



Fall 1988

## The Lantern Vol. 55, No. 1, Fall 1988

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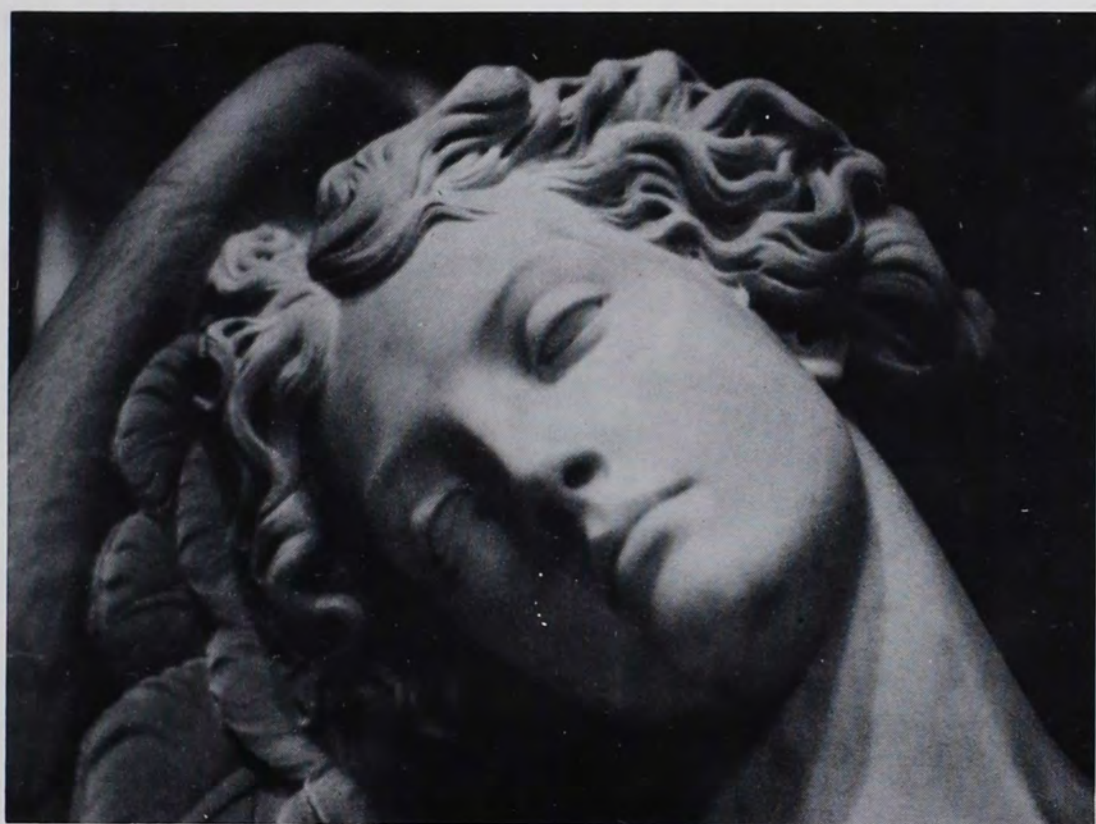
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# the Lantern

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Vol. LV, No. 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Fall, 1988

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

Named after the architectural structure atop Pfahler Hall, Ursinus College's literary magazine, THE LANTERN, is a collection of poetry, prose, and photography composed by the students of Ursinus College. In its 55th year of production, THE LANTERN staff congratulates photography contest winner Meg Sleeper whose winning photograph is featured on the cover, and short story contest winner Brian Evans whose story, THE THIRD GRADE GORILLA, can be found on page 3. The staff would also like to express its sincere thanks to President Richter and Ted Xaras for their valuable input towards the creative content of this magazine.

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## THE THIRD GRADE GORILLA

By **Brian L. Evans**

The clock above Mrs. Lemon's desk is racing towards the first recess. Baxter fears recess more than anything because it is when Johnstone gets the best chances to hurt him. He figures he will go out into the woods behind the playground and look for crayfish in a stream that runs at the edge of the school property fence. Johnstone almost never goes deep into the woods. The teachers make a kid stay after school if they catch one there, so most of them stay out, but Baxter is good at hiding and being quiet. Capture the flag and hide and seek are his favorite games. Baxter will go to the woods. It's his best chance.

"Mr. Esdras," says Mrs. Lemon, "would you please tell the class the meaning of the word somnolent?"

"Ummmm...No, Mrs. Lemon."

"Maybe you could if you weren't daydreaming."

The whole class laughs. Mrs. Lemon has just told the class the meaning of the word. She hates daydreamers, and she has developed tactics for catching those who do. She can keep a kid alert because when she catches someone several times the results are grim: she calls in their parents for a discussion. Before she continues she makes a mark in her black book.

A moment after everyone stops laughing at Baxter's expense the bell for morning recess sounds. Baxter moves tentatively. He is trying to get behind Johnstone so that he won't notice him. When he gets outside Baxter will put some distance between himself and Johnstone, then he will head for the woods. While he is passing Mrs. Lemon's desk she asks him to wait. "What is wrong with you these days, Baxter?"

"I paid attention Monday and Tuesday."

"It's not just that. Your work in general, especially your homework, is not as good as I expect of you."

"I'm sorry."

"Is there some problem—something you want to tell me?"

"No, Mrs. Lemon, I've been a little sick lately, that's all."

"I don't need to call your father then?"

"No, I'm O.K."

"Alright, you can go now, but if this continues I'll have no choice. Would you like to see the nurse?"

"Yes, please."

"She won't be in until later, but you may go during the spelling lesson."

"Thanks, Mrs. Lemon."

Baxter walks down the hall and out the door. He is relieved because he thinks Johnstone will be long gone by now. He is probably engrossed in a

game of kickball. Baxter is wrong. Johnstone is waiting for him at the door. His face is dominated by an evil grin. He blocks Baxter at the door. Baxter tries to get past him, but Johnstone catches him. Johnstone is a year older than the other kids in the class because he failed a grade, and he is taller even than most kids his own age. He presses down hard to make sure Baxter doesn't get away, and delivers a Spock that buries his thumb and forefinger deep into the boy's shoulder, but that is all he gets a chance to do. Baxter sees Carol running to his rescue. She runs right to Johnstone and starts kicking him in the shins while she yells, "Leave him alone, you big doofus!"

Baxter steps away and watches Carol continue to kick the tall boy. Johnstone looks confused. He retreats from Carol and growls, "You sissy! You let girls fight for you!" And then he walks away.

Baxter puts his hands to his shoulder and feels the sore spot. He will have another bruise by tomorrow morning. Carol walks over to Baxter and says, "Did George Spock you?"

"Yes."

"That jerk, I'm going to tell Mrs. Lemon."

"No, don't do that. Let's go to the swings."

She stops with her threats and the two walk to the swings. They compete for height, and then they play a jumping game where they try to get as high as they dare and leap off the swings at their farthest point forward. Their velocity sends them flying through the air, and the one that lands the farthest away from the swings wins. Baxter wins this time. He always wins because he lets his swing go much higher than Carol's. The only problem is that it is impossible for Baxter to land on his feet. He falls forward and drags through the grass, staining his sweater and pants.

Recess is over. The kids in Baxter's class line up behind Mrs. Lemon at the front of the playground to go inside. Johnstone is near the front of the line. He stands over a head taller than all of the other kids in the class. Carol is right in front of Baxter. He looks at her. She is about an inch taller than he is. She has light brown hair that falls to her shoulders, and hazel eyes. All of the adults that know Carol say how pretty she is. Baxter's dad likes to upset him by calling her his pretty little girlfriend, and by asking when the two will get married. But Baxter doesn't care that she is a girl. He knows that he has a friend who will catch frogs with him, watch cartoons with him after school, and only insists on a minimum of girl type activities like playing house and Barbies.

Baxter remembers where he is supposed to go and, with Mrs. Lemon's approval, breaks from the file and heads to the nurse's office. While he walking down the hall he thinks about Johnstone. He wishes the nurse could give him a pill to make him real tall so he could step on Johnstone like Godzilla, or make him fight like Muhammed Ali so he could dance



around him, snap his head with his jabs, and then close in for a total right cross. K.O., the fight is over!

When Baxter arrives at the nurse's office he goes into his act. He really does have a stomach ache, but he knows it won't be enough. The wrinkled nurse in the starched white dress approaches Baxter.

"What's wrong with you, young man?"

"I think I have the flu. My stomach hurts and my head aches."

"Hmmm...I'll take your temperature. Sit down."

She sticks the thermometer into his mouth and leaves the room. Baxter prays for a fever. Anything that will send him home before lunch and recess is worth it. He bears down hard with his tongue to make sure the thermometer is completely covered.

The nurse returns and removes the thermometer. She holds it up to the light and says, "Ninety eight point six." Baxter leaves for class. He tries to look pitiful on the way out, walking slowly and with a sad expression, but the nurse says nothing.

Baxter arrives in time for math. Today the subject is long division. While the kids try hard to keep from daydreaming Mrs. Lemon gives out problems and chooses kids to come to the board and do them in front of the class. "Mr. Johnstone, why don't you lead us off today. Do 4736 divided by 16."

Johnstone walks up to the board. He never looks so tall when he is doing problems. He picks up the chalk and starts writing on the board. His writing is slow and labored. His numbers are large and clumsy like the hands that made them. His face is turning red. The kids know better than to giggle, but there are many low whispers crossing the classroom. When Johnstone is finished Mrs. Lemon looks at his work and says, "Incorrect, try studying your multiplication tables, George. I need someone else. Mr. Esdras, try the problem."

Baxter approaches the board like a matador entering a stadium, picks up the chalk and begins scrawling the answer. He organizes his work efficiently and writes 296 on the top of the division bar. Baxter is always Mrs. Lemon's choice when the problems are tough. "Correct, Baxter, take your seat," says Mrs. Lemon.

Baxter returns to his desk and looks around the room. He looks at Carol, who sticks out her tongue at him when Mrs. Lemon isn't looking. Baxter returns the gesture. Then he looks over at Johnstone out of the corner of his eye, and the big kid throws a crumbled piece of paper at him. Baxter opens it and reads the message. It is almost illegible. It reads, "I will kill Bacstir."



Baxter and Carol are eating lunch at the edge of the cafeteria. All of the kids are eating while teachers pace the aisles trying to keep them from throwing food. The kids are talking about how the Bruins are doing, the TV they saw last night, and saying bad things about the teachers when they are out of range. Baxter and Carol are talking about Johnstone. "I hate him," Carol says.

"Me too."

"What are you going to do?"

"Go into the woods. If he comes I'll hide."

"I'll go with you."

"Let's catch crayfish."

"No, crayfish are yucky. Let's catch frogs instead."

"O.K."

"Can you come to my house after school?"

"Yes, if I'm not in the hospital."

"Don't worry, he won't find us. Do you want your chocolate cakes?"

"No, you can have them."

While Carol licks the icing from the cakes Baxter picks at his lunch. He takes a bite out of his ham and cheese and puts it back in the baggie. He opens his thermos and takes a sip of milk, but he puts that back also. Finally he just closes the metal Batman lunchbox, looks at Carol, and says, "Let's go catch some frogs." The two leave through a side door.

Carol and Baxter are going to the creek. They hear footsteps moving, almost running, towards them. It is Hope, a friend of Carol's. "George is coming into the woods. He's looking for Baxter," she says and runs off. Baxter moves like a rabbit into a patch of thick brush and lies prone as low to the ground as he can. He tries to be still, but his body is shaking and his heart is making his ribs jump out with each beat. He is terrified that Johnstone will hear him breathing, so he inhales with shallow breaths.

Baxter can hear footsteps crackling the leaves on which they walk— heavy footsteps. It is Johnstone. He walks over to Carol. He stares down at her from above. "Where's Baxter?"

"I don't know."

"I saw him with you."

"I think he went to the bathroom."

"I think you're lying."

Johnstone grabs Carol by the arms and shakes her hard. "I know you're lying. You ain't gonna fool me. Where is he?"

"I don't know." Baxter can feel the fear in Carol's voice. She tries to punch him, but Johnstone is holding her too tightly.

Johnstone shoves Carol and she falls hard on her back. He jumps on top of her and grabs her by the neck. He keeps asking her where Baxter is while he presses. She starts to cry, and then she starts to scream, but the volume is muffled by Johnstone's weight on her chest, and his hands on her throat.

Baxter can't take the screams. He rises with no sound from his cover and stalks towards Johnstone's back. He clenches his Batman lunchbox in his left fist so hard his knuckles turn white. Some leaves crunch as Baxter approaches Johnstone, and the boy starts to turn his head. But before he can turn around Baxter twists his torso and builds momentum towards a swing of his lunchbox. The lunchbox lands hard on the side of Johnstone's head, and then Baxter hits him again with a backhand to the opposite side of his head. Johnstone falls to the ground landing hard on his side. He does not break his fall. Blood is trickling out of his mouth and left ear and there is a wicked four inch gash on the right side of his head. Baxter prods him with his foot, but the boy does not react. He is out cold.

Carol squirms from under Johnstone and gets up. She brushes the leaves from her sweater and the tears from her eyes. There are red marks on her neck. She stands beside Baxter.

"Gross! Do you think he's alright?"

"Who cares? Are you going to tell?"

Carol pauses for a moment. "No."

"The teachers will find him in a few minutes. Let's go to the swings."

She and Baxter slip out of the woods. They go to the swings, but he and Carol just sit down in them and kick at the gravel and stare at the woods. Soon enough the two can hear the horrified voice of a teacher cry out of the woods. Recess continues for extra minutes amidst the chaos. When an ambulance arrives a bunch of kids have gathered around. Everyone is asking what happened. Carol and Baxter walk over in time to see Johnstone being hoisted into the ambulance on a stretcher. He lies motionless with bandages wrapped about his head and an oxygen mask on his face. Hope asks what Carol and Baxter know. "We left the woods to go to the swings before George got there," Carol replies.

Then Hope looks at the marks on her neck and says, "How did you get those?"

Carol doesn't answer, but she looks guilty. Her eyes are cast downward, and they are red from her tears. But Baxter knows she will never tell. She is a good friend.



Later in the day at Carol's house the two of them sit in her room watching TV. They hardly move or speak the whole time. They sit in large beanbag chairs. Baxter thinks about talking to Carol, but he stops himself. He can't think of what to say. His stomach ache is gone, but it is replaced with a dull ache in his head which is spinning with violent images. The blow, the blood, the crumpled figure lying there in the dead leaves, and the ambulance lights and sirens amidst the mass of kids and teachers with their horrified faces dig their way into his head. He can't get rid of the feeling that his own head was hit also—he can almost feel the pain himself.

Finally Carol speaks. "Are you going to keep the lunchbox?"

"No."

"Do you want to catch frogs?"

"Sure." But nothing happens because neither of them moves from their place.

Later at dinner Baxter sits on a barstool and tries to eat. His dad made tuna fish sandwiches and tomato soup. Baxter strains down the sandwiches, but he can't even look at the soup. He knows his dad will expect him to eat everything he is given, or he will get the standard threat of eating it for breakfast. His dad is watching him take every bite.

"Eat your soup."

"Dad, what's the punishment for murder?"

"Life in prison in this state, but it should be the death penalty."

"Oh."

The phone rings in the other room, and Baxter's dad goes to answer it. Baxter runs to the sink and dumps the soup. Dad talks for several minutes and returns with a very serious look on his face.

"Baxter, do you know anything about what happened today?"

"I didn't do it."

"Of course not, the police think a dangerous man did it. Did you see anything? One of the girls in the class said you and Carol were the last to see the boy."

"No dad, we went to the swings."

"From where?"

"From class. We were at the swings."

Dad looks at Baxter for a moment, and then tells him to clean up the kitchen and do some homework.

At school the next day Mrs. Lemon gives news of Johnstone. He is in something called a coma. The doctors aren't sure if he will ever come to school again. She says recess will be held indoors today. She is acting funny. She keeps looking out the window at the woods during the morning lessons, and sometimes she stops teaching and just looks at the kids like Baxter's mother looked the time he came home at ten in the evening.



Before recess is half over she makes all the kids sit down, and then she speaks. "How many times have we told you kids not to play in the woods? Did anybody see anything yesterday? Anything at all?"

One of the other kids in the class raises his hand. Baxter wants to run away, but his body feels like jello. He knows this is it. He'll be put in prison, and what if Johnstone doesn't wake up? Will the police kill him?

A kid raises his hand and speaks, "I saw a real big man jump over the fence yesterday!"

"What did he look like?" Mrs. Lemon asks.

"He was real big and ugly, and he had warts on his face."

All of the kids in the room stare at the boy except for Baxter and Carol. Then Carol raises her hand. Now Baxter gets up and starts for the door. How could she do this? She's his friend! Carol gets Mrs. Lemon's attention away from Baxter by stomping on the floor.

"I saw him too," she says, "He wore old clothes and he had hairy arms."

Mrs. Lemon turns to Baxter. Tears are streaming down the boy's face. The kids are giggling at him, except for Carol, who is starting to cry herself. Mrs. Lemon yells at Baxter, "What has gotten into you?"

"I did it, " Baxter screams through his sobs, "I hit him with my lunchbox."

After Baxter speaks Mrs. Lemon gasps, and the kids' eyes widen. Everyone stares at Baxter, and no one speaks. He runs to the front of the room towards the door, opens it, and runs down the hall. He is heading for the woods. He can't let them find him; they'll kill him for this.

At the back of the woods Baxter crouches behind a tree. He didn't have time to get his jacket, so he is shivering. In a few minutes he hears the teachers calling. "Baxter...Baxter." They're getting closer. He makes a run for the fence and tries to climb it, but it is too tall and he isn't wearing his sneakers, so he just keeps slipping down. He knows it's over. They'll get him. They have him surrounded already and they are closing in. He hears a teacher yell, "I see him!" He falls on his butt, his energy to resist and escape gone, and he covers his face with his hands.

## **FRIEND, I AM NOT YET A POET, BUT**

**By True P.**

Friend, I am not yet a poet, but  
last night as I walked from the lake to my bed  
I entered a temple of Light.

The altar was a warped and splintered picnic table,  
behind it rose the Image:  
a tree transformed by golden light  
into a trident.

And the dark-eyed child who suffered  
Sunday after Sunday  
legs dangling from a hard wooden bench, eyes  
strained forward, skirts tucked  
under her knees in shame,  
this lost and stumbling Daughter of Zion  
was changed in a flash  
of green and golden ecstasy  
into the high priestess of the forest,  
who leaped atop the weathered altar  
hurling her patent leather shoes into the shadows,  
dancing with uncanny, amazing grace.



## TWISTED

By **Suzanne Kleintop**

My parents and I were driving down Route 4 in our rust-colored Chevy Caprice. Dad was in the driver's seat with my mom sitting two feet to his right. I sat cross-legged in the roomy back seat, alone, as usual. For the millionth time in eighteen years, I asked myself, "Why am I here?" And for the first time ever, I knew why. I knew why my father drove a little faster than his usual 55, his hazel eyes intent on the endless stretch of charcoal-grey highway. And I knew why Mom's face was tear-stained and pale behind her light brown bifocals as she clasped Dad's large right arm, her knuckles white and tense.

Aside from an occasional snuffle from my mom, the three of us were silent. Dad wasn't even humming along with the instrumental Beach Boys' tune on WZZZ. I couldn't distinguish the song—they all sound the same after Muzak. I was preoccupied with twisting a small silver paper clip I'd found on the back seat and recalled the scene that had occurred ten minutes earlier on the front porch of our Thorton home.

The young, emotionless cop had pulled into our driveway and asked us to go to the Giles Valley Hospital Center immediately. "Your son's been in an accident," he said, after asking Dad if he was the parent of Andrew Wealing. The cop played his stone-faced part perfectly when my mom asked how bad the accident had been. "I don't know any of the details, just that he was air-lifted to GVHC, and they want you there now."

He could have told us that my brother was dead; they already knew that. Then my wandering thoughts would have been more appropriate during the endless drive to the hospital.

As we drove out of Thorton, I thought, "Drew, I always tell you that you drive too fast. Why don't you ever listen?" Then I found the paper clip, and as I bent it out of shape, my thoughts became as distorted as the bit of metal. I unbent the outermost segment as we pulled onto the thruway, thinking about how this busy road usually took me to the mall, the movies, or dinner at Chi Chi's. Where was this highway leading me now?

With the second bend, I thought of the assembly I had seen in school the afternoon before my Senior prom. They'd shown slides of people who had been MedEvac-ed because of serious automobile accidents, too often the result of drunk driving. I knew Drew hadn't been drinking before he'd taken off in his red Subaru.

I continued molding the metal as my mind recalled the slides, flashing through pictures of cars mangled beyond recognition, of severed and bloody arms and legs, and of Julie, age 18, who'd been decapitated after flying through the windshield of her brand new Corvette—congratulations, Graduate.



By now the paper clip was beyond recognition. It had become a small metal spear, and I twisted it in opposite directions, bending it back and forth. A piece of it broke off, and I threw it into the metal ashtray on the armrest. The harsh clang of metal on metal caused both my parents to turn around suddenly, but I lowered my head to avoid eye contact with the startled faces.

How would we ever afford my college tuition if Drew had been paralyzed like the guest speaker at the assembly? The hospital bill and the adaptations we'd have to make on the house would cost a fortune. Maybe I should have chosen State after all, it's a lot cheaper than Clayton.

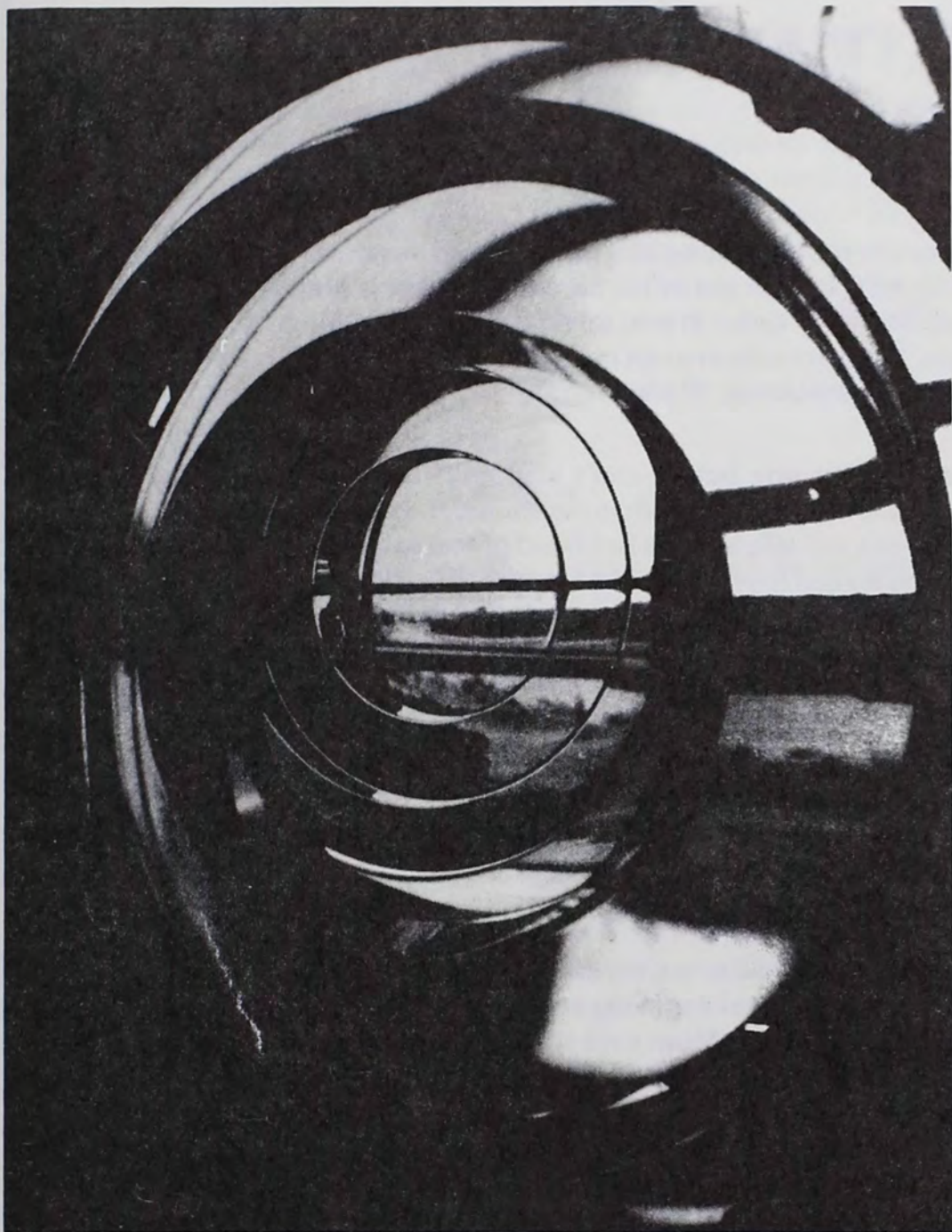
Why had Drew been on Miller's Trail Road, anyway? It was Tuesday night, the night he'd faithfully gone to Legion Band for the past seven years, and the club where they practiced is in the other direction. Then I remembered the phone call he'd gotten while we were watching M\*A\*S\*H. Betsy, his ex-girlfriend, had called and asked Drew to come see her new apartment in nearby Lawdale. The two had remained good friends after the break-up, after they'd both found new romantic interests. So before going to practice, Drew wanted to stop by at Betsy's place, on Miller's Trail Road. If he hadn't been going to see the bitch, he'd be safe at band, playing marches and afterward having a beer with the guys. I never did like that girl.

Another piece of paper clip broke off in my hands, but this time I tossed it onto the carpeted floor. I reached back into my Sunday School memories, where they'd promised that talking to God always helped, and I prayed silently. The grey clouds looked like waves rolling on a purple sea, and I noticed a bird soaring in the distance. What was a sea gull doing in Pennsylvania? "Please, God, if you just let Drew live, I'll never do anything wrong again...I'll never ask for anything...I'll become a saint...anything!! Please, God, please..."

When we finally reached the hospital parking lot, I stuffed the remains of the twisted clip in the pocket of my faded Levi's as we trudged toward the glaring red emergency sign. Maybe it would bring good luck when we faced the surgeon in the consultation lounge.

Two weeks after my brother's funeral, I attended a Legion Band concert. Before the show, his best friend Mitch appeared on stage to tearfully dedicate the concert to Drew Wealing, who had been killed in an accident on July 21. Drew had been the band's lead trombonist, and to honor him, they'd be leaving his chair and trombone stand on stage for the remainder of the season.

As I jammed my sweating hand into my jeans' pocket for a tissue, I felt a cold piece of metal prick my finger. I pulled out the forgotten paper clip and examined it closely for the first time. I was happy that I'd saved the scrap of metal, because somehow the clip had been shaped into the perfect memory of my brother—a tiny silver treble cleff.





# THE FINAL JOURNEY

By Lora L. Hart

## 1

There are tubes running into his nose and arms and back out again. A big grey tube is inserted in his mouth. His skin is grey and his eyes are closed. My little sister starts to cry, and I say, "Alta, honey, please," because her tears only prompt my own. I walk over to the hospital bed and call to my grandfather, "Parker?"

"He can hear you but he can't respond," the nurse says, coming up behind me and putting a hand on my shoulder. I turn away from the bed as if Parker can actually see the hot flood of tears that are pouring down my face. I pull myself together for Alta's sake. If she sees her twenty-one year old sister upset, she'll get hysterical. I put my arms around her and murmur, "It's okay, honey, he'll be okay." My words comfort her, and she walks towards the bed to touch him. A doctor bustles in, and oblivious to our presence, he says to the nurse, "It's time to look at him."

The nurse asks me if I mind waiting in the lounge. Nodding because the lump in my throat blocks words, I take my sister's hand and we walk out of Intensive Care.

## 2

I was two and a half when my parents and I moved out of my grandparents' home. Memories of moving are vague, but I do remember being very upset at leaving them. Mom says that when Maggie and Parker (as I and everyone else called them) first came to see me, I hit both of them, and cried, "You deserted me, you left me alone." Apparently my parents, and the fact that we moved out, did not matter.

Going to Maggie and Parker's house was the highlight of my three year old world. I insisted on sleeping with them, and as doting grandparents of their first grandchild, they never refused. Sleeping with Maggie and Parker meant I could drink soda and eat cookies in bed. I got to watch Johnny Carson. Sometimes Parker let me put Keri-Lotion on his back and I loved the mediciney smell, lathering my hands with the cream and spreading it over his back. I always avoided the mole on his left shoulder because I thought it was an ugly spot. Usually one of my grandparents left in the middle of the night because I kicked.



Parker loved to travel and we went to Atlantic City when I was four. Maggie, Parker, Uncle Palmer, Aunt Madeline, and Cousin Jeannette, and me. I played all week with a big black dog named Sunny. Parker carried me into the water because I hated the sand beneath my toes. It was squooshy, I said, and we usually left as soon as I got sand in my suit. I wanted to play with Sunny. We went to the boardwalk, Parker bought me cotton candy and we went on all of the rides I wanted to go on. We collected sea shells and I showed them all to Sunny. Maggie and Parker bought me souvenirs for my sister and my parents, and I cried when we left.

"She's crying over the dog," my grandfather laughed, and my grandmother agreed.

## 3

I gaze with fascination and horror at the machine next to Parker's bed. It stands on two grey metal legs and has a flat square face. Across it runs four squiggly lines. At the ends of these lines are numbers. Two generations of nurses, on both sides of the family, mean I've acquired more medical information than most people and I know the bottom lines stand for his diastolic and systolic heart rate. I think one is his EKG, but I'm not sure. I discover later I'm right, and the top line is his brain waves. It's hard to believe that his machine is one of our only indications that Parker is still alive.

The tube in his mouth contains oxygen and is helping him breathe. Whenever the little red light flashes, it is telling us that the machine is breathing for him, and he is no longer breathing on his own. To my relief, the red light rarely flashes.

The tubes in his arms contain various fluids sustaining his life. One tube holds IVACS, which are natural fluids his body needs. The other two tubes contain drugs to combat pneumonia. Kathy, his personal nurse, tells me they are ticarcillin and gentomycin, which mean nothing to me as drugs, but oddly enough, make me feel better. He is also on morphine for the pain.

While I am studying these machines, my grandmother is talking to him. "John (his first name), I'm here, can you hear me? I love you, John." I want to cry for her pain. She is rubbing his swollen hands and trying to get some response from him when Kathy returns. "Mrs. Davies," she says, "It's important that we discuss what you want us to do if...we have to discuss the possibility of Code Blueing him. Let me explain what a Code—."

"I know what a Code Blue is," my grandmother says quietly, her face grey and sad. "What is it you're trying to tell me?"

Kathy hands my grandmother some tissues and puts her arm around Maggie's shoulders. "There's a strong possibility he won't make it through the night," she says softly as panic fills my body. "We need your permission in writing if you don't want us to Code."

Maggie begins to tremble and as I walk around the bed to hold her, she says, "I have to talk to my daughters. I must talk to my daughters. They have a say in this, too." She starts to cry and I leave Kathy holding her to go call my mom.

## 4

Traveling with Parker was always fun because he never swore like Dad did whenever we got lost. Maggie, Parker and I got lost fifteen times the year we went to Washington D.C. We saw the Jefferson Monument and Monticello. I was bored in line, so I read a book. Parker took pictures of Maggie and me eating ice cream, me looking at the Lincoln Memorial, and squirrels sleeping in the grass. Washington bored me, to Parker's dismay, and I wanted to get back to my book.

Fridays were Maggie and Parker days. They always came to see us and I waited for them. Parker never shaved on Fridays and I refused to kiss him because his face was scratchy. He'd laugh and say, "Come here and give me a kiss, Picklepuss,"—his nickname for me because I love pickles. When Parker did shave, I'd kiss him on both cheeks because I knew he shaved for me.

Parker loved practical jokes and every April Fool's Day he called with a new one. He fooled me every year because I always forgot the date. When we walked into his house in Coaldale, he would say, "You've been here long enough—Go home." The doormat in front of the house read, "OH NO! NOT YOU AGAIN!" He also loved puzzles and Mom bought him a Rubik's Cube when they first came out. He had the whole thing solved within a week.

## 5

We are gathered around Parker's bed. Mom, Maggie, and me. Megan, my middle sister, can't get her boss to let her leave work, and when I talk to her on the phone, she cries while ringing up three customers. Dad and Alta are on their way over from home and the rest of the family is driving down from the coal regions. Mom, Maggie, and Aunt Jacque via phone, have decided not to Code, which means if his heart stops, they'll let him go.



Maggie is talking to Parker, and I'm on the other side of the bed, next to the monitor, talking to him too. Mom is looking at the monitor and crying.

"Daddy, you can't leave us, you can't leave me, you just can't die!"

"Mom, you're not making this any easier. Think of your mother," I hiss at her, mad because she should be supporting Maggie.

"Let her alone," Maggie says. "She is losing her father." You are losing your husband! I want to cry, but I know that Maggie being strong is her way of coping with the pain.

We all keep sharp eyes on the monitor. His heart rate is dangerously low. Kathy tells us that's because they gave him more morphine to make him more comfortable. We are talking to him, saying anything just so he will know we are with him. I start to talk about my upcoming trip to England and Wales and I try to bribe him into living.

"Parker, if you make it, I'll take you with me, I promise I'll take you with me. I'll even pay."

The breathing machine starts to kick in. He is no longer breathing on his own. Mom screams and throws herself on the bed. He takes a deep strangling breath, and the red light stops flashing. I try to joke to break the tension.

"He was shocked by my offer to pay; he knows how I am with money," Mom and Maggie laugh. Kathy comes over and asks us to step outside for a few minutes while the doctor checks him. Maggie kisses him on his cheek and we leave.

## 6

Parker and Maggie came to everything I did during junior and senior high. In 8th grade, they came to my spelling bees. They came to every Saturday game I cheered for, and every play I starred in. When I graduated from high school, Parker gave me \$2,000 because I chose Ursinus and it was more than my parents could afford.

"The most important thing is to get you educated, young lady," he told me. "We'll manage somehow."

I was at Ursinus three and a half weeks when they first came to visit me. They brought me Tab, crackers, and cheese. Parker was getting sick and no longer heard too well. I had to shout for him to hear me. I had a new male friend, and when my grandparents left, Ed and I walked them to the car.

"He seems like a nice guy," Parker whispered to me before they drove away. It was the first time he approved of my choice in men.

They visited me frequently during the next three years. Parker and Maggie would get Christmas decorations and help me decorate my room. They drove the two hour drive so often that the maid on the hall began to recognize them, and she would let them into my room if I was at class. They always brought food and money. On my 19th and 20th birthdays, they showed up with birthday cakes. On my 21st birthday, I called them to see if they were on their way. Maggie answered the phone. "Parker's really sick, honey, so we're not going to come down." I was disappointed, but I knew he was not in good shape. I had no idea how bad he really was.

## 7

They allow us back into ICU. Kathy tells us he is slowly fading away. They have removed some of the tubes from his arms, and turned off the breathing apparatus. The machine will no longer breathe for him. It is now only giving him oxygen. We gather around him. Maggie starts to cry quietly and puts her arms around his shoulders, telling him she loves him. Mom breaks down with loud sobs. I am desperately trying to hold myself together. Somebody has to be strong, I tell myself. His vital signs slowing down. Mom starts to yell at Parker, "Hold on, Daddy! Hold on, dammit, we need you."

"Mom! He needs to go. He'll be so much happier in heaven. You're only making it harder. Let him go." I am mad at myself for being so cruel, but I am afraid she'll totally break down and get hysterical. She pulls herself together momentarily, and says quietly, "You're right. He won't have any more pain." I feel myself tearing at her words. I know these are his last moments with us and I want to scream. Kathy is rubbing Maggie's back, as Maggie is crying on Parker's shoulder. Mom is holding his hand on the other side. I move over to Maggie and Kathy steps away. Maggie takes my hand as I lean over to kiss Parker goodbye. My tears drop on his bedsheet, and I wipe them away. The once squiggly lines start to straighten out and Mom starts to moan, "Oh no, God, please no."

Kathy says quietly, "He's gone," but we already know. Maggie's face is ashen as she thanks Kathy for being so supportive. Mom, Maggie, and I are holding onto each other as we slowly leave the room to allow them to prepare the body.



## 8

When Parker was first hospitalized for pneumonia, Ed and I made the two hour drive to Leighton on one of the hottest days of the summer. I was not particularly worried about Parker—after all, a lot of people catch pneumonia and survive. But when I saw Parker in the hospital, my heart dropped. He didn't laugh, didn't have any dumb jokes to tell, and wouldn't eat. For one of the first times in my life, I could not think of a thing to say. We spent the entire afternoon with him, and before we left, Parker took my hand and said, "Picklepuss, I'm not going to make it out of the hospital."

I kissed him on the forehead. "Parker, you're an old poop. Of course you'll make it. You have to stick around for my wedding—which won't be for another 20 years." A week later he was transferred to Intensive Care in a hospital in my hometown because of the lung specialists that worked there.

None of the living have any idea what an afterlife is like. Only those closest to dying can have any hope or conception. I like to think, though, that Parker is sitting on the porch of his old home with his parents, with a new audience for his jokes, and a huge Rubik's Cube on his lap. He's in a place where the Eagles always win, and there's always a new place to visit.

# RITŪ MILTONIS A TRAILING ALEXANDRINE

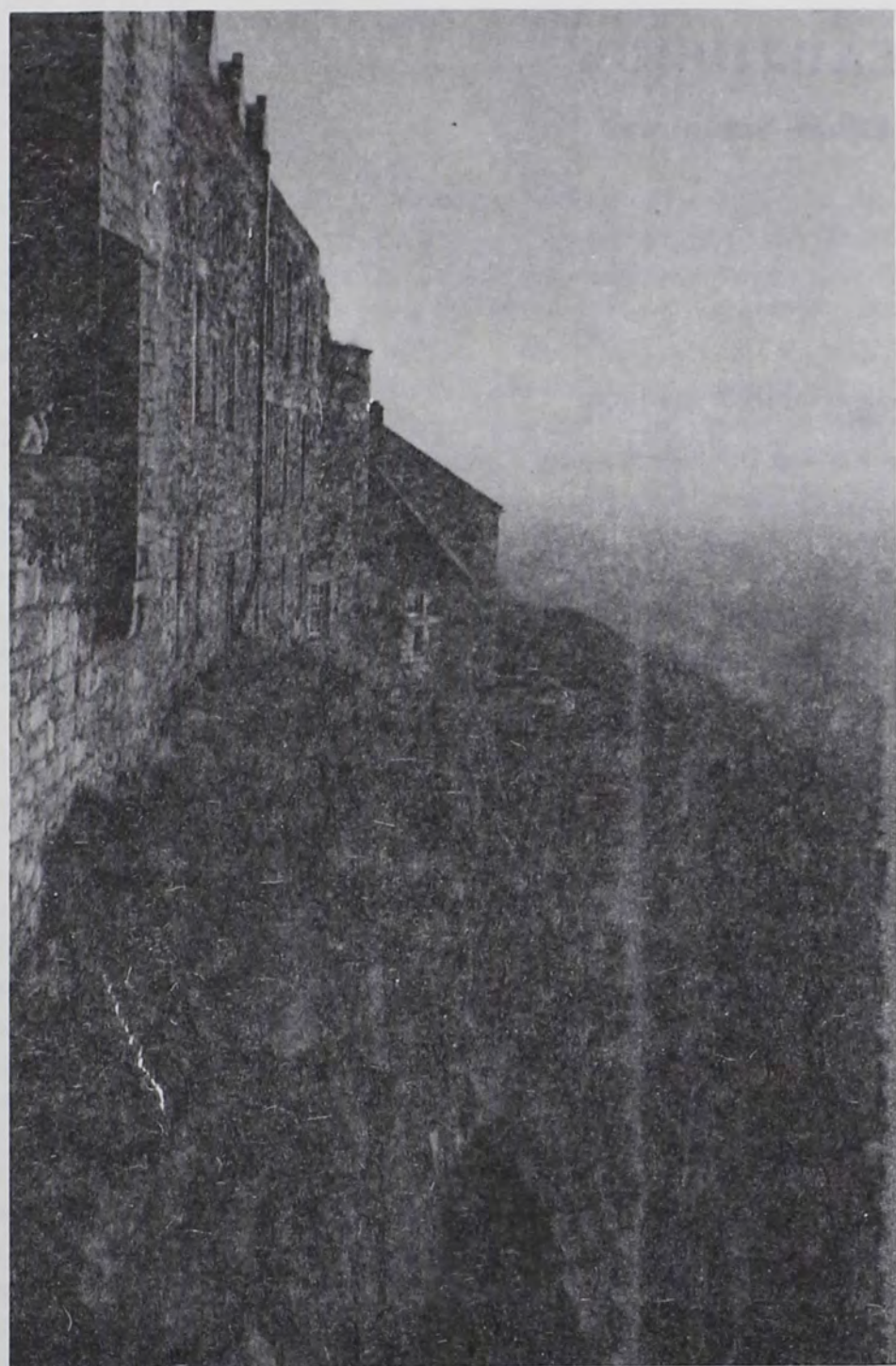
By Frank R. Moulton, Jr.

Dost thou not hear my moan above the drone  
Of this abyssmal paradise regained  
By Grace of God, or Satan's victory?  
If it be blasphemy to doubt, atone  
My sin before the Christ whose rule sustained  
Man's faith, which, sorely tried by history,  
Remains intact and veils the contradictory.

Why take ye heed of apostolic rot  
With promise of transcending the etern'1?  
There be no sense to seek reward in faith  
Redeemable in death—a trial unsought  
Except by fools who harbor thoughts nocturn'1.  
For if 'tis true, the nonsense prophets saith,  
One but surrenders satisfaction to a wraith.

Seek ye for light within thy mortal frame  
And fathom not the words of godly men.  
For paradise, as 'tis revealed when numbered days  
Are shed, whate'er, will not dispel the shame,  
Nor dim the fame, of that within one's ken.  
Take up thy measured Talent! Set thy world ablaze  
In fire of thy salvat'n and 'wait thy Master's praise.





# HEARTHIDE

By Laura Sassaman

I look around at the faces  
Lit by the dancing fire  
My family  
Sitting forward in their wrapped blankets  
Harmonizing in eager appreciation of Mom's story  
As we while away the time  
Until the power goes back on.  
This one quiet interlude  
In the midst of our busy lives—  
Constantly wired—  
I wonder  
    Why it takes a blackout  
    For communication to start...  
I wonder,  
    After the blackout,  
    Can we pull the plug?



## THE OGRE

By John Biesecker

Shameless, like the empty plastic bag casually hanging from my hand, I gaze at my fuzzy reflection in the dark window pane before me. The taste of the mushrooms lingers. Shuffling through books and Busch cans littering the dorm room floor, little piles gathering dust on the cold linoleum, I throw the empty bag away and sigh.

At 8:30 I hear a light knock on the wooden door. Shaking my head ever so slightly, I take a deep breath, hesitate a second, and open the door. The bright lights of the hallway crash into my dimly lit room, as she stands in the doorway. My date. Blonde but homely, she is nicknamed "The Ogre" by my drinking buddies, the same ones who convinced me to do the mushrooms before going out. Making my quick but necessary inspections, I am totally turned off by her face, which is flat and wide, like a clay figure which was dropped on its face. I look away and walk wordlessly with her to the parking lot. She and I fold into her blue Chevette, with Springsteen groaning some song about the drab life in Jersey out of a cheap set of speakers. I say, "Great tune! Mind if I crank it?" and raise the volume enough for Bruce to make any conversation impossible. I ask myself why I couldn't say no to her party invitation as my buddies had advised. Rebecca, a sweet little blonde on my hallway, begged me to go with the Ogre. She said that the Ogre has a crush on me. Lovely. Besides, as my buddies said, if worse comes to worse I can always get drunk and "do her." I glance at her blue but slightly crossed eyes, which smile at me and immediately glance ahead, as if the quiet parking lot in front of us is more important than anything. She shifts the car into gear with a grind of metal on metal, and we pull out. My mind aches as I anticipate my evening with her.

As we spill out of the car and onto the pavement, our breath mingles in wisps in the crisp dark air. I look my date over and say, "Let's hit the beer."

As I climb the hallway stairs to the apartment, the beer-stained carpet begins to shift in shades, as my mind soaks up the chemicals in my head. Never much of a partier in high school, my shipmates here at the fine institution of Shippensburg introduced me to the wonderful life of altered consciousness.

Fluorescent greens, yellows, and blues scream from the walls as drunken sots armed with markers sign people's white t-shirts and the sheet-covered walls. The Delta Zeta graffiti party! Free beer if I am a sister's date!

I pound beers quickly while scoping my surroundings for a more attractive prospect than my date. From time to time I answer yes or no to her



incessant questions or attempts at conversation. In my multicolored haze, I continue to drain the plastic cups she hands me. She is probably trying to get me drunk. No problem!

My eyes wander. Glimpses of returned gazes, glazed and tired, tanned female legs and angry profanity on the walls filter in and out of view. Shapely legs with brown wraparound sandals and topped with white cotton shorts patterned with pink, possibly tropical flowers, call to me from the center of a group of sisters. The complexion of the face is so-so, but the body says yes. I move.

"Hi, my name is Grant," I hope I am saying. My tongue is no longer entirely coordinated.

"Hi, I'm Cheryl," she answers, as our eyes meet. Her manner is innocent enough, but her hazel gaze beckons to me. Words are a mere convention, the stepping stones on which I inch carefully forward, to confirm my intuition. I lean against the damp wall, as much to keep from falling as to be cool. I no longer listen to what she is saying or what I am answering, content to wallow in anticipation.

Reeling out of the gray slosh in the back of my mind, I am yanked back to the surface by a desperate, pawing grip on my arm.

"He is my date," breaks into my world. The Ogre spins me around like a beer-soaked rag to the other side of her.

"No problem, we were only talking," Cheryl says. She looks at me, with the sorry-honey,-maybe-some-other-time look and turns away, her shapely butt weaving in and out of sight in the mass of people. "You're my date!" the Ogre pleads, as if I weren't already aware of the nightmare. Desperate to escape her confining arms, I leave "for the bathroom," oblivious to the quiet "hurry back" behind me. Swimming through a mass of sweat and beer cups, I stumble my way into the far wall and stop. Immediately I am captured by a herd of well-fed Delta Zeta sisters who are standing nearby. As they scramble for space around me, I settle the question by turning toward the only non-obese one in the group, leaving the rest to talk at and stab my back. This girl is cute in an innocent sort of way, with brown hair cascading across her shoulders and framing her beautiful dark eyes and pert nose. After a few moments of friendly conversation I realize she is not drunk enough to forget the boyfriend she has annoyingly referred to twice already. Taking the hint, I move on, the sweet scent of her lingering perfume enveloping me in a cloud of puzzling feelings of loneliness and a tightness in my throat. I know what I need to combat the loneliness. I surge forward, seeking companionship for the night. I scan the crowded room, which pulsates in rhythm to the music and rumbles with shouted, incoherent conversation about mundane, drunken things. I spy the Ogre squirming in and out between people, her eyes darting back and forth, searching for me. I dive into the bathroom.



The acrid stench of vomit violates my nostrils upon entering. A buddy of mine, kneeling on the filthy beer and urine soaked carpet, rests the side of his face on the edge of the bowl. His black, shaggy hair is tousled and slick with sweat. Beads of sweat form on his forehead and trickle down his red cheeks. His glassy, blood-shot eyes strain in my direction, but his face remains glued to the bowl, too heavy to lift.

"Too much, eh Psycho?" I say as I set my plastic cup among the turned-over cups and chaos on the sticky counter.

"Great party! Hook up or throw up, I always say," he gurgles. We continue in unison, like at countless parties before, "and a girl is a girl." "Well I'm..." He didn't finish as his face twists and his body convulses, his mouth gaping and straining as if he had swallowed his tongue. His guts spew forth, splattering the sides of the bowl. He coughs a few times and spits the residue from his mouth.

Drowning in the sights and sounds of sickness, my stomach rebels and tries to follow the lead of the pathetic soul hugging the toilet. I grip the edges of the formica-covered counter, the corner's biting into the slick palms of my hand as I squeeze tightly and close my eyes, trying to isolate myself from the penetrating smell and sounds of his torture. I take a deep breath and force the contents of my stomach back down, almost gagging. I grab my beer and flee.

It is getting late. My mind sloshes back and forth, trying to regain equilibrium in the swirling patterns of the lights and colors. I have no idea how many girls I hit on and no longer care. I grasp the familiar blue and white cup in my hand. The cup is my last crumb of concreteness. My vision is inverted and spinning, my hearing fades in and out and understands nothing. My nose can't clear the smell and taste of the bathroom. Images return of the desecration sliding down the insides of the once white and pure toilet, stained forever with the effects of too strict parents, too much free time, and not enough self-discipline.

But the cup, my friend, remains firm in my hand, the familiar wash of beer wiping away the world and momentarily making me forget my Ogre or quest for a hook-up.

It is empty, drained for the umpteenth time. The brownish droplets which circle the inside are looking at me and laughing. I need more. My hands are sticky with overflow and somehow my t-shirt has gotten drenched. My feet are splattered with fuzzy pieces of blue carpet which adhere to the dried beer on my bare skin. My feet are ugly, disgusting and twisted. They can't be mine. How have my feet become so ugly? They didn't used to be. What happened to my shoes and socks? I can't remember what they looked like, much less where they are.

I wedge my shoulders into a corner to keep from melting into the carpet. The reeling picture of my favorite Ogre returns and grows larger, trying to plant her sloppy lips on mine. People might see. I try and twist, but the muscles in my neck no longer listen and I let her kiss me.

The party is dying, with a few large girls still dancing to the loud music which makes my ears bleed and curl. Couples are either leaving or hanging all over each other like rag dolls, stumbling into walls. One drunk couple is planted on the orangish couch which leans against the far wall. They ignore the empty cups they are sitting on and the fact that their haven is drenched and squishy with beer. As their kissing and mauling becomes more animate, I watch until her fat thighs begin to wiggle, as if trying to make me sick.

All the good-looking girls are gone, not that I can see faces very clearly anymore. Despite the convulsions of my brain, I remember my buddy's golden rules. Hook up or throw up and a girl is a girl. And so is the Ogre.

I reach for her paw and mumble, "Let's go." She looks up at me, surprised, and smiles.

I drive. She insists. Despite my lack of any sort of depth perception or any knowledge of where I am going or how to get there, I manage to get us home, and we arrive in a squeal of tires back at her dorm.

We slosh through the sludge of partially frozen mud and crisp, dead grass. She tries to kiss me and I ignore her and look for anyone who might see.

As she struggles with the lock on her door, I bitch and press my hand on the small of her back as if trying to push her through the still-locked door. I glance over my shoulder at the empty hallway. No one there. My hand begins to wander down across her butt, pausing to slip inside the waistband of her shorts before continuing on. Too soft.

"Jesus Christ! Give me the damn keys!" I say after her eternal fumbling. Wrenching the keys from her hand, I push her to the side and jam the key into the lock. Pulling the door open with a rush, I yank her into the room behind me. I give her butt another pinch as I slam the door behind me.

"Where's your roommate?" I ask.

"She went home for the weekend," she answers. "I hate sleeping alone in a room," she continues. I look into her bright blue eyes and see the pleading behind the drunken glaze. Her make-up is still perfect and she obviously spent quite a bit of time doing her hair. Her room is full of teddy bears, carefully arranged. Some sit in a group on her pink, soft bedspread, their marble eyes penetrating into my head and reading my thoughts with



their glassy stare. I quickly look down, to the uncluttered carpet where I can see a row of neatly placed shoes peeking out from under the bed. The room is spotless and decorated in pink and pastels. Crude orange and green crayon drawings plaster the walls, all of them signed "Love, Davey." On the far wall her desktop is cluttered with pictures of family, and a little boy with dimples and freckles everywhere, probably Davey. Her mother could be her older sister, sharing the same nose and round cheeks. The Ogre's squat father has his arm around the woman in a more than father/daughter way. His eyes are honest, almost naive. Images of hard days in some factory, and evenings with the family come to mind as I stare into his pudgy face.

Her bulletin board is covered with pictures of prom dates, a freshman orientation sticker with "Hi, I'm Geri" on it, the name carefully printed in those curving, flowing letters that only girls can make. She carefully sits down on her bed and faces me. I am silent as I continue to look at the photos of her and her brother or nephew, her and her grandmother, pictures with a group of handicapped children. When I look back at her, her form wavers in and out. My tears form like condensation and trickle down the sides of her warm heart, which has somehow floated to the surface and lies vulnerably waiting. My buddies' faces appear and dissolve in my reflection in her eyes. I feel their buddy-like arms around me and the tightness in my pants cries out. Returning my gaze to her open, caring, face, I swallow the rock forming in my throat.

She clears her throat nervously and her fingers twist her key chain and keys in slow but tight patterns. She whispers, barely audible and almost crying, "Please stay."

I stare at her innocent face, and become sober and sick to my stomach in self-disgust. Squeezing my eyes shut slowly, I inhale and answer, "I really can't. But, thank you very much for inviting me to the party, I had a good time." I quickly kiss her sweet cheek and turn away. I quietly close the door behind me, sick of good times.

I go out onto the front steps and pause, leaning on the handrail. The cold air slaps my face, as I say "Geri" softly, with a barely perceptible nodding of my head. The bright street light, which guards the entranceway to the girls' dorm, reflects off the unlit glass of the door, hurling my image back at me. I stare, and vomit, not from the alcohol, but at the reflection of the ogre in the glass.

# O INDESTRUCTABLE EVERLASTING TONKA TRUCK

By Matthew Noll

O indestructable everlasting Tonka Truck

Where are you now?

Rusting in a musty damp cellar

behind puzzles that were never assembled

Games that were never played after

(What would you like for.....)

Christmas

Pick it out of the Sears catalog

and it appears

like breath on a window

did we invest so much

crying over broken toys

They promised us the world

but they never told us

we had to work for it.



# DECEMBER 1, 1988

By Erika Rohrbach

stall      in my toll booth  
                    little doe,  
            & there      is  
your                              exit.

## OUR CHURCH

**By Keith Leparulo**

It was hot and humid. It was summer. I was bored and I knew the same applied to all those batty children who were my age. Pew after pew, elderly after elderly, I spent my Sundays in the small Pakerford church that became our home away from home. It was a weekly gathering of Protestants whose hearts were big but heads were small. Although Pastor Briley was credited for the congregation's motivation, he began to drag-on the sermon more and more. The sweat dripped off my chin onto the oak floor. My fidgeting became a constant bother to my mother who had me sit near her every week, second pew from the front, left-hand side, right corner. My only prayers were for that of a shorter service and Kelly Dodson's phone number. She was a beautiful kid whom I would have given anything to be with. I don't think she thought of me, but I always dreamt of her, us, intimate, alone and naked. I hung on her every gesture; I lusted, and put my imagination to work. Pastor Briley's words merely formed sounds as he delivered the message to us. I focused entirely on her, forgetting I was in a house of God. She seemed to be the only thing that was real on Sunday mornings. It was almost as if she was all that mattered. However, Pastor Briley's niche was salvation. I wasn't sure of the meaning of the word, but I would listen intently, as if I were a child prodigy whose crusading would soon begin.

How I love to perform for the church-going crowd. Indeed they thought I was a character of distinct mores. If they only knew I was the child whose sole intention was to play doctor with the Dodsons' daughter. She was not all I thought of, though. I became adept in the art of amusing myself. Listening to the choir often made me smirk, which produced an awful grimace on Mother's face that I could only combat with dead silence throughout the remainder of the service. Since I did not wear a watch, I would often look at the clock wondering how long each of their hymns would last. It was an awkward task because the clock was directly behind me, hanging on the wall. The periodic turning of my head caught the attention of our beloved Deacons who, without a morsel of doubt, thought I was the most ill-mannered child since K. Roddy's son. I never minded that as long as I went about my usual comparison of the choir's hymn to last week's. Sure enough, as Pastor Briley's sermons became more lengthy, so did the choir's few moments in the spotlight of embarrassment.

Occasionally, Mertyle Bagwell, who had an outstanding soprano voice, would offer her services to do a solo. And when she sang her last note it was all I could do to keep from laughing. One moment, the beautiful sounds of Mertyle and the next was punctuated with silence as the



congregation sat in awe. I thought it would be great to seize the moment and cry aloud, "Well, there you have it folks, the inspiring sounds of Mertyle Bagwell. And for a limited time only you can keep this treasure on cassette or album. Send your money order now!" Roger, my brother, would do his best to restrain himself too. However, it was most dangerous when we would simultaneously look at each other for some kind of reaction. This is what happened after Mertyle's solo. I could hold it in no longer. I exhaled a giant gasp of air and it must have seemed like I was holding my breath. I actually laughed but my mouth was closed and that made a sort-of spitting sound. I roared as I clutched my side; my eyes were pervaded with tears. And then I came back to reality. I had blown it. My attention turned towards Roger—nothing. He knew he could not follow my act for fear of Mother's punitive nature. I did not need to look at Mother's face to see her anger. She writhed and twisted with it. Her upper lip vanished into the depths of her mouth. She reached into her purse searching frantically for her Tagmet. She used this medication every time her ulcer was bothersome. Even though she sat beside me I was safe in church.

My exit would have to be quick and unsuspecting. I planned carefully; I had to execute carefully. The closing benediction would be my cue and it came. Pastor Briley always walked down the aisle, and as he passed people thronged out of the pews after him, as if he were a celebrity and they all wanted his autograph. I had this idea that I could blow by him without him seeing me if I kept low enough. I was sure he'd heard me laugh at Mertyle.

The exit I used was the only possible answer. The pews were simply too high for me to climb over and as I approached puberty, I did not want to take any unnecessary risks. I only had the church floor to work with. There I found myself crawling wildly among slacks and skirts. Startled men and women looked below to identify what they thought they had just plowed into them. The sound of Mother's cries slowly waned as I crawled further and further away down the aisle. I felt no sense of embarrassment. I didn't realize what I had done until I arrived at Pastor Briley's feet. For a moment I gazed at his black-polished leather shoes. Then I slowly rolled my eyes until I was staring directly into his. I quickly lifted myself to my feet fearing the worst.

"Good morning, Keith! Pressing engagement?"

That instant I was lost, desperate for an excuse. But I could only mumble in a timid voice, "No, nothing special."

With that he pulled up his slacks just above his knees and bent down to whisper in my ear, "You really ought to practice, I think you could shave a few seconds off your time." He shook my hand and smiled at me. I turned to notice Mother gaining on me. I knew my sojourn with our church was over. I left.







# LOUISE

By Jerry VanKanan

Louise stood at the edge of the Steeltown YMCA swimming pool watching the lap swimmers. I was in the water. She peered down and seemed to tower over me. Chuck Murphy the lifeguard had just introduced us.

"Louise, I'm going to put you in the pool alongside of Dr. Rabbitfoot," said Chuck. "But watch out for him. He loves to run into people. Especially women. Pretty ones." Chuck winked at me.

"Dr. Rabbitfoot, if you run into me, I might just run into you," said the girl.

This was said in a low husky voice. The memory of that voice would haunt me for the rest of my life.

We swam that day and I didn't hit her. I climbed from the pool, my twenty laps finished, and sat on the bench. Louise continued, and finally she too left the water. Standing in front of me, she took off her cap, shook her head, and her hair plunged to her waist. When she removed her swimming goggles, I saw her large, rabbit-like, brown eyes.

"Dr. Rabbitfoot," asked Louise, "is that your real name?"

"No," I answered. "It's my stage name. I'm a magician. I was a master plumber until I retired three years ago."

"A magician! Really?"

"Just amateur stuff, but it keeps me in pocket money."

Her eyes lit up. "Maybe you can do a show for my boys out at the home."

"What home?" I asked. "What boys?"

Louise told me that she taught art therapy at Steeltown's center for mentally disturbed boys. She said in the fall she planned to attend Tufts University to get her master's. When I told her I'd do the show, Louise said, "That's great," got my telephone number and headed for the locker room.

I stood to say goodbye like a gentleman and to get a better view as she walked away.

"What are you looking at? You're old enough to be her granddaddy." It was Chuck.

"What do you think I'm looking at?" I answered.

"Did you hear that voice?" asked Chuck. "How about that undulating walk?"

As the days went by Louise and I got to know each other better. After swimming we'd have a coffee from the Y vending machines. I'd let her do most of the talking. She had a sister Katie who lived down on the Main Line while Louise lived with her mother on Valley Forge Mountain. Her mother and father were recently separated and she needed somebody to talk to.

One day when she was going on about her rotten father, I wanted to change the subject. Trying to cheer her up I asked, "Are we allowed to do the magic show?"

"No," she said glumly, "We can't because they won't budget any money to pay you. I'm so disappointed for the boys."

"No problem," I said. "We'll do it anyway. I don't care about the money."

She looked up at me, tears in her eyes, then grabbed me and gave me a hug. I was embarrassed and must have turned fire engine red.

We set the date for the show, but I came down with an infected ear, and had to spend a few days at the Steeltown General Hospital. The only good thing about it was that Louise visited me twice at the hospital.

After my release we rescheduled the show for the next Sunday. Two of my granddaughters, Renee and Circe, came along to help. As I was unloading the car, one of the older boys approached me and asked, "How did you meet our Louise?" I detected jealousy in his voice.

"I go swimming with her," I answered.

"Swimming."

"Yes, swimming."

"In a suit."

"Of course in a suit," I answered. What in the hell did the kid think, that we went skinny dipping? Suddenly I noticed Louise blushing. To cover up she asked, "Where are the rabbits?"

"Already inside," I answered. "Let's go see them."

We went into the lounge. I sat on the sofa with Louise alongside of me. The boys already in the room were playing with the rabbits. Rather roughly too. Christopher, the little white one, acted extremely nervous, and I was worried he wouldn't stay in the hat.

Louise picked up Christopher, placed him in her lap, and an immediate metamorphosis took place. The rabbit became docile and seemed almost ready to sleep.

Now it is showtime. I turned on my cassette of circus music and the boys filed in to sit on the floor in front of the magic tables. Louise stepped



to the front to the room and announced: "Here he is: Dr. Phinius T. Rabbitfoot III, master magician."

I appeared, resplendent in a white suit. I materialized calm Christopher from a top hat and placed him in an empty black bag. I pulled the little rabbit from the bag and now he was black. The granddaughters wheeled a small cannon center stage. I rammed the black rabbit home, yanked the lanyard and the rabbit sailed into the net. Once again Christopher was white. I brought kids up front and plucked eggs and coins from their ears and mouths.

For the final effect I told the boys I needed a pretty girl. "Where can I get one?" I asked my audience.

"Louise! Louise!" chanted the boys.

I pulled the cover off. They gasped as they saw the guillotine. Louise, escorted by my granddaughters, was locked in the stocks. I placed the basket out in front to catch her head, and signaled Renee to dim the lights. I blessed myself and pulled the trigger. Down crashed the heavy steel blade. The audience screamed when a head fell into the container. The lights came slowly back up, and there stood Louise. She still had her head. The kids whistled and applauded.

The next time we met at the pool, Louise looked at me coyly and said, "Dr. Rabbitfoot, Chuck tells me you're a writer. He said you wrote a story about me. Would you let me read it?"

I gulped. That damn big mouth. Why had I ever let Chuck read it? The story was a fantasy about Louise and me.

"Dr. Rabbitfoot, answer me. I want to read it."

"Alright. You can read it."

Unknown to Louise, I had already written several stories about her and I swimming. By the end of the Louise writing cycle, this became twenty-one stories. All fantasies. All about the Steeltown YMCA and the rest of the crazies who stalked the corridors and haunted the pool.

Louise liked the stories and so did her mother. Katie, her sister, liked them. So I let them read the whole shooting match. My classmates in the adult evening class liked the stories, and the teacher urged me to send them out. I began to feel like a reincarnation of Mark Twain.

I sent the stories out and they came back accompanied by fifteen rejection slips.

I ran into Edna Guilder out at the Y. Edna was sixty-seven—one year older than me. She didn't swim laps. She took the geriatric aerobics at 6:00 A.M. and always tried to get me to go. But I couldn't stand all those old

people and I told her so.

"Rabbitfoot," said Edna, "you're at it again. I've seen you and that long-haired thing. Leave those young girls alone."

"But she's special."

"That's what you said about that playground instructor last summer. That Louise of yours is about as real as a rainbow."

"Rainbows are real," I told her, "and they're beautiful too."

Edna just snorted. "Wait till you try to grab hold of one. You'll see what I mean."

I said good-bye and left. What's that old lady know anyway?

Since my literary career was apparently over, I decided to try the theatre. I enrolled in a class at the community college, "Introduction to Acting." The college put on a winter play, *Harvey*, and I got the part of Judge Gafney.

For the first three weeks of the show, I did nothing right. I couldn't remember my lines, so I ad-libbed. This was alright for me, but it fouled up the rest of the cast. During one performance I leaned against the back of the set. The wall crashed to the floor. The theatre had no curtain, so all the scene changes were done during blackouts. The first exit on opening night I led five people off stage. I didn't know where I was going. When the house lights came back on all six of us found we were out in the audience.

"That dumb son-of-a-bitch," shouted someone back stage. It was the director.

I was too embarrassed to tell Louise about the play, but she found out from Chuck in time to get tickets for the last performance. The snow began to fall at curtain time. There was no sign of Louise. I was disappointed, but relieved.

I went out to say my first line. I glanced into the audience. There she was. She and her sister. I almost swallowed my mustache, but I was perfect that night. Didn't forget a line. Knocked nothing over. Successfully navigated all the blackouts.

After the show, Louise and Katie stopped back stage. Director Jones joined us. "Girls, your grandpappy did a great job this evening."

Once a year the magic club I belong to holds a stage contest downtown. I said to Louise as we were sitting with our coffee at the Y one day, "How about helping me in our club's annual magic contest? With my brains and your beauty we're a cinch to win the gold cup."

"I don't know. I've never been on stage."



"You were at the home. Just look pretty. Leave the rest to me."

Louise accompanied me on two professional engagements. My chaperon Renee was along, of course. For the second one Louise surprised me by showing up in a low-cut evening gown. Her sister Katie had insisted she couldn't pop out of an empty box looking like a school marm. We laughed and talked all the way home.

"Louise," I asked, "do you like Chinese food?"

"Love it."

"Good. When we get home, I'll let Renee off and we'll go get some."

An apprehensive look crossed her face, and it was the last time things would ever be the same between us. "I can't," she stammered. "I'm burnt out from work, and I have to get up early. I'd better go home."

I weakly said, "Maybe some other time." I knew there'd be no other time.

I parked the station wagon. Louise got out. She turned to me and said, "I'm sorry."

One week later was the magic contest. I was closing with the guillotine. Chop her pretty head off. The day before the show Louise called.

"Hello, Louise," I said, fearing the worst.

"I have bad news. I won't be able to help in the show. I'm quitting work in a few weeks and going to Martha's Vineyard for the summer. My boys are throwing me a farewell party and I couldn't let them down."

"No, but you can let me down. This pisses me off. You're trying to hurt me. You got your magic show out of me, so the hell with the old man."

"Dr. Rabbitfoot, you're wrong. I'd never hurt you." Louise was crying. I could tell.

"Go to hell, Louise." I slammed down the phone.

The phone jangled. I picked it up. "Please don't be mad. I wanted to help you. Call me up. Let me know how you make out. Please."

I waited a few seconds and then said, "Yes." I felt ashamed of myself.

We won the contest. I used Circe and Renee. With only a few hours to rehearse everything went wrong. The audience gave us a standing ovation and the judges gave us first prize. "Funniest act I ever saw," said one of the judges. "It really looked like an accident when the rabbit ran away."

The next day I called Louise. She congratulated me and said before she

left for Martha's Vineyard she'd have me out for dinner. Her mother and Katie would be there. Katie was going to take some pictures of us together as a remembrance. She told me how to get to the house on the mountain and said she'll call in a few days.

I didn't see or hear from her for weeks. She stopped swimming. I wondered about my dinner date and pictures. I waited a month, swallowed my pride and called her. Her mother answered and said Louise had to leave earlier than she expected because of a job at Martha's Vineyard.

I went into a shell. Talking hardly at all. I was miserable to everyone. My depression deepened and I thought about suicide. I couldn't sleep so I started counting Louises jumping over a fence. That husky voice bothered me the most. It wouldn't leave.

Finally I purged myself of her by writing the last Louise story. All the hate poured out of me. I was an old funeral director who fell in love with a beautiful young girl who worked at a home for handicapped children. I asked her for her hand in marriage. Upon being refused, I went berserk and killed her. I dressed her in a wedding gown. Embalmed her and placed her in a secret room. I slept in the same room in my favorite casket. I later poisoned myself and joined her in eternal rest.

I sent a copy of the "Louise" story to her house on the mountain, knowing full well her mother would forward it to her. Later that day I showed a copy of the story to Chuck and told him what I had done.

"You idiot," shouted Chuck. "Do you realize what you've done? She'll think you're nuts. Maybe she'll report it to the police. If anything ever happened to Louise they'd nail you for it, Doc."

I panicked. I raced to the post office and asked for the big brown envelope. I was in luck. It hadn't gone out.

I renamed the story "Amanda" for my college evening writing class. Later on I submitted it to the college magazine. The girl editor liked it and helped me fix the story so they could publish it.

I thought it was about time to pay a visit to the Steeltown Senior Citizen Center. I hate to go down there because of the old people. Can't stand them. The only reason I go is to visit Edna.

Going inside, I noticed Edna holding court. She was surrounded by



men, old ones, but at the sight of me she gave a blast. "Rabbitfoot, get over here." I meandered over.

"Alright, fellows," blasted Edna, "it's the Doctor's turn. I haven't seen him for weeks."

"Well, Doc, have you forgot about your Louise? She can't still be bothering you?"

"Yes, she is," I answered.

"Forget your pretty little rainbow. She's only a kid. Listen Doc. Why don't you come out to the apartment Sunday? I've got a pot roast that's too big for just me."

"No!" I answered. "I, uh, I, I have to go away."

We said our good-byes. Edna seemed very cool toward me. I turned around and saw a herd of men approaching again.

Very softly I said, "So long, Edna."

The next morning I picked up my mail. There was a letter from Martha's Vineyard. I almost tore it apart getting it open. Two pictures fell out. Both of Louise. One was of my friend in a new red bikini. The dictionary defines a bikini as a woman's abbreviated two-piece bathing suit. The dictionary is correct.

I answered her letter, thanked her for the pictures, but received no answer.

A couple of months later I was at the Y pool. Chuck yelled over to me. "I ran into an old friend of yours. Louise. Met her at the high school reunion. She still sends me, with that husky voice of hers. By the way, she asked about you."

"Yeah," I answered. "Is she married?"

"No, but..." Chuck's voice faded.

"What's the matter?"

"She was with this guy. They've been living together, I think."

I didn't answer, but turned away. Tears had filled my eyes and I didn't want Chuck to see an old man cry. I looked out the window. The rain had stopped and there in the corner of the window gleamed a tiny rainbow.

I reached out my hand. Tried to grab it.

## GAZEBO FOR LEARNED WOMEN

By Liz Young

A stone gazebo for women who once studied  
There does nothing for some. For me,  
though, I get some strange and tranquil feeling out of it  
I like to go there with myself and just sit.

On a hot day, the gazebo for learned women is cool  
And yet on a cold, windy day a fool  
young girl can find a breakwind shelter  
where the dusty leaves, ghosts, and hornets' nests are.

Sometimes the learned women ask me to see  
their joys and works in my reverie  
But hardly can I hear their ghostly words  
Thanks to endless banter from the birds.

Really, I only want to think there alone  
about things like who Francis Clamar is and getting stoned.  
Still, the stones form a sturdy hide-away  
sometimes broken, sometimes boring, but where my mind can play.



## HANGING MIRROR

By Erika Rohrbach

On Lilac's wall there hung a mirror.  
and that blinding glass did more than throw back stones—  
She held a face.

Not only did the hanging mirror watch Lilac  
stab herself with the gardening shears—  
She returned a smile,

as Lilac splattered into her.

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## OF FOOTBALL AND FLASHLIGHTS

**By Jeremy S. Trinidad**

"What's wrong with you? Are you on the boat?" Tom stood with his battered helmet in his hand.

Sheepishly and softly I answered yes. On the boat in football means you have an injury and are missing practice. It's the worst place to be if you are part of a team.

"What did you hurt?"

"Well you see, it's sort of my back and part of my leg where the hamstring connects to the lower..."

"Yeah well I gotta go to the field. Don't stay out too long, Admiral." Tom saluted, pulled his helmet on his head, and trotted to the field.

"Very funny," I said. That's all I could say. I really was injured but it wasn't the kind of thing you could explain to your teammates without having to go into a complete course in kinesiology. I just said my back was messed up, at the risk of my teammates being skeptical. Surely some of them were. That made me feel bad but not as bad as the coaches. Unless you are bleeding from a major artery or are in threat of losing a limb, coaches won't accept an injury for an excuse. Although I would only be out a couple of days, I already started to feel different, like I was losing my inner strength. I was.

As I walked down the hill to the lower field, I heard those whistles. A chill ran through me because I knew whistles meant headaches: bodies slamming into bodies. For a brief moment I was relieved I didn't have to practice; then I saw the faces. Dirty, sweaty, almost grotesque faces of my teammates. The smile left my face and I was silent. As one player ran by me he asked how I was doing. How was I doing? I felt really small. Here I was watching everyone else sweat and work and someone asks me if I'm alright.

At the end of practice, the whole team gathered around the head coach, put their hands in the center and did our cheer. Well, for today it was their cheer. As they performed the ritual I went to the back of the pack. I was still technically part of the team, but I did not put my hands in. I put them up, but I did not touch another player. I was not one of them anymore. While the team walked up the hill I searched for familiar jersey numbers so I could talk to someone. I found none. They were foreign to me.

I went to dinner while the team showered and left before they got there. Back to my room. Safe. But was I? Studying was always a reward for working hard during practice. Now I just felt like blowing everything off. I couldn't function. Helpless, I went to the library, as if it were a temple,



hoping that the books and silence would instill in me a sense of control and somehow I would be able to study. I couldn't concentrate. I went back to my room and went to bed trying to hide from this helplessness, hoping this rotting feeling would leave. It didn't and I couldn't take it. I had turned off.

I remember one birthday I had when I was young. I can't recall how old I was but I'm guessing I was about five. Life was pretty simple then and I don't remember much, just feelings or smells or the way something looked. Thoughts like that I think stay in your brain and have definite repercussions on how you react to those same feelings later on in life. I mean if you had a bad experience as a child being bitten by a dog you might have a dislike or distrust for dogs later on. But back to the birthday.

My mother, my sister, and I were waiting outside our apartment building on some wooden and concrete benches. We were waiting for my father who was to pick us all up and take us out in celebration of my birthday. I was very excited because I knew this meant presents. My family wasn't very wealthy, but as far as I was concerned, we were the richest people in our apartment.

The restaurant was dark and I remember the candles lighting the cake being the only source of illumination in the room. Now for the presents. I got a few things which I don't remember, but I do remember the flashlight. Yeah, a big flashlight. Somehow my parents knew that I could be thrilled by the thought of owning my own light source to turn on and off and to make big hands on the ceiling and to read in bed; cartoons, I suppose. This did thrill me.

The flashlight was big and black and metal and heavy. A glass lens covered the foil-surrounded bulb. My father put in the batteries and I was in heaven. This was great. I played with my light constantly. I played so often that my parents would replace the batteries every week. I had no concept of batteries so it didn't matter to me. They were round silver things that made my light work and they must have been in abundant supply since I could get so many with little argument from my parents.

Time went by and the flashlight started to chip and get dented. Playing with my light did not seem grand anymore. So it was put in my drawer where it sat and sat for a long time. Then one day I pulled it out perhaps feeling that it could once more possess the magic it had on my birthday. It didn't work.

I unscrewed the black, chipped, metal cap and dumped the batteries into my hands. What was this crap? I had orange powder and some kind of liquid all over my hands.

"Dad!!!"

Needless to say, I was scared. My batteries had not only bled all over



me, but had taken over the inside of my flashlight as well. It was ruined. Dad said never touch corroded batteries. He explained if batteries idly sit they will rot. That sounded really stupid since when I used them all the time they died. It was just another phenomena that as a child I learned to accept not really knowing why. If you use batteries they will serve a great purpose but eventually burn out, and if you don't use them they decay.

I was out of football for an entire week and I suffered. The structure in my life had been pulled from underneath me and I was like a child who lost his mother in a store; helpless and not knowing what to do. I was a part of something that was a part of me and then it was gone.

But I'm all right now and am back in practice. My structure and core of my lifestyle are once again functioning. I can talk with my teammates without feeling guilty because I didn't practice. The sense of accomplishment after finishing a practice is very rewarding. It carries over into my academic work and into my social life, giving me confidence in anything I do. Just being with the other players, having a sense of belonging, a common understanding, and striving towards a goal, have always been a part of me. I'm the kind of person who needs hard work in order to enjoy the rewards that come in life. I can't just sit back and watch things happen. If I sit back for a second I start to feel lost and begin to corrode. I must remain on at all times. I know everyone will burn out someday, but while I have this seemingly endless supply of batteries, I am going to stay on, and get as much accomplished in my life as I can.

# THE RAGGED BROWN PEASANT

By Matthew Noll

the ragged brown peasant  
whose crusty wool pants split down the inseam  
whose rusty hoe kicks up the gasping dust  
which floats, vulture quiet cloud  
through a high window  
lashes itself like wet sand  
or pine sap  
to a throat  
and chokes the king  
the termite  
savagely meandering  
a writhing rice grain  
gnawing with the acute ecstasy of a serial killer  
to bereave them of worth  
the matching washer and dryer  
the new wallpaper  
(of a hunt scene) in the living room  
the carefully compromised china  
that will be crushed by a falling beam  
the fly in your soup  
that is dread  
dirty legs that carry visions of lengthy hospital stays  
rotting flesh and sterile underwear  
while you disturb the maitre'd  
and ruin the date  
i will become all of them  
with a few blind strokes  
i will stick like a fishhook in a child's toe  
kick up clouds of dust  
pick at the rotten wood  
fly fleshless and blind to drown  
and i will keep you awake at night.





The following text is extremely faint and illegible due to the low contrast and grain of the image. It appears to be a multi-paragraph document, possibly a report or a letter, but the specific content cannot be discerned.

## JUDGEMENT OF THE SERPENT

By Rich Galeone

Jack Nicholson looked deep into Julian's eyes and said, "I love you. You know you're the only girl who ever meant anything to me." Julian popped another peanut chew into his mouth and slouched down in his seat. The camera panned to Angelica Huston. "When you left me, my father treated me like I was a whore." Julian slipped his arm up and around his wife, Anna, and pulled her a little closer. The smell of buttered popcorn filled the theater.

Julian Bideau was a transplanted Vermonter. He taught Latin to precocious sophomores at a prep school in Philadelphia. He was a man of medium height, bearded, but balding on the crown. His most remarkable characteristic was his persistent French Canadian accent. The school and the scholars challenged his capacity and he reveled in it. Nevertheless, he missed the mountains and the pines and the quarries of home. He had met and courted and married Anna in Vermont and it had been a hard decision for both of them to leave.

The movie house was silent. An electric expectation filled the air. Then, without warning, a red hot cannon ball hit Julian in the chest. The lava-like heat shot up into his head. It seemed as though some terrible giant had stuck Julian's upper body into a coal furnace. The white heat raced down his arms. Fingers and palms tingled. Hearts were pounding in his ears. Panting lungs gasped for air. Terrified, Anna propelled him out of the theater.

The green beacon of the EKG machine radiated softly over the room. Julian lay bathed in that emerald mist. Oxygen lines snaked their way over his face and slithered into his nostrils. The pasties from the heart monitor sucked to his body like the tentacles of a giant, mindless octopus. His mind had been a blur when they first got to the local hospital. The doctor was quiet. Reserved. Confident. Julian would stay the night. They took his blood. They took his urine.

Drenched in fear, he recalled the promises of a long life. "You have the heart of a teenager," the doctor had told his father at sixty. His father had swelled with pride when he reported this declaration. He remembered the old man sitting at his desk in the quarry office with his tank top tee shirt, a can of beer sweating on a notepad, and the old pine wood windows open to the porch. A summer breeze carried away the rings of cigarette smoke. "The heart of a teenager." Julian himself had already been a decade beyond those hallowed years. A strong heart. It was in the genes. A bead of perspiration rolled down into his eye. It mixed with a tear and Julian drifted off.

In a dream Julian was hunted by the police. But now the police had scalpels. They cornered him in a boat. There were other people in the boat and the police began to operate on them indiscriminately. Julian slipped



over the side and escaped through some marshy grass. But there were leeches and terror and it woke him up.

At dawn, a three hundred pound orderly pranced into the room craving blood. Meticulously, he prepared his needles and rubber tubing. "This won't hurt at all," he assured Julian in a soprano's treble. Julian was happy for him.

Anna brought him his toothbrush and a copy of *The Moon and Sixpence* by Maugham. She was shaky as much from the lack of sleep as from the anxiety. Her blue eyes were large and tragic. She gave one the feeling of suppressed fear. After Julian finished his breakfast, she left, promising to return later in the day.

Julian tried to lose himself in the book through the morning. He lunched on an overbaked piece of cod and a plain boiled potato. As he finished his ration, Dr. Bob Portnoy, his doctor's partner, floated in, his face all asmile. He looked rather dapper with his stethoscope and yellow bow tie dangling from his neck. "Good news, Julian. You didn't have a heart attack," he drawled with his faint Georgia accent. His smile beamed wide to reveal the gold of some bridge work. The man was a saint. No, a god. A giver of life. "How can you tell?" Julian asked. "Blood gases," boomed the god doctor. "They didn't change. No question. No change--no heart attack."

"Conspirators stabbed Caesar in the heart on the Ides Of March, 44 B.C. This act brought Cicero suddenly back into politics." Julian found himself before his Latin scholars early the next morning. He had third period free and found Mark Merlin, the magician of mathematics, in the teachers' lounge eating a tomato and cucumber salad. Pepper. No salt. Mark had had a coronary bypass done the previous year. The kids called him Magic. And Magic was in good shape. He ate well. He played lots of racketball. But he had that scar down the middle of his chest. "Any pain in your left arm," he cautioned, "is a bad sign. Any pain at all and they'll want to do a cardiac cath."

"No way," thought Julian. He knew three people who had cardiac caths and all three ended up under the rib cutters.

"After they did the cath," Magic told him, "The cardiologist came up to my room for a little tete-a-tete. He comes over to me with a sour look on his ugly face and slaps a nitroglycerine patch on my neck. 'You can't leave the hospital,' he says. 'You're a walking time bomb.' How's that for the subtle approach, Julie boy? If I ever see that son of a bitch I'll run him over. I swear to God." Magic loved to test his blood pressure. "If they do a cath on you, they'll crack you open, Julie. So be careful."

Between classes, Julian racked his brain. If it wasn't a heart attack, what was it? It seemed he did everything wrong. He smoked. He drank. He ate too much. He worked too hard. He didn't exercise. He slept poorly. The litany of self-abuse went to the horizon. When he wasn't berating himself he searched for a meaning to his life like some grave Monty Python. He averted his gaze when he suspected a hollow emptiness.



Julian sat before his friend and physician's desk early the next morning. The desk and wall were ornamented with samples of the doctor's black and white amateur photography. One picture showed Julian and Anna under a loggia in Florence. The window was open and Julian watched as a sparrow washed in the birdbath of the enclosed garden. George Guenter looked like a forty year old Walter Matthau. "How you doing, Julian?" he asked as he swooshed onto the room, his lab coat trailing behind him. He had on a striped shirt and a polka dot tie. Nonconformist maybe. But bright. George had a Ph. D. in physics before he even thought of med school. He was sucking on an unlit pipe. Julian had never actually seen it smoking. He found himself wondering why such an intellectual needed a pacifier and how that related to his nursing experience.

The two men exchanged courtesies which seemed a little absurd. The doctor sat back in his chair and peeked out over his wire rims. "Suppose you tell me what's been going on." Julian was a little taken aback. Hadn't he talked to his own partner? Had he been away? Pe. naps to the moon, Mars or some resort outside the galaxy.

He sensed Julian's hesitation. "In your own words," he offered. Julian had no idea who else's words he might have used. Or did the doctor suspect some verification and wish to verify what he had heard. ". . . Just to make sure I didn't miss anything," he finished inhaling deeply.

The sides of Julian's throat grew taut and sore as he began once again to form the words that would relate the events of the preceding Saturday evening. Once he started, however, he could hardly articulate the words as they came tumbling from his lips. His voice cracked as he remembered the expressions on the faces of the people in the theater. A hundred decapitated heads all controlled by one morbid brain studying its subject like some distant clinical anatomist. As he finished his tale, he noted that his palms were sweating and he had a prickly sensation on the back of his neck—a particularly detestable feeling.

That sensation always disinterred the memory of his father's sixty-one blue impala. Julian had been driving the car. The rain was slanting down in sheets across Frankford Avenue. It fell relentlessly in an almost human spite. His younger brother Gary and he were returning from Holmesberg Library. As they passed a trackless trolley, the impala began to hydroplane. It slid off the road, up an embankment, and into a utility pole on Congressman Green's front lawn. Gary had been knocked out and for one terrifying moment Julian thought he was dead. He had not been quickly forgiven.

Julian gathered his courage and controlled his voice. "What do you think it is?" But he was thinking, "Will I live or die?"

"Well," the doctor said, "It sure doesn't sound wonderful but I'm not convinced it's any sign of coronary blockage." He tapped the stem of his pipe on the notepad before him. The cleft of his chin closed almost completely over in a little mini-cleavage as he considered his patient's face.



"You know," he said, "when you're dealing with chest pain, you've got to have a philosophy. And we have one in this practice. Our philosophy is to search for the etiology of the problem until it's found." Another draw on the pipe. "Have you ever had a stress test?"

"No," and he wasn't looking forward to this primitive form of diagnosis. If he lived, then perhaps there was nothing wrong with his heart. If he died...

"Well, then, let's schedule one." Dr. Guenter went on to complain that it was always his personal friends who carried in the most bizarre of symptoms. He would have to don his Sherlock Holmes' cap. He might even have to switch pipes. Dr. Guenter's tone suggested that Julian should be proud to be the bearer of this unique disorder. Congratulations. My compliments. Many happy returns.

Julian presented himself at the chamber of horrors on the following morning. The nurse who greeted him looked as if she would have been happier working on the killing floor of a pork slaughtering house. One dark eyebrow ran across the center of her forehead. Her arms seemed a bit long for a *Homo sapiens*. He removed his shoes and shirt and she proceeded to paste the hated suckers onto his chest and back. She showed Julian the running machine. It could be adjusted to make him run uphill. Its speed could be varied. She petted the thing tenderly like it was her first born.

The doctor limped into the room. The nurse went into a hush as if awaiting the start of the Olympics. This doctor, a dry man, explained the procedure to his patient. His monotone was hypnotic. He was like a dull Gary Moore. "It's perfectly safe," he finished. Then he had Julian sign a release form.

The games began. At first, the pace was civilized. As Julian tossed a smile at the eyebrow, the doctor tired and leaned a little more heavily on the rheostat. As if surprised, the machine kicked as it picked up speed. Any pretense of civility had been discarded. Julian was breathing hard and perspiring. Then they added a slight tilt. The doctor asked his prey how he was doing. "Fine," Julian gasped, hoping the learned man would detect the polite lie. But he missed the cue. Julian's breast had not yet reached the bursting point. Incredulously, the speed and incline were again increased. Clearly, they meant to kill him.

The alternatives began to race through Julian's mind. If he slowed down, he would be run off the back of the ramp. If he simply collapsed, he would most likely be flung across the room into the sink. It was evident. His only salvation would be to have the damn heart attack and be done with it. After some humiliating begging and several sidewise looks of distinct terror they freed him. "Relax until you catch your breath," he was told. Twenty minutes later he was still sweating like a filly in the winner's circle. "It looks good," the doctor had told him. "You can get dressed now." His shirt stuck to him.



Julian escaped through the outpatient doors. The day had dawned crisp and clear and the sweet air tingled in his lungs. The sun's rays sloped through the azure sky splashing off the geranium and goldenrod. A pair of doves cooed a birdsong in the cool shade of the garden.

They decided to take a holiday. It was still warm. They would take a long weekend and go to a seaside resort. Anna arranged to borrow the beach house of a friend. The house was a quaint cottage of nautical blue with an open porch going all the way around. Like a return to the womb, Anna was soothed by the sound of the surf. The smell of the salty air filled her with youth and ambition and appetite. But Julian insisted on locating the closest emergency room before they unpacked.

Julian woke at daybreak and walked along the beach. Two old men were digging in the sand. He remembered how his grandfather had taken him down to the beach with a bucket in each hand. The cold sand would smack against their bare feet in the early morning chill. They would dig for clams where the air bubbles came up at the water's edge until the buckets were full. At night the men would sit on the porch playing checkers and drinking beer until they had solved the problems of the world. The more practical women would busy themselves in the seashore kitchen steaming the clams and boiling great cauldrons of water for pasta.

Later, they took a beach umbrella and a blanket down onto the sand. Julian took a rubber raft out into the surf and rode in on the waves. Anna built a sand castle with a moat and a tower. But later, an invading army of waves destroyed the fortress. The sun gave them a healthy color and the salty froth bleached their hair. They combed the beach looking for marine shells. That night they ate at a lobster house and went to the honky tonk boardwalk. But later their desire was strangled by the crippling fear, and melancholy, they turned to sleep.

A one-legged seagull perched on the rail of the porch and watched hungrily as Julian ate a nectarine. Old Sol rose up out of the Atlantic and emblazoned the cumulus clouds that hung over the sea. He went in to get a piece of fruit for the creature. Anna was still asleep. When he returned to the porch, the bird had gone. He put the fruit on the rail. From atop a telephone pole the gull took flight. He made widening circles like the ripples in a pond. Each pass brought him closer to the house. On the final sweep, he tucked in his right wing and veered down. He landed on the rail just by the piece of fruit. He flapped his wings until he found his balance on the one leg. He looked Julian in the eye. Not fear. An expression of thanks to an equal. Then he thrust his prehistoric beak into the moist fruit. He seemed wildly primitive as he thrust over and over again, tossing bits and pieces of pulp on the rail and the floor. After he'd had his fill, he flew back to the pole and called out in his untamed gull's voice. Julian had never seen such an intelligent creature in the wild. He was profoundly moved as he went back inside and lay down.



Like a bolt of lightning the ball of heat welled up in his chest. It swirled around his head and arms. The pounding and the hyperventilation resumed. He shook Anna awake. She jumped up and tried to calm him. He forced himself to breathe deeply and slowly, trying to break the rapid panting. Abruptly the attack ended.

He got up and paced the room. What could it be? He went out on the porch for some air. The bird had messed on the rail. He went into the musty bathroom and looked into the mirror. As he peered into his own frightened eyes, the heat hit his chest again. The color completely drained from his face and he went white, like a death mask. Sweat beaded up. He feared he would die if he didn't get enough blood to his brain. Anna helped him back to the bed. In another moment, it was over.

The room began to get muggy as the sun rose toward its zenith. The day would be an oppressive one. A fly had gotten in through the porch door to escape the heat and was buzzing along the ceiling directly above Julian's head. The thing annoyed him but he didn't dare any sudden movement. This fly could do what it would. But not Julian. This fly was well and vibrant and healthy. But not Julian. Julian envied the fly. He would be a fly. If only he could live.

And then he was lying in a room at the University Hospital. The walls were a moldy green and the stench of disinfectant pallid the air. A crack mapped its way across the plaster ceiling and like the Nile ended its tortuous course in a delta of wet islands. A shapely nurse bustled into the room with her starched uniform rustling. Julian watched as she stretched well over a table to draw back the drapes. She apologized for waking him but it was time for his pill. The cardiac cath was scheduled to be done in an hour. There was no need to apologize. He had been awake through the night. After she had gone, he closed his eyes.

Julian remembered his uncle John. They used to play pinochle. His father and his brother and his uncle John and he played cards until one or two in the morning, eating sandwiches and drinking beer. They would talk about politics and the big war and the space program and about when their parents first came to America. Then, in the middle of one night, Julian's father came into his room and woke him. He was crying. Uncle John had died. A heart attack. In the ambulance on the way to the hospital. He was such a sweet man.

The doctor came to talk to Julian. He was a small, thin man with brown, dull hair and large blue eyes behind coke bottle spectacles. He had a long face, like a horse, but he gave no impression of slowness, but rather one of alertness, like a small bird. His most remarkable feature, however, was his voice which was high pitched like a dentist's drill. One could tell that he had given this little talk hundreds of times before. Mercifully, the tranquilizer began to have some effect as Julian waited for them to come for him.

Two steroidal orderlies transferred Julian from the litter to the cold operating table. They removed his smock and he lay there, naked, beneath the threatening black x-ray equipment. From that slab he could see a pair of nurses giggling inanely over an instrument table. "Would you like to watch the procedure?" asked a nurse covering him with a towel. He said he would and someone switched on the ceiling monitor. One surgeon pressed hard on the inside of Julian's numb thigh to stop the flow of blood while the other did a cutdown and inserted the catheter into his great femora. Julian watched breathlessly. He felt violated as the thing penetrated inch by inch way up into his chest. Like some giant, phallic snake, it writhed through the center of his body. It crawled up and over the arch of the aorta and poked its ugly head into his heart. Those four chambers confronted this rape and boldly held their relentless rhythm. Helpless, he lay there. The room was heavy with silence. The thing moved back and forth in the throbbing ventricle and then violently excreted the white dye into the pulsing muscle. With two rapid thrusts the dye stained its lightning judgment across the screen. He wretched as wave after wave of nausea conquered his senses. Then, the ravishing, giant serpent within him went flat and died. And rotten, it was drawn from his body.



## SIDEWALK WARS

By Michelle L. Grande

Smog-filled  
Rainy city day  
Humidity high  
And I sweat as  
I trudge off to work.  
It's just another day,  
I say.

Foolish girl that I am—  
Aware that  
Busy crowds plow  
Around me,  
Through me,  
Over me;  
Push, shove, scurry  
Gottagettherenow!!!!  
—My heel  
As usual  
Gets caught—  
In wet cement.

I try to shake it off  
(It's quick-drying, though)  
As the grouchy foreman  
Tilts his yellow plastic to glare at me.  
I shrivel under his snarl  
And suddenly remember  
This isn't the  
First Time  
Cement has gripped me  
Like quicksand.

I remember the time  
When I loved you  
And how I simply  
Couldn't let you go  
Like you wanted me to  
(Even though I needed finally to  
Release my grip).

I remember seeing  
YOU with  
HER—  
And hating  
Both of you

Because I (thought I) had no one—  
Nothing.

Jealousy, in its  
Distinctive fiery green,  
Roared out of my soul  
And leaped out of my mouth  
(Hasty tongue, mobile lips).  
A shaky friendship,  
Already stumbling,  
Fell...  
Crash.....like porcelain  
(Mom's finest, you know)  
On a dingy gray-green tiled floor.

I remember my feelings for you  
When I refused to turn away.  
I became suspicious  
As I saw more of you  
And knew less.

Do you care?  
Did you ever care?  
And if you did,  
Why is it then that  
All I ever saw (ever wanted to see)  
Was your  
Cement Heart  
Avoiding  
My Own??

I remember when you said  
No more—  
I'm relieved that it's over.  
Sorry, but  
I didn't know that  
I was  
So much of a  
Burden  
To you.  
Are you unburdened now?

Sinking deeper into the wet cement,  
I recall the cement heart  
As you molded it within me.  
(Others have since then  
Created similar hearts, but  
none of them  
could possibly be  
Like  
Yours).

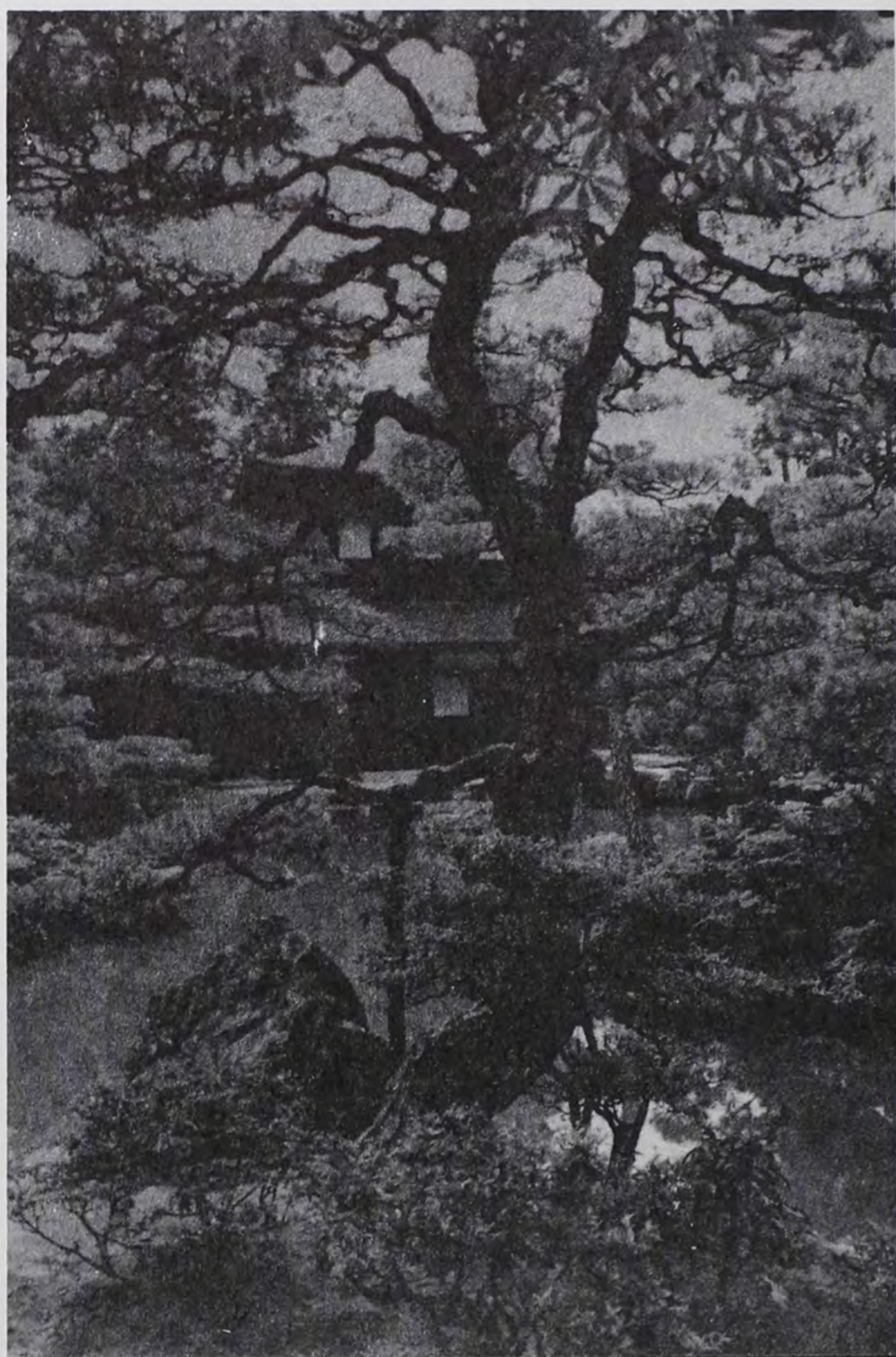


## THE LANTERN

My tender heart, thrown into a mixer.  
You, the foreman, directed a driver to  
Grind/crunch  
Churn—mix—twist  
Break.

In the belly of the mixer  
You (Cavalier that you think you are) thrust a sword  
And slashed me (OW!)  
While your assistant gleefully stirred  
All those Lines,  
Lies,  
Memories.  
Some blood came oozing out of your finger.  
"This drip'll add a good color,"  
You laughed heartily and shook off  
(As you always do)  
The pain.  
Mr. Foreman, I didn't  
Ask to be stabbed, and  
You're violating my property.  
Go away.

Reality, like a briskly moving wind,  
Slaps my face  
(Or was that sting  
merely the slap  
of some passerby?)  
So....I guess I am  
"Back to reality" now  
(Whatever that means).  
The hectic city continues its hassling—  
And I realize I am  
Caught in wet cement—again—  
To my ankles.  
Skyscraper people  
stare at me—I make no effort to come out of the glue  
(It's quick-drying, you know).  
The foreman strangely remains  
Silent.  
So, I logically conclude  
As I rationalize my predicament—  
Perhaps  
My  
Self-Deceptions  
Have created  
My Confusions of Grandeur.  
And then (and only then)  
Do I realize  
I'm only a  
Fool—  
Caught—  
In wet cement.





# I GUESS THAT'S WHY I WENT AWAY TO COLLEGE

By Liz Young

I suppose her tightly and eternally braided black hair showed her conformity and boredom. She wasn't exactly the symbol of freedom with her pudgy, swollen face with her buried yet musical eyes

We sat in her office. It had ceramic clowns and colorful prints on the walls mixed with pictures of

Bill, her husband, who also taught in my school.

Finally, we got down to the questions. Dutifully, I answered.

It's my mother. She's psychotic and she lives in my home. That and school. Here I am, a daughter and a student. Two things I hate.

No wonder I was so messed.

I think that's part of the reason I went away to college. School, the lesser of two enemies for me, anyway.

But I didn't expect a class like that one while I was away at school. Rolling green turf in front of me without a

hampering classroom around it

Where I could hit a ball into the open air with a rusty driver

And I enjoyed attending class.

And I was only happy while hacking at the balls in the sand traps.

And neither my giddy golf partners thought or cared that something might be wrong

But that's the way I'd rather have it.

Without the braided, blind, and dominating constraint of any woman.

# PATRONS

Jane Agostinelli  
William Akin  
Peggy Baer  
Patricia L. Benes  
Philip I. Berman Art Center  
Barbara Boris  
Douglas M. Cameron  
Kenneth Campbell  
J. L. Cobbs  
Continuing Education  
Jeanine Czubaroff  
Louis DeCatur  
Mary Ellen DeWane  
Hiroshi Dezawa  
Sarah May Dieter  
Mildred Dilliplane  
The Doan Boys  
Carol Dole  
Sue Donato  
Helen Eash  
Ingrid L. Evans  
George Fago  
Victor Tortorelli  
John and Edwina French  
Judith Fryer  
The Grizzly  
Colette Hall  
Jeffrey Harp  
Faye Heidel  
Joyce Henry  
Ronald E. Hess  
Steve and Mary Hood  
Barbara Imes  
Charles Jamison  
Auda May Johnson  
Neeta Kalra  
Houghton Kane  
Carolyn Klee  
Donna Landis  
Bernard Lentz  
Thomas K. Lindsay  
Joyce Lionarons  
Annette Lucas  
Deborah Malone  
Pat Mancuso  
Linda Marchetti  
Brian McCullough

Glen McCurdy  
M. McMahon  
David Mill  
J. K. Miller  
Douglas Nagy  
Debbie Nolan  
Beverly Oehlert  
Heather O'Neill  
Peter Perreten  
John Pilgrim  
Bonnie Price  
David M. Raible  
Sally Rapp  
Joan Rhodes  
Kenneth Richardson  
Richard P. Richter  
Bruce Rideout  
Carla Mollins Rinde  
Jamie Robson  
Joan Rojas  
William E. Rosenthal  
Ken and Janet Schaefer  
Patricia R. Schroeder  
Maggie Slonaker  
Peter Small  
Evan Snyder  
Joelle L. Stopkie  
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Victor Tortorelli  
Theresa Tuscano  
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Derk Visser  
Jon Volkmer  
Cheryl Walborn  
John R. Walker  
Jane Whitman  
Margaret Whittaker  
Sally Widman  
Nelson Williams  
Grace Wurzbach  
Cindy Yaffer-Vassat



