KOL
Yeshiva College Literary Journal
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You Never Know What You’re Gonna Get”

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Winners of Yeshiva College Writing Contests

Sponsored by the Yeshiva College English Department

* Best Poem

** Best Short Story, Jerome Robbins Memorial Award

Kol Literary Journal Awards for Writing

*** Best Poem (s)

In nearly every publication, the editor acknowledges those persons without whom the work could not have existed. So I asked myself, why be different?

The publication of this original journal would have not been possible without David Schertz, Editor Emeritus of Kol, for his shrewd guidance and essential help. Special recognition goes to Rabbi Yosef Blau, Mashgiach Rachani of the Yeshiva and a personal role model, for his invaluable help and counsel. I would also like to thank Dr. Efrem Mufman, Dean of Students, for his continuous support and Daniel Billig, President of the Yeshiva College Student Council for his strong leadership and astute advice. A debt of gratitude also goes to the English Department, specifically to Dr. Will Lee for devoting a great deal of his time and effort to Kol, as well as to Professor Leo Taubes for his generous and needed help. Lastly, I would like to thank everyone on the editorial board for their consistently positive attitude and for putting in so many long hours.

Tzvika A.R.E. Nissel, Editor-in-Chief
A Living Soul

N.M. Bodoff

words are
Meaning
as I reveal
and attempt to share
my thoughts, my feelings
my true self.

words are
Deception
as I construct
and hope to hide behind
my persona, my facade
my conveyed self.

words are
Tension
as my companion wonders
and continually ponders
these words, those words
which are which?

At Random

Ilan Haber

I beheld a beautiful thought today
yet I can't remember what it was
silvery voices softly stirring
lost within a moment's tug.

I glimpsed a second's revelation
as the sun swept clouds clear
taking strength, firmly warning
the heavy sky hovering near.

The moment trips, the wave moves on
into the throes of melancholy drone
banality sits, the image dulls
awakening a familiar monotonous tone.

Thoughts at random, sometimes gold...
sometimes lost before they're told.
The Sprinkler Song
Noam Cohen

"Hey apple-dapple, sandy-catcher,
Brother-smile, shock!
Write me off your reading list,
And take me up the block."
To lay in the comfort of the big window fan,
Blowing here the hay dried grass smell,
And the sweating children,
In the lawn sprinklers, impotent,
Jump over and over, chanting,
Hey apple-dapple,
Teach me cool day songs,
Lemonade tunes, ringing,
Ever softer as I lay my back,
Hands holding up my head,
The cleft, shadowed, beneath my chest,
Supporting your cheek.
Then, to lay my heat-swelled hand,
Upon your neck or chin,
Is a comfort, though the fan,
Can't cool us that well,
Just like those sprinklers can't ever save the grass...

Growths
Yitzchak Aizik Inselmann

1. Darkness thrives in cracks
grows under sidewalks
shadowed by huge office buildings
where blood and lives move across telephone lines
faster than the falling raindrops

2. Cracks form under crowded streets
crowded with bodies and emotions
darkness looks through cracked windows and smashed skulls
gnaws on the ends of old telephone wires
feeds on sparking bodies scattered among the empty needles

3. Darkness breathes in hate and boiling pain
creeps through the cracks to strangle the dim shaking streetlights and
glowing red clocks keeping digital guard over the earth
tumble flaming onto the rat-deserted streets
libraries of magazines, revolutions and spring sales are
swallowed by the swirling concrete tide
like revolutions darkness doesn't grow; it's grown

4. Darkness swells under even darker streets
looks, smiles, feels and grows
buds
then shakes off the heavy sidewalks
and the heavier city
to bloom
in the dark
under all the people.

Photo by Aryeh Muskowitz
The Haters of the Rich

Yossi J. M. Faber

Reside. Ladies from the Ladies' Betterment League
Arrive midday, vertical shadows,
Scorched brows mopped,
The masses huddle in their insecurities
Unsure of rich widows' benefactions,
Afraid of wealthy fingers' retraction,
Amused by coifed dos' repulsions
To the mundanities of everyday life.
Two tiny eyes peer out from my tresses,
Small hands cling to my apron strings,
Whilst greedy mistrust ranks around me.
Savage malefactions arise from benefactors
Unknown on Fifth Avenue.
Such ethereal dress we had never
Laid eyes upon before, the gossamer
Sheen of the Paris Original, its
Sleek, Slender, Fashionable bearer
Shrouded in the mists of decay arising from Us,
The depths of Human Unkindness.

Upon entering our Abodes
The money moguls cast fears to the wind,
Along with their cash,
Yet paste they wear still, afraid of what the dog brought in.
Fathers, Mothers, Sisters, Brothers, Aunts, Uncles, Sons,
Daughters, Parents, Children, three generations,
Huddling under the umbrella of their misplaced kindnesses,
Unable to stand and shout: "I am too Proud!" for
Fear of empty stomachs and cold beds.

So Pity us not Oh League
Of Self-Pity, whose magnanimity travels
Not past the boundaries of your own hearts.
Retain your money,
And your Pity,
For Your own poor Hearts.

New Year Reflection

Michael Sussman

and the scorching begins again
my flesh my eyes glazed
her hair flowing waving gold upon lace
of her forehead, gesticulating and
the music i didn't hear
rambling about the morn loving her contours
her slightly plump thighs bowed
shoulders and craned neck her
chest heaving primitively.
And I laughed of nervousness. We sat on
the floor. I dont like sad grimaces like
the bitter taste or the cringe upon waking.
Wanting to choke and count choke
and count to clench our bodies
to rub hands and thighs. We never
touched. We never could speak; could
only stare at the sadness of our
varied dispositions knowing that never
could we just throw each other down
on the floor and know.
The Coin

Dan Roth

There must be something out there
bigger than my front porch,
there must be something bigger.

I know I was destined for the top,
to be the man in charge,
there must be something bigger.

This dead town,
I could sprint across the length of it.
This dead town,
is not worth the seeds they tell me to impregnate it with.

Is this what I deserve?
Is this what I earned?
I put my time in,
I want something in return!

So I will sit on this porch
and have another beer,
soon they will come on the chariots of reward.
I know my time is near.

There must be something out there
bigger than my front porch,
there must be something bigger.

I know I was destined for the top,
to be the man in charge,
there must be something bigger.

So tonight I pack my bags
and I grab that train
and I get to the big city
and I plant my home.

When it blossoms and when it takes root,
I'll be the man they pursue,
not the man in pursuit.

So I will sit on this porch
and carve my home,
because in a year,
there won't be enough to do the same.

Highwayman

Tzvika A.R.E. Nissel

Out of the murkiest blackness,
he emerges onto the highway.
Scoping wide-eyed,
the reasons for those days.

Wandering endlessly,
he alone knows why.
For he has seen it all,
and knows not to cry.

His world does not just turn
a few hundred days per year.
It speeds, spins, and rotates,
knowing his fate is always near.

His arm is an album
of a raw world in the nude.
He's one of the few survivors,
they labeled him a Jude.

Wide eyes like his,
see more under the sun.
Time's real Kohelet,
whose work is never done.

A king of the world,
yet he sleeps on the floor.
Hides all he has,
austere from before.

So he travels the highways,
only, flowers to send.
A soul of forgiveness,
a life without end.
Ball & Glove
Richard L. Soclof

Dad handed the ball & glove to me
"They're a symbol of love" he pointed out
I love the way they fit so easily
Is this not what life is all about
Oh how I love my ball and glove
I'll never know why they're a symbol of love?

Tenth Anniversary

Certain as the setting sun
Each year at this time,
Steadfast as all seasons,
Memory imbues my soul with melancholy,
Standing still, I'm jolted back to my bleakest day.
That day my father taught me about fate
.. Cold grey stones standing in stiff rows like school children.
And suddenly it's not ten years ago, it's today.

Just yesterday
My greatest worry was acting cool-
Playing ball, comic books, trading cards
.. Stretching colorful chewing gum around my index finger.

I jumped ten years without skipping a beat
But missed so much of him
So much of myself.
He had challenged me, loved me
My childish body wondered who would sign my report card?
Teach me to throw a football?
My mind inquired who would nurture my growth?
Would I go hungry?
.. Solitary swimmer in an ocean of confusion

Puberty viciously stolen from me
My first cigarette, my first kiss
The farthest thoughts from my mind.
The hand that protected me, unjustly torn away
.. Plucking petals from the blossom
I was left unguided, yet forced to focus

I exchanged childhood curiosity for maturity
Forced to think, I taught myself to think.
Why did I receive this undeserved punishment?
Sadness, anger forever a part of me.
.. An infant walking before he could crawl
How I yearned to be twelve again.

I felt spited, cheated
I hated the emptiness,
I hated life
But life hated me more.
The Hanging of Intentions
Ira Piltz

Characters:
Intentions
Good conscience
Bad Conscience
Murderer
Victim

(The scene opens with VICTIM OF INTENTIONS standing USC
on a raised platform. Behind him, on three arched flats, are one
dimensional drawings of gallows)

INTENTIONS: I regret that I have but one life to give for my country....
(From behind the platform, GOOD CONSCIENCE and
BAD CONSCIENCE appear and take positions beside
VICTIM OF INTENTIONS, GOOD CONSCIENCE
to his right, and BAD CONSCIENCE to his left)

INTENT: I regret that I have but one life to give for my country...
BAD: There is no reason for him to die for this.
GOOD: He is a man of conviction.
BAD: No, he is a man convicted. And for that he will die.

(ALL freeze. MURDERER AND VICTIM enter.
MURDERER sits in chair and begins writing, while the
VICTIM looks over his shoulder, spying. The MURDERER
notices after several beats, and reacts, catching VICTIM in the act)

MURDERER: Spy! For this you will hang!
VICTIM: Murderer.
GOOD: Who was the true killer here? The one who pulled the trigger or the one who murdered the ideals and dreams of a man.

BAD: It is of little importance. Laws and conventions were broken and society demands that someone pays when blood is shed.

GOOD: Then it is the hopes and passions of all men that swings from these gallows. Perhaps the gallows takes more then the lives of guilty men. It also takes their ideals to the grave.

VICTIM: Who is a murderer?

MURDERER: And what defines a victim?

INTENT: There are no answers. Only the gallows brings order to this question of ambiguity. (Pause) I am going to the Lord and I take the intentions of all who have stood here before me.

(Silence. ALL freeze and slowly turn to IDEALS who is gazing upward. Gallows noise is heard)

ALL: Im pace requiescat.

Reunion

Come, sit down, give me a song
He says as he settles on the stool
Rickety, of fading brown, the piano chipped
The keys worn with countless years.

It's been so long.

And as I take my pen in hand
And lean against the table
His voice drifts softly by

Let me play for you, he says.

But before I answer the music spills forth,
Engulfing me in its bitter sweet embrace
The memories of long ago awake:
Of summer camp and junior high
And people grinning into frames
Of shaky, washed out film from olden days.

And of the two guys who walked into this room
That was old even then
And as the one stood in anxiety,
The years before him stretching out of sight,
The other smiled sat and beckoned
As he laid his fingers on the keys
That were worn even then
And his voice came softly drifting by...

Come, sit down, give me a song.
Let me play for you.
Aleph-Bet
Yitzchak Inselmann

1. The black pen fell
   next to the old man
   on the ground
   near a blue pen
   three other blacks
   one red
   on the old man's paper
   are seven words in different colors
   another pen falls

2. The wind blows nine pens across the street
   it is cold outside
   the pens are broken
   all of them
   so is the old man
   thirteen words on the paper
   ten to go
   another falls
   the sun dies

3. Ink flows into the gutter
   it leaks out of them
   black ink, blue ink, and red ink
   the old man leaks red ink
   they all lie in the curb writing messages
   then the rain comes and the streets are clean
   now and forever
   God

Wayne Gretzky
Chaim Leffel

The N.H.L. is home to a man named Wayne
Who is surely destined for the Hall of Fame
Fourteen seasons he has chased a man named Howe
Tallying goals and assists by the sweat of his brow
He began to play at the tender age of three
Little did he know then of the star he would be
He started with the Oilers now he plays with the Kings
Through it all he's amassed four Stanley Cup rings
There's a show every night at the Great Western Forum
Not only can he pass but he sure can score 'em
Gretzky is the man as you may know
He's second to none not even Mario
He has sixty one records and yet he's not done
At thirty two years he's still The Great One
The Rock of Zephorditee

Zev Williams

In the saddest of sadness, in the gloomiest of gloom, Zephorditee Von Winkle sat alone in his room. Day out and day in, day in and day out, No one played with Zephorditee; friends he was without.

Said he to himself in a quiet undertone “I wish I were popular, and not left alone!” He made a plan, his road to fame, So everyone in town would recognize his name.

The very next morning at the crack of dawn, Zephorditee ran out to search his lawn. And there he saw it, by a big maple tree; A grey rock that weighed two pounds, maybe three.

Von Winkle lifted the rock. He had the skill. He walked down his street then up a big hill. Then he sat down beside his rock and started to wait. “This is the right place, today’s the right date!”

Along came his classmates and started to stare Because a sight like this was indeed quite rare. “Watcha doin’?” they asked, for he seemed quit dim. But Von Winkle answered them with a sly little grin,

“This is my rock, it’s special you see, And if you want to use it you’ll be friends with me” “Ha! Ha!” laughed the classmates “Hee Hee, Hoo Hoo” “You think for that rock, we’ll be friends with you?”

That day after school he ran back to his room. “I’ll make a new plan, they will like me soon!” Zephorditee picked little pebbles, twigs, branches and stones He filled baskets with flowers and small pine cones.

Around his big rock Von Winkle made a ring. And instead of just sitting, he started to sing. Along came his classmates and started to stare. For a sight like this was indeed quite rare.

“Hey Winkle” they shouted “have you been here awhile?” But Zephorditee just sat there and said with a smile, “I’m singing to my rock because it’s magical, you see. And you can too if you’ll be friends with me.” Again they laughed and wandered away. But this time two kids decided to stay.

And so just like this everyday it went on, More and more kids woke up at the break of dawn. They collected flowering dandelions and brightly colored stones, Twigs, leaves, marbles and small chicken bones. And holding their flowers of pink and blue To their mighty stone they sang “Rock we love you!”

Until one day the elders of the town Looked up the hill, and saw the kids on the ground. So the town elders hiked up that faithful hill; To find what was happening, what was the big thrill.

The town elder said “Who is the leader in charge of this game?” “It is I!” said Von Winkle “Zephorditee’s the name!” “But sir” he continued “We’re not playing a game. For power and this rock are one in the same. This rock is magical, marvelous and mighty, And so we sing, to the Rock of Zephorditee!”

The elders laughed “that’s ridiculous” they said. But as they laughed the eldest slipped, fell and hit his head. The town whispered “He insulted the rock and then he fell! What would Zephorditee say? What tale would he tell?”

Von Winkle stood and said to the town in his deepest voice, “He insulted our rock, he made a bad choice. We love our rock because it’s so powerful, you see, And you can too if you’ll be friends with me”

The whole town set to work with one major aim, To surround their rock with fortune and with fame. A home of gold and diamonds must rise from this ground! A palace that the world can see from all around!
Everyone left the stores and stopped working the land,
They used up all their riches to build a temple so grand.
Then the people started to steal, to argue and to fight.
Because everyone wanted to give more to their wondrous sight.

But Zephorditec Von Winkle felt nothing but sadness
As he watched from above all this senseless madness.
"Please stop" he pleaded "don't fight or quarrel,
It's cruel, barbaric, ruthless and immoral!
But the town ignored him and continued with their crime.
They chanted "for the Rock of Zephorditee, we waste no time!"

Von Winkle couldn't stand the hardship and tears.
So he yelled to his countrymen "Lend me your ears!
This rock is not strong, or godlike or mighty
I made up the name, Rock of Zephorditee!"
This is my rock, it's plain you see,
It was all a trick so you would be friends with me!"

The Zephorditees could not believe they heard right;
A little boy insulting a rock of such might!
So they took him to the town gate and sent him away.
In the hot, dry desert is where he would stay.

This Zephorditees were happy, the complainer away.
They continued to build the palace, to steal and to play.
But suddenly, years later, on the tenth of June,
As workers were building by the light of the moon

A silver pillar dropped and smashed on the ground
And scattered thick dust and dirt all around.
But then the air filled with cries and with screeches
Because the rock of Zephorditee had been shattered to pieces.

"Oh no, oh way, what a dark dark day"
The Zephorditees could think of nothing to say.
But then one of the children, a girl barely eight,
Said almost as a whisper "Maybe it was fate!
Look all around at what we have got
The town which we once had this certainly is not."

Years after Von Winkle had left his homey town
The Zephorditees stopped, and looked all around
There town which was so pretty and grand
Was now just a mess; dirt, ugly, and bland.

Finally and quickly they came to the notion
That the rock was not some magical potion
They said "The rock was not powerful, magical or strong,
We loved a plain old rock, we were wrong all along."

Then they remembered their wandering friend.
"Oh poor Zephorditec, I hope he hasn't seen the end.
He tried to stop us, to end our evil ways
But we sent him away for so many long days.
We must bring him back, our smart little guy.
It may be hard to find him, but alas we must try."

But find him they did, out there in the sand
And the biggest parade came out to welcome him back to his land.
In front of the parade were the drummers and the lights
Then came the dancers and acrobats in colorful tights
Behind them were lions, zebras, peacocks and giraffes
Next were the trumpets, flutes and clowns to make them laugh.

And there in the middle of the musical tones.
Sat Zephorditee Von Winkle, high atop a purple throne.
"It wasn't the lies," he realized, "that got me my friends,
It was simply the truth, and with that my story ends."
A Box O' Chocolate
Forrest A.R.E. Gump

My mama used to say,
"Life is like a box O' chocolate,
you never know what your gonna get."

It must be one big box
that my mama used to talk about,
because I keep gettin' surprised.
I guess it's more like a tub O' chocolate.

Every now and then,
I think about what kind
my mama's favorite was.

But she would not have told me
what her best piece was,
because then it wouldn't be no surprise.

My favorite
is the kind with milk chocolate on the outside
and sweet stuff in the middle,
they remind me of Jenny.

If life was a box of Jennies,
instead of a box of chocolate,
I'd always know what I was going to get.
But my mama told me,
you better shop around.

Just like my mama didn't know
that she'd have me,
or that I didn't know
that I'd have little Forrest,
I guess you gotta take what you can get.

Some people,
they pick a chocolate,
and if it aint what they expected,
they spit it back out.

If my mama spit me back out,
I would'n't of never met Jenny.
I aint so smart and all,
but I know that if I would'n't of ever lived,
I would'n't of never met Jenny.

Mortal Soul
Shai Canaan

Indentation of the mortal soul
is not like the ones on a tree,
it is also not like a wound of the flesh.
The mortal soul is connected to all the others.

When it is deformed its steric effects contribute to
a collective laceration, in the ever
flowing river of mortality.

When a wound is born, it matures
and passes away in a fulfilling cycle
of resource allocation to a specific region.

When the river is indented
the flowing lava of life distorts,
and absorbs the corruption over
miles of zones, connected by virtue
of their creation.

Curing harm of this sort is art of
language and deeds long forgotten.
For the only medicinal wisdom that
may cope with a nick in the river
is that of the same.

Evil coated with agents of superficial
good is dealt with by denaturation
of its coat.

The art of breaking the matrix of
good to expose evil, dressed
by thin layered good masked by
masses of evil shells.

Good and evil are now lost,
our land marks our betrayal and deception.
Our hopes are to avoid that
which is inevitable.
Immense effort, protruding through
the heart of degradation, by the collective,
may be the only resurrection
from the onslaught of
the mortal soul.
We the People
Daniel Sentell

Her slow and deliberate pace was not one of choice. The aluminum walker that preceded each step would always come down with an audible snap and then pause for a second. Her feet would shuffle, reset, and the walker would be raised again. Walking was not a spontaneous action anymore; it was a cold and calculated event. The floor was an adversary who had to be overcome. Hear ye, hear ye, knights of the old table. Your challenge has come and you shall meet it.

"Could somebody make my bed? My bed isn't made."
"Will you shut up already?"
"I have twenty-five dollars. If somebody will make my bed, I'll give it to them. Please, all I want is for somebody to make my bed."
"Can't you just shut up for five minutes?"
"Why won't anybody make my bed? That's all I want."
She shuffled past this conversation, and made her way to her own table. With a practiced care she switched her weight from the walker to the table, and then with a movement that was always scary, she sat down in her chair.

"Hello."
The two other occupants of the table were already there. Louie, a former seam cutter and New York City cab driver, who always wore pants up to his chest, and Esma, a quiet senile woman who usually only perked up when a newcomer made an appearance.

"Hello Louie."
"Hello again."
"How are your grandchildren?"
"Good. They're in college now. I'm very proud of them."
He paused and looked at her through impossibly thick lenses.
"What's your name?"
"Sara."
"What?"
"Sara!"
"Sara?"

"Yes."
"Sara." He said it as if he was tasting it. "That's a beautiful name."
"Thank you."
She knew that in five minutes he would ask her again, and as usual she would answer him. And then the process would repeat itself.
And repeat itself.
And repeat itself.
And she would constantly answer because she was a nice woman and Louie was a nice man. Somewhere in the tangled tunnels of his mind each piece of information got lost, and he was unable to access it. On some vague undefinable level, Louie knew that he was asking the same questions again and again, but he didn't know why. He just continued to plug away. After all, he was a nice man and nice men were friendly with the people around them.

"What did you say your name was?"
"Sara."
"Sally?"
"No. Sara!"
"Sara?"
"Yes."
"Oh." He was quiet for a moment. "That's a beautiful name."
"Thank you."
She turned away a little so as to make herself inaccessible to further conversation. It wasn't as if the rest of the room was a more pleasant alternative to Louie. The atmosphere abounded in forced cheeriness. Colored leaves hung from the ceiling, and they swayed every time someone opened the door. The walls were white, the ceiling was white, the floor was white. Everything screamed at visitors how bright and antiseptic the room was. The decor consisted mostly of old movie posters from the thirties and forties. Hey everybody, remember these? Remember when you used to go to the movies by yourself, and eat whatever it was you felt like cooking, and went to work every day, and even made a decision every now and then? Do you remember that? Do you really?
Sara did, but she was quickly forgetting. The home was beginning to work its magic on her. At three o'clock they were scheduled to do finger
painting. Oh, how lovely. Sara used to like to dabble in pastels, and occasionally switched to watercolors, but now her medium of choice was acrylic finger paint.

One of the fluorescent lights started flickering. She looked at it and wondered how long it would hold out. A day? A week? Possibly longer? Sometimes these kinds of lights would flicker for...

There was a loud snap and the bulb dimmed to a lifeless gray. Just like that. It was over. It barely even had time to struggle. Two minutes of valiant flickering and then boom! Nothing. It was the home. It had to be. This was not a place which could sustain life. When people came here, they didn't necessarily die, but they did learn how to stop living. Nothing mattered anymore. Not life, not light, not...

Sara, stop it! You see a light go out and all of a sudden you become the purveyor of doom. What's wrong with you?

She didn't want to answer herself but she knew. As much as she fought against it, her mode of life was becoming that of the finger painters.

"Mrs. Pletsky, we're serving lunch now."

Sara turned and looked at the attendant. She was dressed in white from head to toe, and the only color came from her small blue eyes. Sara looked for some sign of the living in those eyes of youth, but it was a search in vain. The attendant's eyes were dead as they always were. When she was on the job, her body and mind turned robotic, and all her actions and speech were purely perfunctory. It was an unconscious defense against the disease and grayness of old age. Sara wished that the attendant would show life once in a while, but she knew why she didn't. Why accept the doom of the aged before you have to? Why feel the pains of the elderly while still in the throes of youth?

Damn it Sara! There you go again. Getting all dark on yourself when there's no reason in the world why you should.

"Mrs. Pletsky!"

And now you're blanking out on people. Excellent Sara. Good going.

"Sorry about that. What are we having this afternoon?"

The attendant smiled down at her.

"Chicken salad and roast potatoes. You like that Mrs. Pletsky, don't you?"

"Yes," said Sara, acting in full the part of the elderly child. "I like that a lot."

"Good. It's nice when people like what they eat."

Is that a fact, little miss robot? Is it really nice when people like what they eat? Does it ease your guilt a little over the way this place is used as a receptacle for old folks whom society has deemed obsolete? Oh, look, they're enjoying their food. I wish I could enjoy my food like that. Too bad though. I just don't have the time. I have a theater date and then a photography class that I have to attend. Boy! Can you just imagine it? Having nothing to do but eat all day. That's the life.

Now go ahead. Smile your bright cheery little smile, and try to convince me that I'm happy.

She looked around the room and saw nobody with whom she could talk. There were a few who looked like they once had a glimmer of intelligence, but their years in the home had destroyed it. Now they just sat at their tables and looked at nothing as they waited for their next meal. Any attempt at conversation usually ended up in a monosyllabic question and answer period.

Sara didn't believe that she wanted to die. So she was a little bit older. So she couldn't run the marathon anymore. Did that mean that she had to be put into a hole and wait for God to take her life?

"Excuse me."

The attendant turned, teeth all white and glittering.

"Yes?"

"This may sound a little bit strange, but I how do get out of here?"

"Out of the dining room?"

"Out of the home."

For a second the attendant's concentration on lifeless detachment was interrupted, and a look of puzzlement replaced it on her face.

"I don't think I understand."

"I'm dying here. If I don't get out soon, I'll end up as lively as the steamed prunes that they served for dessert today."

"You can't just leave."

"Well I can't just stay."

"I don't think that I'm really the person that you should be talking to."
“Now we’re getting somewhere. Who do I talk to?”
“About leaving?”
“Yes about leaving.”
“I’m not really sure. You most probably could go to the front desk and they could tell you how to proceed from there.”
“The front desk downstairs?”
“Yes.”
Sara put a hand on her walker, and pulled herself up.
“See ya.”
The nurse fluttered a little.
“You’re going now?”
“Right now.”
Once again the rhythm was started up. Step, walker, shuffle, step, walker, shuffle, step, walker, cha cha cha. She pressed the button for the elevator. The electronic gears hummed to life and provided a nice bass accompaniment to her baritone percussion. For melody, the voices of her fellow inmates filled the air in an odd type of chaotic disorder.
Hum.
“Who’s there? Is that you Jimmy?”
Hum.
“Will you be quiet? It’s not Jimmy.”
“Jimmy, come over here.”
Hum.
“It’s not Jimmy.”
“Come here Jimmy. Come here.”
Hum.
Step.
“Yes, may I help you?”
“I hope so. I’d like to leave.”
“Leave?”
“Yes. Leave.”
“Have you made arrangements for this already?”

“Have you?”
“Yes.
“Come here.”
Hum.
“Will you be quiet? It’s not Jimmy.”
“Go on.”
Hum.
“Just a minute.”
Step.
“Thank you.”
“Your things, say goodbye to your friends, etc.”
Right now.”

“Nope. I just decided a few minutes ago.”
“Well, I’m sorry but you can’t just decide to leave and then do it. There’s a lot of paperwork that has to be filled out, and then it has to be authorized, and then there’s some more paperwork to do. If you’d like, I can set you up an interview with our applications manager and he’ll tell you exactly what to do.”

“Why don’t you just send the paperwork to me?”
“Please, you know that’s impossible. Look, I’ll set up your appointment for tomorrow and you can be out of here by week’s end.”
“I have to wait a week!”
“It’s not that bad. Pack your things, say goodbye to your friends, etc.”

“What would happen if I just walked out now?”
“Security would be on you quicker than you could blink. If you think it’s hard leaving now, just imagine what it will be like after a failed escape.”
Sara looked at her watch with the large digital numbers. “Okay. Set me up for an appointment.”
The secretary turned a page in the binder in front of her. “Is three-thirty okay?”
“That’s fine.”
“All right. See you then.”
“Thank you.”
“You’re welcome.”

Sara walked away from the desk. It seemed that her whole life she had been waiting for certain things. A few days more shouldn’t make that much of a difference. Just a few days more of living with her chronological peers. Just a few days more of passing other’s tables on the way to her own. They wouldn’t bring the food to her room, and she didn’t know if she would have that way even if she could. The dining room was her cherished personal maze. She hated crossing it, but she continued to do so every time. Upon entering the room she would pass Lily’s table on the left, make a right in front of Louie, and then cut between the tables of the Zangure sisters. This constant daily repetition burned into her memory the conversation that she would always hear. Those locked inside of themselves always said the same thing to no one in particular. Those aware of the outside world always said
the same thing to whoever would stop and listen. In contrast to the sleek and silent wheelchairs that dominated the home, her walker announced her presence like a motorcycle roaring down a quiet country lane. When she passed by people knew it, and they also knew that she was a friendly ear. They took advantage of it.

"Hello Sara."
"Hello."
"Is that Jimmy?"
"Will you leave her alone? It's not Jimmy."
"Jimmy come here."
"Will somebody help us please! Would somebody open the window?"
"Please, we just need a little help. May God help us. Amen. Is somebody there? Could you open the window? Could somebody help us please?"

Sara didn't know Libby personally. Apparently, at some point many years ago, Libby and her two infant children were caught in a house fire. The firemen responded quickly, but they had trouble reaching the small nursery in which she was hiding. Libby came out unharmed, but her children died almost immediately from smoke inhalation. She cried a little bit, and then responded no more. Life went on, and Libby even had another child. It wasn't until two years ago that age had decided to free her mind. Now all she did was relive over and over again the experience that had shaped her.

"Would somebody please open the window? Please?"
Sara put a hand on her shoulder.
"Libby, it's okay now. Everybody is safe."
"May God help us. Amen."
Sara made the switch from walker to seat.
Just a few more days. After one short week she'd be out of here forever. Oh, just imagine the possibilities. Perhaps an apartment overlooking one of the parks, or maybe her niece would want her to stay with the family. Either way, life would be joyous. Good food, good company, the freedom to go out and do things.

"Louie?"
"Hello Sara."
"Hello Louie. Guess what? I'm..."
Wait a minute. He answered her by name. Louie never remembered her name. Maybe it was just a brief return to a more complete mental state. Whatever.

"Guess what? I'm leaving."
Louie sat back and stared out at the thickening clouds.
"No."
"What?"
"No."
"No?"
"Nobody leaves. We're not allowed to."
"Well, that's where you're wrong. I'm getting permission from the administrators. I should be out in less than a week."
The clouds had condensed to the point where the room seemed overcast.

"Nobody can give you permission. If it's against the rules, it's against the rules."
"What are you talking about? Tomorrow I'm going to fill out some paperwork, and then in a short time after that I'm going to walk out."
"Where are you going to go?"
"I was thinking about living with my niece. She has a nice home near here with plenty of guest rooms. Her husband is a caterer, so you know that food isn't going to be a problem. Her two children are seven and nine, the perfect age for babysitting. I can picture it now. Cocoa and marshmallows in front of the fireplace with tales of New York City and how much different it was back then."
"Sounds idyllic?"
"It just doesn't sound idyllic, it is idyllic."
"I'm sorry."
"Sorry?"
"You know, that you can't leave. Rules are rules."
Sara pulled herself back up. Quite suddenly she didn't want to be sitting there anymore.

"I'll see you tomorrow Louie."
"Goodbye, Sara."
She shuffled past the table again, and made her way into the hall. The attendants' desk bustled with activity as she passed it.
"Where you going, Sara?"
"I'm a little bit tired. Just heading off to my room for a nap."
"Should we wake you up for dinner?"
"No, that's okay. I should wake up by myself."
"All right."
"See ya."

Sara continued on to her room. The bed sagged very little as she sat down on it. She stretched out, and then put her glasses on the small table beside her. Sara always did it that way. She had a notion that people who took off their glasses before they lay down were somewhat disorganized. Didn't it seem logical that they would be within easy reach from a reclining position if they were taken off in a reclining position? That was just good common sense.

The sunlight filtered through her window and came to rest on the yellow floor. The yellow paint was supposed to say, "Hey, this isn't an antiseptic sterile room. This is a warm and cozy domicile. Come on, it's all yellow. How can you go wrong with that?"

She looked at her watch. It read 9:00 A.M. Wow! That was some sleep. She never slept that long. Well, you try something new everyday.

She dressed quickly and lost no time in getting to the elevator. The buttons lit up as she hit them, and each floor signalled its passing with a ping. Before the doors were fully open, she was already out and walking down the hall. My, didn't the air seem to be especially fresh today.

The door was paneled wood with an embossed gold nameplate, "Executive Administrator - Richard Young". She knocked and heard a faint "come in" from the other side. The handle turned easily under her hand.

"Yes, how may I help you?"

That was abrupt. The secretary's desk was barely three feet from the door. Now who would do a thing like that? Anybody with any sense at all would...

"Excuse me, may I help you?"

Sara, now is definitely not the time to be spacing out.

"Yes, I have an appointment with Mr. Young."

“And your name please?"

"Sara Pletsky."

The secretary flipped through her bound appointment book.

"I'm sorry but I don't see you listed here."

"Impossible. The woman at the front desk said she would certainly set one up for today."

"If you're not listed here, you don't have an appointment."

Sara stood up to her full 5'2.

"I have an appointment!"

She shuffled past the desk, and opened the door to the inner office. The secretary jumped up.

"You can't go in there!"

Sara looked back for a moment.

"Too late."

And then she slammed the door behind her. The man sitting at his desk appeared as if nothing had just happened. He reached over to the intercom.

"Sally, don't worry about this. I'll take care of it."

He looked up and smiled.

"How may I help you?"

"You're Mr. Young?"

"I hope so," he chuckled, "or else my wife is sleeping with a strange man."

"Mr. Young, I'd like to leave."

He stopped laughing.

"Leave!"

"Yes, leave! Why does everybody get so agitated at just the sound of the word?"

"Mrs. Pletsky."

"Mrs. Pletsky, you just can't leave."

"I know, I know. There's paperwork to do."

"No Mrs. Pletsky, there's no paperwork. You're just not allowed to leave."

She paused for a moment, thought of Louie, and then began to feel scared.

"Why?"

"You have no place to go."
"I'll live with my niece."

"Your niece doesn't want you. She's called here numerous times and has made that very clear."

"Then I'll get an apartment on my own."

"With what? Your social security check? Mrs. Pletsky, I don't mean to be short with you, but you have nowhere to go. You may like it here, or you may not like it here. Either way, you don't have a choice."

"You're going to make me stay?"

"Mrs. Pletsky, if there's anything I can do that will make you more comfortable, just let me know. It will be done immediately. But as to actually letting you walk out that door and become an old homeless vagrant whose life expectancy is near zero, you're going to have to accept my apology when I say I decline."

Tears started forming on her cheeks.

"... I can't leave?"

"I'm sorry, but no."

Sara turned with a small whimpering sound.

So this was it. She lived her life for the privilege of dying among the mentally challenged. Excellent. It was a perfect sort of cherry. Work, work, work, have crazy friends, die.

Sara walked out of the office, not even aware of the secretary's pitying glance. The glass door to the outside was there as always, standing solid at the end of the hall. She walked up to it and looked out. The sun shone straight through the trees and lit up the sidewalk. She reached out, and her fingertips brushed the warm glass. Very quietly, the door opened beneath her hands. She walked onto the sidewalk and the light embraced her. My, didn't the air seem fresh today.

Sara took a deep breath and turned to go back inside. She wondered what they'd be serving for dinner.
My voice broke on the second line of this last verse. The attention of the entire class sharpened - Even the bored kids in the back were paying attention. “I'm sorry,” I said. “Excuse me.” But as I tried to continue to read, the words on the page began to blur as the tears fell from my eyes onto the page. I cleared my throat, and before I could attempt to start reading again, the bell rang, signaling the end of class. I sat back against the front of my desk, and waved them out of the room, still unable to speak. The students filed out of the room, murmuring in small clumps, like funeral-goers leaving a church.

I dropped the book onto the desk, walked around to my chair, sat down and took a deep, shaky breath and exhaled slowly, eyes closed, attempting to regain my composure. But when I opened my eyes again, and saw the leather gloves on my hands, I lost whatever little control I had.

I always wear gloves. Most people I know dismiss it as a small quirk in my personality, and then forget it. Every once in a while I have to awkwardly explain them away, but I usually don’t even think about them. They have become a part of me - A shiny, smooth veneer that separates my sweaty hands from the outer world.

They come from summer vacation, 1985, on a hiking trip in the mountains. Debbie always said that it was OK that I didn’t get much of a salary as a teacher, because we got a summer vacation. We decided right after our honeymoon that we would go somewhere new every summer. So, in the summer of ’85, two years and three days after our marriage, we went hiking in the Poconos.

She hadn’t thought it a good idea to go that summer, because of Tracy, our six month-old daughter. I disagreed completely. Tracy was the reason why I woke up in the morning. To watch her discover the world every minute of every day was like understanding god and his reason for creation. That was why I wanted to bring her with us to the mountains. I always loved the outdoors, and I couldn’t wait to watch her explore the splendor of nature. “Come on,” I said, “It’s only four days. We can pack diapers and formula in the car and have a great time. It will be good for her.”

Debbie agreed, and once she did, the three of us had a great time. Tracy adjusted to her surroundings in the cabin almost immediately, and seemed to really enjoy the display of natural wonder that is the great outdoors. Debbie was also having a fantastic time, so much so that after just two days of hiking, she and Tracy were leading, and I was dragging along behind. So when I finally got to the summit of Branner’s Peak, she had been there long enough to decide that the view would be better from the other side of the guard rail. She was standing about three feet out on the ledge, holding Tracy up to see the fantastic panoramic view.

“Deb,” I said slowly, suddenly aware of the sweat cooling on my brow, “I’d be much more comfortable with the two most important women in my life on this side of the railing.” She turned around, her long auburn hair swinging back to reveal cheeks still pink from the exertion of climbing in the cool mountain air. Her entire face was lit up with the exhilaration that comes from seeing the majesty of nature.

“OK you party-pooper!” she said, sharply exhaling and taking a deep breath. “But isn’t it all just... so... wonderful! Here, take Tracy.” I stepped over the railing and took my daughter so Debbie, who was much shorter than me, could clamber back over to the other side.

I took a step out onto the ledge to see what she had been looking at. The view was absolutely incredible. I stood, holding my daughter, on a precipice jutting out over a pristine valley so beautiful I felt that a huge painting had been lain out below me - it was too good to be real. It made me feel insignificant before the splendor of all that is. “See all that?” I whispered into the back of Tracy’s head. “That’s god at work. He made all of that, he made me and mommy, and he made you too. Quite an artist, wouldn’t you say?” It was a poignant and private moment - Just me and my daughter. I took a final, deep breath of the mountain air, and turned back.

The rock that my ankle twisted on must have been no more that 2 inches tall. That’s it. Just two inches of well-placed stone was all it took. I fell, and Tracy, little Tracy, slipped out of my hands which were still sweaty from the climb. I turned, eyes wide in disbelief and watched her, making no sound, fall to the ground and slide off of the ledge.

That was six years ago. Debbie and I have since had four other children, Robert, Allison, Jerry and little Wendy. We still go on summer trips, but Debbie refuses to come up into the mountains anymore. So this time I came by myself. I slept for the night in the same cabin, in the same bed. But the crib, which I will always think of as her’s, was brimming with emptiness. I spent the night without sleeping, tossing and turning until, finally, the sun
came up, and gave me a reason to get out of bed and get dressed. I walked out onto the porch, and scanned the surrounding trees with weary eyes. I had nothing to do, so I began to walk, aimlessly, allowing my feet to lead the way. Without me realizing it, I hiked back up onto Brannet's Peak.

So now I stand here alone, my gloved hands resting on the metal guard rail, looking demandingly out at the panorama of nature in front of me. Each tree is placed just so, The river cuts through the valley at just the right angle. No sign of man anywhere, all the way to the horizon. It's truly an idyllic scene, another masterpiece made by God.

Taking a deep breath, I think back to Wordsworth's last two stanzas, which have driven me to come back up here again. How long can I go on living as his "little maid," believing that my six are really seven? God, damn you-Why does it all have to work out like this?

I recall the first stanza of the poem -

---A simple child,
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death?

It seems like a simple question, and I think that I understand the answer now. It's really all about understanding the art - even if you don't like it, you have to appreciate it. Every brush stroke has a purpose, and we just can't see the whole canvas.

I remove the gloves that have covered my sweaty hands for so long, and drop them over the edge, like a bouquet of roses thrown up on stage to laud a world-class performer. Running my bare hand through my sweaty hair, I draw in a shaky breath, and let it out as a chuckle, strangely devoid of humor. Two inches of stone was all it took. Just a small rock, in the right place at the right time. God put that rock there - quite an artist, wouldn't you say?