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Award Winning
Poetry, Short Stories
&
Nonfiction

2013 - 2014
tucked, his mouth light on the reins that have become more relaxed in my hands. It is somehow like waking up in the middle of my childhood, a joy I thought was gone.

Now it is up the same steep hill and my fear is being left. I lean forward, feel the power and the trust I have now, hear the deep working breaths of an animal carrying me up rock strewn ground because he knows how, because I let him. Then we burst into sunlight, my friend, my little girl and I.

How do I say it? I am thinking. How do I say what this day has meant? My daughter shines in the setting sun. My friend rides with the innocence of being a 20 year old. And not yet knowing what life holds in store, of fears that can take away love. She does not know, I think, that she is like a third daughter to me. That she has a place in my heart I don’t open all too often. And that she has shown me such happiness this day. She was the special person who could do this. Who I knew would not laugh at me, or let me down.

I am off now, mission complete. I have regained confidence, and trust is there. I hear her tell me in the background he was mistreated, and scared when he came to them; abused, with hundreds of pounds packed on his back in the Rocky Mountains. That he had been hurt by people. He is not beautiful in the conventional sense. He is not some rearing, thunder-hooved Pegasus. He is more. I stroke his scarred face, a face he has turned from me all evening. No trust. I tell him softly. “Thank you. You took care of me. You are such a good boy.” Then the massive head turns, and he is looking in my eyes from inches away. We stare at each other, us two wounded souls whom fate brought together this wonderful day. Dear Shiloh, though your wings may be scarred, or hidden, they are real to me. Because today, you let me fly.

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Selection Committee
Dr. John P. Kristofco
Emeritus Professor of English
Dr. Susanna K. Horn
Coordinator of Developmental Programs

by Melinda Neuhauser • Burbank
I feel my heart race, just a little, just an internal signal that reminds me of the last time, years back... Getting hurt. I smile it away, sweat away the nerves like petrified gnats, still buzzing around me enough to irritate, but hoping this big guy won’t notice, that he won’t sense my fear.

One, two, three, I am up, and gripping leather in my hands. How is it they don’t shake, because I thought they would? How do my hands remember how to expertly hold these life lines, feel the right tension, instinctively feel the line of communication and the repertoire that I used to know and feel by heart, that I could have spoken of blindfolded, or even in my sleep. Feel the cadence as I move forward; find the rhythm of memory and patience. There is my friend, half my age, looking at me with the question, “Are you ok?” I smile it off again, not wanting to fail, this is too important. This is my goal, after a long year of sitting on the sidelines, and watching from the bench, with crutches and casts. I am whole again, and this is my moment.

The night air is perfect, calm, and I try to find my natural feel for what I once loved, for what I once cherished. Wooded land awaits us, hiding in its depths many fears, but they are slowly sliding away, I am leaving them with every smooth step of this big animal; this 1200 pounds of muscle that I command with more than a little fear, atop this horse named Shiloh. I can do this.

A mountain of shale, steep and tilting, and I am last in line, here comes that part I have lost, the hardest element to regain. Trust. But yes, we slide and caravan our way down, deep into the belly of the land, and I sigh a little, lean back and enjoy the balance, the rhythm that is coming back. Water, tree roots, and stones the color of a memory are no obstacle. No wall that I won’t overcome. I am doing this.

Time counts by in minutes and I feel a sense of calm come over me. I close my eyes; hear the bird song, the smell of woolen moss and the feel of strength below me. Ahead of me, on her welsh pony, I see my little girl, still tucked between my friend and I. I hear her chatter lightly, sounding much like a bird herself. I hear her giggle as her pony splashes in the creek, becomes afraid of a large leaf growing in his path. I see her turn back time to time and flash me a smile that tells me this was a good idea. Shiloh collects below me; he floats along like a champion, his head regal and...
and screeched the target to a stop, which must have made little Bubby feel pretty doggone powerful. We in that oak tree peed our pants. Down below, Bubby stood, fat legs spread, feet firmly planted, and reloaded. The cop stopped him before he could fire again, gave him a stern lecture about throwing things at cars, at playing so close to the road. If he did it again he’d have to tell his mama, he said. He might even have to take him in, he said.

“Do you understand what I’m sayin’ to you, boy?”

Bubby stood, open-mouthed while we watched, unmoving, in the branches above.

“Where is your mama, anyway, boy?”

Bubby shifted from one fat, bare foot to the other.

“Ain’t there someone to watch over you? Ain’t there someone out here with ya?”

Bubby nodded. We closed our eyes tight. Bubby dropped the acorns from his fleshy fists. We held our breath. Bubby turned toward the tree, pointed up.

That day, there were no crustless bologna sandwiches, no paper-thin potato chips, no doting from my pot-pie deliverer, my zaftig heroine. That day, the mighty oak became off-limits, and, soon afterwards, either because Charlie Wise found his new wife, or because the tire and rubber factory laid lots of men off, the Bixby Boys moved on. They left behind a big oak tree, an old white farmhouse and a restless little girl with no one to play with, except shrimpy Shane Wilson and buck-toothed Bobby Smith, and, maybe, if she was lucky, a new girl whose ephemeral family landed in one of the Raff Road duplexes just long enough to break her heart.
The Lie of Perpetual Motion

A dead crow,  
unbeautiful as ash or anything  
left over.

This, then, is the failed ambition  
of wings,  
the stilled prayer for direction.

One dull eye reads  
the fractal history of clouds,  
the entrails of wind,  
the vastness of a cold map  
etched with rain.

A sudden glance of light  
knits the terrible lace of the body  
to earth,

the soil lifting gladly into death,  
the bitter distance.  
Lifting,

as if to see beyond  
the transparent gestures of gravity,  
the lie of perpetual motion  
to release.

Lifting into flight,  
wings whistling like blood,

or into nothing, now,  
that God  
or anyone can hear.

“Boy, do I have a hankering for a chicken pot pie,” I said, “but there isn’t a single one in our freezer.”

LouAnn, bless her heart, said, “Why, I believe I just happen to have a chicken pot pie in my icebox. I’ll go fetch it right this minute.”

LouAnn Bixby became my hero that day, because that was the flakiest, chunkiest chicken pot pie I’d ever slipped past my lips.

LouAnn Bixby doted on me because she and Terry had no daughters. What they did have were three little rough-and-tumble Bixby boys. Billy, the oldest, slightly plump and already full of testosterone at age eight, would fly into a fit of rage at the slightest sidelong glance. Randy, the brunette, was more likely to get into a scuffle with his older brother than anyone else, but if you made him mad, he’d ball up his fists, scrunch his nose until his piggy blue eyes were nothing but slits on his freckled face, and let loose a lisping stream of expletives that would make a sailor blush. Bubby, still in diapers, had the same temper as his older brothers, but it hadn’t been fully manifested yet on account of his inability to clearly vocalize.

The summer the Bixbys came to town was spent eating bologna sandwiches in their slope-ceilinged attic and scrambling to the highest branches of the gigantic oak tree in front of the white farmhouse. Up in that tree, thousands of solid acorns served as perfect propulsion devices, just the right size to harvest with a free hand and toss hard enough to bean the guy on the branch below. Before long, braining each other lost its appeal. We searched for other targets, winging nuts at windows, blasting little brothers who couldn’t climb trees, and pummeling parked cars. We were careful to avoid single-paned windows and mothers bent over bean rows. Soon, stationery objects posed no challenge. It wasn’t long before one of us took aim and fired at a moving target—the cars passing by on the country road. We bet from the branches that we could land an acorn in a retreating automobile’s muffler. None of us was a very good shot. We hit the road. We hit the backs of wood-paneled station wagons. We hit windows and tires and, once, Randy hit a license plate. Rarely, someone would hit the bumper, and, occasionally, someone would lie about plugging an exhaust, followed by defiant “nu-uh”s and “did not”s, but no one actually made it in.

Those of us high up in the tree knew when to call it quits. And when a car the colors of Charlie Wise’s holsteins wound around the bend, that was when to hold your fire. But little brothers in baggy diapers who can’t climb trees are respecters of no target. Bubby scooped a handful of pointy brown ammo and flung it hard, a buckshot that brought the bright red flash of brake lights.
To Hit a Moving Target

Except for buck-toothed Bobby Smith and shrimpy Shane Wilson, our rural midwestern neighborhood suffered from a severe dearth of children. Lots of old people playing checkers on their Greek revival porches, lots of clodhoppers popping hard yellow kernels into the ground that would rise in green spikes each summer between the single-story ranches (those, too, sprouted up from the bumpy ground). But not many kids. And out of those, most were hillbilly boys, too interested in hunting coons or mooning the bus to play with weird little girls like me.

Once in a while, a family with a female child would make a pitstop at one of the duplexes on Raff Road, but never without complications. Like Laura English, whose creepy older brother cheated at hide and seek and would pull your pants down if he happened upon your hiding place between the tasseled stalks. When Mom found out what a pervert he was, she put a stop to hide and seek. And my friendship with Laura.

Marnie Matthews had a creepy brother, too, a squatly little kid with a bad buzz cut and a nasty temper. We did our best to dodge the rocks and ignore the insults, hiding in the basement or behind her dad’s Volkswagen van to dress our dolls, though, once, he managed to heave a muddy brick which made its mark on Marnie’s dark-haired skull. One winter, Marnie’s parents broke my heart when they got divorced and Marnie’s father took her away to live in the city. I hardly saw her again—except once at the Revco. I was reading Spy vs Spy in a Mad Magazine, and she was waiting for her dad to buy a pack of cigarettes. We had only enough time for a quick wave, and then she was gone. After that, I had to settle for the likes of buck-toothed Bobby Until, that is, the summer of the Bixby Boys.

The Bixbys moved into Charlie Wise’s antiquated, achromatic farmhouse on the other side of our curvy country road. Charlie had farmed the fields around our brown brick house, had milked heavy-footed holsteins in the ramshackle barn out back until his young wife died of cancer, leaving Charlie with a cluster of clingy, heartbroken babies he didn’t know how to handle. He eventually herded them off to his parents’ farm on the other side of the county until he could find another wife. In the meantime, he rented the farmhouse to the Bixbys.

LouAnn Bixby was a pleasantly plump woman who metered out bologna sandwiches on Wonder Bread wet with Miracle Whip and yellow mustard, the crusts cut off, and potato chips—usually salt and vinegar—so thin you could practically see through them. Feeding kids was her specialty. Once, my mom was chatting with LouAnn Bixby as I bounded off the school bus.

To Hit a Moving Target continued on page 10
The Crow’s Brother

My brother
was born waiting for black wings to sprout
behind his pale pink arms,
waiting for the cracked bill to soften into
a rounded nose.

Our mother spent hours
drawing the oily feathers of his neck
through her fingers.
“Come, see your brother,”
and she held his black cannonball eyes to my
own soft brown,
comparing kings to crickets,
breaking the masts propping
lung sails and heart sails and tongue sails.

My brother waited to
be a cowboy,
to be an astronaut, to
be a pirate,
because being born of
down and shell,
the aunts and cousins said
he would fly.

My brother waited for his feathers—cravat black
like the horseman’s cloak gathering lights from skies—
to reach beyond his shoulders, to
curl five toes into four claws.

cont’d on page 4

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My brother waited for a voice, with his maple twig tongue stitched between a scissor split beak, with the belch-crackle of myna repetitions.

Because the neighbors and grandfathers and tutors said he would fly, he waited, with his bill-hobbled dinner manners. Because Mother said he would fly, he waited, tending baskets of orchids, waited with crinkle-faced, brown-skinned men buried under glassy-eyed skyscrapers.

Mother said he would fly.

Now, he tollbooth-guards the crossroads, chasing every shiny thing, turning six strings and a foot-kick bass with his protected, pale hands, meting out his pale-waiting night songs to dark cars through his window.

He waits with his crow’s tongue, his lipless mouth, waits with his man’s thoughts, his flightless hands.

Mother always wanted him to fly.
horse never led him wrong. Cows or horses, the old gelding knew what they were doing. But something was different this time, because as Joe asked him to move on, the old boy shied slightly, picking up a foreleg to paw. Joe felt his pulse quicken, and he pulled his Winchester 30-06 from its scabbard on his saddle and leveled it under his arm, its weight comforting. Still shining his light, he asked a second time, and this time the horse responded, though he chewed his bit with nerves.

Just over a crest of hilltop, before the woods, and near a stream, Joe saw a flash of white, or movement. He was about 300 yards away, and he squinted his blue eyes to better see in the flashing snow and dark. There, again.

At first he thought he was looking at wolves but then quickly remembered there hadn’t been wolves in this area for many years. There was more movement, and this time he understood. The mare was down, on her knees, but still fighting. Four white and grey dogs took turns lashing at her face, trying to get nearer the small, still dark form laying Joe’s side of the mare. Without hesitation or even a breath, Joe leveled his rifle, took aim in the dim beam of the light and pulled the trigger. One dog twisted away, down, damaged, and then laid still. He fired again and yet another fell, lifeless. The remaining two dogs sprinted away, back towards the house Joe knew they came from.

He would get them later. Settle up. A man still had a right to make even what happened to his livestock. Whether he went to jail mattered not to him. But now he had more important matters at hand.

He loped the old horse over to the mare, sliding off in one quick motion, and knelt before her. Her face was badly torn, where the dogs had grabbed her nostrils, tearing at her. He felt his blood boil and forced himself to calm down. Another heart attack wouldn’t help anyone right now. She wore her leather halter, and looked at Joe before turning her bloodied head toward the small dark form that Joe now moved to check. He heard her nicker, the sound of motherhood and protection and he felt tears well. She had almost died for this baby. He hoped he wasn’t too late.

The foal, a little filly, lay motionless; when he pressed her hide he felt nothing but the ice and snow that chilled her. But then, a shiver, ever so slight. He knelt down and pressed his ear to her heart, not noticing the sticky coat. A heartbeat was there, ever so slight. He tore off his outback coat, wrapping it around the little foal, carried her to the dam, who lifted an elegant head and nuzzled the chilled baby, eliciting a small sound of response.

Joe carried the foal to Smoke, laying her crossways across the front of the saddle, grabbed his rope and threw its end over the mares head,
First Place - Short Story

Coming Home

The air was crisp enough that the horse’s breath fogged in the glow of the flashlight, keeping time with each gentle puff. The old man rode wordlessly. It was December, just before Christmas, and although it was cold it was not the cold he knew. Joe had come to Ohio some four months ago. It had been a mild heart attack, but enough that his daughter, recently widowed at thirty seven, had coaxed him to come live with her and her kids. Two twin grandsons who lived for skateboarding and video games, and little Holly, the five year old who seemed to be coming out of her timidity with him and was beginning to talk more. He couldn’t blame her. It was tough losing her dad at such a young age. But car accidents and drunks in oncoming SUV’s didn’t discriminate by age; life just didn’t work like that.

Given the choice, Joe would gladly have died in the saddle, gazing out over the purple mountains of Wyoming, sun or snow; it wouldn’t have mattered to him. But alongside his heart attack his boss had decided to sell out. They were both getting old, he had said, it was time to switch gears, slow down. So, Joe had made his way east, and his boss had gone south, to fish off a boat. Joe was a working man. He planned to stay busy.

Now, loaded with search light, and a loaded rifle in a scabbard, he leaned into the wind, and said a mild curse to the night. One thing he didn’t understand was why people bred thoroughbred horses to foal so damned early. Not before, but as close to January 1st of each year as possible, as that was their racing birthday, regardless of when their dam actually foaled. Oh, Joe understood the logistics. Colts had a head start this way, an edge, a chance to be bigger, faster. He just didn’t like it. Even now, seeing the artificial lights above the stalls that were used to coax the mares into early heat seemed like cheating. Ranch horses didn’t work that way. The sun and God determined their foal date. But this world was not the same from which he came.

Smoke, Joe’s old quarter horse, picked his way down a steep slope easily, partly butt scooting a couple times in the slush and mud that was trying to freeze. A steady snow had been falling for several hours, but was just now beginning to stick. Joe raised the flashlight beam a bit higher, scanning the woods to his left carefully. When the mares had come in that evening they were one short. Apparently this was not a normal occurrence on Windway Farm, because it sure as hell threw all the Mexican workers and his daughter into a tizzy. The mares that had been out were not heavy in foal, at least according to the grizzled old country vet from the past week. But Joe knew there was one big reason a mare would wander from the herd alone and disappear. It was the gospel of birth. It just was hell bent weather to be doing it in.

He’d found the source of her exit a while back, a downed board in the back field that looked like it got rubbed on one too many times. The missing mare was tall, she had probably stepped right over and slipped away, and he had told his girl as much. But she didn’t listen to his common sense like he wished she would. He had decided long ago it was her mother’s fault the girl had no country or ranch sense. She had been made in a bunkhouse in the west, and journeyed back east to a city before her mama even knew she was being carried. Short visits in the summer weren’t enough for Joe to have taught her his ways, and his life. She didn’t really trust him. And that was the part that hurt.

More than the weather that night worried Joe. The farm was out far enough away from others that there were coyotes, and for all he knew, maybe some bear. But more than the wildlife, Joe didn’t trust his closest neighbor, a breeder of champion sled dogs. Just last week he had lost some of his laying hens in the middle of the day. He’d come home to piles of feathers and half dead birds tortured and torn up that he’d had to put down. He had been livid, furious. When his daughter came home he had approached her rapidly.

“Those dogs of his over there? They aren’t farm dogs. Huskies, they have a prey drive closer to a wolf. You cannot ever, trust them with livestock, big or small.” She had sighed, pushed her coiffed hair back with a weary hand.

“Dad, they are kept fenced in. I’ve never seen them over here. It was probably a coyote or fox or something.” He had nearly boiled over. He had never had the chance to teach her that coyote and fox would not leave a perfectly good dinner lying out to waste.

“Invisible fence? A small underground wire meant to keep them in? That ain’t a fence, that’s a joke.” But she had simply shaken her head and carried groceries in.

“Its different here dad. It’s not the same as back west.” Without knowing it, she had surmised the whole problem Joe had here. It was different.

It wasn’t a few moments later, forty minutes after leaving the farm that Smoke stopped in his tracks and softly nickered. Joe stopped, checked his reins. He was close. His...
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Joe had come to Ohio some four months ago. It had been a mild heart attack, but enough that his daughter, recently widowed at thirty seven, had coaxed him to come live with her and her kids. Two twin grandsons who lived for skateboarding and video games, and little Holly, the five year old who seemed to be coming out of her timidity with him and was beginning to talk more. He couldn’t blame her. It was tough losing her dad at such a young age. But car accidents and drunks in oncoming traffic was the new threat, not packs of coyotes which Joe was more used to coax the mares into being. Joe knew there was one big reason for the cold. The farm was out far on the three hundred acres she and her husband had lived on for fifteen years. By herself, still running a law firm, it was too much. She had promised him he would be helping her, not sitting idle. That had been his tipping point. Fifty years of wrangling ranches didn’t lend well to a life in a retirement village or condo. Joe was a working man. He planned to stay busy.

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Coming Home continued on page 8
then mounted quickly behind the foal. Holding the baby with one arm, the mare’s rope with his other, he gently coaxed the mare up. Then, trusting Smoke, as he had done many times before, he prodded him forward, unguided, and they went around the dead dogs, and headed home.

The way home was long going. Joe didn’t notice the cold; he only concentrated on holding the foal as near to him as possible to share his and Smoke’s body heat and encouragement. They stopped every couple minutes the whole way back, but finally, he saw the lights of the barn. He almost paused then, for just a moment at the welcomed sight. Snow fell in earnest now, and the lights of the windows and doors threw out a glow into the night that reminded him of some art work he’d seen once many years ago. He didn’t think about being right or wrong in that moment, he only thought of saving the foal’s and her mama’s life. He had been given purpose.

The old grizzled vet, the one man Joe understood here, welcomed him at the door wordlessly. He handed the foal off to the man, still wrapped in his coat.

“Found em back of the farm, neighbor’s dogs did a number on the dam, foal is just about frozen, but she’s warming up.” The vet looked up at him. “Two of the dogs are dead. The other two will be in the morning.” The other man smiled slightly and shook his head, then turned his attention to the mare and foal, taking them into a warm stall where there were heat lamps set up. Where there was help.

Joe led old Smoke the other way, past his daughter, who stood frozen in one spot. He couldn’t look at her just yet. For some reason his emotions were all scrambled up. She followed him into the stall, and watched him untack the horse.

“You warned me about those dogs.” She said softly. He nodded, lifting the saddle off and then the bridle.

“Yes, I did. And you need to remember that when I go back in a while and finish off the other two.” He waited for her argument, but when none came turned to her. Tears soaked his girl’s face, and in her eyes he saw Holly, the little granddaughter he now cherished. Wordlessly, his daughter stepped forward and hugged him hard. He let her cry, sob into his damp flannel shirt, and he held her tight, unfamiliar with the tugging his old heart had taken that night.

“I’m just so glad you’re here dad.” She cried. He held her even tighter.

“Me too Love. I’m here to stay.”

by Melinda Neuhauser • Burbank
The Crow’s Brother

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behind his pale pink arms,
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the aunts and cousins said
he would fly.

My brother waited for his feathers—cravat black
like the horseman’s cloak gathering lights from skies—
to reach beyond his shoulders, to
curl five toes into four claws.

cont’d on page 4
First Place - Nonfiction

**To Hit a Moving Target**

Except for buck-toothed Bobby Smith and shrimpy Shane Wilson, our rural midwestern neighborhood suffered from a severe dearth of children. Lots of old people playing checkers on their Greek revival porches, lots of clodhoppers popping hard yellow kernels into the ground that would rise in green spikes each summer between the single-story ranches (those, too, sprouted up from the bumpy ground). But not many kids. And out of those, most were hillbilly boys, too interested in hunting coons or mooning the bus to play with weird little girls like me.

Once in a while, a family with a female child would make a pitstop at one of the duplexes on Raff Road, but never without complications. Like Laura English, whose creepy older brother cheated at hide and seek and would pull your pants down if he happened upon your hiding place between the tasseled stalks. When Mom found out what a pervert he was, she put a stop to hide and seek. And my friendship with Laura.

Marnie Matthews had a creepy brother, too, a squatty little kid with a bad buzz cut and a nasty temper. We did our best to dodge the rocks and ignore the insults, hiding in the basement or behind her dad’s Volkswagen van to dress our dolls, though, once, he managed to heave a muddy brick which made its mark on Marnie’s dark-haired skull. One winter, Marnie’s parents broke my heart when they got divorced and Marnie’s father took her away to live in the city. I hardly saw her again—except once at the Revco. I was reading Spy vs Spy in a Mad Magazine, and she was waiting for her dad to buy a pack of cigarettes. We had only enough time for a quick wave, and then she was gone. After that, I had to settle for the likes of buck-toothed Bobby Until, that is, the summer of the Bixby Boys.

The Bixbys moved into Charlie Wise’s antiquated, achromatic farmhouse on the other side of our curvy country road. Charlie had farmed the fields around our brown brick house, had milked heavy-footed holsteins in the ramshackle barn out back until his young wife died of cancer, leaving Charlie with a cluster of clingy, heartbroken babies he didn’t know how to handle. He eventually herded them off to his parents’ farm on the other side of the county until he could find another wife. In the meantime, he rented the farmhouse to the Bixbys.

LouAnn Bixby was a pleasantly plump woman who meted out bologna sandwiches on Wonder Bread wet with Miracle Whip and yellow mustard, the crusts cut off, and potato chips—usually salt and vinegar—so thin you could practically see through them. Feeding kids was her specialty.

Once, my mom was chatting with LouAnn Bixby as I bounded off the school bus.

**Second Place - Poetry**

**Scales**

Spring came to the Sumerian
Just as it came to me
When I was young in limb and lung
And far from atrophy.

But then Sumeria grew old
Along with Greece and Rome
And found that even empires share
The aging chromosome.

But springtime for the butterfly
Is briefer than a day!
Creation plays a trillion scales
From moth to Milky Way.

by Grace Schantz • Orrville
The Lie of Perpetual Motion

A dead crow,
unbeautiful as ash or anything
left over.

This, then, is the failed ambition
of wings,
the stilled prayer for direction.

One dull eye reads
the fractal history of clouds,
the entrails of wind,
the vastness of a cold map
etched with rain.

A sudden glance of light
knits the terrible lace of the body
to earth,
the soil lifting gladly into death,
the bitter distance.

Lifting,
as if to see beyond
the transparent gestures of gravity,
the lie of perpetual motion
to release.

Lifting into flight,
wings whistling like blood,
or into nothing, now,
that God
or anyone can hear.

“Boy, do I have a hankering for
a chicken pot pie,” I said, “but there
isn’t a single one in our freezer.”

LouAnn, bless her heart, said,
“Why, I believe I just happen to
have a chicken pot pie in my icebox.
I’ll go fetch it right this minute.”

LouAnn Bixby became my hero
that day, because that was the
flakiest, chunkiest chicken pot pie
I’d ever slipped past my lips.

LouAnn Bixby doted on me
because she and Terry had no
daughters. What they did have were
three little rough-and-tumble Bixby
boys. Billy, the oldest, slightly plump
and already full of testosterone at
age eight, would fly into a fit of rage
at the slightest sidelong glance.
Randy, the brunette, was more likely
to get into a scuffle with his older
brother than anyone else, but if you
made him mad, he’d ball up his fists,
scrunch his nose until his piggy blue
eyes were nothing but slits on his
freckled face, and let loose a lisping
stream of expletives that would
make a sailor blush. Bubby, still in
diapers, had the same temper as his
older brothers, but it hadn’t been
fully manifested yet on account of
his inability to clearly vocalize.

The summer the Bixbys came
to town was spent eating bologna
sandwiches in their slope-ceiled attic and scrambling to the highest
branches of the gigantic oak tree
in front of the white farmhouse.
Up in that tree, thousands of solid
acorns served as perfect propulsion
devices, just the right size to
harvest with a free hand and toss
hard enough to bean the guy on the
branch below. Before long, braining
each other lost its appeal. We
searched for other targets, winging
nuts at windows, blasting little
brothers who couldn’t climb trees,
and pummeling parked cars. We
were careful to avoid single-paned
windows and mothers bent over
bean rows. Soon, stationery objects
posed no challenge. It wasn’t long
before one of us took aim and fired
at a moving target—the cars passing
by on the country road. We bet from
the branches that we could land an
acorn in a retreating automobile’s
muffler. None of us was a very
good shot. We hit the road. We hit
the backs of wood-paneled station
wagons. We hit windows and tires
and, once, Randy hit a license
plate. Rarely, someone would hit
the bumper, and, occasionally,
someone would lie about plugging
an exhaust, followed by defiant
“nu-uh”s and “did not”s, but no
one actually made it in.

Those of us high up in the tree
knew when to call it quits. And when
a car the colors of Charlie Wise’s
holsteins wound around the bend,
that was when to hold your fire. But
little brothers in baggy diapers who
can’t climb trees are respecters of
no target. Bubby scooped a handful
of pointy brown ammo and flung
it hard, a buckshot that brought
the bright red flash of brake lights

by Beverly J. Potter • Seville

To Hit a Moving Target continued on page 11
and screeched the target to a stop, which must have made little Bubby feel pretty doggone powerful. We in that oak tree peed our pants. Down below, Bubby stood, fat legs spread, feet firmly planted, and reloaded. The cop stopped him before he could fire again, gave him a stern lecture about throwing things at cars, at playing so close to the road. If he did it again he’d have to tell his mama, he said. He might even have to take him in, he said.

“Do you understand what I’m sayin’ to you, boy?”

Bubby stood, open-mouthed while we watched, unmoving, in the branches above.

“Where is your mama, anyway, boy?”

Bubby shifted from one fat, bare foot to the other.

“Ain’t there someone to watch over you? Ain’t there someone out here with ya?”

Bubby nodded. We closed our eyes tight. Bubby dropped the acorns from his fleshy fists. We held our breath. Bubby turned toward the tree, pointed up.

That day, there were no crustless bologna sandwiches, no paper-thin potato chips, no doting from my pot-pie deliverer, my zaftig heroine. That day, the mighty oak became off-limits, and, soon afterwards, either because Charlie Wise found his new wife, or because the tire and rubber factory laid lots of men off, the Bixby Boys moved on. They left behind a big oak tree, an old white farmhouse and a restless little girl with no one to play with, except shrimpy Shane Wilson and buck-toothed Bobby Smith, and, maybe, if she was lucky, a new girl whose ephemeral family landed in one of the Raff Road duplexes just long enough to break her heart.
Ride

I feel my heart race, just a little, just an internal signal that reminds me of the last time, years back... Getting hurt. I smile it away, swat away the nerves like petrified gnats, still buzzing around me enough to irritate, but hoping this big guy won’t notice, that he won’t sense my fear.

One, two, three, I am up, and gripping leather in my hands. How is it they don’t shake, because I thought they would? How do my hands remember how to expertly hold these life lines, feel the right tension, instinctively feel the line of communication and the repertoire that I used to know and feel by heart, that I could have spoken of blindfolded, or even in my sleep. Feel the cadence as I move forward; find the rhythm of memory and patience. There is my friend, half my age, looking at me with the question, “Are you ok?” I smile it off again, not wanting to fail, this is too important. This is my goal, after a long year of sitting on the sidelines, and watching from the bench, with crutches and casts. I am whole again, and this is my moment.

The night air is perfect, calm, and I try to find my natural feel for what I once loved, for what I once cherished. Wooded land awaits us, hiding in its depths many fears, but they are slowly sliding away, I am leaving them with every smooth step of this big animal; this 1200 pounds of muscle that I command with more than a little fear, atop this horse named Shiloh. I can do this.

A mountain of shale, steep and tilting, and I am last in line, here comes that part I have lost, the hardest element to regain. Trust. But yes, we slide and caravan our way down, deep into the belly of the land, and I sigh a little, lean back and enjoy the balance, the rhythm that is coming back. Water, tree roots, and stones the color of a memory are no obstacle. No wall that I won’t overcome. I am doing this.

Time counts by in minutes and I feel a sense of calm come over me. I close my eyes; hear the bird song, the smell of woolen moss and the feel of strength below me. Ahead of me, on her welsh pony, I see my little girl, still tucked between my friend and I. I hear her chatter lightly, sounding much like a bird herself. I hear her giggle as her pony splashes in the creek, becomes afraid of a large leaf growing in his path. I see her turn back time to time and flash me a smile that tells me this was a good idea. Shiloh collects below me; he floats along like a champion, his head regal and...
tucked, his mouth light on the reins that have become more relaxed in my hands. It is somehow like waking up in the middle of my childhood, a joy I thought was gone.

Now it is up the same steep hill and my fear is being left. I lean forward, feel the power and the trust I have now, hear the deep working breaths of an animal carrying me up rock strewn ground because he knows how, because I let him. Then we burst into sunlight, my friend, my little girl and I.

How do I say it? I am thinking. How do I say what this day has meant? My daughter shines in the setting sun. My friend rides with the innocence of being a 20 year old. And not yet knowing what life holds in store, of fears that can take away love. She does not know, I think, that she is like a third daughter to me. That she has a place in my heart I don’t open all too often. And that she has shown me such happiness this day. She was the special person who could do this. Who I knew would not laugh at me, or let me down.

I am off now, mission complete. I have regained confidence, and trust is there. I hear her tell me in the background he was mistreated, and scared when he came to them; abused, with hundreds of pounds packed on his back in the Rocky Mountains. That he had been hurt by people. He is not beautiful in the conventional sense. He is not some rearing, thunder-hooved Pegasus. He is more. I stroke his scarred face, a face he has turned from me all evening. No trust. I tell him softly. “Thank you. You took care of me. You are such a good boy.” Then the massive head turns, and he is looking in my eyes from inches away. We stare at each other, us two wounded souls whom fate brought together this wonderful day. Dear Shiloh, though your wings may be scarred, or hidden, they are real to me. Because today, you let me fly.
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