



Fall 1985

The Lantern Vol. 52, No. 1, Fall 1985

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the Lantern



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Fall 1985

A collection of poetry, prose, photography, and artwork composed for the Fall Term, 1985, by the students of Ursinus College.

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

Nudes

*if i were a painter
i think i'd paint
a red man
straight lines and planes
against a white background
and then i'd paint
a blue woman
all curves and shadows bent down
on a background of black
and i'd call them both "self-portrait"*

e.m.

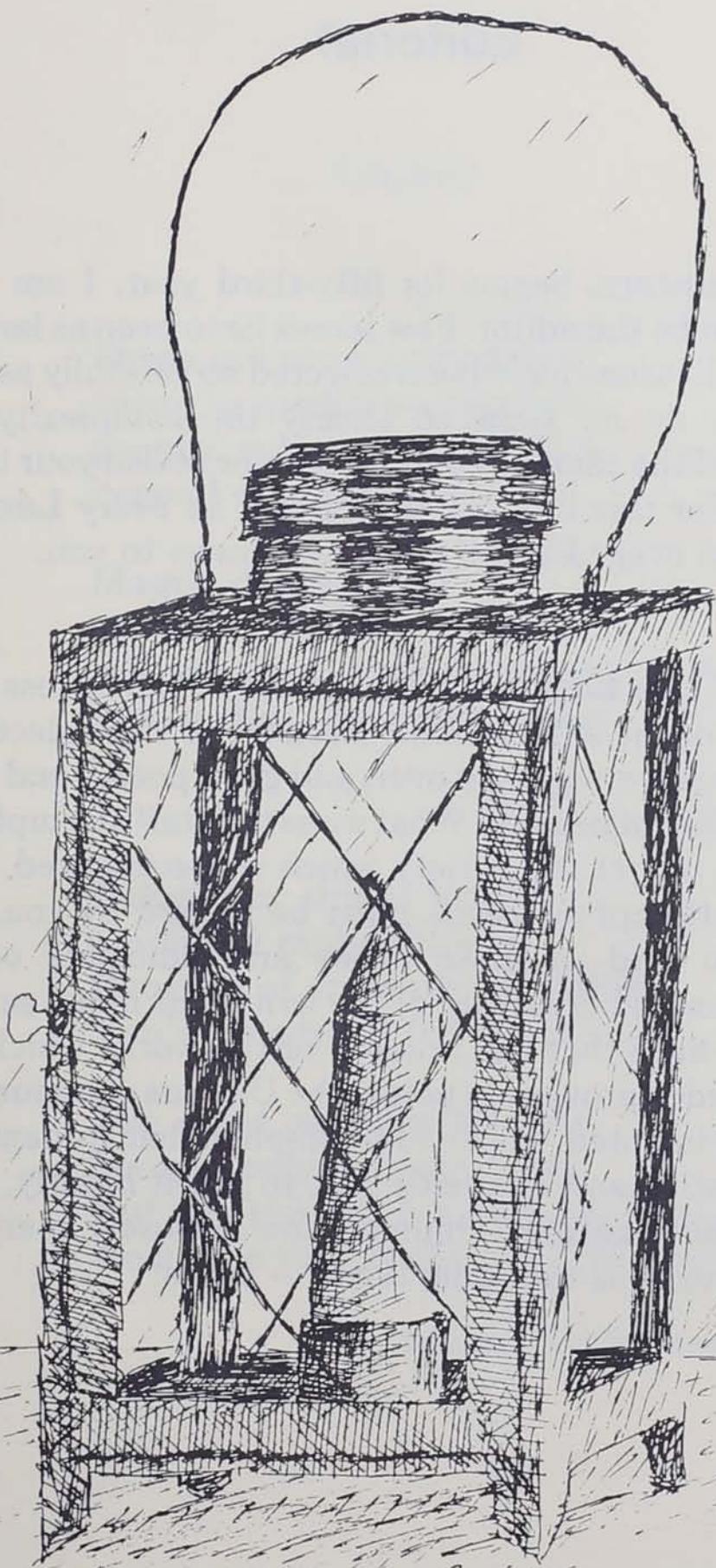
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Editorial

As **the Lantern** begins its fifty-third year, I am truly honored to be the editor. Few issues have been as large as this; not all issues have been selected so carefully as this; and many do not show so clearly the complexity and diversity of the campus community, nor reveal your talent so fully. For this issue is **your** issue, as every **Lantern** before and every **Lantern** hence belongs to you.

This fall, the **Lantern** staff selected slightly less than one-third of the submissions. Because of this selectivity, good writers were passed over, and good poems and short stories were not printed. What we as the staff attempted to do was to reflect the variety which was submitted. How well our attempt succeeds must be judged by you. The works you find in these pages are indicative of the imagination and creativity of the writers as much as their style. I believe that the breadth of the works which this issue includes proves my point: the Ursinus community is eminently talented. Those who complain that students are unimaginative and apathetic are, to put it bluntly, dead wrong. **The Lantern**, shining more intensely than ever after 53 years, is radiating talent -- yours!

Orion

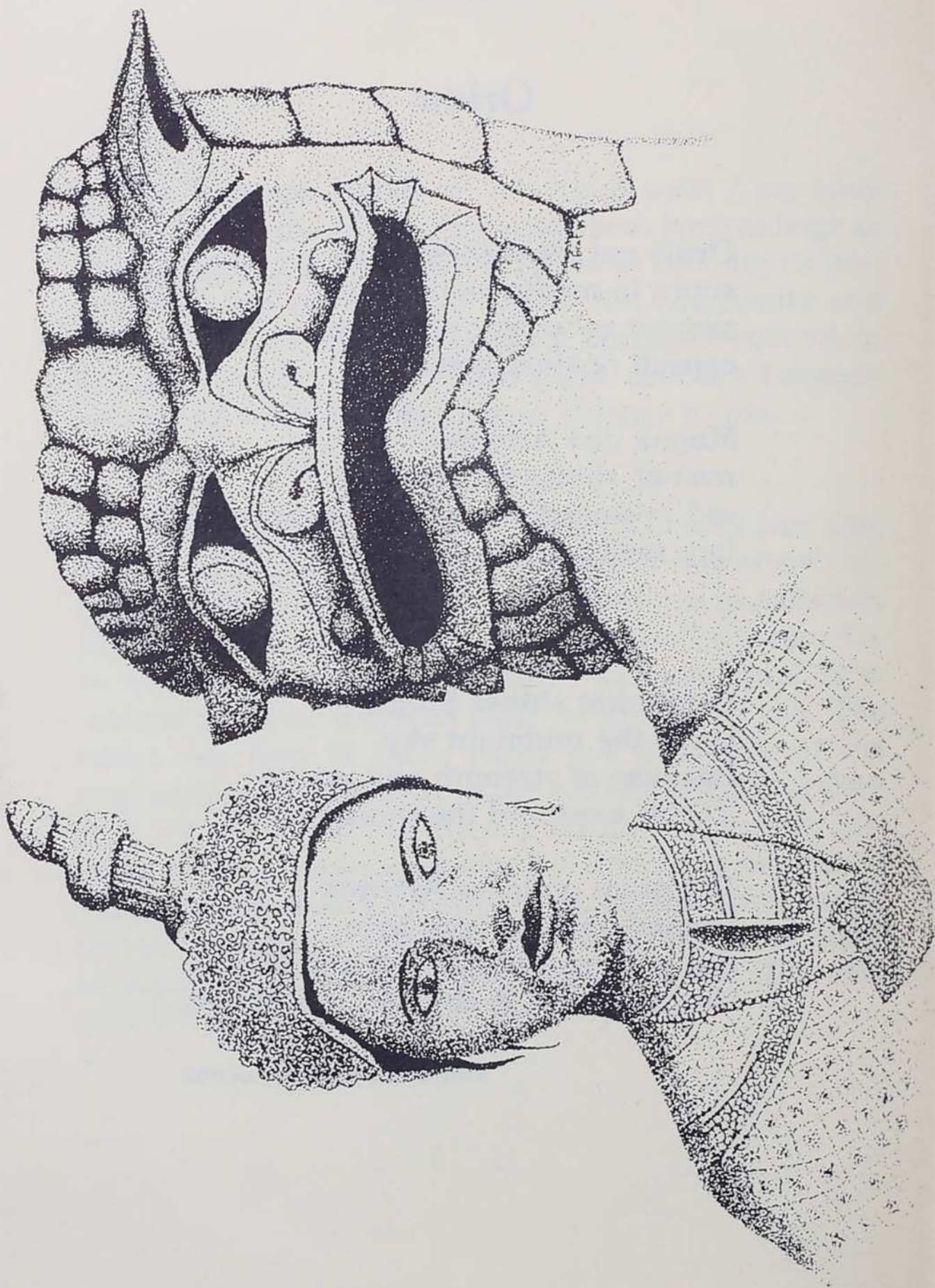
Orion qui nites splendidus
supra in media noctis caelo,
propter robur et potestatum
cepesti oculum lunae.

Magna dea Artemis
avebat solum tui amorem
sed negavisti ei nodo unum osculum.
Iam reclinas in caelis supra.

Orion that shines bright
Up in the midnight sky,
Because of strength and might
You've captured the moon's eye.

The great goddess Artemis
Longed only for your love
But you refused her just one kiss.
Now, you rest in the heavens above.

Johannes Galliae Leonz



Fragments of an Epic

As the sea-swells, surging strongly,
Roared and rumbled into shore,
I walked alone, wrestling my thoughts.
Silently I stared at the waves which washed
To the shore, then from the shore,
Retreating and returning, restlessly moving.
A spectre stalked me, shrouded and silent,
Behind my back. I turned not around,
For well I knew who walked with me.
Some called him Doubt, or Despair, or Dread;
They called his companions Darkness and Death.
The grim giant overtook me then
And I faced the foe, frightened and fearful.
I faced the foe, the double-minded one,
The Questioner, the Cynic, the Skeptic, Uncertain one.
As the waves washed over the sea-strand,
I stood alone and heard him speak.
"Show me your strength," said the shadow one.
"You are too young, too weak, too weary
To duel me, Doubt, for I am mighty.
To fight is futile, for fall you shall."
Yet stood I silent, greatly daring,
Unsheathed my sword, the Sword of the Spirit,
And Doubt the dreadful fell before it.
He cursed and cried out, "Retreat I must,
Return I will!" I hardly heeded
Like the battered beach, which strong withstood
The ceaseless sea's pounding surf.
As silent I stared at the sea-surge,
I heard (or haply, only thought I heard)
A voice reverberate through the sea-sounds.
The voice said, "Victory! You have won, Warrior.
Doubt only assaults the weak, the weary,
The faint of heart, the frightened or fearful.
His questions quell them, cow them with ease,
But the strong he flees, fearing their valour.
Also remember, warrior; remember the roar
Of the mighty sea and the steadfast shore.
I made them both, and I am the Lord."

Sally Stricker

Due to printing errors in the Spring '85 Lantern, we are reprinting this poem.

Sunrise

**The beach before dawn,
... cold, somber, deserted.
Movement before the light,
... anticipation, restlessness.
Light begins to filter through the clouds.
Slowly the sun comes up,
The dark world becomes bright,
... activity, movement, life.**

Alison Graf

The Planting Season

*Passion starves to be devoured
Fragrance sated season soured.
Deserving only this it breeds
Against its will.
Feigned felicity begotten
Soft enchantment swiftly sodden
Incorporating lines, we seed
Devoid of light.
Heartless lovers love no matter.
Love itself endures the chatter.
Nourished without consent, our weed
Matures in pain.*

Geoffrey Allen

NURSING HOME

Once golden galleons,
These abandoned hollow ships
List leeward, anchored.

Alfred L. Creager

HOPE CHEST

I crept up the attic stairs of my grandmother's house. Amidst piles of old furniture and smells of must and wood sat her hope chest. I opened it up easily, as the lock had been worn with age, while cobwebs made a last desperate attempt to keep the lid shut. My eyes scanned a decade; here were the 1920s. Pictures of my grandparents, young and fresh, captured on paper, old and stale, seemed to hid the reminders below. Such memories of hard times deserved to be covered. My grandmother's only toy, a rag doll, made from scraps of her old dress, was peering meekly out of the corner of the dark chest. The Bible she carried in her wedding, which sufficed instead of a gown or ring, newspaper clippings which predicted better days, cut out by my grandmother in order to raise the spirits of her family, and the tattered flag which had been draped over my grandfather's coffin, were all nestled carefully away. Each precious item had its own symbolism: the doll, a constant reminder of the beginning; the Bible, which held on as a guideline for real love and marriage; the clippings, which generated hope when there was little to be found; and the flag, which meant the death of a true gentleman, but not of the memory nor the undying love for his wife.

Here was no elegance, no luxurious clothing, no fancy car, and no social gatherings of the affluent. Here was no roar of the twenties, only the growl of the Depression. Here was a simple life and an unconditional love.

I walked up the attic stairs of our house. Amidst piles of old toys and baby furniture sat my mother's hope chest. I opened it after a few minutes, for the rust had started to eat away at the lock. As I opened the lid a thin coating of dust fled in disturbance. My eyes scanned a decade; here were the 1950s. Pictures of my parents, young and fresh, captured in colors slightly faded, were lying face down as if in shame. Underneath were seemingly good memories. The toys which my father had won for my mother at the various carnivals they went to together now peered into emptiness. Each item seemed to be purposely buried and shoved away: his letterman's sweater, now half moth-eaten with holes, her pink chiffon prom dress with its lace torn apart, and the now tarnished school ring he gave her when they were going steady. My mother's hope chest seemed filled with good memories, and yet, what happened? Here were no reminders of hard times or war. My parents had been living in a fairy tale. The lavish wedding, their beautiful children and their wonderful marriage would have made anyone jealous. Here was the innocence of the fifties, the perfect time for a fairy tale. Why then was there a divorce? They gave us their reasons and yet each reason seemed to contradict the past as told by the hope chest. How could the love they once felt die?

I sneaked into my sister's room. Amidst piles of stuffed animals and all the latest fashions sat her hope chest. I had a hard time opening it, as the lock was still stiff and the combination somewhat confusing. My eyes scanned both the present and the future at the same time. As I gazed over the few things inside, my mind wandered. Here were her favorite stuffed animals, but only two because she wanted to make sure that the others could be seen by her friends, and her dancing shoes, which she only wore twice because she became bored with taking lessons. There were a few pictures of her old boyfriends and some pictures of her favorite movie and music stars. Somehow though, what was inside seemed dwarfed in significance by what was all around her room. Among here telephone, T.V., posters, and those ever-present stuffed animals, was uncertainty. All around my sister were things which meant nothing to her; she just had them. Even her hope chest held no meaning. Would these things remain here, or would they be replaced by souvenirs of misery or happiness? What would be the outcome of such memories? Only the hope chest influenced by time could even begin to explain; and even the hope chest held some secrets.

Christopher Harbach

Childhood Swing

I remember the swing--

Swinging high
higher than the earth
reaching for the clouds.

Fresh-mown grass
smelled so sweet.

Birds sang.

Crickets chirped.

Life was perfect.

I need a swing now
To see above the earth
To find perfection again.

A child's dream--
Now an adult's reality--

Disillusionment.

Debra Ritter

RELATIONSHIPS

*You can not expect fire in a cold place.
A flame will not kindle on a cube of ice.
A seed can not sprout in darkness,
As the night is not known for its light.*

*When distance remains or expands,
Progress stands still.
A gap is not closed
Without acceptance and love.*

*A circle, a ring, has no loose ends-
It continues.
Relationships continue,
Few end, none die.*

*A heart and its eyes must remain open
For love to take root.
Persistence and honesty
Fuel the flames of relationships.*

*You can not expect fire in a cold place.
Relationships don't exist where acceptance is lacking.
Seeds do not grow without trust,
And without conviction love is a hollow dream.*

Timothy S. Weible

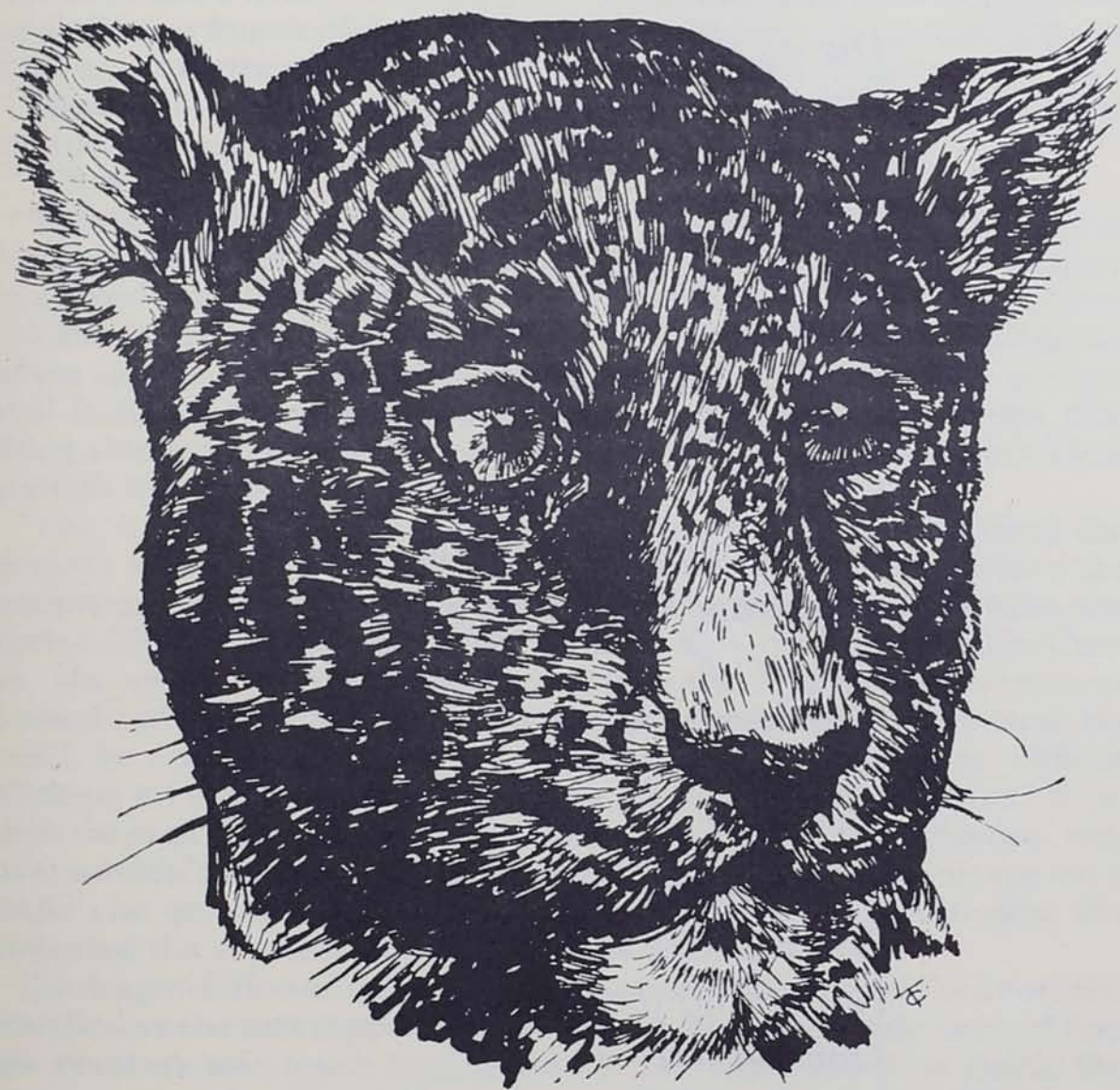
*A Hershey kiss
Ground by careless feet
A chocolate reminder
Of a sweet love
Gone.*

Rebecca Moore

“Elroy, Leopold, and Max”

Elroy had started a war,
Leopold helped with some more,
Max bombed them both
With the solemn oath
To stop fighting they so adore.

Stephen Pote



*She sits high on her throne
Above him
The goddess of
What?
And when she commands
He obeys
Without question
As all good subjects should.
And he lies bleeding
Before the throne
So unaware that his life
Is slowly spilling from his body
In his rapt adoration,
Obsession,
That leaves him so
Helpless
Like a child
Dependent on her smile
To keep him alive
Not seeing that she's
Only baring
Her teeth.*

Jennifer Healy

Urban Dragon

Linda was finding it very difficult to enjoy her lunch that afternoon, particularly with a very large dragon peering in at her through the restaurant window. She tried for half an hour to ignore the creature, but its sad gaze eventually got the best of her. "Excuse me," she called to the man at the counter, "but who does that belong to?"

The man snorted. "It's back again? Damn! I chased the bastard away three times this morning. If it's bugging you, I'll get rid of it."

"No, no, he's all right." By now she was somewhat intrigued -- one did not often see a living dragon in the middle of downtown Philadelphia, and after her fourth job interview in as many weeks, it was something of a pleasant distraction. "I wonder where he came from."

"Beats me," the counter-man grunted, "but I'd lay odds that those weirdos brought him along."

"What?"

"Weirdos. Lord, they show up here every once in a while when they have their conventions. You should've seed'em yesterday, all done up in spaced-out clothing and doing God-knows-what in that hotel down the street. They come in here for lunch sometimes. You know what one of'em says to me? 'I'll have an Italian hoagie, and make sure you use real Italians!' he says. Weirdos! Anyway, I figure they brought that thing along with'em and then didn't bother to bring it home. Ain't it bad enough that people let their dogs run around loose?"

"Yes, it is..." Linda turned back to the window and watched the dragon for a long time. It was amazing that nobody but she (and the occasional pedestrian who stumbled over its tail) seemed to take any notice. That did not surprise her; after all, this *was* Philadelphia. Even so, she could not help laughing when a man reading a newspaper passed right under the critter's nose. Its breath blew the hat from his head; he stooped to pick it up, and continued on his way without blinking an eye. Had some fantasy buff left this dragon behind? If so, then the poor thing was probably lost and frightened -- and hungry, too, or it wouldn't have parked itself where it had. Linda kept an eye on it while she gathered up her coat and purse; as an afterthought, she collected the remains of her lunch and walked outside.

The dragon followed her with its gaze as she stepped out the door, and watched as she unwrapped a half-eaten hamburger. Linda noticed that the creature was much bigger than it had appeared from inside the restaurant; such a tiny piece of meat wouldn't even be a mouthful for it, but the poor beast looked so eager. "Here, boy!" she called, and lightly tossed the hamburger. Huge jaws parted and snapped, and the morsel was gone before it could hit the sidewalk.

Linda smiled and began to walk away, feeling quite the Samaritan. She had not gone more than a few yards, though, when she heard the rhythmic pitter-pound of dragon-paws behind her. "Oh, Lord!" she groaned, and stopped. The dragon stopped, too; Linda could almost feel its mournful gaze upon her back. She started forward again at a brisk pace, hoping that the critter would get discouraged and decide to follow someone else.

There was a sudden, grinding crash behind her. Linda spun about to find the dragon standing very sheepishly beside the flattened wreckage of a 1974 Toyota. "Nice going, Dummy!" she shouted, stalking toward the cowering reptile. "They'll probably hold me responsible for this! "Yes, Officer, I was being followed by a dragon who accidentally tromped on the car.' Sure, right!" She sat down miserably on the ex-automobile. "Do I need this kind of aggravation? Why couldn't you watch where you're stepping?"

"I'm sorry."

"Well, you ought to be! God, you crunch some guy's car, and all you can--" She gasped and jumped up. "Hey! You can talk!"

"Yes. Is something wrong with that?"

"Er...no, it's...never mind. Now, we've had our fun, so why don't you just run along like a good little dragon before the owner of that car shows up, OK?"

Linda turned and hurried away, but the sound of a dragon's footsteps followed her. She broke into a run; the dragon kept pace. Finally, in total exasperation, she stopped and whirled. The dragon skidded to a halt and retreated a few steps. "All right, you," she growled, advancing until she stood almost nose-to-nose with the creature, "what do you want?"

The dragon hung its head. "I want your help," it whimpered. "I'm lost."

"Well, I'm sorry that you're lost, but I really can't do anything about it. Why don't you go bug somebody else?"

The dragon began to sniffle. Linda softened. "Look," she said gently, "we've all got our problems. I'd love to help you, but there isn't much I can do, except give you the number of the SPCA. Now, I've got a train to catch, so you--"

"Please help me!" the dragon bawled. "I don't know where I am, and I have no idea of how to get back home, and I'm hungry and..."

"OK, OK, Calm down!" Linda ran her fingers through her hair and pondered the situation. It was only natural that the dragon would latch on to her; apparently, she was the only one who had shown it the slightest bit of kindness. Well, she had some spare time, and the dragon *did* look upset. She reached up hesitantly to stroke the long, sinuous neck, which quivered slightly beneath her fingers. "it'll be all right," she said soothingly. "I'll try to help you. What can I do?"

"You could take me home with you."

Linda dropped her hand in alarm. "Wha-? No!"

"Please?"

"No!"

A pause. "Pretty please?"

"NO!"

The dragon cringed. "Why not?"

"Because I live in an apartment and you'd never fit, that's why!"

"But you said you'd help me."

"I said that I would *try*! That doesn't include trying to stuff you into my apartment. Hell, the place is barely big enough for me."

The dragon sat down dejectedly. "Oh, well," he moaned. "Thank you for giving me something to eat, at least." He paused, gathering his courage. "Won't you let me stay with you, just for tonight?"

"Look, I've already told you--"

"I don't want to sleep out here again!" he pleaded. "Last night was horrible! It was hours before I found a quiet place to lie down, and even then, I kept waking up to find *these* stuck on me!"

He pointed to his short nasal-horn, from which fluttered a small bundle of papers. Linda was surprised that she hadn't noticed them before. She pulled them down and read them. "Parked in a loading zone...no visible tags... 'thanks for blocking me in, you asshole.' OK, I'll admit that it probably wasn't a very comfortable night for you."

"And you said that you would help me..."

"Yes, I know I did," she said helplessly, "but I have nowhere to keep you."

"I could sleep on the roof."

"Uh...no, no, that wouldn't work." Linda sat down on the curb. She really did feel sorry for the dragon, and despite herself, was beginning to feel a little guilty. She sighed, defeated. "Do you have a name?"

"I'm called Braethorn."

"OK, Braethorn...we'll try to find you someplace to sleep tonight, and tomorrow, maybe we can figure out a way to get you back home."

Braethorn perked up. "Thank you!" he said earnestly.

"Of course," Linda continued, "the obvious question is, where is home, and how did you get here in the first place?"

The dragon stood up. "My home is Kalderian," he said, "and I was summoned here."

"Summoned?"

"Summoned. Conjured."

"Conj-? You mean, as in...oh, shit!" She felt ill.

"What's wrong?"

"Oh, nothing...nothing." What in blue blazes have I gotten myself into, she wondered. "Oh, well, I should have expected something like that. Let's go." She stopped suddenly. "Wait a minute -- how am I going to get you onto the subway?"

"No need," Braethorn said, stooping. "I can carry you."

Linda paled. "Carry me?" she said weakly. Then, "Oh, why not? Might as well go the whole nine yards on this one." With a sigh of resignation, she climbed up and perched herself carefully on the dragon's neck. "Just go slow, will you?"

"I will."

"And be careful not to step on anyone in the way."

Braethorn chuckled. "Oh, don't worry about that!" Before Linda could utter a sound, the dragon extended his massive wings and leaped into the air. Linda gasped, and then screwed her eyes shut and held on for dear life, praying hard and asking herself why she had bothered to get up at all that morning, as the ground shrank away beneath them.

"Where to?" Braethorn asked lightly.

As luck would have it, there was an empty warehouse on the opposite side of the vacant lot behind Linda's apartment house. Braethorn found that he could just fit inside if he stooped a little, and curled up for a nap while Linda returned home and fixed herself a stiff drink.

"OK," she said to herself. Her hands were still shaking badly from her unexpected flight. "So, I met a dragon at lunch, asked him to stay the night, and promised to magically poof him back home in the morning. Nothing out of the ordinary there. Don't I always hitch a flight home when I'm downtown?" She took a long, heavy gulp. "Oh, Jesus, how do I get myself into these things?" She decided that it had something to do with the critter's eyes -- like some goddamned giant cocker spaniel's, she thought. How does one say "no" to a ninety-ton cocker spaniel?

The television helped to soothe her, and she spent the rest of the afternoon watching it. She'd hoped that it would take her mind off of her problem, but she could not help wondering just how she was going to get the beast home. Conjured! How could that be? Magic isn't real...but neither are dragons, right? How is a dragon conjured? More importantly, how is it unconjured? And what sort of person would conjure one and then forget to unconjure it? And what sort of person would conjure one and then forget to unconjure it? Damned stupid, she thought.

"Linda?"

She jumped. "Braeth! What the hell are you doing here?"

The dragon gazed in at her through the sliding glass door. "I didn't mean to frighten you, but it's lonely out here"

"Oh, no," she moaned. "I thought you were asleep!"

"I was. I thought we might talk a little bit more."

"Lovely." She sat down heavily, and then glanced at her watch. "Maybe in the morning. It's getting late, and I've still got to grab a few things at the store. Oh, did you find something to eat?"

"Yes. I caught some fish in the river."

Linda paused briefly. "The Delaware River? You mean, there really are fish in there? No, never mind. I'll be back in a bit, and then I'll try to find a Godzilla movie or something for you to watch." She hurried out of the apartment and slammed the door.

Usually, Linda avoided going outside at night, but she needed the walk to clear her head. She was still uncomfortable about her promise to send the dragon back to Kalderian, wherever that was; after all, she hadn't the slightest notion of how to go about it. She eventually decided that a good place to start would be the library, and made plans to visit there as soon as it opened in the morning.

She spent more time in the store than she had intended, and it was quite dark by the time she arrived home. At the front door she hesitated, thinking about the dragon, and realized that she had been rather short with him before leaving. That sparked some guilt -- he was feeling lonely and wanted someone to talk with him, and instead, she had rushed off. She tried to imagine herself lost in a strange, hostile world and, ashamed at her own lack of sensitivity, decided to pay him a visit. She strolled around the building and into the lot; Braethorn was nowhere in sight, so she turned toward the warehouse.

"Hey, beautiful!"

She froze. That wasn't the dragon's voice.

A figure stepped out of the shadows ahead of her. "What's in the bag, Beautiful? Snacks? Hey, maybe we can have a little party."

Linda turned to run, but found her way blocked. "Yeah, that sounds like a pretty good idea to me," the second youth drawled. "We's gonna have us a party!"

Her mind reeled; the two ruffians were drawing closer. "C'mon, Baby, let's have some fun!"

"Yeah, don't be so tense! Mellow out, and enjoy it!"

An arm shot out and seized her own. She lashed out desperately, vainly. One of them grabbed her hair and jerked her head back. Something was on her neck. "That's it, doll, show us some moves! God, you're making me--"

A deafening roar drowned him out. "What th-?"

"Jesus!"

Braethorn had appeared from nowhere, and now towered threateningly over them. They slowly released their hold on Linda -- she stumbled forward and ducked behind the dragon's forepaw for protection -- and began to back away, mouths agape. The dragon's massive head swung downward and grinned at them, revealing a vicious set of teeth. "OK, boys," he said smoothly, "party's over." His jaws parted, and a huge burst of flame leaped from his gullet. With a yelp of terror, the two youths whelled and fled into the darkness.

The dragon turned his attention to Linda. "Are you all right?"

She was shivering. "I-I think so."

"Are you sure?" His concerned expression hardened. "If they've hurt you, they're breakfast!"

"No, I'm fine," she insisted, trying to sound convincing. "I only need a second or two to catch my breath.."

She began to fall, and the dragon caught her. "You don't look fine. Come on -- I'm putting you to bed, and then I'm going to track those two down."

"No!" she said quickly. "Please, don't. It wouldn't do any good." She managed a smile. "Besides, I think it will be a while before they try that sort of thing again."

"If they ever stop running." He lifted Linda up gently, carried her to the balcony, and gingerly set her down. "Do you want me to stay with you for a while?"

She made her way to the bed and sat down heavily. "No, I think I'll be all right," she said at length. Her head was swimming. "What took you so long, anyway?"

"I was playing poker with the cockroaches. Good night."

"Good night..." Linda lay back, and fell immediately into a troubled sleep.

She was awakened by sunlight streaming through the window, and sat up with a start. It was a moment before she could clearly remember the events of the previous night, and another before she was certain that she had not dreamed them all. If Braethorn hadn't arrived when he

did...she did not want to think about that. The concern that he had shown for her was touching, and made her feel even worse for having been so rude to him. She crawled out of bed, dressed hurriedly, and went out to see him.

The dragon was curled up in the center of the warehouse, his nose resting upon his tail; tiny, barely noticeable wisps of smoke were rising from his nostrils with each ponderous breath. Linda watched him, a little awed, and then approached. "Braethorn?"

No response. She crept closer and rapped on his snout. "Braeth!"

The dragon's eyes opened. "Hello," he said sluggishly. "Is it morning already?" He rose and stretched; even in the dim light of the warehouse, he was an impressive sight. "How are you feeling?"

"Better," she said. The dragon lay down again and extended a forepaw. Linda sat down comfortably upon it. "Braeth, I want to thank you for helping me out last night."

"Any time. It's the least I could do, after all that you've done for me. Besides, it was fun chasing those hoodlums away -- which reminds me, I've already had breakfast."

Her eyes widened. "You didn't...!"

He chuckled. "No, I didn't. Just teasing." Linda swatted him playfully on the nose.

They talked together for over an hour. He was intelligent, and easy to talk to; Linda enjoyed his company, and grew a little sad when she thought of his upcoming departure. It was Braethorn who finally brought the topic up. "After all, this isn't my world," he explained. "I don't belong here."

"No, I suppose not," Linda said quietly.

The librarian eyed Linda a little strangely when she checked out the entire Occult section, but Linda ignored her. There was a good deal of material to sift through, and she wanted to avoid wasting time on a lengthy explanation.

They spent much of the afternoon poring over the manuscripts. Most were expository works; others were nothing more than trash. Finally, they narrowed their choices down to a single rancid tome which Linda had unearthed in the Rare Books room.

"Tell me," she said thoughtfully, peering closely at the faded print, "what was it like when you first...arrived?"

"That's difficult to say. It happened so fast."

"Well, was there anything that might have indicated that something out-of-the-ordinary was happening? Like a sudden change in the weather?"

"Mmmmm, yes, there was, come to think of it. A sudden storm sprang up, on a day that had been perfectly clear."

"Ah. Was there any fire?"

He thought. "I didn't see any, but I could smell it."

"Are you sure it wasn't your breath?"

"Positive."

"OK. Was anyone there holding a willow branch, by any chance?"

"As a matter of fact, there was. That I remember."

Linda looked up and grinned. "This is it!"

The next hour saw a hectic search for the material components of the spell. Braethorn flew to a nearby park to search for a willow tree, while Linda dredged up an old copper pot, some garlic, and a candle. Soon, all the materials were neatly arranged on an old blanket on the warehouse floor. All, that is, but one. "A dead chicken?" Linda winced in disgust. "Now, where am I supposed to find a dead chicken?"

"Maybe a pigeon would work," Braethorn suggested.

"No, it has to be a chicken. Ugh!" She wracked her brain, and then hit upon an idea. "Wait here; I'll be right back." She ran outside, and returned shortly clutching a grocery bag. "I hope a frozen chicken counts."

Braethorn carefully traced a huge pentagram on the floor, and then sat in the center. Linda placed the components into the pot, dripped candle wax over them, and set them alight. "I hope this works," she said, "because I think I can only do it once." Her voice dropped, and she swallowed. "Bye, Braethorn."

"Goodbye, Linda, and thank you!"

"Sure." Linda held up the willow stick, and began to recite the incantation.

At first nothing happened, but soon the wind outside began to increase, and the dim light grew even dimmer. It's working, Linda thought, and began to read faster. The wind grew to a roar; the fire in the copper pot swelled into a searing pillar that threw cavorting shadows onto the walls. Lightning flashed, illuminating the bizarre scene, and the thunder rocked the warehouse. Linda's voice rose, and the ends of the willow-branch exploded into blue-white flame. The words rolled off her tongue, and as the last syllables died on her lips a great fire erupted from the pentagram and engulfed the dragon. The wind screamed louder, the fires leaped - there was a sudden rush of wind, as if a mighty door had been flung open, and abruptly all was silent. The sky outside cleared, the fires died down, and Linda raised her eyes. "Braethorn?"

The dragon still sat before her, unscathed except for a slightly singed nose. Linda looked down at the blackened remains of the spellbook; when she looked up again, there were tears in her eyes. "Braeth...I'm sorry."

Braethorn bowed his head. "It's all right. You did your best." He lay down miserably and sniffled. "I suppose I can forget about returning home, though."

Linda sat down next to him and leaned against his side. "Maybe we could find the one who brought you here to begin with," she said, gently caressing his glistening scales.

"There were over a thousand people at the convention, Linda."

"Oh." Linda shared the dragon's sorrow. She wondered if she had botched the spell somehow -- read the wrong word? Added the wrong component? Perhaps a frozen chicken didn't count after all.

Braethorn seemed to read her thoughts. "Don't blame yourself," he said softly, and drew his tail in closer to her. "You did more than

anyone else could have done. I'm sure that is was the proper spell; maybe I just wasn't concentrating on returning."

Linda caught his meaning; it moved her, and a bit of her grief faded. Braethorn had become very special to her, and although she was sad for him, in a way she was glad that he would not be leaving. She had never had a friend quite like him before. Hell, if she couldn't find another job, she could always move into the warehouse with him. There was plenty of room, and it would certainly be safer than living on her own, especially after the way he had thwarted her assailants the other night...

...the way he had...

An idea began to form in her mind. Her eyes grew wide, and her mouth fell open. "Of course...Oh, Lord, why didn't I think of it before?" She jumped to her feet and shouted triumphantly. "Braeth! I've got it! I've got it!"

"You certainly do," said the dragon, drawing away slightly. "What is it?"

"You're staying - that's wonderful!" She threw her arms about the startled dragon's neck. "You're beautiful! Wait here! Don't move!"

She wheeled and raced out of the building. Braethorn wondered if she hadn't lost her mind, and was considering going after her when she reappeared, carrying a bucket and a large scrub brush. "What ar you doing with those?" he asked, a little nervously.

Linda grinned broadly. "I'm going to give you a bath," she said as she took the brush to his hide. "Tomorrow, you and I are going on a job interveiw! It's perfect! They've got to take us! They've got to!"

The young man cruised along the expressway at breakneck speed. It was early morning, few other cars were on the road, and his new radar detector was blissfully silent. He enjoyed high speeds -- especially with such little chance of being caught -- and took to weaving from lane to lane, relishing the sensation of absolute freedom that it gave him. He was Lord of the Highways this morning, and revelled in it.

There was a sudden jolt; the steering wheel jerked out of his hands as he was thrown sideways. The car began to rock insanely, as if it were dangling at the end of a string. Frantically, he pulled himself into the driver's seat and gripped the wheel. It turned freely, ineffectively. Something blocked his view; he had no idea if the car were moving or standing still. He started praying.

A second jolt came. Suddenly he could see through the windows, and found that the car had come to rest on a high bluff overlooking the highway. Miraculously, it seemed perfectly undamaged, and he himself was not hurt at all.

Then he saw the cop.

She stood nonchalantly by the door, regarding him with a slightly bemused expression, and gestured for him to step out of the car. "May I see your driver's license and registration, please?"

The youth climbed out and closed the door. "I'm glad you're here, Officer," he said panting. "I've just had a little accident."

"Not quite, Sir. You've simply been stopped for speeding. You license and--"

"Stopped? What are you talking about?"

"--registration, please?"

"Hold it," the young man said, leaning back against the car. "What the hell is going on here?"

"You were clocked at ninety-five miles per hour in a fifty-five mile-per-hour speed zone, Sir. May I please see you--"

The youngster laughed nervously. "Hey, hold on!" he said, raising his hand. "I don't know what your problem is, Lady, but I wasn't speeding!"

Linda pulled out her pad and pen and stepped closer to him. "I'm afraid you *were* speeding, Sir," she said in a tired voice, "and *your* problem is that you rely too heavily on that little radar detector on the dashboard."

He said nothing.

"That may have helped you to avoid our radar traps," Linda continued, "but I happened to be following you from above."

"Ah. Helicopter?"

"No. Him." She pointed

The young man turned, and very slowly looked up. "Good...God..."

Towering above him, its foot resting casually on the roof of the car, was an enormous dragon. A golden badge gleamed on its chest; upon its head it wore a gigantic replica of the grey, wide-brimmed hat of a the Pennsylvania State Police. It glanced downward at him and grinned, showing a respectable collection of fangs.

"Now," Linda said patiently, "Do I get to see your registration, or does my partner here get to eat your car?"

Samuel C. Conway

*The darkness cannot hide you
From me.
Your warmth comes to me
It surrounds me, enters and soothes me.
It keeps the night chill off, and
Comforts me.*

*Your breathing reaches my ears.
As it deepens with the night
I allow my breath to join with yours,
For I know you are
At ease.*

*I can feel your heart
Beating next to mine.
The pulse carries your life-force
To me, and brings mine
To you.*

*The light of your soul shines on
Through the night.
It envelops us both -
A protective blanket
of truth.*

*The darkness cannot hide you
From me.
It is a glass, through which
I can look, and in it
I can see
The you which is hidden
In the light.*

Beth Henderson

The Farmer's Wife

He has cowed her into laying down...
Waiting for the reign
She feels there cannot come a drought
If there is never truly pain.
Looking throughout her window
For a dreary afternoon
She will never find the sun before the storm;
For depression shades the light of reason
While tears drown the seed of despond.

Geoffrey Allen

A Ballad of Two Lovers

When all the world was in its spring
The sun shone bright above
A young man plucking forth a rose
To give to his true love.

"This rose," he told her, "Is as deep
As passion, you'll agree
And perfect as it is, you are
More perfect still to me.

"The bloom upon your cheek outshines
The rose's deep, deep hue
To you I give it, with my love
I want to marry you."

"This rose," she scoffed, "Will wither soon,
Its beauty fade away.
As for my blush so red, its caused
By your effrontery.

"Your passion is a little thing,
Your love will soon abate,
And I'll not wed you, not for all
That in the world is great."

When it was in the summertime
He took her to the strand
And there he showed her that he wrote
Love letters in the sand.

“My love is boundless, boundless as
The vastness of the sky.
To tell my love or count the sand
Is futile just to try.

“These letters here I wrote,” he said,
“To add a silent plea
To the short words I often say...
Will you please marry me?”

She said, “I fear your love will be
Small as a grain of sand,
And vows like love letters are blown
And vanish in the wind.

“Oh no, I will not marry you
Nor yet believe your love,
Not if you were to promise me
The sun and stars above.”

When it was harvest time he brought
To her a diamond ring
And gave it to her, saying that
It was a precious thing.

He said, “The bright gold in this ring
Shines brighter than the sun
And all the stars from the night sky
In this stone are as one.

“Yet sun and stars themselves are dimmed
When in your presence dear,
And this small ring is just a pledge
Of my love so sincere.”

But she replied with haughty scorn,
"I care not for your ring,
Nor for your promise, nor your love,
From you I'll take nothing.

"For I will never marry you!"
Her words cut like a knife.
"Naught you could give could change my mind
Were you to give your life."

When it was in the wintertime
And on the ground lay snow,
She heard him calling out to her
And to him she did go.

The snow lay thick upon the ground
And in the winter chill
The wild wind shrieked among the trees
And past a little hill.

Atop that hill a marker stood
Beneath lay her love true
And in the snow inscribed there were
The three words, "I love you."

Then down she fell upon the grave
She wept, "This day I rue
And all the days I never said
That I always loved you."

They found her lying on the hill
All covered by the snows.
Beside the marker they did place
A ring, some sand, a rose.

Sally Stricker

Betrayal

slowly

brick

by

brick

one

microscopic

step

at

a

time

endless

days

of

despair

nights

of

tears

each

step

seems

of

no

consequence

days

months

years

barely

moving

Finally!

fears fading!

heart opening!

Stabbed.

excruciating pain

icy tears

a wall of stone...

Trisha Carvelli

never to trust again.

Now that I go to write it down I forget it all
or maybe I don't want to remember
writing it down with Purcell's overture
for trumpet and orchestra for background
it's like I'm writing one of those
dumb books but I'm the one they're
writing about. I thought about it all the way home but I couldn't
write it down then- there was a
police car behind me- I thought
it was following me- the stop sign
I went through today and only stopped
when it was too late- some one, saw
me- now they'll get me
what a shame- such a good
student, fine girl, doesn't dot her
i's but she's still a fine girl
or was until then
why- was it
her environment as a child- maybe because she's the oldest-
psychology is tricky
accepted to college already- so bright- now
this, criminal record
they'll put her away for sure- such a nice family, cutest
little brother, nice boy she had, too- fine young man- the kind
you take home to mom and dad.
She had it all- or so they say- and now this.
Don't be absurd, no one gets locked up for running a stop sign,
do they?
Besides the police car turned
the last block. Trumpet-
Purcell- nice music
it's so dominating but still fine music
Sax could never sound like
that- There I go again. I do that.

Sue Darley

I don't know what's going on. The whole world has gone to hell, you know? All I did was go for a walk and leave my mind unattended, as any American citizen should be free to do without fear, and when I got back, it had been torn up. Utterly violated.

God, what a mess. The embers were glowing in the evening's blue light. The back half of my mind had not been torched, but it *was* ransacked. My thoughts were hanging out of drawers, flung about various parts of the rooms. My soul lay in the corner of the foremost part of my mind. It was bruised and bleeding. I held it in my trembling hands as it quivered and died. Then it oozed through my fingers like a raw, broken egg.

What animal would do this to me? Dazed, I lurched to a phone and called the police. They were no help. One officer sneered at me and muttered something about "Twinkies" to his partner. I know he was talking about me, although I never touch sweets. They patted me on the head, as if I were an ailing beast and left me, mouthing nonsense about my sense of humour. They left me alone in the wreckage, the slime from my soul hardening on my hands.

I can barely see. The stench of death clogs up my nose. There is no symmetry, no order to anything. I can't begin to clean up this mess. I've been hollowed out, contaminated.

The only thing to do is to terminate my body. The thin, flat metal blade slides easily through arteries as I administer my own abortion. Red is bright and competent as it fans across the ceiling. It is warm as it gushes down my shirt. I wet myself and place my face against the comforting coolness of the toilet. Time to sleep, sleep....

Just count me dead.

A.M. Salas



I do see.

I do feel.

I have grieved over a sparrow fallen from its nest, a baby harp seal clubbed to death, a squirrel hit mercilessly by a speeding car, a child stricken with cancer, a son nailed to a cross.

I hear your cry.

I see your tears.

I feel your pain.

You say that I don't hurt-

My pain is infinite.

I have not forgotten you.

I send my love to you on the path of a sunbeam,

in the sparkle of the stars,

in the reflection of a rainbow,

in the chirping of a cricket,

in the beauty of a waterfall.

You do not notice.

When you tried to take your life,

I stopped you.

Through the surgeons, the anasthetists,

the nurses, the medication,

I was with you.

It was I who brought you through.

You have a purpose.

The moment you were born,

I whispered in your ear,

and you began life.

Do you remember what I said?

Let me refresh your memory.

You are an extraordinary creation.

You are unique.

You are a miracle.

You opened your eyes.

Then you cried.

Now you cry,

and must open your eyes.

Anonymous

**Lonely people.
Walking apart
Living in their own thoughts
Pretending that they aren't
Lonely.
Lonely man! does the sun shine for you?
Do you notice the brightness of the new day?
Or are you blind in your world?
Imaginary dreams
Invisible friends around the coffee table
With whom you can chat
"And how was your day? Shall we go out tonight?"
Lonely people
Walk at night
Down to the river, along the shore.
In the moonlight the lonely people see their dreams
Rushing downstream.
Close-out of reach.
Lonely people
Lay in bed and stare
The ceiling is the sky
Through the window, a draft
The night breeze brings the chill of despair
The lonely ones sleep
And live in their dreams.**

Rebecca Moore

When i win the war inside my head
ask me and I might write a song for you
control is all i think of now
except for a minor distraction or two

but chords and melodies are too tough now
i plan advances and retreats
my minds a battlefield torn to bits
i see the carnage - with front-row seats

the only one to witness the fall
to count the bodies with my rubber gloves
i inhale deeply to absorb the stench
and destroy the only things i love

it may go on for many years
destruction, reduction, guilt and sweat
i can't be harmed by the demons since
i'm the only war-zone they could get

i promise it will be a good song
when i really have the time to write
but the warriors are straying toward my heart
so i have to focus on the fight

(it takes such energy to fight)

A.M. Salas



CHOICES

Amanda didn't go out very often, and when she did, she always went alone. Carrying her wicker shopping basket over her arm like an old woman from a Dickens novel, she'd start out from her tiny house in the woods along the path and into town. The town was very much like any other, cluttered little shops along the narrow streets, children riding their bikes and snapping pink bubble gum with relief after a day in school and harassed looking mothers trooping their children in and out of the stores. An occasional elderly man or woman could be seen sitting on the benches that had been placed along the cement walks by some community club or another and these were the only people that ever smiled or acknowledged Amanda.

She didn't mind though, her excursions into town were out of necessity, not for pleasure, and she didn't feel the need for company anyway. She was an odd sight, slipping quietly through the streets on feet that barely seemed to touch the ground when she walked, but not odd enough to attract too much attention. Her face was young but always expressionless when she went to town except for her lively eyes and she wore her long brown hair in one braid down her back. Her clothing had a timeless quality about it, jeans and old baggy sweaters and worn, scuffed shoes, that were neither in nor out of current fashion, they were just there.

As she walked by a bench where two aging men sat catching the autumn's few warm rays of sunshine, one of them looked up and nodded to her. She nodded back and continued on her way without changing her expression. A moment later she was in the grocery store, picking her way silently through the aisles in search of the items on her carefully written list. As meticulously as a woman shopping for a large family, she checked off each item as she found it and placed it in her basket. When she was finished, she approached the checkout lines. They were all very long, filled mostly with women standing beside overloaded carts with a least one child in the seat at the front of the cart and another close by, begging for candy which was prominently displayed where there was no escape from it. Amanda's turn finally came, and as the boy at the register handed her the change he smiled at her, a fact which startled her for a moment and she nearly smiled back. Just in time she tucked the emerging smile away and said merely, "Thank you" as she lifted her bags and approached the doors.

Once outside, she dumped the contents of both bags into her basket and, folding them neatly, put the bags inside as well. She started walking, and as she passed the old men on the bench again, the other looked up at her and said, "Good afternoon, miss" in the formal tone only an elderly gentleman can use properly.

"Good afternoon, sir" Amanda responded politely in a ritual tone, without stopping. It would never do to stop and talk no matter how friendly anyone may be. Amanda continued quietly on her way, until she reached the edge of the woods, just outside of town. There her manner changed drastically. Her expressionless face burst into full bloom, she began to hum quietly under her breath, and her step, although still light, became springy and quick. She walked along the narrow path, made and used by her feet alone, until she returned to her tiny house.

It was a stone house, built nearly a hundred years before and it crouched low to the ground. Its walls were covered with tangled vines, and the windows stared into the forest like dreamy eyes. There was nothing around for miles and to a stranger the house looked almost as if it had grown there and had never been occupied. But to Amanda, it was home and it was there and in the surrounding forest that she felt she was truly happy.

Amanda walked quickly through the front of the house and into the kitchen calling, "I'm home, Mother." She set her basket on the red and white checked tablecloth and turned toward the sink to wash her hands. Before she could get to the sink, a small tabby cat walked in and began purring around her ankles. "Hello Muffin, you sweetheart" cooed Amanda, scooping up the cat and burying her face in her fur. "Did you miss me honey? I wasn't gone too long and now I won't leave again until . . ."

"Amanda, there you are" a woman's voice broke into Amanda's words and a moment later a small, delicate looking woman came into the kitchen. "Did you get everything on the list?" she asked, heading for the basket sitting on the table.

"Yes Mother, I did, and here is the change." Amanda answered hastily putting down the cat and washing her hands. "I was just going to put everything away and then we can have supper. What would you like tonight? We're all stocked up now." Amanda began to rapidly unpack her basket and put things away in the cupboards. As she turned from putting the last item away, she noted that her mother had disappeared without telling her what she wanted for dinner. For the first time, a look of impatience crossed her face and she sighed as she opened the refrigerator and began to poke around for something to eat. Amanda ate her cold meal alone, and spent the rest of her evening reading by the fire with her cat curled on her lap. Her mother did not appear again.

Amanda was up early the next morning, as she always was. She made herself some breakfast, then fixed a tray of tea and toast and took it to her mother's door. Knocking lightly, she called softly, "Mother, are you ready for breakfast yet?" For a moment there was no reply, and Amanda was about to go back to the kitchen, when a voice came weakly through the door.

"Amanda is that you dear?" the voice inquired. Stifling a sigh, Amanda answered, a little sharply. "Yes Mother of course it's me. Do you want your breakfast?"

"Yes dear. Please come in." the voice responded.

Amanda pushed open the door to behold her mother lying in her antique canopy bed. She was dressed in a dainty lace nightgown, complete with matching nightcap which rested squarely on her faded blond curls. The patchwork quilt was drawn up close around her and at least four pillows propped her up and she was surrounded by several more. To Amanda, she looked like a porcelain doll, so very fine and beautiful, yet so easily broken. At the sight of her, all of the impatience left Amanda, and she smiled brightly as she carried the tray to her. "Here you are, Mother." she said. She settled the tray on her Mother's knees and turned to go.

"Wait dear, come sit by me, I want to talk to you." her mother's voice

pleaded anxiously. Amanda came up and sat on the edge of the bed. Her mother grasped her hand tightly and looked at her imploringly. "Amanda, you know your poor mother isn't as well as she once was and, well, someday and it could be soon, she's going to die." Amanda stiffened at the word, for she'd heard the speech before and it always upset her. But her mother continued relentlessly. "Now your father left us very well off and I know you won't lack for money, but what I feel is more important is the way you're going to live your life when I'm gone. I've done my best to teach you what's right but it could be so easy for you to forget when you're alone." Amanda thought of the boy who'd smiled at her in the grocery store and how she'd nearly smiled back. "You must be able to live the right way. Tell me again please, so I can rest easy when I'm gone, the right way to live." The woman's eyes were wide and riveted to the face of her daughter. Had she not been so close to her mother, Amanda would have squirmed like a restless little boy at such a request. As it was, she merely looked at the floor and began her embarrassing recitation, hating, yet from her mother's constant nagging, believing every word.

"I have to live the best life that I possibly can. And the best is to be alone, away from all the evil in the world. Everyone is evil except for my family. But when you're gone, there will be no one left and I will be alone." Amanda's voice was monotone as she said this, but then her whole character grew childlike as she looked up at her mother and asked "Is that right, Mother?"

"Yes dear, I can see you understand and now I know I can die. Go now, and do your work around the house. The house must be kept neat." She turned her face into the pillows and settled her quilts around her. Amanda slipped out quietly, closing the door behind her. There would be nothing more coming from Mother today.

Amanda spent her morning cleaning the house, as her mother instructed. Although it was a tiny house, it was cluttered with strange mementos of her mother's childhood--china figurines and porcelain cups, faded yellow photographs in tarnished silver frames, and silk fans whose bright colors had softened with time--and every one needed to be dusted carefully and put back into its place, so it took her quite a long time.

Mid-morning the mailman rang the doorbell, which happened occasionally when there was too much mail to fit in the tiny mailbox. Sure enough, he stood at the door with a large pile of mail and the ingratiating smile he always wore when circumstances forced him to ring the bell. Amanda barely glanced at him, she merely took the mail and thanked him politely. She shut the door quietly behind her and then walked softly to the window to watch him. She saw him stand looking at the house for a moment then he shook his head and walked away. Amanda let the lace curtain fall and began to sort through the mail.

There was a bill from the pharmacy for all her mother's many prescriptions, a letter from the library about becoming a member, a notice about a church food drive and several letters addressed to her mother with thin spidery writing with strange stamps on them. Amanda took these and

left them on the table beside her mother's favorite chair, never stopping to wonder who they were from. The rest she took to her own room to read more closely and deal with later. She had the housecleaning to finish first.

It was late in the afternoon when Amanda was done. Mother had not come out from her room and Amanda knew not to disturb her. Once again, she ate her dinner alone and spent her evening by the fire with her cat.

The next morning, Amanda's mother died, very quietly and very calmly. She called Amanda in early, before breakfast, and asked her to sit with her. When Amanda was seated beside her on the bed, she clasped her hand and said, "Darling, your mother is dying. You know what I told you to do, who to go to right?" Amanda nodded numbly. "Then just stay here with me." Amanda sat silently with her for more than an hour then her mother turned to her again and said "Don't ever forget what I've told you." Amanda shook her head and her mother smiled and closed her eyes. Amanda waited for a long time, but she did not open them again.

Amanda didn't cry, for some reason the tears just would not come and she didn't know what she felt. She left the house and headed for the town, to the church where her mother said they had instructions for her funeral and burial given to them when Amanda's father had died when she was a very young child. The town looked the same as always, but today Amanda felt a curious thrill as she walked through the streets not knowing whether it was excitement or fear.

She hesitated for a moment at the church steps, wondering whether there would be anyone there. Her eyes fell on a door into the side wing bearing a small sign that read "Church Office" and decided to go in and check. She knocked on the door and a man's voice answered, "Come in, come in. No need to knock." Amanda opened the door and stepped inside. A short, balding priest was seated at a desk covered with papers which he was sifting through slowly. Amanda waited, wondering what to say but before she could speak, the priest looked up. "Hello, Amanda is it, right?" Amanda nodded. "Come, sit down. What can I do for you?" The priest's voice was friendly, as if he were eager to help her and Amanda relaxed slightly.

"My mother died this morning and she told me to come here for help." Amanda said softly. "I came as quickly as possible. I hope this is the right place."

"I'm so sorry to hear that." the priest said, looking very concerned. "Yes your mother's arrangements are all on record here and we will help you. Are you O.K.? Do you want anything, coffee tea?"

"Yes, tea please." Amanda answered, surprised by the man's manner. "With honey if you have any." she added out of habit.

The priest bustled around the office and soon handed Amanda a steaming cup of tea with honey. "Now, I have to make some phone calls to get things started for your mother's funeral. Then I'll drive you home so you can be there for the people to bring your mother's body here. Would you like me to call someone to stay with you for a few days? There are several women who'd be willing to."

Amanda, a little dazed by all this sudden action, nodded, then shocked by her action, blurted out, "No, no really it's O.K. I'm fine, I'll be all right..." She stopped in confusion as she saw the surprised look on the priest's face. But he smiled quickly and continued dialing the phone. Amanda sat back and closed her eyes.

A few minutes later, the priest's voice broke through her thoughts. "O.K. everything's arranged. Let's go back to your house now." Amanda stood up and headed for the door. As she stepped outside, a woman came to the door. She's smiled and greeted Amanda and turned toward the priest. "Can I speak to you for a moment please?" she said.

The priest turned to Amanda. "Excuse me a moment please. My car's over there, you can go get in if you want." As Amanda walked toward the car, she caught snatches of conversation, the woman's voice not quite low enough "So she finally died....poor girl....kind of weird, from her mother no doubt....O.K. I'll see you there..." The woman walked away rapidly waving to Amanda as she passed. Amanda's face was burning the whole drive home but she said nothing.

Several men came and the body was taken away. The priest urged Amanda to let one of the women from the town stay with her and again she refused. she asked the priest to finish with the remaining things to be done and she went up to her room. She sat by the window and looked out. After a few minutes, the priest and the women who'd come to see if they could stay with Amanda walked out. Their voices floated up to Amanda. First the priest's voice calm and reassuring. "It's O.K. ladies. I'm sure she'll be O.K. She's probably used to being alone. Certainly her mother wasn't very much company. Poor girl."

One of the women began, "But Father, she must be upset, although why she'd miss that woman, I don't know. Wrecked the girl's life she did. Living all alone back here. Keeping her isolated since her father died. I just don't underst...."

The priest's voice cut in "I know you don't but it's not for us to judge. Now Amanda wishes to be alone and we have to respect that. I'll see you ladies at the funeral tomorrow I suppose." The last part of the statement was an obvious question and the women glanced at each other in embarrassment. Then one spoke up.

"Well of course we will Father, all of us. We have that much decency." The words, though spoken with indignation, somehow lacked conviction.

"O.K. I have to go. Don't stay too long, you won't change her mind." The women lingered looking up at the house now and then, talking among themselves.

"I think he's wrong, someone should stay here. Leaving her all alone. Still, maybe she doesn't care, I certainly wouldn't. She's finally free to do as she likes. She's much better off without that woman. Some mother." The other woman nodded in agreement and began to discuss the funeral and the reaction of the other people in town. Their words kept whirling through Amanda's head until at last the women left.

Amanda was alone. She crept quietly around the entire house, stopping in each room and looking around closely. The women's voices, the priest's voice, and her mother's voice mingling in her mind, each one trying to be louder than the other.

"Amanda, the way you're going to live your life when I'm gone....kind of weird, from her mother no doubt....I've done my best to teach you....Not for us to judge....How could she miss that woman....Tell me again so I can rest easy....Free to do as she likes....Some mother...."

Amanda stood in the living room, among all her mother's treasures. Her eyes scanned each item and noticed for the first time how much her mother looked like her when she was young. She noticed her mother's letters, still lying unopened beside her chair. She hesitated for a moment then went over and sat down and picked them up. For a long time she sat holding them, turning them over in her hands, examining the writing.

"No, I can't read these. It wouldn't be right, it's none of my business." she said to the cat, who'd wandered in behind her. "But why does everyone....I mean who's right? Was Mother? Or was she really the way they all said? Well how could they know? But sometimes I wondered...."

Amanda stopped talking, put the letters down and gathered the cat into her arms. She sat for a while, thinking, turning it all over in her head. "Twenty years old, acting like a child all this time. Could she have been trying to keep me a child forever or at least dependent on her alone?" Amanda thought of the young man in the grocery store smiling at her. "Maybe..." Amanda closed her eyes and fell asleep.

The few people who attended the funeral the next morning were friendly and kind to Amanda. She listened and watched closely, her mind still in turmoil over all she'd seen and heard the day before. The women who'd been at the house all asked her to come to their homes after the funeral for tea and danish, but she declined. She had things to do.

The priest drove her home after the funeral with a promise to stop by the next afternoon. Amanda entered the house and stood in the silence with relief. Then she walked quietly through each room, closing curtains and tidying a few things that were out of place. She picked up the letters on her mother's table and looked at them one last time. Then she put them down again, and hurried upstairs to her room. She picked up a small suitcase she'd packed that morning, and tied a length of rope onto the collar on the cat's neck. She led the cat downstairs and outside. Then she closed the door, locked it carefully, and walked down the path through the woods.

Jennifer Healy

Letting go

*I'm hurting, Mom,
-but let me hurt.
You can no longer be my shield
against pain
and my protection
against failure.*

*I'm crying, Mom,
-but let me cry.
Tears that come from the heart
Cleanse the soul
and open my eyes
to the unseen
power of love.*

*I'm falling, Mom,
-but let me fall.
You can no longer catch me
when I trip;
the blows that my body receives
can teach me
how to live.*

*Mom, I must be able to
hurt, feel,
cry, fall,
and fail...
in order to find out
who I am.*

*I'm growing, Mom,
-and let me grow.*

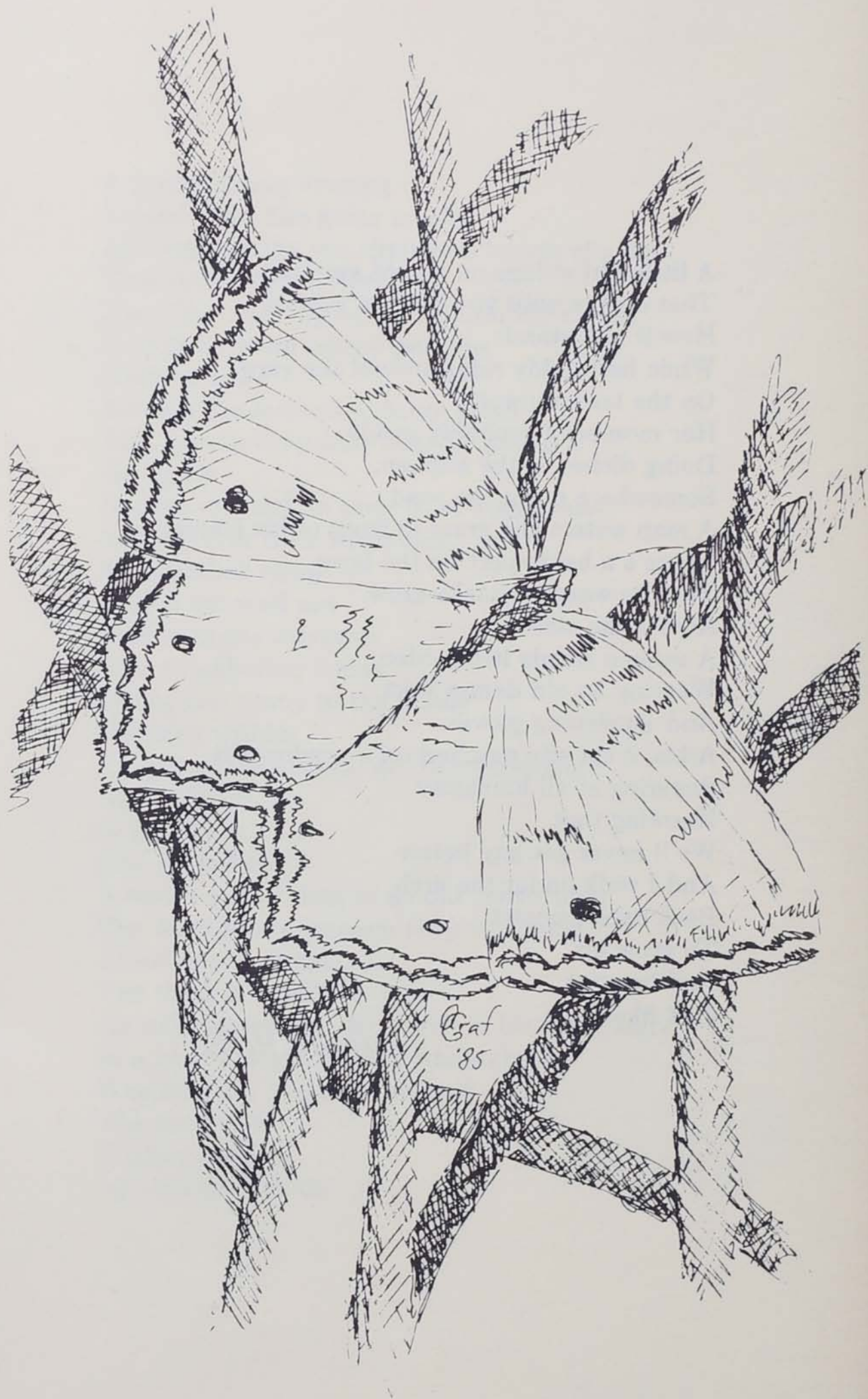
Trisha L. Carvelli



A bright spring evening
No one feels like going inside
And wasting the sun drenched bursts of color
That decorate the world.
There's a little log cabin built on the corner
A neighborhood oddity perhaps
Nothing more.
Art and Flo live a few doors down
And I guess their kids have all grown
And gone
So they sit back in their prim little house
Smiling over their successes.
A basketball hoop
With a tattered net
Stands in the driveway
Of a neighboring house
Giving testimony to the family
Residing within.
I suppose the kids all do their homework
After dinner,
Watch T.V.
And go to bed
A family goes riding in an old convertible
The wind blows through their matching
Blond heads of hair,
The think it's really neat.
An old man sits on the porch in his undershirt
In a very straight backed white chair
Watching his dog nose around
The front yard
Finding nothing
Like most of us do.

A little girl swings on an old swingset
That creaks until you have to wonder
How it still stands.
While her daddy rides around the yard
On the lawn mower.
Her mommy's probably inside
Doing dishes in the kitchen.
Somewhere down the road
A man waters the grass in front of his house.
There's a bald spot on the lawn
That he wants to make grow.
Across the street
A woman weeds her garden
Wearing an old denim skirt
And gardening gloves.
A black cat sits perched on a window sill
Sneering at all humanity
Knowing that
We'll never get any better
And I walk under the arch
Back onto campus
To grow up
And become
Just like them.

Jennifer Healy



THE EMERGENCE OF A BUTTERFLY

The sun rises over the desert, blinding white and hot. I grit my teeth, crunching sand, and take a look at the endless expanse of sand dunes through my binoculars. No sign of the enemy. Again. Another day I sit and wait but the enemy never comes.

I put the binoculars down and begin to clean my rifle. Eight months I have served in the Moroccan Army, and I have seen battle only once-when a group of infiltrators tried to cross the lines, I fired a burst at them with my rifle. I missed. One threw a grenade, which exploded harmlessly in front of the bunker, and then they ran away. I want to prove myself in real combat. I have heard many glorious tales of great battles in the wasteland, where Polisario rebels tried to penetrate the Moroccan lines. My mind would flash with images of charred vehicles, roaring airstrikes, and screaming Moroccan soldiers dashing across open ground to bayonet fleeing guerillas. Memories of these tales make my blood boil.

But today is yesterday, and the day before. The months drag on, as does the war. The army is a boring business, but it has its moments. I enjoy my life here.

“Rajiv, have a smoke?”

I take the offered cigarette from Ahmed. Ahmed is a machine gunner at our post.

“We’ll win the war this year, eh?” he says

“If Allah wills it,” I say, not believing it.

The Civil War has been going on for many years. The southwestern section of the country wanted to be an independent state. The king let them have their worthless strip of desert, and sealed it off with a line of barbed wire, sandbags, bunkers, and army troops. The war is as eternal as the desert.

A cloud of dust sprouts to the east. Friendly troops. Probably a supply convoy. Closer investigation with my binoculars shows who the visitors are: twelve armored troop carriers from Sicily Airstrip. They’ll be here soon.

The time passes quickly. My head buzzes with excitement.

I am gazing upon the armored troop carriers with awe. The soldiers begin to unload fuel, supplies, and weapons. Two officers are sitting on top of a massive troop carrier, looking at a map.

“Excuse me, my friend,” one says, “Who is in command here?”

I point to Sergeant ben Yusef, who is directing some soldiers unloading sandbags from one of the carriers. An officer gets down and converses with him.

"This machine-it is good in war, yes?" I stroke a dust coated, scarred flank of the carrier. The second officer folds his map and smiles, squinting his eyes against the sun. "It does its job well," he replies, looking down at me.

I examine several charred streaks splashed across an armor plate. I run my finger along one. The metal is warm and smooth to the touch. "It has seen much battle, yes?"

"If this machine could speak-ah, the tales it'd tell!" he smiles.

"Why are you here?" I ask. I like this man.

He removes his pith helmet and presses a bandana against his sweating forehead. "Routine reconnaissance flights have reported an armored column moving in this direction. They are still over thirty kilometers from here. If they come here we're to radio for some tanks and repulse their advance."

"I have read much about the battles in the newspaper." I say. Actually, Ahmed read them to me; I am illiterate.

He leans forward and says confidentially, "But the army newspapers are such rubbish, aren't they, my friend? Just a moment..." He takes a small book bound in black leather out of his shirt pocket. "Have you been to any of the big cities? Casablanca? Tangiers?" He is flipping through the pages.

"No." I say. I was born in the small desert village of Sinpash. I had a happy childhood there.

"I was born in Casablanca, went to the academy in Tangiers. They have a wonderful univerisity there."

"Um." I say.

"Listen to this:

In ancient times

The sun rose in eastern skies

To shed its grace over the people of Arabia.

It was there God spoke Truth to Mohammed

And told him to bring his people forth from ignorance.

Many tried to stone him

But many listened

And they cried, "Allaho Akbar!"

This new religion blossomed and bore fruit.

It was like the sprouting of a flower in the desert,

Or the emergency of a butterfly."

"That is beautiful." I say.

"Yes, it is. This book of poetry and I have become old friends. Tell me my friend -- why have you never journeyed to Tangiers or Casablanca?"

I look at my feet, my hands are in my pockets. It is my turn, but I have nothing to say. "My parents have forbidden it." I answer.

"Your parents?"

"And the village elders." I say.

"What did they tell you?"

"They have said that the cities are dens of sin." I gather my courage. "That in the cities there is plague and famine. Men feed on men there, and painted women sell themselves for copper. Corruption of the soul is everywhere. Allah does not smile on such places."

He laughs, and unscrews his canteen. It is gray like his uniform. My features darken. "What is so amusing?"

"The cities, my friend, are centers of art, music, literature, commerce and culture! There are schools, hospitals, paved streets, market places, museums, great public libraries, and marble palaces! In the cities there is law and the King's justice. At night there are great celebrations of life. And daily people gather in the mighty temples to praise God's glory. Surely Allah smiles on such places."

His eyes gleam. I listened in utter fascination, and it is only now I blink. He takes a swallow from his canteen--it is only now I notice my thirst.

"I only know the desert." I stutter, not knowing what else to say. "I am happy here."

"But now you see more. You now realize there is much more to life than guarding the desert. You have found Truth. There is a whole world in the cities which awaits your pleasure, my friend. You liked the poetry. You have glimpsed Beauty."

"Ah," I gasp, "your words leave me burning for more!"

"Then satisfy your desires. The way to enlightenment is exploration. You must reject everything your elders have forced on you. You cannot allow anything or anyone prevent you from finding Truth and Beauty. Do not let anything inhibit you."

The soldiers begin to reload the equipment back into the machines. I am too busy thinking to pay attention.

"You are deceiving me." I decided angrily. I have destroyed my confusion with a stroke of convection. "You talk from your book with a serpent's tongue, trying to turn me from all my elders taught me. You would have me journey into the steaming fleshpots of Tangiers! Allah has sent you, a corrupt man, to tempt me into wickedness, and I have stood the trial!"

The officer looks at me sadly, and smiles. "God wills." he says with a shrug. I gaze at my feet bitterly while he takes another long swallow from his canteen. I am still thirsty.

“Captain!” the other officer calls. “Captain Assad, we must move north. The enemy column has changed its course. We are seventeen miles in error.”

“Farewell, my friend.” the officer Assad smiles. Soon the men breath life into the machines and they jolt toward the north. I return to cleaning my rifle, but my soul is restless. I take off my cap and run a hand through my hair. I don’t even regret that there won’t be a battle here after all--my mind is preoccupied with my strange visitor.

Perhaps he is right. Did not Mohammed the Prophet enlighten his people to the evil, idol-worshipping ways their elders taught them? And then didn’t he bring his people forth from ignorance to lay the foundations of Islam? Only seventeen miles off their destination. Perhaps it was chance which brought Assad here. Or the will of God.

Ahmed is firing the machine gun at the sand dunes, sending little geysers of sand into the air. I watch listlessly, my back against a heap of sandbags.

I would like to know more about Truch. And Beauty. But now it is too late. I have failed to escape my ignorance. And now I feel frustrated. It is too late.

A shadow falls across me. “Your friend, Captain Assad, left you this,” Seargent ben Yusef hands my a book bound in black leather.

Or is it too late afterall?

“I cannot read, Hassan.” I tell the seargent, feeling my ignorance. “Would you read me some of it?” Perhaps when I get out of the army I will leave the desert and go to Tangiers.

Craig DiLouie

Poem For Every Father Man

I will present you
parts
of
my
self
slowly
if you are patient and tender.
I will open drawers
that mostly stay closed
and bring out places and people and things
sounds and smells, loves and frustrations, hopes and sadness,
bits and pieces of three decades of life
that have been grabbed off
in chunks
and found lying in my hands.
they have eaten their way into my memory,
carved their way into
my heart.
altogether-you or i will never see them-
for they are me.
if you regard them lightly,
deny that they are important
or worse, judge them,
i will quietly, slowly,
begin to wrap them up,
in small pieces of velvet,
like worn silver and gold jewelry
tuck them away
in a snall wooden chest of drawers
and close.

Miss U. Susy

When the Sun hides
in the dark gulch of night,
I lay in my bed and hear echoes of the days' passing.

Whispered questions travel deep in my mind
And I scan the shadows for answers
But they deceive and betray me; it is their function--
To twist and distort the day-truth into a dark facade.

As I pass through the veil of reality,
I find myself in that valley.
Forever searching for the Sun,
But always fleeing from the goblins, who hunt me for
their feast.

My lungs heave, my knees tremble,
My heart keeps time with their death drum.
Still I press on and call to Him--beg Him to outshine the moon
I hear no answer

Finally, my legs surrender (without my approval)
Onto the hard slope of the ravine,
And my spittle mixes with blood as I succumb to the
terror.

I see two goblin-legs, a shining spear,
and then no more...

Because the Sun shines brightly in my face.

Beth Riccio

let's be obscure
shock ourselves with our
cleverness
Knowledge of academic minutinae
trivia
intellectual masturbation

Let's get pretentious
discard Shakespeare
in favour of Didion
for purposes of utility and
"relevance; mon vieux"

let's discuss novels we've never read
wax eloquent about composers we've
never encountered
listened to

let's massage our pitiful
egos
rear back and glory in the
sounds of our own
brilliant, lilting voices
incisive, pertinent commentary

let's make asses of ourselves
no one will notice
no one will hear
no one will care
they're too busy
doing the same thing

A.M. Salas

Friction

Skin slides over skin
temperatures raise
the heart pumps
 as pulses race
tempo increases
as the moans louden
faster and faster
Suddenly the pace
 STOPS!
and an eruption occurs
the sweat drips slowly
 down the skin
As the blood slows again
 in the veins.

The Woman in Black

Genesis

In black night's foreign, close embrace,
Quick terror troubles quiet sleep;
Spirit locks flesh fast before he wakes.

Obscure in dark he tries to keep
The unknown hand from dealing death:
This nameless terror quick in slep.

Embrace returned in human stealth,
The maker's cunning mind escapes
And robs the angel of his wealth.

Now he has seen God face to face,
And on new journeys must embark
In black night's foreign, close embrace.

The poet mocks God's angel in the dark,
But when he goes, the angel leaves God's mark.

P. Pauper

“All’s Well”

The meek will inherit the earth
That’s true from the time of our birth.
But the meek are a dying race
Arrogant threw sand in their face.
If they don’t find their Noah’s ark
They’ll be eaten by Arrogant’s shark.
But the meek will shortly discover
The arrogant kill each other.

Stephen Pote

The Willow Tree

*The willow weeps for no one
not for the black carriage
or the black silhouettes, who follow
Blind and drenched by torrential rain*

*The willow sees no one
its branches hang still
like a moist dark curtain
and the wind wails
through the silent willow tree*

Kevin Trayner

The earth is nestled under a blanket of snow,
The tree limbs are laden with soft white down.
The sleigh bells are echoing in the valley below,
And the whinnying of the horses can be heard all around.

The glow of the moon reflects the gleam of white,
The horse-drawn sleigh comes into view.
The stars in the sky shine into the night
Like a beacon of hope reaching through.

Debra Ritter

White Wasteland

No life to be seen,
Forms are melted together,
Their shapes softened by the blanket they share.
The earth is a deserted wasteland.
White dust swirling and blowing across the fields
is the only movement.
No sounds ... except the shrill of the wind
through the trees.

Alison Graf

MOE'S HAPPY CHRISTMAS

Friends,
We are gathered here on this Christmas Day,
Because your aunt has much to say.
She passed away a week ago,
But wanted to make sure that you know
She'd had loved to spent Christmas with you alive,
But you were always busy with friends, husbands, and wives.
An occasional card and a rare phone call
Were your only contact with her at all.
That last time I saw her, she asked that I remember
To get you together on this twenty-fifth of December.

She doubts that you know this, but knows that you'll care:
You lovely old aunt was a millionaire.
She's been investing in stocks and owns her own company,
but now that she's gone, who'll get the money?

She died alone but left her will
The first entry is for her niece Jill.

"Oh, Jill, you neither called nor wrote.
I'd hoped that you would have kept in touch.
I think I have the antidote:
Of my fortune, you're not getting much.
Oh, but I won't forget in '73
When you sent me that postcard by accident.
Written to Aunt Flo but addressed to me,
I leave you a stamp---owrth eleven cents."

"I now address my nephew Tommy,
The oldest son of my late brother Jack,
You have the nerve to ask for money
When you blow your paycheck at the track.
You've lied to and cheated your family for years
And rejected your relatives, too.
So to pay back your wife for all of her tears,
I'm funding her divorce from you.

"Last but no least is my dear nephew Paul,
You only looked out for personal gain.
Of my amassed fortune you'll get nothing at all,
You deserve less than that for all of my pain.
You tried to put me away in a home
When I became old and gray;
You failed and I just wept alone,
And waited for this day."

"I knew about your robberies,
I had lawyers on your tail;
So here's my Christmas gift to you:
Your warrant---have fun in jail!

"I guess the three of you might say,
'How could she ruin our holiday?'
Yet you three ruined many of mine,
I spent them alone because you had 'no time.'

"And who's getting my fortune?
Do you want to know?
Five million and a corporation
To my canine friend, Moe.

Happy Christmas, Kids!

Happy Christmas, Moe!!"

Bill Connoly

Rare Bird

*The next time they call me,
"Free Bird,"
I'll say, "No,-
Rare Bird."*

*When my brother sings me a song,
I'm going to listen.
And when the moon bounces off the pond,
I'm going to look.*

*You, they, may accuse me of
False love-
Scorn me, laugh, damn me-
Yet shall I love.*

*A Rare Bird taking flight
Toward the stars.
I am a streak in the distance,
A bright burning soul.*

*One may see, another may touch,
None can possess
A Rare Bird, whose very existence
Depends upon freedom.*

Timothy S. Weible

Carnival

Sweet cotton scooped into paper cones
Peanut shells heat paper cartons
Bizaare-painted horses circle round
the tent flaps open, the barker shrieks
 come inside, come inside
Metal serpents entwine and struggle
People ride their crashing backs
quietly seething, passionately breathing
the serpents entwine in rhapsody
their fervor increases, the young child ceases
until a soft voice whispers
 time to go, time to go

Kevin Trayner

Here End

Invitation

Sweet cotton candy, soft and sticky
 Peanut shells, crisp and salty
 Peppermint patties, cool and minty
 The fair lady, with the basket spinning
 Come, make a wish, and spin
 Around the carousel, and ride
 The carousel, that spins and spins
 And spins, and spins, and spins
 The carousel, in the park
 That is, in the park, the carousel
 With a soft voice, and a smile
 Time to go, time to go
 I am, I am, I am