

eleven40seven



Photo Credit: Christina Hicks

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"So it goes."



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I want to stay as close to the edge as I can without going over. Out on the edge you see all kinds of things you can't see from the center.

Kurt Vonnegut
(1922-2007)



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Editor's Note

In the Fall 2006 edition of *eleven40seven*, I addressed the issue that authors write for various reasons, often times expressing their inner anxieties. Notice the woman on the front cover. When I first saw this photograph it made me think that she was looking for guidance or shelter. I didn't give the photograph much more thought until I began reading over the submissions accepted for this print edition. Soon I began to notice an inadvertent theme running through several poems and prose pieces. Many featured works have a fearful tone surrounding common anxieties about death. I began to wonder if the woman in the photograph was confronting or contemplating some similar anxiety.

Both John Wood and Patricia Hilborn write about war and the worries of death and killing. In Patricia's short story "Come With Me," there is a striking sentence that displays death in two different ways. She speaks of physical death but also speaks of a metaphorical death and loss of childhood: "Some boys his age were already men, Pa said, on account of their fathers not coming home from the war." We see this theme continue with John's poem, "Turning Blue" because it also explores the loss of childhood innocence while also expressing realistic worries about a brother training to kill. "End of Seasons" by Sara Hevron is about the speaker's struggle with the death of her mother. These few mentioned are not the only pieces in this issue that have this theme.

It is healthy to express these fears and to seek sanctuary from them, especially through writing. One of our greatest novelists, the recently departed Kurt Vonnegut, did so. I hope you enjoy this edition of *eleven40seven* as much as the editors had fun putting it together. Always remember to keep writing, and we look forward to seeing your submission in Fall 2007.

Katy Garrison

P.S.

Please be sure to read our web-companion at www.1147.tcu.edu.

Anne-Marie Thompson

Quanta

The blueblack length of tar ahead
grows faint beneath the light, a sheath
of blinking waverings that slides
westward along the midnight highway.

And from the frontage road, I watch
the lights bend up and fall in waves,
like blackbirds that glide silent, turn
and dive in common time, one life.

Or like a ferris wheel at night,
with glowing arms that spin slow back-strokes
and little bulb-lined chairs that swing
on lonely spokes, and follow, follow.

But moving closer, I can see
the wheels, the mufflers, windshields glared
with headlight beams, and faceless forms
behind the glass, all driving singly,

and yet as one—a single soul
that pulls me into its bright file.
Inside this core, this throbbing white,
I lose myself, begin to dream.

My thoughts fly up, take on the hue
of winter rain, so like the gray
of Caillebotte's Pont de l'Europe.
And now I stand inside the frame,

looking down on railway cars
emerging from thick cloaks of steam.
I am small, a fleck of paint,
anonymous within this scene

[stanza break]

where all the universe is motion,
steam and metal, blinking lights.
But I stand still and watch it pass,
gripping icy metal beams.

The lights shrink down to pinhole size
behind me as I leave the road.
They fade into the blueblack night
and stars are all I see for miles.



Anne-Marie Thompson

Supermarket Fishtank

In the tank with filth and mildew grass
packed inside the blackness of the corners
and with a handmade sign taped to the glass
haphazard, yellowed at the curling borders,

a silent, clustered motion. Shackled flight.
The scales alive and heaving with strange rainbows,
the giant, fishlike mass of gills that bites
and gnaws the water with a kind of slow

resolve, the twenty fins that push and crawl
against the stagnant weight of never-tide,
the never-falling, ever-unseen wall
pressing, pressing the nose, as bubbles slide

along the wall and surface in a lather.
But now a rapid shifting in position,
a flash of light, a crash of skin and water,
then eclipse again, the lid slid back on.

They are scattered now, the little fish,
separate and all singly treading.
Soon, a slow turning in of fins, a hush,
and they are gliding as one again, and shining.



Patricia Hilborn

Come With Me

Wildflowers had come up sparse, probably on account of there being too much spring rain. Pa didn't talk about it much, but Jasper noted that Mama hadn't taken her flower vase down from the ledge high above the galvanized sink.

A year before, Jasper and his knee-britches brother had played among the red-petals of the Mexican Hats and striped Indian Blankets that grew on the hillside above the family's slant-roofed house. Adam wanted flowers for Mama's little glass vase, the one she'd brought from her childhood home to their rocky farm in the Texas hill country. So he and Jasper had climbed the hill together, kicking toadstools, bending for weedy flowers in the upper pasture where Pa kept his bull.

Jasper didn't want to think about wildflowers now. He pushed back from the table, trying not to meet his mother's gaze. She stood by the doorway, holding the bucket, preparing to fetch water from the creek. He ought to offer to carry the pail, but he waited, hoping she'd turn to the door without a questioning look in his direction.

Over the winter, he'd grown tall as her. He doubted he'd ever stand as tall as Pa. Across the yard, the chickens pecked the ground in front of the barn. Jasper would join his father out there, just long enough to receive his morning instructions. Pa would already have that hoarseness in his voice.

He glanced back at his lower bunk. Earlier that morning, he'd removed the worn cloth-covered readers from under the straw mattress where he'd tucked them away at least a fortnight ago. The schoolmaster would pass through from Temple Junction at the end of the month and he'd expect Jasper to have finished them. Jasper would take them with him, wrapped in his spare shirt, even though they weren't good for much anymore besides practicing letters. He'd had enough of that lately with little else to do except tend Mama's early garden, haul wood inside for the hearth or pick ticks off the old dog that followed Pa home from the war with Mexico.

Some men died lucky in that war, killed by cannon fire, and not from the gangrene that ate on a body for days. Pa had

said so plenty of times to men who rode through looking for the next town over, asking for a roof to sleep under for a night. Jasper would sneak out to the barn, late, when the stars touched the top of the hill, and listen to those dark talks. Pa had returned from the war missing his left ring finger and carrying stories he never told except to strangers. He had other scars to prove the war was over, he said to the men. But Jasper hadn't ever seen them.

"Now, you head due west for another seven miles, you'll come to Willow Springs," Mama would tell them the next day, after loading their knapsacks with biscuits and some dried meat.

Pa would check the leather cinches on their saddles, and whisper an aside to each rider, so's Mama wouldn't hear. "Up that hill, keep your distance from that red bull. He'll watch you, quiet like, then decide to run you down."

"Fair warning," would be the general reply, or sometimes a man might nod his head and add, "seen a fellow stomped to death once," but Pa would have already quit the horse's side and gone into the barn.

Sunday last, Jasper had come into the barn for no good reason and seen Pa slipping in the cork and tucking away his secret bottle. He made himself busy, hanging tack on the wall while Jasper asked about the fallow rows, whether they ought to plan on putting in a crop before long.

Some men died lucky in that war, killed by cannon fire, and not from the gangrene that ate on a body for days.

"When are you going to know the things a man needs to know?" his pa had asked.

Like knowledge was to come directly to him, and he should already know that bubbles under creek ice mean fish are looking for air, or that damp on a barn door means rain has leaked through the roof. That in a wet year the milking heifer shan't be allowed to munch on the wormy grass.

And that wildflowers don't come up.

A while back, Jasper let a good knife slip out of his hands into the swollen, rushing creek. And once he'd stumbled behind the mare and sliced the skin off his left heel on the plow blade, ruining a good pair of boots. But he'd turned 12 over the winter. Some boys his age were already men, Pa said, on account of their fathers not coming home from the war.

Jasper crossed the yard to the barn. He found his father sitting on an overturned pail, his arms idle at his sides. The tack needed oiling. The barn needed mucking out. But the farm gave enough work for one man, not two.

After lunch Jasper would slink past the rock wall at the top of the hill, hunching low and taking care not to trample mesquite twigs. The bull might lift his head at an intruding sound, but Jasper knew better than to try and outrun him. He knew what he would carry: the readers, the shirt. And some of Mama's biscuits.



PLP Hilborn

Buttoned Down

Have you ever worn button-downs?

Too hands on
Too young, too sassy-tree
Too sway with rhythm.

The thing is,
the button-down
stretches after breath, curls around places
zippers never tried –

alighting on erotic blues.
Pause. Unbutton. Fly.

John Wood

Turning Blue

To my brother Karl

I sat between a prideful patriarch
and a wet-eyed mother of four grown boys.
We heard thumping boots in gripping cadence
as rows of green-clad muscle, disciplined,
marched from behind towering Georgia pines.

There he is! and she waved at him in vain,
second from the left in the second row,
the youngest of four sons at attention.

Was it you and I, Cowboy, Indian,
battling in the yard? You never won then
but you are taller than me now, eighteen,
and you know well how to kill other men.

He will jump from a winter sky five times,
kind blue-eyed patriotic Icharus,
floating, deadly, the son of a craftsman,
while I write poems... yet I am terrified.



John Wood

Mariana, the Window Has a Candle in It.

This moment of clarity is tangible,
palpable as rain falling, undeniable,
the recognition of thou.

When a window curtain is drawn back from the building across the way,
and that is her,
looking out from behind panes of glass,
smooth and clear and
she is completely isolated.

There she is,
standing in perfect balance,
occupying this moment like a sentient sculpture in the complete sense of
occupying.

This window I see from across the way is lit from within,
and I say do not go out,
do not go,
I say to it, the light, I say,

Engulf this still-frame photo album of the present in the blaze from behind
your eyes like a candle in the windowsill that suddenly grows
in a flood of heat and light and everything is illuminated.



Gillis Hedlund

A Diary of Personality

I came home today. I was just tuning in as the door slammed shut. I turned on the TV out of habit. I looked in the fridge to see if I had remembered to buy milk. I was about to head towards the kitchen as the thought struck me: is this how everyone acts? Is the order of my homecoming sequence something uniquely specified as mine?

I was pondering this as I caught my reflection in the mirror. I was taken aback by what I saw. My eyes, they looked worried, anxious, but upon discovering this, they rapidly returned to their normal hazed, but observational gaze. I suddenly felt an urge to stay in front of the mirror pondering the moods bouncing off my face, but I was thirsting for milk and mindless entertainment. Narcissism has recently become one of my most tender vices.

I sat down in front of the TV, and I was just about to grope the tender parts of my couch in search for the remote, when I realized that my craving for milk had gone unsatisfied. A feeling of ambiguity was rested upon me, but I retained my sense of fatigue and slowly sat myself down upon finding the remote, wedged in between two differently sized pillows. Laurel and Hardy were on, one of their classics, but I had no urge to stay tuned.

I hated it. The life, the people, everything. I took comfort in the fact that it might eventually lead to something good further on, but there was no guarantee. I sit off life as others would a jail sentence. All I do is work. Nothing I do, I do for the simple pleasure of doing it, but rather in order for me to do more work. I am Sisyphus, unable to take joy in the futility of my pushing.

When I get home I want only to escape this life, but I prevent myself, largely in concern for others. I watch TV, that is what I do, and that is all I want to amount to in life. I scarcely hint to emotion, with rare late-night exception. I live in my world, comprised of passive-aggressive apathy and

exhaustion, and I am not content, but I am in understanding with my surroundings.

Why I must go on like this is not of my knowledge. I do what I have to do, to make time pass. I did not choose this role. It was dealt to me unasked for. I persevere, but with a constant look of weariness in my eyes. I look as though I have to. Nothing in this world gives me joy by serving as an object for my gaze.

Occasionally, I catch an old Laurel and Hardy on the box. They do not stir my emotions, but they awaken an understanding in me. I sympathize with their destiny. They are forever: the two unmatched partners who would forever be known as mundane, all because of their grayness. They are forever life. They can fall down all they want, but in the end nobody will be laughing hard enough to discourage themselves from looking for another channel. I guess things were different before. Nowadays nothing is worth getting off the couch for, not even when I feel myself yearn do I have any wish to suppress the apathy and contempt that is me.

I was astounded by it. The weather, it was amazing. Colors I could not spell were displayed in front of me taking the temporary shape of a sunset, but they were soon swallowed by the grayness of everything. Night fell, and all my work was done. I make haste down the street to catch my bus home.

I walk these streets, always with a sense of urgency. I walk as fast as I can, from point to point, enjoying as much as I can in doing so. I walk in this gray world, and occasionally I see spectacular things. Some things are of spectacular beauty, and some of complete repulsiveness, but they are a disappearing few in the vastness of nothing I inhabit.

I look forward to them though, those instances in life; when life chocks me by the emotions expressed around me. Those pleasures, however short, are what drive me. It worries me that I might one day be surrounded by complete nothingness. That is why I keep rushing. Anxiously waiting for the next moment in which Nature, in her essence, might present herself.

I have seen her in many different places, but I find her most often in such mundane tasks as seeing a beautiful

sunset, or having a tall glass of milk. I always promise myself that I will look for her, but it seldom happens; it is as if this monumental grayness was holding me down, but as often as I can, I look for her, and hope that she will once again let herself be found.



Gennifer Williams

Doors of Ominous Portents 1



Sara Hevron

End of Seasons

Boxing up your clothes from the closet upstairs
Felt like shutting away every memory of you.
The bright yellow raincoat that protected you
From the rain, dancing with your daughters in the spring;
The lavender skirt that you often wore
On afternoons at the park in the summer;
The vibrant blue shawl that draped over your shoulders
On chilly nights in the fall;
The red dress that you saved for
Special nights out with Dad in the winter.
Now, I face the white walls behind the empty hangers;
I feel as though all color has been drained.



Tyler Brown

Infinite Resignation

We delivered them from the mall's holocaust,
Wet, round, and sticky like lichen on a stone
Wall. Took them home and lay their frail little
bodies in a slate of stale water in a steel pail.

Eventually, we moved them to a cardboard box.
Laurie fed them in the morning and talked
Like they were her own. She watered them
While they scratched against the rim of their prison.

Still scratching, scarring our ears with their
Claws on cardboard, they crawled in despair,
Though we didn't know it was despair then.
Soon, however, their stalwart shells softened,

And their eyes cleared, as though our simple love
Saturated their shells to skin, and thinly wove
White silken threads into their eyes. In their blindness
We couldn't deny that death defied us, so

We took them home, round in our palms like slickened
Stones, to divide in a wood. In the calm water,
We released them. They dissolved, as in a dream,
Into the rippling plumage of the stream.



Tori Hutchens

Rainy Days

I see one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-clad, and ill-nourished. The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.

~Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Second Inaugural
Address, Washington, D.C., January 20, 1937.

The sun has hardly started its ascent, and already the line stretches around the corner. I curse myself for not rising before dawn in order to be home with bread before my family awakens. I see my reflection a hundred times in the men around me; we look exactly the same. We are weary, depressed along with the rest of this world. Lack of work mocks us daily, but we continue the struggle to provide for our families. We dress for rainy days, even when the sun shines. And the sunrises? It's difficult to find beauty in them when there is so much that needs doing.

Wrinkles of doubt furrow our brows and laugh-lines are only present in the elderly, for only they have known a time for laughing. And while I know the good Lord has told us there is a time for everything, I don't believe he ever guaranteed that each of us would know all seasons.

It is a brisk cold, but the wind is weak. My back aches this morning, and the pain is almost gratifying. For the first time in months, I had a half-decent day's work moving boxes for the grocer in my neighborhood who is open for business, though he can rarely afford employees. He was kind to give the work to me, and I am lucky to have been in the right place when he needed someone to hire.

St. Catherine's has opened for business this morning, and the line begins to move. I wonder if they'll have more than just bread today. Last week, they gave us some butter with the bread, and some days they have milk and even fruit. With difficulty, I restrain myself from fantasizing about what may be. I know if I wait long enough, at least I will have bread.

The sun has found a good place in the sky, and its light is illuminating our grey, rundown ghost of a city. The steadily

employed are just now leaving their families for work. Shops are opening. I've begun to enjoy watching the streets awaken around me. It's a little ritual we share, my reflections, the city and me. It is one constant in a shifting and unreliable world.

The city is noisy, but I tune it out. A husband kissing his wife on their front stoop while she passes him a lunch tin has reminded me of a past time. I miss what he has. I do not know this man, but I know he provides for those he loves with something better than stale bread taken from the local charity. I know he has a wife who cares for him, who has her health and beauty both. I do not know this man, and yet I know him well, for he represents a mirror-image I used to see; the image I saw before I came to be reflected in the men who continue, even at this moment, to shuffle forward for their bread.

My daytime reveries center upon a beautiful woman. At one time, her name alone brought music to my ears. Ah, Patricia. Patricia, so greatly have I missed your knowing eyes and loving embrace. We had such happy years together, Patricia. Remember? The memory of your face when I gave you that string of pearls can bring some happiness into my eyes even now, though the pearls are gone in exchange for a couple of meals. Now, when I can no longer gaze upon your knowing doe-eyes. I do see some of you in the children, however. Paul, who knows his mother only from pictures, shares your long eyelashes and golden hair. I like to think he has my strong chin. Virginia mimics your curious nature. She is always asking questions, about everything. She reminds me so much of you as you were in our youth, glowing, innocent, pure. And here I stand waiting; naively believing you might be able to know my thoughts even now, hoping that you are not too disappointed in me when you see your family.

The bread line has paused. There are only twenty-some men between the bread counter and me. I strain to see what the men are taking with them from the line, but as far as I can tell there is just bread. Even stale, it is superior to nothing.

I was not rich when we married. We were so young, and at twenty-one I had just received my first paycheck. We lived such frugal lives, then. If I had known what would happen to all of our savings, I would have lived luxuriously instead. I would have kept the money under the mattress. I would not be waiting here in line today. If only it were feasible to redo it all. My Patricia, you might still be here today had we had

the money for a doctor to help you give birth to our son. But these imaginings are fruitless and painful. And so it is with "if only's" and "I would've's."

Out of the corner of my eye, I see a man who has lost more than I. He has already received his hand-out, and he stands across the street eating. A sign draped over his shoulders advertises his homelessness and skills as a laborer, though, like me, he does not appear to have done much laboring. He probably held down a good office job before this depression rearranged all our lives. Perhaps, like me, he had spent his days reading blueprints and estimating in an engineering firm. S&J Company closed its doors less than six months after Black Tuesday. Every one of us lost our jobs just after losing the money we'd invested in the stock market. And so I became an out of work project manager. I wonder if his situation is similar.

*wrinkles of doubt furrow
our brows and laugh-
lines are only present in
the elderly, for only they
have known a time for
laughing.*

We continue moving. Pigeons descend around the man across the road, fighting viciously for the few crumbs that have fallen from his loaf. Even they are hungry. I overhear the man whose turn has come at the counter asking if they are sure they don't have something more for his famished family of six, and I pity him. Like Father Clarence said in mass on Sunday, I do know I have been blessed even in my hardship. I have managed to retain a small apartment for the children and me, and I have only three mouths to feed, including my own. And so, until the companies reopen, the bread line promises that my children will not starve. May the Lord continue to bless us thus.

I have lost an hour and a half of the morning waiting in this line. Virginia and Paul will have awakened by now; they should be preparing for school. Mrs. Davis will see them off this morning if they need to go before I have returned with breakfast. She is kind to us. When you died, Patricia, she offered such assistance as I could never have expected in these hard times. She and her family truly have perfected the art of loving one's neighbor.

At last I reach the counter. One of the nuns smiles at me as she hands me the dry bread. I tip my crumpled hat and smile in thanks. She understands me. I turn my back to the bread line and to the hundreds more just like me who wait for nourishment for their bodies. I head for my home, continuing to see reflections of myself throughout the city. The rain gear we are wearing only intensifies the dreariness of our days. My matching American brothers wander aimlessly, stopping at each office, requesting work even in the least desirable places. This routine matches mine of the past weeks, months, years. There is little work to be had.

I walk up the three flights to our apartment and find my children have not yet left. Mrs. Davis is clucking at them like a mother hen. I chuckle as she calls to them, "Virginia, do you have your school books together? Paul, where are your suspenders?"

Paul's sleepy hair stands on end, and I pat it down before placing his cap on his head. Virginia is perched on a chair at the kitchen table, swinging her legs. I hand her a piece of the bread. Paul tugs gently on my trousers, and I hand him his breakfast. I thank Mrs. Davis and see her and the children out the door with a smile I hope is reassuring. Now it is my turn to join my reflections in the quest for employment. I doubt I will find work, but I must continue to try. Some days, the grocer needs help moving boxes.

At the close of the day, Roosevelt's second inaugural address plays on the radio in the apartment below ours, and the neighbors are kind enough to let us join in for the listening. His soothing tones encourage those of us who waited in the bread lines that morning and ease the fears our children harbored. We have bread on our table upstairs, never mind that it is a bit stale and we lack the butter to sweeten it, and Roosevelt is on the radio to remind us we still have nothing to fear.

And yet we are afraid.

Eric Fisher Stone

Swan

The hook-throated swan
glides with the arrows
of her feathers
splaying with her wings
soft as the sea's white foam.
She stops to swim on the pond
like a boat made of silk
with a snake-high prow.

Into the water she slips
her neck nape-deep
for slivers of minnows
shaking lights like foil.

When her golden beak
emerges from the murk,
the sun swells lava
on the water,
its crests tussle against each other.

That snow-driven bird
paddles to the wilderness
of another shore
where currents beat inch-high waves,

the sound of it subtle
as a petal falling on the water.

The evening is deep blue,
as the swan flies away;
her eyes open their black ovals,
her body bright as a lotus,
as she ripples her wings
to the silent spear-points
of the stars.



Eric Fisher Stone

In Sixth Grade II

I made up my mind of what to do at lunch break:
I was going to speak to her.
She was by herself in the cafeteria,
Her arms stretched out on a table
Tender as white butter,
Her face round as an apple
Before ripeness.
I whispered "hi" hoarsely
As I stood, ready to dissolve backwards
Like an ocean tide into the deep,
Though I stayed, to sit next to her.
She turned her head soft as a seagull
With its balance and brightness,
And her mouth, subtle as a dolphin's,
With that barely upturned smile.
With her pink finger, she curled threads of her hair
Into golden spirals of May,
And looked away,
Her ear facing at me, a coiled white shell.
She stood up, and walked to her friends
Gliding away on her sandals.
Goodbye my young Nereid,
My rising Aphrodite.
That night I dreamed I danced
With the sea



Jacqueline Leung

At Home Away

7:58 am

"Next station, Wan Chai. Please mind the gap." Here I am, on the way to work like every weekday of the year. Stuffiness and the smell of over-circulated air fill the MTR carriage, or at least what is left of it. In fact the carriage is so stuffed with people that I am beyond lucky to be able to get a seat this morning. Sometimes I can only imagine us being sardines enclosed in this crowded metal container. A brief stop, then the train regains speed and rumbles along the tracks.

Three more stops before Central. I often observe and wonder about those whom I share the carriage. Passengers are usually reading the paper, talking on their cell phones, anxiously waiting to get off, or simply staring into thin air, wandering in their minds. Of course, there are always ring tones that go off non-stop on the train. Together, they almost sound like a symphony complementing the dullness of the ride. My mind drifts off. Peeking over someone's shoulder I notice an advertisement for cheap flights in the paper: \$4982 HKD for a flight to London. Tempting. London was where I spent my university years and it was a city I have come to love. How nice it would be to catch up with old friends and professors, lounge in those romantic cafes for hours on end, be a tourist again and walk around Hyde Park and Covent Garden, watching the performances in the square. Pigeons would be everywhere, inhabiting every little nook of the city. And let's not forget the neon lights reflecting on the red double deckers at Piccadilly Circus, forever a classic image of Central London...

"Next station, Central. Please alight on the left." My little daydream jolts back to the MTR carriage. I diligently squeeze my way pass the crowd to get off.

8:15 am.

After work I head to Citysuper at IFC for some grocery shopping. As I walk through the entrance I'm greeted by assorted panettoni of different shapes and sizes. Another Christmas is coming along already, I realize. The panettoni

sold in Hong Kong are all immaculately presented in colorful boxes. I still remember the first time I saw these cakes in Sicily. It was a rainy afternoon and in the small city of Marsala there was a family-run grocery shop on the main street. Out of curiosity I ventured in and picked up a large, yellow cake covered with icing. It was shaped a bit like a mountain with a flat top and wrapped with transparent plastic, secured nicely on top by a ribbon. Not knowing what it was, I wondered what the cake would taste like. As if reading my mind, the friendly shopkeeper lady walked towards me smiling and pointed to the cake and said "Buono." I still remember my excitement, and I could not wait to get back to the hotel room to try the Italian specialty...

I returned home with bags of shopping. It's Mom's birthday today, and I felt obligated to do "something." Since Dad left two years ago we had always gone to the standard dinner out to celebrate. This year perhaps I thought a home cooked meal would be more "thoughtful." Despite my elementary cooking skills, I pulled off a three course dinner. She put a spoonful of the homemade mushroom soup to her lips. "Nice, but too salty. Too heavy on the wine." As usual, criticisms! She did not make any more comments about my other dishes. She assured me that the effort was very much appreciated. But I feel bad that I am not able to please her. Sometimes it just makes me want to break free from this cage again. I know it is insensitive for me to feel like this, but my mind cannot help but go back to the days in London when it was so much easier to just "get out" of the city, trouble free and without obligations whenever I wish. A three hour journey from Waterloo would take me to Paris- a whole different world altogether. The city of romance was always spellbinding. Whenever I'm there I feel special. I don't know if its reputation as the most romantic city in the world is such a definite influence, all I know is that the Eiffel Tower and hazy yellow lights at night always add elements of style and fantasy to enhance Paris' celebrated impression as the city of l'amour....

Feeling disillusioned, I excused myself from my mother's apartment and took a walk. This is the city where I grew up, a city where my feet walk everyday. Yet, I have never REALLY observed it closely. Most of the time for me, Hong Kong is just Hong Kong, and I am only here because this is where I was born. Tonight however, I began to take a good look around

me. It's ironic that I have traveled to so many countries to see and appreciate what they had to offer; yet I never took a closer look back at my home city. I stroll around aimlessly. I am surrounded by buildings. The color of the buildings might differ, but the windows all look the same, every single window of every floor are exact copies of each other. In between the buildings lies a highway where a double decker passes through. It is an almost surreal image out of a sci-fi movie. What a bizarre sight! I wonder how the occupants of these buildings cope with living just meters away from the traffic.... Of all the cities I've been to in the world have I have never seen residential buildings so close to highways. A bit further along I see a huge bamboo scaffolding covered by layers of green gauze-like netting. The resulting bamboo ensemble is always rows after rows of perfect squares, and I find myself marveling at this sight. This is common in Hong Kong, but nowhere else in the world. So are the neon lights. Tourist guides are full of pictures of them. On a sleepless night at 4 am, a walk around Causeway Bay or Mong Kok still helps to ease the pain of solitude. At least, there are always people walking around, CD/VCD/DVD shops are open 24 hours and one can be assured that the bubbling noise of curry fish balls sauce at snack stalls will not stop after the last MTR train of the night.

With these scenes in mind, it's hard to imagine how Hong Kong was once just a "barren rock" with a small population of fishermen. Just last week, mom and I paid a visit to Tai O Fishing Village, our attempt to "experience" and remind ourselves of the past again. Of course, we felt like tourists when we arrived. Although nowadays it is filled with visitors and bustling with stalls selling traditional street snacks, there still exists a sense of tranquility in this fishing village. A lot of the stilted houses are still intact. Before the bridge was built, the villagers' only way of crossing between the two sides of the waterway was by their sampans. The waterways of Tai O have been compared to those in

It's ironic that I have traveled to so many countries to see and appreciate what they had to offer; yet I never took a closer look back at my home city.

Venice and thus named “Venice of the Orient.” We browsed the market stalls where dried seafood was on sale. Mom and I devoured malt sweet cracker sandwiches. No one sells this type of snack in mainland Hong Kong anymore. Memories flood back for mom as she eats. “Back in those days there weren’t so many varieties of snacks! These cracker sandwiches were a treat for us years ago, of course they are all replaced by the infinite choices of biscuits and crisps nowadays!” she sighed. I took a mouthful and the filling stuck to my teeth. I can only wait for it to dissolve before I can enjoy another bite! If I am in Venice I would definitely have a gelato in my hand. I tasted the best panna cotta gelato when I was there, and I still find it puzzling that even though Italian ice cream is now available in many places in the world, it never tastes as good out of its home country. I remember how I arrived in Venice by train and as soon as I stepped out of the station, I stood in awe of the amazing Grand Canal. Gondolas, the gondolas I always heard about, read about, seen in photographs, were in front of me, sailing along the canal and following the rhythm of the gentle waves. Finding it difficult to decide whether to look to the left or right, I couldn’t stop but marvel at the water alleys and the grandeur of the amazing architecture. There I found my perfect image of Venice. It was a narrow water alley, and a short, curved bridge served as the connection between the two hotels on opposite sides. It was a calm alleyway and the tiny ripples were the only moving element in this perfect frame. In contrast to the rich array of dried seafood in Tai O, Venice’s market stalls were filled with multi-colored pasta of different shapes and sizes, red, blue, green, orange, black, yellow...in addition to these were bags of porcini mushrooms and jars of pesto sauces. Further along were carnival masks, mysterious yet brimming with bright colors and shimmering with glitter. For me, they evoke images of masquerade balls and I could almost picture the immaculately dressed Venetian high-society all enjoying themselves behind masks in opulent palaces.

Venice, the most famous water city in the world, actually has a lesser-known sister in Belgium. Again, I jumped on the Eurostar to Brussels on a whim and found myself heading for Bruges, a medieval city not far from the capital. It escaped the bombing of the wars and remains preserved in its original state. In fact, this enchanting city is frozen in time. Everywhere I saw old fashioned chocolate and waffle shops, with so much variety

that I could not decide on what to buy. I went on a boat around the canals, passing through many bridges where we had to duck. Around me were houses that are centuries old, one next to another varying in rooftop colors and window shapes, all making charming sights for the eye. The final sight of a Belgian woman dressed in traditional blue and white clothing weaving a sheet of intricate lace reminded me of the people here and how little they have changed.

Today is Sunday, and I'm in for a long ride on the MTR heading for a relative gathering in Yuen Long. On the seat next to me is a woman knitting a scarf. Normally I wouldn't look twice, but I suddenly realized that in Hong Kong women knit everywhere. On buses, MTR, in the park, dim sum restaurants....For someone whose circle of activities is only confined in Central, I begin to observe my surroundings. The train is now traversing the above ground pass tunnels of the city. Although most people only look down at their magazines or newspapers, I find myself actually looking out of the window today. In this part of Hong Kong, more grasses and trees are appearing in front of my eyes. Density of the buildings fades away to an open sky.

I got on the KCR and continue my journey. A traditional Chinese house flashes past my eyes. As I travel through these stations in the New Territories, I realize that Hong Kong is not just about high rise buildings, traffic and shopping malls. "Next stop, Yuen Long." My aunt greets me at the station and asks me to accompany her to the market. It's been so long since I have bought food from a street market. Hong Kong markets are full of color. Vegetable in rattan baskets are plentiful, fruits divided into different sections are shone on by bright red lamps, butchers stand in front of their stalls with their huge cleavers ready to chop off your desired portions, chickens are crammed into tiny cages with hardly any space to move. A few steps away from the market I see two elderly women in traditional Hakka attire sitting on low stools selling pak choi on rattan trays. Next to them is a bakery selling egg tarts and preserved egg pastries. I finally begin to feel the lively rhythm of my city. It is ironic that I spent so much time traveling around learning about other cultures that I have ignored my heritage. Little do I know how much I have missed.



Shannon Hardwick

Marriage on the Rocks

"Another one on me," he said,
sipping on what I thought
was romantic or at least somewhat
captivating.

It doesn't matter what week
or day or hour it was,
I can't remember the last time
sex was interesting.
Just take me home.
"But you're still so young," he said,

"and your skin gives your age a desired
effect, the way your eyes
trust me."

How often can a marriage be rebuilt?

"It was her intensity that made me weep.
She had this way of making me feel wanted."

And I wanted him in a dark room,
to be a woman on a higher plane:
[a different perspective]

An exotic thought...
to speak such words,
sifting the wife out of him,
on the sheets of soiled promises.

But as he poured another whisky,
I wondered how his wife would feel.

[stanza break]

Perhaps now she's pretending
to sleep in a new negligee
she bought this afternoon
after dropping the kids off,

hoping he will slip in quietly,
notice her last-attempt purchase.
Maybe at this moment she's struggling
with the thought of her babies.

Remembering the day he told her
that her skin gave her a desired effect,
wishing that her eyes could trust him again,
that their marriage could be rebuilt.

I listen to him speak of brokenness.
Maybe he thinks I can repair him.
I have been sending him signals
through my eyes that do not see
patterns, just my desiring present.

Realizing that I am not his savior;
I cannot be mended through exorcised pain.
Because investments never go away,
and there's one too many women
drowning in his half empty glass of whisky.



Shannon Hardwick

Islington 1 A.M.

Islington 1 A.M. and I am thinking of
desperation and cold fingers
as I walk in a haze of tears, splashing
my way back to Euston.
So this is '67.

I find conversations
after the initial shock
accents sometimes bring.
"You must have pie and mash,
sometimes it's nice just not
being alone. Do you mind
holding my hand?"

He talked like the movies
I had seen – wet streets glowing,
a business suit in suffocation.
And after the Vodka and cigarettes
the age lines blur.
"My wife left me" and the kids I
don't remember.

But what is 17 years –
reaching blindly to relive
1984 through the bluest of eyes:
"Even more lovely when you cry."

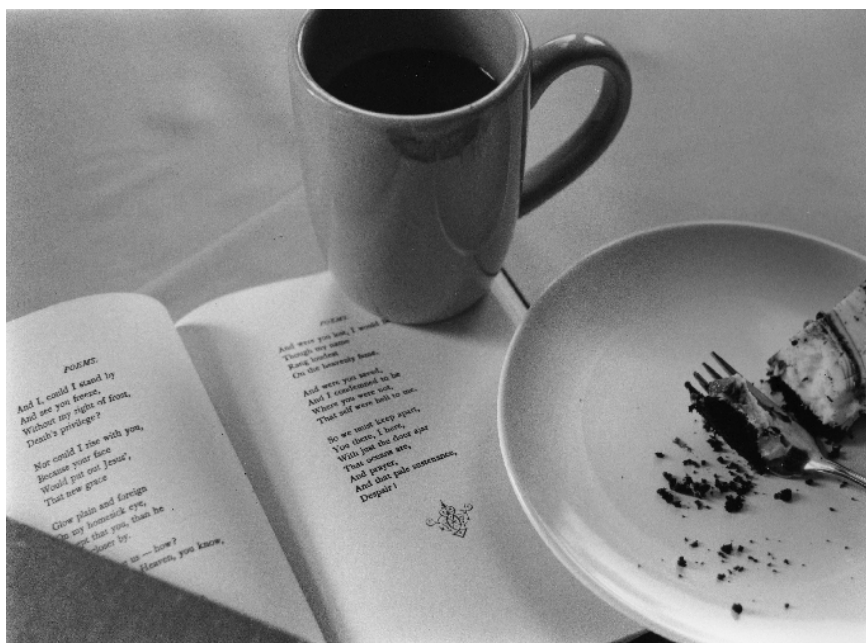
And I add to the pavement in waves,
walking alone dodging whistles
and thinking of the man
drowning in a three piece suit.
"You will make a wonderful wife"
he said, tracing the ghost of a gold ring.



Christina Hicks

"I Cannot Live with You"

~Emily Dickinson



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One need not be
a chamber to be haunted;
One need not be a house;
The brain has corridors surpassing
Material place.

~Emily Dickinson