

The Alchemist Review

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Jackie's Husband Loves Her

Emerald nights sipping bottled tea laced
With harsh whiskey in rusted goblets cold.
Stepping out of her man's saliva traced

Kisses on soft fleshy hands with well spaced
Regret for ignoring the time and bold
Emerald nights sipping bottled tea. Laced

Curtains half block her scant secrets encased
In unmailed parchment that she will fold
Stepping out. On her man's saliva traced

Skin she playfully and generously places
Hearts before she runs to shadows who hold
Emerald nights sipping bottled tea laced

With sweat in their thickly calloused palms. Vows raced
For eternal contentment they scold
Stepping out on her. Men's saliva traced

Lips haunt her closed eyes, memories defaced
By alcohol scented trysts and hours untold
Perfecting an alibi. She feels graced
Stepping out on her man. Saliva traces.

Phyllis Coon

Summer's End

Alma grabbed the railing for balance as she leaned down to dislodge her white pump from the gravel path. She shoved the shoe back on her foot and climbed the steps of the Wagon Wheel Bar and Grill.

Inside, the circular bar was lit only by beer signs. The jukebox blared "Boot Scootin' Boogie" as about a dozen men and a couple of women tried to make themselves heard over the din.

As her eyes adjusted to the dark, Alma saw shafts of late afternoon sun coming from the dining area beyond. Pushing past the crowd at the bar, she stopped uncertainly at the doorway of the empty room. Tables covered in white cloths with small glass vases of fresh carnations contrasted with the smoky rusticity of the adjoining bar. The walls and ceiling were glass as if the dining room had once been a greenhouse. Through the windows a small lake surrounded by trees glistened in sunlight.

A plump woman in jeans and a western shirt bustled toward her. "Table for one, honey?" she asked.

"No, for two," Alma said. "I'm meeting my husband."

The waitress seated Alma at a table next to the windows where she could look out across the lawn to the lake and also have a view of the bar through the arched doorway.

"Would you like a drink while you wait?" the waitress said.

Alma considered a minute and ordered white wine. She preferred red, but she tended to spill when she was nervous and red wine would leave an awful stain on her white linen sundress.

She leaned back in her chair and tried to think positive thoughts. Rick had been as charming and funny as usual when he called last night on his way back from California, but his suggestion to meet at a public place seemed somehow ominous.

She sipped her wine and recalled their first meeting a year ago at the faculty meeting before school opened. Tall and bronzed, Rick told fascinating stories of his study of oceanography, which seemed exotic and glamorous to Alma who had never even seen an ocean. Being the only first-year teachers at Washington High, they had naturally struck up a friendship. This had blossomed into a romance and culminated in a wedding last Christmas.

She remembered how Rick had broached the subject of spending the summer in California at breakfast two weeks before school closed.

"Alma, I have a chance to work with one of my former professors at UCLA on a research project this summer," he said.

"But I've already signed a contract to teach summer school. You're not going to do it, are you?" she said, knowing in her heart that he had already made up his mind.

"It's a wonderful opportunity and it's only for two months. You'll hardly know I'm gone," he said, pouring milk on his corn flakes.

"I don't blame you for wanting to work in your field, but I was looking forward to our first summer. And you promised to teach me to swim." Alma concentrated on stirring her coffee. "You're not sorry we got married, are you?"

Rick hesitated a moment before answering. "I love you, Alma, but it happened so fast. I think we need some time to think, to decide what we really want."

Startled by a warm hand on her shoulder, Alma jumped, spilling her wine.

"Rick, look what you made me do," she said, looking up into his blue eyes.

"Sorry," he said, sliding into the chair opposite her. "You look wonderful in spite of the spots."

"So do you. You're so tan and everything." Alma blushed, suddenly feeling awkward and shy.

A commotion in the bar drew their attention to the doorway. A young man in jeans and a cowboy hat led a young woman with swinging blond hair through the dining room past their table.

"Jimmy, what are you doing?" she said, pulling back.

"I want to show you something," he said, as he opened the door leading to the grassy lawn.

As soon as they stepped outside, the crowd from the bar poured into the dining room and lined themselves along the windows.

"Is he going to do it?" a man asked.

"That's what he claims," the waitress said, peering over Alma's head.

Alma and Rick watched with the others as Jimmy pulled the young woman along toward a weather-beaten dock beside the lake. The setting sun laid a shimmering path across the water.

When they reached the dock, Jimmy fell to his knees still holding her hand. Then suddenly he stood and engulfed her in an embrace. As they kissed, the crowd cheered and began drifting back to the bar.

With tears in her eyes, Alma watched as the couple walked slowly back up the path, their arms intertwined.

"Poor sap," Rick said, opening the menu. "Have you ordered yet?"

Linda McElroy

Wear Your Shoes

Remind me how bitter the winter wind tastes
when I long for a deserted county road.
The frigid triangle of summer softened asphalt
repels unforgiving snow plows,
yet beckons creeping fingers of huddled snow masses.
Silent sirens howl enveloped by the desolate
sanctuary of naked pines and stuffed silos.

Leap through seasons on soles caked in blades of grass basted
by fresh coats of road
oil. Gasoline foot baths offer minimal assault
on cemented layers that entangle
all the little piggies in impasses
on the edge of the solid liquid until late
in the evening when I know I will never ever forget
to wear my shoes--until tomorrow afternoon.

Phyllis Coon

Salted Sheets, 3am

Suddenly there's a sterile room
and it judges me as I sit,
lip-reading a faceless person
whose clinical sympathy blinds her
to the rush and roar of blood
double pumped and deafening inside me.
Her starched counsel alone moves nothing
but my hands run red and my barren mind
begins to push life, screaming, to an end.

J. Danz

Contributors' Notes

David Aikman--I would like to express appreciation to the following whose support of my work made the difference this year: Dr. Marcellus Leonard for inspiration, insight, and friendship; Poets' and Writers' Literary Forum for the outlet; and Phil Funkenbusch for the opportunity to channel Tom's spirit in "The Glass Menagerie."

Jason Bennett--My greatest hope is never to be taken too seriously. I think we lose our perspective when we forget how to laugh at ourselves.

Anita Buis--Nominated Silly Poet of the Year. The movement of words link past and present into one place. The future sits blank like white space.

Ward Campbell--It's all true! Every name, date, and place in "Simeon A. Dunn" is straight out of an article on Mormon midwives in the Utah Historical Quarterly, and it's somewhat eerie to think that these people once really existed. Still...Patty Sessions rules! And it's a hoot to hear Steven Wright tell these jokes in my head (even though he didn't really say them; I did).

Phyllis Coon--"It doesn't matter if I go to heaven or hell because I'll have friends in both places"--Clemens the sophisticated Midwesterner!

Razak Dahmane--An Assistant Professor in the UIS English program who feels ecstatically fortunate in the caliber of students and colleagues he works with.

J. Danz--To my Muse and to my drive: I'm sorry. Please come home.

Sam Davis--History. Midwest. Artist. Avid traveller.
Photographer. Filmmaker. Axe-lobber.
Fortune-teller. Gypsy. Writer. Cat-lover. Poet?

Myrna Felix--After writing my short pithy statement, I felt as if I were back in high school, waiting for the bus, and suddenly realize my outfit is quite odd. Once I board the bus, there will be no escape from an entire day of embarrassing dress. So, I resort to seeking my friend Tavia's advice...And so it goes:

This poem is an angry response to a demoralizing incident. Writing becomes a path to recover individual power.

Jael Goatley--Distance has distorted my perspective. As the inexplicable need arises to comfort myself with nostalgia, I reach back into the recesses of my childhood memory and scrape images away from the events, combining them with longing and shaping them into poems.

Jeanne Handy--I began writing because of a love of travel and a very short memory. Whether traveling around the world or to another point in life, there are experiences and people I never want to forget.

Charles David Heimlich--A native of Springfield, lives with his wife Cathy and daughter Jane. He began writing after the sudden death of his six year-old son John in 1994.

Ryan Hibbett--Poetry from a fairly easy existence and rather dull life on the Illinois Plains.

J. Mitch Hopper--Just when you thought it was safe...it's the all new Authorship III!

Heather Hughes--"The ba the ba the ba that's all, folks!"

Linda McElroy--Ever since I saw "Rashomon" I've been fascinated by point of-view. How characters perceive their world and what they say about it reveal so much more than physical descriptions.

Patt Miles--"I'm free ~Things are only as important as I want them to be."- John Secada

Melvin A. Rutan--A recent graduate of UIS...has also studied at Ohio U. His education...has come from travels without (in material, spiritual, and topographical senses) and within. Though subscribing to Creeley's credo on form as fundamentally extension of content, Melvin has also published sonnets and villanelles, and composed plays in verse. Works in progress include a long poem set in Washington Park.

J.D. Taitt--Received a B.A. from Iowa State in Political Science and History. He is a grad student of English at UIS, and has only recently submitted stories for publication.

Mikel Weisser--Writes books and political comedy. He is 37, a husband, father, and dog-owner; a grad student in English and works as office staff at a homeless shelter.