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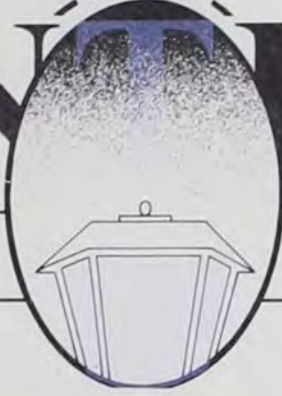
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Named after the architectural structural atop Pfhaler 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 57th year of production, this semester's issue of THE LANTERN features short stories. THE LANTERN staff congratulates visual art contest winner Allison Puff, whose winning work is featured on the cover, and short story contest winner Judy Evans, whose short story, CANDLELIGHT ECSTASY TABITHA, appears on page 3.

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Candlelight Ecstasy Tabitha

By Judy Evans

She felt romantic and timeless and womanly. She lay on her back on a blue rag rug, her eyes half-closed. Through the blinds of the southern window, a streetlight shone into her apartment and glowed in pale stripes across her outstretched legs. Handel's Water Music played gently, and her body lay still. Her mouth was working in soft contractions and every once in a while she took a deep, long breath.

Tabitha was reveling in Damon. It was 9:45 and she knew she should be dressing for the company party Corinne was taking her to tonight, but she wanted to savor Damon a little more. Damon's wide, sun-bronzed chest, the taut, sinewy muscles that moved with the leashed power and grace of a panther. Damon, whose calloused hands could caress with aching tenderness. Damon, who had not only the physique of Adonis and the chiseled granite face of Michelangelo's David, but also an unerring ability to say the perfect words in any tone - flirtatious, cocky, adorably somber - to take her heart captive. And right now, he lay on top of her.

Someone knocked at her apartment door and she jumped up, the book on her chest tumbling to the floor. "Just a second," she called, and shoved the book under the bed just as Corinne appeared in the foyer. Corinne headed straight for the bedroom mirror and Tabitha felt prickles of envy as she watched her. She wore a black velvet dress, its deep vee neckline framing a pale triangle of flesh that gleamed against the blackness. Her hair, the color of orange marmalade, was cropped and glinting. She moved with slow, limber smoothness, and the energy she seemed to radiate made Tabitha think of a burning cigarette.

"Ready?" Corinne said, and went to sit on the bed. Tabitha looked sideways at her to see if she was joking but Corinne didn't notice her. "What are you wearing?" Corinne asked, her mouth still open. "I had such a time trying to decide what to wear I almost gave it up and went naked." Corinne giggled, her voice low and Debra Winger-hoarse.

"I don't know yet," Tabitha said. "You have to help me decide." Tabitha had been fussing about an outfit for about a month, ever since Corinne had described the annual Boss's Birthday Bash for the staff and friends of Hostert's Interior. Corinne had stopped waitressing at the Carriage House with Tabitha two years ago, and had gotten a job as a fabrics consultant at Hostert's. Her new boss was a 26-year-old named Bethann who ordered things like a picture window in everyone's office and crimson flecked wallpaper for the ladies' room. A party at Bethann's, Tabitha figured, demanded a smashing outfit, something that showed that you, too, were so caught up in the expansiveness of beautiful youth that you spent gosh, who knew? on your dress. It made Tabitha nervous to think about it, and she hoped her seventy-five-dollar sweater dress was expensive enough.

"Where's the sweater dress you got at Lord's?" Corinne asked while

Tabitha plugged in her hot rollers. "Aren't you going to wear that? It looks really good on you -- it makes your hair look sort of blondish." Corinne leaned back, kicked off her black pumps, and held her feet up. "I remembered to shave my toes this time. And oh my God, on the back of my ankle there was this one hair, it was like, half an inch long. You know, the kind that you don't see until three weeks later when you turn your leg around just a little more than usual, and there it is." She leaned over and rattled her bronze fingernails in Tabitha's jam dish of M&Ms on the floor.

"Whatcha reading?" She dragged the flopping novel from under the bed-spread's edge. "The Garden in Winter? Wish I knew a guy that looked like this."

"Oh, that's my little sister's." Tabitha said. "She left it here a while ago."

"Oh, listen," Corinne said, sounding delighted. "He was Damon Trantridge, the heir to a fortune he didn't want, a spy for the government he loved, and the unwilling guardian of a beautiful girl. She was Alyssa Cullen, a blacksmith's daughter, young, lovely, and determined to hate Damon. But feelings changed and a passionate love was born on that fateful day, in the garden in winter...' Oh God, remember these?" She laughed again. "Check this cover out. Alyssa's tits are falling out of her gown, and the rest of her is skinny. And this author - Angelia Woodlawn."

Tabitha smiled tightly. "Yeah, they're pretty silly," she said.

"And they all have the same descriptions," Corinne said. "My favorite was 'the evidence of his desire.' God forbid they should say he's got a hard-on." She crunched an M&M. "And I love when they describe the heroine: her ripe young breasts," she crowed. "What's he going to do, pick them?" She dropped the book onto the floor and headed for the closet. "Where's your dress?"

"Oh, no, "I'll get it--" Tabitha started to say. Corinne flicked the closet light on.

"Oh my - God, Tabby ..."

Tabitha whirled back to the mirror.

"Tabby, what-- where'd you get all these?"

"Oh, you know, when I was, like, fourteen or fifteen. I never went out anywhere. I used to read them a lot. You can borrow some of them if you want. Here, look through them." Her ears hot, she went to the closet and turned the Sears box upside down. She watched the novels flood out, the familiar covers blurring into a parade of women with long, curling manes of hair in every color except brown. Each woman, barely covered by billowing silk, languished passionately in the savage embrace of a tall, shirtless man.

"Oh, God. There must be a hundred of them," Corinne said. "so that's why you never go out with anyone. I wouldn't either, with guys like these to distract me."

Tabitha put on her red dress, her back to Corinne. She heard Corinne whisper, "She was Tabitha Ross, a tempting vixen. With her sea-blue gaze

and ... dark gold tresses, Tabitha was--"

"Shut up," Tabitha said sharply, but then forced a smile at Corinne. She finished dressing quickly.

Tabitha drove so Corinne could drink as much as she pleased, but Tabitha figured it wouldn't hurt to have a drink herself. She'd met Bethann once but the rest of the people would be strangers. A drink would make her face flush, a detail someone like Damon might notice.

In the blank beige face of the condominium, the open door was a single rectangle of dim, writhing light, and Tabitha had the impression of looking down a throat into a grinding stomach.

"Hi, you guys! Help yourselves to the party favors." Bethann's short, perpetually tanned body was decorated with seashell jewelry that clinked as she swung the door wider. The stomach swallowed Corinne right away in one quick gulp, but Tabitha went slowly, her heart beating faster.

Tabitha knew that some of the people were watching her so she let her eyelids drop. She didn't recognize the music, some pop song she hadn't heard yet, but she walked in time to the beat so men could see that she was innately sensual. She inhaled to make the sweater dress more snug and threaded her way to a kitchen where people stood around the counters, spilling their drinks. The guy who was tending the bar had his back turned and was bending over something. She cocked her head to the side and watched the man stand up, hugging three bottles to his chest. As he set them down, the moisture on them made his white shirt cling to his body -- she sighed. As she pushed toward the table a guy whose shirt said "I Only Sleep with the Best" grabbed her shoulder. She looked up at six feet of muscle and a neck the size of an oak tree trunk.

"You gettin' a drink? Come back an' see me when you had a few, Babe."

"Are you worth it?" she asked, trying to flirt, but he shoved past her and grabbed a tall girl in a long lace skirt. Tabitha stared, then laughed so people wouldn't think she was a snob. She wished she'd been to a party, any party, since her own high school graduation party four years ago.

When she got to the bar, she smiled at the bartender. "Hi," she said softly. He smiled back with impersonal politeness but the smile got bigger as he looked at her in her red dress.

"What'll it be?"

He had grey eyes. Like a storm, she thought. She bit her lip. "Mmm, I'm not sure. Would you surprise me?" She turned her mouth up to him so he could see her full lips. She'd remembered to fill them in with extra lipstick because the magazines said a pouty mouth was hot. It seemed obscene somehow, the fat, glistening red lips, but maybe that was what men really liked.

He handed her a glass of something dark red. "Taste this," he said. She looked at him steadily, her blue eyes wide, as she swallowed.

"I hate it when a women comes on too strong, when she tries too hard."

But you, you don't even try, and you drive me wild, Alyssa."

"Well?" He was watching her, smiling.

She tilted the glass and said, "It's really good. What is it?"

"Justin's Surprise. When you're done with that one, come back and I'll make you another one."

Tabitha laughed gaily and walked away, careful to swing her hips the scantiest bit, in case he was watching.

She went to the living room, where she spotted Corinne perched on a chair, her body straight but relaxed, at ease. Corinne's spine curved up to meet her bright head and the smoke of her cigarette went coiling toward the ceiling like an extension of her sinuous, black-sheathed body. A dark-haired man was leaning against the wall next to her, tracing his finger along the neckline of her dress. Tabitha stopped watching and wandered through the rooms until she came to a group of girls in a cloud of smoke and Obsession.

"Hi," she said when a girl in a body stocking looked at her.

"Hi," the girl said, her glance sweeping her friends in the circle. She smiled at one of them, then turned to Tabitha. "Do you work at Hostert's?"

"Uh, no, I'm a friend of Corinne's." Tabitha smiled uncertainly.

"Oh she's a doll," the girl said. "How do you know her?"

"I used to work with her," Tabitha said, sipping her Justin's Surprise.

The girl nodded. "Oh. At the Carriage House? Oh, God, Corinne's the only girl I know who could make that uniform look good. 'Scuse me. I need a refill. It was nice meeting you." She moved away.

Tabitha looked at the prints on Bethann's wall-- Nice, Marseilles, Mykonos. She thought of going to the bathroom, but then she remembered a novel she'd read about a New York City party where people had gone to the bathroom to sniff stripes of pink-tinted cocaine off a gilt-edged mirror that had a hot air balloon etched on it. Deciding against the bathroom, Tabitha pushed through to the kitchen, which had emptied, and out the door to a porch. Fanning herself, she wondered if the bartender -Justin- had noticed her. Her sweater dress felt damp and had a scattering of small dark dots near the hem where someone had splashed a drink. She sighed, squinting at the tree branches that waved at her from the next yard.

When Justin didn't come out, she decided to go in. She relished the stuffy warmth of the kitchen, which had a privacy now that everyone had drunk their fill. Madonna's helium cries filled the other rooms, and people were dancing. Justin was leaning over a trash bag and stuffing bottles into it. When he noticed her, he smiled.

"You're missing a dance in there." He angled his elbow in the direction of the darkened rooms as he shoved another bottle into the bag. "I don't really know these people so I told Bethann I'd rather hang around in here. I like making drinks." He smiled again. Tabitha looked down, then noticed she'd carried the same glass--the one he'd given her--around all evening. She smiled back at him.

"Is there any Coke left?"

"Mmm, for those baby blues, I think so," he said, filling a fresh glass with ice. He watched her drink, then said, "Actually I saw you go out and I wanted to be here when you came back in."

She drew her finger around the edge of the glass. "This is the first party I've been to here at her apartment."

"You live around here?"

"Yeah. I work at a restaurant."

"So what are your plans? School? Career-woman? Getting married?"

His seriousness made Tabitha want to kiss his forehead.

"Oh, I don't know. I'm going to work for a while until I decide what I want."

"What you want." Justin smiled again, slowly. Tabitha laughed, feeling a breathless flutter inside. She moved away from the counter, leaving her hands on its edge behind her. She knew her breasts were stretching her sweater dress.

Damon couldn't keep his eyes off her breasts. The daintily swelling curves beneath her velvet riding habit hypnotized him, and he feasted his gaze upon her sweet, sweet form...

Justin came around the table, wiping his hands on a towel. His hands took the glass from hers.

Alyssa, in a rosy height of confusion, opened her mouth and closed it again helplessly, panting a little. Damon was unable to resist the temptation any longer, and in the space of a heartbeat he--

Justin's mouth. It was touching hers and she almost fainted from the pleasure.

"You have pretty eyes, Tabitha," he whispered. "Tabitha Ross. I asked about you, you know. I like you."

"Oh..." Her eyes were half closed, her mind hardly believing.

"Let's borrow the guest room. Nobody will bother us." He brushed a fingertip across her eyelashes. "I've been thinking about you."

The bedroom was dark, so she couldn't see his eyes, but she imagined them stormy grey with passion. She lay on her side so her hips looked thinner, and she made tiny mewling sounds while his hands touched her body. She closed her eyes finally and waited for Justin conquer her. She'd always known it would be like this.

They lay together for a long time, a streetlight casting a bluish glow on the sheets. Tabitha's limp, damp body relished Justin's unmoving embrace, but after a several minutes of complete silence she whispered, "Justin?" No answer. She sat up, nudging him. "I have to take Corinne back to my apartment."

"Well, take it easy, Tabby. Thanks for your company tonight," he said. "I wish you could stay."

Tabitha looked at him, waited for him to jump up and take her face in

his hands, but he lay still on the pillow. No. no! she thought. You're supposed to say I'll never let you go.

"Justin?" She could feel tears hiding in her voice.

"Tabitha?" He got up and hugged her. "You okay? Hmm?"

His crooning made her stomach feel soft and quivery. "Justin? Do you want. . . to call me? she whispered. "I think I'm --"

"Oh, Tabitha, uh, I live in California. I know it was a nice night, but I gotta go back home next week," he said, smoothing her hair off her forehead. "My girlfriend at home would kill me if she knew I ran off with a beautiful woman, don't you think?" He kissed the corner of her mouth. "If I'm ever back east I'll look you up, Tabitha."

Her throat squeezed tighter and tighter until she thought she'd throw up. No! Justin! her mind shrieked, but somewhere, deep inside, she was beside herself, thrilled. Her - this was all happening to her.

In the car on the way back, Corinne quizzed Tabitha. "Tabby, oh my God, how was it? Was he, like, good?" She leaned closer. "Tabby? You okay?" She hugged Tabitha, who couldn't keep her eyes from watering. "What is it? He wasn't Mr. Right?" Tabitha drove. Corinne's eyebrows furrowed. "Tabby, don't be too upset, okay? Everybody has a trashy night sometimes." Then Corinne had slid down in her seat, her head nestled against the black upholstery like a bright penny in an old wallet.

Now Tabitha stood in a white nightgown, in front of the open window. A trashy night? she looked out the window.

Waves crashed all around her but she was oblivious to them. Her haunted eyes searched the horizon so intently that the sharp wind brought tears. Damon, Damon, where are you?

Justin, Justin, where are you? She saw her eyes in the mirror, big and shadowed, and it was comforting to know that the lovely, mournful face was hers. Besides, she was supposed to cry now - It was part of feeling the emotion.

Tabitha sighed, wanting to stop crying and smile with the thrill of it, but it wasn't as easy as she thought - it was impossible. She told herself it was probably just as well. She told herself it was probably better to cry. She told herself that at least when Justin came back, her eyelashes would be starry black with tears.

The Waffle Maker

By Kate Phillips

"I'd love a cup of tea."

He told her and watched her
fumble with her keys
and then unlock the door.

Her house-
tidy compact
like her-

was warm and he loosened his tie.

The evening had been a joy
their first date

and he hoped there could be another.

Her back to him

she put the kettle on.

The Waffle Maker.

The waffle maker sat

conspicuously on the otherwise
barren counter.

"Do you, make good waffles?"

he asked, remembering his childhood.

But the smile on her face

and the light behind her eyes

were nothing like his mother's.

She shrugged.

The waffle maker

on the counter

a blatant invitation

and he kicked off his shoes

hoping in the morning

he would remember

they were under the kitchen table.

Thoughts From The Street Corner

By Jennifer Rausin

This rain is soaking me to the skin, thought the man in the black overcoat as he walked down the dark, busy street. This day is terrible, the worst it's been all week. How am I suppose to make this presentation when I look like a wet rat?

My clothes are not what is going to be impossible about this presentation. *It's more important to you than I am! If it weren't you wouldn't be going to that damned meeting tonight! Who ever heard of an evening business meeting anyway?* How could Julia walk out on me! Like I don't have enough on my mind. And I don't have the time to chase her back. Maybe it would be best if I was just alone for a while.

Now what the hell is all this? I need to start to parking closer to the building, he thought with annoyance as he came upon a crowd on the sidewalk. The concrete was smooth with age and slick with slimy rain. There was a bag lady and her overturned basket sprawled across wetly on the concrete stage. The man, nearly shaking with impatience, quickly pushed his way through the helping people and stepped over her on his way into the building beyond.

Thanks a lot asshole, thought the embarrassed old woman. It's bad enough I'm wet and I'll be wet all night now and my stuff is all over the place and them damn people! I hate nice people, almost as much as I hate people like that asshole! She gathered the remains of her life from the hard slickness and limped down an alley away from legitimacy.

Why won't they just leave me alone? I ain't done nothin' to any of 'um, but they just won' let me be! Fuckin' bible totin' crazies, crowdin' me in a little room fulla whiny women for a hot stinkin' night! Rather be half hot on a grate in the snow. Or is it half cold? Hell, what's wrong with a lonely life? Why can't I wander? I don' wanna job, I wanna to live off the land, live off the city. That's what life is, the struggle, the fight for it! Don' give me nuthin' else, I don' wan' it! I don' wanna life like this powder puff here, strutting along to her next date, she thought. She peeked around the corner of the alley, studying the young, well dressed woman walking down the street. Don' give 'im too much, sweet cunt, he might not take the bait.

I could enjoy this rain if I wasn't wearing these darned shoes. Feet weren't meant to be at this angle. Oh well, I do want to look nice for Tim. He's such a nice man, he'll be good for a girl like me. Mrs. Nancy McKenna. No, Mrs. Tim McKenna, that's more like it. I miss him so much when I'm not with him. I don't know what I'll do if he doesn't ask me--no, I mustn't even think of it, I might jinx it. Oh, but it would be so wonderful. In a burst of joy she lifted her face to the white sky and laughed as the clear rain softly hit her skin.

My life is so grand. I have Tim, a good job, my boss is nice to me, not like Mr. Grenville. If Tim ever knew what he made me do he'd be so angry.

And it wasn't anything, not really. And no one ever saw us, it was all right for us to be in his office with the door closed...locked. I could always say I was taking dictation, not letting him...touch me. Old man! Bastard! Oh Lord forgive me. Forgive me my sins and my youth and my emotions, I know so little. But know that I don't like men when they stare at me, like that worker over there. I can't believe anyone would be so rude as to stare at anyone like that. Tim isn't like that. He's a proper gentleman, kind and clean. Look at that man, dirty, all over, you can tell, she thought, looking out of the corner of her eye at him.

He was looking at her, all right. Mmm, he thought, what a hot little number. I'd like to get under that tight little skirt of hers. I miss that, now that I'm married. I almost feel guilty, and that takes all the fun out of it. It's not my fault, somehow the girls all got prettier since I married Linda. She's a good gal, though, and I wouldn't want to hurt her. Hey, bye bye little lady, I hope somebody's getting some of that, he thought as the young woman disappeared around the corner. He put his back into his work, thinking of his sister, who was about the same age as the woman. Mabel's going to be a mother soon, and I'll finally be an uncle. She keeps bitching about kids of my own. Shit, they'll come, it's not like Linda 'n me ain't been trying. We've only been married a year, we've got plenty of time. 'Course, Mom had me nine months after she and Dad were hitched. He was a man's man. Always knew just how to treat his family. Cared for us, taught us, kept us in line. Never knocked us kids around unless we really deserved it, and we did. Yeah, if Linda would just get pregnant I'd raise my kids just like my pop raised us, strict, with an iron hand.

Check this fairy out. "Damn nice tie, pretty boy!" he shouted. His fellows, pausing at their work, laughed heartily as the well dressed man of his comment walked stiff-legged past them.

He ignored them by thinking, yes, it is quite a nice tie, thank you. Probably cost more than you earn in a year, cretin.

I just hope Jasper likes the outfit. It's so nice to have someone to dress for again, someone who will really appreciate the artistry of the craft. I'm so glad that I've been able to augment his meager wardrobe. He's such a good man, and those are hard to find these days. I must be very good to him, one is too many to lose, even if it wasn't my fault. I miss Mick, though...

But now I have Jasper! I knew I had found the right man when he agreed to have children. That's the true test. Anyone willing to go through the process of adoption has got to have the kind of staying power that I have. Won't it be marvelous to have a child in the house, that we can love and teach and watch grow. It's all I've ever really wanted. It's hard to have children in the gay community, I've seen people try and fail, but I've seen them succeed too. I know we can. All our friends will fall in love with the child, you wait and see. Jasper and I, we can do anything.

Good God, you'd think she'd have the decency to dress like a human

being. Well, she's young, I'm sure she'll grow out of it. Tie-dye, give me a break. He eyed the young woman with an amused distaste.

She eyed him right back and rolled her eyes at him as she passed by. What a jerk, she thought. Just because you look like Ken doesn't mean I have to look like Barbie. It took me just as long to put this outfit together, believe me. To hell with him.

What am I going to do about Cherie? If she has that kid it'll ruin her entire life. She's too bright to end up in a housing project married to some fool. She says she won't have an abortion, but...no, it's her decision. I can only do what I can, and that doesn't include living her life. What a shame, though, she would have made such a brilliant writer. I guess she can always take it up later.

I should be thinking about my own school work, nothing I can do about hers. Two tests next week, that paper looming over my head. They'd better have the stuff I need at the library, or my ass is grass. Christ if I don't make Dean's list this semester I'll never hear the end of it from Mom. Nag, nag, nag. She never seems to remember that I have a life, even if she doesn't. I have friends and things to do other than school work. I've got George to think about and if it doesn't work out between us I'm through with men, that's it. He's a nice guy, but I'm sick of being pushed and shoved into things that I don't want a part of. No, he'd better watch his step, or else.

Okay, here we are. Library, don't let me down. As she walked up the steps a woman on her way out held the door for her and the student smiled winningly and thanked her. The older woman smiled too and let the door fall shut as the student passed through.

Nice kid, she thought. A lot like that kid on ward six. Wish I could do something for her. Too much pain, too long in the dark. I can only help heal her body, I can't help her mind. But I would if I could.

Maybe I should get out of nursing, I'm not sure it's worth the blood I put into it. Maybe I should just leave the hospital, start a practice...don't be silly, you're being silly again. You can take it, it's all right. Besides, what would Randy say if you quit. He always said I wasn't a quitter, he should at least have been right about that...

What shall I get for Stephanie's birthday? Sweet sixteen used to mean a lot, I'll have to call Marta and find out if it still does. Adolescence is such a difficult time, I'd like to help her as much as I can. Maybe I should take her on a trip of some kind, shopping or to Wing Street, I know a lot of kids her age hang out there. Hell, Randy and I used to go there when we were young. Yes, that is a good idea. That way she can pick out her own gift. Sometimes it's best not to try out-think them.

God, I wish we'd had one or two of our own. Vicarious parenting just doesn't cut it. And then I'd have something left of him...Well, maybe it's for the best. I know what it's like to lose a parent before that parent's time. Maybe Martha's right, maybe I should jumpstart my social life again.

I've got to get down to the youth center, that'll get me going, she thought, noticing a nervous gang member beribboned in red. She saw too many of those inside and out of the hospital.

Shit, man, it's just an old white woman! You got to calm yo self down. Blood runnin' too hot today, save it for tonight. Then--pay back time! Damn Hawks'll pay for what they did to Matte, they'll pay. Glad I found this knife, he thought, fondling its ragged handle. Brothers won't give me a gun since the last time, but I can still help. Just have to be a little sneakier than usual.

Can't believe Momma threw me out of the house! Bitch! Women just don't understand honor, blood, hate. Bitch just don't get it. Fine, I don't need her, she can just fuck off. Think she so much better than me...bitch drove Pop off too. See how she manages without us. Sister stick by me, the rest just that much meat.

Here's Sparks. He nodded to the other boy. Yeah, I'm ready, he thought, ready to spit some blood, ready to spill some blood. They walked on in silence, unwilling to announce their presence to anyone, friend or foe. Other boys began to fall in around them, appearing as ghosts from doorways and alleys. He felt strong, strong enough to take all of the Hawks. Be dusk soon, that's the best time. Can't tell shadows from people, great as long as we have the advantage. *Surprise!*

They quickly took places and lay quietly in wait. Then--the darkest flash of green. The street erupted in gunfire.

Now's my chance, got to taste it! He lunged at the first green he saw, stabbing viciously. The blood was warm on his hands and the screams, indistinguishable from the others, were like the most poignant violin concerto. When he reached for the throat the world stopped. The little string of plastic beads fell to the ground with a clatter on the grate. Thin little neck, who are you? He tasted the sweet, rancid blood on his soul. In the light of the store front he saw the tiny black face, tiny flat nose, beautiful wide eyes, wide with terror and pain.

N--wh--

The Grip

By Bob Lane

Thank you for the times you were

there

it is again that empty

feeling

with my heart now and not my

hands

that should have reached

out

-side on the porch where we used to

talk

-ing about the future scared

you

were the one person I thought would be at my side

forever

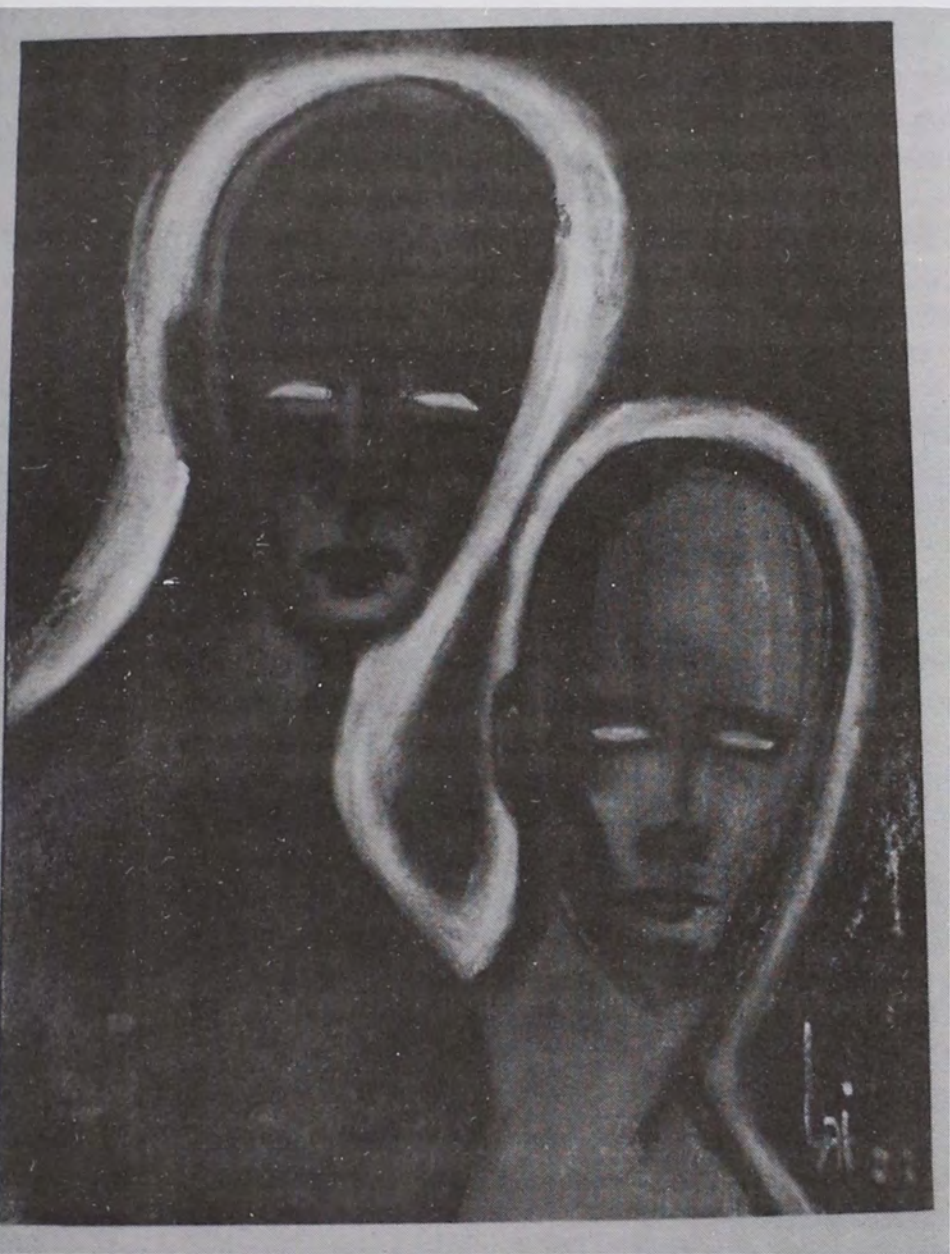
missing you my

friend

-ship that made me

strong

as I may be I will never let go.



Eugenio's Room

by Rich Galeone

The room is plain and white, a crucifix watches over the bed and a yellow moon casts milky shadows on the bureau wall. There is no smell, rather the dry feel of heat in one's nose and the sound of Eugenio's breathing, raspy and slow. On the night stand is a glass, empty but for an olive whose pimento hangs out like a silent tongue, and a pile of books.

He is alone in the bed. On the nights when he drinks he is abandoned by his wife who claims that the snoring disturbs her. She carries her pillow on her shoulder and drags the heavy bedspread behind her so that in the shadows she looks like Christ bearing His cross. He wakes only for a moment and feels the shame of her unhappiness. He had wanted to make love to her, earlier, during the time of conquered inhibitions, but the heaviness came on too soon and he drifted away to disturbed visions.

Eugenio lies uncovered on the white sheet, his dark skin goose-fleshed and the thin blanket kicked down to his ankles. The roof of his mouth is swollen and dry and falls back against the sore wall of his throat blocking the flow of air. He turns his head to the side and tumbles into a world between sleep and death and he cannot move as if on some other world where many atmospheres press him to the surface and he sucks in the heavy air as if breathing mercury.

There is a sound at the door, the little squeak of the knob as it turns, and a thin wall of dust-filled light crosses the room. The door opens further and there is a whisper and a rustle and Eugenio lies still, the long snout and beady eyes of a rat peer around the corner of the high-glossed door jamb. There is no expression in the face of the rat, no fear or happiness of hunger or stealth but only the flat look of a taxidermist's glass eyes. Eugenio takes in long drafts of mercury and fills every lobe and sack of lung to painful fullness and then howls a fearful, desperate silent scream. The rats, for there are four of them, are tall as children and walk upright like men, smell of a foul smell and enter the room quietly and with purpose. They proceed single file and halt when there are two on either side of the bed. Eugenio looks into their dark sore eyes as if he's peering through a window. The rat's lips pull back in a smile and expose a fetid row of cone-shaped teeth. They are not real lips, by only the dark skin under fur which ends as it turns in. And then his open mouth is pressed against Eugenio's lips and his eyes are open looking into Eugenio's eyes, his tongue has entered Eugenio's mouth and it comes and comes and finds Eugenio's tongue and Eugenio is afraid he will suffocate for the tongue has filled his whole mouth and there is the chalky feel of their teeth gnashing together when finally the rodent's tongue is pulled back like a worm caught by a bird's beak.

They pick Eugenio up and his body is stiff as if rigored and solemnly they take him, feet first, out of his room in a funeral march without a coffin. They descend the steep steps to the kitchen and then the bare steps

of the cellar where Eugenio's eyes pass the pock-marked damp concrete walls and his nose smells the dirt-packed mausoleum floor. They lay his body on a marble slab and face him and as they turn he sees their cold eyes and white bibs tied around their necks and knife and fork in each hand.

Eugenio remembers he is in his dream and this is the place where he wakes but he has read in his books that if he forces himself to sleep past this point the dream will not recur. To his surprise Eugenio sees that they have crystal glasses and they are passing around a bottle of vodka and filling the glasses full so that there is a meniscus hanging over each rim and they are not yet carving meat from the bone. They hold the glasses up in a victor's toast and he remembers that if you dream that you die, you really die.

Eugenio tries to wake. He tries to shake his body from side to side but it is heavy under all the atmosphere and he must concentrate on breathing and he worries that he is smothering, wrapped in blankets. Then, as if from under water, he wakes, and gasps in the dry hot air.

Instantly he knows he will be awake for hours as if his body is overfilled with helium and he has risen too far from the depths and fear has scared away the tortured being who sleeps in his body. He has made this trip before, a hundred times before, and he knows the hills and valleys and the detours and the length of the road. In his fingers and toes, arms and legs there is an itching of the bones, something deep within where nothing can reach to relieve, like worms eating at the marrow.

* * * *

Eugenio does not have to drink but he elects to. He did not plan on drinking this day but his students, those reluctant scholars of Greek antiquity, were especially dull and he could see the boredom in their eyes as if they were thinking Who cares what this man is saying; Of what possible consequence to my life is it that Achilles withdrew his forces from the rest of the Greeks; Is it possible that a man of his years has not yet achieved significance? And he remembers the blank faces of the people on the train, empty lusterless eyes, spiritual cataracts filtering out the whole encyclopedia of human learning save sports statistics and soap sex. He had buried himself between the turned up collar of his overcoat and the halo of his fedora and escaped to a remote burrow of solitude. The peace and the loneliness of that place pulled Eugenio away from the hard faces and graffitied car and captured him in a deep sleep. But too soon, there was something in the quality of the light, the flickering of shadows cast on the train, that called him back from his asylum and deposited him onto the concrete platform of Frankford Station.

Eugenio walks the two treeless blocks to his house. His wife has surrendered to the jaws of depression and is slowly digested in its maw. She does not speak or gesture or react in any way as he enters the room but only looks sullenly at her checkbook and the pile of bills scattered about

the kitchen table like fellow artifacts of the shark's belly. There is no longer the energy or the desire and Eugenio does not think to pull her back from that acid pool but opens the refrigerator door and glows in the holy light of eternal mother-love, reaches for the bottle of vodka chilling dreams of happiness and passion and terror next to the diet ginger ale. It pours itself into a glass and finds its way to the table next to Eugenio's chair from which he holds audience with the impeccably groomed, well spoken, sexually desirable electric images of hopeless emulation.

* * * *

But now, Eugenio is alone with his wet body and sticky sheet and restitution must be made. There is a protocol to be followed and the feet of his dehydrated body touch and freeze to the wooden floor as he sees death's gruesome mask staring from the frame of the second floor window, but is afraid to look directly, afraid to affirm its presence, instead looks obliquely at the bureau, and thus, only by degrees does he realize the image is merely the reflection of his lamp on the billowed screen. He washes down too many aspirin with volumes of flat chemicaled water, then wallows back to the bed where his full belly presses up so that he is short of breath and long of worry about his tormented body and the genetic ticking and tocking of his wretched heart. He picks up a book, worn and loved, tries to escape to the sanctuary of it's yellowed pages, read about Hector and the Trojans but worries instead of the aspirin burning holes in the pickled lining of his stomach, and his uncle whose stomach has been repeatedly cut away by supercilious butchers in green uniforms and he wonders what they've done with those strips of ulcerated tissue.

Eugenio has turned out the light and tosses for hours within the spun cocoon of his blanket, worried about vertigo and nausea and disorientation and the dreaded palpitations which will inhabit his day. He turns finally to prayer but confronts instead the lost faith and denied gods and hypocrisy of his adolescence, pleads for the intercession of the Virgin, whose statue Eugenio's wife has kept on the sill above the sink in the kitchen since the priest touched it to a relic piece of Christ's cross, a chip of wood in a glass tube, and then considers which member of the Trinity to implore. Dare he approach the Father, the all knowing, ever present, omnipotent, most superlative being of everything praiseworthy. Who by His very nature, must also be the most forgiving (but, how then, the most just) and so, will forgive Eugenio his sins of excess and bestow on him that healing balm of sleep by a mere thought or a slight gesture with no more effort than the losing of an eyelash. Perhaps, he thinks, he should seek the protective wings of the Holy Ghost for the Spirit is seldom petitioned, and so, might be more receptive to a Pharisee's convenient penance. But Eugenio decides on the Son for He was human and had the temptation of the devil, tasted wine and had a man's heart conquered by the lustful Magdalene and he approaches the Son as an old friend.

Eugenio jumps as he does when dreaming of falling from a cliff or off a

high rock as if his conscious mind will not surrender control to the sleeping being within and he tries to make his mind go blank and pictures a black starless universe but there is always a Martian dot in the vacuum which swells to a scarlet globe and fills his whole vision as if he is looking through eyelids at a desert sun. And, with few decibels, he chants an Eastern Ohmmmm of meditation but carries it too long and becomes overly concerned with breathing and drops to too low an octave so the sound vibrates the waxy hair of his ears when he GASPS, and gives up the quest.

His vow of abstinence is desperate and pulled up from a deep canyon and he wonders why he's forgotten time and again the black torture that the uncorking of the bottle rains down upon the earth of his miserable life and he feels the throbbing in the muscles of his head, the dryness of his mouth and the nausea in his chest and shoulders. He will never drink again. He has learned his lesson, Cause has had its effect. He has finally reached maturity and will leave the paraphernalia of his crisis, his menopause, behind and shed the barren uterus and malignant addictions of his youth. He will lie awake in penance and suffer the consequences of his actions. He will pray to the Savior for grace and the grace will give him strength and with this thought he drifts away.

Eugenio is aware of a large black box with a metal lid resting at the foot of his bed and he hears the melodious rhythm of a snake charmer's flute and smells a certain saloon where he drinks vodka and eats black chunks of burnt beef. When Eugenio blinks there is a loud clapping of his eyelids as if two slats of wood are smacked together. The music stops and the metal lid of the box springs back with a mighty force, a foul wind blows out of the chest and around Eugenio's room, as a giant Jack-in-the-box explodes from its cubicle and swells to fill the entire expanse of his vision with an earth-shattering WELL? But this is no laughing Jack-in-the-box with its cloth-covered spring. This is a fearsome giant with distended head and varicose eyes which look through Eugenio and see his insignificance.

It is dark and cold and the streets of the city are bare. Eugenio finds himself running down Carrion Street past the old bowling alley of high school memories and toward the eerily quiet post office where he would rush with his father for the late night pick-up. His flesh is cold and heart pounding when he sees his nakedness, his blackened feet, bloody and sore, and smells the familiar soot of the gutter. There is the giant chasing him. Eugenio runs and is gasping for air. The giant walks but gains on Eugenio as the earth quakes with each footfall of those colossal legs. There is a Z shaped intersection at the corner of the post office and Eugenio runs through it just as the giant's moon-cast shadow covers him and he ducks into the seamy darkness of an alley to await his tormentor's overtaking, pawing, dismembering, eating, and he fights to control the gasping suck of his hungry lungs and looks up to see the monster in hat and coat pass by unconscious of Eugenio hiding behind a pile of trash.

The rosy-fingered morning dawns and Eugenio finds himself on a great

macadamed parking lot of a supermarket bounded by stygian shore, and crossing the stream of that shore in a longboat is the giant wearing a black mitre and carrying an oaken shillelagh and a large bottle. Eugenio starts to run but his steps are short and painful and his eyes drop in horror to see that he has ground away his feet and hobbles only on the bloody stumps of his ankles, and as the demon steps from his boat, Eugenio falls to his hands and knees but the hard cinder and sharp glass eat too soon into tender flesh so that he lies down and tries to roll away to buy, if only a few, extra seconds. And then Eugenio's body begins to rise in circles above the ground like a gull in an updraft, the monster jumps to grab at him with a horny claw but gashes the leg only, and Eugenio rises high and uncontrollable above the surface so that the giant becomes a dot and the stream a trickle. There is a great bellow from the earth, the monster holds up the shillelagh, and a bolt of lightening shoots up to the sky, enters Eugenio's chest, and pulls him by the heart back to the trembling land.

The great thorny paw of the monster grabs Eugenio about his neck and that inhuman thumb presses like a spike into his soft windpipe so that Eugenio twists and squirms and grays, and when finally he does loosen the grip, he inhales the putrid exhaust of the devil's evil breath. The giant pins him to the cindered pavement, takes a towel soaked in white vodka, and stuffs it down and further down Eugenio's throat and blocks his air so that Eugenio must tear the nail from his own neck and punch a hole through flesh and cartilage to gain a forced sucking pant. Then Eugenio is thrust against the narrow mouth of the bottle and the monster pushes Eugenio's nude body roughly through the vessel's spout so that it gouges out bleeding stigmata of arms, legs and chest and like a firefly caught in a savage menagerie falls, tumbling through space, to the bottom of the bottle. When he lands he is greeted by a sleeping tarantula and the half eaten body of his dead father whose yellow waxy face begs him to be quiet lest he wake the beast and be consumed and as he says this the hairy spider moves and attacks with unexpected speed and Eugenio's only weapon is the old man's torso which he lifts and beats the animal with until both bodies are entangled in the ropy web and the face of the giant laughs and fogs the side of the bottle when Eugenio awakes in his own bed.

Eugenio takes too many aspirin, showers, shaves and picks out a tie. He carries his dirty glass and copy of Homer to the kitchen, makes a cup of coffee, lights a cigarette, and, leaving for the train, places the bottle of vodka in the refrigerator next to the diet ginger ale.

Amnesiac

By Gar Donecker

Kissing frankly the window pane,
How startled you are to see the sun.
Tracing your frail finger down the frame,
Forgetting your weakness in light
Of this outdoor dimension,

Like a toddler in the zoo you stare
Openmouthed. Your thin crimson lips contrast
Pale clinic-lit skin and sponge bathed hair
Wet in dark strands to your cheek and nape.
Of recovery, the doctor that I asked

Apologized helplessly; few return
To wakefulness from so long a sleep;
You're strong. And now the sky is churning
Faintly over disinfected rooftops
As cotton gauze floats, seeped

In blue, filmy like your gown.
Lightly stepping away, sighing
And fogging the window--Shall I bow
To the emaciated majesty before me?
You turn to me and I look for a sign

And am granted a slate-colored, stony
Stare, curious yet strangely void of
Recognition. Now I am stricken, utterly
Mesmerized. Even the silence is sterile
Here; we both take a tentative

Forward step. And stop. Slowly
You grow a smile, and I receive,
Not the welcome, distant, echoing
Remembrance of the sky, but a familiar
Wry grin, both wary and eager.

Life At The Edge

By Chris Major

"Dude, tonight we're getting you laid." Danny's usual greeting. He tries every night to do me the favor, as he clls it, and wonders why I remain faiathful to lori. Tonight is different.

I took the job as a waiter without any previous experience, hoping to make enough to cover expenses for the semester. The money was good, and with the summer on its way, the crowded deck promised a sure way to fill my pockets. The River's Edge Hotel and Restaurant, or The Edge, as it is affectionately called, is a registered landmark dating back to 1803. The oldest free-standing fireplace in the country, according to the framed article hanging crookedly on the wall. Tourists stop in just to see the water marker behind the bar. An etched line with a date scribbled beside it registers just how much of the historic tavern had been submerged in past floods.

Yeah, tonight is different. I fell in love with Lori four years ago. As soon as I saw her I knew it was inevitable. She was wonderful. She loved to have me take her out to dinner a couple times a week, and still let me go out with the guys every Tuesday night. Lately things hadn't been going that well. She contended that I didn't have time for her. Said I was working too much. Said I should have Mom and Dad pay tuition. So she leaves me for a WASP in a convertible.

It's already busy, even for a Friday night. I grab a quick bite of my mushroom steak and a handful of cold fries while Danny, the head chef, recounts his latest conquest.

"You saw that little red-head in the black mini last night, didn't you?" He swigs the bottle of Bud in his hand, taking a long drag on a Marlboro. "Well I took her upstairs and slipped her the mother love bone. Never did ask her name."

Marcel helps himself to my cold fries. "I saw her too, my friend. Not exactly a lady to take home to your mother, you know."

An odd threesome to say the least. Danny, a seventies hold-over, likes to think of himself as Rod Stewart. He's five-foot-four at best. Six-two with attitude. He's pushing forty, but since getting a divorce, finds it necessary to prove his virility every night in the upstairs guest-rooms. Marcel, on the other hand, has been married over thirty years. He's a born frenchman, his dark hair slicked back over his head, neatly pulled back into a pony-tail. I love to listen to his wonderful accent as he explains how to roll your own cherry cigarette. Danny brought him in as his assistant, but Marcel knows more than Danny could ever hope to.

Then there's me, twenty-one and heartbroken.

I pick up my order, a chicken parm sandwich, from under the heat lamp. The plate burns my fingers. I take it out to the deck. A big red-haired guy in a softball uniform stuffs a twenty into my shirt. Two pitchers, Coors Light. Keep it, he says. Nine dollars tip. I love drunks. The deck has its own separate bar on busy nights, but as I shove my way to the front of the crowd, I realize that everyone is in line for the same reason. The kegs are being changed, and rather than wait for the new bartender to fumble with the taps, I head to the tavern room inside.

Even on a hot summer night, the tavern room is packed. They're five deep at the bar. R.E.M. is pounding through the DJ's set-up as sweaty bodies slide past each other to the counter. Christ, it'll be ten minutes before I can get through to get my two pitchers.

I feel a tap on my shoulder.

"Excuse me, you must work here, could you do me a little favor? I could use another Absolut Collins."

I freeze up. God, she's beautiful. How her eyes sparkle, such expressive, ice-blue eyes. And those blond curls. Soft tresses, flowing to the middle of her back. Thin, demure lips. Tan, long legs. Wonderfully taut lines. Am I staring? Does she notice?

"Hello," she giggles, "are you okay?"

Words fail me. I stammer. "Oh, sure. What was it? Absolut Collins, right? Coming up." God, she thinks I'm an idiot.

I meander my way through the crowd, squeezing my way through hostile beer seekers. Excuse me, I work here. Let me through. I feel as if I'm on a mission. How do I get this girl? Who am I kidding, she probably came in with Tom Cruise.

I plunk down the two empties and lay eleven dollars on the counter. Her cute little face is still dancing around in my head. Do something. Get her attention.

I fumble through my pockets for another five dollars and slide it to Ray, the bartender.

"One more thing, Ray," I blurt out. "If you only do me one favor in your whole life, take an Absolut Collins to that little dream over there." I point in the direction of my infatuation. "Tell her its from me."

Embarrassed even to go past her, I take the back way out, through the kitchen, and head out to the deck. I sat the pitchers on the table and a tatoood arm reaches out and grabs me.

"Eleven bucks, right?" He slaps fifteen crumpled bills in my hand. "Keep it."

God, I love drunks.

Feeling pretty good, I make rounds of my other tables, hoping to hustle a few more dollars running drinks.

Jesus, it's her. Lori, with a group of her friends. No WASP with the convertible. And she looks great. Long dark hair. The Ray-Bans that usually hide her light green eyes are now propped up on her head. She's wearing my favorite outfit, the black culottes with the printed blouse. I walk over and say hello.

"Sorry," she smirks, "I forgot you were working tonight."

She's lying through her teeth. Go ahead. Rub it in.

"We have to talk. I think we made a mistake," she says in a curt, right-now kind of way.

A mistake she says. She fucking leaves me for an Ivy league asshole, and she says we made a mistake. Don't give in. It was her mistake. "Okay, but I'm kind of busy right now." Nice going you pussy-whipped jellyfish.

"Well, as soon as you can," she whines. She traces her fingertips over the table top.

I race back to the kitchen for a huddle and nearly collide with my infatuation on the way.

"There you are!" she chimes. "I was looking for you, the bartender said you might be out here. Thanks for the drink, it was really cute."

I search for something clever to say. "I always buy the cutest girl in the bar a drink. I just started it tonight, so that makes you the first." Now she knows I'm an idiot.

She laughs. "You're too much. Hey," she touches my arm, "I'm inside with my girlfriend and her fiancée, and I'm feeling like a third wheel. Why don't you join us after you're done?"

I feel my face flush. "I'd really like that," I say sheepishly, "but I'm not quite sure when I'll be done. It's usually around midnight."

"Well, if you can, my name is Cindy."

With that, she disappears into the barroom. I sprint to the kitchen.

"Danny, Marcel! Look at this!" I peer through the window, searching for Cindy. She's near the video box. I point her out.

"Dude," says Danny, "I said I was getting you laid tonight, but I ain't no fucking magician. Besides, we both know you don't have the balls to fuck around."

"Listen, asshole," I counter, "Lori dumped me for some pretentious fuckboy, anyway. I'll do what I want."

Danny changes his tune. "Then I say I can get you upstairs with her."

I shudder for a moment as these words flow through me. He makes it sound so cold, so unfeeling. Do I want to be just like him? I love Lori. "Lori's outside. Wants to talk to me," I say.

Marcel interjects. "Listen boy, I know more about this than

Danny and his debauchery. I say talk to Lori before you get mixed up with this girl."

I head back outside. I reach the door and feel the summer breeze against my face. It's a beautiful night, not too hot, even for late July. The stars are out. I remember how Lori and I would sit out at Valley Forge on a night like this. Park the car in some out-of-the-way spot, grab the blanket and the bottle of Sutter Home. Sit back and count the stars. God, we were in love. Sometimes we'd talk about getting married.

"How about a fucking drink, man?" An empty handed drunk yanks my arm, bringing me back to reality. I manage to hustle a few more around the table.

Carrying a tray full of drinks in one hand and two pitchers of Coors Light in the other, I hear the familiar sultry voice over my shoulder.

"Hey handsome, got a minute?" She winks and beckons me to follow. "Come here."

I set the drinks on the table and follow her out to the parking lot. Before I could say a word, she pulls me close and presses her soft, wet mouth to mine. It feels so right. As much as I want to hold her I can't.

"Jesus," I say, "not here, Lor." Even as I say it I can smell the Perry Ellis perfume. My favorite.

"Well, there's a blanket in my car and..."

"What about Biff, or whatever his name is?" I jab. "If you want to, we'll talk later, okay?"

I step up to the bar to find out where the action is and the bartender hands me a drink. Says a blond was here. I chug it heartily, an Absolut Collins. I pause a moment and slap six dollars on the counter.

"Give me a double Jack Daniels." I raise the rocks glass to my lips, throw back my head and close my eyes. I gently replace the glass, and slide it along the counter. Liquid courage. I'm drowning.

I head to the tavern room. Sitting at the bar, looking at the water marker, is Cindy. I approach and say thank you. Finally, I introduce myself.

She smiles. "I see the Absolut Collins worked. I thought you'd never come back in." She nervously tugs at her hair. "I'm sorry, I know you're probably busy, but the offer still stands from before. Besides, I think you're kind of nice, unlike all the other guys around here."

She squeezes my hand, turns and traipses on to the dance floor, joining a guy and another girl.

I glance down at my watch, time enough for last call. I head

back outside. It's only a matter of time before I get accosted by Lori.

"It didn't work out between us, if you're really wondering." I know she means Biff.

"Besides," she coos, "I always liked you better."

Obviously he dumped her. I feel like I'm in a whirlpool, the current sucking me under.

"Listen Lor, I'm almost done. Can we quit playing games? We'll talk later, in private."

She pouts. "I guess so." She turns and walks away.

Time for last call. I hustle my tables one more time, run a few rounds. Decisions race through my head. I've got the sure thing on one hand -- I could go back to Valley Forge with Lori and a blanket. Just like old times. Then again, Cindy is nice. Danny's pushing for her. Yet I want more than just taking her upstairs and never seeing her again. Maybe Marcel is right.

I carry two pitchers to my last table. I can call it a night. I go inside and get cleaned up and out of my polyester polo with the Edge logo on the left breast. I walk through the kitchen as Danny is slapping on his Musk.

"Dude." He winks, and continues, "I got my little piece lined up to take upstairs. Why don't you take your little piece up for the magic carpet ride?" He does his little dance, shuffling in place.

Marcel gives me a stern look as he throws down a shot of Vodka. They both disappear into the barroom.

I'm alone again. It feels as if the walls are closing in around me. I sneak into the Private Stock, Danny and Marcel keep a bottle of Stolli in the freezer for emergencies. I pour myself a double.

I raise the glass. It looks so much like water.

Do I just want to take Cindy upstairs? I feel myself sinking to Danny's level. This isn't how I want it. I think of Valley Forge. I feel like I'm drowning. I set the full glass back on the counter.

I head back outside. Lori is sitting alone. I sit next to her. She throws her arms around me. I feel suffocated.

"I knew I'd get you back. Now why don't we just forget about this last week and get in the car." She smiles and runs her fingers over my lips.

"Excuse me," I say, "I'll be right back."

I slowly walk into the bar. Cindy is sliding quarters into the video box. She glances up and smiles. I return the smile and she shyly says hello. She's so...nice.

I feel a tap on my shoulder.

"Party moves upstairs in ten minutes, dude." Danny hands me two Molsons and disappears to find his "piece."

Cindy giggles. "That's neat, I didn't know you had parties upstairs." She tugs my arm. "Can we go?"

No Danny. Don't do this.

"I'll tell you what, Cindy," I begin, looking into those innocent blue eyes, "it's such a beautiful night, why not take advantage of it? Can we go for a walk along the river?"

She takes my hand softly. "That sounds nice. It is a bit stuffy in here. It would be nice to talk in private." She squeezes my hand.

I turn and lead her to the door. I hold it open for her. I look back and see Lori asking Danny where I got to.

By the time he looks over and smiles, we're already gone.

College Love

By Kathy Barret

Stolen moments hide the loneliness.
One night of passion, then a week of lies,
But flesh on flesh is easy to dismiss.

Some alcohol begins the search for bliss,
It adds deep meaning to slurred, empty lines
And stolen moments hide the loneliness.

Slow, romantic songs - my biggest weakness.
Hormones that come alive when music dies.
But flesh on flesh is easy to dismiss.

I could go home alone but then might miss
A gentle touch or gaze into my eyes.
And stolen moments hide the loneliness.

My numb nerves are awakened by a kiss.
Tonight's deep love is just sex in disguise
But flesh on flesh is easy to dismiss.

I promised myself I'd never do this
Again. But time spent with another flies
And stolen moments hide the loneliness.
Is flesh on flesh so easy to dismiss?



Dry Ice and Red Roses

By Theresa Richardson

Tessa Madison thought she might be going insane. If so, insanity was not as she imagined it would be. She thought it would be sudden and violent like a loud clap of thunder. She changed her mind. Maybe it could come slowly and spread through a person without them knowing. But if that were true she wouldn't be sitting there thinking about being insane. She just would be.

Tessa was mulling this over in the back of the local funeral parlor in her small hometown of Hopewell, New Jersey. Her father was the main event of the evening. He was lying dead in a box in the front of the room. People Tessa didn't know were touching him, straightening his collar. Someone put a rose in his lapel like he was going off to a prom or some gala affair. Tessa thought he looked awful and scary. She had started to sit in the front of the room next to her mother but when she got within 10 feet of the box she panicked. Her face turned gray as she quickly did an about face and quietly hurried to the back of the room. Her mother got up and followed her.

"Don't you want to say good-bye to Daddy, Honey?" she asked Tessa quietly.

Tessa looked at the floor and shook her head no. If she spoke she knew it would be a scream at her mother that she most definitely did not want to say good-bye to her daddy.

The funeral parlor was packed with people from town. Everyone who thought they knew Tom Madison. Their murmurings were amplified in Tessa's head.

"Poor Tom. Still so young. His youngest daughter only fourteen."

"Such a waste. He was a drinker you know."

"Everyone knows the man drank too much. If you wanted to find Tom Madison all you had to do was call the Inn or Charlie's Bar and there he was."

"I told him that whiskey would do him in."

"The oldest girl isn't even here. You'd think these girls would want to be more of a comfort to their mother."

In the past, Tessa would have stood up and thrown her chair at the people she heard discussing her father. But Tessa was busy packing her heart up in dry ice for future use. She felt numb inside and out. Her dad would have said she was shellshocked. He always used war words to describe how he felt. Shellshocked, under fire, R&R. R&R days were like rays of sunshine streaming through black clouds for Tessa. Those days her father acted like the dream-dad she had made up and he might take her fishing or take her for a ride on his tractor while he was plowing the fields of their farm. Once he had taken her to the seashore and they built sandcastles all afternoon. They watched as the ocean waves came up on shore and washed their sandcastle away. Tessa was sad as her father explained

that absolutely nothing would last forever. Tessa knew he was right. Not sandcastles or rainbows or R&R days and most certainly not fathers.

Tessa wondered what was her older sister Joanne feeling. Joanne said she couldn't go to the funeral because there was no one to sit with her one-year old son, David. Tessa would gladly have sat with the baby while Joanne endured the body in the box and their mother's red, puffy eyes and the cruel sympathy flowing out of people's well-meaning mouths.

Joanne had returned home a few days before the funeral. Joanne had been away to college in Virginia two years earlier when Tessa was 12 and Joanne was 18. Mrs. Madison was determined her daughters would go to college and make a better life for themselves than she had. After Joanne had been away for a year, Mrs. Madison received a disturbing phone call. Tessa remembered how her mother had gripped the arm of the chair until her knuckles turned white while she was talking to Joanne. When she hung up the phone Tessa could tell her mother was not pleased.

"Married! Married at nineteen and has a baby. All this time she hasn't been going to school, she's been getting pregnant and getting married and I know absolutely nothing about it. Who does this boy think he is, taking advantage of a young, innocent girl? MY poor darling all alone in Virginia on a Marine base with a baby. She says she's happy but I know she must be miserable. Tessa, she married a Marine!"

Tessa could not believe Joanne had been crazy and impulsive because she had been that way all of Tessa's life. Always taking chances and doing things to be different. Tessa could not believe her sister had married a Marine. The whole town knew their father had been a Marine and it had broken his heart and his spirit. Mrs. Madison loved her husband but did not want her daughters to go through what she had gone through because of the war. Now her eldest daughter's husband was a Marine and there was a war on. Life was out of control.

Tessa knew about live combat from the stories her father would tell. He would tell anyone he could get to sit still long enough. Tessa would cringe as he'd tell his stories about the "dirty little Nips" who would hide up in the trees and try to pick him and his buddies off. When he was done with a story he'd look at Tessa as if he had no idea who she was. He was so lost. Her father drank to forget Guadalcanal but the only thing he forgot was his wife and daughters who were desperate to love him only he didn't know how to love them back.

It was August 1967 when Mr. Madison died. Joanne's husband, Allen, had been in Vietnam since June. Joanne said Allen had wanted her to come home right away after he left but she wouldn't as long as her father was living at home.

Tessa noticed Joanne had changed since she had gotten married. When Joanne had first left home for college, Tessa hadn't missed her that much. Joanne was usually angry at their father and would take it out on anyone who was available, like Tessa. A lot of tension had gone out of Joanne

when their father died. She took time to talk to Tessa, usually about how much she loved and missed Allen. Tessa wondered what it was like to be in love. She thought Joanne looked like she should have still been in high school instead of worrying about a husband in the war. Tessa wished she looked more like her sister who was tall and slender with long chestnut brown hair and huge hazel eyes and pale white skin. Tessa realized her own looks had improved significantly since last year. She lost what her mother had referred to as "baby fat", a term Tessa found disgusting when talking about someone as old as she was at fourteen.

When Joanne wasn't writing to Allen she was taking care of David. David was the joy of her existence. All events in her life had led to the creation of that precious human being. Joanne took so many pictures of David to send to Allen, Tessa thought he'd go blind from all the flashbulbs going off in his face. Joanne wrote to Allen every day and sent pictures and books and food. He wrote back as often as he could and Joanne lived for the mailman to come. If the mail was late, Joanne would fume and blame the mailman personally for her suffering.

It was right after Thanksgiving in '67 that Allen wrote to Joanne to have her family write to some of the guys in his platoon who never got any mail and he gave her the name of one soldier in particular, Sgt. George Jones.

It took Joanne weeks to get Tessa to write to Sgt. Jones. At first Tessa said she had too much to do. She was in her first year of high school and it was harder than junior high had been. But Joanne played on Tessa's guilt. She knew she could make Tessa feel guilty about anything. Tessa felt that anything bad that happened could somehow be traced back to her. Like if she had loved her father a little bit more he might have stopped drinking and if he had, then Joanne wouldn't have had to go away and then she wouldn't have met Allen and be worrying about him and crying herself to sleep every night and Tessa wouldn't have to write to Sgt. Jones. Joanne painted a picture in Tessa's mind of a poor, lonely boy-Marine, sitting in a foxhole halfway across the world, looking dejected while all his buddies were reading their mail and he had no letter of his own.

Then Mrs. Madison said she didn't think it was such a good idea for a young, impressionable girl to be writing to a strange soldier. Tessa began writing to Sgt. Jones that day.

Nov. 29, 1967

Dear Sgt. Jones:

My name is Tessa Madison and I'm 14 years old. My brother-in-law, Allen Conner, is in your unit and he said I could write to you if I wanted to. I hope that's okay.

I live in Hopewell, New Jersey with my sister, Joanne (Allen's wife) and their son David and my mom. We live on a farm but since there's no one to run it anymore, my mom is trying to sell it. She sold all the cows and other animals. We had 100 cows and I had named them all which seems pretty

illy now. We aren't going to sell our house though, just the farm. I'm glad we don't have to move. Our house is small but nice. It's a white cottage with a porch that wraps all the way around it and there's a rose garden in the side yard. In the summer you can't smell anything but roses.

How old are you? Most soldiers I read about aren't very much older than me. When will you get out of the Marines? Are you going to make a career out of it like Allen is? Did you like high school when you went? I just started my freshman year in September. Where are you from? I'm sending you a rose I pressed in the pages of a book. You can still smell the summer in it. I hope you like it.

I see bits of the war on the news and hear about it on the radio. My dad was in WWII and he told me about his war. I hope you don't have as bad a time as he did. I hope you get to come home soon. Take good care of yourself and say hi to Allen for me.

Tessa Madison

Joanne mailed the letter with the ones she wrote to Allen. Tessa was in agony wondering if Sgt. Jones would think her letter was stupid and didn't want some kid writing to him at all. She wished she didn't care. She didn't know why she should.

Sgt. Jones did write back. Tessa took the letter and climbed out of her bedroom window and out onto the porch roof to read it even though it was a cold day. It was a short letter. The printing was very neat and perfect. Sgt. Jones thanked her for writing to him and hoped she would write again. He was 19 years old. He said he'd been there for more than a year and when a soldier lasted that long, they sort of automatically made him a sergeant. He enjoyed serving with Allen and Allen was a very confident and capable officer, well liked by his men. Allen was 2nd Lieutenant in charge of the 2nd platoon in K Company. Sgt. Jones wrote that Vietnam was very beautiful but was scared by artillery shelling and bombing. On top of the bombing, it was monsoon season there and the weather was "not at all agreeable". Tessa knew that had to be a record for understatement. Sgt. Jones said he liked the pressed rose very much and put it in the band of his helmet for good luck.

Tessa was touched by this one, short letter from this soldier she didn't even know. She considered taking her heart out of dry ice and giving it to Sgt. Jones. He was 19, only 5 years older than Tessa. He was getting out in 6 months. She'd be almost 15 by then. When she was 18, George Jones would only be 23 and she'd have caught up to him in a way. After that first letter she wrote to Sgt. Jones constantly. He became "her soldier" and she felt responsible for his happiness. She sent him books and magazines and baked him cookies and poured her heart out to him in letters that sometimes became so long Sgt. Jones said he didn't have time to read them all in one sitting. He had to wait between firefights and patrols and

duties to finish them. Tessa told him he could write to her about anything he wanted to. Sometimes he'd write about how he was tired and scared. It was hard to tell who the enemy was and he'd watched so many men get killed. The days were often peaceful but the nights were hell. He felt as though he hadn't slept since he arrived. Mostly Sgt. Jones would tell Tessa about his dreams of going to college, meeting a nice girl, falling in love and making a home for himself. Tessa wondered about the nice girl in his dreams.

Tessa wanted Joanne to take her picture in one of the sexy nighties Joanne had gotten in anticipation of Allen's future homecoming. Joanne convinced her that Sgt. Jones wouldn't want to have any thing to do with a girl who would send a picture of herself like that. Tessa felt it would perk up Sgt. Jones' spirits and maybe motivate him to look her up when he got out of the service. But Tessa had to settle for having her picture taken in one of Joanne's tighter sweaters. Joanne even put a little make-up on her and Tessa tried to look as grown-up as she could as she smiled for the camera and Sgt. Jones.

Mrs. Madison did not like Tessa writing the "Sgt. Jones character" as she put it.

"Did this Sgt. Jones ever mention where he was from, Tessa?" Mrs. Madison asked.

"Yeah, he's from New York City but he doesn't want to live there when he gets back to the states. Maybe he'll come and live in New Jersey." Tessa said.

"George Jones. It doesn't sound like a very 'white' name, does it Joanne?" Mrs. Madison asked her eldest daughter.

"Don't talk to Joanne, Mom. Talk to me. And what does being white have to do with anything? I haven't even thought about whether he's white or black, ugly or handsome, short or tall, fat or skinny or anything like that. His letters are wonderful and he's young and scared and fighting for our country and I care about him. I know I'm only 14 but I won't be forever. I mean, what if I do marry a black man someday? If I love him, will it matter? Will you love me less? God, Mom, you're so hypocritical!" and Tessa ran to her bedroom.

Tessa didn't understand why her mother was trying to ruin what she'd found in Sgt. Jones. Her mother didn't know that deep inside, Tessa was reaching out and saving her father from the war that had hurt him so badly. Maybe if she touched Sgt. Jones and made him feel there was something to hope for, life would have some kind of balance again.

Tessa and Joanne had become closer since Tessa had begun staking a personal interest in the war. They watched the news together and mailed their letters and packages. They looked at each other with those worried looks. Mrs. Madison begged Joanne to stop encouraging Tessa to write to this Marine but Joanne thought everyone should get involved in what was happening in Vietnam. If everyone was worried about someone over there,

Maybe they'd bring them all home sooner.

Tessa had just gotten home from school the day the congressman's car drove up their drive. She heard her mother yell, "There's a car in the driveway! And a man in uniform is coming to the front door!"

Tessa watched from the stairs as her mother scrambled around. No one ever used the front door. It stuck and the lock was broken and had to be opened with a screwdriver. "It's not in the drawer of the bookcase! Where is it!" She was frantic. Tessa held her breath as the tall man in uniform came up the porch steps. Mrs. Madison finally found the screwdriver in the kitchen. She heaved a sigh of relief as she yanked open the front door, just as the man was getting ready to knock.

He explained he was Congressman somebody or another and had to speak to Mrs. Joanne Connor, wife of Allen Michael Connor.

Joanne was playing with David in the other room. She looked like a slob that day. Her hair was up in huge, pink, plastic rollers and she had on an old pair of black stretch pants. She hadn't been expecting a congressman in uniform to show up for a visit. Her mother stood so still, Tessa forgot she was even there.

Joanne came in the room all embarrassed and smiling nervously. David was toddling after her. The man in uniform had a very solemn expression on his face. He looked as though he'd been practicing to say something over and over to himself and was having a hard time getting it out. Joanne tried to help him. "Can I help you with something? Is it about my husband, Allen? Is anything wrong?" Panic hit her face. Her eyes bugged out and her forehead wrinkled up and she started to lose control. "Tell me! Tell me what's happened!!" the man cleared his throat and started to say something like, "It is with the deepest regret I must inform you..." But Joanne wouldn't let him finish. "NO!" she screamed. "No, No, No, No, No, No, No, No..." over and over she said it as if she didn't let him finish, the words wouldn't be true.

Tessa never heard the rest of what the man had to say. Mrs. Madison thanked him for coming and asked him to please leave. He turned and walked out the door. Allen was dead.

Tessa looked at her sister and knew there was nothing anyone could say. Joanne held David close to her. Now her "No's" had become a whimper, saying no, no, no into David's curly, fine hair as she rocked back and forth. He was crying too. Maybe he even understood.

Tessa slipped down the stairs and out the door. She ran after the tall congressman and tugged at his sleeve.

"Please sir, do you know about anyone else in Allen's platoon? I mean, did they all die? Please, I have a friend. His name is Sgt. Jones. Can you tell me anything about him? I've been writing to him for 4 months and he was going to visit me when he got out. He gets out of the service in April. Just two months away. Please can't you tell me something?" Tessa pleaded.

The congressman cupped her chin in his hand. "You'd best forget you ever wrote to a Marine in that platoon" he said to her sadly. "There's no one left to write to now." He got into his car and drove away.

A few weeks later, Joanne moved to Ohio with Allen's family. They buried Allen in their family plot. Joanne wanted to be close to Allen and the people who had loved him best.

Tessa was with her mother when she opened the package from the Marine Corps. It was Allen's personal effects all packed up in a cardboard box. When they opened it the first thing that hit them was the smell. Everything was damp and smelled like rotted leaves and grass. There were his dog tags, and uniforms. Tessa picked up a bunch of letters and pictures. They were the letters Joanne had written and pictures of the baby. The letters were all torn and dirty and the pictures had muddy fingerprints all over them. Tessa thought about Allen looking at those photographs over and over, carrying them with him everywhere. His special treasure. All he wanted was to be with his family again. He wanted to live.

Tessa recieved a letter from another Marine not long after Allen's package had come. His name was Corporal John Bennett. He had been a good friend of Sgt. Jones'. The corporal wanted Tessa to know "the sarge" really appreciated and enjoyed all those letters and things she had sent to him. The sarge didn't have anybody in the States to do stuff like that. Even though all the guys teased him about Tessa being "jail bait" the sarge got a big kick out of how Tessa really wanted to be his friend. Even though he knew Tessa's mother would probably call the national gaurd, he had wanted to look her up when he got out in a couple of months. He used to share part of her letters with the corporal and that was why he wanted to write. To make sure she knew the sarge was gone. It wouldn't have been fair for her not to know for sure. The corporal said she could write to him if she wanted to. Maybe that way she wouldn't feel she had lost so much. Cpl. Bennett told her Sgt. Jones had carried the rose she had sent and her picture until his death. He sent back the rose but hoped she didn't mind him hanging on to her picture.

There it was. The rose she had mailed across the sea months before had come back to rest in her hand.



FOREVER A MONUMENT**By Karen Lunova**

FOREVER A MONUMENT,

CARVED IN STEEL AND RUBBER.

FILLED WITH FLOWERS,

SHOUTING OUT THEIR CHORUS OF COLOR,

IN SILENT TRIBUTE. . .

TO RACES WON,

AND KNEES SCRAPED (AND PAINT CHIPPED),

TO PAPERS DELIVERED AND BOTTLES COLLECTED,

AND THE LITTLE GIRLS, CARTED AND COURTED

(FOREVER GIGGLING, FLASHING THEIR PUMPKIN GRINS)

FORCED INTO OBSOLESCENCE

(BY A RED CONVERTIBLE MUSTANG OF COURSE)

AGED AND UNWANTED

BY ANYONE BUT A MOTHER WITH A

GREEN THUMB AND A WARM HEART,

TOO WONDERFUL TO GO THE WAY OF BROKEN

TINKER TOYS,

QUIETLY IT STANDS, FOREVER A MONUMENT,

EVERYWHERE)

(TO MISCHIEVIOUS LITTLE IMPS

Melanie

by Donna Cuddeback

Sitting next to her father at the front of the courtroom, Melanie watched as the potential jurors filed up to the witness stand one by one to answer questions from the defense attorney, and Mr. Armani, her dad's lawyer.

When his turn came, Mr. Armani pushed back his wooden chair and snapped himself upright like the blade of a jack-knife, sharp and shiny. He marched up to the witness stand and rifled off his questions smoothly: Your name? Age? Marital status? Place of employment? have you any prior knowledge or pre-established opinions concerning this case?

Then, placing both hands firmly on the banister in front of the potential juror, he leaned over, looked the person directly in the eyes and asked: Have you ever been drunk? Have you ever had a fight with your spouse while you were drunk? Has your spouse ever threatened to leave you wherever you are having a fight and walk home? I admit, that this has even happened to me. These things happen. Now, how would you feel if while your wife was walking home after your fight, she was hit by a car and killed? You'd feel pretty damn guilty about that fight, wouldn't you? I know I would. I'd be a wreck. Especially, if like my client Mr. Wagner here, I had two kids at home.

Out of the corner of her eye, Mel saw her father shifting in his seat. She started to reach over and take his hand, but stopped, and let her hand drop back into her lap. She couldn't even look at him for fear she would start crying and never be able to stop.

Mr. Armani continued: And then, after I got over the initial shock and guilt, I'd want to know WHY the driver of the car hit her. I'd want to know how come he didn't see her, and I'd want to know how come he didn't avoid her. Then, I'd be very angry, and I'd want that driver to pay for what he's done to me and my family. I'd want him to pay for taking away my children's mother. Wouldn't you feel the same?

Mel felt the pitying eyes of the potential juror on her, but continued to stare at her hands resting in her lap. That familiar knot tightened in her stomach.

Melanie always thought of that knot as her enemy, and envisioned it working its way up to her throat in an effort to strangle her. It had become a daily battle just to keep the knot loose enough so she could concentrate on her school work and do all the things that needed to be done around the house.

After hours of repeating the same series of questions to each potential juror, the selection process was finally over. Mr. Armani returned to his seat next to Melanie, and patted her knee reassuringly. As they left the courtroom, he gave her a little wink and a smile, and shook hands with her dad. Mel clung to that smile all the way home.

* * *

Flicking on the kitchen lights, Melanie saw a piece of paper propped up against the cookie jar next to the sink. It was a note from Joey, her sixteen year old brother, saying that he had a wrestling match that night and wouldn't be home for dinner. What's new, Melanie thought. Even when he is home he's so grouchy he won't talk to anyone.

Her father came into the house, dropped the mail and his keys on the table, and mixed himself a Black Velvet and coke. Mel wondered when he had gotten the new bottle, and could tell the drink was practically straight B.V. She had learned a long time ago how to judge the strength of a mixed drink by its color.

Melanie picked up the mail, sorted out the bills from the junk, and wrote out checks for the phone and electric. She laid the two checks on the table along with a pen so her dad would sign them.

"What's for dinner, Mel?" Her dad asked from the living room. He was stretched out in the recliner with his feet up. His tie and socks lay in a heap on the carpet. Dan Rather murmured the evening news in the background.

"I was thinking spaghetti. I just want to get the laundry started first," she answered.

"No hurry," he said, returning to the kitchen to mix another drink. Great, she thought, clenching her teeth and escaping to the laundry room.

Mel waited a couple of minutes, then returned to the kitchen. She checked to see that her dad was reclined once again before grabbing the bottle of B.V. and heading for the bathroom. Searching the back of the cabinet under the sink, her hand came to rest on the little box she had hidden there. She opened the bottle of B.V. and emptied about half of it down the sink. Quickly, she added water to replace the alcohol, then opened the box of food coloring and added two drops of yellow and two drops of brown.

Returning the bottle to the kitchen, Mel looked for her Things-To-Do note pad and started making two lists: one of the homework she had to make up for missing classes that day, and a grocery list. The phone rang.

"Hi Mel." It was her friend Lisa. "Why weren't you in school today?"

"I had some things to do with my dad," Mel answered.

"Well look, did you ask if you could go to the dance Saturday night?"

"Not exactly, but it's no big deal. Would your mom mind picking me up on the way?" Mel asked.

"Don't worry, we'll give you a ride. You aren't going to back out of this, are you? Like the roller skating party? You just have to come, Mel." Lisa said.

"I will, I promise. But I have to go now, dad's waiting for dinner."

"Okay, talk to you tomorrow." Lisa said cheerfully. Melanie said goodbye and hung up the phone. She wondered if she could really keep that promise. No matter how much she wanted to go to the junior high dance, she knew that when Saturday came, she would most likely feel

guilty about leaving her dad home alone, and would end up not going.

* * *

Mr. Armani's office was decorated in deep navy, rich green, and burgundy colors. Melanie admired the impressive display of leather bound law books that lined the walls. She especially liked the gold trimmed name plate that sat on his desk, and decided that one day she would have a gold name plate just like his.

"Since your son is being uncooperative," Mr. Armani was saying to her father, "I suggest we center this case around how hard it's been for a fourteen year old girl to adjust to being without her mother. We'll show how much emotional stress has been placed on all of you as a family. Melanie, I want you to be at the trial. I want the jury to see how hard it has been on you to be torn from your mother so tragically. I'm positive that by using Melanie we can get a much larger monetary award than the insurance company is offering, Mr. Wagner. There is no reason why you should accept their settlement. What they're offering is an insult. Mel, it might be a good idea if you wore a real pretty dress. Do you have a pink one?"

"Uh, no," Melanie said.

"Well, how about I take you shopping and then maybe we can stop someplace for a burger? Would that be okay Mr. Wagner? I know you have other things on your mind right now. Okay with you, Mel?" He turned his bright smile on her.

Melanie nodded while her dad muttered "Fine. Whatever you say is right," and got up to leave. "I'll see you back at the house," he said.

Mr. Armani went to tell his secretary to cancel his 12:30 pm meeting. Mel couldn't believe she was having lunch with a lawyer and that he was going to take her shopping. She hadn't been shopping in months. She used to hang out all the time at the mall with Lisa, but that was before mom died.

At the mall, Mr. Armani wasted no time looking in other stores for bargains or sales, he just went straight to Macy's. As they looked through the racks of clothing, Mr. Armani emerged with a pink cotton dress with white ruffles and puffy sleeves.

"How about this one?" he asked, looking quite pleased with his find.

"It's, uh, kind of childish looking, don't you think?" she said.

"It's perfect. Try it on," he said, leading her towards the fitting rooms. She didn't have the heart to object. Once he sees how silly it looks on, she thought, he'll see I'm right.

Mel entered the changing room that the sales girl directed her to, and began undressing. Outside, she could hear Mr. Armani's charismatic voice and that of the sales girl.

"Is that your daughter?" she asked.

"No, I'm her father's lawyer. We're looking for the perfect dress."

"Special occasion?" she asked.

"Not exactly," he chuckled. "We go to trial next week and we need a

pretty pink dress for the young lady. It's a proven fact that juries give large monetary awards when young girls wear pink. It's true. You really have to keep up with the law journals these days to know your stuff."

Melanie emerged from the fitting room feeling very self conscious and very foolish in the dress.

"Beautiful. It's perfect," he said.

"It's awful," Mel groaned, twisting a piece of fabric between her fingers. "I look like I'm five years old."

"That's what we want. We'll take it," he said to the sales girl with a look of triumph. "Now let's get that burger I promised you."

* * *

"Now here's what I want you to do," Mr. Armani said, finishing off the last of his fries. Mel couldn't help but think how out of place he looked in McDonald's. "Just get up on the witness stand and tell the jury how much you loved your mother and what a great mom she was and how much you miss her. Just be honest and answer any questions the defense attorney may ask you."

"You didn't tell me I had to get up on the stand in front of everyone." Mel said. The knot in her stomach began to tighten.

"I know, I know, but it's okay. All you have to do is talk about her. Although, you may have to describe what she looked like at the hospital. The jury likes details. Just tell them how bloody she looked and how horrible an experience it was for you to see your mother dead."

Melanie had begun to cry. She couldn't hold back the hot, stinging tears. Mr. Armani reached across the table and squeezed her hand, which she quickly withdrew.

"I'm sorry, I know it's hard for you," he said. "I really didn't mean to get you so upset. But you know, talking about this on the stand is probably going to make you cry, too. That's good, Mel. You should cry. In fact, I think you should cry the entire time you are up there. It will help our case. Do you think you can do that?"

"But..." Melanie said.

"You have to do it for your father and your brother. But most of all, you have to do it for your mother. Can you do that sweetie?" He reached over and tried to take her hand again. That ever present smile lit up his face. Melanie suddenly felt very trapped.

"Please take me home now."

Melanie wandered through the house dusting and polishing everything in sight. She couldn't sit still. The knot in her stomach had tightened so much that she was positive it had won the battle and was just biding its time before going in for the strangle. The funny thing is, she wanted it to. Anything to keep her from having to get up in front of a room full of people and say how much she missed her mother, let alone tell them how horrible she looked after the accident. Couldn't they see for themselves how much

ne missed her? Mel sat down on the couch and couldn't hold back the tears. God knows, she tried. Her father found her laying curled up in the fetal position and clutching her pillow in the dark.

"Mel? You okay?" he asked, standing in the doorway of her room. When she didn't answer, he ventured in and sat at the edge of her bed. This was the first time since she was real little that he had actually entered her room. "Want to tell me what's on your mind?"

"I don't want to do it," she sobbed.

"Do what?" he asked, gently brushing the hair off her face.

"Mr. Armani said I had to get up in front of everyone and tell them about mom. He told me to cry."

"Well, I'm sure he knows best. He wouldn't have you do it unless he thought it was important," he said.

"You don't understand! I don't WANT to do it. I don't want to have to tell them what she looked like that night at the hospital. I want to forget that night, but I can't. That's all I can remember. I can't picture what she looked like before then. All I can picture is mom laying dead on that table." Melanie reached for the box of Kleenex next to her bed.

"I know Mel. I feel the same way. We'll talk to Armani. Maybe you don't have to bring that up."

"Aren't you listening to me?" she yelled. "I'm not going to do it. I'm not getting up on the stand at all. Why don't you just take the settlement they offered? Do we really have to relive this just to get more money? There isn't enough money in the world that could make me forget."

They both sat silently in the dark. Mel blew her nose loudly, causing her dad to start laughing. Before either knew what happened, they were both laughing uncontrollably.

"Okay," he said quietly.

"What?" she asked.

"You're right. It's time we put an end to this mess and put our lives back together somehow. I'll call Armani in the morning and tell him to settle out of court. I guess I was just too wrapped up in myself to see what this was doing to you. I'm sorry."

Melanie reached out and gave her dad a big, long hug. Maybe now they could be a family again. She felt the knot loosening its hold on her.

Respectable Man

By Jennifer Blay

My father is a respectable man,
with a calculator quick humor
and a mink fur heart.
He wants his children to follow his
example.

Work hard, Forget the past,
Climb the bureaucratic
ladder.
Reach for the BMW's.
My father's many lessons

swarm like commuters
at rush hour through my
calm mind as I hug a
picket sign against my Anne Klein
blouse.

My father is a corporate
lawyer, born in cube,
but I must not remember
dead or living ancestors.
Today

I will speak, opposing a
company that bathes seagulls
in oil like sausage soaked in
molasses. A company supporting
a respectable lawyer, my
father.



A Conversation With Craig

by Alan McCabe

I first came across Craig Plaster the autumn after high school graduation. I had had a major falling out with mom and dad; they did not like my idea of taking a year off before going to college. I was sure I knew everything back then. What was best for me, what my future would hold, who I could trust, what everyone I met was thinking, and what life was all about. I had it all figured out. Basically, my philosophy was this: Half the world is good and half the world is bad. The good want to convert the bad and vice versa. You could never tell by a person's profession or lack thereof whether he was good or bad. But, I, being the world's best judge of character, could tell after a brief conversation whether a person's heart was black or gold.

It was as simple as that to a wandering 18 year old.

I wound up somewhere in Maine. I had taken my \$5231.77 out of my checking account and gone on the road. I didn't want to go West. I wanted to go North. I wanted to be cold and damp. I thought about living in the woods for a while, building myself a lean-to, and contemplating the bad half. Try and figure out how I could convert them.

Because I, of course, was part of the good half.

On the road, I spotted a rotting sign in the shape of a pointing hand. It pointed right and said, MARVIN'S BOOKS. 4 MI. Sure enough, up ahead slightly, there was a narrow dirt road headed to the right, leading into some serious woods. A beautiful symphony of orange and yellow autumn trees surrounded me, mingled with tall and proud evergreens. The air was crisp and clean; I drove with all my windows open. The road became narrower and narrower, soon too narrow to drive on. I parked, got out and walked.

"Perfection," I thought to myself as I walked along, hearing the distant sounds of nature and chainsaws. "Nature is perfection. Man is good and bad."

Marvin was an aging hippie. All used book store owners are aging hippies, at least in my experience. His barn of books was impressive, but the dust aggravated my sinuses. I love books and bookstores. But as I browsed, my body was going through hell while my mind was being taunted by tastes of heaven.

Marvin sold beautifully handcrafted volumes of the classics, bound in thick leather with gold gilt pages. Not the kind you can buy from an offer in TV Guide, but the genuine stuff. But there was also a small section of

known writers, locals, published by unknown presses.

I picked up a two page book published on what seemed like ancient parchment. Its title was

STOP SCREAMING! More Poems by Craig Plaster

It was Volume 51 in a series called Slim Volumes.

Naturally I was intrigued. I opened it up and randomly selected a poem.

MORTIMER MILLER WENT TO THE WELL
AND FOUND NOT FRESH WATER,
BUT THE GATEWAY TO HELL
HOW CAME HE ABOUT THIS SHOCKING SURPRISE?
EASY -- HE LOOKED INTO
HIS VERY OWN EYES

I didn't know what to make of the poems at first. I tried to fit the tale of Mortimer Miller into my own view of life and people.

I had always thought that the bad knew they were bad.

Mr. Plaster was saying something different.

And Mr. Plaster had to know better. His words could be found etched in ancient parchment, in a barn full of semi-sacred books in Maine. Maine, where it's cold and damp, and where old wrinkled men have eyes that reflect the sky and the sea and all the knowledge that comes with it.

Mr. Plaster had to be one of these old men. A sage who lived in a log cabin, smoked his pipe before the fire, who took all he knew from his vast experiences and summed it up in concise and pithy verses.

"I envy you so much," I said to the man behind the cash register, a greying man who looked like what John Lennon might have at 50, "Up here in the woods, a ton of great books...you must be Marvin, huh?"

"Chad. Lookin' after the place while Marvin straightens out his..well..we're in prison. I'm so fucking cold. Two dollars."

i found

WARPED SOULS IMPALED ON POLES

on my front lawn today

Then an evangelist

TOLD ME GOD HATED MY SOD

lawn and frightened me away

After reading more of his poems, and finding out in the ABOUT THE AUTHOR section that Mr. Plaster lived in New York, my conception of him changed dramatically. He must be younger, I thought. Late twenties, early

thirties. Lives in Soho, with the artists and that whole scene. Lives on the edge. Has seen a lot of life in the big city, knows things I don't, and maybe don't want to. Sees a lot of first-hand violence. Warped, but wise."

DEATH IS STINKWEED
TO FAMILY AND FRIENDS
BUT SPICES AND ROSES
TO HIM WHOSE LIFE ENDS

"To New York, then!" I decided as I got back into my car. The only information given about where he lived was "Mr. Plaster currently resides in New York." Didn't say where exactly in the state of New York he lived, but I took it to mean the city, and was convinced it was Soho. And so I cried, "Soho, ho!"

By the time I got back to New York, I had a little over three thousand dollars, a stiff back, a trunk full of broken pottery and a philosophy on life that was becoming more and more difficult to cling to.

Briefly, the pottery deal was this: Saw handmade craft store on road, stopped in. Lots of beautiful, expensive-as-shit pottery. Very well dressed couple looking at display of particularly fancy pottery. Thought I saw insect crawling on woman's face. Without thinking, reached for it; husband thought I was getting fresh with his wife who just had tattoo of scorpion put on cheek. Decker me. Fell over into \$1000 worth of pottery. Stuck with bill.

I put all the pieces of pottery in my trunk, hoping that in some way it would prove useful.

All the way down to New York, my mind was mulling over the events of the past thirteen hours. "People who hate the cold and don't care for books, and yet are willing to suffer to help out a friend are...which half? The bad don't care about good intentions, especially costly ones. But I think I knew that."

I found a hotel in Soho. As I dosed off to sleep in my grimy, sour-smelling room, I think someone in the room next to me was shot.

I woke up at 4 in the morning. The people who had been carousing in the streets at 11 PM were still at it. I couldn't get back to sleep, so I thought maybe I'd join them.

Once I was out on the street, I had second thoughts. I believe it was the

ght of a petite black gentleman in pink tights leading an extraordinarily
bese white fellow on a leash that convinced me I was not among my
eople.

A bald woman wearing a two piece bikini made out of a newspaper
ame running towards me, brandishing a kitchen knife.

I ducked into the nearest entrance, panting and perspiring.

"You're not from around, are you?" a gentle voice said. It came from
elow. I looked around and saw the entrance I had taken refuge in led to a
escending staircase. A young lady whose face was painted green was
oming up. "My name's Venus," she said. "I own the bookstore down
ere. You saw the sign?"

"Well..no."

"I'm just closing up."

"I wonder if I might...just take a quick look?"

"Sure. You got a cute face."

She opened her store for me and followed me closely as I browsed.
nder all that green, she was amazingly attractive. She asked me question
fter question, from what was my name to did I think Earth was the only
lanet with intelligent life. "Oh, does Earth have intelligent life?" I asked,
ying to lessen with humor the unease that only I felt. She seemed
erfectly at ease.

"Oh, God, yes," she said solemnly. She then added, "I'm in mourning for
m Henson, you know."

The books were mostly pornographic, and I felt incredibly embarrassed.
Venus, I don't think you have...wait just a minute!" For I then saw,
redged between two books both containing PLEASURE and PAPER-
IACHE in their titles, a thin yellow booklet.

ly heart leaped with excitement as I grabbed it and read:

SLIM VOLUMES NO.32 SO, YOU WANNA PLAY BALL!
MORE POEMS BY CRAIG PLASTER

"I'll take this please! How much?"

"Just take it," she said, suddenly seeming sullen. "And leave, I wanna
ck up."

So I took it, ran back to my room and read.

THE NIGHT IS DARK
THE DAY IS BRIGHT
A COMMON FACT
TO EVERYONE'S SIGHT
SHIFT IT
LIFT IT
LIFE WILL CHANGE
A TOTAL DELIVERANCE
TO REARRANGE
POOR MAN, PROSPERI

RICH MAN, BARK!
IF NIGHT IS BRIGHT

AND DAY IS DARK!

I wept.

I couldn't help but think that Craig had somehow foreseen this whole thing, and written this just for me. Here I was, stranger in a strange land, disoriented and a little scared. The night to these people was like my daytime, everything was rearranged.

"I must meet this man," I said aloud. "He must be nearby."

Then I noticed that there were creases in the slim book, revealing that it had been folded in the way one folds a formal letter, in threes. I folded along the creases, and I could clearly see writing indented on the triad that ended on top -- as if someone had put the volume into an envelope, addressed the envelope with the book in it, and left the mark of the address behind. The address was VENUS' BOOKS. Inspiration struck, and I looked in the upper left hand corner.

The return address.

CRAIG PLASTER

451 Seminar Drive

Yonkers, New York

I knew Yonkers well. It's a small suburb with shopping centers just outside the city. I drove there the next day. I stopped at a diner for coffee and Danish. I nearly spilled my coffee reading the next poem.

a LITTLE CLOSER...

...THat's IT...

nO...oKAY...OKAY

just a bit to the LEFT and VERY GOOD!

now let's just wait till it stops screaming and it'll be perfect...

When Mrs. Plaster answered the door, I knew it had all been a big mistake. Not Mrs. Plaster as in wife of, but as in mother of.

Add a little gray to her hair, and she would have looked just like my own mother.

"Hello," she said pleasantly. "You must be a friend of Craig's?"

"I...ummm...yes."

"Well he's downstairs he'll be happy to see you he's leaving tomorrow you know I'm sorry I don't think we've met your name is?"

"Dan."

"Hi Dan. CRAI-AIG! CRAI--AIG? There's a Dan here to see you. Dan, just go down to the den I'm sure he's just watching TV."

The house smelled like dog food. It was decorated in a distinctive 70's style, with lots of plasticky greens and false wood panelling.

Craig Plaster was my age. He had a bad case of acne, braces, and was lying down on a big brown sofa eating Cocoa-Puffs and watching "McHale's Navy".

"Mr.Plaster?" I said--don't ask me why.

"Mr.Plaster?" he snorted good naturedly, then laughed like a donkey. "HNG HNG HUH HNGHH! Who're you why you call me that?"

I didn't know quite where to begin, so I held out his two books. His eyes popped open and he sat up.

"Cooooool--nessss!" he said, slamming his fist down on the couch repeatedly. "Wherejegettum?"

I told him the whole story. He looked at me with a kind of awe.

"That is so damn COOL!!! You are so cool to be able to just, like drive around like that. And, like, just go around and shit.

Like in your car, just you and your car. And you found two of my books."

Had my mental images of Craig Plaster said "two of my books" I might have prostrated myself before him and said, "There are more, Master?"

Instead, I was getting this nauseous feeling, and I said, "About these books..umm..you really wrote them?"

"Yeah, hng hng hng huhh hng. Pretty gay, huh?"

"Well, I kind of liked them. For instance, this poem about the man who finds hell in the reflection of his own eyes. Are you saying that, maybe, there is a savage beast in all of us that we all share? What does the well symbolize?"

"Dude," he said, again looking awestruck. "You, like, going to Princeton?"

"Not going to college, like I said"

"Oh, yeah, that's right. Well, I just wrote that 'cause I thought it sounded cool. Don't it?"

I nodded.

"Wanna play Super Mario Brothers?"

"No, I gotta get going," I said.

It had suddenly occurred to me, all in a flash, that I knew next to nothing about people, and much less about the world. What a terrible thing to realize when twenty-four hours before, you thought you had it all figured out. It was like having a neatly organized desk, with all your papers stacked and put away neatly, and all your pencils and paper clips in their own separate compartments, where you knew you could find them at any given moment--and then having a tremendous wind come and scatter the papers, pencils, and clips, making an incredible mess of the floor, and having some blown way out of your grasp.

That's exactly what it was like.

And so I headed home, ready to tell mom and dad they were right. I was not the wise man I thought I was, the world's best judge of character, the independent wandering 18 year old.

What was I then?

Going to college.

CHEDDAR CHEESE TREES

By Neil Schafer

The sun rose over the brim
of the bountiful trees.
It cut them in two;
the tops illuminated.
To a tired runner
they looked strange.
Like God spray painted
the most high reaching branches.
Cheese flavored popcorn
came to my mind.
The beautiful sunset was hidden
by the huge floral arrangement.
A possibly breathtaking scene
obscured by overgrown leaf bearers.
As it came to pass, the lofty masses
turned back to the normal green.
Actually we could see the other side
with trees of cheddar cheese.

The Jazz Butcher vs. The Oreos

By Debbie Kriebel

"Pass me the Oreos" is all I said
but the trumpet solo was shouting
and the jazz was swingin' in your head.

You heard accomplishment and fame calling instead
of my uninspired munchies drooling
"Pass me the Oreos" is all I said.

The tenor sax ground into your hips and fed
your avaricious young American lusting
and the jazz was swingin' in your head.

I don't mind, but alone I went to bed
Really I try to understand all you're hearing
"Pass me the Oreos" is all I said.

Outside my sleep the bassman slapped and popped
your practiced fingers once again blistering
and the jazz was swingin' in your head.

You slid under the covers and into our bed
I heard the cellophane crinkling
"Pass me the Oreos" is all I said
and the jazz was swingin' in your head.

Sally's Home From Vacation

By Despina Tsouris

Kaliegh screamed, above Jim Croce's Bad, Bad, Leroy Brown, "Dad, turn that down!" She turned to Alyssa standing at the bottom of the stairs, "He's always playing music all the time. He just veges out in front of the tv or playing video games while listening to the music."

"That's what's cool about him," Alyssa said. He's not like most fathers. He can just kick back and relax."

Hy came out of his room long enough to squeeze Alyssa's arm and give his daughter a hug. Alyssa liked how he dressed - khaki bermuda shorts and beaten up Blucher moccasins. He was a distinguished man in his late forties with gray hair, and paralyzing crystal blue eyes. She thought him good looking, and knew he was a successful psychologist. Alyssa never knew what to expect, or how to dress when visiting Kaliegh's forty acre farm. One day they'd have her hauling trash into the compost pile over the hill, and the next day they'd take her to Mozart in the park.

Today Alyssa wore a wide necked T-shirt that kept slipping over one shoulder. It made her self-conscious because she had not worn a bra. She also wore hiking shorts, which she kept tugging at because they were creeping up her thighs.

Alyssa waited for Hy to go back to his music and whispered, "Kaliegh, these cramps are killing me. Sally must be home from vacation. Have any midol, advil, aspirin, anything?"

"No, I'm just about to get mine, I took everything I could get my hands on." She went to the doorway and screamed, "Mom got anything for cramps, Alyssa has her period!"

"Kaliegh, shut up, your dad's in the next room!"

"What honey," came her mom's voice "I can't hear you."

"Alyssa wants something for her cramps," Kaliegh screamed.

"Kaliegh, I'm going to kill you," said Alyssa.

Kaliegh's mother came in. "There's motrin in the kitchen cabinet. I'll get it." She gave Alyssa one pill and a glass of water. She had her purse, and as she walked towards the door said, "I'll see you two later, I'm going to see Aunt Debbie."

The girls watched her pull out in the Volvo. Kaliegh said, "I have to go feed the horses and clean stalls. Want to help?" "I don't feel like tramping around. I'll just sit here and wait for the motrin to kick in."

"Ok., you can watch some tv while I'm gone."

Kaliegh left and Alyssa went into the den and turned on the tv. Hy came out from the kitchen and sat down beside her. She was about to ask him if he was up on "Days Of Our Lives" when he said, "Do you smoke dope Alyssa?"

"Excuse me?"

"Do you smoke pot?"

She didn't think Hy was the kind of dad to give a drug lecture. "Ah, yeah, occasionally," she said cautiously.

"Well, come with me. It's the best thing for cramps! I'll have you cured in no time!"

"No, I'm fine." Alyssa could feel her face turning red. But Hy was already on his way. She followed him up the steps, into his dressing area by his bedroom. She sat down on the sofa.

"Hold on while I get my rolling papers."

"O.k., no rush," Alyssa said, cracking her knuckles, staring at the bizarre paintings by Salvadore Dali.

"Alright, are we ready?" Hy came back into the dressing area with a porcelain car in his hands. He pulled the top half of it off and dug around in it for the weed. He rolled the joint and put it in between her lips. Standing over her, he put his lighter towards the tip. Alyssa pulled her shirt back up on her shoulder, and took in a breath. The joint flared and went out.

"These are onion papers, you've got to take a harder hit. Just suck in and hold it."

She tried again. This time she felt a big rush. Smoke came oozing out of her nostrils.

"Wow," he said, laughing, "Pretty good hit! Do you feel it? This is some good stuff. You can tel by the red hairs."

Alyssa tried to hand him the joint, but he held up his hand.

"No, enjoy it, I can imagine what women go through. You need it more than I do."

She did not want to keep smoking it. She felt uncomfortable, and it would have been awkward if Kaliegh or anyone else in the family would had walked into the room. "Thanks," she said, "But I'm good."

"Have one more, just in case."

Alyssa took another drag on the joint, filling her lungs until they would expand no further. She held it in as long as she could, and exhaled a huge cloud of smoke.

"How do you feel?"

"Huh, what?"

"Do you feel better?" he asked.

"Yeah."

"I mean are your cramps gone?"

For some reason it no longer seemed weird to be talking to Kaliegh's dad about cramps. She envied Kaliegh that her dad was so cool about things. She said, "They're still pounding, but it doesn't bother me. It's kind of drowned out."

"I knew it! Any time you get cramps, smoke a joint. Do you want to listen to some tunes?"

"Sure, why don't you choose though."

"O.k., I'll surprise you."

From the corner of the room Led Zeppelin began to play. It was

Stairway to Heaven. Alyssa smiled to herself, thinking this was always the last slow song played at every dance she had been to since the eighth grade. She looked up and he stood over her. She pulled her shirt up onto her shoulder.

"Do you want to dance?" he asked.

"Uh, well..."

He swept Alyssa up from the couch. "Come on!" He pulled her so close to him that she thought she could feel his heart pounding, or could it have been hers, or maybe she was just stoned. He clutched her tight, and she could feel his breath in her ear. Singing the words silently, he stroked her back with his gentle, commanding fingers. He slowly worked his way down towards her shorts. He slipped his hands into her back pockets and tenderly squeezed her ass. Alyssa tried to pull away, but he twirled her around, into his arms, and dipped her. She thought he danced well. Actually, she had never danced with anyone this way. He twirled her to arms length, pulled her back, and glided her up his leg. She forgot to be nervous, and thought it was fun to dance like professionals. As he pulled her close he kissed her. He had sensual, full, wet lips. His tongue twisted in her mouth. She was surprised to find herself responding, amazed to think, he's turning me on.

"Alyssa," a voice screamed, "where the hell are you?"

Jerking away, Alyssa ran to the bathroom and locked the door behind her. Gripping the edge of the sink with both hands, she stared into the mirror for several seconds. Her eyes were barely slits, and the whites were blood shot. Maybe she danced with Hy, but he did not actually kiss her. She could have misunderstood what happened. The knock at the door startled her.

"Who is it?"

"What the hell do you mean who is it, it's me!"

"Wait a minute, I was just going to the bathroom."

"No shit!" Kaliegh screamed. "What's taking so long, did you fall in?"

"Huh?"

"Come on, we're supposed to go shopping, remember?"

Alyssa attempted to open the door, but it wouldn't open.

Kaliegh bellowed, "You've got to unlock it first, idiot!"

After accomplishing that Alyssa walked through Hy's dressing room where he sat. She chose to look at the ground, but from the corner of her eyes she could see him looking at the tv, smiling.

"Alyssa, what's the matter?" Kaliegh asked.

"What?"

"Look at me!"

Alyssa looked up, and Kaliegh screeched, "DAD!"

"What honey?"

"Did you have to get her stoned?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Dad, I know you got her high!"

"Don't yell at him," Alyssa said. "He said it would help my cramps."

"He thinks pot is the remedy to any ailment!"

"It did work," Hy said, "Didn't it Alyssa?" He turned, smiling, to face her. Alyssa pulled her shirt up onto her shoulder and looked away.

Kaliegh rolled her eyes. "Come on Alyssa, let's get out of here!"

It was a long and silent drive. When they reached the parking lot neither of them made any motion to get out of the car.

Kaliegh said, "You know, you didn't have to do it. He wouldn't have gotten mad."

"I'm sorry I felt weird doing it, but I didn't want to insult him."

"The least you could have done was save some for me."

Alyssa looked at her friend, astonished. "Look, Kaliegh I didn't know your dad even smoked dope, let alone plan for him to offer me some, or intentionally smoke it all so there would be none left for you."

"I'm sorry." Kaliegh shook her head as if to clear it. "I'm not mad at you."

"What's the matter?"

"I'd rather not talk about it." Kaliegh's face sank into her hands. "He tried to hit on you, didn't he?"

Alyssa felt her face grow hot. "What are you talking about?"

"Just tell me! I know he did!"

"Kaliegh, really..."

"No, I won't let you play these head games with me. Just tell me the truth!"

"I guess you could sort of call it that." Alyssa squinted. It seemed, suddenly, as if it had all happened a long time ago. "He asked me to dance and then kissed me. I didn't try and lead him on, I don't know what made him do it."

"I do!"

"What are you talking about?"

A look passed over Kaliegh's face as she broke into sobs. She caught her breath and said softly, "I'm embarrassed to tell you I never told anyone."

"Told anyone what?" Even as she said it, Alyssa had a sinking feeling that she already knew what Kaliegh would say.

Kaliegh stared straight ahead. "It's just been going on for too long." Kaliegh told her story. When she was sixteen she was in the bathtub and he came in and started to scrub her back. He hadn't been in the bathroom while she was bathing for years. Then he ran the soap up her neck, pulled her close to him, and kissed her. He told her he loved her in a special way. Her mom had only been away visiting with her parents for two days when it happened. Kaliegh looked at Alyssa and quickly looked away. "I tried to stop him, I said he was my father and it wasn't right!"

Alyssa could barely breathe. "What did he say?"

"He said, 'Actually I'm not your biological father. This is as good a time as any to tell you. Your mother was raped before I met her, you are her child. So really, Kaliegh,' he said, 'this isn't incest, it's not wrong.' Can you believe my mother still hasn't told me about all of this?"

Alyssa looked at her and said, "But Kaliegh maybe..."

"Maybe what? Finish what you were going to say!"

"No, never mind, but you've got to do something! Haven't you told anyone?"

"No, I'm too afraid! He would just deny it. I just don't know what to do."

Alyssa tried to convince Kaliegh that she had to tell her mom what had been happening. Alyssa said she would tell Kaliegh's mother that Hy tried to hit on her too. After some time, Alyssa convinced Kaliegh to tell her mother. Kaliegh seemed relieved. She told Alyssa that it had been destroying her. She thought about her mother and then him, and what they had done. It made her sick. Alyssa and Kaliegh agreed that it would be easier if they confronted her mother together.

They had been sitting in the mall parking lot for over an hour. Kaliegh started the car and they headed back towards her house.

At the sight of the farm Kaliegh stopped the car and said, "I can't do it! I don't want to be the one to destroy their marriage."

Alyssa said, "I thought we agreed it would be best if..."

"No. I'll just confront my dad, and threaten to tell my mom. I just can't tell her, it would kill her!"

When they arrived at Kaliegh's house, Alyssa and Kaliegh both went into Hy's bedroom, where the music blasted as usual.

Hy smiled to them. "Back so soon from your shopping binge, and no bags? What's the matter, one of you sick?"

"Dad, I need to speak with you."

"What's the matter darling?"

"I know you tried to hit on Alyssa. How could you do something like that? She's my friend!"

His eyes quickly darted from one girl to the other. "Honey, I don't know what you are talking about. Where would you get an idea like that?"

"Dad, stop lying!" Pointing to Alyssa, "She told me, that's where!"

Kaliegh began sobbing, "Dad, please tell me you didn't!"

Hy turned to Alyssa and said, "I think we need to speak privately. Please go into the dressing room!"

"But..."

"Please Alyssa!" His voice was stern, commanding.

Alyssa went into the dressing room, and Hy shut the door behind her. She tried pressing her ear against the door, but she could not hear them because the music was too loud. She sat on the couch, waiting for them to come out. She expected them to be several minutes, but they took much longer than that. Twenty minutes, forty? There wasn't any clock in the

room. Her eyes grew droopy. The pot had worn off, and she felt tremendously tired. She fought to keep them open, but could resist no longer and fell asleep.

The next thing she knew she woke up on the couch to Billy Joel's "Captain Jack".

"Alyssa, you're up!" Kaliegh and her father were playing cards on the floor.

"Dead man's hand, aces and eights," Hy said laughing. "It'll lose to three kings every time." He folded the cards into a deck and put them on the floor.

"Hon, I have to run out to the store. I'll be back a bit later." Hy kissed Kaliegh's forehead and motioned Alyssa to come to him. She pressed herself back against the couch, clutching the cushion in front of her. He sat beside her and put his arm around her shoulders. "I'll see you soon," he said, pulling her close to him. Then he left.

As soon as the door closed, Alyssa flung aside the cushion and jumped up. "What the hell is going on? Did you confront him about everything?"

Kaliegh picked up the deck and started to deal solitaire. "There wasn't anything to confront him about. I made up the whole story. I get that way sometimes when I'm jealous."

"What do you mean? You scared me shitless and now you're telling me you made it all up? How can you say that?"

"Alyssa, I'm sorry for getting you upset. Sometimes, right before Sally comes home from vacation, I get emotional. I was jealous because my dad was being affectionate towards you. He is always that way." She looked up at Alyssa, and tears glistened in her eyes. "You have to promise you'll never mention it again."



Cookin' Kangaroo

Sharon Long

3/88

So She Said

By Kate Phillips

It was missing.

MAA she called it.

(Missing After Action)

and she tried to laugh it off.

She claimed it must

have lost it's way

somewhere deep inside

her intuition told her it would come.

So she said.

And she waited many days...

It's the flu.

IAA she called it.

(Ill After Action)

and she tried to laugh it off.

She claimed it would

all just go away

her intuition told her not to worry.

So she said

it's the ice cream.

TMC she called it.

(Too Much Cream)

and she tried to laugh it off.

She claimed it must

be tons 'o adipose

her intuition told her a diet was in need.

So she said.

It was pregnancy.

PAA she called it

(Punishment After Action)

and she tried to laugh it off.

She claimed it must

be time to tell him

her intuition told her that she should.

So she said.

He wasn't her type.

PIA she called him

(Pain In Ass)

and she tried to laugh it off.

She claimed it would

all just work out fine

her intuition told her she really didn't need him.

So she said.

It was suicide.
DOA they called it.
(Dead On Arrival)
but they didn't laugh at all.
They claimed it was too many pills
their intuition told them she didn't want to live.
So they said.

PATRONS

Jane Agostinelli	James McCartney Jr.
Dean & Mrs. William Akin	Mr. & Mrs. T.P. McKinney
Mark Appelbaum	Stephanie McNulty
Jane Barth	Sheree Meyer
Nick Berry	William Middleton
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Adele Boyd	Jay Miller
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Paul Cramer	Sheila Nelson
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Ellen Dawley	Debbie Nolan
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John & Edwina French	Andrew Price
Judith Fryer	Bonnie Price
Tom Gallagher	Ray Price
Stuart Goetz	Sally Rapp
Joyce Hagenbuch	Joan Rhodes
Lil Hankel	Bill Rosenthal
Steve Heacock	Jahan Saleh
Joyce Henry	Kim Sando
Jae Hively	Patricia Schroeder
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Barbara Imes	Scott Smith
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Houghton Kane	Brian & Sue Thomas
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Donna Landis	Donna VanDusen
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Debbie Malone	Jane Whitman
Kathleen Manzella	Sally Widman
Linda Marchetti	Mary Frances Woodall
Phillip and Muriel Berman Museum of Art	

