



Spring 1984

The Lantern Vol. 50, No. 2, Spring 1984

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Ursinus College

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the Lantern

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Spring 1984

A collection of poetry, prose, photography, and artwork composed for the Spring Term, 1984, by the students of Ursinus College.

The **Lantern**, the literary magazine of Ursinus College, symbolizes the light shed by creative work. It is named after the structure on Pfahler Hall, which has the architectural design not of a tower or spire, but of a lantern.

THE STORM

*Violence in motion, hovering gray
Leaves and papers blow away
Emerald green the trees
Whip the air
And then
Sun
Slowly at first
The sky breaks open
Into a glorious glaze of gold
Shimmering grass and leaves warm and wet
Clean air washed and refreshed to start a new day*

Mark W. Wingel

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La lumière du soleil est brillante
pour mes yeux,
Les oiseaux chantent mélodieusement,
La pendule fait tic-tac.
La pendule . . .
Oh non,
Je suis en retard!
Vite, vite,
Je me lève,
Je me lave,
Je me brosse les dents.
Vite, vite,
La pendule fait tic-tac rapidement
Et je suis lente.
Mais, attends,
Ce jour est un samedi!
Je retourne à mon lit.
La pendule fait tic-tac,
Les oiseaux chantent,
Le soleil brille,
Et moi,
Je dors!

Ellen M. Walsh

"Je ne sais pas"

"Où est mon livre?"
Je demande à ma soeur.
"Je ne sais pas," elle répond.

"Où sont mes chaussures et ma veste?"
"Je ne sais pas." Encore une fois.
Ma soeur ne sait jamais les choses importantes.

Mais, quand ma mère me demande,
"A quelle heure es-tu rentré hier soir?"
Je réponds, "Je ne sais pas."

"Je pense que c'était vers trois heures du matin,"
Ma soeur répond,
"Mais je ne suis pas certaine."

Kenneth C. Taylor

The Ghetious Blastious: An Urgent Plea for Help

“Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States!”

Today I would like to call your attention to a horrible thing that is sweeping our nation's ghettos. This thing has been terrorizing the streets with loud noises and is scaring men, women, and children everywhere. It leeches itself onto its prey, primarily black males between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five, causing them serious maladies heretofore unknown to modern medical science. The name of this horrible creature? The dreaded ghetious blastious more commonly known as the ghetto blaster! To help you spot this monster before it takes over your ghetto, I have compiled a list of symptoms that are commonly seen in infected victims.

The first and most obvious way to spot a victim of the ghetious blastious monster is by the appearance of the monster itself. It is rectangular in shape, about eighteen inches long by ten inches high by five inches thick and it has what looks like a handle on top. This handle attaches itself to the victim's right hand and then causes the muscles in the arm to raise it up in the air. Once there, the monster glues its base to the victim's right shoulder, forming a permanent bond between itself and the infected individual.

Another way to spot a victim, even when the monster is not around, is by the one ear deafness syndrome. You may notice this if the person you are observing does not respond well to questions that are asked while you are on his right hand side, but answers normally when they are asked from the left hand side. This one ear deafness syndrome is caused by the excessively loud noise emitted from the monster while it is on the victim's shoulder.

A third symptom of the ghetious blastious monster is a drooping right shoulder. This is best observed when standing behind the victim. You will note that even though the person is standing perfectly straight, his shoulders and head will appear to be leaning. This is caused by the large weight placed on the shoulder by the monster. Some full grown ghetious blastious monsters have been known to reach weights of more than fifty pounds!!

The thin arm is still another symptom. It is caused by the strange position that the monster puts its victim in. Because the ghetious blastious monster inhabits its host for almost ten hours a day, the circulation to the victim's arm is severely restricted causing poor nourishment of the muscles. This causes the afflicted arm to become thinner and thinner over a long period of time.

The last and probably the least obvious symptom is the funny walk. Because of the connection the ghetious blastious monster makes with its victim's nervous system, it causes a strange thing to happen to the way the person walks. While they walk, their head bobs back and forth, their fingers snap, their shoulders move side to side, their feet cross each other in a funny sort of dance, and their posteriors gyrate to and fro. Once a person has reached this stage of infection there is little hope for him.

To sum up, your help is urgently needed in this matter. Emergency ghetious blastious removal stations have been set up throughout the country to cure the infected. But these centers can't solve the problem on their own. So please, if you see a person with any one of these symptoms, get him to one of the centers immediately. The life you save may be your own. Thank you, and good night.

Andrew P. Wack

As a child I played the
normal child games
Had fun, never wondered
why?

Now I live in a grown up
world, deal with grown
up games, always wonder
why?

I saw the maps behind Walter
Cronkite, heard the numbers
of the dead and missing,
didn't understand enough to wonder
why?

Now I *see* the death, the wars,
the starving, the horror of it all
And always wonder
why?

I played as one with nature
through summer, winter, spring,
and fall and never worried
why?

Now I go to the beach and can't
dig up the sand crabs cause
they have disappeared.
I'm worried
why?

I saw the man land on
the moon – the best deal was
the cardboard toy that came
in the newspaper
Could care less to wonder
why?

Now I hear of space wars and
ICBM's, see space shuttles and
men flying around – and wonder
why?

School was school –
you did the HW, called your friends
didn't make waves, Honky Dory,
who needed to wonder
why?

Now I'll sit with an open book,
forced to memorize a bunch of facts
for a grade – 90% will be forgotten
in a few years and I wonder
why?

Swimming in the park was a
blast, summer fun in the sun,
splashing and dunking, who wondered
why?

Now you can't put a toe
in the same water, pollution
and dirt overpower too much of
what I remember as being clean
I wonder
why?

Had to learn to read, write and
do 'rithmetic,
climb the ropes in gym,
study the classics
learn a new language – Did it all
and hardly wondered
why?

Now there's a new language,
computerspeak, with a dictionary
the size of Webster's
(I had enough trouble with French)
I wonder
why?

I remember Lassie, Kukla, Fran and
Ollie, Disney, Kimba and
Pinball was an occasional treat.
Why wonder?

Now I see the A-Team, T & A,
Automan, Donkey Kong, Pac Man
and other assorted garbage and
I wonder
why?

In this ever changing world we
have created, appropriately
likened to a merry-go-round,
I jump off every so often
watch, listen, observe, and
wonder
WHY???

Angela L. Russek



*The Light of Faith shall
not flicker...
but endure forever in the hearts
of those who believe.*

Trisha L. Carvelli

Quand j'étais jeune
le monde était grand
et mes connaissances étaient petites.
Maintenant, je suis un adulte à l'université,
le monde est encore grand
et mes connaissances toujours petites.
Mais j'essaie.

Ronald J. Carter

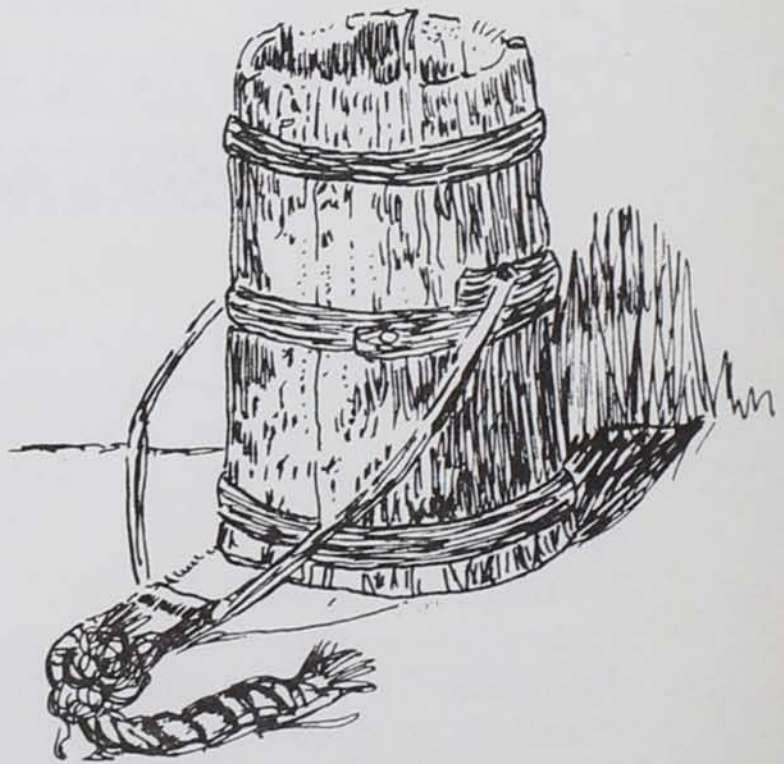
An Empty Cradle

There is a grave where a cradle should be
And tears where there should be great joy.
The parental hearts tear for them to see
An empty cradle and an unused toy.

There is a tombstone where a rocking chair stood,
And silence where laughter had been.
Life is replaced by a coffin of wood,
While the parents are destroyed from within.

Cold and dark replace the warmth of the womb,
From darkness to darkness enslaved.
A sad sight is a grown child's old room;
Twice worse is the sight of a child's grave.

D. Grace Fries



The Playing Hands

The hands that used to play so well
Are reduced to twisted claws.
Viewing these hands, you cannot tell
That they once brought great applause.

She stares at her contorted hands
And tries to fold them to pray
To find someone who understands
How badly she needs to play.

The trills, runs, and scales she once played
Brought so many to their feet,
But now her hands are so decayed
She can't shake with fans she meets.

The keyboard cover has been closed,
And the final note has died.
Yet she will never be disposed
Of the song she has inside.

Arthritis took her valued tools —
Her life's most wonderful part —
Yet still without those precious jewels,
She has music in her heart.

D. Grace Fries



Battle Hymn

Romantic!

Accomplishments are to be borne, not worn.

Sufferer!

Each day passes. Something done, meaning nothing.

Realist!

Unwelcome desires sneak through the bars.

Stoic!

Flags shred to pieces. Dreams endure.

Elizabeth P. Harp

It is said that four years at Ursinus
Will certainly help to refine us.
How refined will I be
When I get my degree
If my average stays close to C-minus?

Brian E. Kelley

Parting Thoughts

Gentle man that he was,
He never suspected that
she would sap his strength
And use his goodness
to her own end, selfishly.

God ended the connection
and consolation can be found,
Knowing he's escaped to heaven
and she's hell-bound.

Jacqueline Crahalla

The River

The sky is clear
The sun shines bright
If love is a flame
Can you give me a light?

Come on now
It's been too long
Life's too short
To not be strong

We'll go down to the river
And sit under the trees
And watch the sunlight scatter
Through the blowing leaves

And go in swimming
When the sun is hot
Life's too short
To miss a lot

Mark W. Wingel

Miss You

Wasn't it Jagger who wrote "Miss You"?
Was he so compelled by a neurotic tune
In his head to write it down
Over and over again until
His fragile little nerves were subdued?
I never knew what he meant 'til you left.

For sometimes you act like an intensifier
Widening my perspective as does a prism
Dividing a jumble of mixed emotion
Into fine divisions called feeling
All varying in purity of color.

Now I understand Moria's void
When the silly little party stood
On the edge of the chasm wondering
What to do now that Gandalf's gone.

No man wants to stand alone
He wants to rely on, to confess
His fears of insignificance
I want that prism but must
Depend on tears to divide the light
And get me through the dark of night.

Matt Fagan

Dear Kevin,

This is the most depressing letter I have ever had to write. I don't know how to explain it, but I know that it's best done through a letter. I think you may have figured it out already. This summer was bad for both of us. We were both just too busy with our own things. We didn't take the time to get to know each other better. Kevin, what I'm trying to say is, I don't know you! I mean really really know you. After 3 years it's scary. We had good times, but I think what I first felt for you is gone. It just isn't the same anymore! Being this far apart for such a long time is torture! I thought college was supposed to be the best time of your life. Instead of growing closer to you, Kevin, I'm becoming more and more distant. The way I feel right now is Kevin Weller doesn't even exist! ~~_____~~

I think I'm also getting tired of the way people look at us, as if we are sinful or something! I know that's an ancient topic but it's really bugging me. Just thinking about it burns me up!

There is something else though. You remember what we talked about. It isn't that my parents don't like you; it's just that they feel uncomfortable with you around. They don't want me to see you anymore. I'm afraid if I do, they will cut off all college support! They're serious! I don't blame them though. I don't think it will work either. There is too much going against us!

Kevin, if you want to write back you can. I'll see you around. I hope we can still be friends. Please!!

Love,
Meg

P.S. Kevin, it's for the best! Really!

I can't get this letter open. What did she seal it with . . . cement?! There, finally . . . boy, this one is nicely folded and everything. It's written nicely too. I wonder how she's doing? I sure do miss her. Oh no, she's depressed again. She takes her studies too seriously. No, I didn't figure it out already! I had to be busy! That's the only way I can get through school. I told you that!

"Say, Tom, could you turn down that music?! I can't read! Thanks!"

What do you mean you don't know me?! What about the romantic afternoons at your parents' cabin . . . the double-chocolate chip sundaes . . . or the baseball game when we were caught kissing on national television! Were they for nothing? Of course you know me! I'm having problems with being this far apart too. But we can do it! I told you that, Meg! She can't be serious. I'm losing touch with her. What if she's seeing another guy? No . . . I can't even think about that now. I should be there with her, right now. No! We can do it! We aren't like other couples! She doesn't mean it. College . . . is . . . just getting to her. Meg, there is no way you are going to throw away three years! You can't do that to yourself . . . or me! What did she scribble out? Not that again. We've already discussed people's reactions toward us. You said yourself you would get used to it, remember?! What ever happened to 'love conquers all'? Nobody said it would be easy! Oh yes . . . that's what I've been waiting for; the real reason . . . her parents.

"Tom! Would you turn that damn thing down?! These walls are like paper!"

Meg, I already know about your parents. Don't let them get to you. I can see them rubbing off on you already. What ever happened to your firmness with them? I thought you didn't care about our differences. That's what you said. Yeah, sure, see ya around. That's easy to say. You bet I'm going to write a letter back! You aren't going to get rid of Kevin Weller this easy! I'll fight for as long as it takes to keep you. You can be sure we'll be more than friends, Meg. Where's my paper? I don't have any stamps. I don't care, I'll be late for class. What ever made her think this way? Probably her parents. They're nothing but a couple of honkies!

Jerome F. Frasier III

De la Tristeza...

De la tristeza, escribo.

De la tristeza, me siento lleno de compasión.

De la tristeza, hay una falta de amor . . .

La culpa; la tengo yo, y tú también.

¿Donde estás cuando te necesito?

Estás en tu propio mundo, preocupado de ti mismo.

Necesitamos el amor . . . ¿de quién?

De la tristeza me siento solo, aislado del mundo;

De la tristeza, tengo que decirle al mundo que le quiero. No puedo; estoy cansado. Pues, no les importa.

De la tristeza quiero decirte “te quiero.”

De la tristeza, te faltó. Eres la luz en el vacío que apagará la vida.

De la tristeza de mi corazón, de la tristeza . . .

A very loose translation . . .

From the/Because of the sadness . . .

Because of sadness, I write this verse.

Because of sadness, I pity myself.

Because of sadness, love is lacking . . .

It is my fault, and your's too.

Where are you when I need you?

You are in your own world, only caring about yourself.

We need love, but from whom?

Because of the sadness, I sit/feel alone, isolated from the world.

Because of sadness, I have to say that I love the world. I can't; I am too tired. But, it does not bother you.

Because of the sadness, I want to tell you, “I love you.”

Because of sadness, I need you. You are the light in the emptiness that will light the way for me.

Because of the sadness from my heart, because of the sadness . . .

Walter S. Keehn

Two So Special

Sara, how i love you
seeing yesterday
that love can be so precious
as the music began to play

Helen, how i love you
is it wrong for me to believe?
in the memories of yesterday
as we both prepare to leave

i stood alone, among the crowd
wondering if you knew
i'd never forget the beauty
as we listened for the cue

Sara, can i love you?
as i stand here wanting more
crying in a silent stare
as the day closed in on four

Helen, one so special
that i saw the other day
deserving of His love
as i knelt and prayed

Sisters, do you remember
as i lashed out in the hall
never to realize
the purpose of His call

Sara, i came to see you
yet words were hard to find
as i saw you with another
falling into line

Helen, do you hear me?
as i signal with my eyes
praying for an answer
through my silent cries

Sara, something better
awaits this futile bliss
prepared by a special Son
as i receive your gentle kiss

sometimes i really believe
a future behind it all
then i see it isn't there
as i wait here for your call

Sisters, please be happy
no matter where your roads may lead
for Jesus holds your trembling hands
and does the same for me

Thomas G. Egner



Jackie Koluck

Time of the Unicorn

i.

I walked in the woods
One mild spring morning.
The new growth was beautiful,
So young, so newly created,
So fragile I could scarcely credit
It was alive.

The opening leaves were pale
In the morning sun. Delicately,
The plants lifted their blossoms
To her light.

I trod the ground so carefully
That I almost didn't look up
In time to glimpse
A white shining creature
Looking at me.
A unicorn stood stock-still before me,
With spiralling white horn
And flashing golden hooves!
Mystery and wisdom
Shone from the well of his dark eyes.
He and I looked at each other
For a moment of eternity,
And then we went on our ways.

ii.

As spring and the foilage matured,
Great oaks stretched their leaves up to the sun
Grasses underfoot grew in untamed tangles
The summer air, invigorating,
Carried vitality on every wafting breeze.
And I walked through the woods
Yearning for the fulfilled contentment
That I could sense
In the trees and the plants and the sun.

As far away as I could see,
I glimpsed the unicorn,
Framed by the tall oaks.
For a moment, our eyes met,
And our thoughts merged.
From the distance, he seemed to say,
"Have patience . . . watch, and learn,"
And so I was content to walk
In the quiet loveliness
Among the trees,
Knowing he'd draw nearer
When the time was right.

iii.

As summer mellowed into fall,
As leaves yellowed into rustling gold,
I walked among the trees
And marveled at the season's bounty.

Some divine paintbrush
Had touched the afternoon with beauty
Using every colour from an unimaginable palette,
And the long and slanting rays of the golden sun
Glinted off every hue with shining splendour.

In front of me stood the unicorn;
I dared at last to approach him.
Nearer and nearer I stepped,
And I saw such love and beauty in his face
That I forgot to fear, and stood
Lost in joy and wonder.

And absorbed as I was in the beautiful sight
I heeded not the silence
Till it was shattered
When the sound of a hunter's gun
Echoed through the forest
As another creature's life was taken,
Slain in its innocence and joy.

The unicorn turned from me then,
His jewel-like eyes reflected
The surprise and sorrow in his soul.
And as he darted away, I knew he'd never return
And I felt anguish and longing in my heart
For something I could not define.

Sara D. Seese

*The embers glow
and I am mesmerized
by their red intensity . . .
Now, the fire has begun to fade
Only the soft, bluish gold wisps curl
around the blackened log, beneath which
there is a rich, orange glow.
The flames dance along the log, no longer
roaring and encompassing it as before.
Soon the crackling will cease
the wood disintegrate to ash, very slowly.
What remains is soft, grey powder
and the warm memory of its beauty.*

Angela L. Russek

The Absence

Out of my window I gazed one day
Twas the last week of October, 1983.
A blustery wind seemed to sever the air
And echo forth memories of departed days fair.

At dusk I envisioned in the streetlamp's glow
Those Halloween nights of long ago
When the children, both body and spirit appareled
Kept the elders' hearts young with their mischief and laughter.

Ah! As I sat contemplating such thoughts,
A chasm of neighborhood memories burst forth
Like the day all the neighbors chased Dragon out back
Or the Sunday the lads searched for Martians in cracks
Or the long ago picnics under Spring skies of blue
Multitudinous cheers at the closing of school.

But time, like a leech long affixed to the skin,
Has drained their vitality, spirit, and kin.
A sleepy boredom now entrenches the block.
In the evening the doors rather early are locked.
Nobody are nowadays so swift at their tasks.
Their children have grown up, married, or left.

So, time unconsumed by parental tasks,
John Moore competes in politics.
Hanna and Ken play backgammon out back.
My father sits out to watch the sun set.

Yes, the evening lawns lie devoid of play.
The Pignollis and Harwicks have moved away.
Mrs. Schmitt and Becky have since passed on.
Even the Hancock School is now gone.
Like an aged and corroded pewter cup,
The neighborhood has grown up.

Jeremy Landersfield



Thru The Breeze

Thru the breeze, the summer air,
Silent as the rustling 'tails
In murky pond where creatures wail,
The answer slowly came to me.

I sat beneath an aged tree
Of pine o'erlooking a night marsh
And watched the water slowly crawl
'Til on its muddy border broke.

I sat and braced my head
Against the yielding bark
Inhaling pleasant scents of life,
Remembering.

I gazed into clear heavens,
Released my soul to touch the stars,
Remembered;
And then I wept.

And there was peace of mind
Which had escaped me all those years
When as a younger man I pined
For that which age for me had gained.

Now the wealth, the power, was gone,
And I am worse for all the wear
Yet free to float upon the breeze,
The soft, cool summer air.

Long had my ear forgot the sound
Which then did strike me all around;
The sharp, clear calling of the beast
So small, so alive upon the ground.

Then thru the breeze, the summer air,
Silent as the rustling 'tails
In murky pond where creatures wail,
The answer slowly came to me.

It filled me much the same way
As a drop of liquid soap into a cup of water.
I became saturated by its truth,
And of it, here I write:

Do not feed yourself on lies,
For it is not within the wise
To satisfy the aching flesh
And let the soul expire.

Feed yourself on love and life,
For these, well done, shall make you wise.
To satisfy the yearning soul
You must deny your eyes.

Then as the breeze, the summer air,
Blew silent as a whispered word
The answer, I fell asleep,
Forgot all I ever heard.

Timothy S. Weible



Is the World Really a Round Ball?

"There is a love for the game that is very difficult to put into words. You start off when you're very young and you never get it out of your system. You might get married to a woman, but basketball is always your first love."

(Willie Hall - 135th St. Park - Harlem - "The City Game" Peter Axthlem)

Basketball is a city game. A court, surrounded by a battered wire fence, is the battleground. The sounds of the game are underscored by the uneven rhythm of a bouncing ball against a pebble-strewn asphalt court.

Commitment is a major factor in this world. A great basketball player, almost by definition, is someone who has grown up in a restricted world. Not a world lacking in ambition (thus, commitment) but lacking money. Seen in this light, the commitment of the player becomes more readily evident. With basketball, he can escape the ghetto. In most cases, without basketball, he becomes lost forever, overwhelmed by the same forces of the ghetto that may make him great.

I arrived at Holcomb Rucker Playground shortly after an early morning drizzle that had left slight puddles and had washed some of Saturday's litter onto the court. The court had an abandoned, discarded, and uncared for look about it, but at the same time, I knew it had been the scene for many great performances in the past.

As I waited for the top-flight, inner-city "competition" to show up, I began to analyze my surroundings. I was a white man in a predominantly black area. I had played "slow it down and set it up" basketball my whole life, but in a few minutes, I was about to be engulfed by the high-flying, one-on-one magicians, that so populate city basketball. I was 26 and there on assignment for SPORT magazine.

At about 8:30, my subject, the pride and joy of city basketball arrived. He stood a muscular 6 feet, 2 inches tall, but, standing against the early morning sun, which hung lazily over the skyscrapers, he looked much more like the god he was epitomized to be. His cut-off shorts contained the strong, sleek legs that should only belong to a thoroughbred. A dirty, white T-shirt covered his massive upper body. His face was prematurely scarred and weathered from years of beating under the metal cylinder. Yet, his smile contained a sincerity such as I had never encountered. It was as if he possessed a unique insight into his life and his surroundings. I moved to a nearby bench and began to watch William "Fly" Stallworth perform.

Fly began his obscure career long before he ever reached high school. Every day, after his obligatory school attendance, Fly would head for the playground where he would work for hours. He would try to duplicate the moves he had seen the kings of his youth make. While he was at the park, Fly's father would be at home—drinking, his older sister would be watching the six other children in the family, and his mother would be cleaning house—other peoples', for \$95 a week.

Driven away from home, Fly turned to his "game" as his salvation from the biting grasp of the ghetto. He saw basketball as a light at the end of a tunnel scattered with the grave evidence of the reality of the ghetto. It was a tunnel filled with hardship, long hours, and a few lucky breaks. But, looking behind him at the tenements, the junkies, and the winos, he had no choice except to go forward and never look back.

Unfortunately, he had no one to guide him and monitor his progress.

Thus, compelled to attain the most from his seemingly unlimited potential, Fly sacrificed his school work in return for basketball stardom.

His career started promisingly enough, making all-city his freshman, sophomore, and junior years. His academic career, on the other hand, left much to be desired and Fly eventually flunked out prior to the start of his senior season.

William returned home to the playground and continued to dominate the court. He was still the king of his era and the demi-god of the next. He was a 6'2" person who could outleap people eight inches taller. His moves had an almighty poetry to them that captured audience and opponents alike.

Fly performed things never done before by somebody 6'2", or anybody at all. He became noted for picking quarters off the top of the backboard (some 13 feet off the floor) during pre-game warmups. Also, rather than merely blocking a shot, he would jump to the top of the board and slam the ball back against it. This would cause the backboard to vibrate for minutes. Fly is also credited with inventing the act of pinning—that is, blocking a shot and holding it momentarily as a symbol of conquest (every act in a playground has individual pride on the line and any opportunity to embarrass the opponent is taken advantage of). At times, it seemed as if Fly held the ball for minutes, adding salt to the deep wounds of humiliation of the player that had tried the vain shot. Sometimes, for special emphasis he would flip the ball into the crowd.

William "Fly" Stallworth did all of these moves and more, borrowing and innovating, using them all to form the greatest offensive arsenal ever seen.

Occasionally, Fly would accelerate past his defenders, with speed matched by few, and slam the ball through the hoop with one hand, catch the ball with the other hand, and dunk it again before returning to mortality.

Slowly, with age, Fly's game began to falter. The worshippers of his youth were now his contemporaries. He had trouble finding the desire to play. He sank into a deep depression. A "friend" offered Fly his needle, saying it was just what he needed to feel like a kid again. The same Fly who "wouldn't touch that stuff," in desperation to regain his throne, inserted the needle into his arm. That afternoon, Fly played as he hadn't played in years. The old talk of how he would beat any pro picked up. The next day, however it was the same depression. This time, Fly needed two injections. As the summer passed, the familiar strut of the "king of the courts" turned to the familiar nod of a junkie. William "Fly" Stallworth is now 30 years old and his life is over. All he has are the sweet memories of his youth. He can still recall that young kid being hailed as the greatest prospect since Lew Alcindor. And, as the tears of remembrance roll down his cheek, he decides he needs another and pulls out what has replaced his basketball—a hypodermic needle.

On the playground, Fly was a magnetic figure, representing all the dreams and aspirations of those around him. They spun when he spun, they leaped when he leaped and they died when he died. Some call him a waste, a loser to the intangible destructive forces of the ghetto. Others refer to Fly as a tragic hero, possessing a tragic flaw. That would be a lack of commitment to attaining what was readily attainable through some dedication. Whatever he was—he was a classic example of the beauty, poetry, destruction, and hellishness of the city game.

A happier ending, of course, would be if God had allowed his talent to escape the devastating forces of the ghetto. However, the reality of the ghetto seldom results in a happy ending.



Brother

He may not have great wealth
Or athletic ability.

He may not enjoy good health
Or mental capacity.

But his smile speaks of love
In a way that he cannot,
And he remembers to love
When others would have forgot.

The laughter in his eyes
Reflects an innocent heart,
Still naive and free from lies
As it has been from the start.

His eyesight may be poor
And his words all switched around,
But his gentleness says more
Than any uttered sound.

He may not have money
Or mental powers to spare,
But he has God's gift to simply
Show us how much he cares.

This true understanding
Of how life was intended
Makes me find it quite amusing
He's labeled retarded.

D. Grace Fries



To Michael

As your

Tender blue teddybear eyes

That peek through a soft sheet of freckled face sleep
What dreams does your mind sail upon?

What is your

Simple curiosity and innocent inquiry

That give a moment life?

What does your heart see

That triggers your comfortable smile

And ripples your cheeks into delightful dimples?

In your

Fears and frustrations

Delicately displayed on your sensitive eyebrows

Do you ever imagine anything so awful as adulthood?

Rosemary J. Wuenschel

Gravity

A legend among the children of the east end of Pittsburgh says that if you make a wish on a floating milkweed seed, and it never touches the ground, your wish will come true.

Rosalie quietly closed the apartment door and looked at the clock. It was 3:15. She did not have to be home until 3:30. She smiled and tiptoed silently back to her room in case the baby was asleep, because the baby *always* was asleep and not be wakened for any reason.

A ringing phone shattered the silence. She caught her breath and glanced across the hall, but the baby did not wake. While Mama answered the phone, Rosalie stared first at her toes and then at her reflection in the mirror, hoping that it wasn't who she thought it was.

"Rosalie," Mama hung up the phone.

"Yes, Mama?"

"That was Mrs. Jenkins."

Rosalie kicked the bed in frustration. She was so sure that she had escaped this time! She had oh-so-quietly climbed up the cellar steps while the Jenkins kids played their game, oblivious to her quiet disappearance. Right at the top of the stairs in the kitchen had been Mrs. Jenkins with a squalling baby on her hip and a barking dog at her toes. The phone on its long, long extension cord that could be stretched clear out to the back porch was squashed between her ear and her shoulder, probably to listen to one of her relatives or Mrs. Solavas, while she mixed dinner with the other hand. Startled, but undaunted, Rosalie had decided to bluff her way past. She put a deliberately casual, but purposeful look on her face, as if she merely wished to use the upstairs bathroom and cautiously stepped into the room.

"Who's that?" Mrs. Jenkins had said absently when Rosalie was half-way through the kitchen. Rosalie froze.

"Oh, Rosalie." She sighed, dropped the spoon, and pushed wisps of hair out of Rosalie's eyes. "You'll go blind before you're twenty. How can you see anything through that mess? Your ponytail should be tighter. What was that, Lizzie?" She returned to her phone conversation. Rosalie quietly inched through the house until she came to the front door and then fled.

"Mrs. Jenkins said you left without helping the others clean up," Mama said.

Rosalie was staring in the mirror. Stray wisps of hair from her ponytail floated around and over her face. There was a lot of hair in her eyes! But why couldn't she see the brown strands herself? There were a few colorless lines before her, but nothing that blocked her sight. I can see, she thought. I can see everything. I won't go blind before I'm twenty.

"Rosalie!"

"Yes, Mama. I came home."

Mama sighed. "Well, you'll just have to go back and help the others pick up. And come home right afterwards. If you want to come home early, that's up to you. You don't have to stay somewhere until I say you have to come home. I don't have any trouble keeping track of you. If they can't, or are so bored they won't, they deserve to pick up their own toys. But, Rosalie, it is impolite to leave just before it's time to clean up and you shouldn't do that. Go on with you now; it's the only way to keep them happy. Joey was calling for you while you were gone. In his usual manner," she added with distaste.

"The Dows won't be happy. But his father has him this evening, so we won't be bothered any more tonight. When you get back, we'll get supper ready for your father."

* * * * *

"Joey!" Rosalie called through the screen door. "Hurry, or we'll be late."

"He's coming, he's coming!" called Mrs. Engle in her usual loud, distracted manner.

Rosalie sighed and rubbed her nose, turning the neat black grid imprinted there by the dirty screen into a dark smudge. They would be on time, but only just. She was glad the Jenkins kids went to parochial school and could be easily avoided for most of the day. Yesterday, they would hardly speak to her when she had returned to help clean up. By evening they would have completely forgotten the incident. By now Marina and Sophie would have already left for the public school. If Joey didn't hurry, they would be hard pressed to catch up.

The little boy burst out of the house. His mother's strong voice rose easily over the slam of the screen door. "Joey, do you have everything? Your pencils, a comb?"

"Yeah, Ma, yeah, Ma," he muttered. "Let's go, Rosalie," he said, looking at her with glowing eyes. "Wait 'till you hear about what I did!"

"And don't forget you're to go to Mrs. Jenkin's after school!"

Joey ignored his mother's last reminder and jumped off the steps after Rosalie. "Wait 'till you hear what I did!" he panted as he trotted beside her in an effort to keep up. "My father took me to the biggest restaurant in the city, and he let me order from the grown-up menu, not the one for little kids," he snorted. "And I got everything I wanted and I ate and ate and —"

Rosalie sighed and slowed down automatically when the little boy wailed that she was going too fast, but otherwise she did not listen to him at all. She had heard variations on this same story too many times before.

Joey's parents were divorced. This meant, as far as Rosalie could figure out, that his mother lived in one place while his father lived in another place, and Joey only lived with one of his parents at a time, even though neither of them was dead. She did not quite understand, but as it did not seem very relevant, she did not think about it very often and the other kids thought about it even less. However, before Mrs. Engle arrived, their parents seemed to think about it a lot.

"Divorced!" Rosalie heard someone say to Mama. "Right here in our neighborhood. We've never had anyone here like that before! *What will the children think?*" the someone said in a high, strained, fearful voice.

Rosalie had shrugged. It was a tone she had not heard before, for Mama never used it, yet one she instinctively knew well. It was an attitude other grown-ups often took when they did not know just what their children were thinking and were afraid to find out, and so they moved quickly on to implant what they wished their children to think instead. It was the audible representation of a question she often saw flickering in grown-ups' eyes, especially in teachers' and other people's mothers' eyes when they were watching *her*. And as usual, when there was no censure from Mama, she considered it briefly and then ignored it. Mrs. Engle was loud and noisy and wore wigs (nobody else in the neighborhood did that!) and was hardly ever home, because she had to work, but neither Rosalie nor the other kids in the neighborhood found her so unusual as to warrant their parents' worry. Mama did say that it was the divorce that caused Joey to brag unceasingly about his father, and for that reason, especially on days like today when Joey could

talk of nothing else but how wonderful his father was and how many toys he gave him, Rosalie heartily wished that the man would die or move back in with his wife!

They reached the school without finding Marina and Sophie. Rosalie stood at the end of the path that wound behind the school to the kindergarten door and watched Joey until he went in with the others as Marina had done when Rosalie was in kindergarten; then she ran up the hill and in the side door to be in the second grade before the bell rang.

Later at recess Rosalie glanced occasionally at the kindergarten door. It remained shut. That meant the kindergarten would have recess at another time, so Rosalie was free of any responsibility for Joey. The boys were playing kickball in the court, and the girls were lining up to jump rope. As usual all of the girls wanted to jump and none of them wanted to hold the rope, so the first-grade teacher took an end and persuaded one of the little girls to take the other. Although almost every girl she knew was in line to jump, Rosalie merely sat on the dusty steps and watched. She had no coordination for the game, and everyone else took it far too seriously to have any patience with her. She dug her toe into the dusty ground and waited for enough of the girls in line to get bored and start playing freeze tag.

A gust of wind brought a distraction. A cluster of milkweed seeds hung in the air, high above the children's heads. Girls bored with the jump rope line and boys from the kickball line rushed over the playground after the seeds. Slowly, idly, they would begin to fall, then just as suddenly the wind would rise and toss them high up into the air again. The children scattered all over the playground, each following the seed each one thought most likely to fall within range.

"Get away from the street, you two!" the second-grade teacher shouted, and two little boys sadly watched the wind bounce the seeds across the street and out of their reach.

Rosalie had managed to catch one. The seed hovered gently in her cupped hand, waiting while various wishes danced in her head. A pony? Chocolate ice cream for dinner? Being able to fly? Rosalie picked one and gently told the milkweed seed, then flicked it into the air.

"No, no, no!" another child cried, batting the air under a seed in a frantic attempt to keep it aloft. But the seed turned in the wind and the very ends of the silky white tufts of its parachute delicately brushed the dusty ground.

"Too bad," said another kid, carefully, but expertly picking the seed up off the ground. "You lost your wish." He mumbled something, then blew the seed aloft.

Rosalie had kept her seed hovering in the air until the wind rose again and tossed it with the others high, high above the trees. She stood there with the others watching until the seeds were blown so high that they were out of sight. There was nothing more the children could do to keep them aloft. A few of the boys were called back to take their turn at the ball and the die-hard jump ropers returned to the line, but the majority of the kids began the tag game.

"If I could have gotten the seed up, would my wish really have come true?" the child who had lost the seed asked Rosalie.

"Of course," said Rosalie, and she ran in to play tag.

* * * * *

"Rose-A-lee! Rose-A-leeeeeeee!" It was Joey, standing in the back yard

and screaming his lungs out. Ever since Joey had moved to the neighborhood and attached himself to Rosalie, he always called her this way. He never rang the bell, and he never phoned. He just stood in the back yard and called and called and called at the top of his lungs until she came out. Mama disapproved and would have ignored him, but he could easily keep it up for hours and did so when given the chance. The others in the apartment house did not appreciate the racket, especially the Dows who lived downstairs. The Dows were old and did not like being overrun with kids and even less to be reminded that in reality, they *were* overrun, and all their furious demands for continuous silence were completely futile.

"Like mother, like son!" Mama sighed. "The lungs on those people! Go shut him up, Rosalie." The phone rang. "It's the Dows! Go, go, Rosalie. You can play for an hour, then come right back and finish your chores."

Joey had found a new topic. Unfortunately, Rosalie did not find it to be much of an improvement over the first one. In fact it sounded exactly the same as the one she had been carefully ignoring all week. Only the man involved had changed.

"Ma's new boyfriend took us to a movie last night," he bragged happily to Rosalie and Robbie Jenkins as they sat drinking pop on the front porch after losing their whiffle ball in the long grass of Joey's back yard. "He has a telephone in his car, and he let me use it on the way home."

Robbie and Rosalie looked at each other. Rosalie took another sip of pop and considered. Mama never let her have pop at home. She said it wasn't good for her.

"Only very, very rich people have phones in their cars," said Robbie. "On TV it's always the real rich bad guy that just picks up his phone while he's riding around and talks to anybody he feels like. We don't have a phone in our car. I never knew anyone who did. What do you think, Rosalie?"

Joey beamed.

Rosalie considered the pop again. She wasn't sure she liked this flavor. "All right, let me see it," she said. No one in this neighborhood was that rich.

"Right there," said Joey, pointing to the car at the curb in front of his house. "Go ahead and look. He really does have a phone in his car."

"I want to see this," said Robbie as he hopped off the steps after Rosalie.

Rosalie stood in front of the red car, quietly looking it over. "Sure doesn't look like a limo," Robbie said, kicking the front tire.

"Don't get any marks on it!" shrieked Joey from the porch.

Carefully, Rosalie peeked inside. "There is a phone in there behind the front seat, see?" Robbie peeked in under her hand and got a nose smudge on the window. "Huh. He does have one. Joey sure is lucky that he can use it. It must be fun to just sit back and look outside the window and talk to anybody you feel like instead of just who's in the car."

Joey looked very smug when they returned. "See, I told you he had a phone in his car! And he lets me use it whenever I want! And he takes Ma and me to the movies all the time, and he buys me popcorn and candy and pop and anything I want! Isn't he great? Isn't he just wonderful, huh, Rosalie? Isn't he just perfect?" Rosalie was staring at the bottom of her cup to see how much pop was left, and she did not see the desperate pleading in the little boy's eyes.

"I don't trust him," she said, flatly.

A look of horror and near-panic came into the little boy's eyes. Even Robbie, normally completely unruffled by life's surprises, for in his large family there were many, stopped climbing up the porch railing to stare at her.

Rosalie suddenly realized what she had done. She had merely said something, anything to shut Joey up, and oh, had it worked! She hardly ever saw Mrs. Engle's boyfriend, and she did not even know his name. Quickly, she flashed every picture of him she had through her memory, and a cold hard knot formed in her stomach. She had never thought about him before, she had never wanted to think about him before, but what she had blurted out to Joey to silence him was the truth. There was something rotten about him, something she could not identify, something she knew nothing about and did not want to know about. She did not trust him. She did not trust him at all.

"Why?" begged Joey in a thin, strained voice. The color did not return to his deathly pale face.

Rosalie shook her head. "I don't know. But I don't trust him. I just don't trust him."

And because she was older than both of them, they believed her totally. It was the respect that Marina often demanded and Rosalie, as she grew older, would not always give.

* * * * *

It was dinnertime, and Rosalie was sitting at the table eating her soup and listening to the daily fight between Mrs. Engle and her son. Living right next door gave her no particular advantage. Marina and Sophie lived three houses down on the other side, and they could easily repeat every word. The Jenkins kids lived five houses down from Rosalie, and although they usually missed a word or two, they always knew what the fight had been about. Rosalie did not think it at all fair that although the Dows were quick enough to complain that she or Joey were entirely too noisy in the back yard, and Mama absolutely forbade any noise that could possibly wake the baby while it was sleeping, the neighborhood as a whole let Mrs. Engle and Joey scream at each other undisturbed – and never complained about the noise to them afterwards.

"YOU *WILL* GO TO MRS. JENKINS' TONIGHT!" screamed Mrs. Engle. "AND YOU WILL STAY THERE ALL NIGHT! I DON'T WANT TO SEE YOUR FACE UNTIL TOMORROW MORNING!!"

"NO!" bawled Joey.

"YES!" screamed Mrs. Engle.

"I WILL NOT!"

"YOU WILL, TOO!"

Rosalie looked back towards the baby's room. Mama shut both the baby's door and the dining room door in a vain attempt to shield the infant from the noise.

"I WILL NOT BECAUSE *HE'S* COMING OVER TONIGHT, ISN'T HE, MA?"

"NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!" Mrs. Engle thundered. "GET UP THERE TO THE JENKINS' THIS MINUTE!!"

Joey's voice rose higher and higher. It shimmered at the top of its range, shrill and piercing and near-hysterical. "NO, MA! NO, MA! I WON'T GO! I WON'T GO! I CAN'T GO! I CAN'T LEAVE YOU ALONE WITH HIM, MA, NO, NO, NO! SEND HIM AWAY, MA, PLEASE! PLEASE! PLEASE! SEND HIM AWAY, I CAN'T LEAVE YOU ALONE WITH HIM, MA!"

"What on earth has gotten into you?" Mrs. Engle's voice dropped ten decibels in amazement. "You never used to be like this about him before!"

"They're really going at it this time," said Mama as she looked out the dining room window.

"I CAN'T LEAVE YOU ALONE WITH HIM BECAUSE *ROSALIE*

DOESN'T TRUST HIM!!!” Joey announced to the entire neighborhood.

Mama turned back from the window in amazement. Rosalie froze. For a moment she considered flight, but Mama was always able to find her. She decided to hold her ground. She took another bite of soup as if nothing had happened. Maybe the baby would start to cry.

“Rosalie,” said Mama.

“Yes, Mama?” Rosalie took another spoonful of soup.

“Why don't you trust Mrs. Engle's boyfriend?” Mama's voice was very soft and very gentle as if she did not want to frighten Rosalie, but merely wished to know the truth. Rosalie was puzzled, but as it did not seem that she was going to be punished, she was not afraid.

“I don't know, Mama. I just don't. Every time he comes out of the house or goes in, I run away. He bothers me.”

“But he's never done anything?”

Rosalie shook her head.

“You haven't been getting up early to watch the street light go out lately, have you?”

“No, Mama. It's too early in the summer. I've been reading my books until you make me do my chores,” Rosalie pouted.

Mama smiled and brushed back the hair which as usual had escaped the ponytail from Rosalie's eyes. The questioning look disappeared as if it had never been. Mama was satisfied and at peace, why, Rosalie did not understand, but it was good. “Don't say anything more about it,” said Mama. “Because it bothers people. But don't worry about it, and stay away from Mrs. Engle's boyfriend if you want to. You don't have to like him, and he may not last.”

Mrs. Engle had been shocked into silence, but incredulity added twenty decibels to her voice when at last she regained it. “I DON'T CARE WHAT ROSALIE THINKS!” Mrs. Engle shrieked. “YOU'RE GOING TO STAY THE NIGHT WITH THE JENKINS!”

“MA! NO!” the little boy cried in real terror.

“I'M YOUR MOTHER, AND I SAY YOU DON'T NEED TO SPEND THE NIGHT HERE, AND YOU WON'T! DOESN'T THAT COUNT FOR SOMETHING?” Mrs. Engle's voice reached the pinnacle of its range and broke. The question quavered fearfully in the air. Torn with indecision, Joey could not answer coherently, but began to sob hysterically and unconsolably.

“Mrs. Engle is frightened,” Mama said to herself as she drew the dining room curtains closed. “She does not want to admit that she does not trust him either.”

* * * * *

Rosalie was sitting at the Solavas' kitchen table, nibbling slowly at a koulourakia, the twisted Greek sweet bread that Mrs. Solavas made fresh every week. Marina and Sophie were at Greek school, and Rosalie was waiting for them to come home. Mrs. Solavas was talking on the phone, probably to Mrs. Jenkins since she spoke English. She could only get half way around the kitchen and part way into the dining room on her phone cord. No one had a phone cord as long as Mrs. Jenkins'!

“Yes, well, I understand the money is very useful,” Mrs. Solavas said into the phone. “Especially with that large family of yours . . . Oh, she's here, waiting for Marina and Sophie to come home . . . Yes, I expect them any minute . . . Oh, I agree, but what is any of us to do? Maureen has enough on her hands with that baby! All that time in the incubator!” She clucked in dismay. “Thank God all my children were healthy! I would have washed her mouth out with soap for talking about an adult that way if she was my kid!

It's unnatural! I never know what that child is going to do next!" Mrs. Solavas turned the corner into the dining room and lowered her voice. The minute she was out of sight, quick as light and as silently Rosalie crammed the rest of the koulourakia into her mouth, reached across the table to the bowl where the koulourakias were kept, whipped off the cover, grabbed the top one, replaced the cover, sat back down and bit off the first two twists of the second which was as far as she had nibbled the first and sat there at the table nibbling innocently. When Mrs. Solavas swung back into the kitchen, it would appear that Rosalie was still nibbling the original. "She's a sneak! She moves around so quietly you never know when you're going to turn, and bang! She's there! And her hair never stays in place. I don't want to think about how many times I've redone her ponytail myself. The minute my back's turned, that hair's in her eyes again. And she's always poking into things she shouldn't. I have to chase her out of the room when my soap's on. A child shouldn't be interested in such things."

It never ends, Rosalie thought because her mouth was too full to talk. All TV programs end. I've tried and tried, but I must be missing it. All I want to see is it end once.

A gust of wind shook the curtains. Outside the window three milkweed seeds twirled in the air. Rosalie watched them spin while she munched on her koulourakia.

"Well, I woldn't want to be Mrs. Engle," Mrs. Solavas continued into the phone. "For a variety of reasons, the least being living next door to her. I never really thought about it much, I mean, I knew Joey was spending nights up at your place, but I never considered all the *implications*. I assumed she wanted a little peace and quiet once in awhile, and the house all to herself. Heaven knows any little boy is noisy, and Joey more than most. But now! Now, of course, I wonder just what is going on over there, and how much does little miss spy know? Look what this whole business has done to Joey! It's not healthy, it's not good for a child to be torn apart like that."

Rosalie didn't want to hear anymore. She brushed the crumbs off her hands and decided to try to catch the milkweed seeds. Remembering what Mrs. Solavas had said about being so quiet, she took the screen door in her hand as it swung by and flung it back with all her might. It made a very satisfactory BANG!

"Rosalie!" shouted Mrs. Solavas. "Didn't your mother teach you any manners? Never slam the door!"

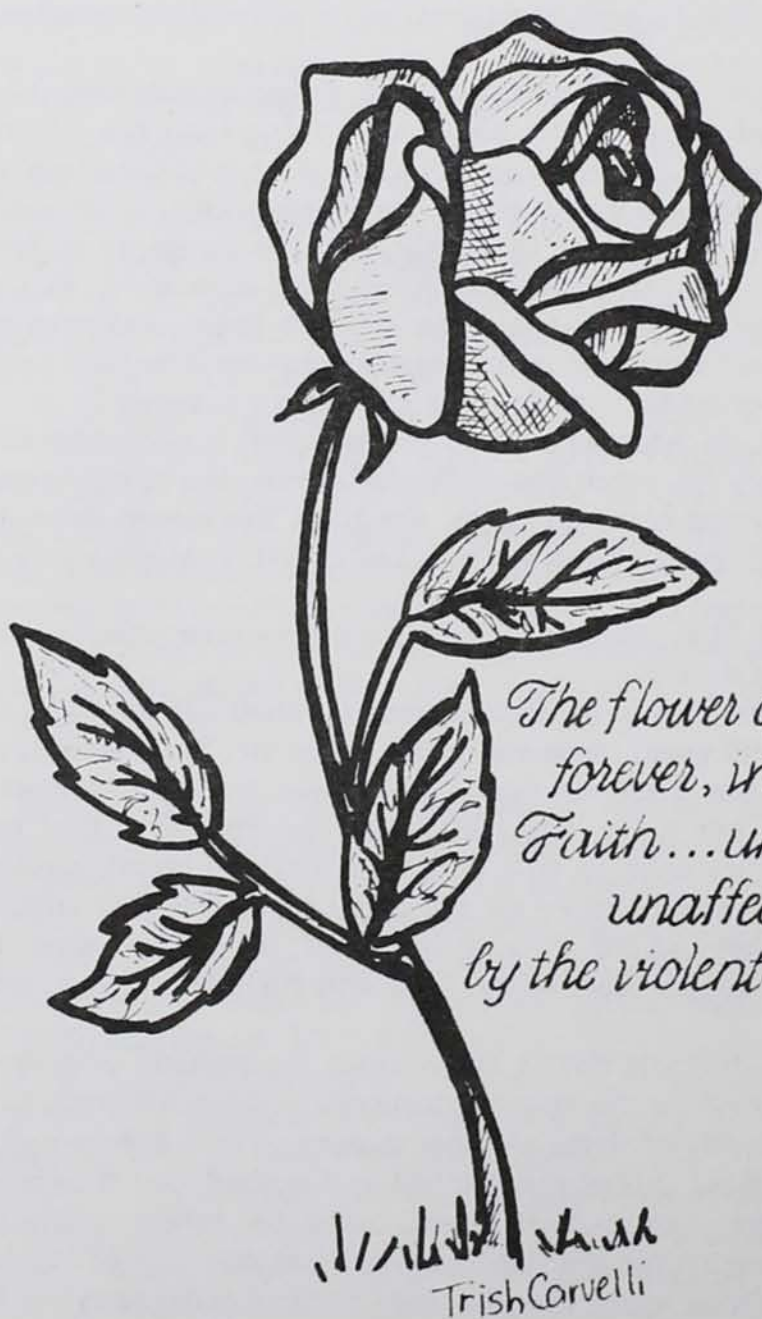
Rosalie threw up her hands in despair and marched off to stand under the window where the milkweed seeds still hung in the air. They were just out of her reach, but when she stood on tiptoe, she could reach the lowest one.

It turned gently in her hand, brushed lightly by the wind that puffed around her hand. The ends were so soft and light that she could hardly feel them daintily brush her hand. Unlike all the other times she had wished on milkweed seeds, no wishes danced through her head, happy and eager to be used, only an image of Joey's tear-stained face and his sobs ringing through his house.

"I wish—" she said, but she didn't know what she wished—Joey to have his father back with his mother, for him to stop crying, for his mother to stop having boyfriends, for both of them to stop screaming and fighting all over the neighborhood—all those things she wanted and wished, but they were all interlocked somehow and not one of them could be solved without the others. There was so much that she didn't know that was just as important as what she did know. Once again she saw Joey's tear-stained face and heard

his sobs. She was responsible for Joey as Marina was responsible for herself and Sophie, and Ann was responsible for all the other Jenkins kids, but as she looked at the milkweed seed spinning slowly in her hand, she suddenly knew that no matter how hard she blew and how much she fanned the air with her hands and how easily it caught the wind that blew strands from her ponytail around her face, that someday, somehow, the milkweed seed would touch the ground and her wish would not come true. Slowly, she dropped her cupped hands. As the milkweed seed gently left her twirling slowly in the suddenly still air, Roosalie began to cry.

Dorene M. Pasekoff



*The flower of Hope blooms
forever, inside a heart of
Faith...untouched...
unaffected...
by the violent storms of life.*

Trish Carvelli

Refuge

Blood racing through body
Heart pumping furiously
Lungs laboring.

Legs collapse
Darkness swallows all
Fear escalates
Silence shattered
Snap of a twig
Stagger on.
Hysteria

Sprinting blindly
Trees looming like vultures
Roots trying to trip
Branches attempting to catch and hold
Pursuing arms

Harsh breathing
Deep silence
Crackling of leaves and twigs
Feet flying through.

Panic rising
Coming closer
Desperation.

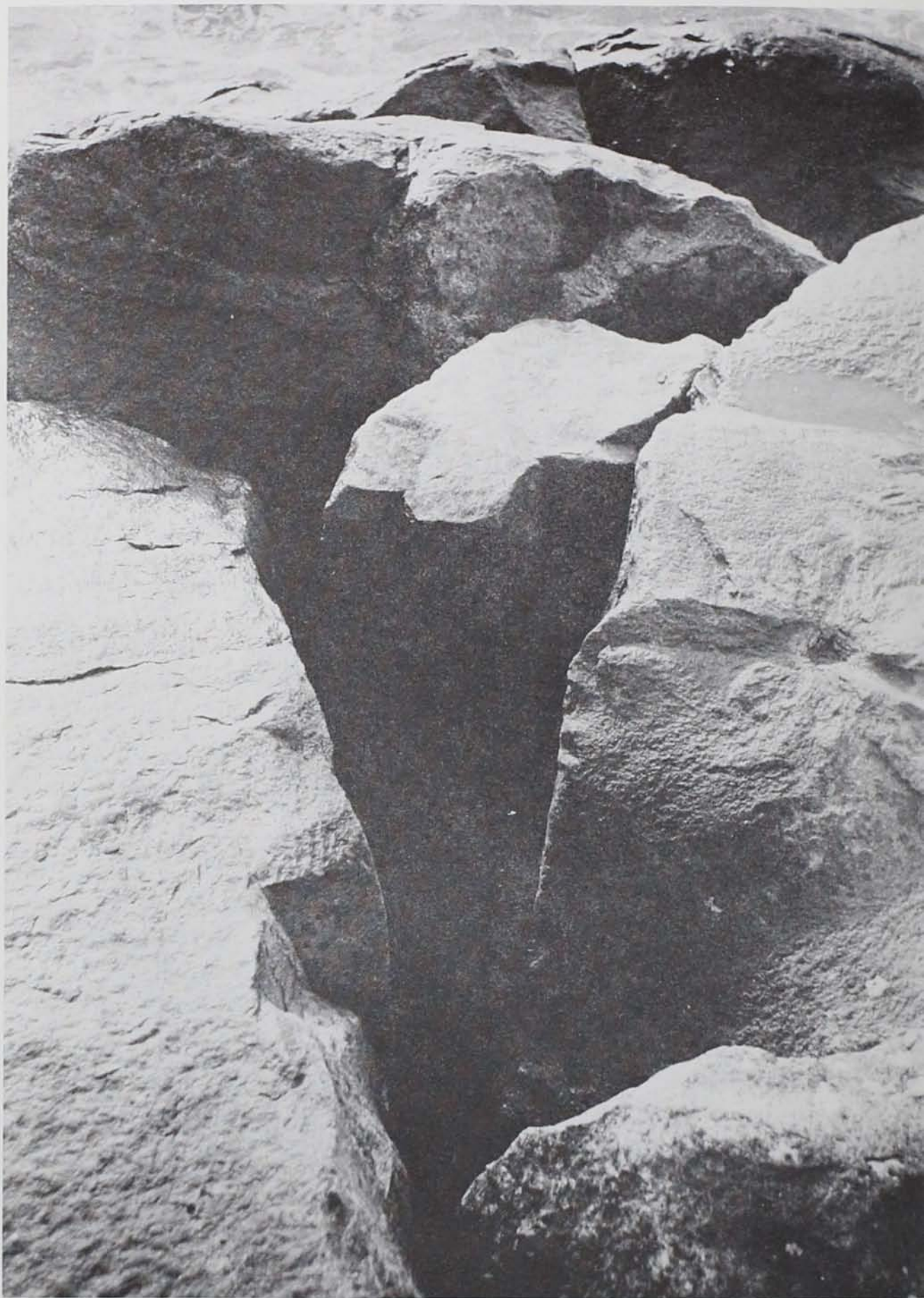
Last effort
Hope dying
Terror.

Light ahead
Crying
Stumbling inside
Cowering in corner
Trembling violently.

Time stretches interminably
Breathing, heart slow
Silence.

Consciousness fading
Memories dimming
Peaceful sleep
Safety
Comfort.

Beth A. Long



Der Witwer

Der Witwer sitzt sehr oft allein,
Und er will nicht mehr auf der Erde sein.
Die Standuhr schlägt – eins, zwei,
Aber er geht an der Uhr unbemerkt vorbei.

Die Zeit vergeht für ihn sehr langsam.
Der Witwer ist ein einsamer Mann.
Nur für seine Frau lebte er,
Aber jetzt hat er eine Frau nicht mehr.

Ohne seine Frau, wird das Leben langweilig, wohl,
Denn er weiss nicht, was er heutzutage tun soll.
Jetzt lebt er nur mit seinem Stuhl, der Zeitung,
Und einer liebevollen Erinnerung.

D. Grace Fries

Very Loose Translation!

The Widower

The widower very often sits alone,
And he doesn't want to be on the earth anymore.
The clock strikes – one, two,
But he passes by the clock unnoticed.

Time goes slow for him.
The widower is a lonely man.
He used to live only for his wife,
But now he doesn't have a wife anymore.

Without his wife, life will be boring
Because he doesn't know what he should do nowadays.
Now he only lives with his chair, the newspaper,
And a loving memory.

Plastic Flowers Never Die

Peter Wagnel had traveled widely. In fact, he had visited sixty-four years by the time his bubble had reached the one called 'Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Three'. Sixty-four is a lot of years to visit.

He found a moral in his travels. In his estimation it's one well worth passing along. This is it: If you find a year that you like, stay there. And how!

One day, while visiting a rather hostile year, he burped. It sounded like this:

*"Since that space that I was born,
I've visited many years.
Now I'm wretched and forlorn.
Damn those ones that brought me tears!"*

This poem embarrassed him. All poems embarrassed him. He jerked his palsied had of jaundiced hue across his open mouth and mumbled this: "Excuse me."

For Peter Wagnel, as you may have guessed, Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Three was a place split asunder by despair. He called it "a crummy year that I hate." He figured that the next scheduled stop on his trip, Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Four, would be even worse. He supposed that it would be best if he didn't take his bubble there. This is not sad—he planned his suicide.

So, late one night, he drove his sputtering (though still shiny) Porsche to a garage called 'U Park It' and he walked the three blocks to a bridge which stretched high across the Nordmont River. The wind was moist and furious and it blew his scant hair askew. He was cold and wet. Despair blew about his heart with the same fury that the wind blew about the bridge. Despair had blown the years askew.

Again he made a poem:

*"Oh! To be back in Seventy-Five!
Where the Negro folks would shuck and jive,
And dance to the disco drummer,
And I'd strut proud like a mummer,
With an insatiable thirst,
For January First!
And how! And how! And how!"*

He politely begged the pardon of his audience, which was, of course, just a few pigeons and the fish in the river far below. I suppose that it was a bit unusual for him to excuse himself after each poem; but he had always done this. It was his thing, so to speak.

Then, from behind the curtain of velvety darkness, he felt his bubble traveling in reverse. When it came to a stop he found himself back in Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-Five.

He switched on his sign, which said this:

Five and Dime Store
Peter Wagnel, Proprietor

And he stepped outside his tiny store and watched the dim, yellow lightbulbs dance around the perimeter of his sign. Then, with a deep breath of fresh air, he studied Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-Five with the scrutiny of a bird watcher.

He looked around at the green, irenic hills which rolled, in every direction, towards his store. They were embellished with shoals of stumpy evergreens and mighty oak trees and strong sycamores which shed their bark like

sun-burnt skin. There was a labyrinth of quiet streams full of hungry trout and fattened bass. They flowed, without any urgent destination, between the trees, among the rocks, from green hill to green hill. They meandered.

"Ah!" he said. He never could find the right words to describe beauty.

The sun was a neighbor and a friend when he had his bubble parked in Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-Five. It splashed gently on the rocks of the streams; it frolicked in the limbs of the trees; and it danced on the turf of the kelly-green hills.

"It's summer," he said. It would be summer during his entire stay in Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-Five. And how!

Frank Vandine popped around the corner of the store and disturbed Peter's communion with nature.

"Hey, Plastic," he said.

Peter, who acknowledged that nickname, returned the greeting with a nod and a flashy, ultra-bright smile. "Good morning, Frank. How are we doing today?"

There are two things that I had better tell you now. The first is this: Peter Wagnel only tolerated the nickname 'Plastic' because none of the town folk knew exactly what it meant. Here is the second thing: It was a strange thing about the town where Peter's store was, but every man there was named Frank. Except, of course, Peter Wagnel.

Anyhow, soon after the arrival of Frank Vandine, ten or fifteen more men would arrive, all of them named Frank, and they'd sit on the wooden benches along the front window inside 'Plastic' Peter Wagnel's Five and Dime Store. It was a ritual. Every day, before work, they'd gather and sip lukewarm coffee from styrofoam cups and spit gobs of leafy tobacco juice into the brass spittoon. It was delightfully 'down home'. They'd say things to each other like this:

"Hey Frank, how's the wife and kids?"

or this:

"Yo, Frank, how's that new John Deere holding up?"

And sometimes this:

"How's it hanging, Frank-boy?"

All of the Franks would laugh heartily at that one; that was the kind of provincial humor that they enjoyed.

The Franks who gathered in the store were nice, to be sure, but they were ugly, and quite frankly, dumber than hell. There was only one reason that Peter respected these men and it was this: they idolized him. This, in his estimation, was good. It was evidence of their good sense.

One morning, Peter said this to a group of Franks:

"To have you Franks in my store is nice;

Nice, nice, nice, nice, nice, nice, nice.

I hope you enjoy my sage advice;

Vice, vice, vice, vice, vice, vice, vice."

He quickly excused himself for having been so crude. The collective face of Frank grinned, with tiny tobacco-stained teeth.

"You sure have a gift," Frank Lee said.

"Amen," said the Reverend Frank Donlon.

Peter stared intently at Frank. I call them Frank because of a rather queer epiphenomenon which was this: these fifteen men, or so, who were all named Frank, began to look alike; in fact, they looked like one person.

Anyhow, here is what Peter saw when he stared at Frank:

A very ugly man.

His teeth, as I've already mentioned, were tiny and they had been made brown by years of chewing tobacco, or, perhaps, by years of neglecting to brush them. Frank's face was too big, and square, and it could have been made of stone. It was marred by purple blotches and long streaks of animal dung. In the creases that the years had carved, there were streams of unctuous liquid—probably axle grease. His hair was oily and grey and sparse. His clothing was made of cotton and wool which had become hopelessly wrinkled and was decorated with tiny holes and unsightly patches. Frank had never modeled for **Gentlemen's Quarterly**. And how!

If Frank was unpolished, then Peter had three or four coats of polish. This is what he looked like when he visited Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-Five:

He was perfect. In spite of the fact that he had visited fifty-five other years, his head was full of thick, brown hair. In fact, the color of his hair was the exact same color as his wing-tip shoes. His teeth were big and straight and as white as a virgin's aura. His midsection was firm, and he looked trim in virtually anything he chose to wear. His only unusual bulge was a curious one in his groin which never seemed to subside; this made him look vital. His clothing was always neatly pressed, and even after a long day, it was conspicuously devoid of wrinkles. His clothes were never patched.

He was beautiful. This is what he told those Franks one morning:

*"Pity, pity, poor, poor, Frank;
You look so vile, base and rank.
Mother Nature, I do fear
Has played on you a prank:
To make me to look so very dear,
While you look like a tank.
Ha! Ha!"*

This was a silly little ditty. "Excuse me," he said.

The morning went on as usual with Franks sitting along the wooden bench and staring at the Peter. They thought of how perfect he was. They thought he was beautiful. They loved him. They were content to simply keep company with him for the entire morning, until it was time for work. God, they loved him!

Here was the thing: Peter was as insatiable as a nymphomaniac; he always needed more love. Beauty is a magnet, he thought, which drew love towards it. Right?

"I'm cold," he said. The chill of the brisk wind had blown his bubble back to the bridge at Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Three. This location was certainly remote from the comforts of Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-Five. He wished with all of his heart that he could go back there, but his bubble wouldn't budge.

His attention turned to a stately factory building which sat alone, and commanded the bank of the Nordmont River. He could see its eerie reflection in the dark river which swam below him. In disgust, he threw a handful of gravel at the image on the water. This is what happened: the reflection was caused to dance by a few mere pebbles. Another handful and the image was lost entirely in the weltering dischord of the water's surface.

"It's good," he said "that the factory itself doesn't crumble so easily as its image shakes." And how!

Then, without even concentrating, he felt his bubble begin to travel again. This time it didn't stop until it reached that place called Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-Eight.

"It's Spring," he said as his bubble arrived. Indeed, it would be Spring during his entire stay here.

It would be Spring because Peter would blossom into the beautiful being that would one day visit Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-Five. However, before you read on, I should tell you this: Peter Wagnel was a very ugly child. And how!

Here are the things that made him ugly:

He had no teeth in the front of his mouth. This happened while he was visiting Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-One. He was supposed to be in a school play which was entitled **Paul Bunyan and His Ox**. He was going to play Paul Bunyan, but there was some difficulty in finding a co-star, someone to play the blue ox. So, with characteristic ingenuity, Peter decided to dye his own horse blue. It sure seemed like a good thought. However the horse seemed to be satisfied with his natural color, and didn't seem to like the idea of pretending that he was an ox. So while Peter prepared the dye, the horse voiced his dissatisfaction by kicking him in the mouth. So much for Peter's blue ox. So much for Peter's white teeth.

Peter also had no hair. This is what he did: in every year that he visited, he left some hair. He left some in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-Four, he left a few clumps in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-Five, and so on, until, by the time he reached Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-Eight, there was no hair left to leave behind. This was really no surprise to him; all of his maternal relatives had performed the same sort of ritual.

As if having to gum his food and shampoo his scalp weren't enough, something else came up, so to speak. It was this: Peter Wagnel had visited eighteen years and had never had an erection. It seems that his sedate, rural childhood surroundings had swiped his vitality. This disturbed him.

It was in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-Eight that Peter was to begin college. He was not anxious to attend his freshmen orientation session as a bald, impotent, eighteen-year-old person with no teeth. It was because of this that he began his beauty regimen.

To combat his alopecia he was fitted for and presented with his first hair-piece. It was shiny and full-bodied. A local dentist constructed straight, white teeth to put in his mouth during the daytime. Of course at night he was to put them in a glass that was to be filled with a solution which prevented them from turning brown. He kept the glass and the teeth on his nightstand. That was also where he kept his toupee. It was lovely!

Peter Wagnel began college as a new man, dashing and handsome. He figured to woo his fair share of girls at his new school, which was Boatright University. However, there was still the problem of his impotency. Ah, but the wonders of modern medicine prevailed; midway through the first semester he was sent to a hospital in the city. It was there that a team of doctors gave him back the vitality that had been lost to him during his youth. They implanted a tiny prosthetic device in his penis.

"This is great," he said as he examined the first bulge ever to grace the crotch of his grey-flannel trousers, "great!"

Coincidentally, Peter's roommate at college was John-Boy Walton. Here is the poem that John-Boy gave to Peter upon the good news of the operation's success:

*"You've done it now, you're a virile stud,
But there are questions that I must ask;
Will the girls of Boatright think you're a dud,
When you perform the intimate task?"*

*Do you think that they'll be spastic,
When they venture beyond the elastic,
And find that Peter's peter is plastic?"*

You may have guessed this: John-Boy Walton was the first person to call Peter 'Plastic'. He really did have a dirty mind. And how!

Anyhow, it was during his visit to Nineteen Hundred and Thirty-Eight that Peter Wagnel realized that he was ready to face the world. Everyone told him that he was beautiful. He figured that they all loved him. His mask was a smashing success.

The first palpable trace of the sun caused Peter's bubble to drift back into Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Three. Only too soon would the sun's brilliance vanquish the tranquility of the dark night; too soon would it illuminate things which are best when left in the dark, namely the filthy earth and the withering anatomy of Peter Wagnel. During his visit to Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Three he had learned to hate the sun. The sun, it seemed, was a roistering rogue that smudged the paint of the Earth's walls, and stripped the polish from his smartly waxed floors.

He screamed at the dark sky. "If you would only stay by my side," he said, "then I'd have the strength and courage to continue on my journey. With you, I'd visit Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Four." And what a lovely place that may have been in the dark.

I suppose that this was sad: Darkness was Peter Wagnel's friend. Darkness was a girdle that firmed his flabby midsection. Darkness was a smile that assuaged the cruel wrinkles of his aging face.

It saddened him to see the sun burning through the darkness. He called it a "ball of hell's fire," which meant that he didn't like it. He screamed this to the sun:

*"Damn that firey sphere above,
It's darkness that I truly love!
For it's he that shrouds my wretched face,
And he my feeble arms embrace!
Get away, get away, get away foul sun!
Go back and spoil China's fun!"*

"Peace," he said, and "excuse me."

It was after this outburst that he felt his bubble begin to drift again, this time back to Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Two.

"It's Winter," he said. Indeed, it would be Winter during his entire visit.

It was lunchtime when he parked his bubble. Apparently it had been a very slow morning, and he'd stepped outside to take a look at this place called Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Two.

It wasn't a pretty year. The fertile, green color of the rolling hills had been etiolated by months of harsh weather. The streams no longer meandered. They had answered nature's beck and call; they had grown tired and lazy; they were frozen solid. The shoals of evergreens had been scattered, and their limbs were weary beneath the burden of the heavy snow. The sycamores no longer looked sun-burnt, but afflicted with leprosy. The mighty oak trees which once defined this piece of land had been replaced by weeping willows.

This was the worst thing: Even in the Winter, the sun was too bright.

"It's sad," he said as he kicked a clump from the ridge of crusty, black snow which had redefined the existing curb along the front of his store. The one thing that hurt him most of all was this: to see beauty reduced to squalor.

"How's our Mardi Gras King doing today?" The voice startled him. It was Faith Constantine. She was the wife of Frank Constantine, the town's

Notary Public. She loved Peter. In fact, all of the women that Peter had met in this year had loved him. So far.

Peter stoically swallowed his melancholy and replied, "Wonderful, Faith, now that you're here." He smiled a bright and hollow smile.

She smiled. "I expect that the other ladies will be along shortly, I'd better go and find myself a good seat," she said.

It was a ritual: every afternoon the ladies of the town would gather in Peter Wagnel's Five and Dime Store to gossip and to stare at Peter Wagnel. It was only on rare occasions that the ladies would actually shop, but this didn't matter, it was their undaunted admiration that supported Peter, not their money.

Naturally, most of the ladies who came to the store in the afternoons were married to a man named Frank. Their collective appearance was as unkempt as their spouse's was. They had fat thighs which waged war against the faltering seams of their cheap slacks. Their bodies bulged in all of the wrong places. They had their hair pulled back so tight that the milk-white skin of their forehead looked like the head of an African drum. The match of the collective Frank and the collective Mrs. Frank was one made in heaven. And how!

Again, this must be said: The ugly ladies were not without virtue; they adored Peter for his beauty. This pleased him. It was because of this alone that he respected these ladies.

Typically, the ladies would say things like this:

"Peter, I love your suit,"

or this:

"Peter, how do you keep your teeth so clean?"

or this:

"I sure wish my Frank had your equipment, Peter. He could certainly make me a much happier woman!"

With this the ladies would giggle and blush and hide their faces as though they had been scolded by Queen Victoria.

Typically, the ladies would simply sit along the bench and admire Peter as though he were a painting with the enigma of Mona Lisa. Typically, they treated him as though he were some sort of dignitary, perhaps even a deity. He enjoyed this. It nourished him.

However, the day that Peter's bubble landed was not a typical one. And how!

It was on that day in the afternoon that the widow of Brendon Q. Madd came into the store and bypassed the ladies on the bench, and failed to bow in front of Peter, so to speak.

"I'd swear that that lady doesn't like me," he said.

Her name was Beatrice A. Madd. She was chairman of the committee which was to select the King for the town's annual Mardi Gras Festival. Peter came to believe that she was a goddess named Nemesis. She was the sun personified.

This should be noted: Her late husband Brendon was, for many years, the only other man in town, besides Peter, who was not named Frank. He was killed in an automobile accident in Nineteen Hundred and Seventy-Four. Beatrice had been a recluse ever since. It wasn't until she moved to Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Two that anybody could even be sure that she was still alive.

It was during his visit to this year that she decided to become an active participant in day to day life once again. This is, of course, why she had

decided to head the Mardi Gras King committee.

About the Mardi Gras King: Every year that Peter had visited, starting with the one called Nineteen Hundred and Forty-Seven, the town had been represented by a Mardi Gras King. He was supposed to be a man who was photogenic. This would enhance the town's reputation when his picture graced the pages of the big-town newspapers. Peter Wagnel had won the competition at every year that he had visited. He coveted his crown.

Now, with Beatrice A. Madd in charge, he figured that his crown was in jeopardy. He figured this because she didn't like him. This frightened him and saddened him. On that day that she walked by him in his store, he figured that he had better try to win her favor.

He approached her as she passed through the aisle which was home for items of personal hygiene.

"Hello, Mrs. Madd, how are we doing on this fine day?" he asked.

"Don't bother, Plastic," she responded. Peter was undaunted by the harsh emphasis on the word 'Plastic'. He responded with a poem:

*"I'll do what you want Ms. Madd, Ms. Madd
I'll even dance or sing, or sing,
You'd never know how glad I'd be, how glad,
If you'd select me Mardi Gras King, The King."*

"Excuse me," he said.

She dropped a stick of anti-perspirant into her shopping basket and proceeded to the aisle where a display of Halloween masks remained in view even though it was long past Halloween. Since few people in that town had any use for a mask after Halloween, they were considered surplus. They were on sale for a very low price.

As Beatrice passed the rack full of masks, she noticed that Peter had followed her. She spun around and faced him with the news that would change his life.

"I'm not going to pick you," she said.

Silence was all the words that he could muster. His jaw dropped, his shoulders slouched. Rejection — it was causing an instant metamorphosis. Should I beg? he wondered. Should I cry? Instead he sang a song. It was one that he had heard on the radio:

*"You can't blame me, I'm heaven's child;
I'm the second son of Mary Mild;
And I'm twice removed from Oscar Wilde,
But he didn't mind, why he just smiled."*

Beatrice looked stern as she watched this pitiful man dance foolishly around the aisle. He sang:

*"The ocean parts when I walk through,
And the clouds dissolve, the sky turns blue.
I'm held in very great value,
By everyone I meet but you."*

If there was even a modicum of pity in her body, it was remote from her stern face. Peter Wagnel, suddenly a desperate man, concluded with the chorus:

*"Everybody loves me, baby, what's the matter with you?
Won't you tell me what did I do, to offend you?"*

As he made the big kick on the final stanza, he slipped on the slick, waxed floor. He knocked over the rack with the masks on it. It made a thunderously loud racket.

He didn't excuse himself; he cried.

The ladies of the town, who had been in the front of the store, had heard the commotion. They formed a semi-circle around Peter, who was still on the floor and sobbing uncontrollably.

"I have no pity for you," Beatrice told Peter, "I only have pity for the people who thought that you were somehow better than they. I pity them because that is nonsense. I'm sorry that they've been so naive."

"Come on, Beatrice. Don't pick on Peter," said Mrs. Frank Lee.

"Yeah, leave him alone," echoed Mrs. Frank Tompkins.

However, Beatrice was coiled like a snake, and she was ready to strike; not let up.

"Look around at these people," Beatrice A. Madd continued, "their hair is grey, yours is brown. Their teeth are crooked and yellow or brown or gone; yours are perfect. Their clothing is inexpensive and wrinkled and tired; yours is the finest that a man of your means can afford. It seems certain that you fly miles above the people of this town, right? You're an eagle and they are just lowly moles, right?"

Peter didn't answer. He was a man of broken spirit. He feared what she might say next.

"Right?!!!" She demanded an answer.

"Right," Peter said. This was not the answer that she was looking for. She continued to assault the very essence of his existence:

"No! Wrong!" she said, "You silly man! You're just a mole in drag and you're as blind as a bat! These people, the ladies standing around you, and their husbands, and their children, they are the eagles. You're a mole. Just a silly and lowly mole."

"How can that be," he asked, "when they are so dumb and so ugly?"

"You fool," she said tactfully, "can't you see that these people are poetry and you are just a sickening, sweet romance novel? Look at their eyes, silly Peter. What do you see? Their souls! And you don't even have to look very hard. Their souls are right there, for all of us to see, and it's lovely! And your eyes: they're murky and distant. Where is your soul? It's tucked conveniently deep in that silly mask that you parade yourself around in – that tatty toupe, those weather-beaten choppers, and the awkward bulge of your charlatan vitality. Your soul is lost in the smoke. We see your appearance. We don't know your essence, and you won't show it to us. This is sad and despicable. Even in your glory years your beauty was fatuous – it was manufactured. Now the years have etiolated the wax, and the bare floor is lost in its smudges. You're more despicable than ever, and hardly fit to serve as our Mardi Gras King. Hardly!"

Beatrice A. Madd dropped her shopping basket and walked out of Peter Wagnel's Five and Dime Store into the streets of Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Two. This was sad: All of the ladies followed her.

By and large, that afternoon was the last one that people spent admiring Plastic Peter Wagnel. He had no more visitors. His flock had fled. He was a sad man indeed.

Before he left Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Two, he switched off his sign for the last time. His store was closed. Life there, without admirers, had become unbearable.

His bubble blew back to Nineteen Hundred and Eighty-Three. It had its tailpipe between its rear wheels, so to speak.

The sun had risen by the time his bubble arrived. It was suspended in the dreary sky by the soot that the brick smokestacks had blown through their cold, iron orifices. It was a lonely morning. He supposed that he had seen the last of his friend called darkness. It saddened him to have not made a formal farewell.

In the glare of the bright morning sun, he became pensive. He thought about his poems. He thought about burps. He thought about his poems as burps.

Here is what he thought a burp was: gas that his stomach was unprepared to shelter. His stomach, he thought, didn't know exactly what to do with this gas, so it packaged it in things called burps, and sent it out through his mouth. Once it passed his lips, he believed, it just became a part of a larger entity of gas — the atmosphere.

Here is what he thought that his poems were: beauty that his heart was unprepared to shelter. His shrouded heart did not know exactly what to do with this beauty, so it packaged it in things called poems, and sent them out through his mouth. Once past his lips, he believed, it became part of a larger entity of beauty — nature.

This is why he excused himself after each poem. It seemed so like a burp to him. His mother had always told him to excuse himself after each burp. He would never disobey his mother; after all, she was the one who had bought him his first head of hair.

Besides burps and poems, he thought about something that he wished he could have done during his lifetime. It was this: find a cure for mortality. Think of that!

While his bubble stayed at the bridge, his mind wandered back to the morning before. He remembered waking up early that day, but having no place in particular to go. He pictured his teeth and his toupee sitting side by side on the nightstand. He remembered seeing himself in the mirror: His face had aged ten years in the space of just one. His head was bald except for the patch of stubborn toupee glue which would not relinquish its grip on his scalp. His bottom lip nearly touched his nose. There was, he remembered, nobody to talk to. There was also nobody to admire him. It had been that way for quite a while now. He was sad.

I believe that he threw up that morning. Then he cried. He may have even wet himself; it didn't matter anymore. He planned his trip to the 'U Park It' garage. He also planned his suicide.

He didn't cry on the bridge. He just kicked his feet back and forth over the edge, like a child in a grown-up-sized rocking chair.

In the bright morning he could see debris floating in the river below him. He spotted a single plastic flower which floated by. There was a cemetery up the river which eventually dumped all of its fake flowers into the water. Otherwise, they'd just hang around and make the graveyard look dirty. They preferred to have natural flowers on the graves, because they eventually withered and died and joined the deceased in the ground. Also this: they looked better.

Peter looked at the flower intently.

"How proud you must have been," he said aloud, "when you had the reddest petals and the greenest stem of any flower in the graveyard."

By the time that it had floated beneath Peter Wagnel, however, it had been changed. Its color had been faded by the sun, and its texture had been made coarse by the chaffing of the wind.

He said this to the flower:

"An Ode to Plastic Petal by Plastic Peter:

*They were faithful, loyal, dutiful;
But now they've all turned sour.
They told you you were beautiful,
A lovely plastic flower!*

*But now your petals have faded;
And am I wrong to think
That the carcass of one so jaded,
Should be allowed to sink?"*

"Excuse me," he said.

Tom Feeney

Book on the Shelf

In my younger days you filled my life. You gave me a world – wonderful in every way. You showed me the beauty of a flower midst the green leaves of spring. You showed me the joy of a bird's morning song; the peace of fresh fallen snow.

And still more you taught me to love, simply and tenderly. You taught me to laugh with the bliss of a spirit free. And you taught me to cry, to refresh my soul.

And oh, how you led me to adventures both fascinating and new. You took me over mountains and 'cross seas to far off lands. You took me to the ends of the earth and farther still. You had given me a world without bounds – you had set me free.

In my younger days I read aplenty.

But then I had a taste of life as it is, as it exists. I had to discovered that the world was not what you had told me, but something less. Disappointed, shattered, alone – for the first time I saw you as I never had before. The fury of the present made me blind to the past.

Angered and hurt, I turned away from you – strong intentions to never look back. I was the faithful spouse and you had betrayed me.

But memories, with the help of time, have a way of pervading all. And, slowly at first, bit by bit, I remembered; and I knew I could not leave you; I knew I still loved you. You were a part of me and I could not deny that. No, I would never leave you forever, but neither could I ever again lose myself completely to your printed page.

B. M. Cosh

