



*The*  
*Bayou*  
*Review*

*University of Houston—Downtown Literary Journal*

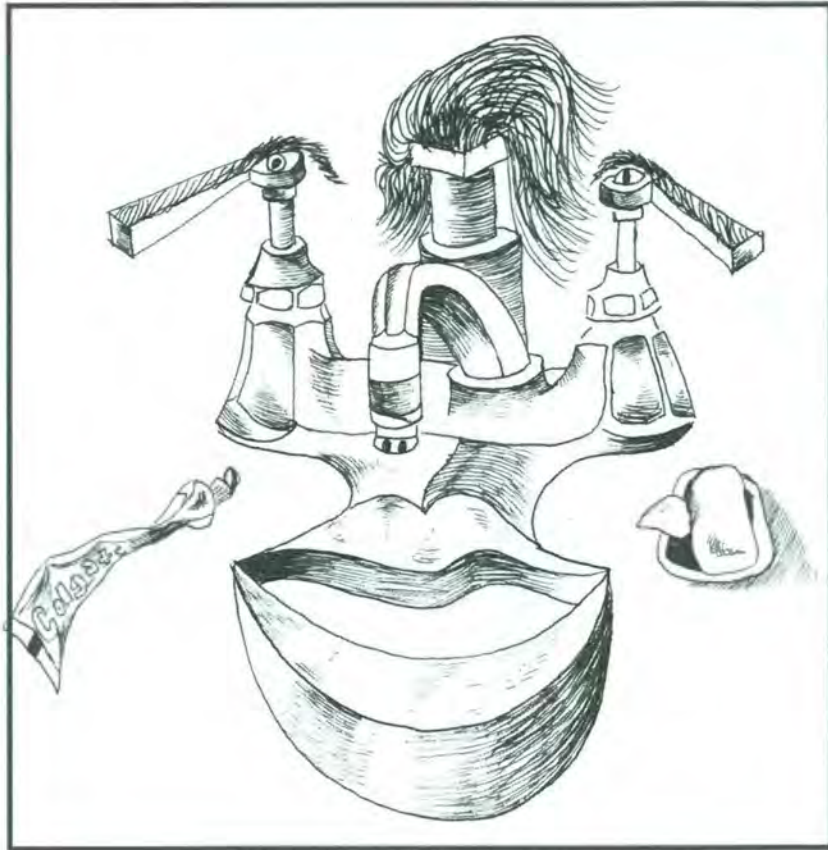
*Fall 1992*

*The*  
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*by Miguel Segovia*

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**Bayou**  
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The University of Houston—Downtown  
One Main Street  
Houston, Texas 77002

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The *Bayou Review* reserves the right to edit for grammar, punctuation, and content.

## Acknowledgments

Finding the creative drive is not that hard of a thing. What is hard is the process that artists use to transfer the creative energy onto the page. The following pages are the examples of the final product of the creative process, allowing the writer and artist to sign their signature with other writers and artists in time. There is no higher calling.

The Bayou Review's fall semester began with a reading at the O'Kane Theatre. Featured at the O'Kane were UH-Downtown professor of mathematics, and poet, Andre de Korvin; and the editor of La Sombra Publishing, E. D. Santos, from Hondo, Texas. There will be another reading during the Spring semester.

The Bayou Review awarded three \$50 prizes for winning submissions in the categories of poetry, short story, translation, art/ illustration, and cover design. No award was given for art/ illustration and cover design. Prizes for cover design and art/ illustration will be carried over to the Spring issue of the Bayou Review. The award recipients for the Fall Bayou Review are:

### Poetry

*Highway*

by Barbara A. Delano

### Short Story

*Wild People Do—and I Don't Mean Maybe*

by L. Ross

### Translation

*Yoksulluk and Yobaz*

by Fazil Husnu Daglarca

Translated by Murat Inegolluoglu

Many special thanks to: Dan Jones, Lorenzo Thomas, Fabian Worsham, Margaret Shelton, Andre and Marianne de Korvin, E.D. Santos, Paula Henderson, Brian A. Pachuca, Jerry Dworaczyk, Terry Tyson, Michael Dressman, Minority Enrichment Center, Thomas Lyttle, David Niver, Ed and the crew at UH Printing Department.

If there was any disappointment among the many highs this journal brought during the fall semester, it is that only one document was received from both faculty and staff.


It has been my pleasure.

Jerry Tumlinson

Editor

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 Indicates award recipient

 Indicates award recipient

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Translated from the Turkish language  
by Murat Inegolluoglu 🏆

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🏆 Indicates award recipient

Barbara A.  
Delano 🏆

## Highway

Gray road stretching ahead  
toward unknown destinations

thin line separates  
dividing into equal parts  
each traveling opposite directions  
Hot Sun beats upon the pavement  
creating illusions of mist  
rising into the sky

Naked feet walk lightly  
pain burning into the soles

Small clouds rolling overhead  
each a thought into the mind

Soft wind singing  
to the trees  
reaching limbs to touch

lonely traveler standing  
weary in the middle  
caught by the solitude of life

## Always The Sun

I was walking from Nowhere  
and I chanced to see  
the sun spreading down  
her blade-shaft wings on the prairie  
I was thinking about the Spanish mountains  
the Sun Kings climbed  
how the light conjured fire  
through the whispering greens  
as shadows raced across the earth  
cast by unseen movers  
I stopped chasing them for a while  
for a face haunted my thoughts  
like an Amtrack going wild,  
a top speed hurricane blurring  
in a wink  
then I thought,  
Maybe you're sitting next to the  
window looking out  
and I'm a speck among these  
cactus rocks I've turned...

Remember that day when it flooded?  
We stood by the ironbox  
you said you loved the rainy days  
and their peculiar ways  
how the skies swelled with dark clouds  
and everything turned gray and blue...

...here the rain letters from heaven  
fell from the lightning heralds dancing  
and casting the winds under my feet  
I jumped from the ground  
into the air...



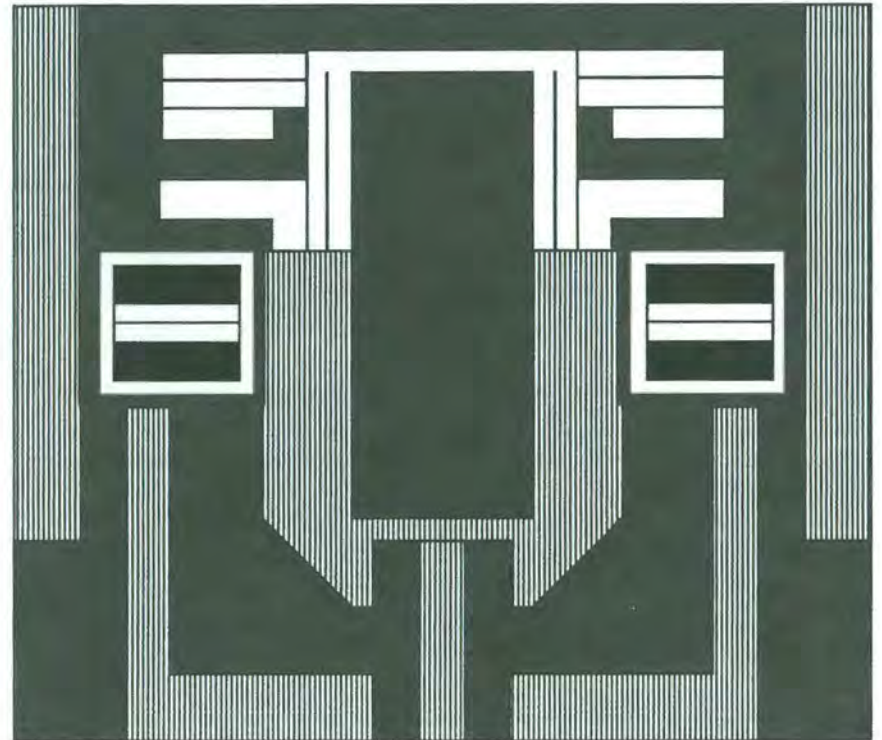
## Ah Kin

by Brian A. Pachuca

Brian A. Pachuca

## Obsidian

Bring me the blackest Obsidian  
blacker than black  
where no stars will escape  
and no light shine on its  
luciphagous and incorruptible perfection  
even now I can feel its hummingbird song  
like wings of hornets' rage  
deep in the ground the seed  
where Spaniards consecrated  
the fate of our ancestors  
the ancients bent under their iron chains  
and crosses of gold  
their temples are shallow  
their gods, false and faceless  
only one mind in perpetual concert  
turning  
beyond the power of primitive design  
and schemata  
beyond the hands of man and ape



## Annex

by Brian A. Pachuca



**WAR!** Being fought inside a person's soul and mind is a continuous battle that has dragged on for months maybe years never leading to peace nor happiness. When it appears that the last battle had been fought and peace will finally be made, another battle slowly creeps upon her and might lead her to Death. She has lost all hope for what other humans call ...happiness. She desperately seeks this emotion, although when it seems that she might grasp the feeling, it begins to slip through her soul and establish its existence further and further away. No, this person's life was meant for nothing but sorrow and misery. No light will ever shed in this person's line of life.

**War!**  
by *ToriRei*

There upon a hill is a light, a light that shines so brightly that all persons can see, for it consisted of heat which glows with happiness. In her life, the light is very dim and so far into the darkness that there is nothing but ice-cold crystals that have formed and developed since the light has been absent from her soul for so long. It grows colder and colder as the years go by. Soon her heart and soul will freeze and die. She has given up all hope and desire to exist in a cold war that continues to fight its battles. No peace will ever seem to exist.

Finally, her heart slowly stops beating as she tries to fill her lungs with life. She cries out to be saved but her cries are muffled by the cold cloud that is upon her. With all lost of effort, she lies on her back looking up to the sky with not a sign of hope from the one up above. It grows dark as she grows weaker by the second. Her eyes begin to droop slowly and finally darkness sets in forever. Her heart thumps for the last time and she breathes for the last time until God called upon her and took her soul from her withering body. Finally, she sees the light and she feels the warmth of the light she tried so desperately to be a part of. She feels the warmth and she glows with the happiness that she could not find on earth. Yes, death was her answer to happiness. Death is the secret to everlasting happiness. □

Screaming forklifts rape the valley,  
as fortune's fat five-hundred  
market the last frontier.  
Hydraulic hook and chain,  
cargo nets, leather straps  
the wetbacks to a new yoke:

*Benjamin M.  
Reyna*

**Nafta**

The white folks are coming,  
the white folks are comin'.

My husband shits blood  
and calls it poetry;  
and I,  
ignoring my own pain,  
hold his head between my breasts  
and assure him  
that everything is going to be o.k.

I stroke his hair  
and pat his back-  
feeling the sweat  
on his skin.  
(We transform,  
as he listens  
to my heartbeat:  
Mother and Son;  
Wife and Husband.  
It's all the same.)

*Todd H.  
Moore*

**Sudden  
Impact  
Part II**

We have been through  
all of this before:  
— he was a policeman  
— he shot and killed  
a twelve year old boy  
— he's been like this  
ever since.

*Todd H.  
Moore*

**Snow**

Nestled in the mountains  
the frosted silence  
sleeps.

I play my role:  
Mother and Wife;  
Saviour and Whore.  
I lay my child down  
and hug him close.  
And I tell him  
that he's the most beautiful man  
that I have ever seen.  
And then he wanes:  
slumbering Oedipus.

My husband shits blood  
and calls it poetry;  
and I,  
ignoring my own pain,  
tell him that his is  
the most beautiful poetry  
that I have ever seen.

## Unconditional Love

by *Philonis Stevenson*

Sometimes Big Jake comes 'round here helpin' mama 'n me whit chores. Papa used to do dat wen he were'nt drunk and beatin' us and all. Mama was real fraid of Papa. Papa ain't here no more, jus vanished. We do alright Mama 'n me, we don't need Big Jake—he puts me in the mind of Papa. He tall and droopy like a Christmas tree with too much stuff yankin' the branches—a real mess. It's ok though, I take care of Mama, if need be I'll take real good care of Big Jake jus like I did Papa. □

*Dawn H. Moses*

## Ours

Their music's filled with strife and pain  
It beats the ear like drops of rain.

So much anger from deep within  
There's a child beneath that skin.

They are in awe of violent acts  
Excitement now, forget the facts.

Have sex, use condoms, they make the choice  
Their morals gone, no strong inner voice.

To go to school they, dress so fly  
Upon the streets they scream and die.

By reference they are the lost generation.  
What does that say of our great nation?

*Benjamin M. Reyna*

## A Sort of Elegy for Porfirio

(My father-in-law, thrown by a horse)

south texas winter valley  
land of milkin' money  
white folks farm the fields  
ranchers, farmers  
blood and water

east houston summer city  
down on the waterfront  
teamster, tractor, mule  
estranged father  
oil and water

cutting 77 state's grass  
hot metal and oil crash  
burning blood and flesh  
rural highway  
diesel and dust

broken axle, right side hill  
flipped Farm-All, the wheels steel  
spinning their warped hum  
but the grass kills  
rubber and glass

city cars, rubbernecking  
pointing fingers from kids  
noses on the glass  
plastic people

rocking horse meat: the boy sees  
a big, red, tractor toy  
oblivious to ....  
the dripping diesel from the iron horse.

Alana D. Rogers

## No One Mourns the Caterpillar

As our lives change daily,  
from year to year,  
We, as humans,  
always remain the same.

But no one mourns the caterpillar.

Their tiny bodies bring beauty,  
but are not beautiful.  
To many, they are useless.  
If a child is questioned,  
of course, the caterpillar wins over the butterfly.  
And everyone knows that a child knows  
the real meaning of beauty.

The beauty of human life is so different  
from that of a butterfly.  
Humans look like small adults  
when they are babies;  
Butterflies look like caterpillars.  
As the butterfly drifts away in the wind,

No one mourns the caterpillar.

As our human lives are changing from day to day,  
we mature and get wiser,  
eventually, we get old and die.  
But no one mourns the baby.  
Butterflies will flit around until  
they meet some untimely death of  
an automobile's front end or a butterfly  
catcher's net, and a little girl cries  
as her pretty butterfly dies in a jar.  
But you see,

No one mourns the caterpillar.

In the beginning there was Aristotle,  
And objects at rest tended to remain at rest,  
And objects in motion tended to come to rest,  
And soon everything was at rest,  
And God saw that it was boring.

Tim  
Joseph

## Unified Field Theory

Then God created Newton,  
And objects at rest tended to remain at rest,  
But objects in motion tended to remain in motion,  
And energy was conserved and momentum was conserved and  
matter was conserved,  
And God saw that it was conservative.

Then God created Einstein,  
And everything was relative,  
And fast things became short,  
And strait things became curved,  
And the universe was filled with inertial frames,  
And God saw that it was relatively general, but some of it was  
especially relative.

Then God created Bohr,  
And there was the principle,  
And the principle was quantum,  
And all things were quantified,  
But some things were still relative,  
And God saw that it was confusing.

Then God was going to create Fergeson,  
And Fergeson would have unified,  
And would have fielded a theory,  
And all would have been one,  
But it was the seventh day,  
And God rested,  
And objects at rest tend to remain at rest.

Although tired,  
I hear the words  
"Please let us out,  
put us on a page"  
they cry. No, shout!

The continuous clamor  
I cannot stand.  
I give them life  
And move my hand.

Across the lines  
I write the flow  
So off to sleep  
I may now go.

Dawn H.  
Moses

## Words, words, words

Sun. Twenty-one days and the sun was finally out from its hiding place. When Zora drew back her bedroom blinds all she could do was smile at the early morning sunlit haze that stretched out its long arms and sent gifts of tiny beaded rainbows to each of her eyelashes. *Its 'bout time you showed your face around here*, she thought to herself as she continued to look out of the window. Everything looked so new and delicate and absolutely beautiful. Days like this made Zora feel like a little kid and brought to her mind images of tall sunflowers. Shade trees. Imaginary tastes of lemonade. Home. But home was far away and there wasn't much else in the refrigerator aside from the light bulb and a box of Arm & Hammer so Zora decided that she'd better snap back to reality.

Another thing that she decided was that she was not going to let the day pass her by without having at least gotten out to play in the brightness before nature changed its mind. The day was certainly a day for The Park.

Zora threw on a robe, walked into the adjoining living room, drew back all the blinds and pumped up the radio. She knew that the upstairs neighbors would probably send security to her door but she couldn't have cared less.

## The Rasta Man

by Ronneia Jené Watson

Next, she went to beat on the wall that lied in between the dining room and her roommate's living area.

Bam!

Bam!

"Nette! Get up girl!" Zora yelled through the wall, but to absolutely no avail, considering that her roommate was the type that could probably sleep soundly through Armageddon. Actually, she had slept through a couple of thunderstorms and later claimed to have heard not one crackle of the noise.

Bam!

Bam!

Bam!

Bam!

"Nette, wake ya tail up!" Zora yelled again, but this time she was headed towards Annette's door. When she reached it she barged in and flung down the thick quilt that was put up to prevent any sort of light from penetrating the solace of her cave.

"Din you hear me yellin' and bangin' onnat wall?" said Zora. "Get up chil'! It's too pretty a day fuh you t'lay ya tail up innat bed all day!"

Annette opened her eyes just wide enough to send her friend a look of pure venom. "I think you betta g'on somewhere wi' that! I'm trynna sleep!" she spat out.

"You mean to tell me that you gon' waste your whole day wallowin' 'roun' innat bed?" asked Zora.

"Yep. Sho' am," Annette dryly said as she turned her deep brown face away from the window and buried it in her pillow.

"Umph. Well a'right then suit y'self, but I'm goin' to The Park cuz I know everybody an' they mama gon' be out there today! So if you decide that you want to go I suggest you get up and put on some clothes quick cuz imma leave in about half a hour," with that Zora walked out, closed the door behind her and went to get herself together.

As she had informed her friend, she was ready within half an hour and to her astonishment Annette emerged from her room half dressed needing only to complete a few finishing touches before she was completely ready.

"Don't leave wit' out me, Z. I'm almost through," said Annette tucking here and fastening there.

After waiting for about fifteen minutes Zora grabbed a blanket and headed out of the door having decided that she'd sit in the car to wait the rest of the while. *Damn, Nette, all the people gon' be headed the other way by the time you bring yourself on*, she thought. So she started the ignition and impatiently blew the horn.

"She 'bout ta get lef' she don' hurry up," Zora muttered aloud while inching slowly out of the parking space. Right then she heard their apartment door slam and watched as Annette came hastily bustling toward the vehicle. Looking like a woman on a mission, Nette was dressed in a two-piece silk short set, sandals encrusted with faux jewels and a large yet stylish Dooney & Bourke handbag. Immaculately coiffed hair and jazzy earrings accessorized her outfit while around her neck hung a pair of binoculars and tucked under one arm was a very large golf umbrella.

"Eeeeeuuuhhhh!" Zora wrinkled her nose and feigned an expression that fell somewhere in between that of a frown and a smirk. "Where you think you goin' Miss Thang?"

"Same place you goin'!" answered Annette saucily fingering through the curls in her hair in an air of mock vanity.

"Yeah, a'right, cool," said Zora, "but what's wit' the binoculars? What you need them for? Folk's gon' think you crazy! And that big-ass umbrella..."

"See, Z, you can afford to let this sun bake your skin to a crisp, but I ain't 'bout to let it turn my skin ten shades of BLACK!" As Annette laughed at the statement Zora's face stiffened slightly as she fixed her eyes on the road. She wanted to turn and tell her friend how much it pissed her off when she said things like that. But she didn't. She simply kept driving and let her mind wander off. She wondered sometimes if her best friend ever resented her. They had

known each other nearly all their lives because they used to live in the same neighborhood back home. Zora could even recall the day that they met. They were in elementary school and it was on a day that Annette and some of her cousins were walking down Zora's street and found her alone playing jacks on her Grandmother's sidewalk. They all decided to go over and make conversation with her, but instead of asking the question "Can I play?" the first question that escaped from their young mouths was "Are you white or what?". Zora remembered feeling rather puzzled by the question because it seemed to her that it should have appeared quite obvious "what" she was. So she answered their question with a quick "NO!" Zora could also vividly remember times like the one when big ol' Deidre had threatened Zora with a good after-school behind-kicking for some reason or another. The news got to Annette and as soon as the dismissal bell rang at 2:20 it was her that was poised and ready to "throw down" with the school bully who dared attempt to torment her best friend. The only thing that had once nearly ripped their friendship apart was a boy. Chris. All the girls who attended their middle school had a crush on Chris. He played on the basketball team, dressed nice and even had a moustache. Many tried to bend over backward to get his attention, but it was Zora that the young man had his sights set on. Word wasted no time in getting to Annette this time either, for as soon as she was able to witness the truth of the rumor for herself she didn't speak to Zora for what seemed to be months. When she finally did speak what she chose to say hurt more than the silent treatment had. Zora could recite within her mind the exact words that were chosen to break the tacit anger which had grown as thick as heavy sheets of ice: "You get all the boys cuz you bright and got good hair. They don' like me cuz I'm a black dog." Zora could not utter one word. Neither her ears, her mouth nor her brain had been prepared for such a blunt statement. She just remembered that pit at the bottom of her stomach knotting up and tears welling up in her eyes. Zora ended up shunning the boy from then on.

Now that they had gotten older it seemed that they had gotten beyond childhood preoccupations. They were sisters in most things from taste in clothing and men to world views and future aspirations. They were both recent college graduates and although they had not secured jobs in their chosen professions, they felt assured in the thought of soon ascending into a life of moderate luxury.

"Damn, Z, the way you drivin' time we get there everybody gon' be gone! You know I got to at least get me a few numbers!" Annette burst in loudly disrupting her best friend's trance.

"I jus' know you ain't trynna talk! As long as it took yo' ass to

get ready!", retorted Zora chuckling. "And besides that, what about ol' boy Charles?"

"Girl, forget Charles for now! We both know that's my baby—with his little skinny yella ass—but he ain't bankin'! You know them nig-roes up at The Park either got some money or they be frontin' real good. And I GOT ta have it! PLUS they fine too! Lord!" At that Zora just rolled her eyes and smiled that faint smile again.

To their pleasant surprise they found a place to park as soon as they drove into one of the lots. Just as they had figured there were wall to wall people milling around on The Park's grounds. It was as if the multitudes had felt it their duty to get outside on this particular day as a gesture of gratitude to God for sending down to them a reprieve from the previous days of darkness. Systems were pumping and spirits were high. A feeling of communal excitement swelled the surrounding air.

On days like this, big-bellied policemen sauntered around The Park and made it their business to patrol the area. They kept a most watchful eye on what Annette had previously referred to as "bankin' nig-roes", with frequent licence plate checks being run on any upscale cars which were spotted. Many of the people were irritated by the presence of the officers and their sometimes necessary, yet often times not, excessive actions. Nevertheless, very little was done or said even after incidents like the one when they had witnessed the shooting of a young man in the back of the head by one of the officers. Folks stopped coming for about two weeks, but then resumed after a general consensus of "Can't fight City Hall" was reached.

After collecting their belongings from the back seat of their car, Zora and Annette made their way across the grass amidst hisses, yes-lawds, and it-don't-get-no-better-than-thats. They walked quickly past without giving the benefit of a second look and continued to survey the area for a spot where they could unload their burdens, watch and be seen. Each had appreciated the fact that the men in passing had taken notice of them but they both agreed that guys with jheri curls, chunk jewelry or gold teeth were not likely prospects for their affection. And the men that they had just encountered occupied top slots on their list of undesirables.

They finally found a place to sit, spread out the blanket, put the radio down and let everything else fall wherever it so pleased. Both plopped down and Annette immediately switched on the radio and bobbed her head and snapped her fingers to the beat.

"Heeeeeeyyyyy! That's the jam!" Annette said as she started to sing along with the tune that was playing.

I-hiiiiii am evree day pee-puuhlll,

I-hiiii....

Zora tuned her friend out as she began to look around at the tall trees which surrounded wondered to herself why The Park had to be so close to Downtown. It was a rather morbid thought to think that she was so near to her job on a weekend. Tomorrow would come soon enough and she didn't need to be reminded of the duties which awaited her the following day, so she turned her attention elsewhere. She looked to see children darting back and forth and shrieking with glee as they chased each other and went about their various games. She then looked towards the stage that was normally used when live bands or other outdoor shows came to The Park during the summer months and saw that the little ones had even taken over that.

She laughed softly as she watched them dance, jump, bounce and laugh boisterously. She reached over and grabbed Nette's binoculars so that she could get a better view of the munchkin party, but when she held them up to her eyes all that she was able to see were blurred figures. She then took them down to focus them and the objects in the distance became quite clear. She gasped at a relatively audible pitch because what she saw sent a quick surge of impulsive fear running through her chest.

"What, girl?! Do you see some fineness somewhere?" Nette asked quickly as she quickly looked around to try to find the object that only Zora could see through the binoculars.

"What...naw...naw...uh-uh," she said, barely acknowledging Nette's inquiry. What she did see was a dreadlocked man dressed in white. The same man that she would see walking up and down the streets of Downtown playing the wooden piccolo that he then held pressed between his lips. The children had made a circle around him while they continued to dance their little dances. Something inside Zora made her want to run up to those children and hurry them away from this man whose clothes bagged and sagged off of him yet she found herself unable to carry out the mental urgings. She sat paralyzed and reluctantly yet curiously observed the episode taking place. She took note of the man's Middle Eastern looking garb that was left unfastened to reveal a smooth, dark, remarkably defined chest despite his gaunt and impoverished build. His dreaded hair hung down to his waist and was streaked with a color reminiscent of a fiery setting sun. The man seemed to pay no attention to the activity that was going on around him. He was fervently engrossed in producing the sounds emitting from the apparently handmade wooden instrument. Was he on drugs? *Yeah, Zora thought, I betcha fatman he's blunted out of his mind!* Yet she could not help but to stare at the strange Rasta man. Dreadlocks. These were without question definite no-no's on her and Annette's list.

While she was taking detailed inventory of the Rasta man's

appearance he looked directly into the lenses of the binoculars and proceeded to play his shrill haunting melody on the wooden piccolo. His dark eyes looked at, through and beyond Zora at something in the distance. Zora jerked back and dropped the binoculars quickly. Her mouth was slightly agape, eyes wide and she noticed that she was trembling. Because she was a considerable distance away, she could not imagine how the Rasta man could have possibly realized that someone's eyes, her eyes, were on him. Again Annette shot her friend a quizzical look, frowned and raised her voice half an octave or so.

"What's wrong wit' you?" she asked, but this time Zora didn't answer so Annette shrugged her shoulders and continued her scoping and finger-snapping. Zora wanted to tell her best friend about what she had just finished seeing and about a dream that she had just at that moment remembered having in which the Rastafarian had made a cameo appearance. But Zora kept her mouth closed because this was one time that Nette would surely think that she was "on crack." The bits and pieces that she could reassemble were her being lost in some jungle, some mass of trees. Hearing music. Drums. And singing. She remembered being scared because it was so dark. Then she looked above her to see the moon. It was a full moon and the only light in the otherwise total darkness. She didn't know where the music was coming from. Whether to be scared or whether to try to find its source. As she parted through the trees, leaves and bushes she noticed the drums and singing growing louder and louder. She eventually found herself at a point at which she could crouch down and part the foliage and peer at the scene from which all the commotion was originating. Many people were gathered in a clearing and danced around a fire while others supplied the music for their fluid body gestures. She let the partition that she had made in the leaves and branches close and she could feel the presence of someone behind her. She whirled around to discover that it was the Rasta man that she would see with his back against Downtown streetcorner lightposts.

Zora didn't know whether it was sheer curiosity or genuine concern that nearly forced her to pick up the binoculars once more, but when she looked back over at the stage she saw the Rasta man being escorted off by their City's Finest. "Probably for vagrancy," she muttered to no one in particular. She sighed with relief as she watched the man being led down the steps which led from the platform and into a police car. One of the policemen stayed behind to "shoo" the children off to "go find their mamas." Although Zora was one of the silent majority who didn't care too much for the boys in blue, she felt that this was one time they did someone a favor.

The sun was then high over head and beginning to get

*Watson—The Rasta Man*

unbearably hot. Entirely too hot and it was starting to bother Zora's eyes. She reached in her purse and fished out her shades and slid them on her face. She then laid back and tapped her foot in the air keeping time with the fading chorus.

I am everyday people  
I am everyday people ☐

Last year one day we met,  
that's the day we will never forget  
Admit we both think it's strange,  
It seemed like the whole thing was arranged  
We started bit by bit talking,  
and to my class we were walking  
You were kind and very neat,  
you were quiet, but most of all sweet  
I heard things about you that weren't good,  
but you proved them wrong, I knew you could  
The more I talked to you the more I knew,  
you were someone special that I could talk to  
Now that I know you well,  
to you I have opened that trusting shell  
You know I love you with all my heart,  
and I always pray we never part  
When ever you are by my side,  
words fall into a rhyme  
like a breeze drifting over the sand,  
thrilled by the wonder of you,  
and the tender touch of your hand  
Just fill my arms the way you filled my dreams,  
the dreams that you inspire, with every sweet desire  
Tell me if we are meant to be,  
if it's me for you and you for me  
Every time I don't see you, I get really cold  
My mind is put off into a total different world,  
but when I see you again with your charming smiling face,  
my mind comes back to me warmed with lots of grace  
When you talk to me you always seem to care,  
If it was not for you my life would be so bare  
I love all the ideas of happiness you share  
the scent of love and sweets comes into the air  
To me you are the biggest value  
I would not know what to do without you,  
and as you said, we will remember all this some day,

*Minerva  
Roman*

**I  
Hope  
We  
Never  
Part**

and I am just hoping that I can pray,  
that you and I will make us together,  
to stay that way now and forever  
Many people tell me you are only playing,  
I don't even understand what they are actually saying  
I am not believing them anymore,  
I'll just kick them out of the door  
They are only interfering with my life,  
and I will be very glad to be your wife,  
but there are other things you need to see,  
it's not only between you and me  
We can't spend time as I wish  
My parents are what is causing this  
A really hate what I am going through,  
because I don't know what else to do  
I thought maybe I should kill myself,  
then I said no! I will only hurt someone else  
I will never do a thing like that  
friendship and love is where it's all at  
I will always keep on living,  
My life with you is not worth giving  
I'll just hope that my dream will come true,  
then I'll see if I'm in love with you  
because our relationship is much more deeper,  
everyone is just so cheaper  
I would like to share more time with you,  
but my parents are the real screw  
I guess I was the unlucky one,  
but you can find someone and have fun  
remember I do not choose for you,  
but I do every thing I need to do  
I've made you happy by saying yes,  
but maybe I'm putting myself into a big mess  
Right now I'm writing does come true,  
just remember that I'll never forget you  
To write this poem I very much dare,  
but it all goes to show you how much I care  
I will always remember that you were to lend a hand,  
and that our relationship was the best in the land,  
but I would say good-bye for now,  
because I don't really know how  
to put all my thoughts and feelings in writing  
I just hope that we won't be dividing,  
because I really like you, yes I do  
not only like you, but love you too.

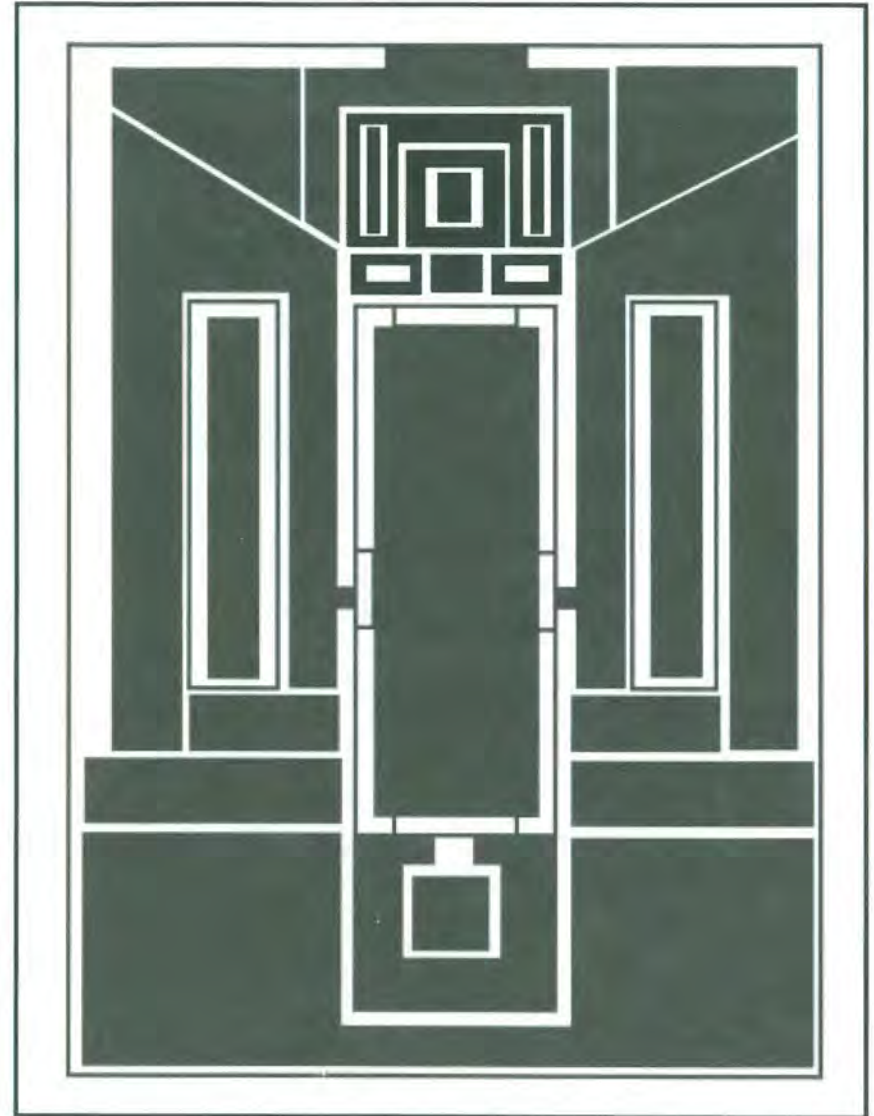
## Unheard Explosions

It's hard to find a good thing to buy  
in this marketsquare  
when you walk through the aisles  
and hear gossip  
from old ladies talking as if time  
would run out  
and there wouldn't be any chance to  
report late breaking news about  
the tug-of-wars of the heart and what  
happened to what and whom  
and you learn to be hopeful  
but you learn to be disappointed too,  
the old idiom that never fails,  
another name and face  
added to your memory banks  
till the features blur and fade  
out of recognition, unthought  
like Richter scales zig-zagging lines  
across the papyrus landscape.

there's a new day waiting to be born  
to die in advance of the myth  
told of the sun baked deserts  
or the river of light slithering sleek  
across pipelines and tight-knit veins  
stretching from miles into the ground

were they listening to your laughter  
or the ocean beneath the staircase  
when the flood prompted you to leave early  
or were they being polite?

did the earth rattle and shake while you  
slept or was it just the wind  
worrying the garage doors  
and the window shutters  
at seven in the morning?



## The Seed

by Brian A. Pachuca



Rebecca  
Gaspar

## From Evergreen to Charcoal Black

Tree stumps still smoldered  
the whole island smelled of smoke.  
They said Imagine a field of pines  
But it's hard to see evergreen  
in a sea of black ash.

Rebecca  
Gaspar

## Downtown

There is no one area  
dedicated to desertion.  
Homes appear  
abandoned at random.  
Time passes  
on those not kept company.

One structure well maintained,  
Stands straight and looks across,  
To a lonely brick shell  
Whose exterior  
caves to the interior,  
Whose insides  
have long been gone.

Quyen  
Lam

## Once In a Blue Moon Happy Birthday Michoux

I sit and stare  
at the empty night  
As the stars in the sky  
gave sparkling light  
I held my hands together  
and I began to pray  
Will tomorrow be better  
will love find a way  
The moon gave a smile  
and answer my prayer  
"The greatest love  
is within the greatest hurt..."

## Mama's Pride

by Nicole Smart

I thought this day would never come! My oldest baby is getting married today! That girl finally got herself a good man. Terrence is somebody I would have hand-picked myself. Just to think about some of them men she's dated makes me sick! First, there was that guy Larry who didn't have a job and didn't want one. I told her that boy was no good—she had to learn the hard way. To top that off, Larry was double ugly! Now, Ahmed, that foreign man, was something to look at! She thinks I don't know what they did on those day-long dates. Humph! I'm not as dumb as she thinks I am. Then there was Walter, the cute thug. (Thugs always seem to be cute.) I have to give her credit—she dropped him like a hot potato when she found out he was a drug dealer. There was another man, too. What was that man's name? She thought she was "in love" with him. Let me see...Terry? No, that ain't it! Uhhhh....Tony! Yeah, that's his name. He was such a nice young man, but he could never get his life together. Yvonne had to finally give up on him. Lord, I'm so happy she found Terrence I don't know what to do! Terrence is such a nice young man. He's handsome, got an education and a good job, a nice personality, and he treats her like a queen. What more could any woman ask for? There ain't too many good men out there—she'd better be good to that boy! And she finally did something I told her to do, with her stubborn self! She found her a nice boy from school. Even her daddy likes him, so you know Terrence must be somebody decent. Johnny always been funny 'bout people. He ain't the most sociable person in the world. I can't wait to see Yvonne walk down the aisle in that dress! When she first showed that dress, I felt like I wanted to get married all over again. It is sooo beautiful! I only wish she could wear it a second time, seeing we spent all that money on it. She's going to look beautiful! I see so much of myself in that girl. She just don't know how happy I am! What? It's 9:30! Lord, let me get up out of this bed and get ready! ☐

L. Ross

He sings the "Rainbow Song"  
Like Kermit, he cannot easily carry the tune  
As he sings to me of love I realize his seriousness  
A rush of panicky fear comes over me as I climb down  
From the barstool that was my pedestal  
Nervous laughter greets him as our lips meet

## Mated

Jean  
Schuck

## The Tides of Prejudice

A grain, a rock, a solitaire  
Lying nestled in the womb,  
Only to be freed at birth,  
And destined to be strung.

A crib, a cane, a family  
Harboring waves of wrath,  
Bringing division to the land,  
Conceived from common soil.

A groan, a grave, a mound of shells,  
Scattered over the fields,  
Equality dangled in their grasp,  
With chains, not strings attached.

A voice, a home, and propriety,  
These liberties are reserved,  
For colors which are solely white,  
And not for those less pure.

A thread, a rope, a chain of souls,  
Unshackled by their faith,  
Rise incessantly against the tide,  
Determined to break free.

"Hi! How are you doing?"  
Along losing smile, warmth and affection  
reappeared after all these long waiting days.  
"Yep, I'm back. I love this place!"  
Still that nice and benevolent,  
as my best listener I always granted.  
"I just got married. She is great!"  
Your satisfying smiles, your shiny ring,  
told me how delighted you are with your new life.  
"We are living in the same old house.  
Come by and visit us as you did before!"  
"OK." I replied, smiled with despairs.  
Congratulations. Wish you a happy marry life.  
Sure, I won't interrupt your life anymore.  
I will walk away with these fragments of dreams,  
live with a life which can find inspirations no more...

Michelle  
Nip

## Untitled

## The Family Tree

by Jerry Dworaczyk

"Delvin, I want ya home by noon time. You know it's supposeta' git water by then." reminded his mother. And then, poking her head around the corner of the kitchen, "Yer father 'n I are goin' t' the mall t' get yer sister some winter boots; ya want some or wool yers last another year?" she said, almost yelling to make sure her voice would not fall on deaf ears as it usually had done.

She registered the usual "Yeah, mom!" as Delvin ran out of the house with a few pieces of green colored paper he snatched from one of the low-lying branches of the family tree. The screen door slapped smartly against the door frame before she could get to it.

"Are ya goin' t' the—" she trailed off as she noticed him racing down the winding driveway toward the direction of Blake's house. His bright green windbreaker with the words 'Angelo Deli Fightin' Tigers across the back bellowed like a sail in full wind. Wiping her hands on her apron, she went inside.

"Chlaresa honey, les go! They'll be closed in 'n hour!" her husband said.

"Ok, ok; Gimme' a few seconds t' freshen' up. C'mon, Cristal." They waited in the car as Cristal vaulted out the door.

She pressed herself against her mother's seat, "Move mama, I caint git in!" After a brief struggle with her purse, Cristal settled into the back seat and the sub-compact sputtered off.

"Mama, I don't need no winter boots. Minz is fine."

Other than a few chores around the house, Delvin had nothing better to do with his time during the hot summer months but to see that the family tree had just the right amount of water and sunshine. The remainder of his time was his. He often woke early, donned faded jeans full of holes with a tee-shirt to match and set out for Blake's house. The two would then ride their bikes to the bayous not far from their neighborhood and explore for anything that might catch their eye. A few days of steady rain often flooded the bayous this time of year, and as they receded, the mud banks became studded with a host of treasures awaiting would-be prospectors. Only prospectors with wild dreams of fame and fortune (and aged ten and twelve respectively) could appreciate the booty anchored in the thick, pungent goo. Old bicycle frames and rims, rusted metal seats from old swing sets, deflated footballs and broken bats, and an occasional plastic toy missing a piece here and there were deposited

in the mud banks from upstream. Delvin and Blake never missed an opportunity to claim their fortune and would often be occupied for hours.

"Wow, look here Delv!" said Blake tugging on what looked like an old ironing board. Delvin noticed his watch and screamed, "Blake we gotta go!" Before Blake could pull himself up the muddy bank, Delvin had mounted his bike and was out of sight.

Delvin furiously peddled up the short steep hill toward his house. He had been riding for over an hour at break-neck speed through parking lots, back alleys, and a few side streets he knew were shortcuts home. The morning fog dissipated upon arrival of a sun that beamed with delight as it commanded its place in the heavens. Afforded a clear view of all that lay below, its radiating heat bore down on Delvin and tried to wilt him into submission as he struggled to reach his destination. His legs and arms ached and his lungs burned. Every breath entered his body as if in a vacuum and left with a powerful whoosh and then the cycle repeated itself. Hot and cold flashes raced from the back of his thighs to the nape of his neck. His hair felt tingly. Despite legs numb from pumping the pedals and arms aching with every gasping breath he took, he fought to continue.

As his house came into view, he saw that his parents hadn't arrived. *'Maybe I still have enough time!' he thought, 'but what if I'm too late...what if it gone without water too long...?'* He couldn't bear what the consequences might be if he shirked his only real responsibility. Nearly tearing the screen door off its hinges as he cleared the porch in one leap, he ran to the tree room. His worst nightmares were confirmed. The Caster family tree looked like a miniature weeping willow. Its wilted leaves and once vibrant branches lay drooping on the floor. Bits and pieces of small green buds that would have someday supplied his family with whatever they desired were strewn about the place. Delvin's knees dissolved under the weight of his thoughts and he sank to the white marbled floor. With tears streaming down his face, he gathered a few of the dried young shoots. Mud stained trembling fingers struggled to pick one up. Turning it over in his palm, bits and pieces of the premature buds mixed with droplets of water from his eyes and dried earth from his hands. While he sat motionless, Blake silently retraced his steps and gently closed the screen door behind him.

Members of the Caster family pitched in to assure that their tree had the best of care. Each family member was assigned a week at a time—a week of total devotion to care and to nourish one of

nature's most treasured creatures. No one knows when the first money tree was discovered, but through the ages techniques were developed and mastered so that eventually every family on Earth had one.

Money trees were passed from generation to generation. The Caster tree was nearing its 7th century mark. Depending on the pruning procedures, (also passed from generation to generation) they ranged in size from an oleander bush to a ficus tree. Homes representing a sort of glorified greenhouse were constructed around a centrally located tree. The 'tree room' as it was aptly called was decorated in exquisite carvings of fine woods from all over the world. The Caster family tree towered toward fifteen foot ceilings inlaid with intricate oak carvings of money trees in bloom. Two round portals in the roof, about six feet in diameter, allowed the sun's nourishing rays to enter through mechanically operated shutters. Dark, pine green curtains accented a light ash paneling that graced the walls. Two by three foot portraits of Casters from generations passed were hung from the walls in frames of gilded oak. Bone leather chairs and sofas and a plush ivory colored carpet completed the decor.

Not everyone had the luxury of owning a money tree. Others not so fortunate either sold theirs due to poor management of its by-product and/or their greed, or they simply failed to fulfill its need for proper maintenance so it wilted and died. People devoid of the pleasures and sustenance associated with money trees were forced to work in factories, restaurants, and to farm in order to supply the tastes and wants of others—and make a living for themselves. Or they lived in the streets not knowing if their next day would be their last. Strict law forbade people with money trees to give to or associate with those less fortunate.

Delvin sat on the front porch with his hands cupped around his face. Blake set a reassuring hand on his shoulder, "Don't worry Delv. I'll still come 'round...nobody's goin' t' stop me from bein' yer friend."

Delvin dropped his hands to the base of the step and rested his chest on his knees. He picked up a twig with his mud encrusted finger and began coaxing a few ants that wandered by. "We're gonna have t' move ya know. They won't let us stay in this neighborhood once they find out." With tears streaming down his cheeks, Delvin looked up at Blake, "My mom and pop are gonna have t' git jobs Blake. No one in the whole generation of Casters has ever had t' git jobs."

Blake took a seat next to his friend and removed a crumpled

## Dworaczyk—The Family Tree

pack of gum from his back pocket, "Want some?"

Without looking up, Delvin declined. After a long pause he continued, "My grandpa usta talk t' me 'bout the Caster tree a lot when I was little. He would tell me, 'Delvin, there's 'n art t' prunin' this baby. A slip o' the shears would be like takin' a knife t' yer own skin. Not t' mention th' pain you'd suffer after I got holt of ya, ye could very easily keep that tree from produc'in' only th' best bills.' Stuffin' his pipe he'd say, 'We had wanna th' original off-shoots from th' 5th centry tree—gave us jus fives 'n tens! Once we figgered how t' prune it, we couldn't believe th' number o' hunnerds poppin' out all over! Careful prunin' pays off—don't forgit that!' Then he'd take another puff off his pipe'n look me'n the eye, 'Another thing—don't git greedy! Jus' take what ya need only when ya need it. If ya need t' git somethin' that cost five dollars, don't pull off twenty! Over-harvestin' stumps th' process th' tree goes through whenever it tries t' replace whatever ya took! Now remember,' he would say pointin' his crookid finger at me, 'this's how it works. It takes 10 hours t' produce a George Washin'ton; 15 hours for a Lincoln; approximately 24 hours for a Hamilton; a little over 36 hours for 'n Andrew Jackson; a full 48 hours for a crisp Grant; and if ya prune carefull, pay 'tention t' how much sun it gits and th' tempature inside th' house—not t' mention th' right 'mount o' water—by golly, ya' can produce th' freshest Ben Franklin ya' ever laid eyes on in jus' under 72 hours!' Grandpa took a long puff on his pipe and fillin' my nose with th' smell of burnt cherries he then said, 'When yer father was born, we gave'm a young shoot off our tree...it'll be up t' you t' keep it goin' son.'"

Blake looked down as Delvin's voice cracked, "What would Grandpa thinka me now...what'd he say if he saw that?" said Delvin gesturing to the tree room.

He tried to comfort the only friend he knew he would never see again. "Here Delv, wipe yer face with this. What'd Christie think if she rode up on'er bike and saw ya waterin' th' lawn like this?" He handed Delvin a worn red rag he used to secure a small camping shovel to his bike.

Delvin took the dusty cloth with shaky hands as he looked down the block. "I sure'd like—" a lump formed in his throat and his stomach started to tingle with unwanted anticipation as a new, shiny, black Lexus paraded around the corner. His sister had poked her head out of the sunroof and was grinning from ear to ear. His parents were waving their hands. Smiles beamed from their faces. Blake mounted his bike and disappeared down the opposite end of the block. Delvin looked on in shock as his family pulled into the driveway. □

Frances J.  
Fisher

## Molly Speaks to Her Support Group

When he said "it's a malignant tumor"  
I felt the room spinning and thought the  
floor would slap me.

I was dazed and bewildered until the unwelcome,  
unwanted invading mass was sliced away taking  
with it slivers of my soul, my courage, my smile.

My life changed from my having control  
to being an empty shell following orders  
from legions of faceless white lab coats.

The only thing I was connected to was the  
chemo machine d  
r  
i  
pping time into my arm.

Dark dreams and depression engulfed me and the inner  
child, hurting and frightened cried, "Why me"!?  
"Why not me" my adult, logical voice answered.

I finally began to emerge from the depression  
that devoured me when we spoke of remission.  
I grew tired of feeling down and angry.  
I wanted hope.  
I wanted peace.

Now I'm fighting to regain  
my soul, my courage, and my smile.

L. J. M.

## I Am Who I Am

I am who I am.  
I offer no explanations and no apologies  
and in this vast sea of criticism and judgement  
I stand alone.  
For do not judge me for who I appear to be.  
accept me for the depth that lies within my soul.  
Accept the very essence that makes me unique.  
I can not apologize for being me.  
I will not give explanations.  
I do offer to you the person I am.  
Who am I, I am who I am.

Ron  
Luster

## Rising Sun

Shortly after sign of rising sun  
A frightened squirrel dashed madly 'cross the lawn  
Pursued by a protective mother bird  
Disturbing peaceful silence of the dawn  
The shrieking cry of angry mockingbird  
Cut through the quiet stillness of the morn  
And suddenly the day became alive  
As if this was its que to be reborn  
The glistening dew reflecting morning light  
Would soon be disappearing from the grass  
While blossoms turned their heads toward the east  
To view the sun's return to them at last  
A canine's bark from somewhere out of sight  
Alerted drowsy neighbors of the fact  
That it was time to wake and greet the day  
The rising sun had brought the morning back

Ron  
Luster

## Messages From Helios

Lying supine on the new mowed lawn  
Not the slightest urge to rise nor move  
Rays of sunlight warming to the bone  
Messages from Helios above  
Quietly, with nature I commune  
Fluffy clouds go drifting on the breeze  
On a sunny summer afternoon  
Blocking pressures from my mind with ease  
Manage to forget my troubled life  
Staring into azure colored space  
Insignificance of earthly strife  
So apparent in this special place  
Lovely in a relaxing state of bliss  
'til the rain begins I will remain  
Messages from Helios above  
Assuring me that peace can be my own  
Sending light and warmth to hill and grove  
Gifts to earth each time the sun has shone

Sheryl J.  
Curvey

## Life...

Life, unobstructed and pure  
Should be.  
Obstacles, created by people.  
Inconsiderate?  
Perhaps.  
Unaware?  
Benefit of a doubt.  
But, life for sure.

## Tacos (Only in Her Head)

by Tommy Thomason

"Tacos, dammit," It was the first thing he said since he got home. He didn't say much anymore. "I said I wanted tacos, can't you do nuthin' right?" She wondered if she could. She didn't seem to be able to, at least not for her husband. No matter what she did, he thought it was wrong, or incomplete, or stupid.

The plat with the non-tacos landed on the floor.

If you hit me, I'll leave you for good. She didn't say it aloud though, only in her head.

But he wouldn't hit her, and she knew it. He never hit her, not with his fists. But his words, like well-timed hooks and jabs, knocked her down again and again.

She bent down to pick up the mess as she had before and would again. As she did, she wondered how she had been deceived. Where was the kind, caring man that she had married. This couldn't be the same man. Sometime in the past two years, her husband had died, and her dead father had taken his place. She thought that he even looked like her father, sounded like her father, acted like her father.

Fix your own damn tacos. She didn't say it aloud though, only in her head.

She always thought of scathing, witty things to say, but she never said them aloud, only in her head.

He got up and helped her clean the mess. "I'm sorry, honey." He carried the plate to the kitchen and returned to the living room and sat down.

If you were sorry, you'd quit talking to me like that. She didn't say it aloud, though, only in her head.

"I'm sorry, too," she said. As she apologized, the frightening thought occurred to her that she sounded just like her mother. She could recall many times hearing her mother say she was sorry and wondering what she was sorry about. It was him—her father who should have been sorry. Her father had treated her mother like a servant—no, like a slave. Long ago, she had promised herself that she would not be like her mother. Her husband would be a good, caring man. Her husband would never treat her as an inferior. Her husband would not be like her father.

When they had married, he had promised to always respect her, to always love and care for her. He had promised to provide. She couldn't say when exactly, but sometime, shortly after the ceremony,

Thomason—Tacos (Only in her head)

those promises went out with the trash. He lost his job, and lost his reason. She figured that when he got another good job, he would revert to his former self. But, he didn't really ever get a job again. He never really reverted to his former self again. She began to wonder if he would. Maybe this present personality was his real self, and the man she married was a facade, created for the purpose of acquiring a wife.

"Where's the damn TV changer?" Apparently, his remorse for the taco incident had faded.

"I'll get it." She crossed the room to the TV and got the changer and handed it to him.

I guess you're blind as well as stupid and lazy. She didn't say it aloud though, only in her head.

"Goddammit!" He sounded desperate.

What is it now? Did you pee in your pants? (Only in her head.)

"I'm out of cigarettes, go across the street and get some."

She began to ask for the money for the cigarettes, but changed her mind. Some things just weren't worth the effort. She started across the street for the cigarettes and as the door shut behind her, she briefly considered getting in the car and leaving. Instead of walking across the street to the store, she would just get in the car and go. No destination in mind, she would just go. She thought that if she could somehow gather the courage to go, she could maintain the courage to stay gone. He probably wouldn't miss her—that is until he ran out of cigarettes and returned willingly to her cell. He took the cigarettes without a word and never looked up from the television. She returned to the kitchen for a second attempt at "tacos". □

Tommy  
Thomason

My little boy (He's five years old.)  
He's sad because he's changing schools.  
Leaving friends, leaving familiar.  
"Jordy's my best friend, Daddy."  
**Zachary** He holds Jordy's picture in his hand  
As he walks around the house.

Looking sad.

Looking angry.

Looking confused.

What do I tell him?

That there won't be friends who go away,

Friends who lie,

Friends who aren't friends,

Friends who die?

What do I tell him?

Tommy  
Thomason

## Evening Service 6:00 P.M.

"Why's he crying, momma?" "Shhh," she said, "Be quiet."  
(I didn't want to cry. I didn't want to come.)  
"but, momma, why's he crying?" "Shhh," she said, "Shhh."  
The man with the mike, with the suit, with the grin:  
"Let Him in, let Him in, let Him in, let Him in!"  
(He talks like he knows where I've been,  
what I've done, what I've seen.  
He knows who's buying what he's selling.  
He knows who's crying and hopes he knows why.  
He knows who knows and avoids their eyes.  
I can't think—what to do? Do I go, Do I stay?)  
"Don't wait another day, friend, come now, come tonight!"  
(What to do? What to do? God, is that you?  
Are You here? Only here? Here with the chosen few?)  
"Momma, why's he leaving?" "Shhh," she said, "Shhh."

Kamilah  
Puckett

## Purest

You said you were mine  
Then I went blind  
When I came to  
I saw the purest light shine through  
We made passionate love that night  
There was no way I was going to put up a fight  
While our tongues tied  
You made me cry  
I wonder did you lie?  
I guess you didn't you are still here with me  
That purest light stole my sight  
Your purest love must have been sent from above.

## Weather Report

by Gregory Stephen Rodriguez

I'm doing seventy-five and the asshole behind me is still on my ass. Lately, everyone's been on my ass. Why doesn't he go around me, I wonder. It's raining again, like it has for the past two weeks. It always starts on while I'm on the freeway, at the same exit, Bingle/Voss. I think it's unusual, but no one else comments. I hate the rain.

In the distance I see the sunlight and I know it's not raining where I live. The stream of cars is disappearing into the whipped clouds. They are lined in gray, rather than silver. The clouds are different in Texas. They're fluffier and better defined and I wonder if that means anything. I suppose everything is different in Texas, even me.

I feel as if I left most of me back in Los Angeles, the city of assholes, and that he is living another life for me back there. I, on the other hand, must piece one together on this new humid terrain from the remnants I buy or somehow acquire.

I'm getting really nervous because I keep driving too close to the concrete wall, especially when a big diesel drives along side me and since I'm driving I can't get them to blow their horn for me, like I did when I was a kid riding in my father's pickup. People drive really fast here and that makes me nervous. All my life my father told me to drive the speed limit and know I feel like an outsider when I do.

Things are slowing down a bit, at least until we hit the next big clog. There's always another one. I wonder if I should pray more, even though my deal with God was only five Our Fathers and five Hail Mary's. I know people say you can't make deals with God, but I do it all the time anyway and I think he goes for it. He knows how I am. Last week I questioned his existence and today as I sit in my unairconditioned car, I'm praying to him to get me home before I burn up and he knows that maybe next month I may quit him again. But I am trying to change, I just don't know into what.

I guess the cars really weren't disappearing because now I see them right before me all in one long hot row and they're not moving fast enough. Sometimes I'm the asshole who wants to go too fast, but I guess that's just city living.

Things are hotter here than I ever imagined and I'm not sure I'll ever get used to it. I know I won't live here for the rest of my life, but for the time being, people say the humidity is good for my skin. So I guess when I leave, I won't look any older. It'll be as if I was never here. □

**I**t was as if an electric shock shot through my body. Then I felt myself floating in the air. Without any effort, I was rising toward the ceiling. Then, suddenly, I was lifting in the night air under a starlit sky.

The air was still and dry and just a little cool. As I rolled over I began to move slowly forward and I started to feel as if I could mentally control the direction and speed of my flight. "Yes," I thought, "I'm flying." Somehow it wasn't strange to me that I had taken flight, even though it wasn't strange to me that I had taken flight, even though it was certainly a new experience. I took to the air without any fear or insecurity, as if it was no great feat. That's not to say it wasn't a very pleasurable sensation. It was exhilarating and for lack of a more descriptive term, fun.

Suddenly, I was performing aerobatics as if I had been an airborne creature all my life. I was soaring inches off the ground, gaining altitude to avoid collisions with houses and trees. I dove and twisted and looped just as naturally as a gull or a hawk riding the air's gentle flow. I was freer than mortal man can hope to be, unchained from my earthly constraints. I was sailing with the currents and drifting with the breeze.

I became conscious of the world below me and the deep space above. An occasional wisp of a cloud would appear before me then disappear behind. I was really flying without the benefit of any mechanical device. I was under my own power and it was as natural a feeling as I'd ever felt.

Here below was a yellow wheat field then green hills and now a blue lake. The night became a lighter blue and I was flying toward the sunrise or sunset, I'm not sure which it was. The ground moved further away from me and I seemed to increase my speed tenfold. Now I was racing over a blue-green ocean, irregularly spotted with lush green islands miles below. Then over another large body of land at a staggering altitude.

The air remained fresh and comfortable with only a slight cool breeze in my face. The brilliant red sun rose above my head and off to one side I saw the moon beaming in full splendor.

The flight might have lasted for hours of maybe only seconds but with the same electrical jolt it ended. I felt myself falling to earth then opened my eyes to find myself lying in bed.

The clock on the night stand showed four twenty-three. I lay there in the dark thinking to myself, "welcome home." □

## The Flight

by Ron Luster

**D**errick grabbed for the gun under the seat of the car. He had hesitated to take the gun and, as his heart raced faster than a hamster powered wheel, he made that fateful decision. He found it. It was where he had put it the night before as he took it from his father's closet shelf, gingerly exiting past the man as he lay sleeping then placing it in the car. The stonefaces were getting closer and the fear of them or what they might do was keeping him and Lorice up at night, he need an advantage.

They were relentless, the gang would not leave Lorice alone that night in the club they frequented called the Pendragon. Lorice's tough beauty was coming of age, she hung onto her sexuality like a sucker fish hangs onto a shark in murky waters. That night in the club Derrick saw Jamie, and old bud and still good friend, come in through the open, shadowy entrance and the two of them escorted each other to the guys' room leaving Lorice alone to guard the coats and cigarettes at the small, smoky table by the band. Pierced Disaster was playing that night an they had just taken on an aging hippie biker dude who could squeeze out some mean sounds on an dual electric guitar.

Sosa, the leader of the three piece gang, saw Lorice as he stood at the bar thinking she deserved better than the white pudding she was steady with. A babe like that needed a real man and, as he saw her at the table alone, he intended to introduce her to her need. He approached her table, "Where's blanco bread?" he pumped as he glared over her seated gyrating figure, his two angels in the snow" she shrugged sarcastically as she motioned with her shoulder the restroom, "he'll be back soon."

Lorice's answer was solid but somewhat shaky as she slowed her gyration and cast her eyes downward noticing Sosa's snakeskin boots. What looked like dried blood was on the right one. "Monkey grease," he said as he noticed her gaze and helped himself to one of the Camels from the butt burned table and lit it with the shorter Marlboro he'd been smoking, his cheeks went in like fluttering heart valves as he sucked to start the tobacco on fire. I hate Camels but I'm out a Marls, he said as he held cigarette holding palms toward her crouching closer to crow "I like to work wid my hands, I've been tryin' to get to you for awhile, I'd like to work wid my hands — how 'bout it cheesy?"

"WHO'S CHEESY!?", grilled Derrick as he pulled his chair back to sit as his self designated spot at the table. Sosa slowly leaned back toward his punks assuming a martial 'chung bei' position of

## Wild People Do—and I Don't Mean Maybe

by L. Ross 



reliance. While continuing his stare at Lorice Sosa rose the lit cigarette to his lips sticking out his tongue and licking the filter before taking a long drag. As he exhaled the smoke through his speech he challenged Derrick, "don't mind if I wrap my bandana 'round cheezy's neck do ya? I think she'd like the feel of the fine Tejano cotton better than one made in the U.S.A., don't you?" sneered Sosa as he removed the bandana from around his neck and moved it toward Lorice's

Derrick's left hand shot out like an automatic round as he darted from his chair and met Sosa's right hand coming down upon Lorice's neck. Derrick pushed Sosa two steps back into the arms of this two favorite fans. Sosa's henchmen stormed toward Derrick pushing chairs from their path. Sosa regained his balance with a front stanch and lifted his right foot up to kick Derrick in the crotch. Derrick saw the boot coming and grabbed it with both hands twisting it around like bread dough as he plodded Sosa's face down on the floor. One of Sosa's punks took a bandana wrapped pool ball and brusquely rapped Derrick's head as he stood there staring at Sosa on the floor.

Lorice ran from the club, Sosa got up and followed her as the semi-conscious Derrick struggled to keep on his feet while the two bandana clad punks guarded him. Jamie was returning from the bar three drinks in hand when he saw his buddy slouched over the table.

Outside Sosa stopped and ran his sleeve over his bleeding nose as he saw Lorice dart into the parking lot lit only by an aging vapor light. She was running toward the car trying to get the keys out of her pocket when she dropped them onto the asphalt. She squealed as she groped on the ground for the keys. She heard running footsteps then looked and saw Sosa running toward her. He slowed and pulled a knife out of his right jacket pocket. A stiletto, he pushed the button and enjoyed the look of fear on Lorice's face as she stood upright and slowly back toward the car.

"What do you want!" she screamed looking around for someone to come to her aid. She felt the sharp ended nail file feel out of her right jacket pocket and lodged into the laces of her ankle length boot.

Sosa didn't notice the file, "I don't want your money," he gritted his teeth as he reached for Lorice's sweater neck and proceeded to jerk at it, "I wanna taste you cheezy." As he bent down to slurp her right ear, Lorice grabbed Sosa's hand as hard as she could with her teeth, causing him to let go of her long enough so she could get to the nail file.

Lorice mustered all her adrenalized courage and sunk the file at least an inch deep into Sosa's cheek. He screamed with pain as he grabbed at the nail file jerking back two paces. She ran back toward

the club and ran right into Sosa's more pitted faced henchman. Stoneface grabbed her and held her there as his larger compadre dragged Jamie and the more conscious Derrick toward the parking lot. Sosa and his henchmen, waiting for orders, stared mindlessly over Sosa hesitating long enough to give Derrick time to grab the 38 from his boot and stick it to the side of his captor's swollen belly. When he saw the gun he let Derrick go but retained his hold of Jamie. "Let him go, yelled Derrick to swollen belly, now moving the gun to his pulsating temple. He let Jamie go but the other still had his hold on Lorice, worst now holding a knife at her neck. Sosa still lay on the ground holding his profusely bleeding cheek, "take her to the car!" he yelled out.

No other of the few that were still coming out of the club would help them. As Sosa's left hand man proceeded to drag Lorice toward the car, she spiked the heel of her boot into his right calf.

He pushed her back to unplug her heel from the flesh wound it had created on his calf. She fell screaming then quickly got up and ran across the street to a vacant lot and darkness followed by a trail that included the gun toting Derrick, Jamie, the still bleeding Sosa and his followers.

Minutes later a shot pierced the darkness and Derrick emerged carrying the hysterical Lorice to the car as Jamie ran ahead to open the car door. "Shut up, Lorice!," said Derrick as he tried to shove Lorice inside the car. "Let's get outta here," screamed Jamie!"

Her conscious ridden with fear Lorice protested "We can't leave here like this." "We can't leave here any other way." stormed Derrick as he backed out the car, put it in drive and put miles behind them and their tempo. □

*Landon  
Colgan*

He seems so tranquil  
in his tattered clothes,  
lying on his bed of green.  
His face is weathered,  
his eyes gazing upward  
toward his shade tree roof.

**The  
Millionaire**

The hustle and bustle  
passes him by,  
and he pays it no mind,  
for it is not a part of his world.

The brown paper bag  
that contains his solace,  
may soon run dry,  
and perhaps he will move on.  
Now he is content to stay,  
now he has everything.

Connie R.  
Thurmond

## Porch Swing

After supper we cover the leftovers and stroll on out  
To swing a spell and reminisce.  
Back

and

Forth

Gossiping like perm-rolled women in a beauty parlor,  
Griping like surly, "Why, me?" curfewed teenagers,  
Gloating like a proud Dad at his son's football game.  
Back

and

Forth.

Connie R.  
Thurmond

## Separation

Her tears  
glistened  
like icicles  
in the morning sun.

Connie R.  
Thurmond

## The Secret

Her smile  
was dictated  
In the shorthand  
of a hidden agenda.

## Short-timer

by Michael Welfl

After a half a day, I started to get the hang of the crude jeep. We passed ragged Vietnamese with homemade carts pulled by water buffalo, a column of nearly naked Montagnards with peculiar baskets and hats, lots of bicycles and pedestrians. One would never know there was a war going on. We were on a straight stretch of the road. Heavy jungle and rice patties alternated on both sides, clumps of mud thumped the undercarriage.

I'm bringing a Marine prisoner back from a mortar platoon. This kid, only in the Nam for a few weeks decided he would fragg some lifer, a widespread practice now-a-days. Being the company brig-chaser, it was my responsibility to pick him up from the MP's and bring him back to Phu Bai to be processed for a court-marshall. Anything at all to get the hell out of camp for a few hours. Being short, it was my responsibility to safeguard myself the last few days in the Nam.

John Lick a long time friend since boot-camp always rode shotgun with me. Nobody else was foolish enough to do it because I always had it in my mind that I would never carry a gun. My main goal in life was to get back to The World without having to fire a shot. John was crazy-wise and really understood me when no one else did. If something ever did happen, John was the person to have around, he really knew how to handle himself.

"Hey kid, what do they call you?"

"My name is DJ."

"Where you from, man?"

"New York."

John turns around from the front seat and asks, "Why in the hell did you try and take out some lifer?"

"Well, it's the first month on the job and sometimes things just don't go well."

"Damn, a Yankee and a wiseass. Pull over to that shack and we'll have a cool one before we get back to Phu Bai."

"I don't know, John, it really looks like a dump and I know its off limits."

I stopped the jeep just in front of the run down cubical. John and DJ went inside but I checked the area a bit before I went in. A fabric curtain loomed from the doorway. I saw a small room illuminated by a single candle. As my eyes adjusted to the dim light, I saw the others already sitting in the corners. They were drinking beer and rolling marijuana into cigar-sized cigarettes. Mama-San and

the other filthy women ran about bringing beer and matches. These had to be the ugliest women I had ever seen in my life. Dirty with stringy hair and bloodshot eyes, they all wore the customary black silk pants. The younger ones had black lacy bras overflowing with toilet paper trying to constitute some semblance of the female breast. There was only sympathy for these young women. I knew they were the only ones bringing in any type of income into the home for a family of usually four to six. I took a beer and sat on a chair. The sweet ambiance of pot filled the room and when the joint was passed my way I took a deep hit. I didn't come here for sex, and I wouldn't have touched any of those women with a broom handle. My motivation for being in this dump was to forget, to escape the reality of a situation that I had absolutely no control over.

John and DJ soon got up and seized two of the young girls and went off to the back. Mellow, I soon began to molt into a world of my own, mumbling the words to some current Top 40. "And it's one-two-three what are fightin' for, don't ask me I don't give a damn next is..."<sup>1</sup>

"GI, you no come here to sleep. What you need?"

The beer and pot were slowly taking their toll on me.

"Take it easy, Mama-San, we're fixing to leave."

It was late afternoon, and it would soon be dark. This is no place to be at night. The stealie boys would come out and jump any GI they could get their hands on. Stealie boys were the immature males of the village, those too young to even work for the VC, but they could take you out at the drop of a hat. Most of them were sappers. Sappers strapped explosives to their bodies and tried to get as close as they could to any GI and set themselves off. Sometimes these freaks would even try to get inside the compounds, that's why everyone was searched coming into the base. It makes you wonder just how much these Gooks are willing to sacrifice to force us to go home.

I proceeded to grab John and DJ by the hand and pull them outside to the jeep. It wasn't quite dark yet, but getting close. As we rounded the corner on the back side of the vehicle, we spotted a young Vietnamese man sitting on it.

"Number one GI, no VC! Number one GI, no VC!"

Before I could do anything, John had his sidearm out. He had the young man by the hair and the gun barrel forced into his mouth.

"I'm going to take his fucking head off, man! I mean it, man! I'm not kidding!"

"John, you don't know that this Gook is VC! How in the hell do you know, man?"

"Listen, man, this kid is almost our age. Why isn't he in their army by now? He's certainly old enough. Let me tell you, if we let

this fucking Gook go, he'll come back to haunt us. He'll probably sneak back into the compound and slit your throat! Not only that, but he more than likely did something to the jeep."

I had never seen John this upset. I mean he was distraught and quivering. He was going to blow this guy's head off any minute. Suddenly, he seemed to back off. He knew I was upset about this situation.

"Number one GI want Playboy, Salem, joints...?"

"Domommie, domommie!" I swung my leg toward the young man and he ran off down the road. John was still shaking long after the Gook was out of sight. "Don't worry about the jeep. I'll take care of it, you just go out and find DJ." I searched the jeep from top to bottom, but I found absolutely nothing. Within the next few minutes, John and DJ had returned. When DJ first saw the Gook sitting by the jeep, he ran as quick as he could. Without paying attention to where he was going, he stumbled into a binjo ditch, open sewer lines common to all the villages. He really did smell bad, covered from top to bottom in the brown goo.

No one spoke on the trip back to the compound. As the MP's waved us through into the camp, you could see the expressions on their faces change as the jeep passed by and they captured the aroma of JD. We pulled the jeep up to the command post and stopped. "Hey, who is the OD today?"

"I don't know, John. Yesterday I heard we had a few new officers fresh from OCS. This could only be trouble for us."

As we walk into the small building, the OD was sitting behind the scant table meant to be a desk. I could see the polished boots gleaming from under the table and the starched utilities reflecting the light from the single bulb that lit the room. This could only mean trouble. You knew he hadn't been around very long, he still wore the polished brass bars on his shoulders and starched cap. He had to be stupid, nobody in their right mind wore polished brass out here.

"Is this the prisoner from the motor platoon? We've been expecting him all day."

"Yes"

"Excuse me, soldier!"

"Ah...Yes sir," trying to hold back the laughter.

"Have you been drinking, Corporal?"

"Who? Me, sir? No sir!" I feel John's foot kicking up against mine, knowing he's trying to stop himself from laughing.

"Why does this prisoner smell so bad, Corporal?"

"No heads on the road, sir."

"Why isn't this prisoner cuffed?"

"Where in the hell do you think he's going, ah...sir!"

Picking up the phone the officer calls for the MP's. Within

seconds they were in the room putting cuffs on DJ and dragging him out the door. I never really knew DJ but I often wondered what in the hell ever happened to him.

"Corporal, where is your weapon? What is that in your holster, I know that isn't Marine Corps issued gear?"

"That's my short-timers stick, sir. My weapon is in the jeep." This rookie first lieutenant was so green; he had never seen one before. The simple red and white stick with notches carved in it to show the amount of days I have left in the Nam is my ticket back to The World. I wear it like a badge to tell the rest of the inmates I only have a short time left. It only needs to accompany me for four more days before it's retired to a green duffel-bag stuffed into some attic never to be seen again.

As we left the Command Post, the rain started to fall. We parked the jeep at the motor-pool and sloshed back through the mud back to Tent City. "Make way for the short-timer! Make way!" John still felt the effects of the beer and he was starting to act a little crazy.

"Make way for the short-timer! Make way!" John started to bend from the waist and extend his arm forward as though he were presenting a king. I carried the red and white stick as a scepter making sure every Marine I passed saw it. Marines showed respect to short-timers, all automatically stepped aside.

"Hey, short-timer, is it raining hard enough for you?"

"No way, man, my underwear is still dry, four days and a wake-up."

We found our way back to the tent, home sweet home. Pulling the flap back we walked inside to discover the house-girl had already been there. Clean laundry was neatly folded and placed atop the freshly made cots. I tell you what, for twenty dollars a month you just can't beat it. I think I'll take her back to The World with me.

Moby Dick sat on his cot sharpening his oversized Bowie-knife. I could never remember his name. Everyone simply called him Moby Dick because he was so smallish. He had to be the smallest Marine I ever saw. Whenever a patrol was going out and thought they might need a tunnel-rat, they took Moby. A tunnel had to be the worst job in the Nam. Charlie lived underground for weeks on end, living on nothing but a quarter cup of boiled rice a day. There was no way to get them out. Tunnel-rats would crawl through miles of dark damp tunnels clearing them out. You had to be nuts to do it, but Moby fit the bill. "Hey, men, you want your mail?"

I could already smell the perfume coming from the letters Moby had in his hands. This was always the best time of the day. I didn't want to open the letter he gave me. Instead I reached under my pillow and retrieved my most prized possession, my stack of letters bound in an old boot blouse. You could almost smell them

from any place in the tent. John and Moby got a kick out of smelling my letters before light-out. Moby pulled out three boxes of c-rations and we prepared to have dinner. C-rations were better than the powdered food served in the mess tent, powdered eggs, powdered milk, powdered mashed potatoes—everything was powdered. At least the C-rations came out of a can.

John reached into his duffel bag and pulled out three brown bottles of beer. After searching through his pockets, he pulled out a joint he still had from earlier this afternoon. "Gentlemen, shall we partake before we dine?"

"Sounds good to me, man."

After the fine dinner of canned ham and lima beans, better known as ham and mothers, we settled back with cigarettes and read our letters. I spun the short-timers stick in my hand while I read the letter from home. According to my girlfriend, we had already killed the entire population of South Vietnam. She just watches too much television. Everyone around here knows the KIA's, killed in action, is greatly exaggerated. Any body part they ever found they counted it as one person. It did tend to look much better on television, at least the generals were happy.

"Attention!"

Moby springs to his feet. John stumbles from the cot and tries to stand up straight.

"Don't you come to attention when an officer enters the room?"

"Only when I..."

"Excuse the Corporal, sir, we had a long day and I'm sure he was asleep when you came in and didn't see you." Saved by John again, for some reason this officer really gets the better of me. I've never seen an OD actually make his rounds in Tent City before.

"What's that I smell in here?"

We look at each other groping for an excuse. I didn't know what to say, it just came out of my mouth. "We had to burn a rat, sir. Killed it inside the tent; there are lots of rats around here, sir."

"Couldn't you do it outside?"

"Didn't want to mess up the landscape, sir."

"I've taken about everything I'm going to take from you today. You're a disgrace to the Marines."

"Cool," I didn't know what else to say. I guess I was a disgrace to his Marine Corps. It really didn't bother me at all. In fact, after I thought about it for a while, I even felt proud.

"After formation in the morning, I want everyone in this tent to fall out for guard-duty at the ammo dump. I'm going to see to it that they make a Marine out of you in particular before you leave Vietnam."

Fear raced through my body. Four days and a wake-up and

I've got to be hounded by this lifer. My primary MOS or job in the service was a wireman, all I ever did was install phones around the base camp and artillery sights. I never had any reason to go into the bush. Didn't want to, there is no pride in being dead.

Later that night as we laid on our cots, John felt like talking.

"You about ready to go home?"

"I don't know, John. To tell you the truth, I'm a little scared."

"What in the hell do you have to be scared about, you're going home?"

"You remember Gary Elsrod?"

"Yeah, he was stupid. He reenlisted and went to Korea. That was really dumb."

"I don't know, John. I don't think he was dumb at all. You know he was afraid to go home. He told me so. When you think about it, it is scary. How are you going to feel when you're walking down the street and people are gawking at you like you're some kind of killer? What are you going to do, go to school and sit with some snot-nosed kid? What's Moby going to do, crawl through sewers and look for Gooks? And how about romance, how do you think you would go over with a round-eyed woman?"

"Romance, hell, I had romance this afternoon."

"See what I mean, John, just go to bed."

The next day it was cold and the rain had increased from a steady drizzle to a full-fledged monsoon. I actually found myself carrying a gun. My feet were wet for the last three hours and there wasn't a dry place to be found. The mud in the shallowest places was ankle-deep, and in the basins one could sink up to his waist and not walk. Even while you were standing still, you found yourself sweating from the humidity though it was raining.

My squad was to join up with a company of ARVN soldiers and walk via the road to the ammo dump. The small squad was to provide temporary protection to the area because the previous grunts who had secured the region were pulling back, an encouraging thought.

The ARVN company didn't show up. We waited three more hours in the rain before continuing without them. Because of the delay and the mud, it was obvious that we would not reach the ammo dump before dark. When it grew too dark to see well, orders came down to kneel in place and wait until first light.

It was too muddy to dig in. Anyone who lay down or fell asleep without positioning his head correctly on his helmet would drown. A loose perimeter was established in hopes that the mud would discourage any enemy attack. Charlie didn't like the mud any more than we did. The thought crossed my mind that Charlie didn't know our exact position, because we were just sitting out in the open

and nothing was happening.

A no light, no fire, red alert was ordered, and man-to-man communication in the darkness consisted only of an occasional touch or whisper. When a soldier sloshed by, no one could be sure if it was friend or foe. The absolute silence was devastating. I could see John smoking a cigarette cupped in his hand so no light could be seen, he was really good at it. It's quite hard until you got the hang of it.

Suddenly, all hell broke loose! Weapons were firing everywhere. Fools sloshed back and forth in the mud in all directions. No one was sure who was moving and where they were going. Thinking to myself, "don't fire, don't fire, the gook on the other side is just as scared as I am. What would you do if you had to shoot someone?" I simply couldn't deal with that thought. An old poster I had seen when I first arrived in Vietnam crossed my mind:

"Yankee, I swear to you  
With words sharp as knives  
Here in Vietnam, it is either you or me  
And I am already here  
So you must go!"

At this time there were no truer words to be found and I was ready to leave. We squeezed deeper into the mud and everyone, except me, kept firing. "What in the hell are they firing a?" I could see absolutely nothing. Suddenly, I knew how it must have felt at Wounded Knee in 1890. Everybody was firing at anything that moved.

John started firing flares into the air. As they intermittently floated to earth, bright light and good visibility alternated with complete darkness. Just as one flare exploded, I saw two NVA regulars pass by me. As I raised my M16 to fire John cut them both down, one fell just a few feet from me, too close for comfort.

"Rapid guard six come in, rapid guard six come in." Someone was on the radio giving out our location. Great, we're saved.

It seemed like hours but it was just a few minutes before our artillery started shelling the area several hundred yards to the north. The rumble occasionally lit the northern sky. Under the cover of the confusion, mortar rounds started walking through our perimeter but I felt a little better because of the bombing, they obviously knew we were here.

"Corpsmen up!" Someone yelled.

"Hey, doc, I got it in the chest, man. I can't breathe."

That voice was familiar, it was John. Doc and John were both out in the open. There wasn't any cover to be found. The only thing we could do would be to drag the dead NVA soldiers and place them around the wounded Marine. I never felt anything so heavy in all my life. I didn't know if they were that big or the fact that we

## Welfl—Short-timer

simply couldn't move because of the mud.

After John was taken care of, I tried to find the spot where I had left my gear. I was totally lost. Didn't care if I found the M16, but I would surely like to have that silly stick back.

It would soon be light and from a distance I could hear the sound of a Huey. Before I knew it, the helicopters were positioned about five hundred yards away. The firing had stopped, but we still had to run to make it the last five hundred yards.

Automatic weapon fire began coming from the Huey. Hopefully they were just clearing the area for us, but I didn't know for sure. I picked up John's arms and Moby grabbed him by his feet and we began to run. One-hundred yards, stop and drop your flak jacket. Two-hundred yards, stop and drop your helmet anything to make it lighter. If I make it to the chopper I'll never drink or smoke again. The last fifty yards, John's back side starts to drag the ground; we can't hold him up much longer but he doesn't complain.

After boarding the chopper, it was obvious that John would soon be all right. The Corpsman had saved his life with little regard for his own. After we settled in for the flight back, we soon realized we had left three M16s in the field, of course one of them was mine. I would have gladly left the rifle if only I could have had my stick back.

While flying back, it was difficult to sit and listen to the stories most of these Marines were telling. I felt as though most of these people really wanted to be here, very strange. How can anyone take pride in killing someone unless, of course, you're John Wayne. I know I'll sleep at night because I never fired a single shot and have nothing to feel guilty about.

1. Joe McDonald  
(Country Joe & The Fish) □

Miguel  
Alliegro

## The Great Star

I start the day out with a smile,  
and the air is clean and crisp.  
I prepare myself all the while,  
for the day's work in a wisp.

I get in my car to go to work,  
and get the engine running.  
While driving along the freeway,  
I admire the great star rising from the East,  
although its light is dim and red.

Its light becomes brighter and brighter,  
as I am almost reaching my destination.  
As it reaches its full golden radiance,  
it gives the earth its nourishment for the day.

What a great creation God has given us,  
when he called forth this wonderful star by saying:  
"Let there be light."

The plants of the earth retain their greenery,  
and look as new as a newborn baby.  
The great star with its golden radiance,  
puts a glow on everything dead.  
Mother Earth is alive again,  
after being dead in the dark days of winter.

As the day ends and my work is completed,  
the great star retires in the West.  
And then I look forward to the next day,  
when I will again see it perform its wonderful work.

*Cheryl  
Beeler  
Grey*

## Crusade

Midst coffee cups and scattered software  
And rejection slips skewered by a tack  
I stare  
At the screen and wish words were obedient.  
From eight to five  
(even though my sugar levels fight back)  
I ritualize  
Stroking the keyboard, petting the mouse  
Sorting words into a ceremony of sense.

### I claim the rite-

What if  
The words did as I bid?

—to right—

What if  
my words convinced them?

—for all the write—

What if  
Someone even paid me?

—Reasons.

"No one but a blockhead ever wrote for anything but money."  
Samuel Johnson

*Eric  
Schnell*

## I Have Communed with the Cheeseburger Men

I have communed with the cheeseburger men  
my ketchup was always distinguishable  
from thick vein blood  
of smell of touch of the tastyfry  
to testify  
the testes fry  
to tsetse fly  
thank god for sweet Al Schweitzer  
a better man than me  
but what of the dying children  
who have never even heard  
that missionaries  
are doing such good work.

*Eric  
Schnell*

## (Sound)

She whispers  
deep down all true souls are sad  
and honey you are at least  
sorrowful.  
Lying in need of love?

Suppose I was-but then again-I never love most rarely-  
or when I do-being most prodigal and pathetic-falling  
for dumb mean girls-constantly comparing penis sizes and  
devoted disciples of Mammon.

But she told me that she saw sadness not fear  
I assured her that I have always been fearful.

Forty miles north-west  
a coyote drags his shattered leg  
through field of poison sumac  
howling for his lost love  
(a lesson most obvious).

## Sunny

by Kwang Yein Chu

"Sunny." That is my aunt's American name. She is a Korean-born mother who has five children. When she immigrated here at first, she thought that America was the "best country" where she could make her dream come true. In spite of the fact that she could speak English, she could not get along with many Americans well because she did not realize that there were many cultural differences. She thought that good behavior in Korea was regarded as good manners in America as well. But actually American customs did not flow in the way that she expected. So, whenever she faced the cultural gaps, she felt very isolated. As a Korean mother, she eagerly tried to educate her children in Korean ways. Perhaps she tried to force her children to follow her in Korean ways because those were all she knew. Because of her unfamiliarity with American custom and because of her attempt to force Korean customs on her children, she often argued with her children.

It was dinner time. One of her daughters started to argue with her. Her daughter said angrily, "Don't bring your friends home, Mom. I don't like them." She was often embarrassed by her mother's Korean friends because their behavior seemed odd and unacceptable to an American-born daughter. They usually talked in Korean about their children. And my cousin did not want to be herself on the subject of their conversation because she could not detect what they were talking about her. Usually Korean parents do not praise their children before others because praising their own children in front of others is considered as the most foolish behavior they can display. But, the custom continued to bother my cousin because she could not find any reason to be deprecated at all. Sunny knew it. But she could not convince her daughter that she was not discouraging her daughter. Moreover, Korean parents often did not pay attention to their children's opinions. They always expect the same behavior that they had done during their childhood even in America. They do not want to believe that different living situations creates different behavior.

"Don't use my bathroom because you stink, Mom." Her daughter did not like smell of Korean food because *Kim Chi* has such a strong scent that it lingers on the body for a long time. *Kim Chi* is made of the mixture of oysters, cabbage, garlic, and other seasonings and Koreans let it age two or three days in order to enjoy good taste. Letting it age makes strong scent and my cousin does not eat *Kim Chi*. *Kim Chi* is one of the basic dishes on a Korean dining menu.

Sometimes after some of her family eat Korean food, she opens all windows to omit the unwanted scent of Korean food. Her words were very irritating to her mother. My aunt answered, "You make me so miserable, daughter. What kind of child are you?" She was really angry at her daughter. She could not calm down.

"You want to become the mother here instead of me?" My aunt said loudly and angrily. She added, "You want to control this home like a mother? I am your mother. I control this house, not you, daughter." She wanted to make it clear that she was in charge of her home instead of her children because even though she was living in America physically, she was still in Korea mentally. In Korea, parents are always superior to their children. Arguments with parents are not common in Korea. Actually it was impossible for her to be against her parents in her early age. Children do what they are told by their parents. Perhaps to a Korean-born mother, it is very difficult for her to change her accustomed ways of thinking.

Then Sunny turned to her husband and complained about her daughter's behavior. She said with blame, "You taught them wrong. You spoiled them too much. You ignored me, so, the children neglected me too." My uncle pretended that he was listening to her at first, but he was mad. He went to his room and slammed the door. My aunt raised her voice, "In this country when a child is 18 years old, she doesn't live with her parents. If you don't want to live here, pack your clothes and get out."

However, Sunny did not mean what she said. She was really worried about her daughters moving out. Whenever her children were out late, we could not sleep all night until they were home safely. She was a very caring mother. But when she was really angry, she lost her temper. If her daughter moved out and never came back, what would she do? Probably she would blame herself bitterly. The situation in which her children grew up was so different that she could not raise them like in Korea. Yet she still expected them to do what she did in her childhood.

Her daughter then mentioned Sarah, her older sister, because her mother loved Sarah the best. Sunny's daughter said with conviction, "Sarah agrees with me."

When she heard her daughter's words, Sunny was perplexed. She said firmly, "No, Sarah never said she did not like my friends. She never told me she did not like anything. She always said, "Yes, mom."

Her daughter replied decisively, "Yes, she did. She said she did like your friends." My aunt became miserable again. She said desperately, "Child, you think you are better than I, but you are not." And she added bitterly, "You cannot be better than your



Chu—Sunny

mother. You think you have a better education, so you are better than I. No way." She tried to convince herself that she was not inferior to her children. Also, Sunny wanted to tell her daughter that knowledge learned at school was not everything. She meant that in order to live in a society, one had to learn to respect others. But because of her poor English, she could not convince her child. Maybe her child understood what her mother tried to tell her, but she pretended not to comprehend her mother's words. Both felt a big cultural and generation gap. The argument lasted for awhile. Later on my aunt was tired of the argument. She kept quiet for a second, then told herself pessimistically, "U-ra-jil-Se-sang" which means "damn this world." □

LOVE,

I loathe the word that everyone longs for.  
The word that everyone pleads for.  
To feel at least once in their miserable life.  
If not, their hearts will soon turn to stone.  
The word that can not be defined.  
The word that is so hard to find,  
In their hearts  
And  
In their minds.  
No longer a blissful word  
When it starts to hurt.  
Soon, it will also be distorted

ToriRei

Love....

With stories,  
With songs,

With all minds whom are so wrong.  
About this amazing word that I hate,  
This word that has yet to enter my fate.  
How I wonder if it really means what everyone thinks,  
Or could it be a versaude of vessels that would soon sink

D  
E  
E  
P

Down into the blue sea.  
Where it starts to turn black as can be.  
With this so called "L O V E,"  
That so many people try to seek.

# Maternal Grandfather

by Miguel Alliegro

Very recently, I found myself attending a performance given by an 82 year old man. He was doing a blues music performance for this was a famous blues singer in the 1930's through the 1960's. As this man was sitting there entertaining us with his remarkable music, I thought about the only man I ever admired and loved. That man was my maternal grandfather. The reason I admired him was because of his great ability to personally attract people and the fact he was a self-made man.

My grandfather was like this blues singer in that he entertained. He entertained his family and friends with his army jokes which he acquired during his 30 year military career. He would always stimulate a lot of laughter in all of us. He had a great ability to attract people. I always considered him to be my best friend. When I was a kid, he never said no to me. He would take me to the supermarket in a red four-wheel wagon. When I went to Miami, I would always stop at my sisters for a walk through eighth street. This is a part of Miami which they call "Little Havana." It is very beautiful at night and it reminds people of Las Vegas.

My grandfather was what people would call "a self-made man." He went out on his own at the age of twelve. By the time he was sixteen, he entered the Cuban army with the help of his older brother, who happened to be in the military himself. At the time, a young man had to be at least eighteen to enter the army. My grandfather had to get in because it was the only way he wanted to support himself. Instead of putting his birthday down as 1908, they set it as 1906. As soon as he got in the army, he decided he wanted to have a military career. Soon afterwards, he started earning the respect of his fellow men. As he got older, he came to be regarded as one of the most highly respected military officials in Cuba.

My grandfather died four years ago at the age of 80. Three months after he died, I dreamed that he was alive again. The man I dreamed about was a young man dressed in a gray suit. By coincidence, my grandfather was buried in a gray suit. I did not dream about the old man my grandfather had been when he died. In this dream, he was young and vibrant. I kept exclaiming: "Grandfather, Grandfather, you are alive again." But he could not hear me or see me. He just kept laughing and laughing and could never stop. It was like he was in another world. I woke up the next morning and realized that I had a beautiful dream about the man I most loved and admired. □

## Chicken Charlie

by Eric Beasley

"Are you really gonna pour it on him," I giggled nervously.

"Yeah, sure," said Matt. He had a look of evil determination on his face. "We have to get back at him."

I wasn't sure exactly what Chicken Charlie had done. But that didn't matter. It seemed only natural to get back at him for something. I didn't like him. And Matt didn't either.

As the green glass of the Coke bottle began to fill with urine, the bottle turned the same ugly, wet color of the walls of the boys bathroom we were in. There was a dead silence that usually happens before you get caught by a teacher when you are doing something wrong.

"I think I hear a teacher coming," I stuttered. My stomach felt like a furnace.

"Oh, shut-up," said Matt. "What the hell's the matter with going to the bathroom in a Coke bottle. Ain't no one gonna say nothing."

The guilt of what we were doing was trying to overcome my nervousness. We had done plenty of things to Chicken Charlie. This wasn't any different. I didn't know why.

To take my mind off of the creeping regret, I thought of Chicken Charlie's head. I hated it. It was large and bald like a rotten peach. I once had him in a head-lock while Matt beat on him. I don't know what Charlie had done, but we were giving him a good beating. I never forgot the feeling of his head between my arm and rib cage. His crew cut scraped my arm and his dirty Redneck smell didn't come off me for hours. I hated his head. I hated Chicken Charlie.

"Here. Here's a Coke bottle," urged Matt. "Fill it up. C'mon."

"Naw. . . I can't. I already took a leak." My leg was more nervous than the rest of my body. It wouldn't stop shaking. I didn't know why. I looked around the corner. "We better go. I think someone's coming."

"Okay we've got enough," said Matt. He held up the urine filled Coke bottle like a trophy. "Let's go get Chicken Charlie."

As we casually strolled down the hall of East Side Elementary, I couldn't stop thinking about that bottle of piss in Matt's pocket. I was nervous. I started thinking that if Matt was shaking as much as I was, that bottle would spill all down his leg. I giggled to vent my anxiety. I looked over at Matt. He had an emotionless look of calculation. He knew what he was going to do with that bottle and who he

was going to do it to.

Matt was never nervous when dealing with Chicken Charlie. His hatred for Chicken Charlie was something he seemed to be born with. It didn't scare me, though. Matt was a great guy. When I first came to East Side Elementary, I didn't know anyone. Matt was my first friend here and had always been my best friend.

The first day I met Matt was the first day I met Charlie. I had been sitting by myself during lunch. Charlie came and sat beside me. He was dirty, smelly, and covered with scabs. I knew he was nothing but white trash. I just ignored him. A few minutes later Matt came by and gave Charlie the look a hungry dog gives you when he growls and thinks you're dinner. I could feel how scared Charlie was as Matt walked by. Charlie didn't shake. He didn't flinch. But his fear felt like the heat from an electric blanket. Matt walked by again and said something about Charlie's daddy and a cow. Charlie didn't acknowledge, but he heard Matt. I knew it. Matt walked by again, but this time he looked at me with a glance that assured me that it was Charlie that he was after. I looked at Charlie. My sympathy for him turned to disgust. How could anyone be so disgusting. I stood up and told Charlie that I thought he was a pussy and he made me sick. I looked over at Matt who was standing by another table. Matt heard what I said and smiled. He's been my best friend ever since.

As Matt and I walked out onto the playground, I looked over at his pocket to see if the bottle had spilled. His pants were dry. We were safe.

We walked over to the shade of the big oak tree by the swings. There was no one over there. There was never anyone under the tree. That was where Matt and I had always hung out. We even had some baseball cards hidden in the trunk of the oak. No one went over there. It was our spot.

We stood under the tree and scanned the playground for Chicken Charlie. Matt was real quiet. I started to think about that film we saw in class about the lions of the Serengetti, or something like that.

"He should be easy to spot today," muttered Matt.

"Why?"

"He's wearin' a suit," said Matt. "Heard him say somethin' 'bout his Dad havin' to go to court today. Said he had to look nice to his daddy's parole officer."

"Oh. Alright," I replied

We kept looking for Charlie. I started to think of the last time we ruined Chicken Charlie's clothes and how his daddy beat him so bad he didn't come back to school for two days.

"Do you think its such a good idea," I questioned. "I mean, I'm sure he deserves what we're gonna do to him. But his daddy's nuts.

He might kill him or break his arm or somethin'."

Matt looked at me sharply. He stared at me as if deep down inside he agreed with me, but something much more great and evil was taking over his mind. "You know what, I hope his daddy does kill him," Matt rasped in a quiet, hateful breath. "I hope that white trash shitbag dies. . . And if his daddy don't kill him. . . I will."

Matt's look shook me. I didn't know. I knew he wouldn't kill Chicken Charlie. But why did Matt hate him so much? I didn't know. But all of a sudden, I remembered that I hated Chicken Charlie, too.

After we sat under the tree in silence for a few minutes, I finally saw Charlie. Matt was right. He was wearing his best suit. Not a good suit, but his best suit.

Charlie was playing hopscotch by himself, trying to ignore the girls playing beside him. I paused a second as I looked at him. Something was different. I thought that for the first time, Charlie actually looked happy. I kind of enjoyed it. I was hesitant in telling Matt that I saw him. But as I turned to Matt, I could tell from the gleam in his eye that he had already spotted his prey.

"Wait, Matt," I said. But it was too late. He was moving towards Charlie. He was going for the kill. As I trailed behind him I saw Matt reach for his pocket. The bottle came out. I was nervous and started to feel my anxiety build. I could see Charlie laughing, hopping and genuinely enjoying the game he was playing. Something was different.

"Matt, wait a second," I tried to say, but the words weren't coming out right. Something was different. I didn't know. I hated Chicken Charlie. Matt drew closer to Charlie like a hawk. Charlie was involved in his happy game. Something was different.

"Whoa! Chicken Charlie!" screeched Matt as he swooped in on Charlie. Charlie's eyes opened wide and showed the sudden terror in his soul.

"Matt, don't do it. I just don't think this is right," I tried to say. But it never came out. It was too late. Matt had covered Charlie with urine.

Matt laughed and chanted Charlie's name in celebration. I felt like I was going to throw up. Charlie's bowed head lifted up. His large eyes soon disappeared as the tears of terror and shame covered his face like blood from a gutted deer. Something was different.

"Why did you do that," a girl shrieked. "Don't you know Charlie's daddy is crazy and'll kill him for gettin' like this."

Matt celebrated and Charlie dropped to his knees. Something was different. Charlie was sobbing. I didn't know. I approached Charlie.

"That's it," Matt screeched. "Kick him while he's down. Kick

the livin' shit out of him."

I didn't know. My stomach was pushing up into my mouth. My eyes started to swell. Charlie looked up at me. Something was different. I didn't know. "Kick him," screamed Matt. I didn't know. I hated Charlie. I didn't know. My leg sprung and my foot sunk into Charlie's ribs. Charlie wailed. Matt screamed in triumph. What had I done? I didn't know. □

Cassandra  
Harris

## Alcoholic

It burned my tongue as I held it in my mouth  
 Afraid to swallow as my gums numbed  
 Sensation fleeing from its presence  
 I let it slip down my throat  
 A path of fire that left no pain  
 But seem to ease the tensions of my soul  
 I felt a brief fire in my stomach  
 As the room began to spin  
 And my very bowels churned with increased anticipation  
 Another sip and all feeling seem to slip away  
 As it rolled down my throat and set my members blazing  
 My blood became a fire that burned briefly  
 Then rendered my whole body painless  
 The taste was awful, then there was none  
 When the glass was empty I felt null and void of emotion  
 Relieved of stress and care  
 I had no memory of finishing the bottle  
 As I slipped from my chair to the floor  
 And watched the room spin causing me to grow dizzy  
 Overtaken by the numb unconscious state I welcomed  
 It was the beginning

Cassandra Harris

## Nightmares

I awoke last night  
In a state of fright  
Overcome with feelings of dread.  
My pillow wet  
I thought from sweat  
Then the visions reappeared in my head.  
It was as though part of me died  
As I realized through the night I cried  
Over dreams that seemed so like reality.  
And even now I tremble and shake  
The nightmares still cause such heartache  
As it goes through my mind things that could be.  
All my courage shrinking  
I just can't stop thinking  
All the fear and despair seem so real.  
It's hard to stay sane  
When you're feeling such pain  
And you pray that these things you won't feel.  
It's not for myself I feel so much grief  
Which is why there can be no relief  
You see the nightmares were so very vile.  
Even now I must fight back the tears  
Wondering how to cope with my fears  
Of the things that could happen to my child.  
It's oh such a shame the world's so full of dirt  
You just want to shield them from all of the hurt  
So you teach them distrust in your efforts to cope.  
You tell them of strangers and others beware  
You feel you must sink to shock and to scare  
Deriving from this some false sense of hope.  
But in all this can we possibly find  
Prayers and guidance will give peace of mind  
Through all our attempts, our kids to assure.  
Oh God in Heaven help us not to despair  
And teach us to show our children we care  
So with our love and protection they may feel secure.

## Jimmy Youngblood | The Serpent

There once was a beautiful garden filled with trees  
and animals and plants.  
A man and a woman lived there completely free  
from pain and work and they danced  
joyously in front of their loving father  
and spent their days without  
a need to distrust any living thing so never bothered  
to attack a certain serpent with his own weapon of doubt.

He was a beautiful metallic beast whose fire  
ruby eyes stared deep into the souls of any mortal man.  
His long sinuous body rippled mesmerizingly  
along God's ground and he climbed a small tree  
in the middle of the garden and used his long  
razor-sharp forked tongue like a sword  
and stabbed deeply into the heart of the Lord  
as he told the woman something not completely wrong  
but not completely right and her naive eyes couldn't see  
past his cruel deceitful words until he  
had already managed to bite her with her own hand  
so that he could not truly be a liar.

There once was a nation trying desperately  
to cope with the hate of its oppressed and the bigotry  
of its oppressors. Though weakened with despise,  
the hearts of men began to unite till ruby eyes  
began to stare and swordingly bite the effective  
methods of peaceful movements with subjective  
words like "By any means necessary" which seemed  
to drown out the beautiful speech about a great man's dream  
of the world being one and installed a feeling of  
fear and distrust in men's hearts instead of love.

There once was a blue sky covering vast blue oceans  
filled with life and beauty. Their waves crashed  
incessantly upon clean shores which led  
up to vast forests and green prairies and  
beautiful mountains and deserts with clean sand;  
but now remains a weak planet bled  
of almost all of its life as the serpent smashed  
God's greatest work with his greatest notion...

## Old Friends

by Julie Hale Bibb

The first time I met her, she was sitting in the back seat of a taxicab, kissing my boyfriend. "Don't mind me, Sweetie," she drawled as I slid in beside them. "Ric and I are old buddies."

"Old buddies' my butt," I thought, and I would have been angry if Ric hadn't looked so terribly uncomfortable. For one thing, she was sitting on his lap and appeared to outweigh him by thirty or forty pounds. For another, Ric was the quiet, conservative son of a Methodist minister and was obviously quite taken aback and embarrassed.

It wasn't until we arrived at the restaurant and were joined by her date that I got a good look at her. She did outweigh Ric by thirty or forty pounds. She was also four or five inches taller than him and stunning, with wavy, black hair flowing past her waist, green, green eyes, and a creamy olive complexion. She walked with long, languid strides and leaned back a bit so she seemed to lead with her pelvis.

She directed her feline wiles at Ric all that evening and afterwards, too, but she never did hook him. Neither did I. He graduated that year and I never saw him again. She, on the other hand, has been my best friend for twenty years now.

It is still difficult for me to imagine how Debbie and I grew to be so close. A shared taste in men does not a friendship make, and, other than that, we had very little in common. She was a strapping, outspoken country girl who tended to leap right into the middle of things. I wasn't. She was aggressive and decisive and uncompromising. Not me. In private, she tended to get depressed, overeat, and feel totally insecure. I was an icon of calm, confidence, and stability. It could be this last difference that made our relationship successful.

In the three years that Debbie and I lived together, she periodically ranted and raved and preached and pranced around the house, shaking her fist in the air and tossing that gorgeous mane of hair, fluorescent green sparks shooting from her eyes. Even when her agitation was directed at me, her fits always ended with her dissolving into tears in my arms. I'd sit in the middle of her arms, and rock back and forth crooning words of comfort. I'd explain to her that all the joy and contentment she'd ever need in life lived in her heart. All she had to do was learn to let it shine.

She thought I was nuts and naive and needed to be protected. As I stumbled toward the apex of the learning curve of life, forgiving

all who tripped me up along the way, Debbie followed, kicking tail. Anyone who hurt me paid dues to Debbie. When my french horn teacher accused me of not being devoted enough to get in an adequate amount of practice time, Debbie explained that I was so devoted that I was working three jobs in order to be in college at all. She physically tossed Tom Greer out the front door one night when he couldn't quite believe that I really did want him to leave. She told the owner of Brownie's Bar and Grill that if I didn't get a raise I'd quit and take all my regular customers with me. My salary doubled that week. I never had the heart to ask her what she said to Glenn Webb the night I caught him out with another woman. He told me later that he'd wanted to apologize but been afraid he might run into Debbie.

Over the years, we seem to have tempered one another. Today, Debbie is calm, content, successful, and genuinely happy. She has mellowed out. I, on the other hand, toss an occasional fit. I shake my fist and stomp my feet and rant and rave. And Debbie sends me Hallmark Cards that say, "I believe in you." □

now  
that we've roared  
silently  
through the city of possibility  
like two intrepid tigers  
marking our secret territories  
with nocturnal tokens  
of our robust appetites

only half-empty  
bottles of wine and  
smoking rumpled sheets  
remain  
on a bed  
where I now sleep  
alone

amidst the neon-lighted ruins  
of a soundstage  
without redemption  
in a cursory place  
truly a big small town

Gregory  
Stephen  
Rodriguez | Fires

I wait  
like a captive awaits release  
for the phone calls  
from a pedestaled city  
where it will always be  
nine hours later  
so that I may return  
to sleep

I've heard lately  
that your city is burning  
but now you've been here  
and learned  
that "the city of angels"  
is burning too.

The moon was full; the night was cold and damp and clammy as a mummy's hand. Clouds shaped like witches on brooms flew through the sky, and a single owl hooted from high up in a gloomy, leafless tree. It was a perfect night for startling things; a perfectly frightening October night.

It was Halloween . . . the best night of the year for roaming the streets in search of tricks and treats and adventures. Every kid's bag would be filled to bursting with candy and toys, candy and coins, candy and . . . well, candy!

Cindy and Jenny were best friends. They were nine years old, and they had been planning their costumes since school started in August. Cindy was going to be a ballerina. Her mom had worked for weeks sewing her outfit. It was a beautiful ballerina costume with a tutu of glowing white netting over a silk bodysuit embroidered with delicate white pearl beads, sequins and glitter. It had long sleeves to keep off the evening chill, and it was perfect!

Jenny's mom had helped out with her costume, too. She was a fairy princess with a long gown of red velvet. A purple, satin cape was elegantly draped over her shoulders. The crowning touch was the rhinestone-encrusted hairpiece, shaped like a crown, that used to be her grandmother's. She looked like true royalty; ready to greet her admiring subjects and collect all the candy and treats they had to offer, all just for her!

The girls rushed home, late from school, to their waiting costumes. They hurried up and put them on. Cindy tying her toe-shoes, said breathless with excitement, "Come on Jenny, your crown is as close to the middle of your head as it's going to get! I'm ready to go."

Jenny, impatiently stamped her foot, "Now, I waited for you to finish your late homework after school, you can wait one little minute for me." She made a final adjustment to her princess crown and before they knew it, they were tumbling out of the house. Off they rushed, into the crowd of other children making their way from house to house in search of treats.

It seemed forever that they had been walking. Their goody bags, filled to the brim, were very heavy. Somewhere off in a tree an owl hooted; the wind blew cold and wet.

"Let's take a break at this next house." Cindy sighed heavily. Her candy weighed so much the handle of her bag was making rope burns on her palm. "My feet are killing me in these toe-shoes."

"Great, my crown keeps slipping off. You can help me fix it." Jenny replied as she plopped down on the front porch of the next

## The Night the Pumpkin Winked

by *Therese M. Duke*

house in line, a little whoosh of air billowed her cape out around her.

The girls sat close to each other giggling and sharing candy. Cindy was carefully attaching some hair pins around the base of Jenny's crown to hold it more securely. Neither girl noticed the big, hulking shadow appear behind them, growing larger and larger as it came closer and closer.

At the last minute, Cindy and Jenny looked over their shoulders to glimpse the awful thing stalking them. Before they could run away. . . a great black cape swept over them and they disappeared. . .

. . . Mysteriously, they found themselves in a big old room. It smelled musty; cobwebs hung from the ceiling and the furniture. They were sitting in the middle of a creaky old floor. Before them towered an old woman with a wart on her nose, dressed all in black. She was the ugliest woman they had ever seen. A broom rested in the corner. Something skittered and snuffled over the floor across the room.

"Well my little dumplings. . .," the old woman cackled through broken and yellowed teeth, "you should know better than to sit on strange porches on Halloween night. You've disturbed my beauty sleep." The old woman threw back her head and laughed the most horrible laugh Cindy or Jenny had ever heard. Goosebumps broke out on their arms and they huddled closer than ever.

"Wwwhhhat do you want from us?" Cindy stammered, trying to appear brave through knocking knees and chattering teeth. She and Jenny clutched each other as best they could. Cindy's tutu was a little stiff though, and threw them off-balance.

"I've decided to grant you both a wish. Any wish you'd like," said the witch with a bemused, crazy grin. She squinted an eye and looked down her long, crooked and bumpy nose. "Only, it better be the right one! And I can guarantee that you won't like the alternative." Her mouth made a snapping sound as it closed, like a turtle.

Jenny and Cindy were smart girls. They knew this spooky old lady meant business, they had to get out of there, and fast, because the woman was just too ugly and scary for words, and anyone that ugly had to be a witch—not to mention the wart on her nose. They put their heads together and whispered to each other.

"Say, say now! You two stop that," grumped the old woman. "What is your wish going to be? Hurry up and no stalling about it. You have two seconds." The ugly woman rolled up her sleeves over knobby, blue-white elbows. A spider fell from her hair, crawled across her shoulder, and disappeared into a fold of cloth at her neck. Floorboards creaked and the house seemed to shudder at the awful, scratching sound of the woman's voice.

Cindy and Jenny turned to the witch and said together, "Why, our one wish in all the world. . ." they paused, measuring their words very carefully. The old woman leaned forward, expectantly; a strand of drool fell from her lips, "our one wish in all the world. . . is to be as beautiful as you are." They made their faces look as serious as possible. It was important that the witch believe them so they could make their next move.

Just as they planned, the witch was completely surprised by their wish. Her wide, bulbous eyes got even wider and her nasty, sharpened face softened—if you could call it that. More spiders fell out of her hair as she patted it and smoothed her ugly old cape. "Why, that is a wonderful wish," the witch gloated as she turned to admire herself in the mirror hanging on the wall.

At that exact moment Cindy and Jenny bolted through the front door, down the steps and out into the street. They ran like the devil was after them. Actually, it wasn't the devil, but the witch herself. She swooped a big, nasty clawed hand at them as she flew by on her broom. The girls ducked behind a tree for protection. An owl hooted and fluttered right above their heads, scaring the heck out of them. They ran again, as fast as they could, and up ahead they saw a bunch of kids, with their parents, trick or treating. When they caught the group they were panting and taking big gulping breaths. Both girls had side pains from running so hard and fast.

In their dash to freedom they had left their Halloween treats in the gloomy, smelly room of the witch's house. But neither of the girls seemed to mind. They were relieved they had escaped from that ugly old woman.

"Where have you two young ladies been!" scolded Mrs. Johnson, one of the neighborhood parents chaperoning the children this evening. "I was beginning to get worried." She looked around with a worried frown in her forehead.

"It's a long story, Mrs. Johnson," Jenny said. "We're okay, we were just playing, but we lost our goodie bags!" Her bottom lip extended and she pouted a bit to make her point. Cindy just stood around looking forlornly at her toe-shoes.

"Well, don't worry about that," said Mrs. Johnson. She pulled two extra bags out of her purse and gave them to Cindy and Jenny to use. "Make sure you hold on to these. Now, get along with yourselves, the evening is almost over and we'll be heading home soon. Make the most of what time you've got left."

The girls thanked Mrs. Johnson and ran off to more adventures ahead, they had a lot of trick or treating to do to make up for all the candy and treats they had lost at the old witch's house.

"Who do you think that ugly old woman was?" Jenny asked Cindy as soon as they were by themselves.

"I don't know, but she sure was scary. . . And double-ugly!" Cindy replied. "We better watch out and keep our eyes open. She might come back for us."

Just as Cindy finished speaking, a black shadow passed over the moon. Clouds scurried by and somewhere an owl hooted a long and mournful sound. They looked up and saw, far away in the sky, a figure that looked an awful lot like the old witch on her broom. Faintly, very faintly the sound of a spooky, eerie cackle came to their ears.

They shivered, walking on to the next house in search of treats. There was nothing to be afraid of, after all, this was Halloween night, a night in which anything and everything was possible. A magical night when nothing is as it seems; when little girls are transformed into ballerina's or fairy princesses; and spooky witches fly through the dark, black night.

They climbed up the front steps of the next house, treat bags open and ready. On the porch near the door, the flickering light of a candle glowed through the gaping mouth of a carved pumpkin. Its monstrous orange head seemed to hang suspended in mid air with a shrouding black cloth gathered tightly beneath its chin. Jenny reached up to ring the doorbell and both girls shouted, "Trick or Treat!" The door opened just a crack and a large, gnarled, blue-veined hand dropped two black licorice spider-candies into their bags. The hand slowly retreated and the door snapped shut.

The girls looked at each other and curled their lips. "Yyyuuuukk!" they chimed, peering into their goodie bags at the blob of black sweetness oozing all over the bottom of the bags.

Muffled and very faint, they heard the sound of bemused snickering coming from behind the door. The hairs on their necks stood up. With their skin crawling, they turned to each other and whispered, "Let's get out of here."

Dashing for the stairs they passed too closely by the carved pumpkin. Cindy, in her panic, accidentally bumped into it and the head and cloth went tumbling toward the ground. She moved quickly to catch the head before it hit the floor and in mid-grasp, the pumpkin swooped through the air, flying away from her steadying hand. Floating by itself, just out of reach, its face seemed to transform itself. Suddenly it looked exactly like the old witch's face. Her carved and cavernous mouth moved to speak, "Have a lovely evening, my little dumplings!" One triangular eye closed in an amused wink, with candle light flickering out of its corners. The jagged mouth cackled with glee and menace.

Cindy and Jenny turned white as ghosts. Squealing, the girls were off and running again into the night, a silent scream caught in their throats... □

Michael S. Lubrano

## Wind Song

When darkness comes I close my eyes.  
My spirit soars, on wings of eagles flys.  
The sun rises high to the anointed spot,  
above wind carved mountains this jewel burns hot.

Inlaid in a turquoise and silver sky. Ebony and Heather  
spirits fly high. Rise and glow in response with amber  
light. Mother and daughter, children of nature of day and  
of night.

Mythical breed of the once dominant race, like the free-  
spirited bison that once roamed this hallowed place.  
Such independence you see no more only in places where eagles soar.  
The most beautiful sight I've ever seen are these two enchanted  
creatures running wild and free. Thundering across the desert  
plains, graceful mustangs no one can tame.

Pure of breed, of soul and heart. The fire of the sun  
burns deep within their heart. Together their hearts  
beat as one, mother and offspring they hear the ancestral  
call. And so they roam the plains in search of the one.  
The great White stallion, three hearts beat as one.  
For only here in the wide open space can three dominant  
souls find love, peace and faith. And so it goes the  
unwritten code of the free, no one above the other  
all equal all free.

## The Pick-Up

by Barbara Temple

The stairs creaked as the two men made their way to the second floor. Down the hall, a baby cried loudly and someone was screaming from the floor below for it to be quiet.

"Are you sure this is the right place," Eddie asked his partner in a whisper. "How could she be here. Who's paying for her rent?"

Eddie shrugged his shoulders and took the piece of paper from his pocket. "That's not our job. Our job is to pick her up and take her back." He checked the numbers on the paper against the ones on the door and nodded. "2-C, yep, this is it. Let's just pick her up and then we can get some lunch. I'm starved."

"We're in luck," Lou smiled. "The door isn't even locked. This is going to be a piece of cake." He pushed open the door slowly and stepped back. "What is that smell? Smells like something dead in there."

"Come on, Lou. You're not going to let a little bad smell slow us down are you. The woman is a lousy housekeeper. We can't all be perfect." He pushed past Lou into the apartment and looked around. The kitchen sink was piled high with dirty dishes, and a layer of rotting food covered the cabinets. The refrigerator stood open, and he could see the rotting meat on the shelves. "I guess they cut off the electricity," he stated, flipping the light switch to no avail. So much for he ability to handle money. No wonder they called us."

In the bedroom, a lone figure cowered in the corner, hugging her knees tightly. The tears streamed down her pale face, gathering strength at her chin before leaping off onto her torn dress. The sobs racked her frail body and as Lou moved closer, she huddled more tightly to the wall.

"You might as well come along with us, Honey" Eddie muttered in a tired voice. "We got to get you back to the hospital, and we ain't got all day."

"Why don't we just grab her and get on with it?" Lou sighs, it's almost lunch."

"You never know how these people are going to act." the younger man warned. "I had one pull a butcherknife on me once. Nearly cut off my little finger."

"She ain't got no knife," the older man scoffed. "She's scared to death. Let's just grab her and get out."

"They said she's pregnant, due any day. We can't spook her. I ain't about to deliver no baby on what they pay me. I'm going to do it just like the man said."

Lou edged closer to the frightened girl. "Come on honey, lets go for a ride in the nice car. Old Lou here, will show you some nice places."

The girl stops sobbing and looks into the old man's face. "Daddy, is that you? Did you come to take me home?"

The men looked at each other and the first winks at the second. "Yeah, honey, it's me," Lou lies. "Come on, we're going for a ride to . the zoo, yeah, that's right, we're going to the zoo."

The girl slowly unfolds her legs and wipes her tear stained face with the hem of her dress. She smooths the lace on her imaginary pinafore and asks without looking up. "Can we get ice-cream?"

"This is going to be real easy," he says under his breath to Eddie. "Sure, honey. All the ice-cream you can eat, just hurry up."

The girl walks forward slowly, and the attendant smiles at her. "That's it, honey, come to papa."



## Temple—The Pick-Up

"Wait til I get my doll," she says suddenly running past them into the kitchen. The sound of breaking glass and banging pans fills the room. "I've got to get my doll!"

Suddenly she pulls something from the bottom of the sink and cradles it to her young breast. "Now we can go to the zoo," she sighs. "Let's go to the zoo, Daddy."

Lou moved toward her and a strange pallor crossed his face. "Oh my God . . ." he barely managed to say before he empties his stomach onto the dirty yellow floor.

The second attendant moved closer to him, trying to find out what was wrong. "Lou, what is it, what's wrong?"

The older man cannot speak. he just drops to his knees as the convulsions continue to wrack his body.

"What the hell. . ." Eddie asks, not really wanting to know.

"Don't you feel well, Daddy?" the girl asks politely, still clutching the object. "Do you want to hold my dolly?"

Eddie gasps as he realizes what the "dolly" is. My God, my sweet Jesus, " he repeats over and over again.

Slowly, he regains his senses. He swallows hard to keep down his breakfast. "Here, let me play with your dolly." He removes his jacket and holds his arms out.

"Here she is," the girl coos. "Now be extra careful."

The man wraps the decaying body in his jacket and says quietly. "Come on Lou. You take the girl downstairs to the ambulance while I call this in. I don't know what I'm supposed to do about this?"

After placing the jacket clad body on the unmade bed, the attendant dialed the hospital with trembling fingers.

"Yes, this is Eddie Monroe. We found the girl alright. Yeah, just like the landlord said. No, she didn't put up a fight but we have a problem. Yeah, I guess she had the baby a couple of weeks ago. No, it's dead. No, I can't tell if it was born dead. I'm not a coroner. I can barely tell it was a baby. Hey, just shut up and listen. Get someone on this line who can tell me what I'm supposed to do now. That's easy for you to say. Just get someone who knows something beside the fact that this is a real mess. Yeah, I'll wait." He sat listening to the silence on the other end for what felt like an eternity.

He shook his head slowly as he thought of the other man. "Yeah, Lou. This is gonna be a real easy pick-up. Piece of cake." □

## Plant Closing

by Barbara Temple

The man slumped against the cold metal fence and cried. With head bowed, and fingers entwined in the mesh of the chain link, he felt the life draining from his body. This job had been his hope. This job had been the future of his family. He had been on top of the world this morning. Now, he didn't know if he had the strength to go home. Joseph Montoya prayed to the Virgin Mary for her intervention in his time of need, but he knew even she could not save his family.

It had begun so well this morning. Little Erica had placed a rose in the buttonhole of his faded denim jacket and smiled at him with the toothless grin of a six year old.

"You will be the bestest papa there," she lisped. "I am so happy. Mama says we can move out of the shelter now. Can I have my own bed?"

Joseph laughed with the child. "Yes, my little one. After today, we will have a new life. Finally, I will have enough money to buy you a bed of your very own."

"Joseph," Angelina chided. "Don't get her excited. You know that it will be a while before you have worked enough to afford a bed. We will be happy if we can move out of the shelter. New beds can wait."

"Now, Mama," Joseph clicked his tongue at his wife. "You must have faith in your husband. I have a good job. I do not have to worry about the immigration coming for us. We are legal. I do not have to pay *coyotes* to allow me to work. This job is a new beginning for us. Let us get excited."

The woman looked sternly at her husband. "You must remember that we have had difficult times in the past. It is better that we do not hope for too much. Then we will not be disappointed when bad things come."

"Hush woman," he took her in his arms. "Bad times are over for us. After today, we are going to be just like millions of other Americans."

She merely shook her head slowly. "Take your lunch, Mr. American and go to work. You cannot be late." She pushed the oily brown bag toward him and he playfully slapped her ample behind.

"You must go out today and find us a place to live. When I get home, we will cash my paycheck and put down the deposit." He looked deeply into her eyes. "I mean this."

Angelina suddenly remembered the child playing on the floor at their feet. "Go find your brother, and tell him to come up and

## Temple—Plant Closing

finish getting ready for school.”

Erica obeyed reluctantly and left the small room the family shared.

“Joseph, I am worried,” the woman sighed. “There has been much talk of the plant closing. What will happen to us if that happens?”

Joseph placed a calloused hand against his wife’s cheek. “The men have told me that whenever the workers ask for more money, the managers tell them that the plant is making no money and it will close. The men say that it is just a way for the management to threaten the workers so they will give in. They say the plant will just give us less money than we ask for and all will be forgotten. They say it is only a bluff.”

“But what if it isn’t?” Angelina clutched at his sleeve. “What if they are telling the truth? Where will we be then?”

“We must not think of things like that,” Joseph said quietly. “Now let me get to work, Woman.”

He almost ran to work. He was happy to be alive. Happy to be an American. He only stopped once on his way, to give his lunch to a man standing on the street corner. A tattered sign hung around the stranger’s neck. The “WILL WORK FOR FOOD” was barely readable. “You need this more than I do,” Joseph smiled. “May God be with you and help you.”

The plant was only a few blocks away from the shelter. Men milled around the front gate. Men were always milling around the front gate, hoping for work. This is how he had gotten this job. One day, a man came out of the plant and offered him a job sweeping up the metal shavings in the pattern shop. That had been a month ago. Now they were going to teach him to be a pattern maker. They said in time, he could make a lot of money. But today, the men milling around the gate seemed angry. They spoke loudly among themselves, occasionally hitting the fence with their metal lunchboxes and yelling toward the plant.

“What is the meaning of this?” Joseph asked one of the men slowly as he came to the fence and saw the large padlock and chain holding the gate closed. “Why have they not let the workers in?”

“There are no more workers,” the man spat out. “The plant is closed. See that sign. That’s our epitaph. The sorry bastards closed the plant rather than pay us what we deserve.”

“But why would they do that? Why would they close down a whole plant?” The words caught in his throat. This is what his wife had said would happen. Sometimes he wondered if she was a *bruja*. If only she were, he thought, then she could fix this.

The other men wandered off, replaced by others who were equally upset. Men came and went, mumbling, cursing, some in

## Temple—Plant Closing

tears. But Joseph stayed, slumped against the fence; fingers entwined in the cold metal mesh. His head bowed, the blood colored flower hanging from his jacket by a single thorn. Over his head read the placard, PLANT CLOSED. He was truly an American today, like a million others. □

Tamara J.

Roles and masks, Taylor  
Fragmentary slices  
Of my life are rationed out  
Like pieces of bread.

Who am I?  
Various devices  
Are employed for my attention  
I have been bled.

I must be  
In a mental crisis  
As my soul now s|u|b|d|l|v|l|d|e|d  
Towards  
chaos  
is  
led.

Face the son.  
Solitude entices.  
Mind and spirit reunited  
Clashing voices have fled.

IAMWHOLE.

I wake with a start to  
find strings in my heart  
tied in distraction.  
With obedient leaps  
teetering feet  
stamp out a dance  
to cries  
behind a frightened  
red round face  
and wooden heart.

## Superwoman

Theo  
Oscar  
Johnson  
The  
Mockery  
of Me

Like a stone facade around  
an ocean his face  
is still  
and distantly concerned  
with the whys of  
the pigeons.

To shake up the stillness  
(or for some hidden sake)  
his fingers absently  
design a choreography.

## U.S. Government II

by Don Alonso

As I approach my eighth week and thirty hours in volunteer service to the Houston Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals I still find it hard not to get emotional when remembering my first day in volunteer orientation. First some background.

As a requirement for a U.S. Government class at the University of Houston-Downtown, a student has the option of doing at least twelve hours of volunteer service for a political party and discouraged by the existent third party I decided to give the SPCA a call and volunteer my service there. After all, one of the many values passed on to me by my parents was the love of animals.

From this point on it would be very easy to quote statistics and give excerpts from the volunteer orientation handout. It would be as easy to just simply state the various odd jobs I did around the facility. However, from this point on this is a story of people, not animals, of the people that staff the Houston SPCA.

Orientation day was a Sunday, a rainy, overcast, dull, depressing day. Perhaps that added to the dejection I felt almost as soon as I entered the facility on Studemont Drive. Slowly it began to dawn on me that while this place was full of animals, not all of those critters were destined to meet a pleasant fate. I love animals too much to work here. I wanted to turn an run. Grown men (this one, eight a United States Marine, veteran and father) don't do that, they face challenges and resolve them to the best of their ability.

The orientation supervisor, a young lady named Karen Tanner-Holt, was assisted by Mellisa Brooks that day. Karen started a cheery but informative session. I found my attention wandering to the volunteer orientation handout. Among the first pages was a sheet titled "Before you begin . . ." by Dr. Thomas A. Beckett, D.V.M. Reading the letters second line the spigot that held back the by now raw emotions could no longer hold the flow. One silent tear followed another while reading the Doctor's words, "Put bluntly, the fact is that thousands of animals are killed in the shelter each year." Fortunately I sat in the back of the room and none of my fellow volunteers saw my sadness. A grown man crying, I don't think I could have stood the embarrassment. Ms. Tanner-Holt could see me though, I expected she'd offer some sympathy, some word of encouragement. None came.

The volunteer group was next taken on a tour of the facility. All of the volunteers were allowed to pet the animals during the thirty minute circuit of the buildings. During this visit to the inner reaches

of the SPCA I saw near a dozen people tending to the animals. There were another dozen or so people looking for that special pet. I could not bring myself to go near the animals, my heart was breaking and the tears were flowing, now unstoppable.

At the end of the excursion the group was returned to the volunteer center. I must now admit I have no idea what Ms. Tanner-Holt or Ms. Brooks might have had to say during the next ten minutes before adjourning the orientation session. I was too damned busy wiping red eyes and feeling sorry for myself. I knew I could not work at the SPCA. I could never bring myself to look a critter in the face and offer it love that it might never feel again. I was busy trying to figure out a way to gracefully un-volunteer myself. An explanation came to mind for the tears. Allergies, I have horrible allergies to animals. By the time the others had filed out of the room there were just the volunteer coordinators and this whimpering heap of manhood left. I decided to face the music and tell them that I was just too emotional to handle their job, thank you very much and good luck.

Those two young ladies have more understanding of the human being between them than whole armies of psychologists or therapists can muster. They, in a few short minutes, made me feel that my problem was not unique. They'd also overcome the feelings and were still working in animal welfare after several years. From somewhere in the brain came the message, "If these two ladies can summon the courage, well then so can I." They explained that not all workers at the SPCA had to work with the animals. I couldn't believe what I was hearing, they wanted me to work in the office where they needed help and that my work there would be just as important as if I were anywhere else in the organization. I jumped at the chance to be associated with such great people. They'd notify me within the week if I'd been accepted to work there.

Six days later I was sure that they'd by now have figured out how to tell me nicely, "Thanks, but no thanks." When the call finally came I was resigned to working for, heaven forbid, the Democrats. But no, they'd cleared a spot for me in the first office on the left and "we'll see you next Wednesday," were their words.

Wednesday found me sitting in a small office with a very dedicated young lady named Courtney. She'd be showing me what needed to be done. I was to help in the management of the mailing lists of names of people hopefully sympathetic to the SPCA's cause. Several stacks of computer printout held those names. After dealing with the first hours work I had the hang of it and was amazed at how many of those people who'd been sent requests for a charitable donation had actually sent funds.

On the request for donation enclosures that I was posting to the

computer printout were often written short but heart touching notes. One such note will stand out in my memory forever. It said, "I am out of work, this will be my last donation for a while, I am sorry this contribution is so small." It had to be hard for that person to part with that contribution. Thank God there are people like that one, probably not far from charity himself, who will put the needs of creatures who cannot help themselves ahead of his own.

In the following weeks I have met on a daily basis more and more of the people who staff the Society and many more of my fellow volunteers. Every one of them are devoted to the organization and to each other and to the animals that they help. There are a few animals that are the pets of the staff. I have seen three cats who've somehow escaped the grim reaper and who have the run of the facility. They roam from office to office brightening each workers' life for the few minutes they can spare their human benefactors. After a while they settle down on some stack of office paperwork and become useful as feline paperweights.

Perhaps the undisputed king and most celebrated of the house pets is Gilligan, a golden retriever. This pooch made the news several years ago. He'd been abandoned on an island in the bay. Heavens knows how long he'd been there. He was recovered by the SPCA staff in sad condition. Gilligan now lives with one of the Society's officers full time. He has his job however, he goes out with the educators to give lectures to the local school children on the proper treatment of animals. He does a bang up job I'm sure.

I have come to respect these people at the SPCA. They in addition to making a great contribution to society have learned many things that are not commonly found in everyday life. Many of us are blessed with patience and compassion, these folks have the good fortune to put those virtues to daily use. They have learned to suppress their emotions and get on with the job of caring for the animals and educating those who are not in the know.

Why do they do it? They obviously have a great love, greater than anyone is capable of describing, a great love for those of God's creatures who cannot take care of themselves.

Karen Tanner-Holt has moved to North Texas and Melissa Brooks had taken her place at the SPCA. I am certain that Ms. Tanner-Holt is already involved in animal welfare in that region of Texas, and animal welfare is the better off for her involvement. □

Leonard  
Hight

## The Student and the Poet

Asked the student of the poet,  
"Tell me how'd you get up there,"  
"Traveled inward" said the poet,  
"Sometimes outward and with care."

"Is there not a straighter path,  
Or a route that's not as slow?"  
Asked the student of the poet,  
"Just how quickly can I go?"

The poet laughed and spoke again,  
"You'd be here at my side,  
If you could simply mount your words,  
"So quick would be that ride."

"The traveling that a poet does,  
Must often change direction,  
It is measured not in miles or time,  
But simply by inspection."

"Going up is not the plan,  
The plan is only knowing,  
And getting there cannot compare,  
With all the thrills of going."

"For poets must decide before,  
They even start to write,  
That theirs will be a different life,  
From darkness into light."

The student pondered this a while,  
And then with much disdain,  
Said "I fear that you make fun of me,  
I also have a brain!"

"Perhaps that's it" the poet sighed,  
"You equate this work with 'smart.'  
Intellect is not the need,  
For this work you need heart."

"But you're published" said the student,  
 "And that surely has its perks,  
 Even children so they tell me,  
 Are delighted by your works."

"So please tell me in the simplest form,  
 At least how I can start,  
 I will be forever grateful,  
 For some knowledge of this art."

"In simplest form" the poet smiled,  
 "A challenge that might be,  
 For all I've tried to share with you,  
 And still you do not see."

"In simplest form I picked up scraps,  
 Of life and bits of time,  
 I saved them sometimes years on end,  
 And sometimes made them rhyme."

## "Laura Lee"

by Tondra Luciene Wheeler

Laura Lee was a beautiful child. She had long blonde hair that hung down to the middle of her back. Her eyes were green like a Caribbean sea, so beautiful, so clear. Her lips were a natural red like fresh ripe strawberries. Her mind was like a running tap, open and free. Her body was small and fragile. "You're the most beautiful five old year in the world," that's what her mother used to tell her.

Recently Laura's mother, Amanda Lee had changed. She slept both day and night. When she was awake, she was always angry.

"The demons are talking about you. They want you, Laura." Amanda told Laura.

"They have told me about the wicked ways of wicked little girls like you. I'll be watching you." she warned. Laura was afraid of Amanda.

Laura spent her days in silence. She was not allowed to have any friends over to the house. "Wicked little girls can't have any wicked little friends in my house." Amanda told her. Laura nicknamed Amanda "the witch." "The witch" never cleaned the house, washed the clothes, or cooked the food.

"The witch" was mean to everyone. "That's why daddy ran

away." Laura thought. "The witch" was only nice to her potions and serums. The potions, she snorted through her nose. The serums, she took through a needle in her arm. "The witch's" potions were making her meaner and uglier everyday. "The witch" had lost all her natural glow.

She had long dingy stringy blonde hair instead of lustrous sun-kissed glowing blonde hair. Her face had become wrinkled and creased. Her potions and serums sucked the beauty from her face. "the witch's" eyes were dark and cloudy. Laura thought her mother had a crooked nose.

Even with all her mother's faults, Laura loved her mother greatly. "The witch" is just lonely and wants to be loved" Laura thought. Laura did everything the witch asked her to do without question. She tried to please the witch as best as she could but it was never enough. It would only be a matter of time before "the witch" would turn into something more evil.

One morning, Laura, hungry as usual, pushed a chair next to the high kitchen cabinet above the sink. She climbed on the counter top and reached for a cereal bowl. As she removed the bowl out of the cabinet, it slipped out her hands and shattered into a million pieces on the floor.

"I'm sorry, Mamma!" Laura cried.

Amanda slowly raised her head from the table. She glared at Laura. Her yellow eyes burned through Laura's chest. Amanda clenched her teeth with a tight grin. Laura knew what that look meant. It always meant the same ... trouble.

"Sorry...what do you mean sorry?" Amanda yelled. Uncontrollable tears flowed from Laura's eyes.

"I'm sorry, Mama! I'm really sorry!" Laura whined.

"You're always sorry!" Amanda yelled. Amanda quickly rose from her chair and grabbed the kitchen knife laying on the table.

"No Mamma! Please No!" Laura yelled.

Laura quickly ran upstairs to her room and locked the door. "The witch" slowly crept after her. Laura heard Amanda coming. She quickly hid in the clothes closet under a pile of dirty clothes. She knew that the witch would not be able to find her there.

"Come here, you little bitch! Mommy has something for you!" The witch yelled. Laura heard the door unlock and the door knob slowly turned. She took a deep breath and held it. Surely the witch, her mom, would not be able to hear her.

Laura heard Amanda turning her bed and toys over.

"I'm coming for you, deary." Amanda said sweetly.

Laura burrowed herself deeper into the pile of clothes. The room suddenly fell into silence. Laura strained to hear her mother's

presence. She heard breathing.

"Is it her, or me?" Laura thought.

Her heart pounded through her chest. It was the only sound that she could distinguish under the thick pile of clothes in which she hid.

The door slammed. Footsteps faded off into the distance. Laura threw off the pile of clothes and sigh deeply in relief. "The witch" hadn't found her. It was time for a plan. The plan of action was simple: Get out of the closet, lock the bedroom door, and wait. The witch would cool off, bring her a happy meal from McDonald's and set it outside her bedroom door. "The witch" would then become Amanda, Laura's mother.

"I'm so sorry, Laura. Mommy didn't mean to hurt you, but you made Mommy so mad. Just be a good little girl so that Mommy won't have to hurt you anymore." Amanda would tell her. Then Amanda would hug her tightly and read her a bedtime story.

For now, however, she would have to protect herself and take care of the toys that were wounded in the battle.

Laura gently eased the closet door open. The closet door had to be opened gently because the witch Amanda would hear it and then she would return. One run-in with the witch a day was enough for her. Laura stepped out of the closet. She moved towards the bedroom door. She froze. Heavy breathing came from the corner the door. White smoke had formed a cloud in the corner.

Amanda sat at Laura's round play table on a little hard plastic chair. Her legs were crossed. She bounced them vigorously up and down. One of her arms was folded over her legs and the other was held up by the arm. The arm was being used to pop a joint in her mouth. Amanda's eyes were dark and mysterious her stringy blonde hair. She glared at Laura, then took one last puff of her joint before she smashed it out on Laura's play table.

"Come here, Laura." Amanda said calmly as she removed the knife from the play table. Laura remained still.

"I said come here! Don't let Mommy have to get up and get you, Laura!" Amanda yelled. Laura took a few small steps forward. Amanda watched with crazed eyes. She uncrossed her legs and planted them firmly on the floor. Holding the knife in one hand, Amanda threw it in the other hand, back and forth like a kid playing with a baseball. Blood streamed from her hands, she didn't feel the pain.

Laura could see the hatred swelling up inside her mother. Amanda moved towards her.

"Is Mommy going to kill me?" The horror of this possibility made Laura ill. She began to cry.

"Mommy, don't kill me, please! I promise to be a good little

girl!" Laura cried. Amanda inched forward. Laura stepped back.

"Shut up! You evil child! You're the reason why your father left home! You're the reason why I look like this! I never wanted you! I hate children and I hate you!" Amanda lunged, Laura ducked and ran between Amanda's legs. As Laura tried to pass, Amanda grabbed one of her legs. Laura kicked.

"Stop it, Mommy! Please stop it!" She pleaded. Amanda then grabbed Laura's body and threw her against the closet door. Pain surged through the back of her neck and down her spine.

"Please, Mommy! Please!" Laura cried.

"Shut up! I hate you! I hate you!" Amanda screeched as she lunged for Laura. Laura, too hurt and tried, didn't move.

"Please, Mommy, stop! Please!" Laura cried. Amanda sunk several frantic demonic blows into Laura. Laura screamed until her screams were muffled by blood that poured out of her mouth.

"I don't want to die." She thought sadly. Amanda held the knife tightly in both hands and continuously stabbed Laura fiercely.

"Die, Bitch, die!" she yelled with each piercing blow.

"I hate you, witch." Laura thought. The coldness of Death took over her body. Amanda continued stabbing Laura ten more times until she realized that the little girl was dead.

Amanda heard the police sirens coming.

"The pigs are coming! It's all your fault, Laura!" She yelled at Laura as she made one last blow, with her hand, open palmed across Laura's face.

Amanda stood up and dusted off her clothes. Divinely she walked down the stairs. She turned into the living room and calmly sat down on the sofa. She could hear the police coming closer.

"I'm ready, they can come for me! Laura's gone! I'm free!" Amanda thought. A grin lit up across her face.

### Three Years Later

After the slaying of Laura, Amanda had spent a restful three years in the county's mental hospital. Amanda's doctor had tried to tell her that she was depressed, but she wasn't. The last remaining item that reminded her of Bobby Lee, the man who had left her alone with a child that she never wanted, was now out of her life for good. Laura deserved everything that happened to her.

"It was all Laura's fault that Bobby ran away in the first place. If I had not spent so much time taking care of Laura," she thought "Then maybe I would have been more aware of Bobby's unsatisfied sexual needs." Needs which drove him into the arms of another woman.

She hated Laura and was glad that she was gone. These per-

sonal thoughts were not the thoughts that she had portrayed to her doctor. She had played those little doctor's games before, those self-centered egotistical bastards.

All she had to do was show a few tears, act like she was sorry, and that she wanted to make amends for her wrong doings.

"Yeah, right!" Amanda mused. She had gotten out of the hospital because of her good behavior, sweet charm, and the fact that she had slept with her doctor. She could be good when she wanted to be but being good was not as much fun. She had a ticket to freedom. Freedom from hell. Freedom from the whinings of Laura. Life was good!

All of these thoughts swarm around in Amanda's head as she stood outside her home. It was the same blue and white house that she had shared with Laura and her ex-husband Bobby. The house was paid for and given to her as part of the terms in the divorce. Amanda's marriage to Bobby Lee may not have been very long but she did get something out of it. If she had known that killing Laura in the house would make the house harder to sell, then she would have killed the little bitch somewhere else.

It had been a long time since she had been home. The yard looked nice. Jonathan Daniels, her realtor had kept his promise of keeping the grass cut and the yard watered.

"It's a nice house in a good neighborhood. It won't be hard to sell, Amanda. I'll have it sold in no time flat." Jonathan had told her. Three years later, she still owned the house.

During the past three years, Jonathan had only taken one couple out to the house, Stephen and Mary Allen.

"There's something wrong with your house." Amanda remembered Jonathan telling her.

"What do you mean?" She questioned. Jonathan twisted uncomfortably in his chair. Slowly, he leaned forward, moving in closer to her.

Amanda studied his chiseled face. His cold black hair received back to his neck.

His blue eyes usually sparkling, seem dull. Something was obviously wrong she thought.

"Amanda, I took a couple out to the house the other day—the Allens." he paused briefly.

"Great! This is good news! Did you sell the house?" Amanda said excitedly.

"No. Almost sold it, but then..."

"Then what?" She snapped growing impatient. Jonathan sprang out of his chair and walked over to the window. He looked upward towards the sky.

"God, how can I explain what happened without sounding

crazy?" he thought.

Amanda sat on the edge of her hospital bed, waiting for Jonathan to tell his story.

"It was going well. I was closing the deal with Stephen Allen, when Mary, his wife, discovered that she had lost one of her earrings. So, we decided to split up to search for it. Mary went upstairs. Stephen went outside and I searched through the downstairs area.

Stephen and I had just finished searching and was about ready to go upstairs when suddenly we heard this blood curdling scream." Jonathan paused briefly. He picked up a clear plastic cup filled with water. His hand shook nervously as he tilted the cup to his lips. He took a painful gulp, then replaced the cup on the table.

"Will you please go on?" Amanda snapped.

"Anyway, Stephen and I ran upstairs. We heard Mary screaming and crying. We tried to open the bedroom door. But it wouldn't open. It was like something was holding the door. Then we heard this horrible raking sound like fingernails raking on a blackboard. Then Mary away from the door. You should have seen her. Nothing but blood. It was horrible. She kept saying "Laura! No! I'm not your Mommy!"

Amanda jumped up from the edge of her bed.

"It wasn't Laura. Laura's dead, damn you!" Amanda remembered telling Jonathan. It felt good kicking the shit out of him. How dare he claim that Laura attacked that woman. Everyone knew that Laura's dead.

It didn't matter. She still had to sell this house and get on with her life.

Nevertheless, if Laura was alive, she would have to kill her again.

"That bitch is not going to rule my life again!" Amanda thought.

Amanda slowly opened the door and walked in. "Nothing so far!" She told herself. Amanda opened her purse, inserted her hand inside and removed a large meat knife that she had purchased from the store before she came to the house.

"Better safe than sorry. If Laura's up there, I'll get the job right this time." She thought to herself. With a new arrogant confidence, Amanda started to march up the stairs.

"I killed you once, bitch, and I will kill you again!" Amanda yelled as she took her power steps forwards.

She stood outside of Laura's room and listened for strange sounds. There was only the sounds of nature—the neighbor's dog barking and the bird's singing.

Slowly Amanda turned the handle and peeked in. Nothing

happened. Everything was calm and peaceful. The only thing that was left in Laura's room was the white walls and the soft baby blue carpeting. She stepped inside the room.

"That Allen woman was crazy! There's no ghost in here!" Amanda thought. She laughed heartedly at the extremes that the Allen woman had gone to get a new car.

She took one last look around the room. She hated this room. It still reeked of Laura's scent. Just some left over Motherly instincts that her doctor had told her that she would have over Laura's death. She didn't give a shit about any instincts all she knew was that the smell of Laura was beginning to make her sick.

Amanda turned to leave. A cool breeze hit her hard. Thinking that the breeze was coming from the window, Amanda walked over to it. The window was already closed. The breeze became colder. Icy smoke came from Amanda's breathe.

"Oh shit! There is something here!" She thought. Slowly she backed up in the direction of the door.

"Mommy, don't kill me, please!" Laura cried. Amanda quickly swung around. She froze. Laura stood in full form floating in front of the bedroom door. The meat knife slipped out of Amanda's hand. Finally she managed to work up a scream.

"Why are you screaming, Mommy? Was it because you were bad?" Laura questioned coyly. Amanda ran for the window.

"Help me! Please help me!" Amanda yelled as she banged violently on the window. No one listened.

"Why did you kill me, Mommy? Why? I was always a good little girl. I didn't mean to break the cereal bowl. It was an accident." Laura cried.

Amanda collected her thoughts.

"That little bitch is still scared of me." She thought. It wasn't going to be hard to get rid of her.

"Why, Mommy? Why?" Laura continued crying. Amanda scanned the room for the meat knife. The knife had disappeared. Laura noticed Amanda searching.

"What's the matter, Mommy? Did you lose something?" Laura asked innocently.

"No, Laura, Mommy's not missing anything." Amanda managed to say calmly.

Laura started to laugh, then suddenly her eyes turned fire-truck red and her nails grew long and purplish. The knife appeared in her hand. Laura threw the knife in the other hand like she was shuffling a deck of cards. The knife went through her hand making no marks or cuts.

Amanda froze. Her mind was racing trying to figure out what to do next. She knew that if she didn't do something soon that Laura

was going to kill her. She had waited too long to have her freedom and she was not going to let Laura ruin it.

"Come here, you witch! I have something for you!" Laura yelled. Amanda ran for the door.

"Don't, Laura, please!" Amanda yelled.

"Oh no, Mommy, you're not scared, are you? You knew that I was coming for you, deary." Laura said sweetly. Laura calmly sat down on the window sill and watched Amanda. It was funny the way the witch struggled with the door. She had fixed the door so that the witch couldn't get out.

"You don't like it when the shoe's on the other foot, do you, witch!" Laura yelled.

Angrily Amanda let go of the door handle. "It's time to make a stand. It's either her or me and I'm not losing!" Amanda thought. Sharply she turned around to confront Laura.

"Do it! Just do it! I know you want to kill me, Laura! So just go ahead and do it!" Amanda yelled. Suddenly she ran like a mad woman towards Laura, yelling and screaming violently.

She snatched the knife away from Laura.

"It's not so damn funny now that the shoe is back on my foot!" Amanda yelled.

"Don't, Mommy! Please, don't!" Laura cried as she floated away from the window. Amanda chased after her with the knife. She held it tightly in her hand.

"No, Mommy, please!" Laura cried out again. She floated around the room several times. Amanda stayed one step close behind Laura with the knife in hand. Suddenly Laura froze in place. Amanda stabbed at Laura piercing her through her chest.

"No, Mommy, please!" Laura yelled. Amanda laughed crazily. Frantically she continued stabbing Laura.

"Die, Bitch, die! I can't sell this damn house until you're gone! Now die!" Amanda yelled.

Laura sunk down to the floor. Amanda spread her legs widely and knelt down over Laura, pinning the girl's body down. Amanda repeated her violent blows across Laura's chest. The knife sunk through Laura's chest and disappeared. Laura's cries lowered to a whimper. Her eyes began to close. Amanda stopped her violent blows. Once again Laura was dead.

She released a sigh of relief. A soft girlish laugh came from Laura. Her eyes flew open.

"I'm already dead, witch! You can't kill me!" Laura yelled. She snatched the knife from Amanda's hand and put one sharp blow through Amanda's heart. Blood spat from Amanda's chest. She tried to yell but only blood poured from her mouth. Tears swelled in Amanda's eyes. "I'm not ready to die, I just got my freedom." She



Wheeler—"Laura Lee"

thought.

Laura floated through Amanda to get a better view of her dying mother. It felt good.

Amanda toppled over on the floor, pushing the knife further into her chest. There she laid on the soft blue carpeting face down in a pool of blood.

"Ding-Dong the witch is dead. Ding-Dong the witch is dead. The wicked witch is dead!" Laura sang. □

Reclining aside an azure sea,  
My beloved's eyes shine lasting light  
On concealed emotions, that somehow might  
Manifest themselves from enduring memory.

Kim  
Newman

## Destiny

Cherished ideals from ancient to fresh  
Suppressed by reality, though animated in dreams;  
Thanks to God, become possible it seems,  
As dual hearts and kindred spirits mesh.

Burdened souls release and become free,  
My beloved's hand seeks himself in mine.  
Dreams become reality to reclaim their position in time,  
Love requires no sound as we fulfill destiny.

Adia Curtis  
Kilpatrick

## The English Teacher

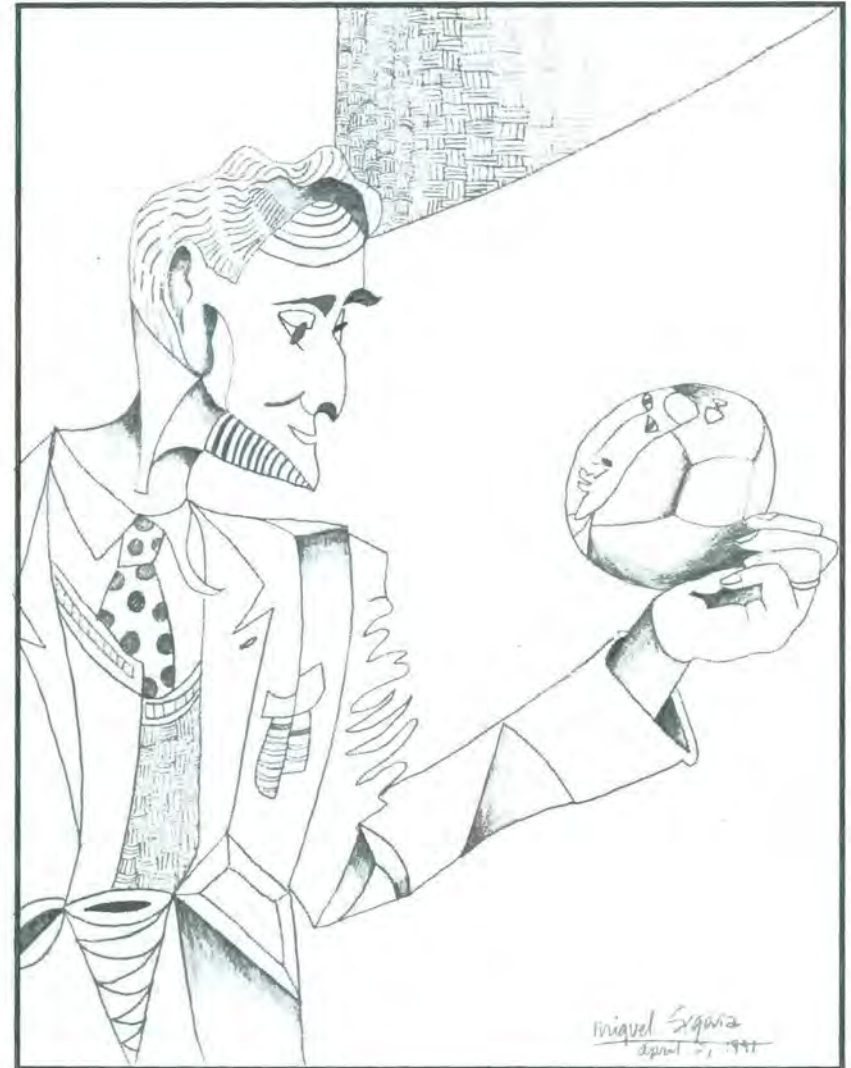
She chooses what she loves to do over what she would love to have. Paychecks of enlightened people, from whom illiteracy has been deducted, cannot buy a BMW.

She walks into the room, closes doors, closes mouths, opens books, opens minds.

She is study of contrasts: obstinate facade/sensitive nature;  
virtuous raiment/nuanced sensuality; pale skin/colorful speech.

"All life is love, hate, sex, and death," she teaches. Omits "taxes."

Students leave with the senses of their imagination substantially sharpened. Sinister lotteries, yellow wallpapers, and questionable barbers will likely be forgotten soon, but never she.



by Miguel Segovia

When Gregory Samson awoke one morning from unsettling dreams, he found the waking world exactly where he'd left it. Newly awakened on his living room couch, his eyes strained to focus on the image dancing across his wide-screen TV.

"RAAAAAID!" cried the monstrous vermin of the airwaves.

A voice-over boomed. "The only good bug is a dead bug."

"I think we're all bugs,"

Gregory muttered as he scuttled into the bathroom. "We project ourselves as men as we crawl about, rolling the dung of society."

The aching pain in Gregory's temple became more acute with each waking moment, so he threw open the medicine cabinet and gazed upon the cornucopia of capsules. As a seller of drugs for Paradise Pharmaceuticals, he had collected the gamut of the modern druggist's product line. From the selection, he chose aspirin; swallowed without water. As his headache subsided, a scene from the previous night raced through his battered synapses.

Gregory was at the annual company sales meeting and President was giving a speech. An intimidating figure, President stood like a tuxedo general reviewing his troops. Gregory remembered the sound of his voice, harsh and charismatic, as it echoed through the banquet hall.

"Ladies and gentlemen," President barked, "I hold in my hand our newest product—a true miracle drug call Metmorphoreal. This incredible gift of chemistry will allow people to see themselves as they truly are."

A tide of oohs and ahhs rolled through the crowd.

President continued. "Our R & D team at Paradise Pharmaceuticals has produced the first reality drug. It focuses actuality as we know it to bring forth an enhanced state of perception. It enhances reality by helping the user see through the facades in everyday life. For the first time, truth will be in the eye of the consumer." President raised a small paper cup.

"A sample of this drug has been placed before each of you tonight. I invite everyone here tonight to drink this koolaid and show your support for your company in its finest hour."

Everyone dutifully raised their paper cups, and happily quaffed mouthfuls of Metamorphoreal. Everyone, that is, except Gregory. He begrudgingly sipped his dose.

"Thank you all!" President chuckled. "When you awake tomorrow, I guarantee you'll see the world from a different perspective."

The memory faded as Gregory sat down on the bathroom floor.

## Gregory's World

by Herman Kluge

"President didn't mention any side effects last night, but I feel like my head is going to explode."

Suddenly, Gregory convulsed with a Krakatoan sneeze. Staggering to gain his footing, he caught a glimpse of a terrifying image in his bathroom mirror. "Oh my God!" he sobbed, "I've been horribly disfigured. I'll never be able to sell pharmaceuticals again!"

The aftermath of the nasal eruption had left Gregory Samson in an inexplicably transformed state. The surface of the mirror reflected a strange new creature with the body of a man and the head of a fly! Gregory begged the heavens for redemption from his curse of transfiguration, crying out in a voice now squeaky and from me.

"Help me! Help me!"

Gregory's wife Greta stood outside the bathroom pounding her fist on the door and chiding him with a litanous barrage. "Dammit Gregory, are you going to stay in there all morning? What's wrong with you? Are you asleep?"

"This is no dream," Gregory mumbled with a quiet certainty.

"You've got to get ready and go to work. You have to help me earn a living so we can pay for this life we're living."

"This is no life..." Gregory whispered.

Greta pounded more fiercely. "You do this every morning! You hide in the bathroom for hours. When are you ever going to change?"

Gregory through open the door and Greta screamed like an air raid siren. "ARGHHH! Jesus, Gregory! You've turned into a huge nasty insect! A filthy, wretched fly! I'll never hear the end of this. I'll never live this down. My husband is horrible disgusting bug!"

"But I can explain!" Gregory pleaded. His voice was garbled through the scissor clicks of his hairy mandibles. Greta strained to understand him.

"Last night at the company sales meeting, President gave us all a new drug called Metamorphoreal. He must not have cleared it with the FDA."

"Oh, so my stupid husband volunteered to be a guinea pig?"

"I trusted President. Was that so bad?"

Greta shook her head in remorse. "The mirror is my answer."

Gregory was having trouble adjusting to his new kaleidoscopic vision. A ferris wheel of images swirled in front of him.

"It's hard to see with these damn bug eyes. Will you drive me to work?"

"Okay," Greta said reluctantly. "But get dressed so we can leave before it gets light. If the neighbors see you, I'll never hear the end of it."

Gregory slunk off to the bedroom and put on his blue suit. While waiting for Greta to finish dressing, he snacked on the kitchen

garbage, sampling the remains of last night's fouled succotash.

Arriving at work, he hoped the day would begin without incident. He approached the receptionist and offered his usual cordiality.

"Good morning, Shirley."

"Good morning, Mr. Samson." she replied.

The economical exchange was the same as always, except there was something different about Shirley. In place of her head was a large gingham duck. Gregory felt encouraged that he was not alone in his altered state, so he walked down the hall and stuck his head into Bob Toiler's office. When his bulging eye-pods got a fix on Bob, he noticed yet another change had occurred. Bob had turned into a man-eating shark and his teeth were pearly white.

"Hey Bob," Gregory clicked, "Congratulations of making Salesman of the Month!"

Bob's reply was raspy and guttural. "Pretty soon I'll have Sales Manager's job."

"I wouldn't be surprised," Gregory answered. "You and President were pretty chummy at the conference last night."

"Don't think I'm getting a big head...uh, no offense, Greg."

"None taken, Bob. Listen, did President tell you how long it takes for this drug to wear off?"

Bob flicked a piece of lint from his dorsal fin, then spoke with a snap of his jaws. "I don't think it does wear off. In fact, President told me, you need an antidote."

Gregory slapped his hairy noggin with his claw. "I'll have to get back to you later, Bob. I'd better to talk to President myself."

Walking through the halls, Gregory counted hundreds of transformations. Every employee had attended the meeting and taken the dose of Metamorphoreal. Even though the office was filled with an array of beasts, Gregory was the only insect. His singular condition made him feel alone and angry. Gregory was fuming when he walked into Sales Manager's office. Sales Manager was a snarling Bengal tiger.

"Hey Greg, you're never going to sell pharmaceuticals like that. Straighten that tie."

Protrusions in Gregory's fly thorax prevented him from buttoning his collar. "Give a guy a break, will you? Don't these weird side effects bother you at all?"

Sales Manager roared. "No! I think it's grrrrrrreat! You know Samson, it's no wonder you turned out as a fly. You're a pest. Quit whining. Get out of my office and hit the road. You have a sales quota to meet."

"If you think I'm going out in public like this, you're crazy!"

Sales Manager growled. "Samson, get with the program."

Gregory was livid. "I'm going to give President a piece of my mind."

"Listen flyboy, you mess with President and he'll eat your balls for lunch!"

Gregory spat his reply. "I'll take my chances!"

Gregory Samson was not a secure man, and the insults of an insensitive beast like Sales Manager had made him increasingly self-conscious of his transformation. He stepped into the restroom and inspected his image in the mirror. It was bad enough having the head and voice of a fly, but his hands were useless little claws and a forest of small nubs stuck through his oxford shirt. He felt inchoate wings crinkling beneath his suit. Gregory stood before the mirror rubbing his claws across his face in quick repetitive motions until he took notice of his action. "This," Gregory buzzed, "has got to stop!" He left the restroom and headed for President's office.

As he entered the executive suite, Gregory was confronted by President's secretary. She had changed into a vicious Doberman pinscher and lunged for Gregory's throat. Fortunately, she was on a short chain, so Gregory dodged her frothing fangs and entered President's stately domain.

President's office had the expanse of an aircraft hanger. His desk sat in the far corner of the space, barely illuminated beneath a row of small cannister lights. Behind the massive cherrywood bunker was his special deep-blue leather chair. Atop the chair was a wicker basket.

Gregory tapped the lid of the basket and top slid off. A slowly writhing serpentine figure rose from the opening and coiled itself in the middle of the desk. President was now a venomous king cobra. The snake hissed as it spoke.

"Well Samson, the architects were right—form follows function. I always suspected you weren't a player. Now you've confirmed my suspicions."

Gregory tried to control his rage. "I had my doubts about this company as well."

President snapped back. "There is no room for doubters in my organization. You either lead, follow, or get out of the way. You're nothing more than a fly in the ointment."

The remark made the bristles on Gregory's flyhead stand erect. "I've got nothing to lose, so I'm going to tell you what's been bothering me."

President sat silently whipping the air with his tongue.

Gregory continued. "Remember when Marketing Manager gave his speech?"

President nodded in agreement.

"When he told us that successful marketing creates dependency, I asked myself what this company was all about. I came to the conclusion that the only difference between our sales force and common drug pushers on the street is that we pay taxes. The rest is the same."

President's small red eyes flashed like warning lights. "Samson, you have a major attitude problem. Maybe a short history will help. Back when I started Paradise Pharmaceuticals, I had a good reason for styling our corporate culture after the other drug culture. The illegal drug trade is the last form of true capitalism left in this country. It embodies the soul of free market economics where the law of supply and demand rule absolutely. It is the American dream"

Gregory gritted his mandibles. "It's the American dream induced with sleeping tablets. The real American dream is insomnia."

President hissed. "You're a lost cause. I'm through wasting time." President pressed the intercom button with his tail and his voice was broadcast throughout the building. "Attention all sales staff, this is President. I want everyone in my office immediately."

President turned his attention back to Gregory. "Samson, I'm disappointed. I had great hopes for you once. You were one of our best salesmen—a rising star. You shouldn't have ended up as a fly. You should have been with the lions, and tigers, and bears!"

"Oh my!" said Gregory.

President's hiss was now tinged with sorrow. "It's a shame you'll have to be destroyed before you reach the final stage."

"What do you mean by final stage?"

As his words faded, Gregory turned to see himself surrounded by snakes of every description. "What the hell is going on here?"

President spoke. "You see Samson, when I passed out that koolaid the other night, it wasn't just to preview a new product. It was a test to see who's really with me. Metamorphoreal let's us live the metaphors we become during our daily lives. In the first stag, you become your own outer reality. Look at Bob Tolier over there. He was a shark in his first stage."

President pointed to a large, green boa constrictor. "Sales Manager was quite regal as a tiger, but look at him now." Sales Manager was a scaly viper.

"Everyone except you has reached the second stage—they have been transformed into the inner reality. They've always secretly wanted to be me, so they've become something very much like me. It's the first rule of corporate gamesmanship—around here, my reality is the only one that counts. Believe it and Paradise is yours."

Gregory buzzed with hatred. "Never! Never in a million

years!"

"Then," President sibilated, "you must be destroyed immediately. You pose a direct threat to me and my sales staff."

"Look," Sales Manager cried. "It's too late. He's changing now. Run for your lives!"

The room emptied as the cadre of serpents slithered away, leaving Gregory alone with President. Gregory felt a rush go through his body. He closed his eyes, then opened them to see an astonishing new form. He was a mongoose.

Gregory smiled wickedly. "You suspected this would happen all along, so you tried to trick me. You're ego wouldn't let someone be better than you, but you're ego let you down. Your ego can't protect you now. Very soon you should start changing to your second stage."

There was fear in President's voice. "What do you mean? I don't have a second stage. I'm special. I'm a snake through and through. I'll never change."

Gregory laughed. "You're no different from the rest. Look at yourself."

President tried to strike at Gregory, but his transformation was already in progress. He began shrinking smaller and smaller until his change was complete. He was a worm.

Gregory picked him up. "You should have known—all snakes are worms inside. Snakes are nothing but worms with better luggage." He walked over to the window and addressed a flock of pigeons milling about the ledge. "Any of you guys work here?"

The pigeons gave no reply. He sat the worm on the ledge. "Here's a snack for you, then."

Gregory closed the window and watched the birds fight viciously for the prize morsel. While the pigeons were busy pecking, squawking, and scratching each other to pieces, a large crow landed on the ledge and gobbled up President in one swallow.

Gregory laughed out loud. "What goes around, comes around."

The intercom buzzed. "This is Johnson from the lab. Is President there?"

"No," Gregory replied. "He is consumed by other matters. Can I give him a message?"

"Sure," Johnson said. "Tell him we can't produce the Metamorphoreal antidote."

"But I thought you guys invented the drug."

"No way! President stole it from some screwball chemist in Berkeley. We can create analogs of the drug, but we haven't been able to figure out how it works yet. It may take years."

Gregory sighed. "President's in no position to help you. You're

## Kluge—Gregory's World

on your own."

Gregory clicked off the intercom and sat in Presidents chair, stroking his reddish brown tail.

He thought about the events of the day and became reflective. "I guess this isn't too bad. At least I'm not an insect, and Greta always wanted her own fur." Gregory sharpened his claws on President's desk, inspecting their razor edge by slicing a "From the desk of President" pad.

"Oh well," Gregory hummed, "the day's still young. I might as well kill some snakes and make quota before lunch. They're probably all hanging out by the water cooler."

Gregory headed down the corridor and into the snake pit. He knew in his heart that he'd have to get busy if he was going to feel like himself by the end of the day. □

Nguyen Bin Kiyem'in icinden gecenler.

Dogustur bu, yerden goge,  
Yak beni.  
Yak beni ya, sen,  
Su barindigim ormanlarimi yakma.

*Fazil  
Husnu  
Daglarca*

## Yoksulluk (Poverty)

Dogustur bu, ne istersen yap,  
Yak gogumu,  
Yak gecelerimi ya sen,  
Su besili okuzlerimi yakma.

Nguyen Bin Kiyem's thoughts.

This is battle, from land to sky.  
Burn me.  
Burn me if you like,  
But don't burn the forest that  
shelters me.

Dogustur bu biliyorum,  
Yak yuregimi.  
Yak sevgilerimi ya sen,  
Su pirinc tarlalarimi yakma.

This is warfare, do as you wish  
Burn my sky  
Burn my nights if you like  
But don't burn my prize buffaloes.

This is combat, I know.  
Burn my heart  
Burn my loves if you like.  
But don't burn my rice paddies.

Yobaz  
Karanligin boyudur enidir.

Yobaz acligin ciplakigin  
Butun yeryuzundeki nedenidir.

Yobaz acmis ellerini goklere karsi guya,  
Her cagda bir kotulukle yenidir.

Yobaz  
Geriligin somurgenidir.

*Fazil  
Husnu  
Daglarca*

## Yobaz (Fanatics)

The fanatics  
Are the size of the ignorance he keeps them alive

If people around the world are hungry and naked  
Fanatics are the reason

Fanatics lift their hands to the sky and pretend to pray  
Conjuring new evil for each era, each season.

The fanatics  
Parasites; living off ignorance and fundamentalism.

*Fazil Husnu Daglarca*  
(Winner of the 1968 Award of International Poetry Forum)

Translations by Murat Inegolluoglu 

## Wood

by Richard Matthews

The unremarkable fact that my father, the old man, and I were two very different people confused us both for some reason, and we typically fought our confusion and each other as if they were one and the same. That, at least, was the general scenario on the day the “new girl” came to our house.

Her name was Vicky Arnold. She gave me a lift home from school one cold, gray autumn afternoon.

She pulled her convertible slowly into our gravel driveway, and I was thinking that maybe she wanted to talk, but before the car had even come to a full stop, I said, “Thanks a lot,” threw open the door, jumped out, and patted the white canvas roof to send her quickly on her way. The sooner she left the less chance she would have of getting a good look at the old man or our place, a leaning old farmhouse crying for paint. The dust that kicked up from the gravel on the way in helped, but not enough. The sagging roof had been visible through the naked trees from half a mile away, and as I opened the car door and jumped out I cringed at the sound of a shutter slapping an uncertain rhythm against the side somewhere.

“Wait,” Vicky said, just as I slammed the door and started away.

I stepped back and stooped awkwardly as she leaned over and cranked the window halfway down. “It’s only three-thirty,” she said, her indigo blue eyes looking hopefully up and then bouncing from side to side as if they were trying to get around to see something I was hiding. “Are you in a hurry? Maybe we could take a drive or something.”

“I’d love to,” I said, “But I told my dad I’d help stack wood tonight.”

“Tell him you’ll do it tomorrow,” she said, smiling in a way that made the problem seem small. She was a year older than I, and rather than feeling bullied, I was impressed by her audacity; we had really only spoken a couple of times in the French class we shared, and once after one of her gymnastics practices.

“I can’t do that,” I said. “He’s goofy about these things. I’ll have to do it now.”

“I’ll wait.”

“It might take an hour.” I hoped she would leave immediately and save me any further humiliation.

“I could help,” she said. “I can stack wood.”

“You don’t wanna’ do that.”

“Sure I do.” She reached into the glove compartment and dug

out, I saw, a pair of thin leather gloves.

“No,” I said, and then, “Really.”

“I insist.” She sprang out of the car. “It’ll make the job go faster, don’t you think?” She wrapped a cashmere scarf around her neck so that both ends were flying behind her. She seemed terribly amused by the whole thing.

I shrugged and took a deep breath as we headed around to the back of the house where I could hear the old man whomping into wood. It was one of those November days that could make me hate Wisconsin. Our lawn was all brown and unhealthy looking, littered everywhere with the wrinkled leaves of ancient oaks and maples whose gnarled fingers reached indifferently into air cold enough to show you your breath; but only a stocking cap, jeans, and a t-shirt stood between the old man and the weather.

In the backyard I saw the broad flat muscles of his back challenge the thin material as he raised the ax high over his head. Then he gave a tremendous grunt and breath shot out of him like smoke as a two-foot chunk of oak split cleanly with a hollow thunk. Half the log landed with its suddenly exposed flesh facing up, rocking in the hard dirt around the huge piece he used for a base block.

Fresh-chopped wood was everywhere around him, and I waited for him to turn around.

When he finally did, I said, “Hey Dad. This is Vicky Arnold. Vicky Arnold, Dick Senger.”

With his gray-green eyes leveled, he gave me his customary weird, searching look. Then she looked at Vicky.

“Hello,” he said with effort.

“Hi,” Vicky said. “Where did you get all this wood?” It looks good. We’ve been wondering where to get some.”

After a pause that the old man used to note her ski sweater and corduroy pants, he said, “Some fellas, the Gaston brothers brought it.”

“Is that Gaston brothers Construction?”

“The same,” the old man said, slanting his eyes for a punch line.

“I think they’ve built most of the new sub-division.” Vicky glanced in the direction of the hills behind our house. “Their signs are all over.”

“You live up there?” the old man asked, and Vicky nodded.

“I hope they gave you a deal on the wood,” I said, trying to work his stare away from Vicky. I knew the Gaston brothers probably hadn’t charged him at all.

One corner of his mouth curled up in a half-assed grin. He didn’t like wasted words. His eyes briefly swept the vacant brown

fields that ran off behind our yard, and the wooded hills beyond that hid the houses in that subdivision—some of which he had helped build himself—a lot bigger than ours. Then he bent to take up the ax again.

"Can I ask you something," I said quickly, before he could get into his backswing.

"What?" he asked, irritated already.

"I know you were planning on me helping tonight. I'll still do it of course, if you want, but, well, we were thinking of going for a drive or something. Could you and I maybe do this wood tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow I work late." He glanced at the deepening white-gray sky. "We aren't lettin' this get wet."

"C'mon," I said, "it'll be all right, won't it?"

"Look, dammit," he fixed me with a glare, "I told you a week ago we'd do this *today*. And I promised your mother." His knuckles whitened on the ax. He had a nasty temper. He'd been quick with the belt when I was younger, and he was already pissed off enough that he wouldn't be talking to me for a while. This was just the sort of thing that was typical with us. He'd make up his mind about a thing and there'd be nothing for it but a battle of wills that he would rather die than lose. When I turned fourteen the summer before, he didn't want me playing Babe Ruth ball anymore. He said I was too old for kids' games and needed a job. The job he thought I needed was working with him. He had visions of taking me into his little construction business (which was always on the verge of going under for lack of work). His dad, his grandpa, and so on had all been carpenters. He couldn't accept it, of course, when I didn't want to keep the tradition going.

"It's all right, Chuck." Vicky smiled. "It'll be fun."

I was too busy hating the old man to be amused, but for appearances I worked up a half-assed grin myself.

Snow flurries had begun falling now. While he kept chopping we started lugging and stacking against helping stack, but each time Vicky or I put a log or some sticks on the rising rows he saw a need to put them someplace else.

The rasping of wood rubbing on wood and the wind brushing through a little grove of pines behind the house made the only sounds. Pretty soon Vicky and I were hauling all the wood and he was just stacking and rearranging. If he'd have been talking he'd have been telling us to bring the bigger pieces first, to establish a firm base. But he wasn't talking. The result was he was having a hell of a time trying to stack the pieces we were bringing over. He'd get one end stacked to his satisfaction, then she or I would bring sticks when we should have brought logs, or logs when he needed sticks,

and he would have to take a section apart to make them all fit. I was getting a big charge out of watching him.

But Vicky soon figured it out and said, "C'mon," under her breath to me. "Do it right."

Then, to us both, quite loudly, she said, "It's wonderful out here, isn't it? There's so much *room*." She dropped off a couple more logs and stood up straight, took a deep breath, and looked out across the fields like she was going to go play. Her scarf was swinging behind her in the wind.

The old man gave her a veiled look and almost smiled. He didn't know what to make of her. Neither did I, for that matter, except that she seemed to have too much on the ball to want to be a part of our little scene in the back yard.

Meanwhile, the Gaston brothers, Fred and Marty—or "Punky" as he was called—showed up. Fred was maybe 40, a volunteer fireman who wore the kind of black plastic framed glasses you didn't see anymore. Marty was a short, baby-faced guy, a fireman too, about 35 years-old, who got saddled with the name "Punky" as a kid because his head was so small, and the name stuck into adulthood. The Gastons were always trying to help somebody out because they were good Catholic boys and felt guilty for being so lucky in the construction business and wanted people to think they were really just a couple of nice guys. They were misfits in any situation, (neither of them had ever been seen with a woman), but around the old man, who had so many debts he often sub-contracted for them on weekends, they seemed to gather some special justification for breathing. They loved to do him "favors."

"Hey, Dick," Fred said to the old man, pulling right onto our grass with his '65 Ford pickup. They had the windows wide open and snow was flying in. That's the kind of knuckleheads they were.

"Hey Fred, Punky," the old man said.

I spoke up and introduced Vicky to them. they said hello and looked at her like she just hatched out.

"You built our house," Vicky said. "It's a beautiful house."

"Arnold," Fred mused, scratching the stubble on his chin. "You just bought that Colonial style."

Vicky nodded, we dropped the woo, and the Gastons and the old man got to talking shop.

Soon I heard Fred say, "You know we're keeping our firewood inside this winter, Dick. Last winter was so cold the wood was frozen all the time. Had to hit it with the ax to bust the pile apart every time we wanted some."

"That's right," the old man mused, thinking backwards.

"Maybe you wanna' put this wood in the basement," Fred said.

"They're sayin' this winter'll be the worst one since '66." Punky was

nodding his little head in approval of the idea.

"That's a long damn haul to carry this all the way down to the basement," my father said.

"That's right," I said. As it was, we could finish soon if we continued stacking the wood against the house like we had been.

The old man stood and thought, anchored in his dumb, dead-pan worker's stance as he stared into Fred's thick lenses. "I don't know," he finally declared.

"It's gettin' cold standing here," I said, smiling at Vicky, making an effort not to roll my eyes.

"Put her through that window," Fred said, pointing to the little basement window next to the pile.

"Christ," I mumbled.

"What?" the old man said, ignoring me as he looked from Fred to the window.

"It ain't gonna' fit through that little window," I said, hoping to gain authority with some good American. I winked at Vicky.

None of them answered or even looked at me.

"Let's do it," the old man said.

"Right," Fred said.

The old man and I trudged around to the back door at the side and descended into the basement. Vicky followed.

"There's Coke in the refrigerator," I said, "maybe you want to wait upstairs. It's like a cave down here."

"No," she said, "I came to help."

Even the old man, I saw, smiled faintly at her.

"You guys can hand me the pieces and I'll stack them here," she said, pointing to a spot along the basement wall ten or twelve feet from the window where the wood would be coming in.

"That's as good a place as any," the old man said, propping the little window open with a stick.

The plan was for Fred and Punky to feed the stuff down to us, and it started out systematic—me and the old man taking two logs at a time, one in each hand, from Fred and Punky. We began stacking it along the wall, and Vicky would add little finishing touches to the pile, moving with the natural bounce of a gymnast and with so much enthusiasm that I was reminded of how uneasy the old man and I were around each other. We were moving like prisoners on a work farm.

"You know this doesn't make any sense," I said. "We should drop all the wood down first. Then stack it."

When the old man didn't reply, Vicky said, "It's more fun this way." I tried to read her face as she spoke, but it was too dark to see if she was smiling anymore.

It felt colder down there than it had outside. It was snowing

harder, and snowflakes sometimes swirled through the window along with the wood. The light bulb was burned out where we were working, so all we could see was the gray from the concrete walls and floors. Even the air was gray down there. Each time you turned in a new direction you had to wait for your eyes to adjust, except when you walked over by the window where you could see the white-gray sky when neither Fred nor Punky was standing there blocking the light and sending wood through. Then you could see even your frosty breath.

Anyway, what started out as a smooth-enough operation soon turned into something that looked like a bad union job. Whether it was a result of the uneasy silence between me and the old man or not I don't know, but pretty soon everyone stopped talking through the little window. Then one or the other of us missed a chance of meeting Punky or Fred and pretty soon they just started dropping the stuff pell-mell. We are timing their drops to stay out of the way, but it wasn't long before I heard Vicky say, "Watch out!" and saw the old man get clunked in the head by a big chunk of what looked like oak. He was half bent over when it hit him, and after it hit him he froze in that position, and seemed for a moment as if he would be suspended there forever, like a carved monument to working men everywhere. Another chunk flew just past his head, rolled, and crashed heavily into the tin covering of the furnace behind him. He grunted as another piece landed with a thud at his feet. That seemed to bring him around. Vicky yelled, "Stop!" and, almost at the same time, he yelled, "Hey!" from deep in his diaphragm. The sounds echoed hollowly off the cement walls; and wood stopped coming through.

The old man staggered backwards a step, still bent over, and then he stood straight up. His face held surprise and concern.

"Jesus," he said, and after he'd focused his eyes, he focused his eyes, he pulled off his stocking cap and let it drop to the floor. Rocking awkwardly back on his heels, he moved past me and over to an old gray sink next to the washer at the foot of the stairs where dusty light filtered down through the window of the back door. He was rubbing his head hard as he went, and as he reached the dim light he held the hand out in front of him. He seemed puzzled by the dark liquid that covered the palm, and he studied it as if there might be some answer to be found there.

He bent and turned on the cold tap.

"Use some warm," I said, my voice breaking with an unmanly shiver as I imagined *my* head under the cold water in that basement. I didn't understand much about treating wounds then.

He held his hand under the running tap and stared fixedly into the sink.



"Are you gonna' be okay?" I called, too loudly over the splashing water as he stuck his head in there. But he still wasn't talking to me.

"You want me to get help?" I asked when he came up for air, and just then one or both of the Gastons yelled something through the little window.

"Should we call somebody?" Vicky asked.

The old man didn't answer anybody. He put his hand to his head and studied the palm again. It was hard to tell—with the light down there so bad—how thick his blood was running. For a moment I thought he was going to ask me to have a look; he started to turn towards me, tilting his head in my direction. But he stopped himself, looked warily at me out the corner of his eye, and smiled a disturbing smile—as if he were just then aware of some grim joke. It was a smile at once strained and yet so broad I saw a gold tooth way back in his head as he bent to the sink again.

"Just get me a towel," he growled, and stuck his head back in there.

I didn't move right away; his look had made me realize that he could see I was *happy* to see him bleeding. Just then I felt a tasseled end of Vicky's cashmere scarf whip across my cheek, leaving a little burn. She had yanked it from around her neck.

"Do something," she said, folding the material into a puffy square and taking up a position beside the old man.

"I will," I said, but in the next moment we both stepped back as he suddenly jerked away from the sink, stood straight up, and shook his head wildly back and forth, giving a whoop like a guy does sometimes after surfacing from a dive into a freezing lake. Ice-cold water and drops of blood flew everywhere. Then he saw Vicky standing ready with the balled-up scarf, and I was sure—because of what happened next—that he also saw the darker spots of liquid on her face and sweater.

In the next moment, as she stepped towards him, raising the scarf up to his head and saying, "Keep pressure on it," the old man took a step back and moved his head like a boxer trying to save his chin.

"That's all right," he said, gently fending off her hand with the back of his own, being careful, I saw, not to get any more blood or water on her or her scarf. "It's not serious."

"Come here," Vicky said, taking another step towards him.

"No, no," he said, raising his hand again. "Head cuts bleed a lot. Look worse than they are." He spoke as if we had just been sitting down to tea.

And then he said, "You two go on. I'm fine. I'm sorry." He winked at Vicky and nodded at me and then quietly stuck his head

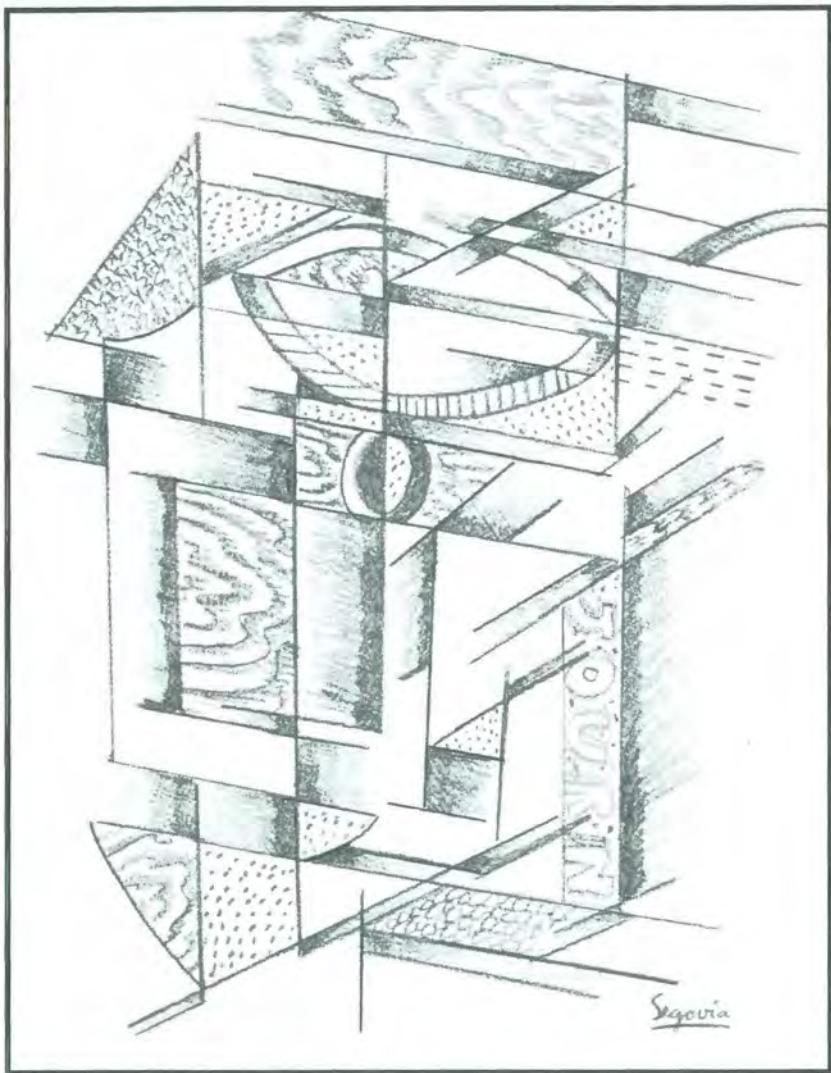
back under the freezing water.

Meanwhile, she tried to hand me the scarf; I felt it press against my stomach. But I was beside myself then, mesmerized by his sudden manners. I moved as if in a trance to the sink, craning my neck over his shoulder and straining my eyes to see what I could see. I watched as he moved slightly to one side of the faucet to see down into the basin himself, and at that moment I realized that my head was cutting off his only angle of light, from that door at the top of the stairs; I felt my stomach drop as I watched him shift to the other side, this time bumping his head against the faucet. In the dim light and general confusion it was clear to me he had thought my shadow his, and had tried in vain to move it. I jerked back with a sense of shame that made me wince. □

Julia  
Matthews

## Destiny

One cold October night, I had a dream,  
Of a ghost who echoes his every scream.  
My psychic powers watched over his fright,  
I knew in time I must show him the light.  
His pain lingered on because of his wife,  
Who first took his love, but then took his life.  
How could she kill such a heart that was true,  
Obsession for money was all she knew.  
I received the truth in my dream that night,  
Which explains my trip on this midnight flight.  
So, away I must go to set him free,  
From despair and pain through his eyes I see.  
For hurt should not linger forever more,  
Faith is the key and your heart is the door.



by Miguel Segovia