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EDITOR'S NOTE

Named after the architectural structure atop Pfahler Hall, Ursinus College's literary magazine, THE LANTERN, is a collection of poetry, prose, and visual art composed by the students of Ursinus College. In its 56th year of production, THE LANTERN staff congratulates visual art contest winner Ted Manser whose winning work is featured on the cover, and short story contest winner Anthony McCurdy whose story, SPIDER SILK, can be found on page 3. The staff would also like to express its sincere thanks to Caroline Darrohn for her valuable input towards the creative content of this magazine.

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SPIDER SILK

By Anthony McCurdy

Kenny could feel the individual gray and black crystals in the cool granite grabbing his skin, almost holding him, caressing him as he reached for a new hold. He felt strong, felt the strength of the earth flow through his fingers as though they became welded to the stone with each new grasp. The subtle bumps and ridges in the cliff became a ladder for him as he followed some inner voice farther and farther up, jumping and grabbing and reaching without hesitation, as though by instinct. He knew this cliff as a lover, probing cracks and contours with a delicate fanaticism. He felt more intimate with this outcropping of rock than he did with most people. Love the rock, his climbing instructor had told him almost six years ago. Love that rock, and it will love you back. Funny, Kenny thought. It seemed logical that the same would apply to human beings. Yet he and Maureen still fought. They fought a lot. The last bout had been just that morning because Kenny needed the car for something and Maureen had said no. She was standing there in the kitchen with her hands on her hips, wearing his robe, saying, "Remember, it's my car after all. You only use it because I let you."

Feeling his palms beginning to sweat, Kenny calmed himself down. Another tidbit of advice from his instructor that stayed with Kenny throughout the years: hot heads and rocks don't mix. Don't climb if you're feeling fucked up. Holding on with his left hand, which was wedged deep into the main fissure running up the middle of the cliff, he dropped back on his haunches to keep most of his weight on his legs. He did not want to tire his arms too fast, as the toughest part of the climb was yet to come.

Looking down, Kenny reveled in the fact that he was almost near the top. Back in school, everyone knew that climbing was his life. At parties, he would start at one point and climb all the way around the room, back to the starting point, without touching the floor. His climbing buddies, Ron and Larry, had tie-dyed a tee shirt for him with "Monkey" printed in big black letters on the back. The shirt annoyed the hell out of Maureen. Kenny was wearing it now.

He allowed his natural sense of vertigo to take over for a moment as he reviewed the eighty feet he had already ascended. He wondered if it was strange to get such a kick out of scaring himself shitless. Though he had only twenty or so feet to go, this was not a normal climb for him. He was solo this time. Larry and Ron were both up top coiling the ropes they had used that afternoon. They had no idea what Kenny was doing. He had considered telling Maureen just so that she would get pissed off, but he didn't need the hassle. Nothing would stop him. He smiled, a secretive smile of delight and knowledge that, for once in his life, he would be doing

something on his own without safety nets, ropes, or Dad making the right phone calls to the right people.

Examining the rock face above him, Kenny analyzed his options with the cold precision of a surgeon. The main fissure in the cliff split in two approximately three feet over his head, with an almost perfect forty-five degree angle formed in the crux, like an upside-down pyramid punctuated by a hand-sized triangular chunk of stone. That chunk would make an excellent hold, one he had used before, though it had a reputation of being unreliable. He knew both branches equally well, having explored both with a toprope holding him. The left branch had always been more of a challenge. What the hell, he thought, I'll go left. Compounding the difficulty of the left branch was the fact that the cliff became an overhang, which meant almost all of the strain would be on his upper body. It was a day for challenges. His harness felt just tight enough, and his lycra tights were a second skin. He tensed up for a spring, bouncing a little on his legs and enjoying the predatorial agility his climbing shoes gave him. He leapt straight up, graceful and cat-like. The lunge was perfect and his timing precise; his hands just seemed to appear right where they were supposed to, the left fist jammed deep in the left branch and twisted to provide friction, and the right hand grasping the triangular cruxstone with an iron death-grip. And the stone pulled out in his hand.

It was the cold that woke Kenny up. He felt tired, and his head hurt. He concentrated for a moment on the beat of his heart. It was strong. His right arm ached, as did the rest of his body. He opened his eyes, wincing at the bright light, and had to squint until it didn't hurt. Then he looked around for the first time.

It came as a shock that he was in a hospital room. It came as a shock that he was alive. Closing his eyes, he listened to himself breathing. Shallow, a touch raspy, but calm and even. He opened his eyes again and saw Maureen sitting next to him. This was another shock to him, as she had not been there a moment before. Kenny wondered if he was dreaming, but he was in too much pain to be asleep. She slouched down in her chair with an empty expression on her face. Maureen often wore that same look, like a blank mask, around their apartment. It reminded him of a jack-o-lantern three weeks after Halloween.

Despite the occasional miserable countenance, Maureen was a woman who turned men's heads. As he turned his own head a little to look at her more carefully, she noticed the movement and jerked around to face him. She smiled as she saw he was looking at her, erasing the worry from her face and making it come alive.

"Hi," she said, her voice soft and rich, still as sensual and musical as he remembered and dreamed it to be. Yet there was something else there that he did not recognize, some tremble hidden in that one syllable, fear perhaps. Probably not, though, and it was gone as she began gushing

words like a thawing river.

"Oh God, Ken, you had me so worried! You know how much it scares me when you go climbing! I came as soon as Ron called, but that wasn't until after you were already in the emergency room. At first they wouldn't let me in to see you, but Larry and Ron helped me convince that Nazi at the main desk that..."

The sun was shining through the big double window. His room was a single, he noted. Antiseptic, bland, and small, the room bored him already. This was going to cost a pretty penny. He sighed.

"...and I must have really pissed off all the nurses and doctors because I've been bugging them about you all day..."

Someone had brought a bouquet of flowers in and the vase was on the dresser in the opposite corner. The flowers weren't much good because they were too far away to smell and he needed his glasses to see what kind they were. At least the bright splotch of red and white and yellow defied the monotony of the room. Why were all hospital rooms painted the same dull cream color?, he wondered.

"...and Larry told me how terrible he feels about the whole thing. He said the sun was in his eyes, and he couldn't see exactly what was going on. Ken, he blames himself for it. He really wants to come and see you sometime soon. So do your parents—Oh, shit!" Kenny could imagine the smell of burning rubber as she screeched to a halt in the middle of her torrent of words. "I'm sorry, Ken. Let me go call your parents. I promised them I'd call as soon as you woke up." She began to get up, saying, "I was just so happy to see you awake that I—"

"No, don't do that." His voice was a croak as he struggled with mucous-encrusted vocal cords. His breath caught in his throat as he fell into a fit of coughing that shook his whole body. His lungs felt dry and dusty, rattling around inside a brittle cage of bones. Frozen, Maureen sat down again and clucked her tongue like a worried mother.

"Are you okay? I mean, just nod or something if it hurts to talk." Peering closer at his face, she furrowed her brow. "Are you in pain right now? I can call the nurse if you want." He shook his head.

"No, just... stay with me?" He coughed again, pain searing his sides this time.

"Of course I will," she said, pulling her chair closer. Maureen leaned over and stroked his cheek with the back of her hand. She pursed her lips and shook her head. "You know, you're damned lucky. When you fell, you hit the ledge with your side and some how caught with your harness. If it wasn't for that, you would have rolled right off. And you would be dead."

He pulled away from her stroking hand, staring straight into her eyes. "Yeah, so?" His voice was rough and deep, and he spat out each word to keep from coughing. "From what you said this morning, I'm surprised you even showed up here."

Maureen sat back in her chair. "Don't be stupid. You're much more

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important than lunch out with the girls. I mean, I'm here, aren't I?"

Kenny looked away, out the window. Outside was a wide, light gray stone ledge. He could almost feel the ledge now, he could envision himself hanging from it, the sharp edges digging into the skin of his hands as they gripped the stone. Judging from the tops of the buildings he saw, he guessed that he was at least five stories up.

"From what the surgeon said, your kidneys are probably fine but they may want to do a CAT-scan just to be sure. One of your ribs came really close to puncturing your lungs, but it didn't. You know you won't be able to climb for along time, thank God. Ken, I hope this accident knocked some sense into you."

Several machines were positioned beside his bed like a row of judges. Kenny could hear them hum and beep occasionally as though they were reading his thoughts and making comments. His nose itched from the tubes in his nostrils. The central air conditioning came on and blew a breeze of cold air across him. He shivered and pulled the sheet up with one hand, covering his bare chest. There were sensors stuck all over his torso, and as he breathed, they pulled at him like some bizarre tentacled creature. The tube coming out of his arm made him feel as helpless as a broken bird.

"In a couple of weeks, this will all be a bad memory, like a bad dream. You can even draw some valuable lessons out of this experience, as long as you don't let the surface effects of the trauma get in the way, and..."

He wished she would stop flaunting her diploma in his face. Bad dreams, my ass, Kenny thought. I'll tell you bad dreams. Dreams of you leeching me dry and hollow, then pulling me around by a string tied to my ankle to show to all of our friends.

He flexed his left arm. It felt weak to him. His left hand was a numb club, swathed in bandages. He had no power now, no contact with the rock to make him strong. It was strange, but recently, the only time Kenny felt whole or substantial was when he was touching stone. Even being in bed with Maureen was no longer fulfilling. She would pull him close and whisper, "But it's not fair to you if you can't.. don't..." He would shake his head and go to sleep. Without the solid, simple existence of stone to anchor him to the earth, Kenny was a ghost, an observer in life, never touching the people or places he encountered.

He had taken to carrying a shard of obsidian in his pocket that he could touch whenever he needed balance or focus. It was on the table next to him. He wanted to touch it. Five stories, he mused. He remembered being that high, and the loose stone and then the spider.

The cruxstone had just pulled out in his hand, and he hung on to it for a moment as his body fell and jerked, caught by his left fist wedged in the crack. He grunted in pain, and dropped the betraying rock. It ricocheted off the cliff and spun through the air, eventually hitting the ground. His

body was bathed in sweat, and a moment later, it felt like a sheet of ice. He was dangling in the air, turning and swaying like a limp marionette. He was afraid he was going to shit himself. Closing his eyes and almost gagging on the bile that rose like a flood in the back of his throat, he fought the urge to scream out loud.

Far off in the distance, he heard the long, strangled wail of a loon. It was a sound of anguish that usually disturbed him, somehow thrilling him as it echoed inside him. This time, however, the cry struck him like a bucketful of freezing water. Blinking his eyes, he cleared his throat and called up to the top of the cliff, "Help me. Uh, guys? Help?" His voice carried through the quiet air, calm and unwavering.

He saw Ron poke his head over the edge and say, "Holy shit! Larry!" Larry's head appeared next to Ron's and his mouth formed an O before he as well said, "Holy shit!" Larry said something about the goldline and an extra oval, and Ron disappeared.

Then Larry called down, "Are you okay? Can you hold on?"

"I think so. My hand is beginning to hurt a little, but then again, I am hanging on it."

Larry laughed. It sounded forced. "I can't believe you tried to solo a fuckin' five-nine face, Ken. This has got to be the stupidest stunt—" Larry looked back over his shoulder and barked some more instructions. "All right, here's the plan. Ron's got a bowline in one end of a rope, and a biner on that. Are you wearing your harness?"

"Yes."

"Good. Listen carefully, Ken. When we lower this to you, don't move too much and stay calm. We'll get it to you and then you clip in and let go, and we'll pull you up."

The rope came snaking over the edge. Kenny tried to stay calm, but hearing Larry swear as the rope got snagged on invisible bumps made him sweat again. He tried not to think about the great strain on his left shoulder, or the blood running down his wrist where the jagged innards of the fissure had bitten his flesh as he hung there. The loon in the distance called again, its cry wailing through the trees and bouncing off the cliff. A slight wind rose, making Kenny sway in the air. He was biting his lip and tasting the blood when he noticed the spider.

It was right in front of his nose on the rock. No bigger than the nail on his pinkie, it was gray and sleek with black stripes on its tiny legs. The spider danced across the rock, back and forth for no apparent reason, across the veins of white quartz that were woven into the weathered granite. Kenny watched it run, waving its legs, a speck of dust on the immense bulk of the cliff.

He heard more swearing, and saw that the carabiner had somehow gotten wedged into the crack about five feet above him. Larry was trying to shake it loose, and yelled down, "Ken, you can't grab that, can you? I can't see, the sun's in my eyes."

Feeling himself slipping, Kenny yelled back up, "No! Hurry it up! I'm slipping!"

"All right, stay calm. Don't panic. It'll be there." Larry jerked the rope back and forth in the bizarre tug of war with the mountain, trying to pop the carabiner loose.

Kenny closed his eyes. His face was burning and his heart was pounding. He could feel his left hand going numb, knowing that when he lost all feeling in it, his grip would be gone and he would plummet to the ground. He opened his eyes and saw the spider, still dancing, but now hanging by a thread from its web. It was waving its legs, as though to mock him. I can hold on but you can't, ha, ha.

His hand slipped a little, flooding him with fear as he screamed, "Goddammit, Larry! I'm gonna fucking die! WHERE'S THAT GODDAMN ROPE?!?"

Larry, his bearded face red and stained, leaned over the edge as far as he could, yelling down, "Here it comes, Ken! Here it comes! Grab it when you can, just don't let go!"

The rope was hissing down, but Kenny could feel himself jerk, his own blood lubricating the rock, his numb fingers relaxing one by one. Tears stung his eyes as he remembered slamming the door in Maureen's face that morning. Damn her! Damn everything! It was all such a fucking waste! He sobbed as he swung in the air, trying to kick the cliff. The rope was only a foot above his head, and Larry and Ron were screaming, "Grab it! Grab the rope!" The spider was still mocking him as his last finger slipped.

Opening his eyes in the hospital, Kenny looked over at Maureen. She lifted her head to meet his gaze. She was crying. Her eyes were wide, and the tears rolling off her nose and face made wet marks on her Mickey Mouse sweatshirt. He stared at one glistening tear that hung on the tip of her nose. She made no effort to wipe it off, and when she moved her head to speak, it dripped off and hit Mickey's ear.

"It must have been horrible for you, knowing you were going to fall like that. If only the rope had been a little lower, or if you could have held on just a little longer... It's hard for me to believe I almost lost you."

He blinked. He tasted salt, and discovered it was from his own tears as they slid down his cheeks. In a voice that was weak and broken, he said, "I don't know, Maureen. It might not have been an accident."

His words seemed to hang in the cool, still air of the hospital room like a slowly leaking balloon. Her face twisted.

"Wha—what did you say?"

He looked out the window again, at the blue sky, trying to keep control over his voice. His chest heaved as he managed to keep from sobbing out loud. "I said it might not have been an accident." He covered his face with his mangled left hand. "Maybe I let go."

"But...why? Why would you do that?" She was standing next to him now, arms wrapped tight around herself. "It wasn't something that I did,

was it?"

"I don't know. I remember hanging there knowing, just knowing, that I was about to die. And it was going to be without you. Goddammit!" He slammed his bandaged hand against the bed frame, and winced at the pain. He could feel his chin quivering as he spoke. "I've done so many stupid things, but to die without having told you how much I—I..." His voice trailed off into dry, shuddering gasps that shook his aching body. "I just want to go home."

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Maureen took him in her arms and pulled him close to her. Stroking his hair with her wet hands, she kissed the top of his head, murmuring, "Oh, Kenny, my poor baby. We'll go home soon, I promise. You're safe now." He just let her hold him as he cried, staring with wide blue eyes at the stone ledge outside his window.

CATTLE PRODS AND PRODIGIES

By Matthew Noll

the brittle cowhorns of Parental Guidance suggested
that their son refine his motives and gain direction
but the opulent boy would not be bested.

“you would do much better if you rested
from extracurriculars and gave school more attention”
the brittle cowhorns of Parental Guidance suggested.

“your knowledge of this material will all be tested
and art won’t get you dinner despite your best intention”
but the opulent boy would not be bested.

“don’t be like us whose best years were wasted
so that now we barely eat off your father’s pension”
the brittle cowhorns of Parental Guidance suggested.

“we would never have guessed we’d be infested
with all you children like some oozing infection”
but the opulent boy would not be bested.

“we can’t just stand around and be molested
we must up in arms and destroy our own creation”
the brittle cowhorns of Parental Guidance suggested
but the opulent boy would not be bested.



HOOLIGANS

By Rich Galeone

Brian Hogan watched slack-jawed as the ample figure of Sister Saint Matthew rocketed toward the sky, let out a yelp and landed on one hopping foot. She fanned her posterior until the object tap-danced to the floor. The silver tack sparkled in the morning sun. The sixth graders were silent except for the red-necked head of Ronald Murphy burrowed beneath his desk emitting muffled squeals of suicidal delight. Sister Saint Matthew's capillaried eyes glared into Murphy's desperate soul, calculated his innocence, and then spared his life. Instead, she placed the evidence on her desk and glowered down at the innocent faces of Jimmy McFee and Brian Hogan who had earned by evil deeds and wagging tongues the privilege of sitting directly in front of their teacher.

It was rumored and generally accepted that McFee was so depraved that on his brother's birthday—the one who was in prison—McFee, cloaked by a moonless night, broke in to Holisberg State Prison to celebrate the occasion, and, after a night of poker playing and beer drinking in the company of murderers and thieves broke back out again and all this undetected by the prison authorities. But even more heinous was his behaviour at the scandalized Christmas polyanna—the behavior that precipitated his being relocated to the head of the class. Sister Saint Matthew's former posture had been to place an abyss between her virtue and the influence of the devil, and thus, McFee and Hogan were garrisoned to the remote corners of the room encircled by girls and distant from the evil sway of their gangster friends. On the occasion mentioned each pupil contributed a gift to the polyanna pool before class in the morning and the pretty mound of presents in their glittering wrappers beckoned to the greed of the Christian children.

"I can see," trilled Sister Saint Matthew, "that some of you can't help but be distracted by the gifts. Well, it's just a shame for the rest of us who have more self control and would have enjoyed seeing them for the whole day." She paused to emit a great sigh of unhappiness. "So, I guess we'll have to have the polyanna now. You may come up one at a time and pick out a gift. Mr. Shem, you can be first."

Portly Peter Shem sat in the first seat of the first row. The only male scholar of the class, he sprang to his feet and selected a large green box with a white bow. Shem would earn an A even for polyanna fetching. In the second seat of that row sat the reigning beauty, Sandra McFadden. Hogan's heart leapt in secret palpitation as the tresses of long golden hair fell away from her perfectly flat chest exposing the ashen grey of the Saint Michael's School uniform. He caught a glimpse of knee as she seductively chose her gift and swooned with impotent desire. The

ceremony progressed in this fashion to the end of the row.

When the name of Joan Mooney, the inhabitant of the first seat in the second row was called, a volcanic spew of pandemonium erupted from the horizon of the far corner. McFee was on his feet, then his seat, and finally standing on his desk. Horrified, the embracing girdle of female innocence shrunk away.

"The hell with this shit," announced McFee as he ran to the front of the room atop the varnish-smelling desks of the dumbfounded. The ungodly fiend rifled through the remainder of the bounty, chose a gift, and darted out the door.

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Jesus, Mary and Joseph," ejaculated Sister Saint Matthew in a feeble, but nevertheless successful, attempt to ward off the fire and brimstone that would surely rain upon the earth in the near vicinity of Jimmy McFee.

McFee was absent for the remainder of that week during which time a tall Jesuit priest with a black beard and passionate eyes was seen frequenting the parish rectory—an exorcist it was said—and when McFee finally did return to class he was seated face to face with his teacher.

† † † † †

Like a great black hawk she did slow circles about the desks of Hogan and McFee, casting occasionally an abject eye at the tack much like a pitcher guarding first base.

"Which one of you two hooligans put that tack on my chair?" Her voice was controlled but the effort caused her complexion to go Harvard beet.

"I didn't do it," quavered Hogan but his voice embarrassed him and he looked down.

McFee's ice eyes looked coldly at Sister Saint Matthew's. "I didn't do it either," he seethed and pivoted to include Hogan in his frozen stare.

"It would be a lot easier on the guilty party if he confesses now." She waited a full minute in the perfect silence of moral vacuum.

The inquisitor turned her back on the defendants and addressed the body of peers. "Is there anyone here brave enough to tell me who put it on my chair?"

Again the assembly was silent. Hogan and McFee wore the expressions of persecuted dogs, Sister Saint Matthew one of ravaged perfection.

"How many of you think Hogan did it?" she said spinning around.

Seventeen lemmings raised their hands. Hogan writhed in the torment of such wanton injustice. And this was not the *first* injustice Hogan had suffered. His friends agreed that his fall from grace had been tragic and inequitable.

It was a dark cold November morning when Brian Hogan was to serve his first Mass. His mother had ironed his altar boy's black cassock and white surplice and bleached the stiff white collar. His father woke him early and drove him in the green Hudson through the blocks of frozen brick row houses to the great granite church on Garfield Street. The smell that

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precedes heat arrived as they parked.

The sacristy was dim and drafty. Mahogany climbed the walls and grew across the ceiling like the inside of a giant casket. The experienced boy had not yet arrived. Hank, the church janitor with the grizzled face, helped Hogan on with his vestments. The bell in the steeple tolled the parishioners to Mass and still the altar boy did not come. Hogan was appalled. Hank explained the predicament to Father Rice.

"You'll do fine," proclaimed the priest. "Go out there and light the candles."

On the altar incense cut the air. His father sat in the sixth row leaning toward a black-clad woman and pointing toward him.

Too soon the Mass began. Hogan preceded the priest to the base of the altar and they genuflected together. Drill team precision. Although Hogan had memorized his Latin, he did it as one great clump, and had no idea of the beginning or end of any passage. Blipp. Father Rice passed a little gas. Hogan was appreciative. He remained silent but tears blurred his vision. The priest recited his own Latin and then that of the server in sort of a whispered sneer. Blipp. Blipp. Hogan bit the inside of his cheeks and quickly started a *Hail Mary*.

"Move the book to the other side," said Father Rice. And later, "Get the cruets of water and wine," and so they stumbled through the Mass together.

It occurred to the boy that his mistakes might have nullified the Mass. Perhaps it was not really a Mass at all. He worried that Father Rice would turn at the end and announce, "Since this was not a Mass you must all remain for the seven o'clock. I'm sorry." Then give Hogan an accusing look and (Blipp) run from the altar. He worried that if it wasn't really a Mass and one of the worshippers died before confession they would go to hell. Hogan was a very concerned boy.

Ah, but he could not linger long on such hypotheses, for with the ringing of the bells the situation degenerated. He knew well enough to ring them with the changing of the bread and wine. But what followed that loomed dark and mysterious. To play it safe he rang the bells each time the now jittery Father Rice genuflected. The congregation sat, then kneeled, then stood, kneeled, stood, sat in such rapid order that the church took on the curious appearance of a geriatric aerobics class. But worst of all some of the confused old timers came forward for communion a full ten minutes before it was ready and had to kneel, bewildered, on the hard marble step before the altar rail. Father Rice's neck was a river of anguish.

Later, the boys from the seven o'clock Mass showed Hogan the refrigerator where the sacramental wine was stored, and the boldest of them poured a small draft into a coffee cup so they could all have a short snort, and just as Hogan touched the cup to his lips, Father Rice came into the room with a Latin assignment. And the next morning Hogan sat next to McFee.



A bird flew in through the open window, circumnavigated the classroom twice, disgraced itself on Zock Wilson's black crew cut and then escaped via the same portal. Several girls whispered something about the Holy Ghost. When the feathers settled Sister Saint Matthew returned to the inquest.

"And who among you think that Mr. McFee might have put that tack on my chair?" while pointing at the tack to avoid any misunderstanding. Hogan spun around to see the tally. He saw the four-fingered hand of Tony Cicero, who lost his finger digging a well at boy scout camp, waving in the air. But the numbers didn't look good, and so, he raised his own hand. Again the vote was seventeen.

"Why do you say that McFee did it?" she said looking into Hogan's innocent dog eyes.

"Because I know *I* didn't do it."

"Well, we can't spend all day on this. If one of you doesn't soon confess you'll *both* be here after school."

"But I'm in a baseball game after school," McFee barked, his body straightening up.

"It's a little late to think of that now Mister McFee." As she pivoted to resume her life as a teacher, McFee leaned over. "I'll get you after school."

Hogan's threatened life rolled before his eyes like the spinning drum of a slot machine. It came to rest on the day of his last visit to the McFee residence. The McFee's lived in a brick row home on Revere Street which Mr. McFee had converted into three apartments of remarkably small rooms. McFee showed Hogan his collection of girly pictures and after a scholarly review of the material the boys slipped out of the bedroom and Mrs. McFee asked Hogan if he'd stay for lunch. She was a comely blond woman whose pink breasts pressed up against the cheap cotton dress that you could see through when she was against the window. She gave the boys canned tomato soup and boiled hot dog sandwiches. Like an old man sitting in a draft, Hogan kept changing seats always with the result that Mrs. McFee blocked the view out the window. Hogan wondered if it was love.

Mr. McFee was out back under his '52 Rambler and his wife leaned out the window and called him to lunch. He washed his greasy hands in the sink.

Mrs. McFee said "Why can't you wash your hands in the bathroom. You always mess everything up. Look at that sink."

Hogan followed a drop of sweat which rolled down her neck and found its way to the warm valley between her breasts.

"Oh shut up will ya. I don't want to hear it," he said. He gave Hogan a haughty look and clambered in next to him at the cramped little kitchen table. He was a meaty man with a round red cherry for a nose and rheumy blue eyes and he smelled like a horse from laying under the car.

Hogan wondered why she had married such a vulgar clod. So far beneath her. Perhaps an arranged marriage? Shotgun? One of secret desperation? No matter. He had found her now. He would find a way to save her.

"What's for lunch?" demanded the clod.

"You get what we get," snapped the angel. "Tomato soup and hot dogs."

"For Christ's sake. I can't eat that slop. I been working hard all morning."

"Watch your tongue, mister. I'll not have the Lord's name taken in vain in this house. And we have company too." And as if to reward Hogan at Mr. McFee's expense she stepped directly in front of the window. The young McFee slurped his soup obliviously.

"I'll use any goddamn language I want to in my own goddamn home," he shouted, "and I'll eat better than hot dogs."

"Well if you'd get a decent job like other men and stop drinking your life away maybe we'd have a few pennies to rub together and we wouldn't have to eat hot dogs," she screamed. And with that she turned and hurled a fork at Mr. McFee. The weapon passed Hogan's eyes at ninety miles an hour and landed—prongs first—right in the middle of Mr. McFee's forehead and it stuck straight out and three little rivulets of blood trickled down to his eyebrows. Letting out a great bellow, he sprang from his chair and chased Mrs. McFee out the front door onto Revere Street for all the neighbors to see their domestic bliss and all the time the fork was sticking out of his head. The boys gathered up their sandwiches and ran out the back and down the alley. In time, Hogan was able to forget her.

† † † † †

And these were the genes that gave life to Jimmy McFee. Hogan was as quiet as a hermit monk during Geography and History while conjuring up visions of McFee confronting him and then pulling out a knife. Of McFee's gang tying him up and dragging him into the woods to be picked to death by the animals. Of McFee's losing team breaking his legs with baseball bats and, years later, coming to visit him in the home for cripples!

Recess came and the students escaped like prisoners from the Bastille. Hogan lingered to plead with the warden.

"Sister, you have to let me go after school."

"I don't *have* to do anything."

"McFee said he's gonna get me after school."

"Well, Mister Hogan, perhaps in the future you'll think twice before you do something like this." The stiff cotton of her habit dug a worried gully across the fleshy brow.

"But I didn't do it," implored Hogan.

"Then this punishment will be," she spat, "for the thousands of things you *did* do and got away with."

"Please," his voice cracked.

She dismissed him with the wave of a fat finger and he weakly

descended the stairwell.

No sooner had Hogan's anguished feet touched the blacktop of the school yard than Skippy Roach who had a port wine birth mark on the whole left hand side of his head and face and Izzy Moran who made thirteen dollars and twenty cents in one day by selling views of the exposed bone of his index finger came running up to him.

"McFee wants to see you."

"Now?"

"Don't worry. He just wants to talk."

The day had grown hot and the boys gathered to pow wow around the side of the building. Not having any chewing tobacco McFee leaned over and tore up a piece of tar from a crack in the macadam and popped it into his mouth like a wad of chewing gum. Hogan wondered if a dog had peed on it. Roach and Moran were on the baseball team with McFee and they devised a daring plan of escape. But they needed Hogan.

"Okay," said McFee. "Don't screw up and maybe I won't have to rip your head off."

When the final bell rang the children gulped the free air as if they had been held under water. Hogan and McFee remained seated to await the nun's return. They sat there in the quiet after school melancholy. The smell of chalk dust mixed with the stink of Nicholas Ponte's sardine sandwich which had spotted his brown bag with grease. The spot had slowly grown to envelop the whole bag. There was a wet spot on the floor where the bag had been and little tumbleweeds of dustballs clung to it. The room was gloomy with the westerning sun.

The second floor classroom overlooked the wide cyclone-fenced school yard. McFee pulled himself out of the grave of his desk and stood watch at the window. He stuck his close-cropped head out and like a frightened turtle quickly jerked it back. "The bitch is coming now," he whispered hoarsely and stood close against the wall like a homicide detective. His nose was running. His zipper down. As she entered the door to the stairwell McFee slipped his leg over the sill, grabbed hold of the rusty rain spout and slid out of sight. Hogan's heart beat against his chest like a sledge hammer on a drum.

The boy was seated stiff backed and hands folded at his desk when the great bulk of Sister Saint Matthew came panting into the room. She stopped abruptly and glared at the spot where McFee should have been.

"Where is Mister McFee?" she breathed, the sound escaping from some secret cavern deep within her. She was perspiring from the climb of the stairs and there were drops of sweat hanging from the lenses of her wire rims. "Where did he go?"

He tried to speak but no sound would come save a weak dry cough. She grabbed him by the shirt and pulled him close. Her voice rose an octave.

"Now you listen to me Mister Hogan. If you don't soon tell me where he is you'll be sorry you were ever born. Do you understand?" She was so

close he could smell the stale fumes of her end of the day breath.

"He jumped out the window," Hogan finally revealed to her whiskered chin.

As if he had spoken some forgotten language, Sister Saint Matthew stared bewildered at Hogan's wretched countenance and then, incredibly, her face widened as the meaning of the words made their mark. She released his white shirt and marched to the window, leather heels pounding the floor.

But when she reached the window color drained from her face like the ebb of a wave, her knees withered and she grabbed the sill to support herself. "Oh my God," she gasped and Hogan leaped from his seat as if shot from a cannon. Mute, he gaped out the window.

Spread eagled on the cooling macadam the hapless McFee was lying unconscious or dead. One shoe was off its foot and rested on the ground in a frozen kick at the boy's head. It was quiet and there was no breeze.

"You," Sister Saint Matthew turned to Hogan. "You go home," she blurted out of her white dry mouth and the poor woman raced out of the room and down the firewell steps to the school yard. But when she thrust the heavy metal door open McFee had vanished. Hogan was sprawled on the gray rug before the round picture tube of the Muntz T.V. He was watching Sid Caesar when his mother answered the phone.



“Well hung, isn’t it?”

JAPAN NIGHT

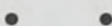
By Pat Benes

On special invitation we went
eager-eyed to Japan Night
at the college. No one seemed
to care anymore that Mom and Dad
dreamed me up the night
the streets of Hiroshima melted.

We strolled through the fog
across a small plateau that flanks
the dining hall. There were tables
set up, little islands of culture,
half-lit shrines beckoning us to offer up
our names, see them brushed
in black slashes across rice paper.

Smiling girls pulled me from the crowd,
wrapped me in a black and white,
red-sashed kimono, aimed the polaroid—
click— handed me a black square:

“Wait patiently, you will see
how you look — very beautiful.”



My son pressed his plastic death ray
into my hand, ran off to tops and tea.
I tried to think of something new to do
with a death ray on a damp, hot August night.

Half blinded by the searchlight of a parked firetruck
I stood alone waiting for him to come back
through the fog tingling with adventure,
hands moving in zigzags, eyes dancing:
this night belonged to jasmine and innocence.

The specters of those other nights
when temple walls collapsed and bones fused
did not sway in this humid air
or flicker in one eye, though we will
meet them again sometime
in the dark on a lonely hill,
breathing in and out, no questions asked,
no answers given.

At ten o'clock Japan Night ended.
The islands were carried off,
shrines packed away in boxes
until next year. I slipped
my son's toy into my pocket
and we moved towards home
through deep shadows.

CLOSED CAPTIONED FOR THE EMOTIONALLY IMPAIRED

By **Melissa Pollack**

I turned around and saw my Cantor, with an appalled look on his face, pointing to my grandfather's open casket and whispering to his wife. I glanced over at my sister Melanie. We both exchanged embarrassed looks and slouched a little deeper into our seats.

Jewish funerals are supposed to take place within twenty-four hours unless it is the Sabbath. The casket is always supposed to be closed. I don't remember the reason they told us in Hebrew school. I just know that it is what is considered proper.

Throwing all Jewish tradition aside, my grandmother had chosen an open casket for the funeral. She said that she wanted to be able to look at my grandfather during the ceremony. Melanie and I decided that an open casket might give my grandmother the opportunity to be nominated for an Emmy in the category of best supporting actress in a dramatic role.

I was so embarrassed, I couldn't even think about the fact that my grandfather was dead. I tried to think about anything that would bring a tear to my eye, just so I could look human. I even thought about things that hadn't happened. I thought about the possibility of my parents dying or one of my sisters contracting cancer. This did no good, not even a tear fell from my eye. I sat there on that cold, hard wooden bench in the front row about twenty feet from the open casket. I wondered when this was going to be over and how long it would be before we would go over to my uncle's house for the reception. Then I could sink my teeth into a corned beef sandwich. They always did have good food after funerals. One slice of corned beef, dry rye bread, and maybe a kosher pickle on the side. After the reception my father, mother, my sisters and I could say our goodbyes forever. We would never have to speak to my grandmother again. My four-foot eleven-inch, one hundred-thirty pound, wig-headed, Yiddish speaking, casino-groupie-grandmother would be out of our lives for good.

I sat and stared at the open casket looking at a waxy complexion that was supposed to resemble my grandfather. I cringed every time I would hear someone whisper, "Didn't they do a good job; he looks so healthy."

"Healthy, he's dead!" I felt like screaming at the top of my lungs. There had to be something wrong with these people. It didn't seem like this could be proper funeral etiquette.

My Uncle Jerry got up to give the eulogy while my Cousin Wendy and Aunt Bonnie huddled around my grandmother, wearing their black wool mini-skirts, netted stockings, and black spiked heels. As soon as one of them would begin to cry they would all break out into tears.

There was such a difference in looking at my family. My dad sat up

straight, his arm around my mother's shoulders. My mother was crouched over and would occasionally let out a low sob and wipe the tears from her tired eyes. My sister Susan was always the overly emotional one of the family. She sat cross-legged with her head in her hands, looking up occasionally to reveal a red face. My older sister, Melanie, sat between her boyfriend and me, as we exchanged sarcastic glances.

Finally the eulogy ended and it was time for everybody to pay their last respects. My grandmother motioned for people to stay back as she walked up to the open casket. After about a minute of tears she started to scream, "Oh Marty, Marty, you're the only one who loved me." She threw herself on my grandfather's lap.

As the Rabbi walked up behind her, my grandmother's body went limp and she fell back into the arms of a small crowd. A few seconds later she composed herself. She kept up a low whimper the entire time, once or twice interjecting an, "Oh, my God." Her eyes were covered as she tried to gain the sympathy of her card players and family members.

It was finally over and Melanie, her boyfriend and I all walked out together as Melanie and I critiqued my grandmother's performance.

The car ride to my uncle's was silent until my sister all of a sudden said, "I cannot believe that witch; she was probably the one who let Poppop die." She had such an angry look in her eyes as she spoke.

After my grandfather contracted a cancerous brain tumor, he was not well enough to go out. My grandmother used to sneak out of the house during the week to go to the casino and leave my grandfather to take care of himself. He could hardly walk, let alone make it up the stairs to go to the bathroom. Melanie had stopped by to visit my grandparents one night and found my grandfather, lying helplessly, at the bottom of the stairs. So she helped him up and stayed with him until my grandmother got home. Finally at three o'clock in the morning my grandmother strolled in with her plastic cup from Bally's casino. A little bit surprised by Melanie, she said that she only meant to go for an hour but she missed the first bus back and had to wait.

Looking at Melanie now, I could see how much she missed my grandfather. She always was his favorite. When my sisters and I used to stay at his house for a couple of weeks over the summer, Melanie and I would always fight. She would end up crying and running upstairs to get my grandfather to defend her. He did, and I would end up apologizing first. I was jealous that she could win him over. I would try to get my grandmother to defend me, but she was talking to either Bee or Millie about the other card players.

When we got to my uncle's, I was determined to let my grandmother know how I felt about her. I restrained myself as my grandmother began to wander around to join in conversation.

She talked to a group of her card players. "I was with him until the end. I never left his side," my grandmother said.

Melanie and I just looked at each other and turned back to give sneering looks to my grandmother.

As my mother walked up behind us, my grandmother joined our conversation. My grandmother could hardly look at us. She talked to my mother. "Elaine, your brother and I have decided that it would be a help if you and Mike could move some of Marty's stuff. I'm going to have to clean up so I can find someone to rent his room."

She was talking about finding a boarder, now, at my grandfather's funeral:

My mother just looked at her and shrugged, "We'll talk about this later."

Ever since I can remember my grandparents have had separate bedrooms. Now a stranger would be living in my grandfather's house and sleeping in his bed. I used to sleep in that bed as I begged my grandfather to tell me about "Jack and the Beanstalk" one more time.

Melanie and I kept quiet and we looked at my grandmother in shock until finally she walked away. "What a selfish witch," my sister muttered under her breath.

"I bet she didn't even cry once through the whole ceremony. She'll probably go out to the casino tomorrow morning," I added.

My mother looked annoyed. "That's enough, it's your grandfather's funeral and I want you to stop standing here criticizing. Instead of giving your grandmother dirty looks, how about seeing how Susan is doing."

Melanie and I looked at her and not another word was said. I couldn't believe my mother; was she blind?

I went over to the dining room table to have a corned beef sandwich. I have never felt so sick in my entire life. It still hadn't hit me that I would never see my grandfather again. After three dry bites and a shot of coke I ran to the bathroom. I crouched over the toilet and threw up. I glanced in the mirror on the way out and noticed how pale and tired my face looked. "Oh God, when is this going to be over?" It was over for my grandfather. He escaped his hell. All that I wanted to do was get the hell out of here. I just stared at myself for five minutes before I got up energy to go out again.

I found it hard to believe that my mother and grandmother were actually related. My mother tries to see the best in everybody and can't compliment her family enough. My grandmother, on the other hand, does not find it difficult to say something offensive to anyone who is willing to listen. "Oh Elaine, why did you let your hair go gray? It looked much better before. You should really wear some makeup; it would do your face a lot of good."

I watched my mother in one corner of the room, standing quietly with my father as people approached to share their sympathy. My mother caught my grandmother's attention occasionally, and would offer an understanding smile.

My grandmother shuffled around talking to her card player friends and making plans to get together with them sometime next week.

The only reason I restrained myself from saying something to my grandmother was because I knew how much it meant to my mother not to make a scene. We would be leaving my uncle's soon and would probably never speak to my grandmother again.

My dad, Melanie, Susan and I agreed that after my grandfather died it would be best if we didn't have to see my grandmother again. We knew how upset she would always make my mother and now that we wouldn't see my grandfather there was no point in letting her get away with it.

The other day my mother and I were in the kitchen when we got a call from my grandmother. I could hear her voice as my mother held the telephone. She was complaining to my mother about our family. My mother shook her head and said, "Yeah, yeah, no that's not right." With a tired goodbye, she hung up the phone.

My mother avoided conversation with me about the phone call as she went back to making my corned beef sandwich. I watched her face as the sun came through the kitchen window. She looked so much like my grandfather. She had the same nose and the same polite smile and even had the same tired look in her eyes.

"Fran, did I ever tell you about the time your Poppop took me to the circus? Just the two of us. He even treated me to cotton candy." My mother stared out the window as the memories came rushing in.

ON READING ELLISON'S "KING OF THE BINGO GAME"

By Erika Rohrbach

movies & bingo —
our whole lives— boobs & wheels
counting down, the frames
spin by

Betty's
In the
Nude
Growing
Oranger

She's eaten too many carrots &
Roy's tied her spread eagle
on the tracks

//cut!

Betty — ?

any second now
that giant cow tiller
is going to plow your groin straight
through to your brain —
we're talking no more
barroom dances or farmers or dogs or
September cannings or county fairs or golden
hoop earrings or haystacks or riding
crops Betty —or riding crops— No More
He's called your # gal — B-19
That's it — Bingo.
Could you at least
feign some reality here —
Please — ?

o.k.

give me a freeze-frame on five —

BREAKFAST TALK

By Holly Teti

Emily stood by the stove in a t-shirt that barely met with the tops of her thighs. "Look, Mom, I can't even make pancakes. They won't pour into circles."

"Honey, this mixture is too thick," said Claire. "See, they're not cooked in the middle. Add some milk." As Claire shuffled over to the pantry, her long lavender robe dragged along the tile floor. "Shoot, now where's that syrup? I just bought it the other day."

Emily poured some batter into a teflon pan. "Uh, Mom, I think I added too much milk."

Claire peeked around the pantry door. "Have you seen the syrup?"

"No." Emily continued preparing the pancakes. Her sister Stephanie sat at the kitchen table rustling the Sunday paper.

"Today's word is VILLAGER. Let's see how many words we can get. It says here the average score is forty-six words," said Stephanie. Stephanie began her list as her mother and sister buzzed around the kitchen.

"V - A - I - L, veil," said Emily. "You know, as in a bride's veil, Mom."

"Very funny," said Claire, rolling her eyes. "And anyway it's V - E - I - L." Claire guarded over the bacon like it was some sacred complement to the morning meal. With scissors, she snipped the fatty sides of the slices so the bacon strips wouldn't buckle while cooking. She placed the cooked pieces on a plate covered with a paper towel. When her back was turned, Emily snatched a piece and hoped that Claire wouldn't notice.

"What about V - A - L - E?" asked Stephanie. "Is that a word?"

"Why don't you get a dictionary?" Emily suggested. Stephanie searched her book-filled bag until she found her Webster's. It was worn with use as were her Spanish-English dictionary, her Roget's thesaurus, and any other study aid she could stuff into her bag. Even though she always said it was cheating to consult the dictionary while making a wonderword list, she turned to "V".

Claire tilted the frying pan and poured the excess bacon grease into a pyrex cup. "Girls, I told you Jim and I went to look at settings last night, didn't I?" Claire asked.

"Yes, Mom," said Emily. "But are you sure you want to do this? I mean after what happened last Christmas?" The four of them were sitting in the living room late Christmas night. Crumpled wrapping paper was strewn about the floor. The fire was burning out and the radio stations were playing less holiday music. Stephanie was listening to some tapes on her new Walkman and Emily was thumbing through a photography book. This is when Jim pulled out a small box wrapped in gold foil paper. An engagement ring, after only four months of dating, surprised the three of

them. Claire, holding the ring box, looked up at her girls with a "do you believe this?" look on her face. Emily returned her mother's stare with a confident "I know you'll say no" expression. Stephanie began to cry and fled from the living room. Jim's look of anxiousness quickly turned to disappointment.

"Well, it's been over a year now. I don't want to marry him, but I don't want to lose him either." The wooden spoon struck against the side of the Tupperware pitcher as Claire stirred the orange juice.

"L - I - V - E - R, liver," said Stephanie.

"Oh, Mom, come on," said Emily. "You need someone with more pep, more pizzazz. I mean, I know he's good to you and all, but it's a miracle when he laughs or cracks a smile."

"I know," replied Claire.

"And what about the crowd you hang out with?" Emily said. "Really, Mom, they're not of your caliber."

"I know, but they're fun. I can't deal with the people from around here. They're such snobs."

"We live here and we're not snobs," stated Stephanie as she looked over her list. "Well, Emily is, sort of."

"Shut up Steph. Like you aren't little miss Main Line, asking for a formal sweet sixteen dinner party. That's sick," said Emily.

"Girls, stop it. Stephanie, would you please get off your butt and set the table?" asked Claire.

Emily proudly stacked her pancakes on a platter, "See, I can cook." Stephanie brought in three placemats from the breakfront in the dining room. Claire reminded her to use the cloth napkins. Once their duties were accomplished, the girls waited for their mother as she cleared the kitchen. "Come on Mom, my prize-winning pancakes are going to get cold. We'll clean up after." Claire brought a cup of warm maple syrup to the table with her. Emily poured the juice as the other two served themselves. The kitchen was bright and warm. The sun streamed in through the skylights, sliding glass doors, and bare windows. Claire sat in her chair that allowed her a view of her daughters and a tree-filled backyard. Outside it was cold. Squirrels and birds danced among the bare branches of the trees.

Claire watched a cardinal perch itself on the railing of their sun deck. "Look," she whispered. The girls slowly turned around to see him. They loved watching the birds. Their only regret was that the large glass doors and windows that brought so much light and warmth into their home often caused the deaths of poor-sighted birds.

Emily grabbed a second helping of her thin, oblong pancakes. They're still not round, she thought, but at least they're cooked in the middle. Emily knew that if Jim had been there that morning, her mother wouldn't have let her cook the pancakes. Claire always got nervous and tried to be perfect when he was around. "Remember that rug?" Emily said abruptly. "I

told you to get rid of your old rug, meaning get it out of the house, not necessarily throw it away, and Jim said, 'The people around here might throw this rug away, but the people in my neighborhood would find some use for it.' Now, tell me he doesn't have a chip on his shoulder."

"Oh, I don't think he meant anything by that," said Claire.

Emily knew Jim meant to make a point. He probably felt threatened that her mother was living more comfortably than he was. Jim didn't even own his house; he rented it. Emily didn't know how much money he made, but it couldn't be much; he was a shoe salesman.

"We agreed that we'd sign a pre-nuptial agreement. In the event of my death, he would get nothing of mine; it would all go to you kids. And I also plan to ask him how much money he makes, you know, if we were to get married."

"That should be the least of your concerns," said Emily. "I mean, you two just don't communicate well. Besides, you've got to be able to laugh and be friends before you get married." Emily felt good about finally being able to give her mom some good advice. Now that she began experiencing her own relationships, her advice went beyond "I don't like him."

"Honey, you know, you're twenty, and I'm in my forties. You've got your whole life ahead of you to find the right person. I know you want what's best for me just like I want the best for you. But, try not to be so critical of Jim."

Emily swallowed her food. "One of the reasons I'm so critical is because of what you've told me about your relationship. You never seem satisfied. I don't remember you having so many problems with a guy before."

"I had problems," said Claire, "you were just too young for me to tell you about them."

Stephanie pushed her cut-up pancake pieces through the syrup on her plate while trying to think of more words. The other two sat, eating in silence.

"Did anyone get the mail yesterday?" asked Claire.

"There wasn't any. I checked," said Stephanie.

"I called my lawyer. Your father is five months behind in his support checks." Emily remained silent. "What exactly did your father tell you his financial troubles were, Emily?" Claire asked.

"Oh, I don't know. Something about his real estate development thing. It isn't as lucrative as he thought it would be. I don't know, he's just having money problems."

"Honey, you are so naive. He may not have the cash in hand, but if he liquidated some of his assets, he'd be fine," said Claire.

"Mom, can we talk about something else?" asked Emily.

"Really," said Stephanie, "if you two aren't dissecting each other's boyfriends, you're analyzing Dad's mental or financial state."

"Well, Miss Wonderword speaks," said Emily.

"Well, it's true," replied Stephanie.

"Girls, do you realize that I have fought for years to keep this house, in this neighborhood, and I am not going to be forced to sell it because your father is playing tricks."

"I don't think he's playing tricks," said Emily.

"I wonder if he's all right," said Claire. "Christ, with the history of heart disease in his family, he could be in the hospital for all we know."

"Mother, you're overreacting. I just spoke to him last week. He's fine," said Emily.

Claire got up to get a cup of coffee. Emily shot a look at Stephanie and rolled her eyes. She then turned her glance to her mother. Claire stood before the coffeemaker watching the last drops drip into the pot. She's put on some weight, and she's got a couple of grays, Emily thought, but she's still cute. Besides, she's a wonderful person. Why can't she find the right guy? Claire shuffled off to her bedroom, letting her slippers drag along the floor. The girls waited until their mom was out of sight.

"That's all Mom talks about," Stephanie whispered.

"I know," answered Emily, "but the funny thing is, she's acting worried, about Dad I mean."

"Yeah, it's weird." The sisters cleared the sticky plates from the table as they began cleaning up. The dishes rattled as they loaded the dishwasher. "R - A - G - E, rage. Come on Emily, we have to get at least forty-six words," Claire heard Stephanie say.

"Okay, Miss Wonderword, I'm thinking," said Emily.

Claire opened her armoire and pulled out the drawer containing her jewelry. She removed a pink silk jewelry roll, untied it and let it drop open. After unzipping the first pocket, she removed a platinum ring with six diamond baguettes. "Em, Emily come here for a second," Claire yelled from the bedroom.

Emily rinsed her sticky hands and wiped them dry. When she entered the room, she saw that Claire was holding her wedding band. She remembered seeing the matching engagement ring in wedding pictures. Her mother regretfully sold it years ago. Claire always said it was the most beautiful two carat pear-shaped diamond she had ever seen. Emily thought that the way her Dad gave Claire the ring was so special. It was her mom's nineteenth birthday and he had placed it in a corsage. Her mom always laughed when she told Emily that she thought it was a decoration, not the real thing. Claire often told her about the surprise party, the large wedding with the strolling violinists and flaming baked Alaska for dessert. From the pictures Emily could tell that it was quite a show.

"These baguettes would look good in a setting we saw last night," said Claire.

Emily knew that her mom would never meet anyone she loved as much as her dad.



THOUGHTS IN A BORING BED

By **Kate Phillips**

Actually I feel like ham and swiss.
And so she thought as he caressed.
His fingers always miss,
and so as he progressed,
getting nowhere really,
she wanted ham and swiss.
He inquired,
asking to know her feelings,
she contemplated lying,
then shrugged and told him,
Actually, I feel like ham and swiss.
He falls away and she remains,
alone,
and now,
she no longer wants,
her ham and swiss.

THERAPY

By Diane Orleman

Sick as dogs, she said
 maid?
 made absolutely no sense
 nonsense

He said: I know exactly what your
 you're

Talking about
 a bout of the flu
 influenza?

No, only the common cold.

But I'm sick as a dog, she said
 dead

On her feet
 sleep

And miles to go
In the uncommonly cold war.

MARIA'S ROOM

By Paula Love

Cassie firmly believed that the small white bump on her wrist was malignant. She imagined the fibrous mass inside of her, spreading up the length of her forearm like a spiderweb. She sat on her bed with the soles of her feet together and her knees jutting out to the sides. She paged through a medical encyclopedia which she had just bought for \$39.95. She turned to the chapter on cancer. There were subdivisions—lung, mouth, brain, reproductive organs, and many more. None of them seemed to describe her particular type of cancer. Thyroid cancer had possibilities, but no, that started with a lump on the neck. She turned back to the index and looked this time under "tumor." She glanced over at the U's and saw "ultrasonography...in pregnancy." She pushed the book off the bed and watched as it hit the floor with a loud thud. She reached over and closed it. She rested her head in her hands and stared at the flowers, birds, and insects on her patterned sheets. She heard Tom come up the steps two at a time.

He pushed the bedroom door open and struck in his head. "Are you o.k.? What was that noise?"

She lifted her head and pointed down to the book on the floor.

Tom entered the room and picked up the book. "Oh, you just bought that, right?"

"Yeah," she answered. "It's a good book to have around for emergencies and things."

"Is it good?" he asked cheerfully.

"I guess so, I'm not a doctor." She shrugged.

He put the book on the night stand and sat on the edge of the bed.

"What have you been doing?" she asked him.

"Still working on the kitchen," Tom answered. "How about you, how are you?"

She glanced into the full length mirror on the opposite wall. She saw her pale face framed by long brown hair, accented with pink patches on her cheeks. Even from a distance she could see that her eyes and lips were swollen. She turned and looked into Tom's eyes. "I'm doing alright." She smiled slightly.

"Good, I'm glad you're getting better," he replied as he patted her knee. "Listen, I need more chair rail for the kitchen. I'm going to run over to Hechinger's and pick some up. Wanna come?"

"You are forever working on this house. Why don't you give it a break?" She waited for an answer but Tom had gotten up and was opening and closing the bifold closet doors he had recently put up.

"So do you want to come along or not?"

"Yeah, I guess I will go with you."

He raised his eyebrows. "Good, I'll wait for you downstairs."

She got ready quickly and remembered to grab the movies they had rented from Erol's. They walked out the front door and immediately began breathing heavier in the 92 degree heat. Cassie noticed the woman who lived in the townhouse at the other end of the row coming out of her door with a stroller.

"Hurry up, here she comes," she whispered loudly. Tom rushed to the car and opened Cassie's side first. Just as quickly he got in, started it up and pulled out of the parking lot. When they passed their neighbor Cassie was bent over adjusting the air conditioning and Tom was staring straight ahead.

Cassie found a reason not to join Tom in Hechinger's. It was too crowded, it always was on Sundays. Instead she lay on the back seat of the car alternately staring into space and examining the bump on her wrist. It had definitely grown, she decided. At Erol's the crowds were again a problem. Tom dutifully returned the movies and selected three more according to Cassie's specifications. Tom convinced Cassie that he deserved a trip to a new wine shop in Arlington. When they arrived at the shop Tom paused before getting out of the car. "Are you coming?"

Cassie looked up and down the length of the strip of small shops and saw only a few people. "Yeah, why not?" She got out of the car slowly.

As they were crossing the street Tom's eyes fixed on an approaching woman. His eyes widened. "That's the lady from the childbirth class," he said to Cassie.

"No it isn't." But by the time she reached the end of the sentence she realized she was wrong. Jean was the only woman she had gotten to know during childbirth classes at Arlington Hospital. She was thinner now, her face more angular, but the blunt cut dark hair, the walk, and the infant in a pouch strapped around her waist made it unmistakable. Jean was studying them as intently as they were her. She smiled in recognition and called to them. "Hi Cassie, hi Tom!"

"Hi Jean," Tom called back.

"Where's your baby?" Jean asked exuberantly.

The question seemed to hang in the air. There was no getting rid of it. It had to be answered. They met on the sidewalk. Tom ran his finger across his moustache and shuffled his feet. Cassie studied the sidewalk. "We ran into a problem," Tom stammered. "The baby was stillborn."

Jean's face dropped. "Oh, I'm sorry. What happened?" She directed the question to Cassie.

Cassie surprised herself and spoke openly and matter of factly. "Well, I felt that the baby hadn't been moving that much the day before my due date. I called the doctor and he said that was normal for the end of pregnancy. Also I heard her heartbeat with a stethoscope I had." Jean nodded sympathetically. Cassie continued. "Anyway, I figured everything

was o.k. The next day I didn't feel movement, it was my due date. I went to the hospital and the ultrasound showed the baby was dead." She twisted her mouth. She pictured the scene in her head. The technician pointing to the image and stating flatly, "There's the heart and it's not beating." Cassie had had to think for a moment.

"You mean the baby's dead?"

"Yes, I'm sorry."

At that moment a great chasm was formed in Tom and Cassie's lives which they would never be able to bridge. They could not remember what innocence felt like.

Jean glanced down at her baby who was sleeping peacefully in its cozy pouch. "Did you find out why it happened?" she asked.

Tom shook his head. "No, there's no explanation, but they think it was a cord accident."

"Does that mean you can have another baby?" Jean asked hopefully.

"Yes," they both answered eagerly. "But we have to wait at least three months. It's only been three weeks," Cassie said.

"Oh." Jean looked around the shopping center, at a loss for words.

"So how did everything go with you? You have a beautiful baby here." Cassie reached over and stroked the baby's curled fist.

"It went well." Jean smiled. "I was two weeks late. I had an epidural that numbed me from the waist down and sure helped the pain more than all of those stupid breathing exercises."

They all laughed. "Cassie had one of those too. It helped a lot," Tom said.

Cassie's smile faded. Her epidural hadn't really helped that much. In fact her doctor had also pumped her full of morphine. There was no drug that could ease her pain. She looked at Jean's baby again. At least her pains were rewarded. Cassie had endured the pain and was left with an empty body and empty arms. Her breasts were still ignorantly producing milk. Tears filled her eyes. She blinked rapidly to keep them away.

"Well we better get going to that wine shop," Tom said. "It was good seeing you Jean."

"You two take care."

Cassie and Tom entered the wine shop. "Should we look at Californian or French?" Tom asked.

"I don't really give a shit."

"O.k., I'm going to get Californian." Tom selected a bottle quickly. In the car Tom turned to Cassie. "Are you o.k. honey?"

Cassie looked out the window. "I'm not up for talking right now." They went home in silence.

They arrived home, threw their packages on the kitchen floor and gulped down some ice water. Cassie put down her glass. "That was quite a coincidence running into Jean like that."

Tom nodded in agreement and checked his watch. "I have to be at work

in two hours," he said getting up from the table.

"Are you expecting a busy night?"

"Actually Saturday nights have been pretty busy—the bar even busier than the restaurant. I'll be training a new bartender tonight too."

"So what do you want to do before you have to leave?"

"I'm going to try to finish the chair rail."

She checked over his latest work. Above the chair rail was a bright wallpaper with flowers and hearts, below was painted a matching shade of cream. "You've done a great job." She went to the freezer and refilled her glass with ice. She stood drinking and reading Tom's "To Do" list which was attached to the refrigerator door with a ladybug magnet. "Let's see," she said. "You've finished projects 1, 2, and 3, and just about 4, but when did you add 5, 6, and 7?"

"I've been adding them as I go along," he said, measuring the chair rail. "The house needed a lot of work."

"It's only six years old," Cassie muttered. Her voice was covered by the banging of the hammer. She waited for him to stop.

"I'm tired. I'm going to lie down."

"O.k." He turned to look at her. "I'll check on you before I leave." The hammering resumed.

The phone rang. Cassie looked at the clock-radio on her night table. It glowed 7:07. "Hello?" she answered.

"Hi sleepy head," Tom shouted. She heard the crowds and music in the background.

"Hi, yeah I guess I was asleep. How's work?"

"Busy. I was just calling to say 'hi' since I didn't get to say 'bye' before I left."

She yawned. "I've really been tired lately." She yawned again.

"That's o.k., you're entitled," he reassured her.

"Well, I'm extremely tired. I think something's wrong with me." She looked at her wrist. "I have this lump on my wrist." She paused but Tom was silent. "I noticed it got bigger recently and sometimes my whole arm aches." She massaged her forearm.

"What exactly does it look like?"

"It's white, round, not that big, but like I said, it seems to be growing." She heard someone talking to Tom in the background.

"Hold on a sec," he said to Cassie. She waited.

"I'm sorry," Tom came back on the line. "The kitchen's going down the tubes, I gotta go."

"Thanks for the overwhelming sympathy," she snapped.

"That's right, you were telling me about your bump." There was a pause. "You know, it might just be a wart. I had one on my finger when I was a kid. It eventually went away."

"Thanks for calling Tom. You better get to that kitchen." There was a moment of silence. "I love you," he said finally.

"I love you too." She hung up the phone.

She portioned out the rest of the night between the rented movies and T.V. to fill in the gaps. She fell asleep on the couch with the T.V. flashing and chatting on. Tom arrived home at his usual time, 4:00 A.M. He gently woke Cassie and led her to bed. They settled on opposite sides of their king-size bed. Cassie stretched out her arm toward Tom but did not come close to touching him.

Cassie woke to an unidentifiable liquid sound. She heard a swishing and dripping and then a rubbing sound. Tom was gone. She found him in the room across the hall. It would have been the baby's room. It would have been their daughter Maria's room. The crib was disassembled and leaning against a wall. The oak rocking chair was in the corner and the matching bureau stood empty against another wall. Tom was standing on a drop cloth with a dripping rag hanging from his hand, a bucket and some brightly colored wads of paper at his feet. He was methodically going around the room removing the wallpaper border they had put up just one month ago. It was a colorful border, about a foot wide, decorated with teddy bears and rocking horses. It spanned the four walls of the room at mid-height. Cassie's face paled and her eyes filled with tears.

"Why are you doing this, why are you doing this?!" she cried.

"I didn't think you wanted to look at it any more."

"How would you know what I would want? You never talk to me," she snapped. "I liked it up, it's still Maria's room." She began sobbing and sat on the floor with her head in her hands. Tom dropped his rag and sat next to her and stroked her hair.

"I'm sorry for everything."

She looked up at him. Her words came quickly, her voice was tense with rage. "You have no idea what I'm going through. You're just going about your life, working away. You say, 'How are you Cassie? O.k.? That's good, see you later.' You don't want to deal with me. You know what? I don't want to deal with me anymore either. I can't handle the pain. I hate being me." Her voice was modulating as the sobs and anger subsided. "All I seem to feel is pain, then numbness, then pain again." She lay down on the carpeted floor and stared at the ceiling. "I wish I could be with her. That's all I want in the world, is to be with Maria," her voice faded.

Tom stretched out next to her, looked into her eyes and rubbed a tear from her cheek with his thumb. "I need you here with me, Cassie."

"It doesn't seem that way," she said sadly.

"I do need you. I'm sorry about this. I should have talked it out with you first. I guess I'm not doing the right things. I don't know what you want me to do, how you want me to feel."

She turned on her side to face him directly. "I don't want you to feel a certain way. I just want you to feel *something*. We had a daughter, we lost her."

"I do feel, Cassie. That's not fair. I've been trying not to dwell on things."

He sighed deeply. "I can't dwell on it. But I love Maria just as much as you. I miss her too. I wish so much," he paused, at a loss for words. "I mean, we spent nine months getting to know her, watching her grow, feeling her move, sharing our excitement with all of our friends and family, and then she's taken from us. And for no goddam reason," he began sobbing.

Cassie held his head against her chest and felt his body heaving in pain. He hadn't cried since three weeks ago. He gradually composed himself and lifted his head. "I love you Tom. I'm sorry this had to happen to you."

"To us," he replied. "About the wallpaper, the reason I'm taking it down is because I couldn't stand seeing it anymore. I walk by the room and I try not to look in but then I do, and I wish I hadn't. I needed to get rid of it but I should have talked to you about it. What do you want me to do with it now?" he asked pointing to the patches that were removed.

"You're right, just go ahead and take it down. That way we can eventually use this room. It won't be the sad room that we try to avoid." She looked at the bucket and the rag. "How do you take it down anyway?"

"You just wet it and peel." He demonstrated by peeling off a large chunk of paper and dropping it to the floor. "I have extra rags." He smiled sadly.

"O.k., I'll try." He helped her up with his free hand and offered her a rag. She followed Tom's instructions and began peeling off the paper. She looked down at the strips of paper she had dropped onto the stained drop cloth. She caught a glimpse of the face of a teddy bear, crumpled, wet, with a rip through his ear. "I'll let you finish up, Tom, I'm going to go back to bed." She dropped the rag in the bucket and quickly left the room. Tom followed her across the hall. He pulled the covers around her and smoothed the furrows from her brow. He sat on the edge of the bed and soothingly stroked her hair until she fell asleep with the slightest of smiles on her lips.

She awoke, came down the stairs and called, "Tom?"

"In the living room," he responded.

"How long have I been asleep?"

"A couple hours."

"Did you finish the room?"

"Yes it's done. I was thinking, I really like that border. If...I mean *when* we have another baby we can get the same stuff and put it up again."

"That's a sweet thought." She bent and kissed his cheek. "What are you doing?"

He held up *National Geographic*. "Reading about the slaughter of the elephants. It's horrible, such beautiful animals killed for ivory. Some people have no respect for the dignity and the value of life. It's so sad." He shook his head.

"Yeah, it's sad." She was unconsciously fingering the bump on her wrist.

"Oh yeah, you told me about your wrist. Let me take a look at it." He put the magazine on the coffee table and stood up.

"It's nothing really." She dropped her hand.

He lifted her hand, turned it palm side up, and examined her wrist. "Why don't you call a doctor right now and have it looked at?"

"I'll think about it. I'll let you get back to your reading. I'm going to go scrounge in the kitchen."

"O.k., but get back in here and keep me company when you're done with the fridge." He sat back down on the couch.

She went in the kitchen and grabbed a stick of pepperoni and a Diet Coke from the refrigerator. She stood and looked at Tom's "To Do" list on the door. Nothing had been added, nothing new crossed off. She sat at the kitchen table chewing the pepperoni and swigging the Diet Coke. She flipped through the yellow pages to the listings for physicians. She scanned the various specialties—Allergy, Arthritis, Cardiovascular, on down to Urology. She looked closely at the bump on her wrist and pressed it gently. "It's probably just a wart," she said softly to herself as she closed the phone book.



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TES 89

THE POET, UNSUCCESSFUL ONCE AGAIN

(with apologies to Peter Meinke)

By Joe Repko

The poet, in his ongoing quest to surprise God,
and began to mock the old and new forms,

Combining-

Dashing,

Placing unnecessary commas:

Colons;

Semicolons. Period.

He took visions and harmonies and shapes

From the past and

Dis

torted

them——

Making Homer, Virgil, Sophocles

Barbarians, Demons, Communists—

No

wit,

No

rationale,

Just a pain in the ass!—

Like women—

Made Adam a female,

Tempted by the fruit,

Thus losing her virginity

And screwing up the universe.

God said, in reply,

“There’s no disgusting me,
I’ve seen Everything you’ve done
since the Beginning.
I’ve regurgitated
the head, heart, and feet
of men from your silly wars,

So file this beneath your baseball cap:

no matter how many times you mock the universe,
how repulsive or crude your thoughts flow,
I will never be Surprised
Because you’ve been screwing up since day One.”

“Is that so,” I replied. “I hardly noticed.”

WORDS IN A RESTAURANT

By Erika Rohrbach

Calliope scanned the menu. "Ah...think I'll have the breath with sound for starters. I highly recommend it David."

"Said I haven't decided yet."

"Oh. All right. I believe we need a few more minutes. Why don't you just bring us two breaths with sound for now. Thanks."

Calliope tossed back an icy splash of water and swiftly dabbed her lips on the napkin's edge. David shut the menu on the table, staring intently at his reflection in the sterling knife.

"Why did you say 'we.'"

"Hmmm?" Calliope twirled her glass.

He looked to her.

"Why 'we'?"

She flicked a forgotten crumb of crust onto the carpet by her foot.

"We what?"

"You said, 'We need a few more minutes.'"

"Did I?" She lifted her head to find his gaze. "So?"

"Don't so me Calliope." In the moment it took David to slam down his fork and pull the chair in tight around him, she stifled a smile. "You said *we* needed more time when it was obvious that you had already decided!"

"So?"

"So...don't you see? You assumed my indecision as your own."

"Look David, I really didn't think about it."

"You didn't think about it."

"No. I just said it to be polite."

"You just said it to be polite."

"What? You know, I never noticed before, but there's a vicious echo in here." Calliope brushed aside the vagrant hair on her forehead lest David miss the full effect of the playful spray of sparks in her eyes. She smoothed the thin layer of silky redness on her lips and extended a hand across the table to him. "We're certainly edgy tonight."

His hand shot back like a frog's tongue. "Don't touch me." The close wetness of her palm hung in his spongy skin though he tried to rub it out on the tablecloth's lacy edge.

"David!...I was only joking."

"Hmph. Yes! That's all this is to you—a joke."

"Oh my God. What are you talking about? Look, I said *we* because, well I don't know, because when two people ask for a private table at an intimate restaurant it's obvious that they wish to dine together, and together means at the same time David, so you tell me why I should give the waiter my order only to have him come back God knows how many

hours later for yours?" The whites of her eyes seemed steaming coals.

"So I'm slow." David fondled his bottom lip to a bony blue.

"Please."

"No, say it."

Calliope dipped a shaking finger into the water and began running it on the crystal rim, tracing circle after circle of airy sound. "You're just a little indecisive, that's all." Her whisper choked the rim's hum.

"Look at me." David glared at her.

Calliope searched the wallpaper's pattern. "I'm sorry...let's just forget it, o.k.?"

"Look at me!" He grabbed her arm, pressing the watch band in between the grooves of her narrow wrist.

She sat, transfixed as by the cobra's hypnotic stare.

David's voice slipped into a low hiss. "Who chose this *intimate* restaurant?"

"I suggested it." Calliope intoned.

"And who asked for a private table?"

"I did—only because you were checking the coats."

"And who said we need a few more minutes? And who ordered two breaths with sound?! Find the words Calliope—Who?" David increased the pressure of his thumb on her wrist till their skins became bone.

Lost in the power of his whitening grip, the words came to Calliope's mouth in a pale gasp—"I did."

"Thank you." David unleashed a toothy grin and rammed her arm into the table. Their violent release sent both glasses crashing into the cloth.

In a still, loaded instant the waiter removed the sharred crystal and soiled cloth, and returned with the two breaths with sound.

"May I take your order now?"

Sight poured from Calliope's eyes like two liquid saucers while she removed her watch to caress the spent arm in her lap. David looked on her with a new gentleness, and cleared his throat.

"Yes...we'll have the silence."

"Very good, sir. And how would you like that done?"

"Well."

Calliope's vision met David's as she raised the breath with sound to her lips.

"No..." David handed the waiter the menu. "Better make that rare—and bloody."



THEIR WAY

By **Richard M. Fletcher**

It was a loving argument but an argument nevertheless. Ruth, my wife, was concerned about my project for Donny, our severely retarded child. We were standing next to the sliding glass door in our family room with Donny playing nearby.

"Ruth, I was talking to Donny's physical therapist the other day and she believes his tendency to stumble when he runs would be helped by learning to swim. It should improve his coordination. Who knows, it might even help him to learn to talk. Like patterning, you know."

"Paul, I just want you to remember what we decided."

"You mean that we will enjoy Donny and let him enjoy himself."

"Yes. You know that Robert, in our family group, is brighter than Donny but he's very uptight because his parents are going to make him normal if it kills him. He never laughs and he always carries that chopstick around as if his life depends on it. Don't push Donny so hard."

"Well, we're off now."

Tossing our swimming bag into the car and strapping in Donny, I drove to the Fern Rock Y for about the twentieth time for their Saturday noon to one o'clock hour of swimming for the handicapped.

On entering the locker room we were bombarded by the usual camaraderie.

"Hi, Donny. High five," greeted Doug Andrews, a retired salesman and volunteer swimming instructor who was helping to undress one of the handicapped.

Bob Landon, an industrial personnel director in charge of the swimming program, offered to help Donny get ready to swim.

Once undressed Donny raced off eagerly through the shower room to the pool, his well-built fifteen year old body stark naked. "Caught the streaker just in time," laughed Bob, swooping Donny's strong five foot four frame into his arms to slip on his trunks. "Now you won't make the ladies scream."

The room housing the pool had bleachers on one side, frosted vertical windows on the street side opposite, a diving board on the far end and the shallow end was where we entered. A tile walkway surrounded the entire pool. Being lowered into the water in a nylon net attached to a crane anchored to the poolside, was Timmy, a twenty-seven year old man, with arms and legs doubled like a grasshopper's with spastic cerebral palsy. Timmy could respond to speech only by smiling and blinking his eyes. Some of the handicapped were severely retarded, usually having physical and behavioral anomalies like my son, Donny, who couldn't talk and had several birth defects; Willard, a completely silent, solemn fifteen year old

who stood on the diving board but would never jump or dive; and John, the screamer, a skinny, six-foot-four-inch seventeen year old who would come up to me, stare into my eyes, and run off screaming. Two of the handicapped were middle-aged stroke victims: Al and Hap, who both had to be lowered in the sling since they couldn't walk. Al was a tall, white-haired, patrician-looking man who had been an accountant, now forced to retire with a right arm and leg that didn't function. Reclining passively, he was usually carried back and forth in the water by the same strong young man. Hap, a stocky, broad-faced Irishman forced to retire as a carpenter, with about the same degree of impairment of his right side as Al when they started swimming together about a year ago, had made astounding progress, now able to swim three laps using only his left arm and leg. Al was passive and stoical; Hap was bouncy and upbeat, only occasionally discouraged. Each week he worked hard at swimming farther. Some basket cases unable to stand or sit simply lay in the stands staring at the ceiling. Heated to eighty degrees, the water in the pool was so heavily chlorinated as to be slightly nauseating. Occasionally toilet training failed.

I worked with Donny in the shallow end, cheering him on, moving his arms, and tossing his favorite ball in front of him as he splashed face forward cradled in my arms; I let go of him occasionally, but he usually swam only a stroke or two and then straightened up choking and spluttering. Donny was still where he was about six months ago.

Donny and I were quiet and grumpy and stared at the road as we drove home. Following our usual ritual, I would eat a Dorito and then feed Donny one. Somehow Donny managed to turn on the radio and find his favorite rock music.

When we returned home, Ruth noticed our quietness.

"I guess Donny didn't make much progress."

"No, he's about where he was six months ago."

"Well, I just wish you would let him splash around and enjoy himself. He loves the water."

"Now, Ruth, you know he'll really enjoy himself when he learns how to swim. Skills are fun but not usually while you're learning them. Every skill that Donny has learned was by hard work, step by step—his toilet training, his feeding himself and his undressing himself."

At that moment Donny handed me his radio.

"Ruth, how do you turn this damned thing on; it has, or had, so many things to turn, but the knobs are missing now."

"Just give it to Donny."

Donny's fingers fluttered and twisted, then found one of his favorite songs.

"I think we're alone now. I think we're alone now. I think we're alone now..."

Donny performed a wild and wonderful break dance, bouncing on his hands and knees, then, putting his weight on one knee, he spun round and

round. His eyes shone in his handsome, slightly asymmetrical face and he shrieked with happiness. His eyes are very good-looking and, if you look closely, they are most unusual. His irises are double rather than single rings. The part of the iris immediately surrounding the pupil is a rich brown ring; the outer half of the iris is a bright blue ring like an aura behind the brown. Perhaps God had not only put a genetic spin in his brain but also reflected it in his eyes.

The snows of March kept us from swimming for several weeks, and the Saturday we returned the roads were still slippery, but navigable. There were six in the pool; the difficulties and dangers of transporting the handicapped kept most away.

I was pleased to have a chance to teach Donny with minimal interruption. While I held Donny firmly under the ribs, he kicked and splashed, happily spouting water like a little whale. The room housing the pool was darker and colder than usual; the frosted vertical windows on the street side were darkened by winter clouds and the room was probably heated less and had far fewer bodies. Letting Doug Andrews watch over Donny, I stroked a few laps, feeling cold and tense. I was ready to give up on Donny's swimming. He had failed to make the gradual progress I had hoped for. And I was angered by a volunteer's suggestion of just tossing him into the deep end, forcing him to swim. After all, you are not going to master something suddenly if you have not done it at all before. But then I reflected that Donny could swim a few strokes. And he seemed too dumb to be afraid of the water.

Holding Donny firmly from the back with my arms under his armpits, I made my way carefully along the side of the pool to the deep end. Then, placing Donny against the side of the pool and facing me, I backed two feet away, the water up to my neck, and held out both hands. Donny kicked and stroked furiously. He crowed happily. He was coming! He was coming!

I kept backing just beyond reach to the other side. On his own Donny followed, I was elated. We shouted together. Everyone watched, shouting and cheering. Go, Donny! Go, Donny! That Saturday he crossed the pool six times.

On the way home we had a special treat—pretzels and ice cream; pretzels and ice cream for me, just pretzels for Donny. Donny is probably the only child in the world who won't eat ice cream.

"Ruth, you won't believe it. Donny took off today and swam all over the place. He crossed the pool six times."

Ruth smiled. She didn't look too surprised.

"And what's more I'm going to train him for the Special Olympics."

In the following months Donny invented one swimming method after another: first, his truncated breast stroke, drawing his hands together and shoveling the water under his chest without lifting his arms—efficiently simple; next, his backstroke with arms tucked to his sides, just flapping his

forearms; his floating on his face and back; and, finally, Donny's experimenting with exhaling and letting himself sink serenely to the bottom, frightening me. But he always came up shouting happily.

When we learned two months after Donny had taught himself to swim that he had qualified for that spring's Special Olympics in a runoff at his school, I decided to train him. At the Fern Rock Y, Bob Landon asked, "How is Donny doing at school?"

"Well, he's learned to stick pencils in a board with two rows of holes. Only when they tell him to take them out one by one, he refuses."

"Makes sense. Why should he undo his own work?"

"Bob, Donny and I would like to win a Special Olympics race that's coming up soon, but his biggest problem is swimming in a straight line. How'll we do it?"

"We could put him on his back, tie a fishing line to his big toe and reel him in."

"I don't think the officials are that laid back. Let's walk along the side of the pool and hold his favorite beach ball in front of him. That might make him a straight arrow."

We worked hard for several weeks; gradually Donny swam straighter.

On the day of the Special Olympics Montgomery County finals, Ruth packed Donny's swimming shorts in a new blue zipper bag covered with white dolphins that delighted Donny. Putting his arms around her neck, Donny forced Ruth to bow toward him, kissed the top of her head and, moving his chin from side to side, he tickled himself with her silky auburn hair, smiling beatifically.

"Donny doesn't love me. He loves the top of my head. You're not kissing me bye-bye. I'm going with you and Daddy."

Donny, Ruth and I drove to Bear College where the Special Olympics were being held. After I helped Donny change clothes in the locker room, we entered the pool area. Every surface seemed covered with a milling, excited crowd of the handicapped in all sizes and shapes: some wearing removable braces, some crutches or canes, and some of the retarded could be distinguished only by the features of Down's syndrome. The crowd formed a colorful, pulsating quilt of children, their coaches, families and friends, with the children dressed in the bright jackets and trunks of their schools.

The contests with smaller children were first and, before I was ready for it, Donny's race came up. The children had been matched roughly by size and ability. Donny was in a group of six, all retarded, of approximately the same size but not necessarily the same age. Two were boys with Down's syndrome, probably brighter than Donny; the other three, like Donny, were severely retarded.

The officials had decided that this was to be a race across the width of the pool. I sat with Ruth in the bleachers opposite the starting side to cheer Donny on. Donny was such a strong swimmer; hands gripped tightly, I

longed for him to win.

A cap pistol cracked and they were off. Donny got off to a good start but, near the middle of the pool, the two Down's syndrome boys began pulling ahead. However, with several powerful kicks, Donny clearly regained the lead.

"Go, Donny, go! Win one for Mommy!"

But then something happened to Donny's stroke. He was veering. No, he was curving! With his face lifted and his right hand and arm extended in a curve, Donny was following that curve into a tightening circle, going round and round in a ring just in front of the finish line.

"Damn it, Donny, fly straight! You can do it!"

By now, however, the two Down's syndrome boys had passed Donny and the other three were coming on strong and then forged ahead. All the others finished while Donny went around in a tighter and tighter ring, shouting happily and chasing his hand like a dog chasing its tail.

Then I glanced at Ruth who was laughing delightedly and I started laughing, louder and louder, almost hysterically, with a sense of release and joy. Donny's laughter reflected his appreciation of the crowd's laughter. And of the echoes in his ears. He kept making rings and the rings in his eyes were brightly shining.

MATERNITY

By Diane Orleman

She stands behind the Doric column, dwarfed
by its stone immensity
swamped

Watches life click by down a cold corridor of mottled marble
on high heels
purposeful feet impelled here, there
off to business.

And down the marble stairs
edges eroded by eons of abuse

Down, down
Into the grass, glen, trees
cornfield; corn snakes lying in wait
Into the field, barefoot.

Lurking behind the pillar
she watches life
waits to see
waits for Him, His Inevitability
Your Grace.

• •

His head, shaved

(We let him. What does it matter?

It's only hair.)

His pants, camouflage

(What does it matter?

So are soldiers'.)

His ring, the Devil, silvered

(What does it matter?)

Skinless am I

Raw, unprotected.

We are of whole blood

And I have given and allowed this,

Loosed it upon the world.

They said, later:

He fathered a genius

She mothered a monster

And the radio told almost daily of mothers

killing their children.

HELL IN A NUTSHELL

By Wes Lipschultz

"...So I tell Jill I love her right as Brinn's standing stark naked in front of me, and then I hang up the phone and take it from there." Ron was doing the talking, and his friends were listening with pleasure. They were all playing poker in Ron's living room. His wife, Jill, was in the kitchen making a tray of food and beer for them. She heard Ron too, but with somewhat less enjoyment.

"I came home late that night for obvious reasons, and Jill was all upset because she had made a gourmet meal for me earlier, and it had spoiled by the time I got back. I should have told her why I was late. That would have given her something to *really* get upset about." Ron loved to be the center of attention, and as his friends laughed, a smile crossed his face, and a gleam appeared in his eye.

"I don't know, Jill must be one hell of a masochist to have ever married you in the first place," said John, a small fat masochist himself.

"That's the way I like 'em."

Jill, in fact, was not a masochist. When she met Ron, she liked his looks and sense of humor. He could be very charming when he wanted to be, and she fell in love with him. After they were married, she soon began to realize he wasn't who she thought he was. Even so, she wasn't giving up on Ron. She had been raised in an atmosphere where everyone stuck together, stayed together when things got rough. Maybe if she showed him how much she was capable of loving, he would start to love her back.

Back at the card table, however, luck had abandoned Ron long ago. His loss was not money, but a bet made with John about church. Since he lost, he had to attend a catholic service for the first time since he was twelve.

Sunday dawned brightly and a little on the cold side. Jill knelt down beside the pew, blessed herself, and sat down. Ron just plopped onto his seat and farted reverently and quietly. He tapped his foot anxiously, waiting for the mass to begin. The acolytes finally came down, followed by the priests. The service went slow as hell for Ron until the sermon came.

The priest talked of hell. Catholic priests have talked about hell since the dawn of time, but Ron didn't know this because he hadn't been to church since the dawn of time. Hell was a place of fire, sadism, masochism, sexism and satanism. Evil, maybe, but definitely not boring like the rest of the mass. People there were boiled, pickled, castrated, microwaved, and decapitated. All this, forever.

Ron walked out of the church a happy man. He fulfilled his part of the bet, and he hadn't even been especially bored. He even felt somewhat pious from the experience, so he decided not to visit Brinn that night; he didn't want to get her all worked up on a Sunday. Instead, he went home

with Jill and went to bed early.

In the middle of the night, he sat up in a cold sweat. He looked around. Everything except him was dark, peaceful, and quiet. He stood up and noticed a body where he had been sleeping. He almost lost control of his bowels when he saw that the body in bed was his own. Suddenly, he heard a "ding" behind him. He whirled around and saw an elevator sliding open where the bedroom door had previously been. He got in just for the hell of it, thinking he was dreaming. Two buttons were inside the elevator. One read "heaven," the other, "hell." He already knew about hell from the catholics, so he pushed "heaven." Immediately the elevator shot upwards. He traveled on for what seemed like hours, when the elevator suddenly jerked to a stop. When the doors didn't open, Ron became angry.

"Come on, heaven isn't supposed to have maintenance problems. Is God incompetent? What's this? An emergency phone?" He picked up the phone. "Hey, send somebody up here, I'm stuck, I want to get to heaven."

"Sorry, just kidding," a voice like John Cleese's answered. The elevator floor dropped out and Ron fell down into hell. He landed in a sauna. Chuck Noriega sat in the sauna, hair on his chest and cigar in his mouth.

"Ron?" he said. "Is that you? I've been a fan of yours ever since I've been here. Your treatment of others has been inspiring to me. True, I was cruel to people in my life, but I was so for survival, for success. You, however, hurt people for a few laughs with your friends. *Time* should have done a story on you, not me. I want you to know that my job is to make your afterlife hell, but it's nothing personal: I wish I could have been as cold as you in my life."

Suddenly, Ron found himself lying on his bed with his eyes open. His amazement and relief were short lived, however, when he wiped his manicured hand across his brow. He was in a woman's body! "Oh God!" he thought, "How can I screw Brinn in this condition?" He went over to the mirror and Jill's face stared out at him. What was he going to do? Suddenly, he heard a noise in the bathroom.

"Who's there?" he said in Jill's voice.

"Who the hell do you think?"

"I don't know, or else I wouldn't be asking you, asshole," said Ron, not liking the stranger from the start.

"Don't call me an asshole, you psychotic masochistic bitch."

"Who do you think you are to talk to me like this, you pompous ass?" said Ron.

"I don't know who I am, and let's just keep it that way so you'll be happy," said the stranger.

"That's it," said Ron, "you're getting your ass kicked." He went over to the bathroom and stopped when he got to the door. He looked inside, and saw someone who looked exactly like him standing there smirking at him.

"You have my body!" Ron said.

"So do you," said Ron's twin. Ron looked into the bathroom mirror and

saw that it was true: he no longer had Jill's body, but was his own handsome self. He looked back at his identical twin, who was staring at him cynically.

"What the hell is going on?" said the real Ron.

"You are in fact dead," said Ron's twin, "and you missed heaven by one hell of a long way. Since the only person on earth you were involved with was yourself, we here in hell figured you might want to spend the rest of forever with someone you care about, so here I am. Face it, you were made for yourself. We are going to do everything together: cook, clean, watch t.v., grow closer, and even have babies together."

"But we're both men, and I'm not gay!" said Ron.

"I know," said Ron's twin, smiling, "that's the way I like 'em."

TRANSFORMERS

By Pat Angelos

I added the "Toy Situation" to my things-to-do list as I sat at the desk in my bedroom. I checked page 313 of *Disciplining Your Child* which stated that by the age of four, a child could comprehend later consequences for previously committed infractions. Billy was four and a half years old and had to learn to put his possessions in their proper place. While climbing the stairs to go to bed, I had almost broken my neck on one of his transformers, those metal robots that turn into cars or planes when the appendages are twisted. I really couldn't see the attraction and cringed when Billy begged me to play. I decided he would be restricted from the transformers for the next day.

As I checked off each item on my things-done list, I decided the day had been satisfactory. The laundry, groceries, dry cleaning, and school clothes shopping had been completed. Billy's five outfits for pre-school were hung in his closet for the coming week. The bowl, spoon, and glass for his cereal and juice were set on the white kitchen table. His fluoride vitamin was placed on the napkin. I snapped the cap on the pen, straightened the doily, and filed the papers and black pen in the drawer.

The past sixteen days had been a constant ninety-five degrees, but mercifully this evening there was relief. As I washed my face, I thought of how much Billy had wanted to play in his plastic pool that day, but I just couldn't see sitting out there in the baking sun and then have water tramped through the house when he would have to use the bathroom. Instead I had rented *Puff the Magic Dragon* and stuck it in the VCR. That had occupied him until his dad came home. When Tom had come in at least I had been able to finish cooking dinner without interruption. I had heard them in the family room, wrestling on the floor. I should have made a note to move my Norman Rockwell collector plates to a different room. They wouldn't be worth anything if they were broken.

This was the first night we could open the windows instead of breathing the stale air conditioning. As I lay in bed staring at the ceiling, Tom was already asleep beside me. Tom had had a long day as usual, but we knew the stock brokerage business would be like that. I had heard Tom telling Billy that he had bought the *Mattel* stock, the one that makes some of his toys. Tom and Billy then proceeded to check for all the toys that began with the letter "M." Then Tom had said, "We'd better put these away before Mommy has a heart attack." Tom wanted to have a party for his friends from work. I would have to finish the living room curtains before that. Billy's school was going to have a country craft fair. I had to think of a creative idea. Billy had a birthday party to go to on Saturday. I had to buy a gift. I pulled the sheet up over my head so that only my nose stuck out.

The sound was like that of a wounded animal, grunting in pain. Tom shook me. Billy was coughing. We both sat straight up in bed in a second of disbelief. He was choking. We scrambled to his room. He was clutching his throat and heaving a horrible sound. He couldn't speak. His blue, watery eyes widened in fright. Weakly, his thin arms reached out to me. I grabbed him and started to bang on his chest. No change. Hurry. Think. Do something. I thrust him into Tom's arms and ran to the phone in the bedroom. I knew the pediatrician's number by heart. The answering service would transfer me. "Hurry! It's an emergency!" I yelled into the receiver. I clutched the phone, my hand turning white. "Hello, this is...." Dr. Weed had started to say.

"He can't breathe. He's choking."

The tears streamed down my face. Impatiently I answered the questions and concentrated on the instructions. I shouted the instructions to Tom as we raced to the bathroom. Every second counted. Turn the shower and sink on hot. Get him in the steam. I swept him into my arms and held him near the bathtub. I should have called an ambulance. It wasn't working. Dr. Weed had said if this didn't work to get him outside into the air. If that didn't work, he would meet me at the hospital emergency room. I rocked back and forth as if the motion would keep my baby alive. The steam and sweat dripped down through my eyes. His fragile body was going limp and his eyes looked desperately up at me. The haunting sound was not diminishing. Please don't take my baby, I begged. My body started to shake uncontrollably. It's not working. Damn it.

I ran down the steps clutching my boy closer. I banged the door open and stood in the driveway, my bare toes curling into the tar for stability. I paced in circles pleading with the black sky. "Please, please, please."

Tom was starting the car. What was happening? What was wrong? We screeched out of the driveway through the deserted streets. I held Billy's face in the palm of my hand to catch the air from the window. I was oblivious to the red lights and stop signs that Tom disregarded. The car was tipping as it went around a hard bend. I almost wished it would overturn and end this misery.

Dr. Weed was waiting at the Emergency room. The nurse was taking him out of my arms but I grasped his hand. She put an oxygen mask over his face which muffled the possessed sound still croaking from his throat.

After a quick examination Dr. Weed explained that Billy had croup. It sounded like an ugly, fatal disease. It wasn't. It was very common in children this age and at this time of the year. It was a swelling caused by a respiratory infection, often the beginning of a cold. There were no other complications, so he would probably be released tomorrow after overnight observation.

Slowly the croup cough lessened to a wheezing sound. We were going up to the hospital room. Thank God Billy was so exhausted that already he was drifting off to sleep. Of course I would stay with him.

Tom had gone to fill out the insurance forms. I sat beside the bed looking at the oxygen tent that separated us. I could still see myself under the tent my Mom used to help my brothers and sister make. We would strip the beds and arrange all the chairs in the house to hold up the sheets for our tent. Then Mom would make Kool-Aid popsicles out of paper cups and eat them under there with us and all of the neighborhood kids. (I never wondered how the sheets were washed again and back on our beds at night.) She let my sister and I paint our room black. We had endless pajama parties. The neighborhood roller skating rink was in our basement. She would let us play in the rain, the puddles, and the mud. As long as it didn't hurt you and you were having fun, you could do it.

There were seven children in our family. Mom always worked, sometimes night shift. Dad was a career soldier. I always hated the disorder and money worries. Hand-me-down clothes embarrassed me. As I stared at my bare feet on the white hospital floor, I could still see those scuffed black shoes stuck on my feet at the First Communion procession while every other third grade girl wore white shoes. When the class reached the altar and turned to the crowd, I glared at my entire family who were waving at me like the Beverly Hillbillies. It had built up inside of me over the years. I resented it. I wanted more than one pair of shoes for the school year. I couldn't find my socks. I wanted to go to a beauty salon to get my hair styled instead of the barber shop where we all went.

I was going to be different with my children. They would have it all: the best clothes, the cleanest house, and everything would be very, very organized. It was something to be proud of. Wasn't it? I was happy, wasn't I?

The dripping of the intravenous tube fell in unison with my tears. How damn appropriate. God forbid I should do something out of sync. I wiped my face with the starched white sleeve of my cotton nightgown.

The sun was starting to rise. Tom came in and rested his hand on my shoulder and I laid my face on it.

"I'm going back to the house. What do you want me to bring back?" Tom said softly.

"Transformers," I said.

Tom put down the pen and paper to write the list of necessities.

"Just transformers?" he asked bewildered.

"Just transformers."

WHAT WOULD MOZART HEAR?

By Matthew Noll

What would Mozart hear?
 if he squeezed his head inside
 and turned a delicate powdered ear
 to the savage thrum
 of the magic drum of my echo cavern chest
 Would Shakespeare deign to pause
 his patriarch's eye, and rest on my
 barbarous charging verse,
 and damn with his perfect iambic pentameter
 my neon frogs and toadstool soldiers

At the 50 yard line Referee
 Carl Yakowicz is solemnly poised with a commemorative coin
 the opposing team captains are beamed in via satellite
 the missing ear, the arthritic brains that strain to escape,
 but only muss the hair, defying
 the empty page or canvas
 they face bleach blond attitudes, barely constrained breasts
 retail, remakes, remixes, re-re-reshuffled languages of
 nothing in particular but cotton candy nightmares and the
 urgings of a million fashion magazine freshmen

Are my cement fingers and leprosy
 brain young enough, to touch the nimble
 feelers of the world, to soft pedal
 all our aunts and uncles and weary gas
 station attendants out of self abuse
 and doughnut shops, to nurture
 themselves in the placenta of Captain Crunch and re-runs
 and weave intercourse and white bread
 into the neon-post-meltdown-pseudo-confessionalist-psychedelic-
 thrash-sit-com-tearjerker-
 ars nova



A SINGLE SESTINA

By Holly Teti

Why should I stay single?

Because I'm fed up.

It's that gender they call "men"

Okay, so maybe my attitude is bad news,
but if they spent as much time thinking as they did drinking
maybe they'd be smart enough to be good sports.

If they're not playing, they're watching sports
I'll never have to watch wrestling again, if I stay single.
Maybe if they didn't spend so much time drinking,
they wouldn't always leave the toilet seat up.
You know what I mean ladies? It's really bad news
to go to the bathroom in the dark after men.

I guess they really wouldn't be men
if they didn't leave the sports
section of the news-
paper lying in every single
corner of the room for you to clean up
along with their beer cans from drinking.

• •

No wonder so many women have turned to drinking.
It's because they hang around men
who have been known to drive them up
a wall from watching so much sports.
I really wish I could think of one single
reason why men aren't bad news.

My mother didn't have to break the news,
but one night when I came home from drinking
she said, "I told you so. You should stay single.
I've had plenty of experience with men.
You know what they want when there's no sports
on T.V. That's when they try to kiss and make up."

"I know," I said. "Some of their lines make me want to throw up.
Their compliments are about as thrilling as getting the news
that nothing will ever be on T.V. again except for sports
and schools of thinking will remain second to schools of drinking
and the world will continue to be run by men
and sensible women like me will remain single."

So why should I stay tied up when I can go drinking
and make news with *many* men?
After all, swinging is a sort of sports when you're single.

PATRONS

Jane Agostinelli	Nancy Hagelgans	Constance Poley
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Blanche Allen	Elizabeth Hankel	Royden Price
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Shirley Barndt	Cindy K. Harris	Jill L. Randolph
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Tammy Green	Peter Perreten	Sally Widman
<i>The Grizzly</i>	John Pilgrim	Grace Wurzbach

