

the fioretti

spring 1999 volume 57 a literary anthology
of marian college indianapolis with prose
and poetry by jennifer gregory • stephanie
k. kesecker • tim koberstein • norman
minnick jr • rachel spitler • joslyn virgin •
and rachel wuertz

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THEFT OF HER

Tim Koberstein

Framed in the doorway
in front of a dark, wooded bureau
she stood there.

The noon light,
after fighting through the trees
in the front yard,
had found its way into the room
filling the house as well,
and wrapped itself
carefully
around her body
creating shadows,
darks and lights
that made this Edward Hopper painting
real.

She claimed only small movements.

I can't imagine her,
or anyone for that matter,
rushing on a Sunday.

THE PREACHER'S DAUGHTER

Rachel Wuertz

She thought that
if she could
she would
bait her mousetraps
with communion bread
and kiss Jesus' cheek
with lipstick on.

MONOLOGUE #1

Rachel Spitler

Steve Marks is speaking as if to himself, slightly facing the left side of the audience. He is standing in worn blue-jeans and a white undershirt with light tan dirt smudges.

I thought for a while it was to keep the peace between my brothers, but then I realized that God couldn't put me here on earth simply to plant corn and keep the peace between two lazy boys that won't amount to anything. So I kept thinking about it. I had plenty of time while I was planting and hauling and bailing and sweating out there under the morning sun to think about why I was there baking in the fields while all my friends from school were in college living the lush life away from home.

When I was five years old I went into the city for the first time to keep my aunt company while she was fitted for her wedding dress. I fell in love that day, and it never was reciprocated. I loved the buildings! They were all so huge! So many people walked in and out of each one of those buildings, and they all looked immensely important, like the world would end if they didn't get into the building they were after. I was in such shock I barely said a word the entire time, even when she stepped out of the back room to show us how the dress looked. (I never heard the end of that one.)

Those buildings took over every waking moment and I often saw 'em in my dreams, plantin' seeds of confusion that just kept growing. When I milked the cows I saw all those people leaving the tallest buildings at dusk. When I sat on the tractor I envisioned the corn turned into a street, leadin' not to more flat fields of swaying healthy plants, but to huge pillars holding up a twenty story building. Every spring as the corn would grow from little seedlings to tall stalks I would see a whole city growing. My mind would design building after building, one for every ten corn stalks (or twenty if it was a big one), until I had one tremendous downtown.

My parents never understood. My brothers made fun of me. The kids at school wouldn't talk to me because I wanted to be different. I never met anyone who understood my dream, so I tried to be a good farmer. I worked hard and long. I had the body and the know-how of a true farm boy. My brothers were good at farming,

and they were better at it than I was because that's all they could see in their little lives. I am sure I never would have gotten the farm if Jimmy hadn't had that accident. I just never wanted it though.

Now's my only chance to change all that. Dad passed away a long time ago, Mom is stable and taken care of, and I'm getting old! Just yesterday I found some grey hairs- on my chest! I never thought I'd live to see the day, but I'm even starting to get love handles! Ugh! I know Mary wouldn't like it, but I think I have to go. I've wanted this so long. I could go to the university in the big city, with all those great masses of stone housing all those important people.

I don't know who would take over the farm though. Matthew hasn't been back since Jimmy's accident. None of the cousins have time or people to give now that their farms are doing so well, so...maybe I could sell it. Mary would have a fit, and the family probably disown me, but...

I know I could get a good price, I just had an offer two years ago. I think it should be enough. I wonder if they let greying 34 year olds into architecture programs. I'm sure they would let me in. I'll work hard. I don't know a whole lot, but maybe they'll like me because I've wanted it for so long. How on earth will I tell Mary? I'm sure this is what I was sent for, it couldn't be that my life was meant to bail hay and grow corn for others, I'm sure there is something more permanent I am meant to do. I'll apply today right after I pick up next year's seeds.

IN THE MANNER OF NOON

Norman Minnick, Jr.

At noon I walked toward the sun
feeling something trapped like a barely innocent
cat behind a cage of ribs trying to escape
and find out what the gods meant when they said
that man was to take nature under his wing and
care for her as if she were his own.

The god mother laid a blanket across my chest
too heavy to bear, crushing my feline friend indeed.
He said he couldn't breathe and wished to take a walk
on the veranda and hold again the hand
of the frail creature that bared her breasts to his
ever eager ever willing applause.

Ever in the noon hour that I first lifted a rock
from its resting place, I found a ladyfriend
flattened by this mound of turmoil.
Her husband's coarse tongue spoiled her and drove her
to her almost final resting place beneath the rock.

I will never forgive myself in the time it takes for the moon
to find a place to rest in the daytime sky.
We cannot shut an eye to the daytime follies
of every lonely sharecropper punishing himself
over the face of the surface he proudly calls
landscape. Please oh fenced in god please don't let us
wake to find this only surface a constable reality,
mine and my compatriot's very sustenance requires some
morsel of protocol. Some bit of depth.

GRASP

Jennifer Gregory

who knows how the sorrow begins
the wind
the wind knows
knows true
at the birth of a child it blows
and covers the sky
while in the cradle the sorrow lies
and blooms
the child can walk, the child is two
carries with it petals of dew
sunshiny nights till the Harlem horns blew
on the dizzy parade of laughter

the sorrow comes the sorrow comes
on the soles of the feet of father it hums
in the small spray of light 'neath the bedroom door
the child is sixteen he calls her a whore
there's no one to shout she's sent them away
on a funeral barge with the wind off the bay
she cries, for the night senses nothing but doom
but walks down the planks to her lonely room
and sits forever lost in the dream
of how it was and was supposed to have been
she never grows old but she'll never be young
frozen in rage with the afternoon sun

THE PROMISE IN THE OPULENCE

Rachel Wuertz

Mom's carpet was fading with the fleas
suffocating in salt
like the slugs on her back porch steps,
their shimmering trails
like the melting yellow snow
 where my man tramped the inevitable,
 and shared the answered urgency with the neighbors,
“a cat among rocking chairs,”
 or so my mother would say the cliché.

Shortly thereafter, he became entangled in his own disciples
with their toilet paper rolls and foil,
not sure which way to go,
 back to me, or just home.

He had never pondered the inexpressible or the intellectual,
only whispers with hickeys,
 only my breasts,
small wonders in his greasy hands,
and the fascination in his programmed mind.

Mom cried and cried
 black tears,
gestures to what we had
a sentiment of what was yet to come.
 (She would always have yet to come.)

What sincere blue eyes he had
When he bragged that he liked quilts and barn lofts,
Sophisticated exotic dancers and passionflowers.

Mom said made one wonder if he was real
or just lying.

He had said that I was delicate and deserved so much more,
given him such pleasure with my amateurish spoils.

He had said damn all the people who stared and ounce the curses.
He promised we'd get our own trailer
and hang thick curtains.

A LETTER TO AN OLD MAN

Norman Minnick, Jr.

I have been vended
from a machine which does only that,
only I am the one dispensed.
I am taking up the age-old custom of selling indulgences.
Don't think I don't know the meaning of work.
To work is to keep sober.

We work to buy candy for the prisoners—to give them back
some crystallized freedom—the saccharine pebble
of reality you snuck to us when we were kids.
I remember you so dignified on the eve of consumption
as Eve herself sat at your feet—
you and I craving lasagna layered with gumption, approbation, and
a mound of shredded assumption.

This would only suffice, of course, as an appetizer
to our one meal of the week—droplets of sweat
from the brow, and a silver ringlet of belief in the afterlife...
Everything went according to our understanding,
and the great nature of your being
in your old age and mind, and my lack of.
Only now I hold a pen in my hand, and you...
you are dead.

COUPLINGS

Joslyn Virgin

I mostly remember him sitting on the porch, facing the window to look out on the Red Georgia sand and the dry pine needles bending and burrowing their way under the sand. Papa's eyes were small, blue clouds behind brown glasses. His hands held cigarettes most of the time, but when he saw me coming to him he'd put the white roll between his lips to make his hands free to touch my hand, then let them fold together between his knees and watch my every step. I remember his smile, sometimes the dangling cigarette still there, and the way he talked to me with his raspy voice, telling me to "get" something over my bare legs. He'd sit out on the porch with a full ashtray and watch me do gymnastics on the homemade mat for hours. Even when he wasn't watching he would never tell me to stop. He could holler at anyone else, for this or that, but mostly he was quiet, and always kind and sweet to me. I still remember Papa's easy going face when he looked at me. His gray-brown skin looked simple under the white T-shirts he wore tucked into brown work pants. There was a sense of contentment in his breath, as if he had a feeling of freedom that let him breathe easier. I couldn't hug him as I could my Nana, but the little things we share—the soft and long looks at one another and the quiet, timeless encounters when I sat on the couch and watched his back inhale and exhale in time with the wind- brought me closer to him.

Instead of patting my head good-bye after one visit, Papa handed me a small plastic bottle of nickels. It was such a simple token of his love for me. I accepted it with innocent wonder, unsure of what it meant, but certain it was meant for me. I looked into Papa's eyes as he spoke to me in his even tones. I imagined him gathering each nickel with thoughts of me and putting them one by one into the bottle. Over and over again I replayed his hand reaching into his pocket to draw out the bottle and sit it on the table next to the ashtray. He placed it there, as if saying you can have the nickels or not, but they are for you. That was his easygoing way, his simple and serene style. I still see Papa's hands handling the bottle, that way I can still see the back of his thin gray hair and rough neck looking out over a landscape of his memory.

* * *

I was sitting with my parents at dinner when I learned more about Papa that I could have understood as a child. I was sharing stories with them about my summer away, hopping trains across northern Canada. I expected them to react with a series of "what ifs," but instead they both laughed and shook their heads. Dad told me about Papa during the depression; how he had lived in Hobo Jungles, hopping trains across America for thirteen years searching for jobs and adventure. As Dad told me the story of my Papa's young life I started to see his smile grow, his eyes water up, and memories fill his head. He was thinking back to the time he was a kid, hearing stories from Papa about the trains and his own younger years. I, too, sat staring at the rain falling outside, imagining Papa on the boxcars with a crew of other kids searching for work just getting away from the sadness of the depression. Dad went on to tell me he himself had ridden the trains in the city with his brother, just for fun.

Papa had been one of the boys with a satchel and dirt-worn hat, the boy with broken dreams and an empty heart, on the rails for thirteen years. He had seen the land pass like a moving picture show, heard the wind on the iron boxcar walls. He had felt the fear of the train stopping suddenly, the excitement of speed through mountains and prairies. He had felt freedom the way I had, letting the train be in control of the next move. I remembered his peaceful face when he looked at me as a child, the serenity I had felt as I let my soul surface and grow in the air that only a freight train can create. My heart was beating so fast I couldn't even push the corners of my mouth down from their heights. What was filling me up inside was of great value, a feeling that started to place me in the family. I felt a deep connection come over me, an answer to a long-lived wonderment. It was no longer an empty-faced ghost figure that I remembered in the boxcars I rode in, but the face of my Papa looking at me and smiling. I longed to see his face looking at me, maybe even giving me a tip on hopping trains. Looking back at my father I started to see the softness in his eyes, the strength in his hands that led me to my Papa. He was looking at me with the same unspoken, simplicity of understanding and love that Papa had.

At the end of our dinner, Dad told me that when I die, Papa would be there on a boxcar his body, standing in the corner of the open door, extending his hand out to me, and inviting me to take a ride with him. My body again felt the anxiety of waiting for the train to arrive, the breaks to hiss and the land to pass by me in frames of iron doors. I thought back to my Papa on the porch, his face always towards the window. I felt as if I knew what he was searching for among the blowing sand. Thinking back to when life was on a boxcar, or how the wind takes into its hands almost anything, how little girls will grow up as little boys do. I felt that a connection between Papa and me that I could touch with my hands had been found. I had a story to tell now, an adventure to look back on and forward to.

I went back to the memory of Papa at the table on the porch. When he looked at me this time he called me to sit next to him, telling me all about the thirties and hopping trains. And then we sat silently, both looking out of the window, remembering and holding onto the freedom and soul-bonding journey that all life had been.

NEVER ASSUME

Stefanie K. Kesecker

"You sure," he said,
as the wind lifted his
hair reversing the part.

"I'm sure," I said,
as I squeezed his hand.

FIND “HER HIGHNESS”

Jennifer Gregory

fear, she does sleepingslips into their voices
takes off all the clothes of a heavenly eye
drifts into the demons whereworlds of words spoken
who knows where the peasant girl goes off to die

while narrow housedances in pale yellow grass
you hear her “hark!” whispers and shut out the light
while yonder fieldswhip like the queen of romances
you break their necks, laughing and sigh your last sigh

some fingers scrapeeven some parts drift away
some come justabegging to follow your gaze

sling heaven don’t know yousay hell if I do
dream your rocking horse dancesyour own iron shoes

9 MILES TO LYNNVILLE

Rachel Wuertz

My ear
Open for crawl space
To shell bugs and mosquitoes.
Given the road ahead
Open for wind space to step,
Gravel to slip and crumble
Beneath my slick bottomed shoes.
Eerie things happened
Like the headlights shorting out to black,
Like the gas gage diminishing to E
In less than a mile—
Demons in the wires—
And night sounds,
Voices in the limbs,
Rustling ferrets
Whispering Latin.
Modern double-wide ruins
Menacing the shadows.
My nose
Open to deceptive suppers
from over the hills
Across miles of soybean fields.
I had left
Without the intention of really leaving,
Strayed from the ordinary with rocks
Held in each hand
Like solid, 3-inch bullets
Should anything come close.

INSTITUTION

Stefanie K. Kesecker

What's it like I wonder,
as I look at you,

To live unhappily in a world that
merely stifles you?

YOUR WIFE AND MOTHER

Rachel Wuertz

Consider me
(kneeling at your feet,
forever increasing my expansion,
screaming, pushing, birthing,
feeling but never completely releasing,
waving unsupported,
always dreaming, white lying,
and giving more than what you asked for).

CHIPPED CRYSTAL

Rachel Spitler

My child with halo-round eyes and sunset red hair,
you sit so lightly on your plush green pillow.
A folded fan rests beneath your dainty right hand and
your left holds a fold of your pure white dress.
Two small earrings hang from your too small ears.
That rich emerald ribbon holds your fountain of hair
like the small round pearls about your pale white neck.
Your princess' corset chokes the smile from your face.

LONE RANGER: HERO: POET

Norman Minnick, Jr.

No one knows where a hero gets his hero ways.
The lone ranger is such today
as he rears back in his saddle to kiss farewell
his mother and sends her back to her den with a sonly yehaw
and blazes a new trail through to the great beyond
stopped by his own flesh and blood, (no one
knows it yet, though everyone suspects it)
the bringer of bad news, who sets the ranger back on his high throne
to ride once again and write it all down this time!

The poet saunters along hands stretching his pockets
sopping up after himself and others like him while
damsels in drag point and laugh and overhead naked metal birds fly
toting hundreds of medievals that are nourished on kissy
movies, salted peanuts and soda pop.

Shaking his fist at the sky
the lone ranger cries out—

Before there were streets there was never poetry like this!

Works of more than 60 years have been represented in the *Fioretti*. The name was given to the works of and about St. Francis. Fioretti means "little leaves" which is the same word as "anthology," as in *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman.

This issue was typeset in Sabon, which first made its appearance in 1966. It was designed by Jan Tschichold, who was best known for his design of Penguin Books.

The cover is set in Futura, which was designed in Germany by Paul Renner in the late 1920's. It follows the Bauhaus philosophy that form follows function, and helped launch a movement known as the New Typography.

free