as blatantly obvious. I cant help but wonder though...

Why is it that we always strive? Why is it that we keep trying to reinvent the wheel? Why is it that no matter how hard we try we just seem to get stuck in the same rut?

Personally I'm A Dreamer...

Because no matter how much we know, it is always more interesting to try to imagine what we do not.



Following the Leader

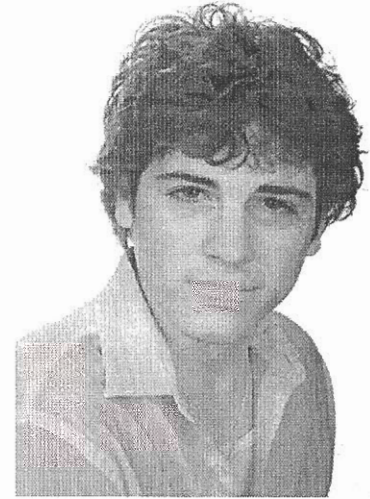
by Santino DeAngelo

Several weeks ago I had a bit of an experience, during which I was somewhat forced into examining the reason behind different actions and choices that I had made. Any time life grants such an opportunity it tends to put me in a bad mood because it's the first inclination that I've done something wrong.

During the course of this inner debate, the quality of leadership came under scrutiny. Why does one lead? Who are they trying to help, others or themselves? As a senior it is very easy to feel, in part, responsible for the rest of the student body. Perhaps that is because of a subconscious understanding that their actions may in some ways reflect our own. Regardless of class, however, there are those among the student

body that have the tell-tale potential of one day becoming great leaders. But what will they lead, and more importantly why will they try to do so? Leadership is not an opportunity to boss those around oneself, it's not about the recognition one gets afterward. A leader must have the courage to say how they feel and the strength to make the right decisions. A leader understands the gravity of being responsible for those around them and doesn't sleep very well at night. The most important quality of a leader, however, is their irrefutable conscience—a principal must have principles.

Sometimes it is easy to think that leadership abilities are reserved for the lucky few, but I'm here to tell you that leadership is not prejudiced to anyone. Sometimes it is easy to think that leadership abilities are reserved for some unknown time in the future, but there are many opportunities right here in our school to take charge of a situation and make a positive difference. Leadership can sometimes be confused with running an organization or performing Herculean tasks, but leadership in its most basic sense is nothing other than guidance. When you strive to make the right decision by helping someone else to do so, you are a leader. To do the right thing simply because it is the right thing to do makes you more than just a leader, it makes you the paragon towards which all of us strive.



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