

## War of the Dandelions

By Tom (Wordwulf) Sterner



He knows in his heart he is wrong  
With a sense of overwhelming defeat  
he crawls on tender-pins of guilt  
to lay at her feet  
She kicks at his head  
in a feeble attempt to drive him away  
He licks his wounds  
a purging lament  
She picks up the phone  
calls the night police

She knows in her heart she is wrong  
She dials his number a hundred more times  
then remembers she threw his phone away  
Relatives bail him out of jail  
Friends pick him up  
take him to their homes  
Obsessed, he rushes back to her arms  
She makes mad impossible love to him  
He says, "Like that, I'm your man"

Their children question

# Writing Raw

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insecure, no backbone home  
compromised, pushed & pulled between  
threatened themselves & used to threaten  
tender-grass, they starve at once  
& are smothered by the wet moss  
of emotional chaos

Names, names he makes  
Her, by god, parents be damned  
He'll show them what a father is  
a husband too  
It's about time she made a choice  
between the man who loves her  
& the parents who don't

Names, names she makes  
His family can kiss her ass  
She's never done anything to them  
She'll stay away from hers  
if he'll stay away from his  
They huddle together  
naughty children  
mad at the world

Their children are isolated, remote  
desperate with an inner resolve to protect  
& insulate themselves  
skin too deep Mommy Daddy kiss  
the tug o' war, their parents' love  
teaching these young hearts  
to accept the unacceptable  
to be the unspeakable  
a too taut {two taught} elastic reality

"It's better my way," he preaches  
"I'll teach you how to live  
We'll be parents to these children  
I'll get a job, you wait 'n see  
Meanwhile, behave yourself  
Tonight we'll get a sitter

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go to the bar & have a couple drinks  
eat out, make love 'til dawn

"It's better my way," she preaches  
"I have a job, you don't  
The kids are mine, no matter what  
I know what my rights are  
You haven't been able to keep a job  
Look at all the trouble  
you've got yourself in  
I like the idea of the sitter  
a couple o' drinks & a joint  
We deserve some time to ourselves

The baby has a nervous tic  
She refuses to look anyone in the eye  
The boys are failing in school  
living on & off with relatives  
extras in a family environment  
loved but an encumbrance, apart  
peculiar to others, contaminated  
tender-roots laid out in the sun to die  
eyes peeking from masks of sadness  
created & abandoned on the killing ground love

"I can't believe she did this to me"  
He stands behind bars in a cage  
"Come on, brother, bail me out  
I know, I know  
We've been through this before"  
Court dates, restraining orders  
city, county & state jurisdictions  
Domestic violence  
Spousal abuse  
Fines & classes, classes & fines  
Child Abuse; Child Abuse  
Child Abuse; Child Abuse

"I can't believe he did this to me"  
She hands the baby to her mother

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"I sure appreciate you being here for me  
Listen, I gotta get to work  
I know, I know  
We've been through this before"  
Court dates, restraining orders  
city, county & state jurisdictions  
Domestic violence  
Spousal abuse  
Fines & classes, classes & fines  
Child Abuse; Child Abuse  
Child Abuse; Child Abuse

"Where are the boys?"  
    "I don't know."  
"I can find mine; where's yours?"  
    "Mine refuses to live with us."  
"So does mine.  
What the hell's wrong with those kids?"

"Where's the baby?"  
    "Oh shit! She's taken off her clothes  
    & wandered out the door again."  
"Damn it! I told you to watch her!  
It's four o' clock in the morning."  
    "Gimme the flashlight!  
    I'll look out in the yard  
    You check the street."

The yard was a peaceful place. Its citizens, the Grass Children, each a separate blade, existed harmoniously side by side. Even times of half-life, smothered under a blanket of winter snow, found them snuggled happily together, expectant of spring. With the arrival of that beautiful season came a new citizen to the yard. It required some space to live, so the Grass Children gave way that it would have a chance to thrive.

And thrive it did, soon joined by its mate. These two grew to wondrous heights, so tall & majestic the Grass Children could not see their faces. Still their yellow collars were wonderful to look upon from away down below. The Grass Children sighed to be joined by such beauty in the yard.

The bright yellow flower beings became angry with each other. They ranted at one another

above the swaying blades & created poison in the air with their hate. The Grass Children were embarrassed for them & bowed down their heads. Then the yellow faces of the creatures transformed into ghastly puffballs of white. Their anger was such that, when the lovely spring breeze came, it blew their puffy heads into the yard piece by puffy piece.

The Grass Children were afraid. They didn't understand anger or the color & heat of envy & jealousy. Soon enough they forgot in their sway by sway reality of everyday. Spring, the promised gift, rocked them into summer. Fall brought an awesome gift of its own, a warm blanket of friendly Leaf Children.

"Beware the tall yellow ones," the Leaf Children warned. "They are warlike creatures. We have watched them while playing in our Mother Tree. They will steal your energy if you get close to them. You will perish that they may thrive. Before long you will cease to exist at all. Then, even then, they will continue until their anger eats them alive.

The Grass Children laughed. "They were only two & now they are gone. Yours was a scary story, Brother & Sister Leaves. Now it is our turn to tell & yours to listen."

The Leaf Children fluttered about a bit as they are known to do. They are a respectful & well-behaved lot once they are settled comfortably into an autumn blanket of cover. "Between us," the Grass Children began, "We have witnessed the seasons. You have spoken in waves to us and we to you. You & some chosen of us will return to Mother Earth & be reborn in a rite of spring. Such is our good news, love & life never-ending."

The Leaf Children clamored & the Grass Children swayed. They tickled & giggled at one another. The breeze joined in their happy song, moments of symphonic perfection. Being playful & innocent, these Children of Earth forgot all about the yellow ones. The next year they were fewer & the yellow ones more. Father Sky pampered them as always. He walked through a handful of seasons, then wept with Mother Tree & her Leaf Children, a softhearted mist of rain, because the Grass Children were no more.

## Pariah

By Tom (Wordwulf) Sterner



on a cold steep night  
Harley rumbling 'tween my knees  
I watch the beggar man dig  
his gleeful dance at morsels found  
a gobbling pirouette

these eyes closed tight  
the beast warren of hunger  
prowling bones of the poor  
momma got no fat kids  
proud & fearful  
she folds her hands & prays  
the lord come help

momma works at the club  
restaurant bar  
a ten-penny waitress  
pinch & tip  
empties plates into her hideout bag  
treasures smuggled to her litter

ah mister beggar man

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I know  
we are brothers of the blood  
underneath coffee grounds  
slick cigarette ashes  
lies the prize precious ort

we are proud in our poverty  
angry in our shame

wrong side of never lost  
found wanting  
I kiss the wind between us  
ride fast into the night

## Enough

By Tom (Wordwulf) Sterner



fearful of death  
determined to live forever  
impossibly worried  
blind by half  
we scurry through  
the scattered alleys of life  
in our time of youth  
never enough time  
never enough money  
never enough love  
grasping at ends  
never enough

adulthood finds us  
pursuing religion  
politics & careers  
running downhill, fornicating  
procreating, recreating  
scorched in a pyre of ignorance  
tangle-fires of youth  
we struggle to earn enough  
be enough



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realize we never learned enough  
paid enough attention before  
when we knew it all  
frustrated that our children know too much  
about the wrong things  
refuse to listen to what we have learned

nearer to & acutely aware of death  
fearful there is not time enough  
to protect & teach them to survive  
we worry the empty rooms of elders passed

graying & balding  
regretting & forgetting  
slowing, going down  
sentimentally elemental  
we are overcome by chance thought  
that what has been  
might be enough

our spirits prepare us to journey  
leave our feet behind  
on the worried path we have made  
we begin to remember  
cocoon water births  
with new eyes  
caress what is left  
our lovely children & life mates  
that we may tell them  
in our going  
the joy of knowing  
they are the all & ever  
more than enough

**Tom (Wordwulf) Sterner bio:** Tom (Wordwulf) Sterner wrestles with creativity: graphic art, music, photography, & WORD. A native Coloradoan, he lives in Denver. Tom's artwork, music, photography, & written word have been published in magazines & on the internet by various folk, including Howling Dog Press/Omega, Carpe Articulum Literary Review, Skyline Literary Review, The Storyteller, & Flashquake. Also published, six novel-length works. He is winner of the Marija Cerjak Award for Avant-

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