“Turn your face to the sun
and the shadows fall behind you.”
Author Unknown

Dedications

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Profane Utterances

whispered secrets,
lies,
and other profane utterances
are sometimes all
that distinguishes
love from lust

So…
do I ask my lover
to remain silent
and hope that truth
will be found somewhere in his quietness?

Waiting for… You

Waiting for…kisses
Oh Yeah, your kisses!
leaving me dizzy, wet
your kisses open-mouthed, sweet,
unnumbered
and never finalized by departing flights

Waiting for…touches
Oh Yeah, your touches! bold, insistent
heating me as thoroughly
as the noon day sun on a puddle.

Waiting for…loving
Oh Yeah, your loving! unhurried, unrushed
hurling me upwards and speeding me beyond;
(yeah, your loving) keeping me In, and Out of my
head;
*(yeah, your loving!)*insisting on my Open-ing, and
Close-ing
(yeah, your loving!) leaving me did and done,
spinning, spent and spun.

Waiting for you…Waiting for your…
Yeah! I can wait for you.

i love you

for believing
that I am better now
than i have ever been

for trusting
that i now know
what i doubted before

for hoping
that i can now give you
what i only wanted from you then

I love you

for loving
me (then) (now)
all
ways

Pa rts of (Me)

You are
my subjective personal pronoun
I love you
my objective personal pronoun
I am yours
my possessive personal pronoun
this love will last
my demonstrative pronoun

because you are mine
there is
no pronoun
to replace You

You are
much too wonderful to remain
just a verb
So,
inspire me
let me
transform
your (possessive personal)
touch, kiss, and love
into the necessary gerunds
touching, kissing, and loving

when all this love (ing) is done
subjecting,objecting, possessing, and demonstrating
We'll just have us (intensified) ourselves

A Letter to my Compulsive Lover

Thursday, January 27, 2005

Darling:

You know that I always love talking with you on the phone. I think I learned more about you last night than I ever knew. Thank you for being so open and sharing yourself with me. I had no idea, how important house-keeping and cleaning were to you. I see now that the only way I can be your true soul mate is to clean up *(if you'll pardon the pun*) my act. In light of that, I want to show you how unselfish my love for you is. Here is the new itinerary for our time together in Las Vegas. The old plans I gave you were full of fun and romance. Thank you for showing me that real love is about shared domesticity…

Monday, Feb 7th

Afternoon – Initially I told you that all afternoon was open to whatever you wanted to see or do. In light of last night's conversation about your penchant for neatness, I figure that before we leave the airport you might want to find a quiet spot so that you can open my luggage and repack any items that are not neatly folded.
I'm still thinking that we won't get to the hotel until about 1:00 - 1:15pm. That leaves plenty of time for you to closely examine whether my nails are buffed to a silky shine and that the nails have been cut evenly.

There will be about two hours between arriving at the MGM Grand and checking in. If you go on the internet now, you can probably get the address of a local physician. I'm thinking you might want to have me X-rayed to ensure I have no broken bones or other physical irregularities. If we forego hanging out on the strip after checking in, that will leave me plenty of time to scrub the bathroom floors and clean the toilets. I know you probably don't trust that the maids have been properly trained. Anyway, while you re-polish the toilet, I can strip and remake the bed!

Whew, we may be a bit tired after that. I suggest we polish the furniture and turn in early *(after you starch and iron my pajamas of course)*. Don't worry about making love Sweetie, we might make a mess, and dammit, you'd have to get up and change the sheets. Let's not forget to call the Front Desk and ask that a vacuum cleaner be delivered to the room no later than 6:00 a.m. (It *is* the early bird that catches the germ isn't it?)

Day Two - Tuesday, Feb 8th

6:00 a.m. – I suppose I'll have time to take a quick shower while you vacuum those durst bunnies you spotted under the bed.
8:00 am – I'd still like to go over to the Caribe Café at *Mirage* for breakfast. Don't worry, I'll go into their kitchen and rewash your plates and cutlery myself. Nothing's too good for my little Felix Unger.

11:00 a.m. – Let's go up to the top of the Eiffel Tower at *Paris* . I bet there's all kinds of cigarette butts and small trash

articles those other messy Vegas visitors have dropped. Thank goodness you told me how turned on you get by a big breasted woman big who always carries a *Hefty* trash bag on her!

2:00 p.m. – How do you feel about us having lunch at *Margaritaville* in *Flamingo Hotel?* While I'm knocking back the tequilas, you can sneak behind the bar and give it a thorough scrubbing.

Late afternoon is your choice! I hear there's lots of great shopping in the area. It would be just like you to let your emotions get the best of you, and slip off to buy me a monogrammed apron or something. Hey, if you really want to get freaky with it, have it imprinted with something like "I'm My Baby's Dust Mite"

8:00 p.m. – I've heard great things about *Rio's* World Buffet, but I know you're picky about proper food handling…So, I've called ahead and asked if you can inspect the kitchen before we eat.

10:00 p.m. - Just remember that I really do love you Sweetie, so what will appear to you to be binge drinking while we're at the Voodoo Lounge at *Rio* really isn't. Your little Hazel just needs some extra energy juice to keep her up and at 'em.

12:00 p.m.– 2:00 p.m. – All righty then. Now, I've been the "Good Girl" long enough. I say it's time for some romance. We can start with a long hot bubble bath. I'll light some fragrant candles *(Citronella of course)*; put on some soft music; and fill

the tub with those lovely bubbles that only a half a bottle of Palmolive can create. I'm getting hot just thinking about this…I'll sprinkle a little Comet on a washcloth, and then slip it under my butt so that any friction we might create will not only have me seeing stars, but will result in that tub receiving a scrubbing it's probably never had before.

Now after that I'll dab a little Mr. Clean behind my ears and slip into one of those sexy negligees. *Oh la la!* I know how important it is for all surfaces to be shiny and spot free, so dab a drop or two of Pledge on the twins to make them sparkle.

Wednesday, Feb 9th
Your choice all morning and afternoon Sugar!

9:00 p.m. – Risque's at Paris (Drinks and perhaps we can find a graffiti splattered wall to clean.)

Thursday, Feb 10th
Day Four. I'm sure we'll both be so overcome with sadness that this "special" time between us together has come to an end. According to the itinerary, we'll have to check out at 11:00 a.m.. I'm sure by now we will have talked a lot and made some long term plans for our future together. We will have filled our nights dusting (side by side) and negotiating how often you want the sidewalks in front of our little love nest scrubbed.

By then, dear heart, I should know that making love to you in the wee morning hours will only be possible if your tee shirts and shorts have been crisply starched and ironed the night before. Honey, I just get all tingly *(you know? Like when you drop the ammonia in your lap)* thinking about the shared life we'll have together. Our love will be so true, and so good and so, so CLEAN!

My darling, I hope that my sharing with you like this isn't a problem. You know that it's so unlike me to be so bold and brazen. I do hope I haven't been too forward, and frightened you. But the truth is that no man has ever made me want to open myself up to him like this before *(O.K., O.K! We won't count the guy on the Brawny package—damn, he's hot!)*

I've got to go now Sweetie, but just know that I love you with all my heart and I'll love you until we drop dead of exhaustion (over our perfectly made bed of course).

Affectionately and hygienically yours,

Jen

When I Grow Up

When I grow up
I want to be just like my Big Momma

I want to be able to cook
really cook
mix, and stir,
fry, boil, and broil
meals that summon
rambunctious children from their play
prepare plates that compel hardworking men
to lay down their hoes,
park their tractors,
and hurry from the field to my table.
cooking that alerts road weary travelers—
"You are home"

I want to talk like my Big Momma
use words
powerful enough to disengage
warring teenagers
gentle enough to comfort
the bereaved
and lull colicky babies to rest
confident enough to assure young brides
that philandering men
are just a part of life
censurous enough to convince philandering grooms
that
"God don't like ugly!"

I want my Big Momma's smells
early morning biscuit sweet
traces of Ivory soap
just a hint of Avon
and earnest, loving sweat

I want my Big Momma's hands
tough and callused
from years of tugging and tearing
coaxing and carrying
molding and mixing
spanking and smoothing
lifting and loving
I want hands that deliver
 warm plates of chicken,
calves, and babies

I want my hips to spread like Big Momma's
Hips that by grandbabies can run
and hide behind
firm, well-rounded hips that still excite and draw
appreciative glances from old men
I want a wide welcoming lap
that accommodates baskets of laundry
bowls of snap beans, and
cradle the heads of drowsy toddlers

I want my Big Momma's wisdom
I need to understand how to keep
keep still
keep secrets
keep my children
keep my man
keep my God
keep my peace
keep my home
keep my own business
keep my balance
While I give away all of me

When I grow up
I want to be just like my Big Momma

touch me …there

because she said "*touch me… there*"
…he complied
unwwrapping his longing
embracing her restlessness
meeting need
he begins touching her…there

because he could touch her …*there*
she never saw
the darkness of the room
suddenly illuminate
the light of a million candles
hoverer above
sweating bodies become phosphorescent
sheets beneath them ignite
sparkle in the pairing
never saw
effervescent sweat
and luminescent fluids flow between them

because he did touch her …*there*
he never heard
the near silence of the room charge/overflow
fill with
whispered asking (pleading)
hum with fevered whisperings
then…couple with
muted assurances (moans)
and become
a lover's ensemble
flowing into opened openings
floating
in and (around) over and (under)
her and (him) and (them)

Colored Church Ladies

Lord!
Just look at those colored church ladies
regaled in finery
wrapped in mink to worship
You.

Oh Lord!
Only they
can sashay
with elegantly hatted heads
held aloft
as high-heeled shoes
quietly tap, tap, tap
out anthems
as they make their way
My Lord, as they sashay
brilliantly, beautifully,
boldly to Your altar.

Lord!
Just look at those fine ebony daughters
those colored church ladies
as they come
adoring
Your adored,
all adorned.

Witch

Haughty, high headed balancing invisible
crystal plates
atop her head,
light! quick
sure stepping gripping diamonds
between her thighs
sighs
moves surely
loves purely for the enjoyment

A veil of sweat perfume trails in her wake
sly sleepy eyes deftly sizing less gifted sisters
teasing then seizing curious brothers
stumbling beside her
enchanted by the sight of her licking her lips

the hunt

deep throated sun roasted love toasted
chocolate colored (covered)
honey *slides into view*
thinly veiled breasts almost bare
nails curved/poised for clawing (pawing)
she laughs and watches naïve game waiting
admittance to her barely parted lips (thighs)
smirking and *rocking*
keeping pantyless time
to internal aretharhythms
only she can
hear (here)
amid the this crowd
among this weighting (waiting)
pack
eyes closed hips oscillating
(swinging)
toes tapping fingers snapping
daring to bare her (bear)
ummmmm
in a smoky den among
clear-thinking boys yearn to taste the fluff
level headed men long to breathe the puff
left in her
pre-moistened (wake)
softly muscled arms (thighs)
snaked up…wound around
then squeezed all remaining sense (scents)
from fresh game
that dared to stare (snare)

deep into her bottomless gimme

Just as soon as I catch my breath

Just as soon as I catch my breath
I'll let him know
loving that makes a soul implode
a head explode
hips and thighs find,
clench and unwind
fills and suspend time
then…makes me lose my mind
is rumored to scandalous.

Just as soon as I'm able to stand up
I'll let him know
loving that heats and ignites
inflames and engulfs
then…leaves me stirred and shaken
scorched and smoldering
is thought to be hazardous.

Just as soon as I'm able to uncoat my tongue
unhinge my jaw
pry apart my lips
I'll let him know
loving that induces profane utterances
in unknown tongues
then…renders the speaker---
speechless
is said to be shameful.

Just as soon as I catch my breath,
forego the panting
remember how to inhale
I'll let him know
loving that promotes pleading
solicits babbled confessions
then…leaves a damp, satiated hunger in its wake
is known to be nearly impossible to repeat!

The Lost Won

If he lost his head
He won't miss his money, his woman, his mind
Headless, penniless, sexless
Stupid, lost, broke, and lonely
Quite the idiot!

Heading towards the pot
Missing it, not seeing it
Misunderstanding its purpose
Quite the idiot!

Lost
Unable to see and decide
Whether to piss or get off
The pot
He can't see
Quite the idiot!

To my weary girlfriend who believes she met her prince charming in the gift shop of a holiday inn

Why should you have thought
a chance encounter
a dash to buy a candy bar—
simple, junk sustenance
a stranger's smile
should could, and would
feed your thirsty soul?

Who would have believed
his bright, earnest eyes
peering through you, then into you
the gleam of perfect teeth
beaming at you, then for you
would, could, and should
stir that fire you had counted extinguished?

Who could have guessed
the warmth of his hand
A benign pressure in the center of your back
lambent comfort of his thigh
on a crowded dance floor
could, should and would
ameliorate trenchant rationale
resuscitate joyful hopefulness?

Will you call him, write to him
pursue the four hour lifetime?
if you managed to overtake him in his world
could you exact
the requisite reparation you desire?
would you, could you, should you
forfeit reason and yield to predation?

The Anointing

Last night Langston
leaned over my bed
pulled my head close placed
his undead lips
dripping with harlem
moistness
saturating california newness
plumping mine
full
all the while
snapping his fingers
to a beat

Ah, that smooth psalmster
silky soul singer
chuckled
blew lyrics into my mouth
note by disremembered note
just a line a jazz overdosed
time
all the while
snapping his fingers
to a beat

His tongue, swollen from years
of brilliance
gently pried my teeth apart
teased my palate
He sighed and exhaled
Rivers

compelling syncopated
phrases
deep
into the back of my
throat
timeless cool
flowing
muting
propulsive rhythms
annotating
dazzling

choking on the sweetness of
such a kiss
I awoke— snapping
my fingers to a beat

Summer Migration

Tickets collected from fingers
sticky with *Cracker Jacks*
the new jersey sisters sleep
under the watchful eye of
colored porters

Baltimore, D.C., Fredericksburg, Rocky Mount
now the tall one, the older one,
watches as the younger, pretty
one sleeps
Fayetteville, Dillon, Florence
big sister listening carefully and
marking the stops
north to south—june to august

gently shaken
awake in *Savannah*

Georgia is long enough to wash
faces then eat
breakfast: cheeseburgers with
cold *Dr. Pepper*.
long enough to chase each
other
through the cars
then sit quietly rebraiding hair,
lotioning elbows and knees
and rehearsing the new
language they must master
"Yesmamnomam" "Yessirnosir"

Finally — Florida

not the palm lined streets of
Tampa
or the hotel trimmed beaches of
Miami
but the dusty, gnat filled air of
Jacksonville
they disembark well before the
East Coast Champion
intrudes into the retirement
communities of aging jews and
dispirited new yorkers.
released into the custody of an
ageless,sweet smelling
Big Momma

Sisters

"And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die".
Genesis Chapter 30:1

a shared husband
can only produce
a contest of sorts
vigorously played on
fertile fields

idle kisses
whispered endearments
muffle laughter
are all a waste of precious time
as hasty nocturnal embraces
must yield tangible results

their target: his love
their goal: his seed
their salvation: his children

Follow Me

"Now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger…And David sent messengers to Ish-bosheth Saul's son, saying Deliver me my wife Michal, which I espoused to me for an hundred foreskins of the Philistines. And Ish-bosheth sent, and took her from her husband…And her husband went with her along weeping behind her…" (2 Samuel 3:14-16)

I see you
staggering
in the sun
planting your tears
in this burning sand

They return me—
send me back
a spoil of war: twelve years absent
long forgotten
now spitefully reclaimed
unwanted except
by you
weeping
staggering
under the sun

When they
order you back
command you
to retreat
without me
        For my (God's) sake
don't make any plans
in the wake of
anointings
covenants of
foreskin redemption are no longer honored.

What Michal Saw

"And as the ark of the Lord came
into the city of David, Michal, Saul's
daughter looked through a window,
and saw king David leaping and
dancing before the Lord; and she
despised him in her heart."
II Samuel 6:16

staring down
at filled streets
the shepherd dances for
the crowds
wild cheering
while that untouched
place in my lap, that
terrible void
tenses and tightens.
so empty

the giant killer dances
throws off his clothes
before the crowd
but unwilling to remove my
slips
fills our bed, my bed with
the perfume of others
fills their bellies with sons
that raisin you call my
womb
contracts and aches and
remains.
so empty

the slick tongued psalm
singer
is running now

whirling and twirling half
naked
for them
spinning and spilling
himself
for them
somewhere down
the hall
one of his many brats is
screaming
my ignorant breasts
respond
foolishly tingling and
filling
with tears.

I watch
hating You
hating him
Your anointed one
my husband the king
comforter of my father
lover of my brother
but not me
father to everyone's
children but not mine
leaping, whirling, spinning,
dancing
"filled" You say, with Your
spirit
while I sit unfilled.
so empty
useless!
like the two hundred
foreskins
he paid for me.

little sister

wrapped so tightly in my own suffering
I hardly notice when little sister boards the bus
her bottom lip's been excommunicated from her fine
face
small dark (thunder) cloud behind bunched brows
eyes flash where they should shine
if I lift my love boweddown head a moment

I could see
when she jerks her brother onto the bus
shoves him into an available seat
demands he be quiet wait a minute
I miss her drama rewind my own
Can't look up got to flex my hand
sore from holding a head/heart/back that wants me
gone flexing trying to ease an ache I fail
to see little sister's fist clench after she pays her(his)way
closed tight from giving.
little sister throws herself onto the seat fixes a stony gaze
out the window toward
nothing knowing it's nothing
while I compose an ending that has no future
me too busy to see

the straight in little sister's back
I miss her
resolution to recognize nothing when she doesn't
see it
I'm still trying to capture a haint
convince myself that unchecked dropping
is
flying
little sister smacks the sleep from her brother
signaling the end of the ride
her arms block
his small attempt to get in front try to move ahead of her
wait a minute
youjustbetterwaiutaminute
little sister's leading the way
she knows he doesn't know
passing
beneath my window
mad but going somewhere
out
in front
where she belongs.

The Queen

The *Queen: Lady Soul*
 closed her eyes
opened her mouth and sang
R-E-S-P-E-C-T
alto edict inscribed on the crown
regal five octave notes
sweeping across
bridges of troubled waters
for the benefit of natural women
who know
and their daughters
who've been taught
SHE created love

The *Queen/Medicine Woman*
reached down past her heart
pushed past the old
presented
the new—leaning note
swinging,soaring, swooping
sliding into the heart of rhythm
wrenching moans
searing then cauterizing blues
A promise of a real thing
dr. feelgood for disenchanted do right women
healed then convinced
She *is* love

The *Queen/High Priestess*
raises her head
releasing the healing incantations (*Baby,Baby,Sweet Baby*)
sacrificial notes waft across the waves
radiating beyond bedroom walls
soulful charged vibrato (*I Never Loved a Man*)

deftly entreat hands to unclench—plead for thighs to relent
adagio timed penance (in unison)
reconciliation upon cold sheeted altars
velvet earthed arias
mediating tension restoring order
SHE sang “Let there be love”
we said “That’s Good”

I'm Confused

Sorry
But I don't understand
yeah, I'm just a little confused
like the two guys who saw the blimp on the radar screen up
in the siting station, but didn't think it was important enough
to tell anybody at Pearl
like the supervisors at the Triangle Shirtwaist factory
as they listened to screaming girls
trapped in the inferno---banging on locked doors, kicking out
glass
and the sound of their tiny heads splattering on concrete
sidewalks in front of their building
like the British troops when Shaka Zulu and his posse came
barreling down to prove that fat meat is greasy
confused like Bill Clinton that the little idiot would actually
keep the damn dress.

I'm perplexed
like the fourteen year old black boy
who didn't understand that a reckless glance
was a senseless affront to Money's sensibilities
l0ike DAR set who just didn't understand
that Marian could, and that she would, and that she
should blow the house down
like the moslems who watched the
cross wearing crusaders
loot the mosque
burn their houses down
defile their daughters
and insist their benevolent God,
was kinder and gentler than their Allah

Yeah,
I'm not sure
I just don't know
like the good Christian people living outside the walls of
Dachau, Buchendwald, and Auschwitz farmed, and fished,
and watched the non-stop black smoke
didn't know;
like the Tuskeegee doctors who inoculated and
charted the agony and watched flesh rot and pull away from
bones
didn't know;
like the Cherokee mothers who packed their babies, thin
blankets,
and a weeks' worth of food
didn't know.

Who knows…
maybe, if you can break it down
explain it to me one more time

If your argument is convincing enough
I may get it
LIke Custer got it when that first wave of Sioux came
crashing through the trees to move him from
hubris to immortality

Like Captain Smith got it as he watched the last lifeboat
being launched;
felt the final tilt of the ship; and
clutched the rails as he struggled to recall the words to the
last stanza of "Nearer My God to Thee."

first cousins (once removed)

I heard you were
dying
so I came to
Santa Cruz

your withering frame
lying on designer sheets
inscribed with wild blooms
and trailing vines
(inappropriate now)

your keloidal shroud
frightens my daughter
unfamiliar with air
forced into nostrils
through clear plastic tubing

repelled by this sickness you
wear
Lauren doesn't believe
you were once beautiful.

your labored breathing
frightens your brother into
a litany of old stories
all the funny lines are
ascribed to you
in his stand-up eulogy.

James fumbles the next
one
a collective inhalation
(the story ends in death)

in the kitchen
Alzada winces

your sister prefers to vent her grief
over a hot stove
standing guard over frying pork
chops and simmering gravy

pretends it is the
spilling
of hot peach cobbler
that makes her cry.

If It Pleases the King

"On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, the seven chamberlains that served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king,To bring Vashti the queen before the king with the crown royal, to shew the people and the princes her beauty: for she was fair to look on. But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains: therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him".Esther 1:10-12

Why didn't you just go?

what would have been the harm?

If it pleases the king.

woman/wife

queen/whore

what's the difference?

If it pleases the king

surely the royal crown

would offset your nakedness

when the king called for you

you should have gone

you should have allowed him to display his property

allowed the crowd

to lick their lips and admire His treasures

If it pleases the king

Now, your disobedience

your failure to acknowledge your nothingness

will result in a draft

a search for one who knows how to obey

If it pleases the king

An Eyewitness Account

I heard stiletto sentences
slash across the face of longing
stabs of finality thrust furiously
and repeatedly.

I saw trust yanked
and punched into a
cowering heap; bleeding profusely
from massive wounds.

There was a pause
then I heard petulant cries
flung against a sleek surface
bounced off hardened resolve
pitiful pleas flung back mercilessly
until there was only whimpering
echoing across the plain
of unconcern.

I thought I saw
pride crawl forward, then
stagger to her feet
she ran elsewhere
into the past
perhaps the imagination
that had spawned
such foolish hope.

Then, I ran away too
afraid that the voracious appetite
of her enchanted lover had not
been completely satisfied.

Getting Ready

Just before Arlene stepped in front of Amtrak's 7:35 *California Zephyr*, she paused and looked over her shoulder. She stared intently at the small group of people on the platform behind her. Scanning their faces, she dismissed their horrified stares. Arlene inhaled deeply on her cigarette, and then flicked it into the rain dampened morning air. She watched as the butt arched and then drifted down onto the platform behind her. Still lit, it rolled and then landed at the feet of a chubby toddler who promptly stomped it out. A slight wind blew a discarded newspaper around her ankles, and she pulled her sweater tighter around her shoulders to ward off the chill.

She had thought that *this* was going to be hard, but *this* had been so easy. No one had asked her any questions when she walked into the station. That she was the only one not carrying anything had fazed no one. But, she laughed to herself, when was the last time she had fazed anyone. She had sat on the scarred wooden bench for awhile, and watched the commuters hurrying to the counter where they scrounged through purses and pockets for the requisite fares. Tiring of that, she had allowed herself to think about home.

Jeffrey was probably still asleep. He had stirred for a moment, turned over when she got out of bed, but his eyes had remained closed and his gentle snoring had gone on. Without her there to wake him, he would probably oversleep. Before she left the house, she had checked the alarm in the boy's room to

make sure they didn't oversleep and miss the school bus.

Yesterday, when she had made up her mind to do *this*, she had spent the day shopping, cleaning, washing, ironing and getting ready. She had swept, mopped, and vacuumed the entire house. She had used hot water, peppered with vinegar and cleaned every window in the house, inside and out until they sparkled. She had torn up one of Jeffrey's old tee shirts and polished every wood surface. All picture frames were Windexed free of dust, making it easier for someone to see their happier times. All of the books had been removed from the case and each one dusted. She had neatly arranged them on the shelves, from the tall ones down to the shorter ones.

She had sat cross-legged on the floor for an hour and arranged the movies by type: forty-four action and adventure movies Jeffrey watched late at night and until the wee hours of the morning; the blood and gore slasher movies she forbid the boys to watch, but that she knew they watched when her back was turned; and five musicals she loved that no one would watch with her. She had spent another thirty minutes alphabetizing the CDs. It had taken her only twenty minutes to delete all of her files on the computer. Hundreds of poems she had written and never read to anyone. She had removed sofa cushions and stored the $1.27 she found in the change drawer she kept in the kitchen.

Arlene had made certain that their drawers, her husband's and her children's were full of clean clothes. All of Jeffrey's dry cleaning had been picked up. She had emptied her drawers and removed her clothes from the closet and crammed them into a

trash bag that she dropped into a donation bin downtown. Her jewelry, including her gold wedding bad, had been placed in a manila envelope and then tucked under Jeffrey's undershirts.
The refrigerator had been emptied, scoured clean with bleached water and filled to capacity. The cabinets were all full. There was plenty of canned soups, cereal, and frozen t.v. dinners. Hidden in the back of the cabinets, away from the eyes of the boys, she had stored six boxes of their favorite cookies. She was certain that Jeffrey would see them.

After the cleaning, she had sat down at the table and written out all of the bills. Subscriptions to the newspaper had been paid through the year. Arlene had used up an entire book of checks, but she was satisfied that everything was paid through the end of next month. They would be fine. She had even walked to the corner and dropped all of the envelopes in the mailbox. "There" she said as she watched the mailbox lid close, No one could say that she had been a bad wife or mother.

Before the sun rose, Arlene had gone downstairs and poured two bowls of Rice Crispies, topping each with sliced bananas. She had taken the milk from the refrigerator and poured two small glasses, so they would not have to wrestle with the large container and risk spilling it. She had carefully prepared and packed their lunches. Bologna and cheese sandwiches, a Capri Sun fruit drink, and three Oreo cookies were neatly tucked into their Spiderman and Incredible Hulk lunchboxes.

Now, as the *Zephyr* bore down on her, she willed her ears to seal as though they were tiny vacuums. All sound stopped. The loud blaring of the train's whistle stopped. The high-pitched screaming of the girl with the pink spiked hair stopped. The anguished song-like cry "Jesus, Sweet Jesus" by the old woman burdened with the huge red Macy's bag stopped.

The pleading for her to "Come back! Get back up here!" by the man in the oversized raincoat stopped. The silence was strangely comforting. Like an electric blanket. Like the first bite of a hot, buttered biscuit. Like the truth. Yes, quiet and comforting. Arlene smiled, turned ahead and walked into the comfort.