



12-1994

The Lantern Vol. 62, No. 1, December 1994

Heather Mead
Ursinus College

Jill Zucker
Ursinus College

Anthony F. Gulotta
Ursinus College

Verena Hussong
Ursinus College

Erec Smith
Ursinus College

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/lantern>

 Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Illustration Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Click here to let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Mead, Heather; Zucker, Jill; Gulotta, Anthony F.; Hussong, Verena; Smith, Erec; Regelman, Sonny; McCarthy, Dennis Cormac; Love, Paula; Cosgrove, Ellen; Sabol, Kristen; Lacy, Gretchen; Plitt, Douglas; Podgorski, Michael; Artis, Sophia; Deussing, Christopher; Miller, Jessica; and Pinsk, Mark, "The Lantern Vol. 62, No. 1, December 1994" (1994). *The Lantern Literary Magazines*. 145.
<https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/lantern/145>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Ursinusiana Collection at Digital Commons @ Ursinus College. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Lantern Literary Magazines by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Ursinus College. For more information, please contact aprock@ursinus.edu.

Authors

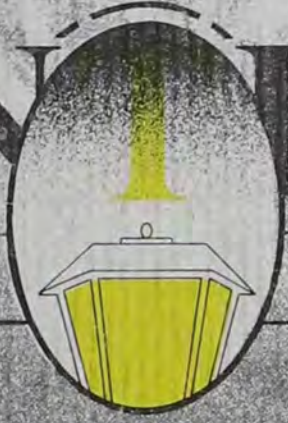
Heather Mead, Jill Zucker, Anthony F. Gulotta, Verena Hussong, Erec Smith, Sonny Regelman, Dennis Cormac McCarthy, Paula Love, Ellen Cosgrove, Kristen Sabol, Gretchen Lacy, Douglas Plitt, Michael Podgorski, Sophia Artis, Christopher Deussing, Jessica Miller, and Mark Pinsk

THE

LANERN

Vol. LXII, No. 1

Winter, 1994



THE LANTERN

Ursinus College's Literary Magazine

Vol. LXII, No. 1

Winter 1994

Heather Mead--HOLLOW.....	3
Jill Zucker--A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE IS DANGEROUS.....	8
Anthony F. Gulotta--MY OLD BLOCK.....	11
Verena Hussong--LIFE.....	12
Erec Smith--The Natural Born Fool.....	15
Sonny Regelman--ORACLE.....	20
Dennis Cormac McCarthy--FORMATION OF A TRIANGLE.....	22
Paula Love--MARIE ON THE BEACH.....	29
Ellen Cosgrove--THE TWEED DERBY.....	35
Cerise Bennet--SING ME A MOUNTAIN--Art.....	39
Kristen Sabol--Tripping.....	40
Gretchen Lacy--IN VITRO.....	42
Douglas Plitt--THE CHARACTER.....	44
Michael Podgorski--COMING HOME FOR CHRISTMAS.....	47
Dennis Cormac McCarthy--UNKEMPT.....	54
Sophia Artis--TOO MUCH.....	58
Christophber Deussing--REIMERTANTI-ODE.....	58
Jessica Miller--SEEDS.....	60
Mark Pinsk--SECRET.....	62
Alex Schaal--UNTITLED--Art.....	62
Jen Mintzer--BEYOND--Art.....	63
PATRONS.....	64

EDITOR'S NOTE:

THE LANTERN, the Ursinus College literary magazine, is proud to present its Winter '94 fiction edition. The staff would like to congratulate Heather Mead, author of the prize winning short-story "Hollow." We would also like to congratulate Kristen Sabol, whose drawing, "Submission," graces our cover.

I also extend my thanks to Lisa Tremper Barnes, Dr. Patricia Schroeder, the staff of The Lantern, and our advisor, Dr. Jon Volkmer. Without their combined talents and cooperation, this magazine would not have been possible.

THE LANTERN

Editor

Erin Gorman

Associate Editor

Sonny Regelman

Layout Editor

Jim Maynard

Patron Drive Coordinator

Patricia C. Daley

Circulation Manager

Heather Mead

Advisor

Dr. Jon Volkmer

Fiction Judge

Dr. Patricia Schroeder

Art Judge

Lisa Tremper Barnes

Staff

Sophia Artis

Heather Jagaczewski

Kristen Sabol

Matt Caia

Mile Katusa

Lawrence M. Santucci

Ellen Cosgrove

Laura Lecrone

Erec Smith

Elizabeth Cullen

Dennis McCarthy

Karen Tyson

Chris Deussing

Douglas Plitt

Judge's Note:

The task of selecting one prizewinning story from the many excellent submissions was quite daunting. Eventually, I narrowed my choice to three that I thought were particularly well done. I admired the understated epiphany at the center of "Marie on the Beach" and the refusal of melodrama that marks the narrative voice in "Formation of a Triangle." However, since I could only select one prizewinner, I chose "Hollow" for its unity of effect. Although we never know the exact source of the narrator's emotional emptiness, her hollowness of spirit emerges on every level of the story. The effect is palpable in the non-event that marks the crisis in the plot, in the dialogue that conceals rather than reveals, and in the specific, concrete objects. Every word, every image, conveys the interior hollowness that the narrator laments but cannot undo, and that the author of the story conveys with convincing emotional truth.

Hollow

By Heather Mead

I woke up this morning to the sound of a bird flying into the window. I lay there for a while until I realized no one else was in the house, then got up. Pulled a sweater on over my nightshirt and headed for the deck. I watched the mist hover in the air over the pond, until the sun broke through. I lit my first cigarette of the day and contemplated getting dressed. I decided against it. I'm never sure where to put the ashes and butts because he can't find out that I've started smoking. Usually, I put them in a coffee mug until it's full, and then bury the remains in the flower garden. I don't think he knows.

Sami is feasting on the remains of the bird that woke me up, his tail flicking back and forth with contentment. Benny is lying on his back, his legs fully extended, paws digging at the air. At this moment, the only thing I want is to spend forever here in my rocking chair, smoke, and pretend that I live in a world where he does not exist.

So I sit here some more and wonder why I have stayed so long. I have been with Joe since the day he drove into the gas station where I work. I filled his tank with premium, he paid with cash, and asked when I got off work. Midnight. He'd be back. Two hours later, I locked the safe, climbed in his Ford pick-up, and we headed for Ned's Tavern. We played pool and darts and drank Moosehead. There was something good about being with him; it worried me. I kept waiting for the other shoe to drop. Three years later, I still am.

Sami's tail stops flicking and Benny's starts wagging. Coming up the long, dirt driveway is Joe in his blue pick-up, kicking up dust behind. As usual, my stomach drops somewhere around my knees. With a final exhale, I put the remains in the mug and go inside to hide it in my closet. I crouch in the doorway and wait until I hear the door open then close. He's home.

I walk into the kitchen, buttoning the fly of my jeans, then sit at the counter to pull on my boots. They are tied before he says anything.

"Mornin'."

"Hey." I am pouring him a glass of grape juice.

"Up long?"

"Nah, half an hour."

"Hm. Got the washer for the sink. I'll work on it this afternoon."

"Whenever." I can't possibly love him.

"So. You goin' to the store today?"

"Do I need to?" He is standing behind me, one hand on my

waist, the other playing with my hair.

"Well, I thought maybe we could eat home tonight. But there's nothin' to cook. And I'm outta beer."

I turn to look at him, thereby pulling my hair out of his hands. I'm okay as long as he isn't touching me. His eyes are so brown, so huge that I forget to breathe if I look directly into them. I watch as he casually tucks his long hair behind an ear, and remember why I jumped into his truck without a first thought.

"Yeah, well we need some other things too. I guess I'll head out now."

He cups my chin in his hand and pulls me toward him. Shit.

"You okay?"

No.

"Yeah. I'm just not awake yet. Give me an hour or three."

His eyes catch mine and won't let go. It's like he is trying to see into my brain. It won't work. Using every ounce of strength I don't have, I close my eyes and break the spell. Then I am able to turn away.

"Ya need anything else?" I grab my bag and keys, clutch the knob, and hold my breath, waiting for the escape.

"Elly." That's it.

"I'll grab some chicken or maybe steaks if they're nice. We can throw them on the grill. I'll make a salad. Maybe I'll get some wine. Red. Okay? See ya."

What am I saying? It doesn't matter, I just need to get out of here. There is tightness in my chest. I am suffocating. At the car, I look back and Joe is standing in the doorway, arms crossed, hair hanging over his left eye.

"Hose the deck down, Sami got another bird."

I start the car, put in a tape, and accelerate down the driveway. At the bottom, I stop to light a cigarette. In the rearview mirror I can see Joe unwinding the hose to clean the deck. Feeling like shit, I turn right out of the driveway and head south on Clover Street.

The first night we spent together, Joe said that he thought it was cool--my working at a gas station. To me it was just money. Since then, it's gotten clearer that we don't look at things the same way. He can't understand why I sit on the deck for hours at a time, not saying or doing anything. I don't understand how he can wake up every morning at six o'clock.

I pull into the shopping center and park an equal distance between the grocery and liquor stores. I buy steak, red wine, and vodka. I flirt with a stockboy in the grocery and the cashier in the liquor store. Later, I drive through the new development and wonder what is going on in the houses, create scenarios, unsure if I could live that kind of life.

Tomorrow is Mom's birthday and I wonder if I should call her. I haven't talked to her since Christmas, and haven't seen her since I left home six years ago and moved here. One small town to another, nothing changes but the street names.

* * *

Today I wake up to silence and a cold bed. Joe leaves for work at seven thirty. His crew usually starts at eight. They are finishing a roof today, so he'll probably be late. I lie naked beneath a quilt Joe's grandma made for us when we moved in together. Sami jumps on the bed as I flip my pillow to the cool side. I have two hours before I go to work, and nothing to do. Sami curls up on Joe's pillow and goes to sleep. Benny is pawing at the side door. With a grunt, I get out of bed, throw on Joe's t-shirt, and head to the kitchen.

From the porch, I can see Mrs. Wheeler hanging her blue striped bed sheets. There is a sinking sensation in my stomach. I know this is my life. Twenty years from now, I will still be sitting on this chair, on this porch. Only then it will be my blue striped sheets on the line, and my children's overalls hanging in descending order.

It is the same feeling I had two months ago; those three days in April I thought I was pregnant. Seventy-two hours from calling the doctor until the negative result came back. My joy of relief was interrupted by Joe's quiet disappointment. I hadn't told him until I was sure it was a no. All he said was "Oh." He hardly spoke until I gave in and asked what was wrong.

"Would it have been that terrible if you were pregnant?"

Pause.

"I mean would having my baby be so awful?"

"No Joe, not just your baby, but any baby."

"Why?"

"I'm twenty-three, Joe. I work at a gas station. I barely finished high school. I have no clue what I'm doing, and no idea where I'm heading. Not the best time to have a kid."

He took a step towards me, pulled me into his arms, and said with sincerity:

"I'd take care of you, Elly. I'll always take care of you."

What could I possibly say to make him understand that the thought of loving him cannot exist? Without hurting him. God, I didn't want to hurt him.

So I didn't say anything. I accepted his arms, his mouth, and returned them with my own. Sometimes when it's dark out, and quiet, just him and me, I believe it could work. But then the sun comes up.

I extinguish my cigarette, collect the remains, and head for the shower.

When I get home from work, Joe is sitting on the porch, drinking

a beer and playing with Benny. A jolt flashes through my body. Without looking, he passes me a half-empty bottle of red wine. My favorite.

"Thanks, hon. How's the roof goin'?"

"When did you start smokin'?"

Fuck.

"A few months ago."

"Were you plannin' to tell me?"

"I wasn't aware I had to report back to you."

"I wasn't asking for a report. I just wondered if you were goin' to tell me."

Good question. I don't know. I drink from the bottle and look out at the lightning bugs. Benny is rolling on his back so Joe can scratch his stomach. There is a new can of beer in Joe's hand and three empties lying at his feet. He has not looked at me.

"I guess I'm just wondering why you never tell me anything. Not until it's already over and done with."

"Well.. I know you don't like the smell of cigarettes, so I figured.."

"I'm not talking about the fucking cigarettes."

"Then what.."

"Hey Joe, good news. I thought I was pregnant but I'm not. Oh by the way, did I mention my father shot himself? Christ, Elly, you went to the funeral without me."

"I didn't go."

"What?"

"I didn't go."

"But you went home."

"No, I went to Norfolk. I planned to go home, but I couldn't."

Joe has moved to the railing, and rests his hands on the top bar. Benny keeps pawing at his ankle but Joe is not aware. I sit on the third step and lean back against the landing. I close my eyes and exhale slowly. This is it. After three years, the second shoe is dropping.

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't have anything to say."

"You never have anything to say. Not anymore. Not to me."

I have no clue how to respond to him, because everything he is saying is true. I lay my head against the landing. If I can block him out, pretend I'm talking to myself, maybe I can get through this.

"When my dad...died...I knew it didn't matter if someone else could make you happy, you had to make yourself happy. Depending on someone else is just setting yourself up, and when they fuck you over, you're left with nothing."

Joe still has not looked at me. I don't know if he is there or if he has left. It doesn't matter. I can't stop now.

"I don't want this anymore."

He lifts his head, as if to look at the stars, but I know that his eyes

are closed. He opens his mouth, pauses then speaks.

"Don't want what?" There is hollowness in his voice.

"I don't want...to be here anymore. I want to go somewhere I've never been before, somewhere I know nothing about." He can't make me say it.

"And you don't want me to go with you." It is not a question.

"Everything's here for you, your job, friends, family. You can't leave it all." It's the truth.

"And you can't stay."

"No."

Neither of us has moved in the last five minutes. All I can see is an outline and his hair, softer than mine will ever be, and for once I am not jealous.

I stand up and walk into the house. In the bedroom, I pack my things. There is little and I'm done in thirty minutes. As a last thought, I grab his red shirt and throw it in a box. I carry my things out the side door and load my car. My life in two bags, two boxes, and a backpack.

Joe is stuck in the same spot I left him. Not a muscle has moved. I climb the steps and stand just behind him, resting my face between his shoulder blades and breathe a mixture of Wisk, wood, and sweat. His back tenses but he makes no effort to move.

"I better be going." But I don't move.

Then he is turning to me, holding me to him and kissing me. I respond, feeling what I've always felt when he kissed me. He releases me. I back away and look up into his eyes, the ones that make me forget to breathe. I know this should be the big moment, the one where I confess everything to him and end up staying. Nothing happens. I feel no need to tell him anything. He knows this and watches as I walk back down the steps and to my car. I pause at the door for a moment, wondering if there is any way...no, none. I get behind the wheel, turn the key, flip on the lights, and slowly start down the driveway. About halfway, I lightly touch the brake. In the rearview mirror, Joe is just a shadow--an outline, yet I think that at that moment he is more than I will ever be. I tap the gas pedal and continue my descent. At the end, I turn right and head into the darkness.

A Little Knowledge is Dangerous

By Jill Zucker

The questions began in December of my seventh year when advertisers were saturating the television airwaves with Christmas promotions. I became consumed with a desire to understand the reason why I was denied the opportunity to reap the benefits associated with this holiday. I never heard any of the announcers say that people could not have Christmas if they were Jewish. This was the manner in which my quest for religious knowledge began, but along the way things went terribly wrong.

It was the tallest tree that I had ever seen. I tilted my head back, as far as my neck would allow, in order to see the top. The aroma of pine needles overwhelmed the room. I recognized the clean, fresh scent immediately-- it was the fragrance of the neighborhood after a summer rain. Mr. and Mrs. Dooley, our next-door neighbors, invited me to help decorate their Christmas tree. As we trimmed it, I asked Mrs. Dooley to explain the purpose of Christmas. She looked at me pathetically; it was an expression that one would give a wounded puppy.

"Christmas is the birthday celebration for the baby Jesus," she answered. I simply nodded.

I thought about the birthday party for the baby and decided that it was a perfectly delightful concept. I had a birthday party every year, and it would have been selfish to deny anyone a party.

I was certain that my parents were not aware of the true meaning of Christmas. I believed that as soon as I enlightened them we would be on our way to the store to purchase a tree for our living room. I stood in the kitchen with my mouth agape, as they responded in unison to my discovery, "No!"

"Why not?" I whined.

Mom answered with the same answer she always gave when she did not want to discuss a subject. "Because I said so, that's why." Exiting with as much noise as I could create, I stomped off to my bedroom to sulk.

My interest in Christianity waned through the winter, but was revitalized in the spring. My classmates were preparing to participate in their first Holy Communion ceremony. I had decided to ask my best friend, Tommy, to explain this concept to me. Tommy and I sat side-by-side on the curb. We were torturing the ants that had congregated on a wad of used bubble gum.

"So, this thing is a big deal, huh?" I began. I moved my foot slightly and created a barrier so the ants could not escape.

"Yeah. I even have to wear a suit. But my mom says I can take it off as soon as we get home. I don't have to keep it on for the party." He moved his foot to create a barrier parallel to mine.

"What party?" I asked with annoyance, now poking the ants with a blade of grass.

"We're having a party afterward. You can come if you want to." The stream of spittle erupted from his mouth so fast that I almost missed seeing it. It landed in the middle of the gum wad, sending the ants scurrying in all directions.

"What's so important about this that you get to have a party?" I had started stabbing at the ants, trying to impale them with a twig, but my aim was off.

"It's kinda hard to explain," he said. Tommy watched me stab at the ants and picked up a twig of his own. The ants did not stand a chance now that we were both armed.

"Just tell me, okay? I want to know," I said with my best whiny voice.

"Okay." He began. "We go to church, the priest does the mass, and then all of us kids line up and walk to the altar and the priest gives us the communion. That's it." He killed one of the ants with his twig. We watched as the others raced to scavenge the dead body.

"What EXACTLY does the priest give you? What's a communion?" I wished that he would hurry up and tell me. Three ants were carrying the dead body back to their home in the crack of the curb wall.

"It's the body of Christ," he answered with a laugh. "We go to the priest and he gives us this thing that's the body of Christ and we eat it." He poked the ants that were on top of the wad, in an attempt to suffocate them in the gum's mass.

I dropped my twig, turned to face him and asked accusingly, "You do what? You do what to the Christmas baby?" My voice was shrieking at that point. I had forgotten about the ants.

Still laughing he said, "No, stupid, not the baby, the grown-up."

I stood up, pressed down on the balls on my toes, and twisted my ankle side-to-toe, killing all of the ants beneath my sneaker. No further explanation was necessary. I had learned all that I needed to know about Tommy's religion. I ran home faster that afternoon than I had ever run before, my mind haunted with images of cannibals.

Prior to my conversation with Tommy, my knowledge of world religions was minimal. I had the birthday party information provided by Mrs. Dooley, in addition to bits and pieces of conversations that I had overheard from various adults. The time had come for me to ask my father to explain what, EXACTLY, Christianity was.

Dad tried his best to explain Christianity to me so that I would understand such concepts as faith and resurrection. Judaic history does not offer examples comparable to the resurrection and the

Trinity. The result was an inability to draw parallel images for me to relate to. Dad simply provided the facts as he knew them.

I did not tell Dad or anyone else how terrified I was of Christianity. As I walked to the playground, my mind filled with gruesome and violent pictures of my friends eating each other and turning to me, looking at me as if I was a McDonald's Happy Meal. My imagination ran wild. I continued to ruminate this subject on the jungle-gym. I maneuvered about the bars with deftness and design. I lost myself in the physical universe: grabbing, pulling, climbing -- exorcising my body of the horror that had encumbered it.

I had been hanging ten feet above the ground, upside-down for a few minutes. My knees were wrapped tightly on the cross bar, my torso was fully extended, and my shirt pushed against my face from the forces created by gravity. My arms extended toward the ground and blood was rushing to my brain when I came to my conclusion about Christianity. I made up my mind that all Christians were evil and bad, especially Jesus, when my knee began to slip out of its hold. I fell crashing to the hard dirt and felt the pain immediately. It took thirty-two minutes, the length of an ambulance ride, to transform me from acrobat to hospital patient.

My eyelids felt heavy and would not respond to my command to open. Finally, one lid slowly rose up and, jealously, the second lid followed. I stared at the wall in front of me as panic spread through my entire being.

"Oh my God, I'm dead," I whispered to the air as Jesus Christ stared back at me from the wall.

Unable to dislodge my eyes from His, my mind conjured explanations for my untimely death. A mistake had been made in heaven and I had been sent to the Christian place instead of the Jewish place; maybe Jesus had stolen me and was punishing me for hating Him and His fellow Christians. Now that He had me, He could torture me. I did not notice the tears until I tasted the salt on my lips.

The sound of a door opening distracted my reverie. My mom was there, rushing toward the bed. She brushed the hair from my soggy eyes in that way only mothers can do.

Pointing to the wall, I asked, "Why is He here?"

She turned her head to follow my finger. "This is a Catholic hospital. Don't worry about that, they know that you are Jewish, they wrote it on your bracelet." She lifted my arm to show me.

The tension flowed out of my body and I relaxed. However, I continued to worry that the next time I might not be fortunate enough to have the bracelet on to protect me from Him. I would have to think of a way to protect myself. Garlic was an option, it worked against Dracula; kryptonite was also a possibility . . .

My Old Block

By Anthony F. Gulotta

Men wearing felt fedoras, others wool caps, hands clutching
Metal lunch pails, drawn toward the Utica trolley as if by
A magnet. I see mothers, hair bobbed, natural faces, their
White aprons fluttering in the autumn breeze rushing

Children off to school--"pencil box?" "handkerchief?" "apple?"
Then the houses are silent except for the squishing of
Soapy clothes against a metal washboard and the whirling
Of a Hoover competing with the cry of an infant.

I smell Officer Hennessey's breakfast, red meat steak!
He wears a dark blue uniform with silver buttons.
Whistling, he announces his arrival. A Capitan's
Hat, much too big, plops onto my head.

I see myself on the stoop of my red brick house
Watching my father trudging home from work.
I hear my mother's voice, "Stay on the steps
Of the stoop, soon we'll have supper."

Ringin'-the Good Humor truck! It's white panel emblazened
With a huge chocolate cone and a raspberry popsicle,
Children running, crying out, "orange pop," "pistachio cone"--
The ice box opens--a cold burst of air against my face.

I am told eight luxury townhouses were built at the end of my
block.

I know that the people who live within them are unaware. . .
Boys once used the empty lots as a baseball diamond
And at night cooked Mickeys by the flames of an open wood fire.

Life

By Verena Hussong

It was quiet on the bus. We had just left Krakow, the next to the last stop of our junior year trip. We had discovered the beauty of Prague, the Golden City; we had driven through the Sudeten Mountains, the region which has been depicted in numerous tales and myths; and we had wandered through the beautiful paths of Krakow, a resurrecting city.

And now the bus was heading towards the last station: Oswiecim, Auschwitz. Auschwitz--the symbol of death, cruelty and inhumanity: the place of horror, of indescribable suffering of thousands of victims.

It was quiet in the bus. I assume that most of the 50 students were afraid of being confronted with the crime and cruelties members of our grandparents' generation had committed. We were going to see the remains of a time which, because of the horrible crimes which happened then, had a big influence on our education and our lives. The feeling of being German, the way of living and thinking in a state that succeeded the Third Reich, was influenced by these 12 years. In addition, the way people all over the world regarded us was formed by what had happened during the dictatorship in which our grandparents had lived.

The time preceding our trip had been filled with information and conversations about what we should expect. Throughout 9th and 10th grade, the Third Reich with all its social, historical, psychological and moral aspects had been part of our syllabus. But knowing the facts and history didn't help me fight my fear.

I had always been interested in this time. I had read many books and asked questions about it since I was twelve years old. I had even seen films and talked to my grandmothers, which wasn't always easy for them or for me. But even knowing that my family hadn't been involved in the cruelties of the Nazi machinery -- in fact they had gotten into trouble because my great-grandfather, a high civil servant, had refused to work with them and gotten sacked -- could not ease my fear.

When I stepped out of the bus, I felt the cool air. It was a misty April day and I shuddered. I reluctantly followed the other students. We passed the gate where 50 years ago the prisoners had walked through on their way to their inhumane work in the factories which were located around Auschwitz. Among these factories were famous names like Krupp and IG Farben, companies that play an important part in Germany's economy today. The inscription on the gate said: "Arbeit macht frei" which in English means "Work makes you free." The cruel irony made me sick and ashamed.

We were guided along the prisoners' barracks, the cells in which the victims were kept in the dark and starved to death. We saw the wall where human beings were shot by other "human beings," often because the SS-men had "just felt like it." We passed the house in which Hoess, the chief of the concentration camp, had lived with his wife and little children. It was next to the gas chambers.

Above the door leading to the rooms where thousands of people were killed a sign said "Duschen" (Showers). Again this sick and cruel irony; what kind of people had invented this? Didn't they have any emotions, any sense of crime or of pity? How could anyone be able to lead helpless children, women and men into here without any feelings, without having something dying inside himself?

I lack the words to describe how I felt when I saw the piles of suitcases, of glasses, of teeth, of hair. These things are silent witnesses of a cruelty that cannot be described. Every single piece stands for a life that had been destroyed for the sake of a sick and insane ideology.

I cried. I cried for the victims and for mankind. I sensed the atrocities that human beings are capable of. I was afraid and scared that something like this might take place again, in any country at any time. At that moment I was ready to give up hope that man could live in peace. But then something happened.

The walls of the last room were covered with pictures of prisoners which had been taken by the SS. The heads of the men and women were shaved and their eyes reflected their panic and their fear.

Except for the eyes of one girl. She must have been around sixteen. Her head was shaved as well, but you could sense that her hair must have been beautiful. But it wasn't the beauty of her features that struck me, it was her expression: the girl smiled.

It was not a big smile. It was a small, hidden smile. I had the feeling that she knew something that her murderers would not know: that life is beautiful and stronger than death.

In the presence of the killing, the gas-chambers, and her own certain death, this girl had the strength to cherish the short life she had and she had the certainty of knowing a secret that couldn't be taken away from her.

Seeing this picture, I felt comfort arising within me. It was incredible how much her look and the expression on her face softened my horror. She was dead, a victim of my country's past, and yet she had the power to comfort me, a granddaughter of the generation that had ignored or even performed her murder. I felt connected to the girl. At the time of her death, she must have been my age. Maybe we would have shared similar feelings,

dreams, and hopes. This picture threw a bridge across time and helped me very much to regain hope after what I had seen. The girl was hope amidst despair and life amidst death.

Ever since then, I have been trying to find out her name, where she came from and who she was. I ordered books and brochures about Auschwitz; I searched for her pictures at exhibitions. I wanted to find out what her life had been like and what her dreams were. I wanted to get to know her and to tell people about her, so that others might share her secret and feel comforted.

At this point, I haven't found anything about her. But even though I know so little, this girl has given me hope and the feeling that one can withstand and even fight against the cruelties that are inside of mankind. But that fight is not accomplished with weapons. By smiling, she had won against her murderers. They are dead, nameless cogs in a deadly works, but her life will not be forgotten. She has taught me far too much.

The Natural Born Fool

By Erec Smith

"I'm going to be normal today," I kept repeating to myself as I lay in bed, staring at the ceiling. "Normal. Normal."

I always seemed to wake up a minute or two before my alarm went off, but this time I started to doze off again. The alarm blared suddenly, and surprised me so much I fell out of bed, covers and all.

"Fuck!"

To avoid the two mile walk to school in the rain, I tried to catch the bus, but to no avail.

"Sorry," said the bus driver. "No bus pass, no ride."

"But he has a bus pass and he lives two doors down from me." I pointed to Sean McConnely, who smiled and pointed his middle finger back at me, in a perverted upward motion.

"What can I say?" continued the driver.

"You could say 'You're a nice kid. Get on the bus and I'll gladly drive you to school.'"

He shook his head and closed the door.

I spent the half hour walk to school cursing the bus driver, rescuing any worms that may not have been able to make it back to the dirt when the rain stopped, and thinking of a wonderful girl named Betsy Gormin and what to do for her birthday.

I arrived at school thirty minutes late.

"What brings you here at such an odd time?" asked Mr. Bednarick, the attendance guy.

The truth was that there were too many worms to save, but I wasn't about to tell him that.

"It was raining, so I called my friend for a ride, but he never showed up so I had to start walking late. I live way down that way." I pointed as if I was telling him I lived down the hall.

He was ignoring me anyway. He handed me my late slip. "Don't let it happen again."

I took the slip and headed for my locker. "Be normal today, David," I reminded myself. "Normal. Normal."

My next class was Phys. Ed. My teacher was nice enough to have us play lacrosse on a cold and wet field. Amidst the inactivity of pissed off non-athletes, I ran around like a lunatic during a full moon. First, I sprinted around the whole field for no apparent reason. Then the ball came my way. I caught it and ran towards the goal. I leaped, bounded, put moves on opponents, real and imaginary, and darted toward the goal so fast that Erika David hurried from in front of the net and watched me dive head first into the goal. The goal was atop a small hill and once I landed, I rolled all the way down, net, stick, and all. "O.K.," I said to myself.

"Starting next period, I'm gonna be normal. Normal. Normal."

With a slight limp, I went to Algebra class for some education and the daily merciless ribbing. Bobby Johnson sat next to me. He was tall, athletic, cool and very popular among the school. He liked picking on anyone who wasn't cool and very popular. Especially me.

"You got some big lips," said Bobby, followed by his trademark high-pitched cackle. "And damned, are you ugly, too." Cackle, cackle.

I said nothing.

"You are smoked, charcoal black." Cackle, cackle, cackle.

I thought to myself, "I could say that he's so black he went to night school and the teacher marked him absent. That would teach him not to ridicule his own race. But that's an old one. Everybody's heard it. They won't laugh."

Seconds later, Bobby turned to me and said, "You're so black, you went to night school and the teacher marked you absent."

The whole class burst out into laughter and I sat there feeling like Elmer Fudd does in mid-air, when the realization hits him that Bugs tricked him again.

After the commotion died down, Frank Nash got up, walked across the room, and sat down in front of me. Frank, unlike Bobby, had a doofy physique and wasn't very popular, but he still liked to pick on me. "Hey, Dave, you gonna take that shit?"

I said nothing and looked away.

"Good, then you'll take this, too."

Frank took out a rubber band and shot it at my eye. The stinging produced a look of restricted pain on my face. I kept my composure.

"Frank, will you stop?" I half-pleaded. "You're not cool. Relax. Will you stop?"

"Ah, let me see. No." He picked up the rubber band from my desk and shot me with it again.

During history class, I walked through the halls, looking for Betsy Gormin to wish her a Happy Birthday. I ran into my ex-girlfriend, instead. Although her beautiful black skin, hair, and body were a treat to the eyes, the sight of her still managed to make me uncomfortable.

"Hi, Miranda."

"You dissed me, David."

"How did I dis you?" I asked, with a fatigued tone of voice.

"You just stopped going out with me like it wasn't no thing."

"You got pregnant by another dude, Miranda," I explained.

"Did you truly expect me to stay?"

She put her hands on her hips. "Well, you could have at least fought for me."

I felt like ripping my hair out, but I took a few deep breaths instead.

"Why didn't you whoop his ass?" she pressed.

I searched for an answer. "Ah, because I'm a lover, not a fighter."

This made her smile, which made me smile, until I heard that high-pitched cackle. I closed my eyes in dreadful anticipation.

From behind me came Bobby Johnson and his merciless cronies. "What's up, D," said Bobby as he slapped the back of my head.

"What's up, bitch," said Jimmy Burns as he slapped the front of my head.

Jay Williams said nothing, but slapped both sides of my head and punched me in my shoulder.

"Ah, I gotta go," I said to Miranda. "See ya."

I started to walk away.

They kept hitting me.

I started to speed walk.

They kept hitting me.

I finally started to run, and dashed through the exit and down to the first floor. Relief was strong as I realized that they hadn't followed me down. "We'll see you later, bitch," said Jay, slightly audible through the doors.

Continuing my leisurely class cutting, I came upon a class with the beautiful Betsy Gormin in it. I waited for her to see me through the glass portion of the door before I started making faces and rude gestures, not minding the others seated around her that I was also amusing.

Suddenly, the teacher decided to let in some fresh air and before I knew it, I had been clocked in the forehead with the door. The class laughed and pointed as I held my aching head in my hands.

"Oh, Dear, I'm sorry," said the teacher, giggling.

"Ah, it's okay. Bye." I walked away, hitting myself on the head and repeating, "Normal. Normal. Normal."

It wasn't until Biology class that I saw Betsy again. I sat in a seat where I could stare at her all period without her knowing. Her long, brown hair went all the way down to her lower back, her cheeks were always rosy, and she had a smile that seemed to light up the whole room and summon a smile from me. I would try to make her smile every day. This day was no exception.

The teacher had finished her lecture five minutes early, so I saw my opportunity. I discussed my intentions to the teacher and darted back to my locker. I came back with a Tina Turner wig and a brush for a microphone, got up on the table in front of the class, and sang my rendition of "With or Without You" at the top of my

lungs to Betsy, while the whole Biology class looked at me in bewildered entertainment. I ended the song on the floor in front of her. She and the class gave ecstatic applause.

Afterwards, we talked. Well, she talked, I watched her lips move.

"That was the greatest thing anyone ever did for me, Dave." She lit up the room.

"No problem," I said to her mouth.

"More guys should be themselves, like you're yourself. Too many guys try to act different."

I decided to talk, out of curiosity. "Why do you say that?"

"The guys here suck."

I smiled in anticipation. "Well, what kind of guy are you looking for?"

"Oh, I want a kind, sensitive, funny guy, but I can't seem to find one."

My smile slowly faded away. In my head, I screamed, "How can you not be able to find a guy who just did a Bono-slash-Tina Turner impression in your honor?" I forced the smile back on my face. "Well, would a guy like that be willing to make a fool out of himself in front of a bunch of people for you?" I strategically asked.

"Yeah," she answered. "Like-." Her eyes widened. "Yeah, like what you just did. That's perfect."

My face lit up.

"Too bad there's no guys like you in this school."

My face dimmed. I waited for her to realize what she had just said. She didn't. "Oh well, I hope you find him soon."

The high point of my day had been confusingly shattered and I went to basketball practice in a less than happy mood.

I was welcomed into the gymnasium by a horde of basketballs hurling toward my head from all directions. Bobby Johnson's cackle shook me like the sudden recollection of a nightmare. The coach, of course, did nothing until practice started, when it was his turn to fuck with me.

"Yo, David, what's wrong with you?"

I shrugged and said nothing.

"Why can't you run this play right?"

I had run it perfectly.

"Get out of the drill," he commanded. Bobby and the others laughed and slapped me on my low hung head as I passed. I did nothing. I never did anything.

After practice my mother came to pick me up.

"How was your day?" she asked.

"It was . . . normal."

"What do you want for dinner?"

"I don't care. Nothing, really."

The second I walked in the door, I headed straight to my room to be alone. I was halfway up the stairs when I heard my father distraughtly yell my name as if he needed help. I turned and zoomed down the stairs at top speed, darted through the front threshold, and skidded to a stop in front of the chair my father was occupying. I looked around for the emergency for which my father direly needed my help.

"What, Dad, what?" I asked frantically.

"Get that remote for me," he nonchalantly answered, pointing to the remote on top of the television, two steps away from where he sat.

I looked around to see if there were any other witnesses to my father's warped sense of critical conditions.

"Well," he said impatiently, "get it."

I gave him the remote, still with a look of confusion on my face, and headed for the stairs.

"Where's the TV Guide?" he asked.

I turned around. "I don't know."

"Who had it last?"

"I don't know."

"Did your mother buy one?"

"I don't know."

He got angry. "You don't know nothing, do you? DO YOU?"

I wanted to yell, "Well you don't know either, asshole. You're the one asking the questions." Instead, I clenched my fists and shrugged. He turned to his television and I went upstairs.

In the darkness of my room, I sat and I thought. I thought about the events of the day and how similar they were to the events of every day. I thought about why I was put on this earth to be a living joke.

Then the anger hit me. The want for revenge was strong. I thought about slapping my father in the face until he started to cry. I thought about breaking Frank Nash's neck and watching him die. I thought about stabbing my basketball coach multiple times. I thought about gunning down the whole basketball team and anyone else who found my pain amusing. I thought of chopping off body parts of Jimmy Burns and Jay Williams and watching them bleed to death. I thought about killing any guy that Betsy Gormin was attracted to. I thought about skinning Bobby Johnson alive.

Then, as suddenly as the anger came on, it went away. I felt better. More relaxed.

"Ah," I said to myself as I set my alarm clock. "Now I'm ready for a new day. I gotta be normal, though. Normal. Normal. Normal."

Oracle**By Sonny Regelman**

I carry my earthly burdens to him
gravity weighs on my shoulders
vice grips crush my conscience
and I dump them there
on the splintered wooden
bench beside him
under the magnolias'
pale petals' spreading arms
screaming silent scents.

My burdens are the theories
of psychoanalysts
recurring plots and scenes caused
by reeking rotten paranoia
mother's gory axe smile
father's gaping hole gaze
I dump them all on the bench
then sit and wait
for the answer.

He listens with patient eyes
practiced ears
folded hands so pale so pure
as if they've never been bathed in blood
as if they've never touched
the waste through which we wade
in the tangled, thorny garden plot
allotted to each of us.

I pause to catch my breath
to choke back the life bile
and anticipate the response
the question he articulates
is the answer
the riddle to cure the plague
the filter of my filth
I nod and search again through the
shit in my garden
looking for the palatable root
of survival.

Sitting amongst the garbage
I bring to his bench

he is immaculate
his mind encompasses the entire universe
though his eyes reconnoiter my subconscious territory
my fears are not idle chatter to him
and the burdens I take
to that bench
are supplanted to allow new growth
by the wise question answers of
my park bench oracle.

Formation of a Triangle

By Dennis Cormac McCarthy

"We're, uh, getting married," Denise said, and my life didn't begin to flash before my eyes, didn't fall apart all around me--nothing melodramatic like that at all.

It couldn't have, I realized, because it had begun to crumble to pieces long ago, back in the earliest days of high school, and I'd not noticed until that very moment.

"Jesus Christ, it's hot in here."

"Yeah...it really is."

Short exchanges of words spread through a night of freshman high-school boys lined up against a cold brick wall. Nothing that could qualify as conversation. None of us, after all, were the best of friends; we had just met, been thrown into something which intimidated us, pinned us against that wall, away from the masses of dancers.

They danced everywhere in the basement of the St. Stephen Preparatory School gymnasium that night, and I didn't have a clue why I was there. I would have been much more comfortable in my bedroom, decorated with posters--too embarrassing to recollect now--with windows left open to let in the chilling breezes of an early arriving winter. But I had decided to make friends with this new environment; nothing was going to stop me.

Until I found myself standing against that wall where all the freshmen stood, frightened of a larger, more adult world. A myth, since the world never advances in years as some would have you believe. We were all still in diapers, and it's never changed--a world where all the fishies have flip-flopped their way onto land and never recovered.

All the fishies, that is, except for this one guy, who apparently had practiced using his tail-fin before. A freshman like us--but not like us--he trotted his best across the dance floor, with anyone who liked being the center of attention. This boy was afraid of nothing, and even his style went against the grain. Loose-flowing clothes, crystals hanging from thin leather straps, a well-kept mop of medium brown hair and the darkest brown eyes you've ever seen. He knew an entire school of fish was observing him at his finest, and he radiated energy.

I stood swaying side-to-side, with greater speed as the night drove on, in frustration.

"Who the hell is that guy, anyway?" I asked the fellow freshman who stood next in line.

"Who?...Him? Alexander Chapin. Went to grade school with

him."

"Really? Why aren't you out there with him then?"

"Better to just give him space."

After a hour's hesitation, I braved walking around to reach him.

"Hi. I'm Michael Schandlin. I'm a freshman, just trying to meet as many people as I can. And you are..."

"Fuck you."

"Okay. I can see you'd like to be left alone."

I returned to the sidelines and frowned for the rest of the night.

We didn't exchange words for two months after that.

Contrary to our expectations, freshman year was spent like a child's allowance. Each of us settled into the game, adapted to our environment and made a home, except I still didn't much feel at home.

Alex and I became the best of friends and, being impressionable, took on the habits of each other. Teachers and friends began to mistake us for one another, and for the duration of sophomore year we were content to play with the minds of the intellectually inferior.

That was what had bonded us--a delusion of intellectual superiority. We would cast judgements on anything that passed our way and enjoy the experience thoroughly. Though we were hatched in different seas, we relished spending our second year of acquaintance learning about one another's worlds and exploring one another's minds.

Still, we both had our problems, some of which were exposed, but most of which were kept hidden, even from ourselves. It would take time for us to make the more important discoveries, the ones that bring a person to re-examine his life and choose a different path.

I spent nearly every weekend at 2363 Sumner Drive becoming the Chapin's adopted son, discussing nothing in particular with my twin, role-playing science-fiction games and life in general, ignoring the fins and gills that kept me from thinking about the world at large.

My days spent in the Chapin home were empty ones, comfortable in that we were never confronted with anything disturbing, left to waste our lives away on trivialities. Nothing ever happened.

So when, one weekend near the end of sophomore year, Alex told me he wasn't coming back to St. Stephen, I thought little of it. We would still spend time together--separate high schools would not change that. Nothing could ever really change, I thought.

Late one night in September, two years since being introduced to life at St. Stephen, I prepared for sleep in Alex's book nook, the name we had given to his bedroom, an uncomfortable mattress without sheets, a raft floating adrift in a sea of books. They were all around us, the shelves vomiting their excess onto the floor. But we had grown

accustomed to the claustrophobic closet of a room.

I lay down in bed and thought of Denise Brown, the young woman who now shared the space with Alex and myself. He had met Denise his first day at Buchanan High School. Not one month since their initial encounter, and the two were romantically involved -- which made it all the more awkward for me to be so attracted to her.

There we lay, and I couldn't stop imagining a relationship with her, while her boyfriend--my best friend!--lay between us. I couldn't help but feel that there was something between the two of us, but there didn't seem room enough for all of us in the happy little world I knew, let alone on this bed.

Irritated with the situation, I decided not to let my imagination run away with me. After a minute spent in sleep, Denise nearly pushed me off the mattress with a nudge.

"For chrissake, I want some sleep already."

"Mike, Alex's got something important to tell you."

Alex, dressed in the green bed clothes he'd stolen from the hospital where he worked, listened for his part.

"It can fuckin' wait 'til mornin'."

"No, Mike. It can't." Denise stood up, throwing aside her piece of Alex's teddy-bear blanket which all of us shared, and stepped off the mattress.

She was wearing a purple bra and matching panties made of a material which looked smooth to the touch, and it took a moment for me to realize that Denise wasn't smiling at me. Her hazel eyes showed concern. With little hands propped on curving hips, Denise stared down at me.

"Listen. It's important."

I noticed Alex propped up in bed as if waiting to be called up on stage. Surely enough, Denise lay back down in bed with me, and Alex cautiously stood up and moved off the bed.

He began to twiddle his thumbs.

That was it.

"What the hell's wrong?"

"Well..."

"C'mon! What's wrong? Here...lie down and relax. Now what's on your mind?"

Alex went off on a roundabout explanation of how he had already told Denise, how he had known for the longest time but had never told anyone before, how blah blah blah.

"Alex! What is it? What do you want to tell me?"

"Mike? I'm gay."

I sprang full-force off of the mattress and hit the light switch.

With my index finger waving in his puppy dog face, I blurted out, "The next time you tell me you're gay, you do it with the lights on and the girl between us."

We were frozen in time, speechless. I watched Alex as his face lit up with laughter. Soon all three of us were laughing hysterically, disbelieving that anything had been made of this.

Very soon after, Denise and I began a more romantic relationship together, spending nights out on Alex's trampoline and spilling our lives to one another. The three of us grew closer, learning more about one another with each day.

Alex and I had always spoken about literature and science, about people who met with our disapproval, and stories which would be written in the upcoming years. Denise and I, on the other hand, spoke of ourselves and our relationship with the world. Born in Israel and fluent in Hebrew, Denise became a fascination of mine, and her enthusiasm enraptured me. Now taking Latin, German, Russian, and learning different cultures and literatures, I couldn't help but get lost in the larger world that awaited my arrival.

Denise and I began to sleep next to each other on the book nook bed, and her dreams of throwing herself into the world took hold of me.

Late one afternoon in the summer before my senior year, Alex and I dined at Houlihan's. I was spending more time with Alex and Denise that summer than ever before, though they hadn't spoken to each other for weeks. I alternated days between the two, and each would complain to me about the other in the most roundabout way, leaving me to wonder exactly what their conflict involved.

"It was the most disturbing dream, Mike. It still bothers me just thinking about it."

Alex sat opposite me in a secluded booth where our waitress had just made her second of three appearances, this time to deliver our coffee and entrees.

Alex had always been interested in some things foreign to me--psychic auras, meditation, and the zodiac. Dream analysis was a favorite of his.

I let my curiosity get the best of me. "What exactly was disturbing about it? I mean . . . just tell me about it." I took a sip of scorching coffee--damn waitress--while still holding eye contact with Alex.

"Well, I just don't know how to explain it. We were there... the three of us, I mean."

"There?"

"I don't know!" he snapped.

I continued to stare at him.

"Sorry," he managed. "I . . . it wasn't any place I'd seen before. I guess it reminded me most of Tannesi Park, where we used to roleplay. The sloping hills, the curving road over the creek." He gestured the features of Tannesi Park with his hands. "Yeah...it reminds me of that most."

"Seems pleasant enough."

"Denise and I were standing in the road."

Alex's face contorted in an expression of discomfort, and his eyes rested on me for reassurance.

"What, Alex?"

"We were armed. Fighting each other."

I couldn't resist blurting out, "Sounds familiar." I heard an exasperated sigh.

"We were trying to strike each other with weapons of some sort, fighting for something."

I waited through a long pause before he continued.

"You were sitting on the curb. With your knees together, feet apart, elbows on knees. Your hands covered your eyes." With his elbows on the table, Alex's hands abruptly froze in mid-gesture, and his mouth hung half-open.

"Alex, what's wrong?"

"It's just. . . your face. It was covered but you had been hurt. You were crying and . . . you had covered your eyes because they had been injured. There were slashes on your face; they went across your eyes. And your hands were just holding everything in place."

"We had injured you . . . with our weapons. And that's all I remember."

Certain feelings which I'd picked up on in the previous months were confirmed, feelings which complicated life for the three of us. Still, it came as a surprise to me that the conflict between Alex and Denise involved myself more than anything else.

"Why does your dream bother you so much, Alex?"

"Well, I'm not certain just how I should say this, Mike."

"Just say it."

"I'm attracted to you."

Alex fidgeted in the booth waiting for a civilized response.

"I'm attracted to you too, Alex."

With what may have been the beginning of a mischievous smile, he asked, "So what do you think should happen now?"

I sipped from the coffee mug, and began.

"Speaking seriously, nothing. Nothing should happen. Nothing

can happen. It would be . . . it wouldn't be right. Look, Alex. I'm attracted to you. I have been for some time, whether I knew it or not. It's mutual. That doesn't mean anything should come of it."

"True."

"I'm attracted to most of my friends. They probably wouldn't be my friends otherwise. But I'm already in a relationship, a relationship whose boundaries you've been testing. Understandable. But we're all too good of friends to let this get in the way. My relationship with Denise is too important to jeopardize. With anyone, Alex."

"And my relationship with you is important too. But I'm kind of comfortable with things the way they are."

"And I hope that you and Denise can work this out between you. I must admit, I don't like being the center of attention. That's more your forte." Another smile. He smiles like a cherub. "And it's not as if you don't have your own relationships to occupy your time."

Alex was uncomfortable with the thought. "I don't know, Mike. I met someone. I'm always meeting someone. I just don't know."

"Things will be fine."

"I wonder if I'll ever find . . . the one for me."

"I guess you'll just have to keep searching."

"I suppose."

"You know, we've barely touched our dinners."

"I don't think I'm hungry anymore, Mike."

Much happened between the summer after junior year and my graduation from St. Stephen. We smoked marijuana on Alex's trampoline and in the threshold of my bedroom window. I had a single and disappointing one-night stand away from Denise on the floor of a child's playroom, outside Barbie's dream house. My mother caught Denise and me in bed together in our hotel room, at the Contemporary Hotel in Walt Disney World, after which I sat by silently in the lounge watching my mother and girlfriend debate the details of my sex life.

Throughout everything, Denise remained the love of my life, whether we were involved with each other or with other friends. And throughout everything, Alex remained my friend, and became more and more the brother I had never had. Amidst this stability, I became increasingly restless.

And then I arrived at Lamden College. Somewhere along the line they told me I'd be happy here. Somewhere along the line they told me I'd continue to expand my horizons.

And somewhere along the line, the brochures gave way to the realities of life in the heart of Hicksville, twenty miles east of nowhere.

In early March on Weldon Street--Alex's new home--the two of us

lay awake on an actual bed, very comfortable in fact. I could recognize the expression on his face, though I'd only seen it once before.

"Mike, I'm HIV positive."

"I know, Alex. It's alright."

Denise had telephoned me the week before distraught. We cried together and apart. The world took on a choking air, and our lives seemed so wasted. Mortality has a way of reprioritizing.

"We're, uh, getting married," she said, and my life didn't begin to flash before my eyes, didn't fall apart all around me--nothing melodramatic like that at all.

Denise and I stood very still in front of Kingston Hall, having walked across Hicksville's Main Street to visit friends. She told me that she planned to travel to California, and that she planned to stay. Alex had given his notice at the hospital and quit his acting class to accompany her. They wanted to live.

"We're getting married when we get to California. The expenses will be easier to handle. I told Alex I'd check it with you first...Well?...Mike, you look disturbed."

She walked gracefully back to where I had stopped so abruptly and held my hands in her own.

I stared into her eyes. "No. What you just said doesn't disturb me. The last few years have been filled with discoveries. I just --"

"What is it?"

"I'm being left behind."

"What? Mike, you have things to do here." She emphasized here as if here mattered.

Reflecting on a hundred separate memories, there was nothing for me to do but admit the truth that had been so long ignored.

"No...I'm not entirely sure that I do anymore."

Silence followed the less-than-a-dozen words that divided my life in half.

Marie on the Beach

By Paula Love

The Jersey Shore again, Sea Isle City, first two weeks of August. Her cousins rented a pink beach front house on a small hill of grassy sand. Marie crashed on the living room couch. At twenty-six she was too old for this, but once again she found herself between careers. She'd held jobs as a sales clerk, a receptionist, a collector, and most recently, a waitress. Just when there was talk of a promotion to management, the restaurant closed down. Her unemployment checks would run out in a month.

Marie lay flat on her back to show her body to its best advantage. The sun shone too bright, a brilliant white behind her eyelids, with flashes of shadow as gulls swept overhead. Through half-opened eyes she checked her stomach, a gentle dip from the hip bones, a white line visible just under the band of her bikini bottom.

"Where's Angie?" Marie asked about Dan's sister.

Dan looked up from his book. "Sitting down by the water. Did I tell you Russell might come to stay for a couple of days?"

"No, you didn't." It felt like an intrusion. "Why's he coming?"

Julia answered for her husband. "To spend some time with his brother and sister." Marie heard the edge in her voice that seemed to say that Russell, as Dan and Angie's brother, deserved to be there more than she.

"I didn't mean it that way. It's just that I didn't think he liked the beach. He's never come down before."

"I guess he has some free time." Like twins in synch, Dan and Julia nodded their heads down to read their paperbacks, their faces shaded by white visors bearing their respective corporate logos.

Marie thought the square pink house would be too small with Russell there. The heat bore down and sweat beaded between her breasts. She sat up to catch the breeze and watched a group of children intently digging moats and sculpting turrets on an elaborate sand castle. Marie admired the confident way they moved their bodies, the smooth straight lines of youth. She thought some of the girls were too young for bikinis, the bright strips of spandex stretching across breasts that weren't there, calling attention to the parts of their bodies that would define their sexuality.

A shadow abruptly cast across her face. The lifeguard stood so close to her towel that she could see the dark, wiry tendrils of his leg hair.

"Hi." He stood with his hands on ers tumbling. Foam hissed in a swirl around Marie's ankles in the ebb of the violent breakers. Her feet numb now, she edged farther out with Angie and Julia. She backed into the relentless waves, pushing past the slapping

water until she reached the sparkling calm beyond. The three of them waded in the quietly undulating water, giddy with their buoyancy.

"How's the job hunt going?" Julia's question rang falsely casual. Marie knew her cousins saw her as a case, as if with their MBA's and PhD's they could form a focus group and clarify the blurry edges of her life. They'd tried before. Julia lectured on economic theory. Marie was the product, she just had to find the demand for her particular supply. Angie was softer, curvier, jovial like Dan, but she couldn't resist commenting on Marie's untapped potential.

"I've had some interviews in the restaurant business but . . ."

"You seemed to like your job at the restaurant," Angie said, unwilling to let it go.

"It's not that I didn't like it so much as I couldn't see myself doing it in the long run. I just fell into it." Marie had drifted into everything so far in her life, boyfriends, jobs, college. She took the paths that presented themselves to her, but she discovered with the rhythm of time that she drifted away in the same apathetic way she had taken them up.

"Is there something you really would like to do?" Angie asked.

"I've thought of being an elementary school teacher." She hoped her revelation had gotten lost in the ocean's roar.

"That's great!" Angie exclaimed. "You've always been so good with children."

"The salaries have come up a lot and you could use your Psych. degree," Julia offered.

"And I'd have my summers off."

Julia dipped under, came up dripping and announced, "I'm gonna ride some waves." Julia and Angie swam on the crest of the rolling tide. Marie stayed behind, turned on her back and floated on the glassy surface, closing her eyes against the reflected sun. She imagined a classroom decorated with crayon drawings, a circle of children to read to, small sticky hands pressed in hers. As soon as she returned home she would call the college and find out about teacher certification.

She spotted him in the distance. He was white and large with wide rolls of fat. Marie felt embarrassed to be related to such an unsightly and ill-controlled person. She noticed the lifeguard watching, so she walked with her shoulders back and cultivated a slight sway of the hips, but as she approached the towel she deflated.

"Hey Marie," he said.

"Hey Russell. Didn't know you were coming."

"Well, I have some unexpected free time." He gave a small laugh. His full, reddened cheeks gave him a jolly appearance, the

beard was neatly clipped and there was no menace in the eyes, nor any glint of acknowledgement of their past. Usually, she only saw him at family picnics where she could dance the avoidance dance. He looked vulgar and odd on the beach. She walked on, dragged her sand chair to a clear spot away from the lifeguard stand, away from Russell.

Julia and Angie were the first to go back to the house, then Dan and Russell went. Marie stayed behind and watched, one by one, the people shaking out their towels, balancing bags and umbrellas as they navigated the dunes. The sand dried warm and powdery under her feet as the tide retreated and the sun cooled to a comfortable glow. She guessed it was about 6:00, too late to still be out when she knew they were probably waiting for her. Maybe she would just hang back tonight, stay at the house, watch TV or read a book while her cousins went to the boardwalk. She didn't have to participate with the rest and follow the routine. She owed them no explanations. Paging through her magazine, she peripherally glimpsed Julia approaching with a determined stride. Marie kept her head down.

Julia inhaled the briny air. "This is the best time on the beach, isn't it?" Her bright sundress and fresh pink lipstick made Marie feel suddenly grungy.

"Yes it is," Marie answered.

"We decided to have an at-home night, watch a movie or play a game."

"Did you eat yet?"

"Nah, we're just lounging around."

"I'll cook dinner. I have all the ingredients for pasta primavera," she offered without planning to and wondered how it was that her mind never stayed made up for long.

"Sounds delicious. See you back at the house." Marie watched Julia disappear between the pines that bordered the side of the house and sat for a moment longer and thought of games. They were a family that played a lot of games. Risk, Monopoly, Pictionary, Clue. Russell had introduced her to Chinese checkers in the privacy of his room while the adults talked. That's how it started, simple enough, just Chinese checkers being taught by her cousin who was eighteen, ten years older, a popular high school football player, and she had liked him. She had seen his picture in the high school football program and thought he was the celebrity of the family. She asked him to play the second time. Then he moved away from Chinese checkers and taught her new games. He said, find the marble, it's hidden somewhere on my body, then touch this, put this in your mouth, let me put this in here. And she complied and sometimes felt stirrings that maybe she enjoyed. She remembered wondering why her mom and dad never came

looking for her. She could hear them laughing around the kitchen table. Was the joke on her?

At the stove in the galley kitchen, Marie stirred the stick of butter around the saucepan until it melted-- a liquid gold. She sauteed carrots, broccoli, and water chestnuts then added heavy cream and thought of arteries clogging, cholesterol counts going up. Russell wasn't supposed to eat fatty food. When the fettuccine was done al dente, she drained it and poured the sauce, topping it all with fresh grated parmesan.

Everyone ate in silence punctuated by "Good dinner."

"You learned a lot at that restaurant."

"I know I shouldn't have seconds but..."

When Russell had seconds Marie figured that he wasn't following the diet for his diabetes and he would probably die young of a heart attack like his mom. Julia raised her eyebrows as he gathered his third helping between the wooden spoon and fork and held it suspended over the bowl like a prize catch. Angie frowned and Dan winced as Russell lowered the noodles on to his plate.

"So, you have some time off?" Angie asked her brother.

"Yeah. I was painting an old farm house and they let me go halfway through the job, so now I have a little bit of a gap."

Russell paused to eat a forkful of pasta then added, "Like a month gap." He laughed.

"Well, you can look for other jobs in the meantime," Angie offered.

"I'm enjoying the break. I figure if things get too tight I can always move back in with Dad."

Julia and Angie nodded in silence. Dan gazed out the big square window overlooking the ocean, as if trying to excuse himself from this unpleasantry.

After dinner and the dishes, when the sun finally gave up the day, they decided to play the dictionary game. Julia sat Indian style in the arm chair flipping through the water-warped Webster's they'd toted to the beach and back for years. Dan sat on the oak rocker, and Marie and Russell sat on opposite ends of the couch with Angie in the middle. "You start, Marie." Julia handed the dictionary over.

Marie took the dictionary and quickly found a word, one she already knew. "Vitiate," she announced. She wondered if anyone sensed her discomfort. As she noticed Dan, Angie, and Russell's matching flourish of dark curls, Marie was reminded of their unbreakable bond. She felt a flash of hostility as she imagined that Dan and Angie knew she had lost her virginity at age eight to their brother, and were hiding it behind laughing eyes as expertly as she and Russell had hidden it all these years. Would anyone believe her if she had the nerve to tell? In profile, Russell looked genial. His

eyes turned down at the edges like sad brown half-moons.

After collecting the definitions Marie read them, trying to place a name with each one. "A, to infuse with life." She figured that was Angie's. Then she read the real definition, maintaining a neutral expression. "B, to corrupt or spoil. C..." She started to laugh and knew this was Dan's. "C," she started again as everyone smiled in waiting. "A castrated llama, considered a delicacy in Peru." In a burst of laughter everyone turned to Dan.

"Why me? Why's everyone looking at me?"

Marie continued, "D, to chop in very small pieces, pulverize." Could be Russell or Julia, she wasn't sure until she opened the next paper and saw the left slanting scrawl in black ink. Russell was the only one using a black pen. She paused then read, "Uh... to spoil, corrupt, or pervert."

"Isn't that the same as one of the others?" Dan asked.

"Yeah, B." She shrugged and Dan and Angie chose B and Julia D. When it was Russell's turn he chose B then enunciated softly, "To corrupt, to pervert, to spoil. I knew that word."

Marie shifted on the couch, tucking her right leg up under her then turned and met Russell's eyes. What did she see there? Embarrassment, shame, and maybe the hint of an apology?

The game continued into the night until everyone tired. Russell insisted that Marie take the bedroom and he would sleep on the sofa. Marie said no, she wanted to sleep in the living room so she could hear the waves and feel the ocean breeze. After lights out she lay on the couch and listened to Dan and Julia's soft chatter settle to a murmur then silence. When she heard Russell come out of his room and go to the kitchen, she pulled the sheet up around her and feigned sleep. Through squinting eyes she could see Russell's face illuminated from below by the refrigerator light. He seemed to reconsider and closed the door softly, looking over at her. Marie shut her eyes and waited through a moment of silence before flickering them open just enough to see Russell's blurred image through her eyelashes. He leaned on the sink, gazing out the window to the ocean. She sat up in bed, catching his attention. "Trouble sleeping?" she asked.

"Yeah, and you?"

Marie nodded. "I'm going home tomorrow."

He moved towards the bed and she fought the urge to back away. "Don't leave because of me," he said. "I'll go home."

"No, I have to get back."

He shrugged. Looking at his downcast face and his heavy body, Marie thought that maybe his problems were bigger than hers, that maybe she'd be all right. He walked with a slow shuffling, defeated gait, back to his room. She turned on her side and felt the rumble of the ocean beneath her and listened to the

waves breaking even and steady in time with her heartbeat.

The Tweed Derby

By Ellen Cosgrove

I stand next to my mom in the receiving line. She's a lot shorter than me and her left shoulder touches the middle of my right arm. She's quivering like she's outside on a 30 degree day, not inside a stifling church. I turn to look at her, and see the black circles under her eyes. She tried to conceal the circles with liquid foundation, but I still see the black marks. Her left temple has a bump the size of a mini rubber ball, like a ball that I would have bought from a machine in Acme for ten cents. My mom gets migraines all the time, and she tries to ease the pain by rubbing her head. The pain stays and out pops a rubber ball.

Our neighbor, Mrs. Moran, comes through the receiving line and walks up to me. I can feel her Love's Baby Soft Perfume pour off of her neck and envelop me like an invisible shield. I try with all my strength to stop myself from choking.

"Honey, sweetie, I know you miss your daddy," Mrs. Moran says. She talks to me like I'm five years old even though I'm actually 20. She acts as though my dad went off on a business trip, and that he didn't really die. I don't think people know how to act at funerals. I don't know how to act at my father's funeral. I think I'm smiling appropriately, hugging appropriately, and nodding appropriately, but I'm not sure.

I walk up to my dad's coffin to say goodbye. I kneel down on the red velvet cushion and study his features. The velvet kneeler sticks to my pantyhose and I can feel the opposing materials tugging at each other in disagreement.

My dad looks how I remember him except for the lines around his mouth. The people who did his make-up made these funny lines in his cheeks. His silver framed glasses are still on his face. I pull a piece of fuzz off his glasses and crush it between my fingertips. His wisps of hair are all combed into place. If the mortician knew my dad, he wouldn't have combed his hair, but left it rumpled and frayed from my dad's afternoon nap.

As he lies in his coffin, my dad is wearing the olive green suit that he'd bought at a sale in Macy's last year. He said if I wasn't away at college at the time, he would have treated me to some clothes also. He needed clothes worse than I did anyway.

Lying next to his hand is his brown tweed derby. My dad loved his derby. I didn't love it at all. I see the derby now and get that familiar sick feeling. I feel like I'm going to throw-up the spoonful of cornflakes I had for breakfast. I can feel the soggy cornflakes climbing up my throat and trying to break through the wall of my clenched teeth.

The tweed derby was the first thing I spotted when my team

bus pulled up to Clearview High School. This was three years before my dad died, and it was the beginning of my high school senior basketball season. My dad hadn't missed one game since my seventh grade year.

My friend Jenna and I were the only two seniors on the team, so we were the first to get off the bus. I can remember the cold air slapping me in the face as we walked toward the Clearview gymnasium. Loose strands of my hair had slipped out of my french braid and kept flying into my mouth. I was carrying my duffel bag in my right hand and the medicine kit in my left hand. The hard metal kit kept hitting me in the shin, and the wind kept forcing me to suck on my strands of straw.

Jenna walked beside me with her black leather jacket on over her polyester green warm-up pants. She had on her usual red lipstick, and I could hear her Pal Bubble Gum cracking every time she chewed.

"Hi, Mr. Corsonel!" Jenna yelled to my father.

"Jenna, shut-up. Now everybody knows my dad's here an hour before the game is even going to start," I said.

I could see him standing by the door waiting for us. I got that familiar wave of embarrassment when I saw him. He still had on his gray pinstripes from work, but had taken off his suit jacket and tie. He now had on his red cardigan sweater that was the same color as Jenna's lipstick. Maybe this color bonding was the reason they liked each other so much.

Even from 50 feet away, I could see his jaw moving. Ever since my dad gave up cigar smoking, he had started chewing cinnamon Trident gum. In the time he lived, I'd never seen him try a different flavor. He never even went as crazy as to buy cinnamon Dentyne instead of Trident. He took his gum chewing seriously. It was almost like if he chewed his gum hard enough he'd have been able to make it dissolve just like food.

So there my dad stood by the gym, chewing like a man possessed, smiling and waving. As I look back, I realize he acted as if he was the luckiest guy in the world when he came to see me play in my games.

When Jenna and I got to where he was standing, Jenna gave him another smile but all I did was shrug my shoulders.

"Why are you here so early?" I asked. "Nobody else's dad gets here till right before the games is about to start."

I knew I was bordering on whining, but I couldn't even stop myself from sounding this way. Even today I don't know why I got so angry at him for coming to all of my games. He wasn't even one of those overbearing fathers who yelled curse words at the referees. He wouldn't even sit in the stands, but instead would stand in the corner with both hands in his pockets and chew his

Trident. He just didn't want to miss one moment of his daughter growing up, and all I could do was get angry.

Thinking about my actions now, I know there was no real reasons for my resentment toward my father. Maybe it was because I wanted to create melodrama in my life that wasn't there. I wanted to act as the neglected daughter who didn't have any support at home and my dad made it impossible to pretend this. Or maybe it was because I thought I was such a cool senior and my dad always being around ruined this image. Whatever the excuses were, they were stupid and didn't come even close to justifying my actions after the game.

The game ended, my team lost 54-46, and I had played awful. I had that kind of game that I couldn't even shoot the ball in the general direction of the basket. I think I even heard a fan yell at me to go and purchase a compass before I played the next game.

As I trudged toward the locker room, the smell of soft pretzels and perspiration swirled together in the steamy gymnasium. I saw my dad waving me over to come and talk to him. I buried my head into my mesh uniform to avoid the smell of the gym, as well as to pretend I didn't see my dad. The denial of mine was of no consequence to my father.

"Meg, Meg, come on over real quick. I want to talk to you a minute," my dad bellowed.

I wiped the sweat from my brow and tucked loose strands of hair behind my wear. I looked down at my Nike hightops and I could see my shins glistening with sweat.

"Meg, your dad is calling you," Jenna told me from behind.

I realized at this point I had no choice but to walk over and speak to him. I trekked across the gym floor, my Nike sneakers squeaking against the wood paneling. With every squeak of the wood, I felt myself feeling more bitter. I didn't want to hear a play by play recap of a game that I played so poorly. As I looked over at my dad, I could see him rewinding the game tape in his head and I could hear the buzz of the rewinding cassette.

"What do you want Dad? I have to go change." I asked him.

My dad continued to chew his cinnamon gum as he adjusted his derby on the top of his head.

"Good game, Meg. Let me just tell you a couple of things you could have done better," my dad said.

He was just about to go into a long detailed instruction list when I stopped him mid-sentence. With one giant swoop of my sweaty hand, I knocked my dad's hat right off of his head. The derby landed right in a pile of dust causing the dust particles to flurry like snowflakes and fly right up into my nose and stick to my sweaty forehead.

"I hate when you come to my games! I hope you never come

again," I said.

With this outburst, I wobbled toward the locker room, unsure my sweaty legs and Nike sneakers could carry the wad of dusty remorse that was lodged in my intestines.

I never looked back to see what my father's reaction was. I just came home that night and the first thing I noticed was his derby hanging up on the hat rack in the corner of the dining room. There were still dust particles clinging to the tweed material like leeches on somebody's skin.

My dad and I never talked about what I did to him. I don't think he ever told my mom because she would have had a disappointed look aimed at me throughout the whole dinner that night. Instead, she gave me a hot cup of cinnamon tea after dinner and told me I didn't have to help with the dishes.

"I'm sorry you lost, Meg. Dad told me it was a good game, though. Don't look so glum, you'll get them next time," my mom said.

I smiled, and tried with all my might to pretend the only thing that was bothering me was the dumb basketball game. Instead, I just kept seeing my dad's derby laying in the dust, hearing my irrational words again and again in my mind.

After that incident, my dad didn't stop coming to my games, but he didn't come as early and he never tried to talk to me after the game ended. He would still come in his tweed derby, chew his gum, observe from the corner, and then sneak out a side door.

I would come home at dinner and encourage him to give me instruction and descriptions of the game. He would talk to me over chicken and rice or whatever my mom made that night. As he ate chicken and gulped cold milk, he would try to be just as enthusiastic as he was before. But there was no video tape rewinding in his head anymore; dust particles and hurt feelings had made the picture all fuzzy.

As my mom gave us tea after dinner, she would smile and tell us how great a relationship my dad and I had. The only thing was, the dust particles never unleached themselves from his hat, and I never apologized for what I said to him.

I struggle, but I manage to hold down my spoonful of soggy cornflakes. I reach into my dad's coffin and I grab the brown tweed derby. The material feels like a bunch of splinters that prick my fingertips. I wonder why my dad had a heart attack. I think about an imaginary apology I could make to him now and how I would do anything to have made a real one three years ago. I take the derby with my sore fingers and wipe the dust particles away. They have almost become interwoven in the material. I lay the derby on the top of his smooth gray hair and stand up so the next person can say goodbye.



Tripping

By Kristen Sabol

have you ever felt so tight--
so tight--knuckles gripping wheel
turning white? Travel longside infinite
yellow glowing knowing light?
off! driving speeding seeking:
homage mileage pilgrimage--
turning corners sharply edged
intersections where the green has gone
down down stepping pressing
on and on--onto roadside altars
for sipping from the cup and filling up
glory glory hallelujah!
battle hymns heightened
as the needing bleeding frightened
believer turns the motor
sparking mindfire running over
faces turned upwards beaming
windows lowered outward leaning
smoke faintly ashen streaming
on the right side seldom passing
starting stopping steering asking
strapped in sturdy seatbelts
salvation saved and born again
vaulting over limits
pulses quickened shading sun
wipers rocking back and forth
lips move humming mumbling
redemption--soul--self-worth
patrol priests weeping
for confessions of regressions
their concessions to digressions
measure tainted breath
while warning scorning pending death
forced to walk the line
on crumbling concrete undefined
out for a spin (a sin)
pretensions of divine divine
off! driving speeding seeking:
from religions and traditions
submissions crucifixions
provisions and revisions
of incisions and decisions
"I drove a '65 chevy once . . .

powder blue and chrome aglow"
(distorted contorted metal heap
out sad-rotting under snow)
have you ever felt so tight?
so tight--beaten roadways
wind the right into high life.
to go in flight as only fight
the engine cry then brake or die
the holy lines bestowed with light:
if i should die before i crash
i pray the lord my car shall last
and if my wheels shall flattened be
lord let this tar then rest one piece.

In Vitro

By Gretchen Lacy

Afterwards, they give you about ten minutes alone in the sterile procedure room, telling you something about how some statistics show or some theories suggest or how thousands of doctors believe something about vaginal muscle contractions aiding in the insemination process. Huh? The doctor and nurse are gone five minutes before I realize what they've left me alone to do. Oh, sure. Like I can do that on the spur of the moment. I mean, I can, but surrounded by all these instruments and charts, pardon me, I'm not exactly in the mood. It's fine for the men, the "donors", on the other side of the clinic. They are given comfortable cubicles with locks on the doors and reclining chairs and videos. Here I am, practically inverted on this hard table, choking on what's left of my modesty, and they want me to perform some magic finger dance.

Before I can even make an attempt there's a rap at the door. "Is it safe to come in?" inquires the nurse with the sort of giggly restraint, as if she's serving breakfast to the honeymoon suite. Right. Just give me a minute to get down from the chandelier.

This is not how I was told that babies were made. Where's the wine, the music, the satin sheets -- where's the man for God's sake?

There is a man, of course. I'm not dealing with just anybody's sperm. There's Jack, only he's at home trying to get back the strength and prowess (not to mention the body hair) that six months of radiation therapy plucks from you. This rather crude, but to-the-point, overweight oncologist had broken the news: "You're sick," he said to Jack. "First thing you need to do is store up some sperm."

"In case I die?"

"In case you lose your balls, son."

We panicked. We stockpiled. Neither of us had especially wanted children, but in three months' time every sperm bank from here to Rochester overflowed with our future. It's a weird thing. It's downright strange to be putting such things away for a rainy day.

The nurse tells me to lie flat for another ten minutes while she readies the room for the next immaculatus. I'm quite sure that my miracle has taken place so I get up anyway. "Where are you going?"

"I'm out of cigarettes. I always have one afterwards." She stares at me in anger and I have to tell her, "It's a joke. It's just a joke."

Jack is waiting when I get home. He sits up in bed and asks quietly, "Did we do it?"

"Yeah. How was it for you?" I get into my pajamas and cover him with an arm and a leg.

Three weeks later, I'm crawling from the bathroom to the bed for the third time that morning when the phone rings. I don't like being interrupted during my as-of-late a.m. vomiting ritual, but I answer anyway. It is the clinic. "We've been trying to reach you with the good news."

"Go to hell." I hang up the phone and race back to the toilet.

It's amazing how things turn around, all at once sometimes. Jack was getting better, I was getting bigger, and it seemed both our bodies were being charged with a new life force. Like this incredible werewolf sense of smell that came over me in about the sixth month. We'd go to restaurants every night, sometimes two or three, because I would walk in, take one big sniff and know exactly what was on the menu and whether or not it was suitable. By the ninth month, however, this new and improved olfactory had a life of its own and led me to cruelty. Jack was making lunch, his favorite, fried fish. I'd tried my best to hide from the smell. I'd gone as far away from the kitchen as I could -- the upstairs back bedroom and even stuffed a blanket under the crack of the door -- but still, it followed me. The unbearable odor, the sizzling scent of extra virgin olive oil. It was gagging. It was life-threatening. I had no choice. I ran down the steps into the kitchen, and with one hand holding my nose, I grabbed the frying pan, opened the back door, and tossed the whole thing out into the yard. The poor dog ran for his life. "Fried fish Jack? I've got an idea. Why don't you have a picnic in the backyard? It's all set up for you." Slam. I kept walking, though I heard him struggling with the jammed door. I sat down at the end of our long driveway on one of the white rocks Jack had painted to keep me from driving over the corner of his flower bed. I didn't have to wait long. He came out with a sweater and handed it to me with mock timidity, then said, "I think I'll write my next article on violence and pregnancy." We sat there looking back at our home, his stomach growling and his hands smelling so clean. He'd washed them at least three times.

The last twenty-four hours, before I set free to the world a rather large and noisy red-faced baby girl, were made up of the kind of torture that not even Dante's imagination could adequately describe. Every myth of motherhood ever invented was shattered, every doctor cursed to hell, and every ounce of sperm (in vitro or in vivo) was issued henceforth a restraining order that only a severe case of amnesia could dissolve.

"Did you meet our only child?" I said to Jack when the worst was over and I realized that I'd actually survived.

"I did. She looks like me, don't you think?"

The Character

By Douglas Plitt

I met the character in Seattle. My father and I were there for a couple days on our way to Alaska. The day I met the character was a pleasant one. I rode my bicycle around the city while my dad hung out on the docks and watched the boats. I got to lay under the Space Needle.

Around five in the afternoon I met up with my dad at an Irish pub on the water named McGovern's. I drank a Guinness because my dad was paying the bill. I ordered a corned beef sandwich. Soon after our food arrived, the character arrived with her husband in tow. My father and I were the only people in the place when they walked in, yet they chose the table right next to ours.

The character was a heavy woman. Her husband was considerably lighter than her. Her eyes were slightly crossed. The first thing the character said to me was, "What is that?" as she motioned to my meal with a pudgy digit. "Corned beef sandwich." I answered. "Ugh, how boring," she replied. She ordered some type of lamb casserole at the waitress's suggestion. She ordered the same for her husband without asking him what he wanted. He didn't protest. Then she asked for a Budweiser for her husband and a highball for herself.

After the waitress departed, the character turned to my father and said, "I'm a genius, you know. I got a PhD and I just finished my first book. It's going to be published."

"Is that right?" said my dad, sounding less than mildly interested.

"What's it about?" I asked.

"Oh, lots of stuff. It's mostly about a dysfunctional family, though."

"Your family?" said my father, jokingly.

"Nah, my kids are great. I got eight of 'em. Four of them are adopted. I got two lawyers, a secretary, a real estate guy, a policewoman, a shoe salesman, and..."

"That's six," I said.

"Oh yeah, two are in the clink. They're still good kids, though."

She paused to take a healthy swig of her highball. "There's no booze in this!" she sputtered. "Waitress! I'm not paying for this unless you put some liquor in it!" she bellowed, not caring that the waitress was at the other end of the restaurant. As the waitress fetched her a more potent cocktail, the character returned her attention to my father and me.

"I'm sort of a Renaissance woman, you know. I got a computer at home. I do all my bills on it. It's got this thing that lets me

make my own Christmas cards. How old do you think I am?" she said, fixing her stare on me.

My mother once told me that the two things women don't like people to know are their weight and age. Obviously this woman was a little different. I was glad she didn't ask me to guess her weight. I guessed low.

"Fifty-three," I said.

"Don't bullshit me, kid. I'm sixty-seven, and I can still do it all. I re-did our whole house, you know. We got a beautiful house. We got this whirlpool bathtub. I put it in myself. Right, Walt?" she said, giving her husband his first chance to speak.

"Yup," he answered.

"Wanna see some pictures?" she asked.

Before we could reply, she had whipped a stack of photographs from her pocketbook.

"Here's the whirlpool. I did all that shit myself. This is our backyard. I did all that landscaping. I put all those little bushes in by hand. What a pain in the ass. Here's the living room. See this vase? It's some kind of Ming dynasty thing. Cost me three hundred bucks."

My father and I sat and nodded at every picture, trying in vain to consume our meals while she continued her demonstration.

"You see this fireplace? I put it in myself. Walt tried to help, but I work circles around him. I had to kick his ass off the job 'cause he kept gettin' in my way."

She stopped talking for a moment and stared at the picture of the fireplace.

"You see this urn?" she said, pointing to a little jar on the mantle. "Cost me a hundred and fifty bucks. That urn's got my little boy in it."

She was quiet for a moment.

"He was my favorite. After he died, my Alice said, 'Ma, Teddy was always your favorite, wasn't he?' You bet your ass he was. He was my youngest. He was twenty-seven when he died. That boy was in shape. He was a tae-kwon-do instructor. He could do karate, judo, all that shit. I pulled the plug on him. He had the cancer all in his lungs and his brain. Started out in his leg. Everyone said, 'Marge, why'd you pull the plug on yer own kid?' I told them that when he was laying in that bed, he wasn't my kid anymore. He was dead. His eyes were blank and he had these tubes and wires and shit all over him. I knew he was dead a long time before all those machines did. He was just layin' there waitin' to go to heaven. Before I pulled the plug I told him, 'You go up there and if that St. Peter gives you shit, you judo chop that son of a bitch until he lets you in.' And I bet he did, too. He was in shape. He was my favorite."

She was sniffing now, and it was making us uncomfortable. My dad turned to Walt.

"Did he break his leg or something? Isn't that how cancer starts in the limbs?" he asked.

"Yeah," said Walt. "He shattered that sucker jumpin' out the second floor window of a crack house when the cops raided it. Would of got away too, except he was crawlin' and they were runnin'."

"This ain't too good." said Marge as she shoveled a mound of casserole into her mouth. She ordered another highball and we asked the waitress for our check.

Dumbfounded, my father and I drove to our hotel.

"She was quite a character, wasn't she?" I said to my dad.

"That she was, my boy, that she was," he replied.

Coming Home for Christmas

By Michael Podgorski

Scene One: In the Bin

"Do you hear any voices?"

"What, like in my head?"

"Any voices that you hear, telling you what to do?"

Dan slouched back in his padded seat and considered the ceiling.

"I hear my conscience; it tells me what to do. But I don't always listen."

"Any other voices?"

"Sometimes I hear my stepmother screaming . . ."

"Okay, I need your watch and shoelaces. If you feel uncomfortable with me doing a bodily search, I'll have Ralph do it. You'll have to be put in the quiet room for the first night because we still don't know how stable you are. But before that, I'll have to redress your arm."

"Yeah, that's okay. No problem."

Dan slouched back even further so that his eyes were nearly level with the desk.

"May I see your arm now?"

Dan lifted his arm, and the woman examined it.

"Are you still feeling any pain?"

"No, I can't really feel anything."

When she was done, she signaled with her hand. A few moments later, Ralph appeared, and without a sound, he gestured for Dan to follow him.

Dan followed him down a low lit corridor lined with metal doors. The quiet room contained only a single bed, four gray plaster walls, and a metal door without a handle. After the search, Dan slipped under the sheet and blanket, both of which emanated an odor of sterile cleanliness, and he slept.

That had been the admittance night into the mental facility for Dan McCloud. In the three weeks since, he had moved from level A to level two, had been allowed to wear shoe laces again, and had been named snack monitor. The daunting hospital, Dan found out, was nothing more than kindergarten with an edge.

It was Monday, December twenty-third, and Dan had to turn in his new set of goals to his counselor at morning evaluations.

Number One: I'll try not to piss off any of the staff.

Number two: I'll try to be a fair snack monitor.

Number Three: I'll try not to get put in the quiet room.

These were the same goals as last week. These were everybody's goals, a generic set that could be found on anybody's three by five index card that morning. As Dan was crumpling up last week's goals, his counselor, Shawn, sat beside him. She smiled.

"So, how are you feeling today?"

"I'm feeling pretty good, actually. How about you? You look good."

"Thank you. I'm excited. I've got some good news for you."

"I mean, you really look good today. I like your hair. It looks. . . nice."

"Thank you again, but I have something important to tell you now."

"Really? What is it?"

"You know that once you're on level three, you'll be eligible for release?"

"Hold it. Why? I don't want to be released. I feel safe here. . . with you. I'm not ready. Not yet."

Shawn smiled warmly again, narrowed her green eyes, and spoke in a softer tone than before.

"Listen, you are going to be safe after you get out of here. Trust me. You're a lot stronger now."

"You think so?"

"Yes, definitely. You're going to be okay."

"How much longer will I be here?"

"I think only another week."

After talking to Dan about his goals for another ten minutes, Shawn put her hand on Dan's shoulder.

"I'm sorry Dan, I have to go now. My shift is over, but remember, you're going to be fine."

"Thanks Shawn. I . . ."

"See you tomorrow."

Dan watched her until she exited the door where the staff went when their shifts were over, where he was not allowed to go. Later, Dan was called into Dr. Chung's office for an unscheduled meeting. As Dan entered the room, Dr. Chung swung around in his padded swivel chair and greeted Dan.

"Good afternoon, Daniel. How are you feeling today?"

Dr. Chung was an old doctor with graying hair whose eyes seemed to pull shut every time he stretched his face to smile. His office was the size of a walk-in closet and scattered all over the wooden panel walls were framed pictures and certificates, papers,

nail sized holes and pieces of tape. The doctor gestured for Dan to sit.

"I have some news I think you'll be happy to hear. The staff, your counselor, and I have decided to move you up to level three and release you tomorrow. Your parents will pick you up early in the morning around seven. Congratulations."

"But I don't understand. Why?"

"You've attained level three designation, and we thought it would be best if you spent Christmas at home. It has been a request of your parents since your admittance. You should probably get going. Dinner line-up is in five minutes."

"Thanks." Dan slowly exited.

Dinner was eaten in silence, and after dinner, informal meetings were held with counselors, and Dan was able to speak with Shawn. He was sitting in a corner of the common room, staring out one of the barred windows, when Shawn walked over and sat down beside him on the floor.

"So how are you feeling about goin' home? Are you excited?"

"I don't know. I don't want to leave here. I know it's just going to be the same as before. I hate it there." Dan slouched back and folded his arms.

"Listen, your dad cares about you a lot. He's not going to let your stepmother do anything to you. You'll be okay."

"But I want you to keep me safe. You said I might be able to see you when I get out."

"I have to talk with some other people now, but I wrote you a letter. Here. Read it when you get home." Shawn handed him a business type envelope with the word 'Dan' written on the front.

"What's it about?"

"Just wait 'til you get home."

"It has your phone number and stuff, right?"

"Everything you need to know is in there. We can't talk anymore. I'm sorry, we can't talk anymore."

Scene Two: Home life

Dan looked around the house and shivered. Every piece of furniture in the house had sharp edges and dark, spotless surfaces. When he entered the kitchen, Lynn, his stepmother, was standing by the stove, making breakfast.

"Good morning, Daniel."

"Mornin'."

Lynn was wearing black slacks, a cream blouse, and a black bow in her straight blond hair. Her lips were chapped, and she had

a cold sore on her mouth that was avoiding the healing process.

"Give me a moment, and we can eat. So, did you learn anything new in the hospital?"

"Um, no, not really."

Once the bacon was done draining, Lynn added a few strips to the two plates she had prepared, and they sat down to eat.

"You know, I hope you have someone to talk to about your problems. I'd hate to see you end up like your father."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, your grandfather never taught your father anything. He's messed up because of that. I'd hate to see you get messed up too because your father doesn't know any better. You do have someone to talk to, right?"

"Yeah, I do."

After breakfast, Dan excused himself, grabbed his bags, and ascended the spiral wooden staircase to his room. He pulled the letter out and read it. The letter was short, not even a page, and it was written on a piece of typing paper. There was no phone number or address, only a time--Shawn would call at nine o'clock. Dan folded the letter and placed it in a book on his desk: The Game of Life. Lynn had given him the book, and its corners were worn, and the spine-creased. He stared at the book and then laid down for a nap.

At noon Dan was awakened by his father.

"Hey son, why don't you come downstairs. Lynn is making chicken soup."

"Dad, I'm not really feeling too well. I'd rather just stay in bed for now."

"I'm sure you'll feel better if you just come downstairs--"

"Don't gimme that crap about chicken soup! It doesn't work."

"Just remember we are having family over tonight. They would really like to see you."

Dan's father looked like a child, who grooms himself perfectly for Christmas, yet finds nothing but sour disappointment in his stocking. Mr. McCloud left the room, shutting the door behind him.

That night Dan cleaned himself up and went downstairs to see his family. He was getting a drink when Lynn stopped him at the entrance to the kitchen.

"Daniel, can I speak with you for a minute?"

"Yeah, sure."

Dan followed Lynn into his dad's office, where Lynn shut the door and dimmed the lights.

"You know, your father really wants us to be friends. It would really make him happy. He doesn't want you to spend all of your time upstairs in your room. I mean, we don't know what sort of things you're doing up there. So, if you could try, it would be nice if you spent a little more time with us."

"I'll try. But sometimes I'm going to want to be alone."

"Now Daniel, I'd hate to see you back in the hospital. You know what happened last time you were alone for too long, and I'm not going to have my insurance pay for your hospital visits."

"I'll try and come down more. But Lynn, right now, I'm not feeling very good and I'm going to bed. I'm sorry. I know I just--"

"But we haven't even eaten dinner or opened any presents yet. Your relatives really want to see you." Dan kept silent while Lynn stared at him. "Fine, go to your room. But things will be different."

When he got to his room, Dan let out a sigh and looked at the clock on his desk. It was five minutes before nine o'clock.

"Good," he whispered to himself. Dan sat down at his desk, and stared at the phone. He continued to do this for the next fifteen minutes, occasionally sparing a glance for the clock. At nine-twenty he slammed his fist down on the desk, and as if this were some sort of catalyst, the phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Dan. It's Shawn. I'm sorry I'm calling a little later than I said."

"No, no, that's no problem. So how are you doing? How are things at the hospital?"

"I'm fine and everything at the hospital is fine. Listen Dan, I'm only calling you this one time because I want to explain something to you. I can't see you or talk to you anymore. You've got to accept this."

"But Shawn, I want to see you."

"No. You are going to be okay without me. You've got to start helping yourself. I'm sorry I had to tell you this way, but you can do it."

"But . . . you said we could see each other. Why are you telling me now? Did I scare you? Was I a bad kisser? I just--"

Before Dan could continue, Lynn opened his door and began to speak.

"I thought you weren't feeling well. Why are you on the phone?"

"Please, Shawn, just hold one minute."

"I really have to go . . ."

"Please, just one second." Dan cupped the receiver in his hand. "I was just catching up with a friend."

"That's it. I've had enough." Lynn grabbed the phone from Dan's hand and slammed it back in its cradle.

"What the hell did you do that for?"

Dan was looking at the other side of the room, so he was surprised when he felt his face catch the back of Lynn's hand.

"I am not going to put up with this any longer. Your family came to see you, you say you're sick, and I find you talking on the phone. Are the people who care about you that unimportant?"

"Sorry," Dan whispered as he stared at the small red spots on the floor. They seemed to float on the carpet.

"Daniel, we are going to talk about your problems right now. I try to help, but you refuse to listen. I mean, do you hate me?"

Dan remained silent, continuing to stare at Lynn.

"And what's this? Why do you have this?" Lynn pointed to an axe, leaning against the side of the desk. Dan looked down, his eyes widened, and his mouth attempted to form words.

"I used that to chop wood when Bob and I went camping this summer."

Lynn picked up the axe and began smacking the flat side against her palm. Her eyes were still focused on Dan.

"You know, I'm afraid you're going to come in my room when I'm sleeping, and hit me with this. Well, that's not going to happen. I won't let it."

"But Lynn, I wouldn't . . ." Dan again was unable to complete his sentence.

"I didn't ask for you when I married your father. I don't have to do anything for you, but I do. You see this?" Lynn pointed to a dish on the floor. "This is mine, not yours." Lynn raised the axe and smashed the plate into a wave of white shards. "Almost everything in this house is mine, and you're not going to take it away!"

"Lynn, put the axe down," Mr. McCloud called from the doorway. "Lynn, I told you about this before. I won't allow this to happen again."

Lynn whipped around while Dan remained seated, with wide eyes. "What are you doing here? This is between Dan and me."

Lynn turned back to Dan, and his father moved behind her and wrapped his arms around her. In the midst of Lynn screaming and fighting, she dropped the axe, and was dragged out into the hall.

Mr. McCloud kicked the door shut. After a few minutes of yelling, Dan reached for the axe on the floor. The door opened and he could see Lynn's contorted face in the light, teeth gritting, nostrils flaring, and eyes wide, like a rabid dog convulsing.

Dan stopped and heard his father yelling, "Leave the fucking door alone!"

The door slammed shut and exploded into the room in a spray of splinters, coming right off the hinges. Dan kept his eyes closed as his stepmother's screaming pushed further into the silence.

About fifteen minutes later, Mr. McCloud walked into the room, stopped, and looked down at Dan. He was sitting at his desk with a plastic bag in his left hand; the axe was placed against the side of his desk.

"I'm leaving. I can't stay here anymore. I've gotta go and find somebody."

(Oh Now How) Unkempt (Are We?)**By Dennis Cormac McCarthy**

oh Darling Wife now, how unkempt are we!
said he while passing off to her another dusty kiss.
oh Dearest Husband, how now then are we?
said she while comforting another wrinkled thought of his.
in an awkward silence with latest stock figures in his grasp,
her dearest husband spilled his morning coffee on the floor.
with flying saucer shards come her uncomfortable twinkling's last,
his darling wife then whispered, life is no dream for us anymore.
my Darling Wife now. let the housework go then,
said he while reaching for his hunting gear.
my Dearest Husband, yes, do murder now the children,
said she while shedding all of her diamond tears.

Too Much

By Sophia Artis

Fried chicken, broasted chicken, broiled chicken, chicken and dumplings, chicken casserole, chicken and broccoli, barbecue chicken, chicken quiche. . .

Ella was an ordinary housewife. The six-foot redhead woman with dishpan hands loved her husband Harry with all heart and soul. However, according to Ella, Harry had two faults. One fault was that Harry would never fix the things that he tore apart. As examples, the bedroom curtains needed to be hung and the toilet seat needed a few more screws. Also, the knobs were missing from the bedroom dresser. Another fault, according to Ella, was that Harry never acknowledged her. Either way, the love between Harry and his redhead produced triplets: John, Joe, and Jeff. Harry, Ella, John, Joe, and Jeff lived a wonderful life in a little white house with a picket fence in the countryside. Life was like a Leave it to Beaver episode until college day arrived.

John, Joe, and Jeff went off to Jasper University to study joints, jaundice and jogger's heel. The financial aid awarded to the triplets was not enough to buy a 1974 Maverick. However, like many teens who leave for college, John, Joe and Jeff chose not to acknowledge the suffering of their mother and father. While the triplets ate in Jasper University's exquisite dining hall, Ella and Harry began to face starvation. It seemed as if every penny earned was either sent to John for fraternity pledging, to Jeff for his credit card bill, or to Joe for a new CD player. Quickly, Ella had to think of a nutritious and economical way to provide for herself and Harry.

One Sunday morning, Ella awoke at 5 a.m. to fix breakfast for Harry. Harry often complained because he was fed up with the usual oatmeal and Sweet n' Low. Ella ignored her husband while reading the morning newspaper. This was a usual practice. Suddenly, she discovered an article about a drastic decrease in the price of chicken. Ella's heart became filled with joy as she leaped to her feet and began to sprint out the door. Harry wondered where the six-foot redhead was going, but he refused to ask. Two minutes later, Ella returned to pick up her purse. Then she sprinted out the door again to her destination.

Three hours later, after aimlessly wandering the supermarket aisles, Ella returned home with a huge grin. "Harry," shouted Ella, "look at what I bought!" As Harry looked into the kitchen all he saw was packages of breasts, wings, thighs, necks, backs, and legs everywhere! These packages occupied the same deep freezer that once housed TV dinners. Harry refused to ask the redhead why there was so much chicken. Instead, he just dealt with the new additions

to the freezer.

The next morning, Ella made a chicken omelette for Harry's breakfast. Then she made a chicken sandwich for his lunch. When Harry returned home after work, fried chicken was waiting for him. Tuesday, Ella made a chicken casserole. Thursday was barbecue chicken. Finally, Friday arrived and Ella made a chicken quiche. Harry decided to speak out against the injustice of eating chicken every day. In response, Ella showed resentment toward Harry about the current financial situation. "Harry," Ella began, "you don't make enough money so that we can afford anything else but chicken!" Harry dutifully agreed with the redhead -- chicken was the only way. He then turned away and left the room, feeling defeated. The argument had been resolved and Harry had lost.

After three hours in a house filled with tension, a letter arrived in Ella and Harry's lonely mailbox. The return address was Jasper University. Harry picked up the letter and vigorously opened it. "Red," stated Harry, "we've received a letter from the triplets." Quickly Ella came forth to accompany her husband. In the letter, John, Joe, and Jeff wrote constant praises about Jasper University's exquisite cuisine. Harry's mouth began to water and he used his shirt collar to wipe the drool away. Ella cried tears of joy because her triplets were healthy and happy.

Life went on as usual around the household of Harry and his redhead. Every day, Ella attempted to create a new chicken dish. However, one evening, Harry was very annoyed with the mere sight of his chicken salad. He blurted out, "Red, I'm sick and tired of this. If I ask for a raise, will you buy something else? I have eaten so much chicken that I feel like . . ." Ella finished Harry's sentence by saying, "You feel like you're going to fly, don't you?" Harry was amazed that his redhead had the ability to read his mind. "Red," Harry replied, "you took the words right out of my mouth!"

The following morning, after sending Harry off to his low-paying job, Ella made a long awaited trip to the supermarket. As Ella strolled down aisle five of the Sav' N Money, she fantasized about a new, wild, creative, and energetic Harry. This new Harry made a lot of money to supply Ella's needs and beyond. It was at this point that Ella heard a voice from within that said, "Buy beef. Your life will take a drastic turn." With the blink of an eye, Ella found herself exploring the meat aisle.

Ella felt as though she were floating to the checkout counter as she fantasized about Harry's reaction to the beef. When the cashier totaled her order, Ella pulled out a credit card, figuring the bill would be paid when Harry got his raise.

Harry returned home from work in a very unusual mood. He mumbled to himself as he tossed his brown baggie in the corner. He found his redhead in the kitchen, stirring something that smelled

unfamiliar, but wonderful. "Red, what's in the pot?" Harry asked with a puzzled look on his face. Ella, with a devious grin, ignored Harry and motioned him to sit down at the table. To his delight, Harry was served a bowl of hot beef stew. He was so used to eating chicken that the taste of beef stew caused him to go into convulsions. "Harry," Ella exclaimed, "let me call 9-1-1!" A few minutes later, Harry came out of his convulsions and ignored the redhead, as he gobbled down the beef stew. "Red," Harry finally responded, "this stuff is wonderful. Where'd you learn to cook like this?" Ella was stunned by Harry's question. She began to feel sexy. It had been a long time since Ella and Harry had . . . you know. "Hey Red," Harry continued, "I think we should go upstairs and make your fantasies become realities!" Every fantasy that Ella had ever conjured up came true. Harry was magnificent in the bedroom, when it came to hanging curtains. He tried all sorts of new positions when he attempted to hang the door back on the hinges. Once Harry was finished, he smoked a cigarette as he watched his redhead sleep. "She must be exhausted," Harry mumbled.

The next morning was exceptionally perfect. Ella dished out the beef stew and Harry felt recharged. This time, he fixed the toilet seat. Later, Harry and his redhead went back up to the bedroom to fix the dresser. As he thrust the long screwdriver into the screws and made swift turns, Ella became excited. Everything happened like the night before.

The following Monday morning, Harry went to work feeling relieved. Now that the redhead cooked beef stew, all chicken frustrations had vanished. Harry actually looked forward to dinner and fixing things.

Returning home at approximately 5:30 p.m., Harry wanted to see his redhead, whom he had once ignored. After slamming closed the station wagon door, Harry climbed the porch steps. Surprisingly, the stench of chicken slapped him in the face. This slap was so intense that Harry fell to the ground, helpless. Ella, with a slight grin, ran to the door to see what the disturbing noise was, but all she saw was a chicken, pacing on the porch step, next to a brown baggie.

Reimertanti-ode**By Christopher Deussing**

ursinus college identification card
 bearing my leering translucent veil of happiness
 functions as my pleasure passport
 to the utopian underworld of the red light reimert district

my canvas-covered squishy-squashy wishy-washy souls are
 assaulted by the never-drying puddle of discouragement
 created by the black biting depression rain
 which incessantly drowns my well-being

burnt-out butts
 devoid of life-giving puffs
 aimlessly float upon this sea of sorrow
 intense reflections of meandering motivations
 blind my introspective eyes
 and savagely strangle my self-esteem

my opening of the bruising brute
 who has mangled my metacarpels
 and blessed my insecurities and instabilities
 reveals a godly evil egomaniac
 who does not receive gifts of gold and myrrh
 but the impending intoxicated inspection of brotherhood

the metal flies that imprison relentless restless reptiles
 are exterminated by xxxtra-concentrated canisters of carnality
 releasing hurting horny hordes of
 sexual serpents starved by the search for superficial sensuality
 empowered by an intoxicated elixir
 derived from cranial moose matter

tormenting throbbing erotic eggs
 charm these squirming snakes into their "heart-shaped boxes"
 sapping their powerful potency poison
 transforming the vicious vipers
 into weak wriggling worms

who are these people
 pelting me with petty pittance
 why do they scar the carpeting of my unjust judgements
 with the acrid acid of their unspiteful spittle?

the senseless stupid nature of this stunning wasteland

across the false face of my concerned conscience
a stoned soul's heaven
a sober soul's hell
is where this confused individual dwells.

Seeds

By Jessica Miller

Look at me with sunflower face
all droopy-stemmed and petal-torn
you knew i'd give you everything.
(me, with my wicker flower basket
and sharp purple-handed clipper
fingers cut and bleeding,
legs all torn by thistles)
standing beneath you
as i always have
both of us fooled by
your majestic beauty--
hiding your more pathetic
and needy nature.
i'd never deny you anything
i was capable of giving--
did you know that
as you cried your seeds
down on my upturned face?
no one ever could make me
smile or cry like you did--
you made sure of that
by being the tallest and brightest
in a field full of tiresome mediocrity.
i know you never made me do anything--
i saw your head grow too heavy
for your thin stalk
and i stood ready to support you
by my choice, not realizing
you were so full of little black seeds
planting themselves in me.
now i have to move on,
get away from the leaves i've entangled myself in.
you're not so tall and all-encompassing
from the next row over
(i'm tired of standing here
bleeding for you--my fingers hurt
my neck is sore from looking up)
it's time to shake the seeds loose
from my hair,
to regain my self, now that i know
i was lost in you
to realize that i cannot keep you
from going to seed,

but i can save myself;
when you bow your heavy head down,
you'll see only the dirt
beneath you, and the seeds you've cried
laying in the muddy ridges
of my footprints...

Secret**By Mark Pinsk**

she said "I want to read your poems"
we met
she was serious
reading every poem I brought

when she finished
she vacantly gazed up and said
"They're good"

she looked confused
uninterested

they were about her





William & Elizabeth Akin
 A. C. Allen, Jr.
 Blanche Z. Allen
 Susan Allen
 Alumni Office
 Cristina Anaya
 Dolores Arnold
 Berman Museum of Art
 Nicholas O. Berry
 Barbara Boris
 Laura L. Borsdorf
 Dorothy E. Bowman
 Brothers of Chi Rho Psi
 Antoni Castells-Talens
 Pamela Chlad
 Mona Chylack
 Hugh R. Clark
 Jeanine Czubaroff
 Ellen Dawley
 Louis A. De Catur
 Richard DiFelicianantonio
 Amalia Dishman
 Education Department
 Carol Dole
 Juan Espadas
 Financial Aid Office
 Gerard J. Fitzpatrick
 Judith E. Fryer
 Steve Gilbert
 Kathryn A. Goddard
 Collette Hall
 C. Dallett Hemphill
 Joyce E. Henry
 Ronald E. Hess
 Jae Hively
 Houghton J. Kane
 Margot Kelley
 Richard D. King
 Gary Knittel
 Jan Lange

Joyce Lionarons
 Annette V. Lucas
 Joyce Makeoid
 Brian W. McCullough
 Todd P. McKinney
 William J. Middleton
 Jay K. Miller
 Donna S. Monheit
 Elizabeth Moore
 Jeffery W. Neslen
 Frances Novak
 Peter F. Perreten
 John D. Pilgrim
 Andrew Price
 Sally Rapp
 Kenneth D. Richardson
 Richard & Margot Richter
 Barbara Rost
 Hudson B. Scattergood
 Kenneth L. Schaefer
 Patricia R. Schroeder
 Ellis Shaheen
 Jill & Dave Sherman
 Peter F. Small
 Peter J. Spurio
 Paul Stern
 Martha Takats
 Kunihiko Terasawa
 Lynn D. Thelen
 Linda Thiel
 Victor J. Tortorelli
 Jon Volkmer
 Tina Wailgum
 Cheryl D. Walborn
 John Walker
 Thomas Whelan
 John M. Wickersham
 Sally Widman
 Joan M. Wlock
 Theodore A. Xaras
 Natalia Zabegailo

Special thanks to Madeline Holland, who, through Wismer Dinning Services, made a generous contribution towards THE LANTERN's receptions.



Printed on recycled paper.