

the  
Broken  
ARMS  
CETERA DESUNT

DANNY NELSON  
"TOLKIEN boy"

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*[www.journaldesign.com](http://www.journaldesign.com)*

*To the united FOB, and the FOB  
not-so-united, all my best. May  
the superpowers of your critical  
abilities never become any less  
critical.*



# Introduction

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**W**hen I discovered, at the age of twenty-four, that there was a growing population of writers who published anonymously online accounts and anecdotes of their lives in the form of “blogs,” and when I further discovered that these blogs were available to anyone under the auspicious description *at no cost whatsoever*, I knew automatically that I would soon be swelling the ranks. The appeal, of course, was that I could practice my writing ability—writing about real life, no less, which was something that I had very little experience with at the time—while establishing a “name” for myself in the vast world of the Internet, a name that people could praise me by. The fact that the name that I chose was the fanatical-sounding “Tolkien Boy” indicates how seriously I took myself in the early days, but by the time the blog became a going concern the name had stuck, and like it or not, I was TB in the Internet world (the fact that I carry with me the germ of tuberculosis lends some irony to the acronym).

From humble beginnings, the blog has grown to a somewhat less humble popularity. My fifteen minutes’ worth of fame and fortune came in the month after I wrote a spoof of Dan Brown’s *Da Vinci Code*, with people all over the world linking to the site from their own blogs, discussion forums, and writing websites. “Life By Dan Brown” remains my most frequently visited post, suggesting that I should write spoofs more often. Meanwhile, popularity on a smaller scale has come in many different forms. Total strangers have appeared, commented, and then become lifelong friends. Whole communities of bloggers have latched on to my site, opening up literally hundreds of opportunities for new friends. There are a few real life friends, even, who have given up on the name “Danny” completely and refer to me only as Tolkien Boy. I certainly never expected my online persona to overpower my real one, but such, I suppose, are the risks you take in putting yourself out there.

I am constantly surprised by how much a constant public writing experience informs and interprets my daily activities. I find myself constantly thinking such phrases as, “Would this make a good blog post?” or, even more frightening, “A good title for this experience would be...” In many ways, constantly recording my life’s events and mental ramblings has created in me an artist’s eye; in other ways, however, it has developed in me a continual distraction. Though early on I criticized bloggers as being the destroyers of conversation, through process of time I have given up on trying to remain aloof. Nothing is so lofty or so low that it cannot be reduced to a blog post, and there is very little in my life that I have not lampooned in some way. Each facet of life, I

find, can be transformed by writing, and in the end, writing is my one true love.

So, despite the times that I feel that my blog is losing some of its appeal, despite the frustrations inherent in a highly depersonalized format, despite, even the time it takes to write a blog post that subtracts from my other writing time, I am certain that I will continue to write in my blog. Because, although I still live at *The Broken Arms*, the view from my window gets better and better all the time.

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SUNDAY, MAY 22, 2005

## **An Apartment at the Broken Arms**

---

When I look out my apartment window, I see a parking lot, an apartment complex, a run-down school and a field in need of mowing. On Sunday afternoons such as today, nothing moves except the sun, making her carefully predetermined way across the sky.

I admit that I am something of a voyeur. I love the steady pulse of life, the unorchestrated, chaotic melody that drives us onward. On more active days I have seen from my window children fighting in the field, flying kites, playing basketballs. I have seen lovers making out against the apartment complex walls, seen them fight, seen them make out again. I have seen friends meet friends shallowly, deeply, raucously. The essence of all this interaction doesn't change much, but I keep watching. I have to watch, maybe. Perhaps I think that some day I'll discover the great formula that rules this glorious sloppy mess we call humanity. Perhaps my hope is that if I discover what makes up the world, I'll understand what makes up myself. Until that point, though, I wait and I watch.

So, why *The Broken Arms*?

In my sophomore year of college, I wrote a poem about my frustration over loving someone whom I knew could never love me back. The final four lines were an attempt to capture my impotence in being precluded from love. I wrote:

*But I know what it is to love shoulders uncreased  
by the sharpened weight of doubt.  
And my own arms have also been broken  
before I could reach out.*

There are times when I feel that the only thing that truly connects us is our collective vulnerability. Perhaps we're all a little broken-armed, each hurt beyond what we deserve, and each trying to reach out all the same. In a lot of ways I hope this is true. I find the idea redemptive that hurt, broken, even evil-intentioned people can still find ways to reach past their own pain and touch the life of another.

So, this is, in a slight way, my letter to the world (which never wrote to me—thank you, Emily) from my upstairs apartment at *The Broken Arms*. If you're planning to move in, I hope that your view is as beautiful as mine.

## Aude Esse Semper Idem

---

I'm not getting my money's worth out of Latin.

When I got my bill for tuition, I was a little disturbed that I was being charged \$700 for one class. Being resourceful, I sat down and figured out to the minute how much of my blood-earned savings were going into the daily torture sessions:

*7 weeks of class, five days a week, two hours a day: \$700*

*1 week: \$100*

*1 day: \$20*

*1 hour: \$10*

So, for a moment I had to pause, because \$10.00 an hour for a professor seems fair. But then, I remembered that there are 10 people in my Latin class. So, as far as profits back to the university, my class contributes:

*1 hour: \$100*

*1 day: \$200*

*1 week: \$1,000*

*7 weeks of class, five days a week, two hours a day: \$7,000*

Which is exactly why I want to be a professor when I grow up.

But, seriously. The other day, I decided that I wanted a book. The nice people at Borders sent me an email promising 15% savings if I bought from them before the end of the month, so I went to the store. At the store I had my selection of a multitude of fine books. Eventually, I selected the ninth selection of Sherman's Lagoon. I paid for the book. The book was then mine. I went to the park and read it. The advantage of owning the book was mine immediately.

We now return to Latin. I go to school. I pay \$700. The advantage of "owning" a semester of college is not mine immediately. In fact, it may never be mine. I then have to work to gain the advantage of my own money. Latin usually takes me about two and a half hours of personal study beyond class. Which means that I work four and a half hours for \$20 a day, which translates to \$4.44 an hour (according to Google's calculator). I work that hard—to pay myself. It's time to rethink my career path.

And, the frustrating thing is, I'm not that good at Latin. The benefit of my \$700 may never be mine.

Someone really needs to rethink this system.

SATURDAY, JUNE 18, 2005

# That Dream I Keep Having

---

They say if you keep having a dream, it will come true.

There's a dream I have had a number of times. It's a disturbing dream.

I'm swimming in the deep end of the pool in my apartment complex. The water is pleasant. The dappled shadows of the trees and the sunlight makes a nice patchwork on the tips of the waves; light and dark, dark and light. I'm doing my modified doggie-paddle, which is my way of keeping from drowning. It doesn't look good by any means—I'm not a good swimmer.

On the shallow end of the pool, there's a man. He's about my age, but certainly better looking. He's well developed, but white—whiter than he should be under the bright sun. His hair is brown and styled in spikes. His eyes are dark brown.

The man calls me to the shallow end of the pool. For some reason I trust the man, for some reason I'm delighted he's called me. I start swimming for him. He moves forward to intercept me, coming right to edge of the shallow end, where it plunges into the deep.

When I get to him, however, he blocks me from swimming to where I can reach the floor of the pool with my feet. I try and move around him, but everywhere I swim, he's in front of me, preventing me. I go back and forth along the edge of the shallow end, but he's always there just in front of me.

At last, I can't swim anymore. I start to sink. And the funny thing is, he sits and watch me sink. The disturbing part of the dream, though, is the look he has on his face as I go down. I've never seen anyone look at me with the same mixture of fervent care and concern. He looks at me as if I were the most important single thing upon the Earth. And yet, he doesn't even lift his hands out of the water. He just watches me go down.

The water closes over my eyes, and everything becomes confused in watery light. As I start drowning, I only have one thought: Will he save me?

And then I wake up.

The dream bothers me. I want to know who the man is. I'm a little nervous, because I think he might be God.

## An Eligible Bachelor for Octogenarians

I went to my parents' ward today.

I like my family's ward. We've lived in the same ward boundaries ever since my parents moved us to Ogden, and since the move was made when I was the tender age of two, my family's current ward is the ward I've known since the ancient date of 1982.

Unfortunately, everyone in the ward who's stayed around for any length of time at all also has known me for twenty-three years. And, after twenty-three years of association, some people begin to assume responsibility for your life.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the delicate matter of dating.

"Hello!" cries a good sister from the ward when she sees me. "Who are you dating these days?"

"Oh, I've been going on dates, but not with anyone in particular," I reply, hoping that my vague-but-firm reply will communicate my desire for a subject shift.

Fat chance. "Who was the last girl you took out?" she asks.

"Um...Maria," I say, digging in my memory.

"And why didn't you ask her out again?" she demands.

"She's pretty busy..." I say, and leave out the remaining part of the sentence: ...*with her fiance Jeffery*.

The sister looks at me and sighs with all the weight of a disappointed parent. "You're going to have to do better than *that*," she says.

I don't blame them. It's like the lovely Emma Thompson says in *Sense and Sensibility*: Women with married children of their own have no hobbies other than to marry off other people's children. My problem in the whole thing, though, is that I'm the type of person that old ladies find charming and my peers find old-fashioned. And it's not always the most comfortable thing to try and explain (in the least socially offensive way possible) my unique and chaotic love life in the middle of sacrament meeting.

Oh, well. They can keep it up. As long as they don't convince me to marry any of their granddaughters. I may not be dating much, but I'm not *desperate*.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 22, 2005

## Funny How It Is

---

I wanted this post to be funny.

Somehow, people remember the funny. “You have to see this,” they say to their friends, their neighbors, their loved ones, their superiors. Why? “It’s funny.” *Funny* has the greatest missionary program in existence. Perhaps God would have more success in getting people to listen to Him if he packaged ultimate truth in a joke. Who knows? Maybe He did.

I want people to remember me. I want a fond remembrance—I want people to think of me with a smile. So, sometimes I try to be funny. Nothing too dramatic—I lack the self-promotion involved in standupsmanship—but at least a little witty, so that when people leave my home or read my writing or finish a tutorial session with me, people will smile and say, “I *like* him.” Yes, at the end of the day, I’m still fishing for compliments.

Blaugh. I sound neurotic and grasping. But I’m thinking about it hard because I wasn’t very funny today. I wasn’t much of anything today. It was a day for gathering pain, for harvesting all the resentment and discomfort and irritation and frustration people harbor against me as part of everyday living. I don’t know why it seems to come all at once, but so it is.

I don’t feel much like a person today. Rather, I feel like a bag of brokenness, a collection of razor-sharp personality defects. I’m going to bed now with the understanding that things will be better in the morning. But I’m also going to bed with the hollow realization that there are some things that *funny* cannot fix, some holes that smiling cannot fill.

So, if I didn’t smile at you today, I’m sorry. If I didn’t lead the conversation, I apologize. If I wasn’t myself, there’s no excuse beyond the fact that she doesn’t love me and I’m never going to try again.

So. Try and make a joke out of that.

SATURDAY, JUNE 25, 2005

## Moving Forward

---

So.

The other day I attended the wedding of one of my very great friends. Flatteringly enough, I was invited to attend the ceremony, the luncheon, and the reception. I almost felt married myself, after it was all over.

It's so easy for me to get snide about happy people. Sometimes, I think I really believe that happiness is some sort of chemical by-product of stupidity. "Of course they're happy," I say to myself, "they have no appreciation for the miserable complexities of life. I may not go through life as the male incarnation of Pollyanna (Paul E. Anno?), but at least I see the world as it really is."

The trouble is, I'm the stupid one.

On the way home, I got caught in traffic. I was feeling out of sorts—the day was hot, I had the heater running (not because I'm a sadist, but because I didn't want the car to overheat), the traffic was at a standstill, and I was feeling pretty sure that I will be forever denied the simple joy I saw exhibited on my friend's face as he agreed to be with the woman he loved for eternity.

*Look at this world, I thought to myself. Full of single, selfish people driving gas-guzzling monsters and fighting like animals for precedence in the crawl toward Provo. It's nothing but steaming asphalt and carbon monoxide fumes. Love fades, friendships disintegrate, life becomes a meaningless, monotonous, and slow drive from Salt Lake to Provo.*

I begin to see why some people commit suicide by jumping off of freeway overpasses. Freeways are incredibly depressing.

I am so incredibly blessed to have the friends I have, though. Even though every so often they want to fix my life, they do have the ability to point out what I do to make myself miserable. And they're right...I am a little enamoured of my own pain. So, I was grateful—if irritated—that in the midst of my helpless maundering, I received a very clear message that sounded suspiciously like the combined voices of my many friends:

*Shut up.*

And the wonderful thing is, they were right. The world isn't paved with asphalt from sea to sea. There are plenty of rainforests to suck up the carbon monoxide fumes. Love is so difficult because it is so worthwhile. Friendships that disintegrate make room for new friendships. And gridlock is a wonderful opportunity to notice the shapes in the clouds, wave to random strangers, and pray to apologize for an ungrateful heart, not even caring about how canned and sappy it sounds.

Around Orem, the traffic jam unravelled, and I was once again speeding down the road. I flipped off the heater and enjoyed the wind. I put my both my arms out like wings and sang along with the radio.

I have incredible alignment on my car. I don't think I had to touch my steering wheel until I got to the Provo exit.



TUESDAY, JUNE 28, 2005

## A Big Boy Now

---

I realized today that I'm no longer frightened of the gym.

I seriously used to be. My junior year, I had a roommate who invited me to the gym with him. I, wanting to confront some long-standing phobias and deep-seated resentments of my junior high PE coach, reluctantly agreed.

And it was a mistake. It must have been the annual Football Player's Festival in town that day, because the weight room was packed with fellows whose biceps showed a disturbing propensity to be larger than their heads. The scent from the crowded room was enough to make me flinch, even from halfway down the hall.

The word *gymnasium* comes from the Greek word *gymnos*, which means *naked*. It's a good approximation of how I used to feel in gyms. Somehow, I couldn't shake the feeling that everyone was watching me and judging my body type. And it was depressing, too. I followed the rooms only two girls on the bench press and had to reduce the weight from what they had been lifting. There's only so much my fragile male ego can take.

I will be forever indebted to my best friend forcing me to start lifting on a regular basis. It doesn't change anything about the gym—it's still a bizarre parade of machismo that smells like three-day-old sweat. And everyone there is still continually watching each other to see who's bigger (of course, they also watch themselves—my contention is that human cloning will cause more people to be gay. The way that some of these guys stare at themselves in the mirror is downright disturbing).

But, strangely, I feel more confident. Perhaps it's my slowly developing pecs and biceps. Or perhaps it's that I now have friends that I can attend the gym with and laugh at the strange irregularities that go on (you want funny, attend a Mormon gym. Where else do you get reported for saying the word "damn"?). Or maybe it's just that I've grown up, just a little.

In any case, today one of the most in-shape guys I've met asked me to spot him. A mere year ago, and I would have been a blushing, blathering idiot who would have spent the whole time being embarrassed that someone even noticed me.

Today, I winked and said, "You want to look more like me, eh?"

After my workout, I checked my progress in the mirror. I have to say I'm looking pretty good. Maybe not *Muscle Magazine* material, but at least

there's something there that looks vaguely like a human male and not like Jabba the Hutt.

As I carefully checked my bicep for any millimeter of growth, I caught a glimpse of my expression in the mirror and was shocked at how familiar it looked. Perhaps I'm lucky human cloning is illegal.

MONDAY, JULY 11, 2005

## The Bikini Act

---

Due to the increasing unpopularity of the Patriot Act, my brother and I—as concerned citizens of this great country—would like to propose a legislation with more universal appeal.

This past week I have been vacationing with my family on the sunny beaches of San Diego. In between my giddy rushing into the extremely powerful waves, I couldn't help but notice that 99.9% of the people wearing bikinis were not as attractive as you would wish. In fact, most of them—and I am including both genders in this approximation—looked positively awful.

Now, I am the last person in the world to be a looks snob. On the great Universal Attract-o-meter, I seriously doubt that I score in the upper quadrant. But at the beach, I feel that it's all right, because I'm not out there to be looked at. My business is with the surf. So, I wear practical green shorts that almost make it to my knees and have the advantage of having a waist-tie that actually prevents the water from stripping the shorts off.

Apparently, however, not everyone shares my practical approach. I saw more exposed flesh there than in the meat aisles during Thanksgiving, and the sad thing was that defeathered turkeys were more attractive than the people that I saw. I pointed this out to my brother and he agreed wholeheartedly.

Thus, the Bikini Act. We propose that the wearing of bikini swimwear should be governmentally controlled, and that those who wish to wear a bikini must get it approved by a Judicial Bikini Review. Hopefuls must model their intended bikini in front of a mixed group of their peers, and if they are voted down, their bikini-wearing privileges will be suspended indefinitely. Perhaps those who are approved could carry a card, or get tagged on their ear.

I guess I'm just civic-minded. I want this to be a better America for me to swim in.

FRIDAY, JULY 15, 2005

## Baby Fingers

---

Strangely enough, I had a long discussion about baby fingers tonight.

FoxyJ, Melyngoch, Master Fob, and I were sitting around in Fob and Foxy's living room, eating brownie ice cream and talking about life, the universe, and—well, sex. In a lull in the conversation, Melyngoch blurted out, "What do you guys do when a baby puts his or her fingers on your face?"

Foxy and Fob looked at each other. "Eat them," they said in unison.

"Ha," I said to Melyngoch. My position has always been that adults are somehow wired to automatically try and eat any baby's fingers that come anywhere near our mouths. You could be a politician kissing babies, trying to win votes, and if Junior put his pudgy little fist up against your cheek, you would forget the quiet dignity of your position and, pulling your lips over your teeth, you would go after the tiny digits saying, "Nam, nam, nam, nam."

Why do we do this? Foxy, the only mother among us, said, "I think, secretly, we all want to eat our children."

Ick. I'd rather believe that than anything Freud would come up with, though. But it doesn't explain why I want to eat babies' fingers. So, if everyone knows a fairly knowledgeable pediatric doctor, I'd sure like to figure out the reason.

In the meantime, I'll be here crunching on baby carrots. It's a poor substitute, I know, but the social implications are so much less frightening.

MONDAY, JULY 18, 2005

## That Green-Eyed Monster, Me

---

My best friend called last night to tell me what a wonderful summer he is having. He's busy, happy (as far as I can tell), and in the process of discovering great things about himself. Though it stings somewhat that his greatest moments come in my complete absence, I'm happy for him on one level.

On another level, though, his call made me desperately envious. This summer, which was supposed to be full of rich and rewarding experiences, is fast becoming one of the smallest summers I have ever experienced. I cannot write. I have no interest in drawing. I can't focus on reading (I am on page twenty of the sixth *Harry Potter*. Page *twenty*. And I probably won't read any more today, either). Fall semester looms, and yet I can't get myself to look for housing, or schedule classes, or even think about graduate programs. Often, it feels that I bounce from one failed friendship to another, trying not to hurt

anyone and doing it anyway. Relationships are so neurotic on both sides that it's better to just not think about them. I wake up in the morning and realize I don't like myself very much, and I wonder what sort of person I have to become to respect myself.

Yesterday at church, we talked about how God chastens us when we do wrong in order to make us more holy. Perhaps this is my chastening period, or perhaps it's just life in its contrary and complicated way of doing things. Borrowing from Melyngoch, I want to invent a Whole New Moral Person, but it seems pointless because I know I can't keep it up. As Cathy once said, the one I'm most disgusted with is the one I can't break up with.

Envy is a particularly ugly attribute, and here I am in the midst of it. I hate being the one left behind. I always feel like all the attractive people will eventually realize that I'm lame and go away. It's not a fair fear, but then, none of my phobias are. It's not even true, but it's difficult to shake. Disturbing to be so dependent and envious of others.

Anyway, to my friends who read this post—thank you, all. I am lucky to have such wonderful friends who are honest with me even when it's difficult for me to hear. I love you. You give me some reasons why I like myself. And I am confident that I will feel better in time—especially if I follow some of my plans to make the rest of this summer one I can be proud of.

I think the first thing to do is to publish this post and try and write some more of my novel. I'll let you know how it turns out.

THURSDAY, JULY 21, 2005

## **Singing in the Shower**

---

I admit it. I sing in the shower.

I make this admission now because I was singing in a very crowded shower at the gym this morning, and received some odd looks from the other guys. You would think I would have more of a sense of social survival, but the moment the needles of hot water hit my scalp I start crooning like Gene Kelly in a monsoon. I can't help it, it's genetic. I come from a long line of closet shower-singers. I'm sure that somewhere in the family history there's a portrait of a Cro-Magnon man standing underneath a waterfall and wailing, "I'm just a hunk-a-hunk-a burnin' love..."

A while ago I was in my home shower, belting it out. I always shower with the window open, because I enjoy having the sun shine on me when I shower. Anyway, I was working through my repertoire, and decided to try out a new

song that I had heard from the soundtrack of *Thoroughly Modern Millie* called “Forget About the Boy.” The lyrics I sang are as follows:

*Cut the cord!  
Is that a man I once adored?  
He’s nothing but an albatross, no great loss,  
doublecrosser!  
Forget about the boy.*

*Pull the plug!  
Ain’t he the one who pulled the rug?  
He’s lower than an alley cat, dirty rat,  
and I flatter!  
Forget about the boy,  
Forget about the boy,  
Forget about the boy.*

And, while I’m confessing, I will admit that I dropped a complete octave and punched my fist expressively every time I sang “forget about the boy.”

Just at the climax of my singing, though, I happened to look out the open window to see the sweet girl from next door who’s in my dinner group staring up at me and grinning. She waved.

I did what any self-respecting, red-blooded American male would do. I slammed the window shut and thought about showering with the toaster.

She was kind enough not to mention it, though, and so I think we’re still friends. Last night at dinner group, though, she winked at me and started randomly singing:

*And in the moonlight, don’t you think about him.  
Sister, you’re much better off without him.  
You can blow the blues a kiss goodbye,  
and put the sun back in the sky,  
for when he comes crawlin’ I’m not fallin’—*

*Shout hooray and hallelujah!  
Now me and mister wrong are through!  
I’ll find myself another beau  
who I know is no rover!  
Forget about the boy,  
Forget about the boy.*

When she got to the second stanza, I joined in, singing harmony. What else could I do?

SATURDAY, JULY 23, 2005

## A Day at Lagoon

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I recreate, for your pleasure, my entire day. For best results, seize your computer screen and shake.

This monstrosity, the infamous white roller coaster of Lagoon, was built in 1921. *It is still running on its original track.* To give you some perspective, 1921 was before people began suing others for whiplash.

The white roller coaster has my vote for the scariest ride at Lagoon—it always has. It’s the most tame as far as the actual ride goes—a fairly straightforward up-and-down rollercoaster ride. However, the fact that you can feel the track spreading and see the wood rot tends to make it something of a psychological thriller.

Don’t get me wrong—there are other scary rides. *The Mouse Trap*, for example. Brother Five and I were in the back seat, so every time we hit a corner Five would smash into me with all of his 240 pounds, and I would begin calculating how many sins I’d be able to repent of before our overturned car smashed on the pavement. Three and his wife, whose combined weight is less than an actual mouse, claim that they felt no such fear. The benefits of an innocent life, I guess. Or perhaps it’s the benefit of being skinny.

For sheer audacity, however, no ride beat the *Spider*. This ride combines all the unbalanced thrill of *The Mouse Trap* with the stomach-wrenching euphoria of an arcade *Tilt-a-whirl*. Watching the carnival-goers freefalling on a flimsy metal track while spinning in circles did little to improve dangerously flagging morale of our little party. In an oratory reminiscent of Henry V or General Patton, I urged everyone forward, reminding everyone: “It’s all over in a few seconds.” To which Five replied, “What? The ride, or life?” With this comforting thought, we girded up our loins and did the manly thing—let Three’s wife get in the car first to make sure it was safe.

Oh...and don’t get me started about the *Jet Star II*. Five was my rollercoaster buddy, and we shared a very cramped double seat. Of course, my legs didn’t fit (I was in front), so I had to sit Indian style—should I say Native American style?—through the whole ride. Comforting, really, to know that if anything goes wrong, your leg bones will shatter. I know I felt the front of our car catch on the track as we sped around a physics-defying corner. Five says he

didn't like the ride much, but I think he's just reacting to me having to sit in his lap.

Oh, and Lagoon has lost all the respect I used to have for it. This is an actual sign:

### PLEASE DO NOT STAND UP AT ANYTIME

Blaugh. Blaugh to them.

All in all, it was a really fun trip, and very good to get to hang out with Three and his wife some more.

I was glad I enjoyed myself so much—often amusement parks are very depressing for me. First, there's all those depressed teenagers running the rides. Has anyone else noticed that they all look as though they've lost their souls? It makes me want to give them a *Watchtower*.

Second, there's the age problem. Single guys my age don't seem to frequent amusement parks much. So, the only guys my age I see there have two or three kids in tow. If I wanted to have it rubbed in that I'm failing in the evolutionary sense, I would attend more family reunions.

The third one is more serious to me. It seems like people are never happy at amusement parks. People smile and laugh while they're on the rides, but it seems like the moment they get off the ride—and all the moments until they get on their next ride—they're sad, cranky, irritable, and depressed. Now, I understand that being at an amusement park and waiting in lines can be an ordeal, especially with kids. But it's sad to me that everyone seems so unhappy until something happens to them to make them happy.

So, I sing songs in the waiting lines. At least, that way, everyone can know I'm happy.

MONDAY, JULY 25, 2005

## Think, People

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So, I'm becoming highly cognizant of the illogical things people do.

It all started when Five told us about being lost at Lagoon when he was six years old. He eventually landed in the security station, where they hustled him off to the lost children's room—a bare, white-walled room with a lone TV set playing *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

I'm not kidding. Can you imagine a worse movie to show to kids lost in an amusement park?

And then there's the prayers that I always hear said over refreshments. The concoction could be syrupy with sugar, and still everyone prays, "Please bless that this will strengthen and nourish us." I realize that "please help this not to give us cavities" sounds a bit less respectful, but it's probably closer to what we should be praying for.

Illogic wreaks havoc on speech all the time. Sisamnesia tells me that people are constantly telling her what they were "mentally thinking." One wonders how else they do it. I have a similar problem with the "honest truth." Quite frankly, I'm not too interested in the dishonest truth.

Another example: The King of Ice was telling Eleka and me about walking to work today and seeing everyone with their American flags out to celebrate Pioneer Day. We agreed that displaying the American flag to commemorate the pioneers' forced eviction from the United States was frankly illogical.

Oh, and speaking of politics, the other day I was driving around town and saw a huge poster that someone had hung in the picture window of their apartment. The picture showed George Bush superimposed onto Captain Moroni.

Think, people. *Think.*

TUESDAY, JULY 26, 2005

## Going Bananas

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So, I've pretty much decided I'm not going to get any sleep this morning.

Sometimes, the whole mess around love reminds me of when I used to work in the produce department of Macey's. As far as the bananas were concerned, it seemed that no one was ever quite satisfied. The bananas were always either too green—hard and starchy, unfit for anything really beyond a brown paper sack and a prayer that they would ripen normally away from the tree—or too ripe—squishy and spotted, unfit for anything beyond being mashed into a banana bread recipe.

Maybe there's never the perfect banana. And yet, strangely, everyone has an idea of what the perfect banana should be. In both produce and love there's this incredible emphasis on utility—which is good, I suppose, because those blackened bananas would never get sold if people didn't come in looking for banana bread ingredients. But when you feel like the last banana on the shelf, it gets wearing to try to figure out what utility you can perform for every shopper as they drift by.



And I know the best thing to do is to be yourself and wait for someone to come by who is looking for your qualifications specifically. It's what I'm trying to do. But I've thrown away a lot of bananas in the course of my life whose time just never came.

MONDAY, AUGUST 01, 2005

## Searching for Hobbiton

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I'm learning some things about myself. Disturbing things.

I'm not cool. I've never much cared about being cool...in fact, most of my life has been spent in attempting to deny coolness in its various aspects. When I was in third grade, I preempted my many detractors by signing yearbooks with "Tolkien Boy is a Nerd."

Twelve years and group therapy have taught me, however, that I secretly want to be cool. So, to realize that I'm still not there is of one of those quarter-life crises that John Mayer is so fond of singing about.

The reason I'm not cool, I have decided, is because I'm not nearly as in love with fun as I should be. I don't trust fun, to be honest—you never know when it will turn on you and become something else. External fun-causing events make me nervous, mostly. I'm much happier amusing myself.

The way that I explain it to myself is that I'm a hobbit among elves. The elves have their fine sentiments, their enjoyment on a higher scale. But, for me, the most meaningful things are there at earth-level. I really do prefer the quiet, consistent loves over the passionate romances. I like a walk in the woods better than a ride on a roller-coaster. I like contentment, peace, quietude, reflection, and—yes—routine.

Call it a wish for childhood if you want. I still want to live where people are still delighted by fireworks. I want a life where there's space to be quiet, space to be reverent, space to be solemn.

I want to live with people with whom I feel like I can be myself without having to apologize. I want to be with someone who will stop with me to watch a flock of birds leave the trees—or the waves rolling in—or the sky fading purple into a starry night. I want to live in a town that's quiet and connected.

I want to live in Hobbiton.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 02, 2005

## Random Waves of Attraction

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I have a friend who randomly sends out waves of attraction.

You know what I'm talking about by "waves of attraction." When you're attracted to someone, you send out signals, whether you like it or not. Some people are able to mask it more than others, but it's always there—that tension that says "I'm interested in you."

Somehow and somewhere, the filter on my friend's Attraction Transmitter got broken. He just sprays it out, 24-7, with all the subtlety of a fire hose. It's only disconcerting when I get caught in the crossfire.

"Dude," I want to say to him. "Knock that off. You're freaking me out, here." The last thing I need in my life of strange relationships is my male and very straight friend blasting me with attraction waves.

But it got me thinking. Have you ever had the experience where you are minding your own business, and suddenly you feel very hopeful and happy about the world around you? I can only assume that the explanation is that you have run into someone's attraction-wave that missed its target. The air around us must be thick with them. Just think what that means—you really have a chance of having a good day pretty much all the time. Just find the attraction waves, and run into them.

And if you want to make someone else's day better, face an open space and imagine someone you are attracted to. For best results, point toward Provo. I could use a pick-me-up.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 05, 2005

## Wrinkling

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I went to Colorado with my friends. The home we stayed in was very nice. I know the home was nice because there were no fewer than four light switches in the bathroom—and one fan switch. You don't get that just anywhere. Not in Provo student housing, at any rate.

The trouble with all that light, however, is that it illuminated something that I hadn't really been aware of before: I'm wrinkling.

Wrinkles are something it's not terribly manly to worry about, and I can't say that I'm all that panicked about the fact that my skin is starting to develop corduroy patterns. However, I couldn't ignore the lines.

Right now, I have only one that's obvious: a thick dark line that slips a comma-like mark right by my left eyebrow. It's a furrow mark, and it has every right to be there—I probably furrow my brow more than the average twenty-five-year-old male. So, I have no trouble with its existence, just its appearance—it looks so affected. I feel like an actor on Star Trek playing an alien, where the makeup guys look at me critically and say, “Well, we want him to look mostly human, just a little different.”

Well. I guess the fact that I even care enough to write about wrinkles means that I'm not likely to be someone who ages gracefully. I suppose that also means I have to start worrying about my hair, which is currently jettisoning my scalp with all the rapidity of the denizens of the Titanic scrambling for lifeboats.

Sigh. Growing old is overrated.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 06, 2005

## **Sweating the Small Stuff**

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It has always been my philosophy that you ignore the coincidences in your life at your own peril. So, when Master Fob pointed out this morning that I place excessive importance on the small things in my life and another friend reminded me that “The devil is in the details” I realized that I need to think about how I view events.

Okay. So I'm overdramatic. I'm willing to make that admission. The problem I keep running into is that the small things keep spilling over into the Very Big Things. The sort of Things that have made the last week a practice in clandestine tears. The sort of Things that have made it a little difficult to get any satisfactory sleep for the past month. The sort of Things that...that...

Sigh. I'm overdramatizing again. There's this strange balance between stoicism, honesty, and melodramatics that I never seem to get quite right.

I make a big deal of the small things, I think, because they seem to me to communicate the issues of the larger things in complete and packaged ways. I can't really help it—as an English major, I'm very practiced at picking out the implications of discrete events.

So, I guess I'll just have to keep sweating the small stuff. In a way, it's how I keep tabs on my emotional health. I mean, if I'm flattered by attractive people complimenting me, even if it doesn't mean anything, at least it tells me something about myself, right?

SUNDAY, AUGUST 07, 2005

## **Loosing Faith**

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Days like today, I realize that it's foolish to think that God is going to come in on a white horse and make everything better for me.

I can't figure out if this is a sign of maturity or cynicism.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 07, 2005

## **Another Sleepless Sunday Morning**

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Yawn.

It's 1:07 again, and I'm back at my post, staring bleary-eyed at a computer screen and trying to explain to myself why the concept of crawling into bed seems so foreign and so desirable all at the same time. It's a bit like those dreams I always have—I know that there's something more that needs to be done, and I can't do anything until it's done—I just can't remember what it is I'm supposed to be doing. So, I'm sitting here in an advanced state of frustration and paranoia, wondering when I'll realize something awful—like that I forgot to pay my rent, or that I promised someone that I'd call three months ago, or that I'm almost twenty-five and completely incapable of sustaining a romantic relationship.

I'm frightened to go to bed. There. I said it. Lately, every time I put my head onto my pillow, my thoughts take the short circuit train to the enormous disaster that I call my life. Melyngoch reminded me today of my melodramatic streak...I guess nighttime is when the actor in me shines. The world gets pretty bleak at nighttime. I'm lucky the sun keeps coming up—it keeps me honest in the midst of my melodrama.

There's no way to end this post. I've written the final paragraph five times, and each time realized that it tells too much about me to share with the world. But, if anyone else out there is sleepless tonight, I'm sorry. I hope you find your solace soon.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 21, 2005

## **My Last Year in Review**

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On my birthdays, I often like to go through all my writing from the past year and reflect on the many changes I've made, both for the good and for the bad. I thought I'd share the process with you on this, my quarter-century milestone.

## **Last August**

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### **Email to Melyngoch:**

I'm so bad at protecting people from getting hurt, but still I try, and sometimes my ineptitude translates into all the wrong things. But, when you don't like yourself (speaking generally here), you can think of a lot of reasons why other people wouldn't like you either, and it's hard to believe when people can like you...even love you. Sometimes you get feeling like you deserve all the crummy things other people hand you.

### **From a letter to a missionary:**

I moved to Provo on the 23rd. Raintree seems to be a nice enough place, though of course our apartment is nothing like the one they toured us through to get us to sign up. Our apartment is in need of paint in a bad way, and the holes and cracks in the walls look disturbingly like a map of the nations of the former USSR with the main cities highlighted. I am well-established with my tiny desk, stuffed-full bookcase, and neatly organized file cabinet, and—of course—my ever-present mess on the floor and on the bed.

## **September**

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### **Short story, *The Divorce of the Moon and the Earth*:**

“Don't you have opinions about anything?” she spat at him one morning.

The Moon shrugged. “Like what?” he asked.

“Like—I don't know!” snarled the Earth. “Current affairs!”

The Moon blinked. “I am not,” he said wryly, “currently having an affair.”

“Men!” cried the Earth. “You're such a—a satellite!”

The Moon blinked again, hurt. “You knew I was a satellite when you married me.”

### **Letter written to a friend:**

Embarrassingly, I wrote my first paper in the class without actually having read the book. I hadn't even bought the book, either, so the hour before it was due I ran to the bookstore, bought the book and then did what I'd sworn I'd never do—I picked up the Cliff's Notes and scanned the first chapter. I then wrote a paper with one quote and a lot of extrapolation...in thirty minutes! Luckily, it was only two pages long. Anyway, I went to discuss it with the teacher, and he said, “I'm really confused by this paper. At times it seems like

you have no idea what you're talking about, and yet when I look at it again, it seems like you are actually making a really relevant connection."

## **October**

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### **From *October Rain*, poem:**

*Ferocious fear! Far flings the flash,  
and spatters spates in spuming splash,  
chaotic colors. A Christian clue!  
Thus weltering, the wind we woo:  
Now bluster, bloom! Blow, blow, be blowed!  
How opulent, October's ode!*

## **November**

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### **From *Which Temple Ye Are*, church talk:**

Perhaps most importantly, a temple is holy. Holy can be defined as sanctified, hallowed, or made complete. God, in giving temples to mankind, allows us to understand and experience some aspects of what life in the celestial kingdom will be like. Through the performance of ordinances and faithful attendance, temple-going members come to understand the nature of God, and through understanding that, come to appreciate the godlike quality of their own natures. To attend the temple is to be in touch with the divine, and revelation and divine inspiration are important reasons for the existence of temples today.

### **A poem called *failing latin*, a poem of thanksgiving:**

*My father will nod knowingly  
to his gravy  
and I  
will know I can never confess  
that  
my latin F's  
my very first  
dulce et decorum est.*

## **December**

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### **From my journal, December 21:**

I was put in the position to pay even MORE money today. I went to get my contacts fitted, and not only have I been doing everything all wrong (to hear

the nurse tell it, my eyes should have dropped out from utter neglect some months ago), but I have to shell out eighty bucks to get new contacts. I'm not terribly thrilled about it all—that, coupled with a difficulty in my car's alignment that Dad picked up on yesterday means not eating this month for Tolkien Boy, esq.

**From *A Royal Virgin Town*, term paper:**

In direct contrast with the British purity of Lizzie, Rossetti depicts the goblins in her poem as being distinctly un-British. The directness involved with this presentation of the otherness of the goblins' identity suggests that Rossetti meant to draw a comparison between the goblins and the "others" of her day—namely, the colonized people of the British Empire, the so-called subaltern. The Orientalist descriptions of the goblins balances Lizzie's established British status by providing an opposite—even a nemesis—to Britishness. The fact that the goblins are stand-ins for Satan within the poem emphasizes Rossetti's imperialist leanings—the other of the goblins is inherently wicked, even as the Britishness of Lizzie is inherently holy.

**January**.....

**Epigramicus, Latin sayings:**

*Amor poena malorum est, sed gloriæ virtutum est.* (Love is the punishment of the wicked, but the glory of the virtuous.)

*Amor scelus cordis est.* (Love is the crime of the heart.)

**Love letter:**

I've tried to be honest here. I've gotten pretty emotional and probably missed the important things I want to share with you, but please know that whatever I say I say with as much love as I've ever felt. Ultimately, I want you to be happy. Whatever that means.

**February**.....

**From *The Sacrifice of Abram*, poem:**

*Do not ask me why, my love, the vision inarguable  
declared your existence a Sin. I am too old to know,  
too old to bear beyond this betrayal. I am not God.  
I cannot continually slay my chosen ones  
and raise up others.*

**From *Summer Work*, poem:**

*They know, they know,  
how well they know—  
in February, I wake,  
to whatever hand, however soft  
that gives my heart a shake.*

**March**

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**March's assigned poem, entitled *In Their Letters to the Universe*:**

*But mostly, I think I am sorry, sorry  
for a Universe that can never be, at least  
for me who sees the God who hung upon  
a tree merely to drink gall while the  
Roman sheriff washed his hands and  
said **I am appalled**.*

**April**

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**From *Beau's Beast*, novel:**

"Look," said Beau, sliding off the horses back, "this is ridiculous. You're not in danger, and I won't be in danger if I stay away from the dragon. So, why don't you let me take you back to your parents and I can get on my way."

"Where are you going?" asked Christina, interested.

"To—to a castle," said Beau. "There's a princess there, trapped by a beast. I'm going to save her."

"Oh," said Christina. "Is she pretty?"

"I don't know," said Beau. "I've never met her."

"You've met me," said the girl.

"Yes, yes I have." Beau didn't like the way the girl was looking at him.

**May**

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**From *Children of the Porn*, article:**

"Are there any nudist colonies in Utah?" asked my roommate Bill, stirring his daily allotment of ramen and staring moodily at the steam rising from his bowl.



“Probably,” I said. I was making my famous macaroni casserole, and at that moment I was standing perplexed over the stove, wondering if I had already added salt to the boiling pasta in front of me. The salt was in my hand, but I couldn’t remember if I had already sprinkled it in, or if I was remembering the salt sprinkling from the previous Sunday. Shrugging, I dashed some more in.

**From *Danette, Me, and the Messy Kiwi of Love*, novella:**

“So, how are you going to help her stalk this boy?” said my father. This is my dad. He may be slow socially, but he’s persistent.

“I think I’m just the chauffeur,” I said, glad to change the subject. “This kid lives across town, and Danette didn’t want to walk.”

“There’s a bus,” said my mother.

“I guess she wants to be able to get out quickly if she’s spotted,” I said. “I can’t say I blame her. The whole thing is insane.”

“I used to stalk boys,” said my mother. “But Danette is a little old for that, isn’t she?”

“Way too old,” I said, nodding. “She’s ancient.”

“Now, you know I didn’t mean it that way,” said my mother. “I mean, that’s something you do in junior high, isn’t it?”

“It’s a cover-up, Mom,” said Calvin helpfully. “He’s really going clubbing with her, and he doesn’t want you to know about it.” He then mimed the word Ops and covered up his mouth, starring in mock horror at me.

“Shut up,” I suggested.

“Don’t say that,” said my father automatically. My father is eternally against the words shut up. He can swear with the best of them when he gets angry enough—which is rare—but for some reason shut up is not negotiable. I mumbled an apology.

My mom put on her parent face and said to Calvin, “We trust Julius.”

“That’s because he’s boring,” said Calvin. “And he’s weird.”

## **June**

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**From an online conversation:**

ELEKA NAHMEN SAYS:

...which was why she decided he was evil.

TOLKIEN BOY SAYS:

Really!

!!!

ELEKA NAHMEN SAYS:

indeed

TOLKIEN BOY SAYS:

!!!

Oh, my freaking gosh!

ELEKA NAHMEN SAYS:

I assume this comes as a surprise?

TOLKIEN BOY SAYS:

Somewhat, I guess.

I mean, I suppose I should have known.

But it's like one of those things that happen to other people, but you never expect them to happen to you.

**From a church talk entitled *Happily Ever After*:**

Besides trusting and hoping in our God, we must trust and hope in ourselves. When we truly believe ourselves to be the spirit children of deity, we can find hope in our own abilities to choose righteousness over evil. Those who have hope in themselves are not overcome by their own imperfections, but rather choose to learn lessons which help them in their progression, as Paul reminded the wandering Romans when he said, "*Happy is he that condemneth not himself.*" (Romans 14:22)

**From *The Curse*, short story:**

Christian struggled to a sitting position. "Can I ask you something, Grant?"

"Yeah," said Grant.

"Do you think I'm crazy?"

"Maybe a little."

Christian nodded to himself. "Yeah, that's what I think too. Do you think I'll be all right?"

## July

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### Journal, July 9:

Five and I went grocery shopping today without the paters. It was a lot of fun. I think we're going to get along great, just he and I. His quip of the day is, "I don't mind being homophobic. It's a lot better than the alternative." I love my brother.

### From *Produce*, a poem:

*But the kind of banana you want—  
the kind that never seems to go on sale  
who peels away the sugar-veined covering of your heart  
and fills your breast and belly and mind  
with passion, purpose,  
reason—  
is always, I'm afraid, in me,  
just barely out of season.*

And there we have it. I can't wait to see what writing the next birthday will bring.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 23, 2005

## The Divorce of the Moon and the Earth

Under the command of His Preeminence, Master Fob, and by request of loyal readers, I give you this cautionary tale.

The Moon and the Earth had been married for over four billion years. To their faces, their friends praised their ability to keep a relationship vibrant; but everyone knew that the Moon was doing all the work. The Earth herself was aging and not gracefully, but the Moon put up with her tempers, her moodiness during her regular equinoxes, and claimed that he didn't notice the earthquake-made wrinkles and her occasional outbreaks of volcanoes.

You may think that the Earth would be content with so agreeable a husband, but after four billion years she was getting bored. The Moon was a constant companion, but he wasn't exactly interesting. Her irritation at her husband's placid nature soon festered into annoyance, and then anger. She began to snipe at him over the million different details that make up an intergalactic relationship, and soon they were having regular fights.

"Don't you have opinions about anything?" she spat at him one morning.

The Moon shrugged. “Like what?” he asked.

“Like—I don’t know!” snarled the Earth. “Current affairs.”

The Moon blinked at her. “I am not,” he said wryly, “currently having an affair.”

“Men!” cried the Earth. “You’re such a...a satellite!”

The moon blinked again, hurt. “You knew I was a satellite when you married me.”

“Well, if I had known you keep the light on all night and like to mess up my tides, maybe I would have thought twice before I did marry you!” the Earth shot back.

The Moon responded to all of this by turning his dark side to her. “I’m not going to argue,” he said.

“Don’t you make that phase at me!” the Earth shrieked at his back.

Eventually the Moon decided that he could not stand the abuse he received from the Earth another moment, and the two went through the process of obtaining a legal separation. The Moon went to live with his many relatives living on the other side of the asteroid belt, and the Earth went home feeling free and happy for the first time in a billion years.

It wasn’t long, however, before the Earth began to be bored with her new-found freedom, and she decided that it was high time for her to find some romance to spice up her declining years. So, with a feeling of repressed excitement, she took out the following advertisement in the *Universe Gazette*:

### ***Blue-Eyed World Seeks Soulmate***

*Shapely planet seeks single male to share orbit. I enjoy star-watching, long walks around the Sun, and philosophical discussions. Are you the one for me?*

*(No asteroids need apply.)*

The Earth was surprised when the very next day she received a reply for her ad, and she was even more surprised when she found that the interested party was no less than the Sun himself. It flattered her vanity that so famous a celebrity would want to share her orbit, and she agreed at once to let the Sun move in.

The Sun was very intense, not at all like her husband the Moon. He had very definite opinions about fascinating things such as retrogrades, quasars, and

the possibility of black holes, and the Earth and he enjoyed several passionate debates.

It was difficult, however, to house two such vibrant people in such a small space, and the arguments began almost at once.

“You orbit me,” said the Sun one day, when they were still settling into their routine.

“Not likely,” said the Earth, affronted. “I never orbited the Moon, he orbited me. You can do the same.”

The Sun shook his head, and his fiery hair and beard blazed. “Don’t cross me,” he thundered. “I am the Sun, and everything orbits me. I will not change that, just because I’ve moved to your house.”

“You most certainly will change it,” said the Earth sharply. “I’m not about to be orbiting anyone in my own home. Around here, I set the orbits, and you will follow them. The Moon orbited me in about a month—I imagine the mighty Sun can manage the same.”

The Sun looked at the Earth and snorted. “I don’t suppose you’ve noticed that I am somewhat larger than the Moon,” he said. “I would have to be running all the time to move myself around you in that time. I absolutely refuse to submit myself to the indignity.”

“Oh, you!” cried the Earth. “You think you’re so special because you provide the center of gravity around the solar system. Well, I happen to know that there are stars in the galaxy that make you look sick—make you look like the pitiful has-been you are! Go! Leave my house! I’m sick of your stupid heat!”

And so the Sun left the Earth, and though she wept a few tears she decided that, generally, she was better off without him. After she had taken a few days to restore her equilibrium (the Sun had done rather drastic things to the serenity of her daily routine), she called up the Universe Gazette and told them to run her ad again.

This time, it took a week before her ad was answered, for the Sun had told his neighbor Mercury about how high-maintenance the Earth truly was, and Mercury had of course blabbed it to the entire solar system. The Earth held her head high, however, and soon her ad was answered by the great planet Jupiter.

Jupiter was a planet of extremely superior gravity, and he impressed the Earth with his knowledge of the cosmos. After a few dates of such high-class activities as listening to the Music of the Spheres or dining in the fashionable side

of Saturn's Rings, the Earth invited Jupiter to move in with her and replace the Moon.

Unlike the Sun, Jupiter was content to let the Earth live her life in the way she was accustomed. "Naturally I'll orbit you," he boomed, winking his red eye, "it's your home."

The Earth sighed and said, "It's so nice to meet a man with real sensitivity."

The Earth and Jupiter maintained their high-class lifestyle for a number of months. Then, one morning, the Earth came to breakfast wearing a new dress.

Jupiter looked at her. "Why did you change your dress?" he said.

The Earth looked down at herself. "I always change my dress with the seasons," she replied. "Don't you like it?"

"No," said Jupiter. "It makes you look old."

"Old!" cried the Earth. "What do you mean, old?!"

"All that white," said Jupiter. "It makes your wrinkles show up like canyons. And your ice cap is definitely a bad choice. Polar ice caps haven't been in style since the Big Bang."

"I'll thank you to let me make my own fashion decisions," said the Earth frostily.

"Look, Earth," said Jupiter, "if I'm going to take you out in public then I expect you to look a certain way. And I am not about to take you outdoors in that getup. It's humiliating."

"Well, I'm not changing it," said the Earth, and stalked away in a sulk.

The Earth pouted for a century or so, but eventually her love of being part of the solar system's elite won over her love of fashion, and she changed to a pale spring dress.

"Is the ice age over?" asked Jupiter when she came to him, not looking up from his book.

"I changed, Jupiter," said the Earth in a sulky voice.

Jupiter looked at her and turned back to his book. "Change again," he said. "That color is awful."

"Again!?" shrieked the Earth. "I just changed."

"Again," said Jupiter. "Or else choose: me or the dress."

Within four hours the Earth had Jupiter packed up and sent him on his way.

By this point the Earth was beginning to wonder if she'd ever find anyone whom she was compatible with. She was also beginning to regret sending the Moon off. "He wasn't so bad," she mumbled to herself. "Certainly he was better than the other yahoos that I've been meeting lately." She began to reminisce about the good times she and the Moon had had together—the eons they had shared of quiet, content companionship. Almost, she thought, she would call him up and allow him the opportunity to apologize. But, at the last moment, her pride reasserted herself, and she called the Universe Gazette instead and told them to run her ad again.

Week after week passed, and no one answered her ad. The Earth, who began her wait with serenity, soon became annoyed. Was it possible the entire solar system rejected her for being too...old? She wasn't that much older than Venus, and Venus still had her charms.

When months had passed the Earth began to fantasize that the Moon would read her ad. She imagined he would feel sorry for her, and would rush home to make her feel better. Then she would ask him to forgive her, and things would go back to the way they had been.

When the Earth was finally notified that someone had answered her ad, she felt sure that it was the Moon returning home. She brushed her forests as best as she could and straightened her shores, trying to make herself up as much as possible. But she was shocked and disappointed when she learned that the planet that answered her ad was, in fact, the disreputable Pluto.

By this time, the Earth was so desperate for companionship that she invited Pluto in without thinking. Pluto was small and dark and cold in manner, and he immediately set about making life difficult for the Earth.

"What were you thinking, getting rid of the Moon?" he laughed unpleasantly. "You must be a class-A idiot. The Moon did everything you told him to. Do you know how few husbands do that?"

"I know," said the Earth miserably.

"Huh," said Pluto, relaxing into the Earth's most comfortable space-time fold. He kicked his feet up on the coffee table and said, "Hey, what's there to drink?"

"Water," said the Earth.

"Water?!" said Pluto. "Who serves water!? Don't you have any liquid nitrogen?"

“Not naturally,” said the Earth primly.

“Well, make some unnaturally, then,” said Pluto. “I’m thirsty. Come to think of it, I’m hungry, too. You want all of that atmosphere you’ve got there?”

Pluto stayed with the Earth for five hundred years, and it was only her new-found patience and humility that helped her to last that long. But, in the end, she found the courage to turn him out and face singleness. Pluto was nasty about leaving and tried to claim some legal hold on her possessions, but fortunately the Earth was still technically married to the Moon and he got nothing. He went back to the trailer park of the solar system to sulk.

The Earth did not call the Universe Gazette again. Instead, she called up the Moon.

“Hello?” said the Moon.

“Hello, Moon,” said the Earth. “It’s Earth.”

“Oh, hello, Earth,” said the Moon. “Um...how are things?”

“Great,” said the Earth.

“Great for me, too,” said the Moon.

There was an awkward pause.

“Moon?” said the Earth. “The reason I’m calling is because I...well, I want you to come back.”

“Oh?” said the Moon.

“Yes,” said the Earth, gaining confidence as she spoke. “I realize now that I was wrong to accuse you of being boring. I know that I love you. I want you to come home. Will you? Will you, please?”

There was a silence. Then the Moon said, “Well, you see...I’ve met someone else. I want a divorce.”

“Oh,” said the Earth.

“Yes,” said the Moon.

The Earth cleared her throat. “Who is she?” she asked, her voice strangely hoarse.

“Europa,” said the Moon. “You know, one of the moons of Jupiter? For some reason he left her, and we ran into each other. She’s a wonderful moon...we have a lot in common.”

“Oh,” said the Earth quietly. “How nice.”



“So, is it okay?” asked the Moon.

“What?” said the Earth.

“For us to get divorced,” said the Moon.

“Oh,” said the Earth. “I suppose so.”

“So, I’ll start the divorce proceedings tomorrow, okay?” said the Moon.

“Okay, I guess,” said the Earth.

“Well, then,” said the Moon. “Good-bye, Earth.”

“Good-bye, Moon,” said the Earth.

And so the Moon married Europa and they set about raising a large family of meteoroids. The Earth, however, was left to her miserable and lonely lifestyle. To make matters worse, she was infested by a bad case of humanity, and the best doctors of the galaxy could not cure her of it. She finally succumbed to the disease in the blaze of a nuclear meltdown. The Moon and his family attended the funeral, naturally, but his children were so rambunctious that he had to take them out halfway through the service.

“Poor Earth,” said Europa as they went back home. “She must have been terribly unhappy.”

“She brought it on herself,” said the Moon calmly, trying to juggle two struggling comets.

“I suppose so,” said Europa, and focused her attention on her children.

***Moral: If your marriage is made in heaven, try not to screw it up.***

THURSDAY, AUGUST 25, 2005

## **Song of Myself**

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I pulled out a beautiful book of Walt Whitman’s poetry today, and the lines have been tumbling through my head all day. Somehow, the verses have got confused with the many ways in which people have attempted to describe me recently. So, apologies to you, Walt, but here’s my own attempt.

### **Song of Myself**

*I hide myself to celebrate myself, in warm quicksilver tones  
of Josh-song, of young tenor throats bellowing in Latin  
a song that speaks me, but does not capture me  
with notes of ebony barb. This is the song.*

*This is the song of myself.  
And what you assume I will become, as a flower  
buds and sheds petals because the Summer requires it—  
for every thrumming atom belonging to me is as good as yours,  
I have crafted each with twitching thumbs  
on mud-stained, tiny potters' wheels.*

*This song of myself, of myself that is the nearest approximation of your  
desire  
belongs to you.*

*I invite my soul to lie, to dine  
shakily  
on chitinous regrets, on platters full of crawling things,  
on white and chalky repentance,*

*this meal is yours, and the settings are yours,  
and the candles have been borrowed from the sanctuaries of God.*

*My tongue, that red-maned herald of my blood,  
has learned only through slow and careful papercuts how to speak  
only in pagan tongues  
ineptly,  
crudely,  
and with a slight Spanish accent. I  
in this song of myself  
begin  
at twenty-five to hope for lightlined glowing  
cessation,  
for the final fermata.*

*My creeds and my schools in abeyance,  
only this eternal visage of YOU  
of your eye  
of your bounded, generous eye  
keeping me careful in chains like Prometheus writhing*

*the stone-feathered eagle of you,  
of your eye,  
retiring back a while, sufficed at what is  
but never forgetting what could and what should be brimming  
brimstone—like in me, me and this song of myself*

*which cannot be permitted to speak  
at any hazard.*

*This song of myself is Nature in her original check:  
the bitter balm  
of a well-wisher's tongue.*

Like all poems that I write that I actually think about and work on, this one will probably not be understood by...well, anyone. But it's what's in me tonight, and it had to go somewhere.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 28, 2005

## Somni Classis

---

I had another one of my revelatory dreams last night.

I dreamt that it was the first day of school. And of course I dreamt about Latin.

Somehow, I had gotten transferred back into my old Latin 201 class. The regular group of stressed-out college students were there, but the class had expanded to include three hundred or more individuals. There was a steady hum as everyone looked over the textbook and tried their tongues at translating.

I leaned over to one of my friends and confided, "I think I've forgotten all of Latin." He gave me a pitying look and responded, "*Est huic finitimum dissimulationi cum honesto verbo vitiosa res appellatur.*" I gulped and looked at my textbook.

The textbook was easily four thousand pages, and when closed it was as large as my desk. I opened the heavy front cover, and—attempting to balance the pages—looked through the book. Nothing looked familiar.

The professor began asking people to read the passages. I turned the pages frantically, looking for where they were reading. After about the fourth page in, I noticed that half the letters in the book were Greek. A footnote told me there was a guide for transliterating—in the back—so I kept my arm in the spot I assumed we were reading and threw the pages back till I reached the appendix. When I got to the back of the book, I discovered that the guide was a transliteration for every writing system, and that the Greek symbols were freely interspersed with Roman, Arabic, Japanese, and Cuneiform.

It was my turn to read. I flipped back to the place we were reading, only to discover it was no longer where we were. I started flipping through the pages,

but they kept sticking together. Feeling frantic, I would rip the pages apart, start reading, get yelled at by the teacher, and turn the sticky page again.

After doing this three times, I realized that the print was getting smaller and smaller, and the print job was getting worse and worse. Eventually, I couldn't read it without tilting the book toward the light, which required a Herculean effort on my part. My final memories of the dream are of me bent double over a book now grown to room size, trying to make out the miniscule Greek type and translate it into something that didn't sound like "Your base are now belong to us."

Maybe I'm paranoid. But, if this is an omen, I should miss the first day of Latin 302. I'm not going to sleep in, however—the dreams I've had already have been enough.

MONDAY, AUGUST 29, 2005

## Hex Symbol

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So, I've discovered another reason for other people to think I'm crazy.

I think very positionally. For reasons which remain unclear, I somehow think that when I explain something to someone else, whatever it is that I'm explaining is metaphysically in front of me. Whenever I'm talking, it's as if the ghost of my subject is everywhere around me. I have a rather dynamic personal space.

I realized this in an exchange with a coworker who I met walking on campus.

"Hey, Tolkien Boy," he said to me, "do you know when our boss is going to give us our schedule for the next semester?"

"Oh!" I said. "You must not have gotten the email." I pointed to the imaginary screen standing about waist-high to the left of my coworker.

"No, I missed it," he said. "What did it say?"

"It said she'd set up a appointment calendar for us to meet about scheduling," I said, delineating the paper on the imaginary door to my right.

"Oh, okay," he said. "Did I miss my appointment?"

"I'm not sure," I said. "You better check with her." I helpfully waved toward the library, where my boss would have been if my coworker and I had been in the Writing Center.

“Um, okay,” he said, looking at me doubtfully. “Did you get the handouts done for this next semester?”

“Almost,” I said, spreading out the imaginary handouts in front of me. “I just have to proofread them,” I swept my hand across the papers in a vague writing-manner, “and give them to the boss.” I moved the whole mess to the left.

“Um, great,” he said. “Well—see you around.” He beat a hasty retreat.

As I walked to my class, I reflected that my frenetic positional gesturing probably looks a little like Tourette’s to the people who can’t see the invisible things around me. I need to be careful—all that gesturing in the air could make people worried that I’m casting spells on them. And picking up the reputation for being a practicing warlock is not the sort of image I’m shooting for in my senior year at BYU.

So, if you ask me to explain something to you, and I start looking like Idina Menzel, just take it with good humor. I’m not about to turn you into something inconvenient, I promise...

...cue music, “*Eleka nahmen, nahmen, namen. Ah tum, ah tum, eleka nahmen...*”

TUESDAY, AUGUST 30, 2005

## Single Male Housing

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I’m beginning to think that I’m not getting the full value of my rent money.

I’m not sure who it is that designs the housing for men around this town, but they obviously haven’t thought much about the men who actually have to live in their creations. There are a number of inconveniences that demonstrate a lack of rational thought.

For example, who wires the light switches? Invariably, the switch for the kitchen is located in the middle of the living room or hall. I’ll be sitting there, stirring my chili, when I realize that I can’t tell whether it’s burned or not. Rather than bend over the steaming chili pot (you never know when some little kids are going to come along and try and push you in), I go to find the kitchen light switch. The first switch I turn on lights up the living room. The second one goes on, and the fan starts blowing. There’s always a third switch that seems to have no function—I always imagine some poor guy across town wondering why his lights keep flickering on and off whenever I play with that switch. At last I find the kitchen light switch, and flick it on. By that time, of course, the chili really has burned, but I still get to relish the triumph of conquering the great rotating light switch puzzle. I have to be

careful, though, not to get too cocky—once I cavalierly flipped on what I was sure was the kitchen light only to have the garbage disposal start grinding.

And speaking of garbage disposals, does no one realize what most red-blooded American men put in their disposals? I was trying to cram some leftover potato soup into mine yesterday, and the darn thing *spat* at me. Now, if it's spitting up potatoes, there's no way that we're going to have a mutually beneficial relationship for the next year. I once read about a garbage disposal so sophisticated that it could turn logs into sawdust, mulch your leaves, and grind up steak bones. That's a disposal system I could get along with.

Plumbing is just kind of a problem in any case. As I guy, I know that I have to deal with a mess until such time as it can be diluted, flushed, or swept down a drain. The trouble with plumbing is that it is invariably connected to other plumbing. This can strain roommate relations. I had one roommate claim I reduced his potential for progeny by fifty percent by turning on the water to brush my teeth while he was taking a shower. I try and solve this problem by selecting roommates who will never marry.

Air conditioning is another inconvenience that never ceases to puzzle me. It works perfectly well for the first three feet. After that, the automatic air conditioner switches to the manual plan. It's gotten so bad I've taken to sleeping half-naked, even though the Surgeon General has issued warnings that it could be hazardous to my roommate's mental health. I would turn off the air conditioning—it's not doing anyone any good, and we do have to pay utilities, after all—but it's so demoralizing. I imagine my mother saying, "You're dying of heat and you haven't even turned on the air conditioner?" So, it continues to blow.

And I don't know why it's so difficult to get a door which fits the frame. Every door I have ever had in my college career has required a series of maneuvers to get it into place. The present model is fairly agreeable until you decide you want to lock it. This requires simultaneously lifting the door while you turn the key in the lock, jiggling the door handle all the while. It works perfectly—all you need is three hands. All the rigmarole has one positive side effect, however—I never worry that we'll get burgled. A robber would have to be pretty talented just to get in the front door.

Of course, there are always the windows that can't close all the way. I really need to talk to management about that...