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## Underpass

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## Nurturing Underpass

Sometimes I think the most secretive place in the world is the underpass where Danny lives, late in the evening when the sky turns the grass a golden brown color and the autumn chill begins to seep into my bones and joints. I'm a little uncomfortable, so I crack my knee and sit up straight. I burrow down in my leather jacket, in an attempt to push the cold off the brink of my mind, but it's not really working. Breathing warm air onto my hands, I stare at Danny as he spreads himself across the concrete. He lies on his back and smiles at me, and I wonder if he's forgotten what day it is. Soon the sun will disappear again and it won't really matter.

After a few minutes, Danny stirs and takes out that little brown book, good as the day he bought it, and hands it to me. He props his head up with his hands and sighs contentedly. "Read this to me," he whispers, his breath forming into vaporous puffs that threaten to become icicles before my very eyes.

"Again?"

"Please." He points to the exact verse with a thin finger. "There."

I press my lips together and sigh. The words squirm on the page and I rattle them off to free them from their antsy anticipation. "You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken—"

"Steady Jeanie. I need time."

I begin again, with emphasized torpidity. The papers, reports, and unfinished homework loom like huge blimps on the edge of my mind. "You set the earth on its foundations, so that it shall never be shaken. You cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains, At your rebuke they flee..."

An older breeze vibrates through the branches, and the sun sits atop the horizon, his inertia captivating my sweet sense of longing. From the edge of the underpass, I can see vultures circling above us in a sky smoky from a distant forest fire. When I finish the verse, Danny's eyes are locked shut and I believe him to be asleep. His eyelids are pale and blue and his face is pink like the foggy sunset. I stand on my feet preparing to leave, when his voice tolls once more from the bottom of his soul: "Again, Jeanie."

I sit down again, and without reluctance I read the passage one more time, my thin voice traveling through time and space, intercepting the stresses and obligations of the modern world, exorcising the demons of every day life. Danny has forgotten to breathe, I think—and I have forgotten to worry. The underpass becomes our world, and all I can see from the small opening are these blue hills silhouetted against a gray sky. As the sun disappears, so do the words from my lips, falling onto the ground like rose petals at the summer's end.

Danny breathes again, and I remember my math homework. The underpass refuses to flinch—but the hills are different now. They're rolling, rolling...rolling away.

—Kristina Garvin '01