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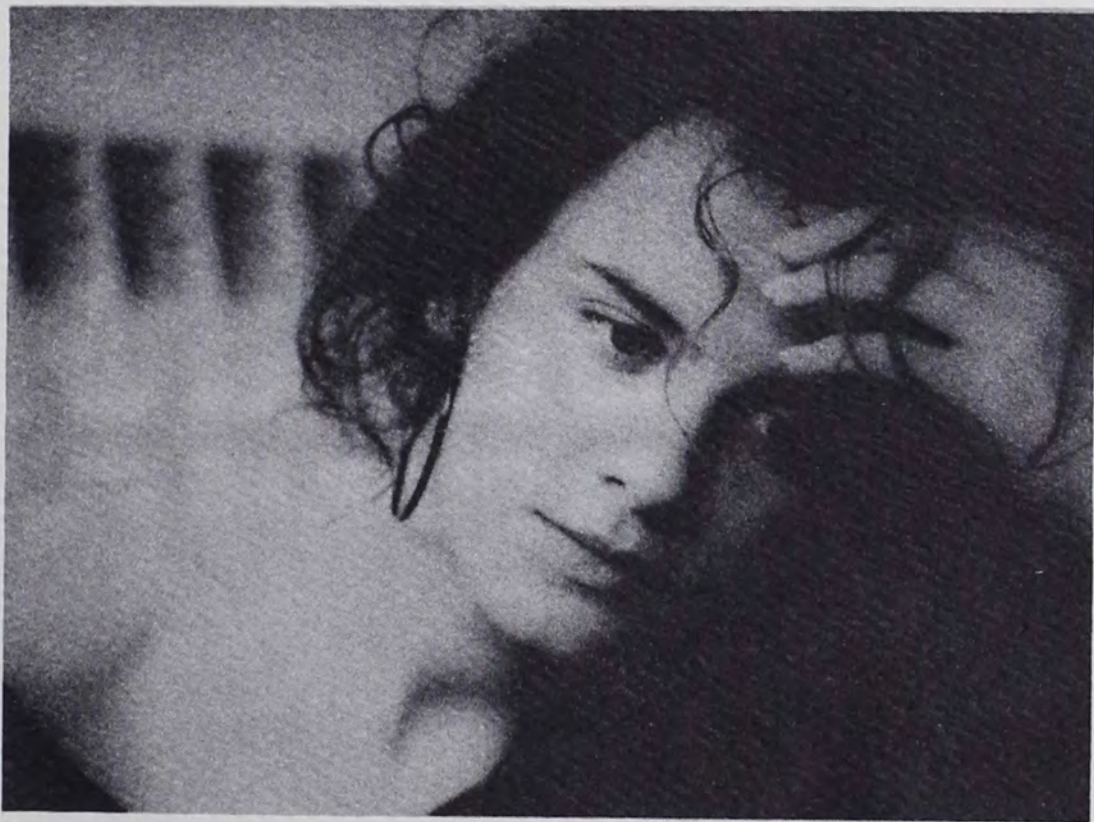
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EDITORS' NOTE

Named after the architectural structure atop Pfahler Hall, Ursinus College's literary magazine, THE LANTERN, is a collection of poetry, prose, and visual art composed by the students of Ursinus College. In its 56th year of production, this semester's issue of THE LANTERN features an environmental section in conjunction with the celebration of Earth Day 1990. THE LANTERN staff congratulates visual art contest winner Toni Castels-Talens, whose winning work is featured on the cover, and poetry contest winner Neil Schafer, whose poem, BRASIL, appears on page 4.

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BRASIL

By Neil Schafer

A sweaty hand wraps around
a smooth wooden axe handle.
Swings back and the blade lands solidly.
Chips of bark tumble from the native Rain Tree.

The lumberjacks chop and chop and chop,
but can't penetrate the layers of aged wood.
They reach for the chainsaws,
received in a trade for soybeans,
and pull the cords to start the motors.

The South American sun
beats down on the straining necks of the workers.
Further down the coast, on the beaches of Rio de Janeiro,
the rays tan naked bodies.

The saw isn't fast enough.
Light the fire and let it burn.
The massive forest melts away
like a child's sno-cone on a hot summer day.
The acres blacken and crackle and thick smoke fills the air.

Brazil's grand greenness,
rain forests disappear.
Man destroying the Portugese paradise,
not for the wood, but to make room for settlements
for out of work woodsmen.

PLASTIC FLOWERS

By **Anthony McCurdy**

People bicycle to work
in the chemical plants
where they make plastic flowers
for Mother's funeral.

Quick and easy, the eulogy was
as shiny as the aluminum
casket. What could we do,
but sit back on the red plush

parlor chairs? She was pretty,
Johnny whispered, but
then she got ugly and
I began to hate her.

We could see her death
coming in like an ever
rising tide of hot tar.
I cried in the brimstone rain.

I saw one pin-striped cousin
scowl around his black Havana
at the synthetic roses
so delicate and scentless.

The dirt on my hands
from the grave bothered me.
I wanted so badly to wash them.
But Mother's funeral had just begun.

BE A PEPPER

By Dawna Grieco

I pop the tab on my Dr. Pepper,
plop on my bunkbed, push
my Anthropology book to the floor
and reach for something to do instead.

I scan the pages of *National Geographic*,
pictures of Mayan temples, brief descriptions
of forgotten rituals, scraps of broken wares, tools.
Pieces that once defined a people.

We discover their society from tiny
surviving fragments, capsules of our ancestry.
Interpreting their lives, their customs from the bits.
How will the future archaeologist read our remains?

This ancient people wore these bags marked *Wonder*.
They painted tree parts black to blend with the night.
Billions waited in lines to worship in golden-arched temples.
Many longed to adopt orphans called BMW.

Experienced seaman fertilized the oceans with rich oils.
Ancient plastic sea animals shed their skin.
They took from the land to give to the air.
This was an efficient people.

We will be remembered by what we leave,
and what we don't.
I close the magazine as I toss my can into a
box marked Recycle.

GRUNGE

By Deborah Kriebel

Curling away from the water's pull,
the hair slides along the sink basin,
too long to be mine.

I splash cold water at someone else's
toothpaste, crusting the rim of the sink
with fluoride barnacles.

Soap-scummy water claims the counter,
no place for my pristine
toothbrush.

Every morning I arch away from
warped formica sticky with *Aquanet* fallout,
keeping my robe clean and my cold feet dry.
Straddling puddles of shower runoff and baby oil
it occurs to me that the fresh clean people
I live with do not use this bathroom.

Somewhere under a bridge a freshly showered troll
is applying *Ban* and *Nivea* in a perfectly clean bathroom
while I stand in disenfranchised toenail clippings.

HANDLING THE RESPONSIBILITY

By Laura Sassaman

Ah, screw shopping! he says,
Snatching cans of tomato soup
Off of crushed potato chip bags
As the ripped and useless
Plastic shopping bag ripples onto the asphalt.
Don't leave it there! says his wife.
She stomps after him,
Protesting his attitude.
Arguing, they step into
His ancient, rusting whaleship of a car
And roar away in a burst of oily exhaust.

The stream of their departure
Stirs the bag
And the wind picks it up,
Like a child who finds treasure
In a discarded
Blasting cap
And carries it along.
The bag catches on a branch,
And fluttering down,
Snags over a bird's nest,
Where three baby robins
Will starve and smother.

RETURNING TO THE FOREST

By Patricia L. Benes

We say we love
the Earth,
so we will try again

to live with Nature as
with the perfect lover,
never knowing,
always understanding,
our paths lit not by sunlight,
but by moon's glow.

Our ears will slowly deafen
to the roars, to the whines of machines
until we hear pine needles
dropping, one by one,
on the forest floor.

Had we not long ago buried
our brothers and sisters, who moved through
these woods like breezes sweeping the ground,
they would have shown us how
to walk feet turning inward
for silence,
for balance.

HOW NICE

By Andrea Lynn

After an afternoon snack of danish and tea,
Betsy extended her gracious thanks
And offered to clean up.
She gathered the debris,
And stared at the line
Of white trash baskets.

“Aluminum cans go here,” said her neighbor.
“This bag is for papers,
That one for bottles.
You know, as a mother, I feel a need
To keep the world
Clean and safe for my children.

“With the oldest I used those disposable diapers,
But not with my newest!
Oh no, now that I am aware
I’ve done away with convenience.
For my children’s sake, for their future,
I use cloth.”

Betsy thought back to using the cloth ones.
Funny, no one trusted the plastic things.
They eventually caught on.
Now they must become extinct.
The old way was better after all.

• •

“Do you see this here?”
Said the neighbor of a framed letter.
“This is a response,
A thank you from our Congressman,
For voicing my views to halt
The chopping of the Tonganese Forest!

“And this is a plaque. See?
I got it from the ladies club
For organizing a *Trash Brigade*.
Trash Brigade, it was such a catchy phrase
That *everyone* came out for it!
We cleaned up the litter near the lake.

“I get to meet so many people, Betsy.
It’s such a thrill to get involved!
I was invited by the PTA to speak Thursday night.
We are involved in a crucial battle
To force the school to use recycled paper.
The Courier Times is covering the assembly!”

Betsy went home
And thought about separating her trash
And about taking back the diapers that don’t leak.
But mainly she thought about how nice it was
To have a neighbor who got letters from important people
And was featured in the newspaper!

NOOZE

By Orena Herold

My skin shreds in shards of melting glass
— aftermath of years lost in worship
of a god that Ra had never been
nor had ever dreamed of becoming.
But can I really blame my mutant cells
On a god cast out by its very own subjects?
Some say yes

Damn the blinding globe!
Hide in the dark that can only be succeeded
by the dank of death
Others say no

Damn yourself and your sensitive schnoz
that longs for armpits gassed with a certain
Fresh Outdoor Scent
Soon the only outdoors you'll survive
Will be that noxious spray —
Seeping its silent, sanguine poison.

But let's be serious here
Why batter a few CFC's
Into a simple catch phrase for pseudo-intellectuals
To spit about over their *vin et fromage*
We know they're here and we know what created them.

Think back to a time in our collective memory
When we plucked ripe, oily olives
In a light Mediterranean breeze
Under a soothing Mediterranean sun
that bronzed our skin to a resilient shield
that had no need for SPF's.



EMMA

By Janet Mast

Aunt Tess moved in to look after the children the summer their parents were called to the mission field. They went as part of a team to build an airstrip in the Brazilian interior for bringing Jesus to the naked heathen. Even after they returned with countless color slides showing lush Amazonian jungle, Emma continued to picture a field. A vast, unpopulated expanse of undulating prairie grass through which her parents waded, their uplifted faces transformed with sublime conviction.

It was their mother who insisted on appointing Tess as summer guardian, overruling their father in an uncharacteristic show of strength. That he objected to Aunt Tess was obvious to Emma and her older sister, Marie, but his reasons were vague. In their presence he made oblique references to the unspecific but troubling "goings on" and to the "unsurrendered" state of Aunt Tess. He wanted the girls to stay with the Pastor and Edith Nestor.

At the dinner table, their father said, "Pastor and Edith have offered to open their home. I don't know how you can offend them this way. And the girls wouldn't be lonely." The Nestors had two sons, Kenny and Wayne, who played saxophone duets in church and had the worst acne in school.

"Oh gag, Dad!" said Marie, heaving one slender shoulder and rolling her head back dramatically. Marie was sixteen and could get away with more overtly mutinous behavior than Emma. Emma was thirteen and a half.

"Tess is my sister. She's available and I want her here," was all their mother would say.

Aunt Tess brought three suitcases and a half dozen shopping bags which Marie and Emma helped carry into their parent's bedroom. It was hard to guess her age. Emma's mother was forty-three and Aunt Tess was older but she didn't look it. There were some gray hairs threaded through the brown, which was a shade lighter than her mother's. Emma thought it might be the way Aunt Tess moved that made her seem younger. She moved in bursts, not exactly graceless, but abrupt. She unpacked her things in no particular order and once, after sorting through the contents of the same bag three times, she stopped, stared into space for several seconds, and said, "What am I looking for?"

Some time later, with her belongings more or less in place, Aunt Tess sat crosslegged in the middle of the bed and talked.

"I like to cook and I'm good at it so food isn't a problem. I don't like to clean and I don't mind things messy except for the kitchen which I will take care of. I'll try to keep my things in order but if you don't like living in squalor you two will have to pull your own weight. I'm pretty easygoing except when I'm premenstrual or ovulating and I'll warn you when that

happens." Aunt Tess squinted thoughtfully at the two girls for a few seconds before continuing. "I read that women who live together tend to synchronize their periods, so there might be certain times when the best thing to do will be to stay out of each other's way." Emma had been staring intently at Aunt Tess up until the word "premenstrual." Here she looked away. She glanced furtively at Marie who was slack-jawed, her eyebrows disappearing under her bangs.

"Oh, and I guess you know I have a friend. Michael. He'll probably be around." Aunt Tess sighed and smiled. "He's nice, but if he gets on your nerves, let me know. He has that effect on me sometimes, but you don't have to put up with it. I want us all to remember whose home this is."

Emma knew about Michael. She had an idea he was part of the "goings on" that her father disapproved of. Aunt Tess had brought him for dinner once. He'd seemed nervous and talkative, addressing himself more to Emma and Marie than to her parents. He was younger than Aunt Tess by about ten years. He'd said that he used to work at an ad agency in New York, but had recently quit to become a portrait artist. He'd said that he paints mostly wives and children of rich businessmen, but business was slow. He'd said that was because this area had too much religion and people thought that having their portraits painted was vain and extravagant, but he didn't want to move especially since he'd met Tess. He'd said he was trying to talk Tess into posing nude. While Emma's father explained tersely that we don't talk that way in this house, Emma had seen her mother exchanging a look with Aunt Tess. It was a complicated look that expressed more than one thing. Humor, exasperation, a secret understanding. Emma could not fully decode the look, but it made her realize in a new way that her mother and Tess were sisters, somehow connected against the rest of them.

Aunt Tess asked Emma and Marie if they had boyfriends. Emma shook her head. Marie shrugged and said, "Sort of," in a casually insolent voice. Emma stared at her sister and wondered which of the boys who had dogged her through the linoleum corridor of school all year now qualified as her 'sort of' boyfriend.

"Well, I don't have a list of house rules," said Aunt Tess. "I figure we can work that out as we go. But don't get the idea I'm a pushover. I take this job seriously. I know I'm not your mother. I'm not even much like her, but I am not stupid. And I'm a teacher, so I can smell a con job a mile away." She seemed to be waiting for a response so Emma nodded at her shoes. Marie was silent. Aunt Tess stood up and stretched. She wore khaki shorts with a lot of pockets and a cropped, white tee-shirt. It pulled up when she stretched, showing a few inches of skin. She was built like their mother, neat and compact, but Emma's mother wore shorts only to the beach, over her bathing suit. The rest of the year she wore skirts and dresses. Aunt Tess said she was glad they'd had this little talk.

Aunt Tess slept late most mornings. Emma learned how to make coffee.

It was for Aunt Tess, but some mornings she poured herself a cup and sat on the patio next to the pool. Marie noticed her drinking coffee and said, "Mom would have a fit if she saw you. And who are you kidding, anyway?" The four of them went for walks in the evening down the street about a half mile and through the old cemetery. They read the names on the gravestones aloud and took note of the dates. "Belinda McDonough, beloved daughter, died of scarlet fever in 1897." One marker had no inscription, just a skull and crossbones under the name "Catherine Jessop." Marie said she'd heard Catherine had been burned at the stake as a witch. Aunt Tess said she probably died of some horrible infectious disease. "People were superstitious about things like that." The most recent marker they found was dated 1942 and belonged to Wesley Warren White who died at the age of eighty-four.

Aunt Tess made salads with red lettuce and mandarin oranges. She made homemade pasta. She made seafood enchiladas and white pizza. Sometimes she cooked with wine. "Don't tell your parents, okay?" she said. The warning was unnecessary. She gave Marie manicures and one night she gave Emma a cucumber and mint facial. When Michael was there, he was either painting or roaming the house. Often he sat by the pool wearing dark glasses and cutoffs. He used their father's office as a studio. He was often around when Emma and Marie went to bed, but he was never there in the morning. He liked to flirt. He called the three of them his harem girls.

"Three beautiful women in one house," he said one night at the kitchen table. Aunt Tess was washing dishes. "Fetch me my pipe and slippers, wench."

"Which wench are you talking to?" asked Emma.

"She who serves me best will be my favored one tonight."

"In your dreams," said Aunt Tess, handing him a dish towel.

"Pound sand," said Marie.

Emma filed these phrases away in her mind for future reference. "Pound sand," she said into the mirror that night. "In your dreams." She threw away all of her plastic barrettes and headbands because Michael once told her he liked her hair pulled back in a pony-tail.

She thought it was wonderful that Michael was an artist. Sometimes, lounging around the house, he seemed bored or lost. He followed Aunt Tess around until she would order him to "find something useful to do or leave." But when he worked, he was all intensity, energy turned inward. He didn't seem to mind being watched and in fact, seemed not to realize Emma was there at all.

It was a summer for watching. Emma watched Michael and Tess and Marie and the faces that drifted in and out of the house. She stored up phrases, gestures and bits of information. It was her plan that by the time school started, she would have collected enough to recreate herself, build a composite personality from borrowed traits. The new and improved Emma. Till then she felt incomplete. "Under construction," she said to her

pony-tailed image in the mirror.

Because of the pool, their house was a gathering place, especially for the crowds of sleek summer teenagers who Marie called friends. They came in packs to swim and eat and hover around her in clusters, their voices low and secretive. Except when they laughed, which was often and loud. The laughter would leap at Emma as she threaded her way through the groups, trying to look unconcerned. The girls were all pretty. Merely pretty, Emma thought, when she watched Marie, moving among them. Most of the boys were still awkward, betrayed by their voices and angular limbs. Emma watched Marie, sometimes from behind her sunglasses, more often from behind the white, eyelette curtains in her room that overlooked the patio. She never saw her single any one boy out. She treated them all equally, with alternating indifference and fascination.

One night, from her bedroom window, Emma saw Aunt Tess and Michael kissing in the pool. She called Marie over to watch. Michael seemed to be saying something in Tess's ear, and she was laughing, the lights from the water reflected on her face and Michael's back.

"Have you ever French kissed?" Emma asked her sister.

"Sure." Marie moved away from the window and sprawled on the bed.

"Did you like it?"

"I guess. It was okay."

"What were you thinking?"

Marie turned over on her back and crossed her hands behind her head.

"I was thinking about germs," she said.

"You're kidding!"

Marie raised one eyebrow. Emma had never been able to do that. "Well think about it. You wouldn't suck on somebody else's popsicle stick, would you? You wouldn't eat food somebody else chewed on. What's the difference?"

Emma buried her face in the pillow, laughing. "Gross me out, Marie," she said.

Emma was in the studio, watching Michael paint. He had gotten a commission and he was almost finished. He was working from a photograph of a woman which was clipped to his easel. "She's the wife of a carpet manufacturer," he said. "About sixty. I looked at her and I knew I was in trouble. A bland, characterless face. Like vanilla pudding. I usually find something beautiful or interesting in a face, and I build the picture around that. Then they get what they want which is a picture that makes them look better than life, and I don't feel like a complete fraud because there's a kernel of truth in the picture—in the curve of the cheekbone, the arch of the brow, whatever. But this lady...she was a tough one. Then I listened to her talk about her life. She was a debutante back in the forties. She got real nostalgic about those days. Sounded like nothing good had happened to her since then. That's how I hit on the veil. She had an old hat with a black veil hanging down the front. When she put it on, it gave her

this mysterious, woman-from-another-time look. But it was a challenge. If you paint the face and then try to put the veil on top, it won't work. The veil will look like cast iron. So I had to block it. Rough in areas of dark and light, then locate the eyes, nose and mouth. Then I laid the veil and painted the face through it. It obscured the veil lines, made them light. See? In some areas only the intersections are visible. I think this painting has a lot of, I don't know...presence."

He turned to Emma and seemed for a moment confused, like he'd forgotten who he'd been talking to. She'd been leaning forward on her seat, caught up in his excitement. When he turned, their faces were close and Emma said, "You made her look good." She wished she could think of some deeper observation.

He pulled a dry, flat-edged brush from the can on the desk, and toyed with the bristles. "If I were painting you, I know what I'd build the picture around."

"What?"

"Here. This line right here." And he drew the brush lightly along her collarbone, from the strap of her tank top to the hollow of her throat. Then Tess came in with a sandwich for Michael and they all admired the painting.

That night Emma stood in front of the mirror, in her nightgown, and traced the line of her collarbone with the tip of her finger, again and again.

Aunt Tess had taken Marie to the mall on a secret shopping expedition. Emma guessed they were buying underwear. That morning, Aunt Tess had come into their room with the laundry. "I don't mean to be nosy," she'd said. "But is this what girls are wearing under their clothes these days?" She held up a pair of Marie's white, nylon panties, the kind their mother wore, purchased by her. They came all the way up to the waist. Marie said no way, that she was embarrassed in gym class. That night Tess asked the girls if they wanted to go to the mall. Marie immediately said yes, but Emma decided to stay home. "Get some purple and white striped bikinis," she whispered to Marie as they left.

Michael said, "Good, I hate being alone on Saturday night."

Michael was catching lightning bugs in the back yard. When they were younger, Marie and Emma used to do that in the cemetery. They would put them in mason jars with holes in the lids, a tiny, flickering galaxy under glass. They always let them go. Now, from her lawn chair near the pool, Emma strained to see through the darkness. Michael was decorating himself with lightning bugs. His hands were dotted with greenish-gold lights, and the lights were not flickering. They stayed, glowing eerily on his fingers and palms.

"How do you do that?" she called to him. "How do you get them to stay?"

Michael moved his hands slowly in the air. "Magic."

"No, really, why don't they fly?"

"They love me. Do you want some?"

"You look like a kid, catching lightning bugs like that."

He swept a hand through the darkness, capturing a passing light. He came to her, his hands cupped. "Close your eyes," he said.

"Why do I have to close my eyes?"

"My magic is secret," he said. She closed her eyes. He told her to put out her hand. She extended her right hand. "The other one. And no peeking." She felt him touch the fourth finger of her outstretched left hand. She opened her eyes. "A ring for the lady," he said, smiling down at her.

Emma looked at her hand. There was no lightning bug, just a dot of oozing light on her finger. Repulsed, she tried to shake it off, but the disembodied glow stuck wetly to her skin. She flicked it off and wiped her hand on her bathing suit. She couldn't look at his face. He followed her towards the house.

"God, Emma, I'm sorry. I'm not a monster or anything. I never pulled the legs off of spiders, even when the other guys did. I swear. I didn't think it would bother you. Come on, Emma. They're just bugs. Don't be mad at me."

She said she was not mad, and truly she wasn't. She couldn't tell him that she was embarrassed by her reaction. Only a kid would react that way. She smiled and said she was going in because she was cold. He draped a towel around her shoulders and they went inside.

The next night was windless and humid. Michael was moping. He didn't want to go to the dinner party for the new chairman of the English Department at the community college where Aunt Tess taught. "A bunch of pretentious, over-educated literate types. It'll be boring." He was almost whining.

Aunt Tess slipped a jade bracelet on her wrist. "So don't go. I have no problem with that."

"I'll bet you don't."

Emma was watching from the sofa, pretending to read. Michael was slouched, arms crossed, at the table. Aunt Tess was standing over him, wearing a green silk dress. She looked beautifully annoyed. "Michael, you are welcome to come with me. You are welcome to stay here. But decide now because I'm leaving."

They left together.

Emma woke to the sound of an argument. The voices came from the front porch, through the window over the sofa where she'd fallen asleep. She started to sit up but changed her mind.

"You are pathetic, Michael. You embarrassed yourself. You embarrassed me. Go home."

"Don't worry. Nobody blamed you. In fact, I think I made you look better. Gave you a chance to be graceful. You were so fucking graceful even I was impressed. You should get some kind of award for..."

"Shut up. Please just shut up, Michael."

"No, really. You deserve an award. Help me out here, sweetheart. I'm having trouble finding my trophy..."

"Get away from me! I hate you when you're drunk!"

"Really? Then we've got a hell of a situation here, because I think I hate you when I'm sober."

Emma kept her eyes closed while Tess ran past, her footsteps echoing on the hardwood floors, pounding the stairs. A door slammed. There was silence, then the sound of the screen door opening and closing and more footsteps. Trapped in her pretense, Emma waited, muscles tense till she sensed him standing over her. His voice was singsong, gentle.

"Emma. Emma. Time to get up. Did you get all that, Emma? You were listening weren't you?"

She opened her eyes. He didn't look any different than he usually did. The same ironic half-smile. She couldn't see his eyes. She didn't answer.

"I'm sorry. You look so confused. Maybe you really were sleeping. Let's go for a walk. I need to walk."

"I don't think I..."

He grasped her wrist and pulled her to her feet.

"You don't think you want to walk with me? That can't be true. I couldn't stand it if that were true. Come on and don't argue."

They walked without speaking. He moved quickly, striding purposefully through the cemetery. Aunt Tess had said he was drunk. Emma expected him to stumble or weave but he didn't. She felt like she was running to keep up and she almost collided with him when he stopped abruptly in front of a granite monolith, the name "Gerard" carved on all four sides. Catching her breath, Emma pictured four dead Gerards under her feet, skulls to the stone, skeletal feet indicating North, South, East and West. A compass of corpses.

"Do I seem like a jerk to you, Emma?"

Emma heard cicadas and her own shallow breath. She seemed to be able to fill only half her lungs, and her voice sounded whispery. "No."

"What do I seem like to you?"

"I don't know. I like you."

Sometimes, coming down the steps from her bedroom Emma would miscalculate. She would think she was on the floor, but in reality there was one more step. It would take her by surprise and she would stumble, sometimes painfully. That was what she felt when Michael kissed her. That same unexpected drop where there was supposed to be solid ground. She had imagined being kissed by Michael would be like the feeling of his paintbrush against her skin, soft and tantalizing. It took a few seconds to realize that his tongue felt too wet on her lips. Too insistent. She kept her mouth closed, but she couldn't breathe. She began to struggle, twisting her head to the side. He sucked hard on her shoulder, pinning one of her hands to her side. His other hand was under her shirt. He was hurting her. With her free hand she wiped her mouth. Trying to

push his face away, she could have scratched him, but the thought of Michael's skin and blood under her nails sickened her. She made a fist and hit him as hard as she could, and kept on hitting him. After a moment he let her push him away. He was laughing. He turned and bent over, his hands on his knees, the posture of a sprinter after a race. Running, she scraped her shin on a half-sunken gravestone. She felt no pain, only the warmth of her blood on her ankle and the dwindling sound of his laughter as she ran.

RESTORATION

By **Patricia L. Benes**

I can't tell you exactly why I started
but what keeps me going's as hard to ignore
as a man's voice saying, "Pat,
you deserve better," as hard
to forget as the sound
of the kitchen door
closing behind him.

I'm stripping the paint
from the old china closet,
keeper of cut glass bowls, my
alabaster cat, the hand-carved
angel from Denmark, little
windup robots.

Now I'm down to natural grain,
to the wild swirls of mahogany.
I wear plastic gloves to protect
me from the paste that chews paint
and skin indiscriminately: if it
gets in my eyes, I may never see
right again. I risk madness from
whiffs of toluene.

There's no stopping for splinters
until rubbing a hand across
exposed wood gives me a good, smooth
feeling stronger than the burning
in my eyes, the stinging of my skin.

I look closer at the cupboard doors—
sometimes the little bubbles
of imperfection in the glass
sparkle like clear water
streams hidden deep in a dream.

CHESTNUTS

By Carolyn Elder

As I stood there in the living room, I surveyed the tree I had picked out. My mother had told me to pick out a small one, but it's hard to judge sometimes. A lot of trees look fairly small in the lot. Firmly in the metal stand, the tree's top grazed the ceiling. When my brother Doug pulled off the last of the plastic netting that had contained the tree, the branches reached into the armchair and the sofa that were on either side of it. Doug stepped back to get a full view. My mother and I looked on in silence.

"It's so...big." Doug broke the silence.

"But it's got a great shape, doesn't it? And it's really healthy," I said.

"Yeah, but it's just so...big." A Lit major in college and he could think of no other adjective.

"Sarah, I said get a *small* tree," my mother said quietly.

"Well, it looked small in the lot, I swear it did," I said, wondering how much fuller it would be when the branches thawed out. "C'mon, it'll look great once its decorated."

Doug looked at the clock. "Damn, I'm late. I told Sam I'd pick him up at five for the concert," he said, bounding up the stairs two at a time.

"Wait, aren't you going to help decorate the tree?" I called after him.

"Can't," he said, pulling his gray Temple sweatshirt over his head on his way downstairs. "I've got to run."

"You Scrooge," I said.

"Hope you have enough lights to go around the tree," he answered, laughing. I punched him lightly in the arm as he passed by. With one fluid motion he grabbed his old, worn denim jacket, kissed my mother goodbye, patted the dog, and was out the door.

My mother and I looked at each other. "We need some music to get into the Christmas spirit," I said quickly. I put on the old Bing Crosby record, and with "White Christmas" playing in the background, my mother and I decorated the tree in silence.

The next day was Christmas Eve, and my mother and I went to the evening mass. The pews were packed with families, aunts, uncles, and grandparents who came to see their children in the Christmas pageant. I watched as the little shepherds, angels, and wise men made their innocent little parade down the center aisle. Only the faces had changed. The scene, the costumes, the burning incense, the story, even the plaster baby Jesus doll in the manger; it was the same as it had been in the years that my own family had crowded together on the hard, wooden seats.

When we got home, my mother went into the kitchen to prepare the stuffing for Christmas dinner, while I arranged the brightly wrapped packages around the tree. I wondered if my two other brothers, both

married, would stop in tomorrow to exchange gifts. They wouldn't be at dinner since it was their turn to spend Christmas with their in-laws. At least we would have Aunt Marion and Uncle Paul over for company. As long as it didn't snow.

Having nothing more to do, I turned off the two lamps in the living room, leaving only the multi-colored lights of the tree to softly illuminate the room. I settled comfortably on the couch and stared into the glistening tree. There's just something about sitting in the quiet living room with all of the lights out, and the Christmas tree all lit up. The soft lights flicker and wink, reflecting off of the long strands of tinsel as some faint, unseen breeze moves the branches, ever so slightly. From where I lay stretched out on the sofa, I could see my reflection in the glass balls, the reflection that so often fascinated me as a child. I'd sit in the old rocking chair, reaching one finger towards the ornament, watching it grow out of nothing to immense proportions in the dimensions of the mirrored glass. Then I'd move my face close to it, seeing my nose and chin become prominent. I would sit by the tree on Christmas Eve until my eyes were heavy with sleep, and my father would come in.

"C'mon, Punkin," as he so often called me. "Santa Claus can't come until all good little girls are sound asleep." Then he would help me put out a little plate of chocolate chip cookies and a glass of milk. I didn't know at the time that I was fixing his late night snack.

I turned on my side on the sofa, propping my head on my elbow. I looked at the wooden snowman ornament and the wreath with the plastic baby deer on it, fashioned so long ago by childish hands, and displayed on a branch every year since. In the darkened living room with the silent, sparkling tree before me, I tried to revive the old peace that I used to feel.

Two years had passed since my father died suddenly of what they said was a massive stroke. We never knew for sure what happened, but it didn't matter to us anymore. Christmas was the season my father loved best. You could see it in his whole character. From the day after Thanksgiving, the family was reminded that Christmas was on the way, as my father went about his household chores singing "chestnuts roasting over an open fire." And if my father wasn't singing a Christmas tune, he was most likely whistling one.

He and I, it was our job to get everyone else into the Christmas spirit. Or, at least we took it upon ourselves to do so. Every year my father and I would dig out the Christmas lights from the dusty cardboard boxes in the cellar. Together we put great care into framing the windows, trying to get just the right look for the front of the house. Then we'd untangle the long strands of lights for the three big bushes outside, carefully laying them out on the front lawn, and then picking them up strand by strand and entwining them into each bush. We talked as we did this, but never about anything really important.

Then it would be time for us to go and pick out the Christmas tree.

Sometimes my mother or one of my brothers would join us, but most years it was just my dad and me.

"Let's go pick out a really nice one for Mommy," he would say. He often referred to my mother as Mommy, even when I was a teenager. I didn't mind. It seemed natural to him. He would search through the forest of cut trees, looking for the "perfect" one. It was no wonder that my brothers rarely came with us; they never had the patience that we had. He was proud of the last tree we picked out together. On Christmas morning it had shone and sparkled just as this one did two years later. But that's the thing about the Christmas tree—every one seems new and different.

Maybe that tree was different, though. My dad left the house one night, four days after Christmas, to go to a fire, just as he had done millions of times.

"Lock the door behind me, okay Sarah?" he said as he left the house.

"Okay," I answered. "Bye, Dad."

It was another fireman who came home that night, to tell us that Dad had had "a little accident." We weren't worried at the time. Living with a fireman, you get used to the cuts and bruises, or even occasional smoke inhalation. He'd been hospitalized for that before. When we saw him next, it wasn't him at all, but the cold, unfamiliar shell that had housed his spirit. And the spirit had gone, taking with it all of the warmth and vigor that had animated the now empty shell. Two hours later, when the family came home from the hospital, the first thing I saw was the extra strand of lights that he and I had draped diagonally on the front of the middle bush. It was only two weeks before. I remembered staring at the lights as I approached the front door; they had mocked us that night, illuminating the house from which Christmas had evaporated like a transitory dream. I had switched them off then. I couldn't stand their hypocrisy.

I sat up on the couch, blinking my eyes and trying to ignore the cold feeling that was lingering on the back of my neck. That sensation was becoming a familiar one, and yet I didn't know what it was. I shook my head to release myself from it. Yawning, I got up from the couch and went into the kitchen to kiss my mother good night. She was putting the last of the stuffing into the refrigerator.

"Oh, did I tell you," she said as I was leaving the kitchen, "Eric called. He said there was a change in plans. He and Natalie are coming over for dinner tomorrow."

"Oh really? That's great!" I said, and I went upstairs.

The next morning I woke early. There was a lot to be done. Slipping into my robe, I glanced into my mother's room. She was already up so I went into Doug's room.

"Come on, Doug, wake up! Merry Christmas," I said, poking him in the shoulder.

"What time is it?" he mumbled from under the covers. "Wake me up in an hour." He didn't open his eyes.

I went downstairs. The tree stood, tall and majestic with all of the presents beneath it. I plugged in the lights. So what if it was too sunny to notice them. I paused a moment to rearrange a couple of gifts and went into the kitchen to eat breakfast.

The day passed quickly, like most Christmases in the past. In the afternoon, after our company had arrived, I played Santa Claus, handing out each gift, chatting and laughing and putting on the Christmas records. Each of my gifts I received with a smile and a thanks, while the cold feeling danced on my neck.

Then it was time for Christmas dinner. The table was loaded with turkey and stuffing, sweet potatoes, corn, crescent rolls, and cranberry sauce. After our feast had been topped off with pumpkin pie, we sat around the table, filling the dining room with the usual reminiscences that the holiday inspires. The topic of our tree came up in conversation.

"I still can't believe you picked out that ridiculous tree, Sarah," Doug said, and everyone began to laugh.

"We've been through all this, Doug," I said, my lips tightening into a forced smile.

"Why did you pick a tree that big anyway," my brother Eric said, laughing. "I was sitting on the couch, and I couldn't see Uncle Paul in the recliner." The memory of this made them laugh harder. I could feel my jaw tighten.

"Looks like I'll have to go with you next year, to make sure you get a small one," my mother said mildly.

"What does it matter?" I said irritably.

"Well, if you want to share the living room with more than two people," Doug began.

I shoved my chair back suddenly, knocking into the table in my haste to stand up. "You know, anyone was welcome to come with me to pick it out. I'm sure none of you would ever make such a stupid mistake like this!" They fell silent, and I stormed out of the room.

When I got to the living room, I walked over to the stereo. My hand was shaking as I dusted off the Christmas Chorale record. Dad always played these records at Christmas time. I turned off the lights and took up my place on the couch.

I took a hard look at the tree. It was the kind of tree he would have picked out, rich green, and big. Since my dad died, I had carried out all of the old traditions, trying to keep alive the spirit that he loved so much. I felt I owed it to him. Each year, I dragged out the dusty boxes, picked out the tree, and decorated the whole house just as he used to. I wrapped my presents, even my brothers' and my mother's presents, while the mood music played on. On Christmas Eve I brought them all downstairs, as was my custom, and arranged them around the tree. It was all the same. Why did that coldness always come back?

Now, as I sat on the couch staring at the blurred lights of the tree, I

couldn't escape the feeling or shake it as I had always done.

"Sarah?" I jumped at my mother's unexpected voice and turned away, suddenly aware that my cheeks were burning with tears. "Are you all right?" She sat down in the wooden rocker across from me.

"Oh sure, I'm fine." I hastily wiped away the tears, annoyed at my own weakness. "It's nice, isn't it Mom? Just sitting here looking at the tree."

"Yes, it is." We looked at the tree quietly for a while, as my mother slowly rocked in the chair. The quiet was completed by the soft strains of "Silent Night" from the stereo.

"I remember the way Dad used to love the Christmas tree. It was always so peaceful, sitting here with him. God, I love Christmas. It's my favorite time I think..." My voice trailed off. I couldn't continue. I knew it was a front. "Oh, Mom, I feel so dead inside. I tried so hard to keep this time special. I wanted it to be the same. He would have wanted that." I still fought back the tears.

"I know." My mother suddenly looked very tired. "Dad was the one who made it special. He brought the warmth to it. When he died, he took it with him, I think."

I sat there, struck by the words. We didn't say anything else. She rocked. I stared at the tree. It only continued its twinkling, oblivious to her life or mine.

FROZEN MOMENTS

By Kathy Barrett

Hurrying to work on a Friday night,
I dread the greasy spatulas and stained coffee pots,
And the left-over sandwiches waiting to be hauled to the dumpster.
Dodging icy mud puddles, I reach Wismer Dining Hall.
But my feet stop on the steps, My hand rests on the door.

Just outside the dark building,
I recognize the echoes of Freshman, female voices
Ringing from the quad.
They bellow the ultimate questions —
“Do you love me, will you love me forever...”

And suddenly I am caught in the moment.
It's as if my feet are frozen to the sidewalk,
My mind, frozen in the past as I recall
The desk-top dancing,
And bodies bouncing on the beds,

The giggles and screams. the spilled beer,
And loud music that once rang from my dorm room.
Four years ago. it was my friends and I
Singing along with that blaring cassette.
“Do you need me, will you never leave me...”

(But some of them did leave.)
Laura, who transferred to Cornell,
And Stephanie, who hugged me good-bye,
Then never called, never wrote,
And never returned the next year.

I smile as I softly join in with the chorus.
I can see me breath in the night air.
“Will you make me so happy for the rest of my life,
Will you take me away, will you make me your wife...”
It's as if that song never left those rooms.

A bitter gust of wind follows me into the building
And I hear the door slam behind me.
So I ring the dirt out of my favorite mop
And leave the melodies of the past lingering —
I'll probably be singing this song all night.

ONCE UPON A

By Diane Orleman

Once upon a time there is a story. Do you ever wonder why people write stories? Serious writers, whatever "serious" means to you, write them (write anything for that matter) because they wish to make a confirmation. They want to pin down something and erase its ephemerality. When something's pinned down, they think they can see it in its parts, they can examine it at its (and their) leisure, they can attempt to understand it. And by extension they can then hope to understand life. Isn't that what you're trying to do, in your own way?

A book about a man who collected butterflies did this. He pinned them down in all their fragile splendor, but then they were dead. And fucking dead things isn't (aren't) much fun.

The story in question here, though, the once upon a story, is a different story (or maybe it isn't. Some people who claim to know assert that all stories are the same story). It has this line in it (or a reasonable facsimile thereof):

You do what you have to do until you can't stand it anymore, and then you crack up.

As a writer, this narrator has always thought it would be jolly fun to write stories based on significant lines from other stories that he (or she) has read. To, as it were, pin down certain pithy statements and let them lead farther. Or maybe let them lead nearer, inward upon themselves. Involutional studies. Yes. Well. Whichever. This is what the narrator learned from reading Jean Rhys, after Mr. MacKenzie, and now he (or she) will tell you. Look at this butterfly. See where its antennae point, where it will alight, what light will filter through its stained glass wings.

YOU are people, all people. How universal is it, the narrator wonders. Do those in far-flung primitive places fit into this pattern? Don't you sometimes wonder if they crack up? You could go to Samoa (or ask Margaret Mead; is she still alive?) Did you see *The Gods Must Be Crazy*? The Coke bottle really screwed things up, didn't it?

DO, a verb with multitudinous uses and shades of things it has to tell about. People who are doing are active, are acting. The narrator is reminded of something he (or she) learned once upon a psych course somewhere, the hierarchy of needs. Doesn't that determine what we do? (You see that "do" can be a helping verb, too.) There are certain things we all have to do if we want to stay here: eat, eliminate the remains of our eating, protect our skins from the elements, reproduce our kind. The higher up on the ladder we climb, the more things we have to do. And the more complicated it becomes.

The narrator has accepted responsibility for feeding the animals. There are two adults, two children, and two cats. Once per week this have-to-do requires a visit to the local Food Fair. It is a crowded and unclean establishment. Carts crash at the corners, wheels stick on blackened spots of spilled soda, dust settles on tops of canned goods. Long lines of waiting follow long pulls and pushes down and up fifteen aisles. The two children, each under age six, impede the progress. In the cart seat the smaller one kicks, a litany of bruises on the narrator's upper thighs. The other, walking, eats from a bag of, (yes, only Double Stuff Oreos will do) trailing chocolate crumbs like Hansel and Gretel, lip smeared with a chocolate moustache, fingernails embedded with sweet brown filth. The process at its best and most economical evaporates two and a half hours of living. This does not include carrying from six to eight weighty bags of food and supplies into the house. On occasion a bag breaks because the bearer tries to save a moment by carrying one too many by its brown paper top. He (or she) has learned by now not to transport bags with soda or apple juice in this manner. Then there is the time to put it all away. Jars of Musselmanns Applesauce and Heinz Sweet Pickle Relish, cans of Campbells Homestyle Cream of Tomato Soup, three-liter bottles of Coke and diet Coke: downstairs to the pantry. Blue and beige Scottissue toilet paper, yellow Bounty towels, Posh Puffs (with lotion), Hefty Steel Sak trash bags: all these in the paper goods closet in the garage. Lettuce, celery, grapes, apples, pears, parsley, tomatoes: all to be washed, dried, packaged in plastic kitchen bags and refrigerated. Meat and fowl to be boned, sliced, seperated and wrapped for freezing. Tylenol, Dry Idea, Kotex, Maalox to be carried to the stairs: second story items. This two hour segment of the job is periodically interrupted by the shrieks of the children clawing each other over the crumbled Oreo cookie remains, being sandwiched into the family room rug. And when that is done (the past tense of "do") then a meal is to be made. Three times a day, seven days a week, plates and pots caked with the remains after each round...

The job is never done so that one might stand back and see its fruits, boast "Well done!" and move on. The job is never done. It's not like writing a story, is it? says the writer.

WHAT is whatever it is that has to be done. There's always more, more than you think, more than you have allotted time for. After eating the above-cooked meals, in a short time the diners must use the toilet. In not too much more time, the toilet reeks, wet yellow places dried, noisome; three of four two-legged animals are male. (The narrator has also accepted responsibility for the house's two and a half baths, but that still equals three toilets.) And not to overlook the cats'(males also) box of dusty clay litter, filled daily with the leavings and droppings, the pungency of ammonia pervading the and-a-half bath. And then thinking the day's work is done, the narrator discovers one of the cats vomited pieces of green plant in gobs of thick saliva on the living room rug, and one of the males has spilled

and left a glass of Coke on the kitchen counter...

YOU. (ibid.)

TO. (with "**DO**," ibid.) part of the infinitive. And sometimes all of the above-mentioned seem to go on ad nauseam, ad infinitum.

Was eliminating **HAVE** here in the order of things perhaps a Freudian slip? as they used to call such phenomena in that psych class. Have equals must. It is a must. I must. Must I? Do we have to do anything? No. But if we don't there are consequences. If we don't eat, starvation. If we don't clean the toilet, roaches. If we don't buy an overcoat, frostbite. (if we do however, we risk its being stolen.) If we don't a) screw, or b) make love (pick one) we... Well, the narrator chooses to let you complete that thought for yourself.

UNTIL. Time passes. Things proceed. Then a certain point of time arrives.

And **YOU** are back again, looking at the contraction **CAN'T**. Can not. Unable. No longer possible. No longer possible to **STAND**. No longer can life be faced with full stature. The narrator did not metamorphose into a giant beetle, upturned, carapace on the bathroom floor, six legs flailing. But the warning sign was almost evident. One morning he (or she) could not arise from bed. The psychic energy was gone, dissipated into some unknown place. Something forbade movement, except to the eyes, and these, frantic, scanned the ceiling, looking for answers in the etching of the age above, flaking plaster and long-dried puddles of leaking roofs, rust-tainted. The other adult had to take the children away. The cats climbed off and on the bed all day long, nestling and nuzzling, unaware of change. Curious.

IT is everything, isn't it? Life summed up in a two-letter pronoun. **ANYMORE**, time again, time; a hop, skip, and a jump to nevermore, a black bird's litany of death. The narrator here in bed, poring over quaint and curious volumes. Searching for the lost Lenore. Will she ever be found?

AND, what is joined to what has already been said, equal. This is an equation. **THEN**, at this time, **YOU** return. Are you the same person on the other side of the equation? Are you the same person you were yesterday? fifteen years ago? The narrator knows that two days ago he (or she) could stand, but not today.

A **CRACK** in the ceiling is like an animal in the clouds. But the cracks are inside, signals of a warped foundation. The fall of the house is imminent. The narrator, in less lucid moments, imagines insects squeezing through the cracks above and dropping onto the bed. (if the cats come back they will eat them. But that is unlikely for this is now a cold place.) "Step on a crack, break your mother's (or father's) back," the narrator recalls. What have the children been doing in their absence?

In addition to the food, the two cats, the three toilets, the four humans, the buying of overcoats, and the screwing or making love (whichever you

chose), before becoming bedridden, the narrator had a job in one of the helping professions. For fifteen years he (or she) gladly dispensed knowledge, recommendation letters, well-done-work critiques. Answered the 1 a.m. phone calls and rolled out the bed to crash in. Purveyed cups of tea, shots of tequila, tokes on a joint. Sympathy; support; salvation, sometimes. Love. The first ten years were simple. Then the narrator began to hunger for things that everyone else seemed to have: houses, cars, overcoats, cats, children. The helping profession became a requirement rather than a choice. Money was needed to finance the above. And instead of giving himself (or herself) away freely, the narrator's self was being drained, sucked down and out of his (or her) veins, through the roots he (or she) was perhaps sorry to have made.

The children became bruised before they were taken away. This was what was not allowed to happen. It was then the narrator could not stand anymore.

In the ghetto the drug of choice is crack. (Someone once told the narrator crack was a fifteen minute orgasm; only once and you're addicted.) But here, what to choose? There's no grass anymore—banned with the onset of the children. Besides, you come back in a few hours. Alcohol. Takes too long. It's years before your liver fails. Pills. (The narrator recalls a neurotic friend who once broke every bottle in the house. Thousands of shards of glass glinting in the oblique sun slanting through the blinds. A middle class American *Kristallenacht*.) A statement, but a statement that could be erased with a dust pan and mop. No. Breakage is not the desired end here. Things are already broken and beyond repair. The drug of choice would have to be all the pills in all the bottles in the first bath, second story.

The cats would cry curiously, calling the other adult upstairs. The narrator, obviously, lives to tell the story.

UP. Can't get up. Can't get it up. Been down so long it looks like up to me. Growing up. Grown up. Up the establishment. Up, up, and away... With the previous word, an idiomatic expression meaning you lose your hold on life.

The narrator is reminded of F. Scott Fitzgerald's publishing his crack up essays in *Esquire*. He had it all, didn't he? The beautiful girl, the saintly editor, the wealth, the fame, the talent. What was that he had to do? What damned him? What couldn't he stand anymore? The pressure of keeping the beautiful girl warm and happy in fur overcoats? The threat of a talent to live up to, daily? Somewhere along the line he floundered in a bath of alcohol. (He sure could tell a good story, though.)

See the narrator now before the desk again, reading from his (or her) blue notebook, filled with the significant lines from other stories that he (or she) has read:

But there was no room ever for all books. They used to stand in great piles in the bedroom, without rhyme or reason. She used to say that I would one day myself become a book. She would wake up one morning and find it beside her in the bed.

"You have a great appetite for them," said Prentiss.

"Appetite," MacMahon said, testing the word... "You have the right of it, I think. For years, I thought that I was gathering up knowledge and wisdom in great double handfuls, but in the end, tis but an appetite like any other." (Thomas Flanagan, *Tenants of Time*, page 9.)

He (or she) scribbles with the pen to get it started. On the other side of the window the butterflies emerge from their cocoons once more, aloft in sunlight. (But this is another story.) The end.



ASI

CLIPPED WINGS

By Tim Driscoll

"Runners, set!..."

Julian's thoughts flew as the dull black of the track hardened beneath him. Running was the blood that kept him alive, pulled him along in a crimson wake. His vision swam, as if his eyes were trying to block out the pain to come. He blinked, and bowed his head, summoning up the determination to go beyond his pain, and triumph over it.

The gun roared, surprising Julian out of his trance. His legs jumped, one step ahead of his mind but already far behind his racing spirit. The track softened under the tread of twenty eight men sprinting for the turn, and the only sound that reached Julian was the echo of the gunshot. He had been here a hundred times before, this solitary world where there is nothing but the running.

Fear was the enemy, more so than other runners, or even the watch. Fear of failure, fear of physical pain, fear of falling just short of your goals. It followed Julian before every race, jumping in front of him on the line and threatening to overwhelm his courage, but he bit it back, locking it deep in his throat, where it lurked in sullen exile. Concentration was the key, he knew; it was the wall constructed in the hours before the race, the bricks of experience held together by confidence. But it could shatter at any stray thought, any distraction, the bricks turning to powder, the wall collapsing around his ankles, and the fear cascading in. Here, for Julian, there could be only the gunshot, and the running, and the wall to keep the rest out.

"Sixty four...sixty five...sixty six...!" The quarter-mile splits put the pack on a four-twenty mile pace, but Julian felt smooth, and pushed a little harder, riding the second lane, breath easy, legs powerful, arms relaxed. 1980 champion John Arbring labored a half step ahead, commanding the inside lane, spikes flashing. Julian's intensity speared Arbring's back, pinning him to the pace.

The woods squatted below, an outstretched hand beckoning to Julian as he dropped down a macadem hill and flew over the lacrosse field. Carbole's spikes picked up cold water and flung it into Julian's face, stinging his eyes. Julian blinked, and blinked again, rapidly, trying to clear his sight.

A sharp right turn, shooting the gap between the scoreboard and tarnished silver fence, and the pace slowed. The pack gathered courage, and lunged forward again, down the trail that struck the woods, a dagger through the meat of his palm, twisting deeper and jutting out the backside in a long, steep hill. A network of thick tree roots carpeted the ground, stones scattered everywhere.

Four quick strides and the straightness of the trail ended, exploding into a twisting creature, writhing underfoot. As Julian planted his right foot to dart around the giant oak that stood sentinel at the first bend in the woods, Ellen floated out of his memory, leaning against the tree as she had been when they first met. He saw her smile, and his ankle folded, crackling like broken twigs. He screamed and blacked out, and the woods reached up to catch him.

Julian's crutches whack against each step, as he swings himself down the steps to his room in the basement, the cold November sun glaring off the windows, leering into his eyes. It's funny how his ankle doesn't hurt. It's been numb since he woke, seconds after his fall, as the back of the pack zipped by. At Granby Medical Center ER, they assured him it wasn't broken, only torn and badly bruised. Three weeks in a cast, two more of therapy and rehab. The memory of pain is fading in the gathering fog of the passing days. His battered leg and shoulder mute testimony to a time three days past.

Julian's key opens the door, and he flips on the light, hating as always the pale beams that trickle down. The network of pipes that web his ceiling eats most of the light, while the earth, held back by four thin walls, soaks up some more.

He throws his crutches in the corner and hops over to his couch, the mottled leopard-skin forming nervous patterns that squirm and writhe with insane energy. The mellow sound of Alan Parsons Project slides from under the eaves of his loft as Julian turns on his stereo. "...As far as my eyes can see...there are shadows surrounding me..."

Julian sits on the couch, cradling a bottle of vodka and munching the last crumbs from a box of Stouffer's hard pretzels, their staleness a brick on his tongue. The vodka stings like a whip, and burns his belly like a hot poker. He stares at a brown smudge on the carpet, his mind spinning off into nowhere.

A light tap on his door jerks him from his empty thoughts. The vodka spills to the floor, staining the carpet a darker green. Julian shakes the fog off his brain, and it settles on his heart.

"Come in," he offers at the stubborn oak door, tracing the parallel lines that run through the wood like the lanes of a track. The door eases open, and Ellen's head pops in, bathed in light from the hallway.

"Hi Jule. How you doin'?" Her straight, brown hair falls over hazel eyes, and she pushes it back with the flick of a wrist that Julian has seen a thousand times. It catches behind one ear, and the concern on her face mirrors that in her voice.

"I'm all right," he said. It is too hard to explain, and he knows how she'll react—not understanding, but pretending for his sake.

"Mind if I come in?" She comes the rest of the way in at Julian's nod. He remembers when her tight, athletic body, hiding now behind sweatshirt and baggy pants, could hold him forever. Making love as the sun rose;

caressing, swaying, rocking, and eventually joined by an instant of penetration and a final, draining, tingling climax—it seemed he could never get enough. She was his first, ten months ago as winter hit its full stride, and she taught him exciting things.

"Julian, what's wrong?" Ellen asks. "You've been acting strange lately. Did I do something?" Her pain and confusion are tangible in the air between them. A small part of Julian is alive, screaming, furious at his lethargy, his uncaring. But the fog shrouding his heart swallows the fury, cooling it to ice and leaving him with emptiness.

"It's nothing you did, Ell. It's just that...I don't know. I guess I'm just depressed over the race last week." He chokes on the numbness.

"But Julian, you tell me that every day!" Ellen's voice has the sour bite of a whine, and it scrapes Julian's sore nerves. "It isn't healthy for you to be this upset. You won't go out with me, and you never come over anymore. Why are you lying?"

"I'm not lying to you, hon. I'm just tired, that's all. I'll be okay soon." Julian's lips convulse in a smile, his eyes dead. Ellen turns back to the door. Anguish drapes over her words like an uncomfortable, oversized shirt.

"I'll let you get some rest, then. I hope you feel better tomorrow." Pause. "I really wish you'd let me help you."

"Thanks," says Julian, answering the first part, ignoring the second. Another pause.

"Could you walk me home?" Ellen asks. Quickly, "if you don't want to, I understand."

"Sure I want to," Julian lies, so she waits while he fumbles his coat awkwardly around his shoulders. He retrieves his crutches, turns off the radio and light, and shuts the door behind them. The snap...click! of the lock resounds in the linoleum hallway. Julian takes the stairs one slow step at a time, while Ellen holds the door open at the top. The wind bustles in, soaking his coat with cold air.

The walk back to Edison Hall is silent, the air too chill for the warmth that words, yelled over the rising wind, might hold. Julian concentrates on his feet—round, rubber pads on jointless wooden legs that trap him inches off the ground. Their weight drags on the ground, making an eerie scraping sound against the muddy, frozen asphalt, through air that is thick and violent.

They walk along the paved path, down a short hill looming cliff-like to Julian, stopping at the nearest door of Ellen's dorm, a faint yellow light flickering feet above their heads. Still winded by the effort of carrying his 125 pound body on crutches, Julian gulps the October air, exhaling frosty plumes that are swept away in seconds. Ellen opens the door with her key, and steps inside the building.

"Do you want to come in for a second?"

"I really should be getting back. I have a lot of work."

"It'd just be for a second, to warm up a bit. Are you sure?"

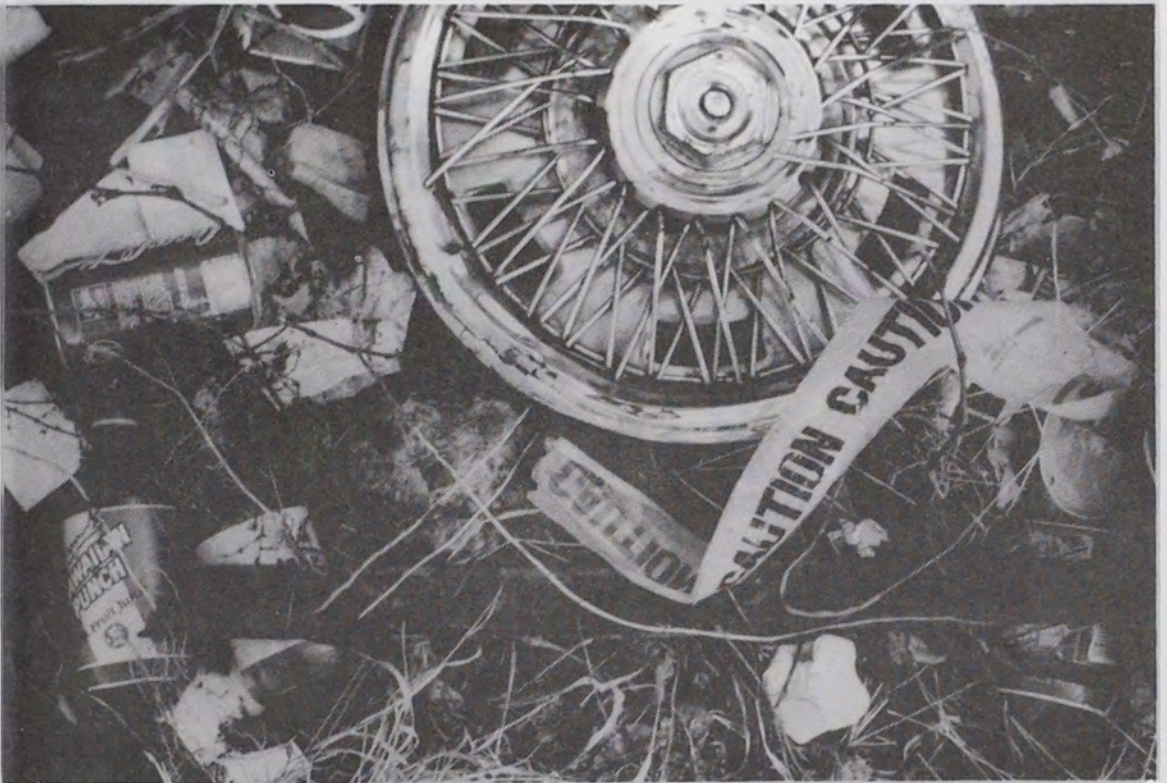
Ellen's voice cracks on the last word, and she shivers. Julian hops through the doorway.

"Maybe a minute or two," he says. The iron door slams shut behind him, blocking out the howl of the rising wind. Ellen's door is on the left, two doors down. The hall is empty, except for the squat, grey garbage cans. One has tipped over next to Ellen's room, and she rights it with one foot. It is empty.

"Where's your roommate?" Julian asks her. "She go home for the weekend?"

"No, she's around somewhere. Probably the library."

Ellen puts her key in the lock and turns, the door creaking once as it glides open. From the light in the hallway, Julian can see her figure, reaching for a small desk light.



GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

By Neil Schafer

Sitting in class, cluttered
strains of vicarious voices.
Rhetorical rhetoric spoken by Pete
some think, some don't, the heat.
Hearing secluded chatter, comments muttered.

Bending minds, making memories
of a poet's perceptions of particular problems.
Anthology pages perform,
relief from weather, storm.
Excessive, exhausting, enveloping—
waiting for a freeze.

Style difficult to read
better to sense with the ear.
Gerard Manley Hopkins page 1581,
ten minutes left, almost done.
But listen to him his message, take heed.

For the earth won't wait for strangers.
In the world you must partake.
Or languish for the shiny foil,
before it's all gone, toil.
Falling asleep is one of the dangers.

ROACHES

By Anthony McCurdy

Jasmine incense tickles my nose
as Camel smoke scratches my lungs.
At two in the morning, Jack Kerouac
just can't put me to sleep.

Bare feet are slapping in the hall,
now Keith is yelling, pounding at
my door— Roach in the wire, man!
Third time this week; I'm sick of it.

My Zippo is full, and I shake
my Lysol can; it's half-empty.
Cornered by the crapper, the roach's
shell glints under fluorescent light.

I saw him first, whispers Steve. Great,
says Keith, You win— let's toast 'im.
We move closer, but the roach
runs, and flanking it, I put

lighter to Lysol and bathe the roach
in a disinfectant flame, its legs
curling as it crawls, a tiny black carcass
popping and stinking on the linoleum.

Keith and Steve laugh and bow, while
our hallmates applaud— We're better
than the Green Berets, man!
Why do I expect Keith to tack an

Ace of Spades to the smouldering
roach? This could be Vietnam,
some kids walking Khe Sanh, cocky,
crazy, frying some slope in his foxhole.

I crush the dead roach under my
bare feet. I reach for a smoke
and think how goddamn lucky we
are that roaches don't carry guns.

IN GRAND CENTRAL

By Jennifer Blay

On The Callous floor
of Grand Central Station
by the entrance of gate thirty-two,
a clean-shaven stranger in
a blue pin-striped suit
crouched beside me.

In torn, car grease and sweat
stained polyester and flannel,
a bum displayed a desperate,
trembling hand. I donated a
quarter, shivering as I touched
his unwelcoming skin.

Gilt Constellations on a painted
navy sky dragged my eyes upward.
The clean man told me
he went to Yale. Asked me if I'd
ever been to The Palm. I nodded,
listening to the rambling trains.

A cracking, leathery voice
said he'd write me a poem,
about anything, for a dollar.
Thinking of trees, mowed lawns,
my tabby cat's collar, I requested,
"Green, please."

The poet, massaging a grizzled
salt n' pepper chin,
forced a green wine bottle
into rhyme, earning a dollar.
The Yale Man said,
"Get a job, beggar."

I inched towards my approaching train.

THE STEELVILLE SHARK

By Jerry Van Kanan

"Son-of-a-bitch!" I roared, "No hot water again." I tore around the corner of the shower room and smacked into a short, naked, bulldog-faced gentlemen who balancing himself on one leg, trying to take his sneakers off.

"Sorry I knocked you down," I said, standing the little guy up.

"That's o.k.," he said, extending his hand. "I'm father Mike Sharkey of St. Mildred's Church."

"My name is Fred but most folks know me by my strange name, Dr. Phinius T. Rabbitfoot III."

"Are you a Catholic?"

"No, I'm a magician."

"Sorry to hear it. Maybe we can do business."

He took off his other sneaker, entered the shower and turned on the water. "Rabbitfoot, there's plenty of hot water."

I jumped under the adjacent shower. "Maybe it's a miracle," I said.

Several days later the Father and I met again in the Y pool. Doing the backstroke in opposite directions, we hit in a head on collision.

"Damn it," someone gurgled. I looked around and saw a floundering Father Sharkey.

"Father, I'm sorry. My head must be made of concrete." I helped him out of the water.

He was seeing stars so I said, "You seem to have lost your equilibrium. I'll drive you home." Twenty minutes later I pulled into the driveway of St. Mildred's Rectory. I helped him out of my wagon and up to the back door. He couldn't find his key, as he was still groggy. I picked his pocket and struck pay dirt on the first pick.

"Father Sharkey's drunk again," said a voice.

"Somebody's holding him up," said another.

I looked. It was two old biddies peering over their backyard fence. "Good evening, ladies," I called out, "Come on over, we're having a party." Realizing that they had been heard, they turned and headed toward their house.

I got the back door open and grabbed the Father, who weighed no more than 130 pounds, and dragged him into the kitchen.

A door creaked. It slid open. There in the doorway stood a huge Irish banshee. She was at least six feet two and skinny as a clothes prop. Sharkey regained his equilibrium under her stare.

"Rabbitfoot, this is my niece and housekeeper, Miss Bridget O'Toole."

"Hello," she said.

"Pleased to meet you, Bridget. Father Sharkey had a little mishap at the pool."

"Just an inspirational knock on the head," said the Father. "Bridget, bring us a couple of cups of Irish coffee."

The three of us sat around the kitchen table drinking and chatting. After the third cup, Shark passed out.

Bridget and I carried him upstairs and put him to bed.

"Be down in a minute, Rabbitfood."

"Foot," I said, "not food."

"Got you, Rabbitfood."

"Foot," I said going down the stairs.

Bridget returned and said, "My poor uncle's under a terrible pressure. Bishop Girard Lovato hates the Irish, so he's always picking on Shark. The parish calls for two priests, but gets no help, so the block collection is always late. The bingo take is not what it should be; somebody robs the poor box about once a month. Church attendance is low and everything is blamed on my Uncle Sharkey."

"That's too bad," I said, and meant it because I was really starting to like the Shark. I said goodnight and slipped out the rectory back door. There were no observers this time.

The next day at the Steeleville Y the good father and I renewed acquaintances. Thank God I didn't bang into him again. After we showered we sat on the bench outside the front door where we could get some air and I could watch the girls that came out.

"What did you say you did, Rabbitfoot?"

"I'm a magician or rather was, Father. I'm semi-retired."

"I remember now. That's funny, I used to fool around with the stuff myself."

"Tell me, how do you do the trick with the bread and wine?"

A look flashed across his face like he was going to be angry. But he held it in, sighed, and finally said, "I don't think I can do that one myself anymore. To tell the truth, don't think I ever could."

"What do you mean?"

"I've been depressed lately. It's not just the Bishop. I seem to be losing it. It's a lonely life, my boy."

"Shark, you're feeling sorry for yourself. Look at me, what do I have? No home. The wife kicked me out years ago. I spend my Christmas' alone. The children don't want anything to do with me."

"Yeah, but every time I see you you're talking to a good looking girl. How does an old geezer like you do it?"

"You gotta talk nice to 'em. Flatter 'em, but make sure what you flatter 'em with is the truth. Too bad your profession frowns on the fairer sex, Father. I think you need to be laid."

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph," he said, rolling his eyes. He lept into his battered Buick and headed up the road.

"See you tomorrow, Shark," I said after the departing car.

Sharkey didn't show up for swimming for a few days so Saturday

morning I took a ride over to St. Mildred's and parked in front of the tombstones surrounding the church. Glancing up I saw the Father sitting on his back patio clutching a tall glass, so I joined him.

"Aren't you afraid of sitting out here among the dead? You're practically encircled by graves."

"No, Rabbitfoot. It's the safest place in the world. The dead can't hurt you. Bridget, bring my guest and me a couple of tall cool ones."

Miss Bridget O'Toole appeared, on silent feet, carrying a tray of drinks. "Hello Mr. Rabbitfoot," she said.

"Foot," I answered.

We sipped on our drinks and talked. Refills arrived and I never saw Bridget bring them. Father Michael Sharkey rose to his full height of five-foot-two and announced he was taking me on a personal guided tour of St. Mildred's boneyard. Refills in hand, we started.

"Here in front of us is the final resting place of Father James Kelly. He preceded me at St. Mildred's. He died in action against a common enemy, Bishop Girard Lovato. The Bishop's unexpected appearance at a 6 a.m. Mass in a sweat suit caused Father Kelly to have the big one."

We sailed up and down the rows of crosses and stones. Shark knew them all, especially the ones he had buried.

"Here's Brownie. Died young. It was a sad story."

"What'd he have?"

"Nothing. His wife caught him in bed with the babysitter and shot him."

Every now and then the good Father would stop, close his eyes and mumble to himself over a particular grave. Somebody he buried, I presumed. The cemetery was surrounded by a six foot high wrought iron fence. The pickets reminded me of gladiator's spears.

"You want to make sure the dead can't get out. Right Father?" I said leaning on the iron work.

"Wrong! I think the fence is very beautiful. Can you imagine, Bishop Lovato almost sold it last year? He had an offer from a construction company that wanted to put it around a medieval food court in a new mall. I begged him not to do it. I told him I'd do better on the bingo this year."

"Have you?"

"No, not yet."

We came to the door of the white church.

"Want to go in, Rabbitfoot?"

I didn't, but I said, "Yes."

I didn't believe in God, but upon entering the church, the goose bumps had a cross country run up and down my arms.

The Father asked me, "Isn't it beautiful?" He was standing in front of the lifelike statue of the Virgin Mary.

"Yes," I answered and meant it.

The tour ended back on the patio. We sat and nursed our highballs.

"You know, at first I thought of you as a possible convert. But now I don't

care. If I ever get to thinking we're just two lonely old men in an empty universe, I'm in trouble, Rabbitfoot. You're dangerous for me."

Shark, who had a good start on me, was well in his cups, so I didn't think too much about what he said.

"You're dangerous," he repeated and we sat in silence for a while.

The screen door banged and out popped Bridget O'Toole.

"Father! Father! They're lining up for confession. Get your robe on."

Father Sharkey had passed out and was going nowhere.

"What are we going to do?", asked Bridget. "The confession will have to be cancelled and when the Bishop hears this all hell will break loose."

"Is there anything I can do?"

She looked toward heaven, blessed herself and said, "Yes, put on the robe and get in the booth."

"But I'm not even Catholic. I don't know what to do."

"It's easy. Listen and give penance for their sins."

"Penance?"

"Yes, punishments to fit the crime. You can do it."

"Well, to save the little fella, I'll try."

I slipped into a robe that only came to me knees, picked up a crucifix for protection and started down the aisle. I could see the stares, hear the whispers and feel the tension, as I floated towards the confessional. Passing a ten year old boy I heard him say in a loud whisper, "Father Sharkey must be drunk. We have a new priest."

I stopped dead in the water. I gave the boy an evil look and pointed the cross at him. The smart ass withered like a vampire caught a mile from his casket at sunrise.

I entered the confessional and sat down and listened to some boring stuff for the next fifteen minutes. I told them to pray for forgiveness. And then the door opened, I got a faint sniff of a seductive perfume and I heard a voice like sandpaper and honey.

"Forgive me Father for I have sinned. I have committed fornication six times since my last confession."

"And when was your last confession, My Child?"

"Last Saturday, Father."

"What!"

I was dying to get a glimpse of this one but I had to think of a penance, quick. My mind went back to my Steelville High football days. Our coach, Bulldog Ratsitski, was mean, really mean. Screw up and it was ten laps around the field after practice. He also liked to give us push-ups by the hundreds.

"For your penance, give me six laps around the church property every day for six days."

The cross banged to the floor. I bent over to pick it up and tried to look under the half door at her. All I got to see was a pair of shapely legs leaving.

"Next," I yelled.

This went on for about two hours. I liked my new idea better so I doled out laps and push-ups in various degrees. Bulldog Ratsitski would have been proud of me. If a parishioner sounded like a senior citizen, I'd give them an easy one. Go home, rent a video of "Going My Way" and look at it three times in a row or put five dollars in the poor box. I was determined to jog their souls and bodies into shape.

Everything turned quiet, so I made a fast exit from my box. When I was safe inside the rectory, Bridget handed me a cup of Irish coffee.

"Where's the Shark?" I asked.

"Sleeping like a baby. Thank you Rabbitfood. You saved my Uncle from the wrath of Bishop Lovato." Bridget gave me a sideward glance. "By the way, did you see what's going on outside?" There's people running around the church. Some kids are doing push-ups in the graveyard."

I went quickly to the window, but was only in time to see a nice pair of ankles disappearing around the corner.

A week later a happy Sharkey told me, "I got a commendation from Bishop Lovato."

"What'd you do, Father? Increase the gate receipts?"

"No! Nothing like that. He drove by the church one morning and saw a gang of parishioners running. He liked that. He jogs four miles every day. He said I must be an inspiration to them. The only bad part is he wants to see me out running with the flock.

"And, here's something he doesn't know. The poor box take quadrupled last week."

"Shark, your luck has turned."

"I hope so."

"I'll tell you what, I'll really get you in good with Lovato."

"Bishop Lovato, please."

"We'll put on a magic show as a benefit for the school. I'll come out of retirement and do my Chinese magic act. I'll be Ah Chu once again and I'll get a couple of my beauties from the Y to help in the show."

"Well, I don't know..."

"I'll even let you in the act, Father. What trick can you do?"

"The Zombie."

"The Zombie! The floating ball. I can't even do that myself! See Shark float the magic ball. You'll stand skinny Lovato on his ear."

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph. He's Bishop Lovato."

"With the Zombie, Shark, you could win the hundred dollar prize at the senior citizen Magic contest downtown."

"I can't go around doing magic. It's undignified. I'll teach you and you can try for the prize."

I was deeply moved. Shark was willing to break the first rule of magic, never show anyone how to do a trick, out of friendship. "If I win," I said, "I'll buy you a lobster at the Columbia House."

One day we were on the patio when a long black limo pulled up behind

the church.

"Quick, Rabbitfoot, hide the drinks. It's Bishop Lovato."

The great one swept up the walk followed by his bodyguard and chauffeur, Vito Lovato. After the usual ring kissing, Bishop Girard Lovato began as if I wasn't there.

"You're not running, Father Sharkey. And, I see your parishioners aren't either. I warn you, I've heard rumors you're spending time with a disreputable old con man from the circus." The bishop eyed me with suspicion.

Sharkey looked around. "Why, I don't know who that could be. Nobody's been around here but my good friend, Fred. We were discussing vocations."

As soon as the Bishop left, Sharkey's face clouded over.

I said, "Looks like no magic show at the school."

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I lied to the Bishop."

"No lie, Father, I am your good friend, Fred."

"I think you should leave."

"Come on, don't let Lovato get to you."

"Get out!"

I decided to stay away from Shark until he called and invited me back to the patio. But he didn't call and three weeks later I saw him in the locker room at the Y.

I greeted him warmly and said, "You know your trick, the Floating Zombie. I mastered it, thanks to you"

That brought a distant smile to his face. "Congratulations, my boy. There's no harm in that."

"I'm doing it in the magic contest Wednesday night."

"Well, good luck to you then."

⁵/₈"Yeah, but remember if I win, you and I have a lobster date at the Columbia House."

Wednesday morning I went into the locker room. Shark stood there in his swimming shorts. I said, "Father, tonight's the big night. Say a prayer for me, and maybe we'll be eating lobster on the Lord."

"Don't blaspheme," interrupted the father. "You should be worried about bigger things. Leave magic alone."

"But, what's the matter? The contest is tonight."

"Shut up! I don't want to hear it. Can't you understand, Bishop Girard Lovato has warned me about black magic."

"But, Shark..."

"Quiet!"

Then to my amazement, Shark slipped on a pair of blue sneakers over sockless feet, left the rest of his clothes in his locker and walked out the front door in his underwear.

I rushed to the entrance, asking him what he was doing. He ignored me, got into his battered green Buick and shot up the road shifting gears

without using the clutch.

Next day I called the rectory, and a strange voice said, "St. Mildred's, Father Alfonso Lovato speaking."

"I'd like to speak to Father Sharkey."

"Father Sharkey is no longer here."

"Where is he?"

"I'm very sorry I'm not allowed to give out any information."

"Let me talk to Bridget O'Toole."

"She is also gone."

"What's the big mystery? I'm his friend."

"If you're his friend, it's better you don't know where he is, because he's not the same person."

"That line doesn't wash with me. I won a magic show Wednesday night and I owe the Shark a lobster dinner."

"Oh, Miss O'Toole mentioned you, Mr. Rabbitfoot."

"That's Rabbitfoot."

"I shouldn't tell you this but he had a nervous breakdown. He's in the St. Thomas Diocesan Mental Home."

I had won the contest using Shark's trick—The Zombie. Now the good Father had turned into one. For the first time since World War II, I prayed for somebody. I looked up the number of the rest home. I called and asked for Father Michael Sharkey.

"He may not speak to you. So far no one can get him to talk."

"He'll talk to me. Just tell him it's Phinius T. Rabbitfoot, III. Tell him I got a table reserved at the Columbia House for two. It's lobster time."

"I'll deliver the message," said the invisible man.

I waited. It seemed like forever. Then a voice came out of the phone. "Father Sharkey said to go away. He doesn't want to talk to you, ever."

A week later I drove over the bridge and passed St. Mildred's Cemetery. The wrought iron fence had vanished, as if by magic.



1940
L. S. J. J.

PANAMA 1989

By Vince Leskusky

My Shepherd whimpers and wonders
why we've stopped here
alone on this frozen pavement
before a house with blue shutters
and double doors
braced against the day's merriment.
In the Christmas night my breath hangs
clouding clear skies
with its mocking and quiet scream
holding harmonies two friends sang
echoing still
in the silent night of dead dreams:

And over fields where footballs flew,
Through loud lockered halls of high school,
In nickel-dime antes of poker
damp with Yuengling and Stegmaier
drunken with laughter natural
on power chords of heavy metal
greased with pizza and chili,
"Guys, I've joined the fuckin' Army

Enjoy college, say what I missed."

Peace on earth

I hear through my breath suspended
dissolving like the dying mist.

Good will to men

A moment eternally ended.

BETRAYAL

By Dennis Moir

A student, sitting at his desk, mulls over *Julius Caesar*. Outside the strong March wind whips, shutters bang the house the way a mousetrap snaps its prey.

Bored with the chore, he lingers over the murder scene. He is very restless. Sliding back into his swivel chair, looking out into the blustery night, he thinks of other March days.

Windy that day too, but it also was a sunny one long ago. The sun began to dip down. Soon the porch light would come on, signaling time to go home.

A bike race ensues, a 200-yard sprint for the supremacy of Manheim Avenue. The student, a shadow of his present self, is racing against the neighborhood bully, Dave. Pedaling fast, they are followed by a swarm of skateboards, some cheering for him, while others are pestering.

• •

Down the street they go, the
Richie Hebner baseball card flapping
between the spokes, when Danny
sends his skateboard towards the
bike, only yards away from victory.

The bike goes airborne, hitting the
parked red Pinto. He breaks the
bike's fall. In the distance, Dave
crosses the finish line with his arms
in the air. Feeling a vague warmth
around him, the boy looks up and sees
his best friend Danny laughing at him.

The student goes back to his
reading. Act III awaits.
He puts the book down,
and looks out the window as
he whispers aloud,
"Et tu, Danny?"

VIOLATIONS

By Katrina Steffy

A scraping sound of metal on metal startled Amanda out of her sleep. She rolled over and gasped for breath when she saw the dark silhouette of a man standing just outside the sliding doors of the apartment. He was bending over the latch, trying to find a way in.

She raised herself on one elbow and tapped the slumbering body of her boyfriend. He was curled up as close to the far side of the bed as possible without his weight toppling him over the edge. She winced as she was momentarily reminded of their fight a few hours ago. "Peter, wake up. There's a guy trying to get in the door." He grumbled a bit, squinted at the door and then reached for his glasses. Without saying a word he climbed out of bed and crawled on the floor until he reached the right hand side of the doors. Remaining in a crouched position he separated the blades of the plastic mini-blinds and looked up at the man. The main entrance of the apartment building was directly next to Peter's patio. Above that door there was a light, which was shining down on the intruder's right side and back.

Peter shifted himself on the floor. The man outside wore a grey hooded sweatshirt and a dark baseball cap. Although looking through the blinds it was hard to see much of anything. It was like working one of those slide puzzles to complete a picture piece by piece. Amanda cringed as the man grabbed the door and yanked again. Nothing. The security clamps on the tracks held the door in place. He switched on a flashlight and began playing it along the bottom of the door and the track. Amanda held her breath as she saw the light pass and then stop at Peter's hand where it rested on the floor. The man stood up and stepped back, then tried the door again.

"Did he see your hand?" she whispered.

"No, I think he was looking at the clamps."

Amanda felt cool air moving through the room, and noticed the sounds of the traffic from outside had gotten louder. A stab of fear passed through her body and settled in her quivering stomach. She looked at the man's shadow. She looked at Peter, who had now moved back and was standing in the door frame of the room. She turned back to the silhouette and slid out of bed and crept over to Peter. When she reached him the figure was beginning to walk away into the parking lot.

"Maybe we should turn on the lights and scare him away," she said.

"No, I want to catch this guy," he hissed. Not taking his eyes off the parking lot, "If we don't get him now he'll just come back and try again, maybe when I'm not here." He started to chuckle, "Ha, this guy thinks he picked an easy target. Well, I've got news for him, he's messing with the wrong person. Now shhhhh, he's coming back."

"But, what if he has a knife or something?"

"You watch too many movies. I could take him. Now shut up."

Amanda looked at his lean, three-times-a-week raquetball hewn frame, wondering. They watched as the man once again tried to force the door to slide. The flashlight came on again as he bent over to examine the clamps a second time.

"Just try to move that," Amanda heard Peter mutter under his breath. The man moved back to the handle of the door. He pulled a piece of metal from his back pocket. She noticed he had a gold nugget pinky ring on his finger as he jammed the hunk of metal into the door frame, trying to wedge it open. He flipped off his light and once again moved away into the parking lot.

"Don't you think you should call someone?" she whispered to Peter. Her body was quivering with adrenaline.

"Yeah, I guess so. But I didn't want to turn the light on while he was here." He walked over and picked up the phone, and turned on the bathroom light so he could find the police number. Amanda remained standing in the doorway, staring through the blinds at the empty patio.

"Peter Rittenhouse. 406 Cherry Orchard Dr., Newark, Delaware." She could hear him in the other room. An involuntary shudder ran up and down her body as she thought about how they had fought the night before over whether they should have left then or this morning for their vacation. She wanted to leave right away, as they had originally planned, drive all night and then stopping at the hotel to rest in the morning. This would give them the entire afternoon to explore the area. He wanted to wait, to save the cost of one night at the hotel. He finally won out because he said he was too tired to drive after the hassle of missing his flight in from Philadelphia and getting home four hours later than he thought he would.

"He was wearing grey pants and a dark coat."

"It was a grey hooded sweatshirt," Amanda corrected.

"My girlfriend saw a grey hooded sweatshirt," Peter told the clerk on the other end of the line.

He hadn't gotten home until 12:30 a.m. and was irritated from the hassle of trying to find another flight and having to scramble for a train ticket instead. All this just so he could tell the guy at the bank's data processing center the same thing he had told them over the phone last week. Amanda had called and cancelled their reservations for that night and the departure time was put off until the next morning. She looked at the clock, 3:10 a.m. in blazing red. She guessed they wouldn't be leaving at seven either.

She heard Peter put down the receiver. He walked past her and over to the window. "Hmm, they're fast. There goes a cruiser already." Amanda walked over and slid the blinds apart. She saw the tail end of the police car disappear around the tree planting in the middle of the parking lot.

"I doubt he's anywhere near here now. He probably took off as soon as he saw the bathroom light go on," she said as she turned around and headed for the couch.

He followed her and sat down. "Maybe. He could still be hiding out there somewhere. Maybe I should go out and look."

"Let the police handle it." They both sat there and looked out the window. "I guess it's a good thing we didn't leave." He didn't seem to hear her. He'd probably forgotten. Amanda wondered if they would ever get to Busch Gardens. Plans for this trip had been made back in the middle of the summer. They had to settle on her fall break from college because the bank had been having problems with their programming and he hadn't been able to take any time off during the summer months. Now, what had started out as summer employment had become a full-time position. The bank liked his work and they were desperate for someone with his broad background, so he decided to take a semester off from school and earn some money. They had him working 80 hours weeks, and had only just salaried him. Amanda hated the fact that their time together had been regulated to the occasional weekend. After investing three years-plus in this relationship she wondered what their future would be like.

There was a loud knock at the door. Peter got up and looked out through the peep hole, then opened the door to let two local policemen in uniform, walk in.

"O.K. so what happened here?" asked the first officer. Peter began to narrate everything that had occurred.

"Can you describe him?" the officer asked.

"He was tall and slender. Maybe taller than me," Peter began his description.

"No, he wasn't any taller than you," Amanda said.

"O.K. and he was about my build. He had on grey pants and white sneakers."

Amanda and Peter continued to answer the officer's questions, trying to recreate the scene exactly as it happened.

"Were there any lights on at the time?" asked one of the men. "Let's get it to look like what you saw."

"No, there weren't any lights on," Peter answered as he moved to turn them off. With the apartment darkened the outside became visible again by the glow of the light over the entrance. Amanda could still imagine the figure that had been standing there a few moments before. She felt as if a spider had just crawled down her back.

"O.K. We have a guy out in the car," the first officer said. "We'll need you to make a positive i.d. on him. We stopped him as he was driving out of the parking lot. His story is that he was taking his girlfriend home." His partner asked to use the phone and Peter showed him into the other room. Amanda watched as the first officer jotted in his little black notebook.

"Looks like he's our boy," the second called from the other room, "they've got nine pages on him and he's got a stack of traffic violations."

"O.K." his partner said, "we'll get things set up outside then come back to get the two of you for the i.d."

Left alone, Amanda grabbed her sweater and Peter put on his coat and they both sat down on the couch to wait. She could tell he was worrying about the apartment. He always furrowed his eyebrows like that when he was concentrating on something. Great, she thought, this is going to be a fun trip. He's going to spend the whole time agonizing over the breached safety of his apartment instead of enjoying himself like she wanted him to. This weekend was supposed to be a stress releaser, not create more. She looked at his tired face as he turned to her.

"I hate the stupid doors they put in these places. If that guy was smart enough he could have just lifted the door right out of the track when he got it open that far." He exhaled loudly as he glared at the partially open door. "I'm definitely going to have to come up with a better way of securing this. I wonder why he came to my door? It's right under the light."

"Maybe he was just randomly moving from apartment to apartment seeing if he could get lucky."

"Yeah, unless he's been watching this place and knows I'm the only one who leaves for work in a coat and tie."

"But, how would he know which apartment you came out of? This building has a common door. And you really can't see any of your stereo equipment from the windows, except your speakers. And Polk's aren't that impressive-looking unless you know what they are."

"Maybe he's been watching the apartment and knows that I'm usually not home on weekends," he paused and then he continued in an undertone through clenched teeth, "because I'm always visiting you."

"Then why would he try this on a Thursday night when you usually leave in Friday night?" She tried to ignore his insinuating comment, "Besides, you do at least have timers on your lights."

Peter got up to answer the door.

"O.K. We're ready for you outside," the officer said as he turned to lead them down the hall. They went over to the far side of the building. When Amanda stepped down through the door she felt as if she were on a movie set. A very cold movie set. There sat two police cruisers with patrolmen standing around. One of the cars had its spotlight blaring across to the far side of the road. Trapped in its beam was the suspect they had detained. Amanda was transfixed by his gaze. The completely blank stare caught her off guard. No fear, just a kind of docility as the officer pushed and prodded him into different stances. He was dressed in all grey; hooded sweatshirt, grey pants, and white sneakers, but no jacket. He looked too short.

"Well, what do you think?" the officer who had been in the apartment asked.

"Those are definitely like the same pants I saw, and the sneakers are the same," said Peter.

"I don't know," Amanda said, "his sweatshirt looked darker. It might have been the light. The body of the shirt looked darker making the hood stand out more." While they talked, the officer holding the suspect made him turn around. He pulled up the sweatshirt to expose a grey windbreaker underneath. "I'm not sure, it doesn't look as dark as when I saw it."

"Is it the same sweatshirt?" the officer asked.

"I don't know. It looks like any other grey sweatshirt. It's hard to tell. And he doesn't have the ring on his finger that I saw."

"So, you don't know for sure?" the cop snapped.

"No, I don't know."

He turned abruptly to Peter, "Did he have socks on?"

"I don't know. The way he was standing his pants fell down over his shoes and I couldn't tell.

While Peter talked, Amanda looked into the front seat of the car. All she could see was the tangle of a black mane, and a dark blue shapeless jacket that looked centuries old. This must be the guy's girlfriend, she thought. She probably has her head turned at the instructions of the officers.

"You can go back inside now, we'll be in to fill out some paper work in a few minutes," she heard the officer say. She and Peter turned and went into the building. She noticed that he didn't look at her or put his arm around her.

"That was him," said Peter as they entered his apartment. "Why couldn't you decide if it was the same sweatshirt?" He stalked across the living room and crouched down by the sliding door.

"Everyone wears grey hooded sweatshirts," she said glaring at his back, "especially near a college. They all look the same to me. Just because he happens to be black and looks like the guy we saw, and he happened to be driving through the parking lot when the police pulled in doesn't mean it was really him."

"But he has a police record," he turned to stare at her. "Does it really matter? This just gives them an excuse to take him in." He turned away from Amanda and continued his inspection. "People get away with too many things nowadays. He's probably a drug pusher too."

Amanda flopped down on the couch, only half listening as Peter went into the technical details of how he was going to improve the door. Maybe if you would move into a better apartment complex, she thought, you wouldn't have this trouble. But she knew he was just trying to save money until he got through school. She began to think about the couple that was outside in the cold being questioned by the police. She thought about the couple that was inside the heated apartment. What made them different? One had tried to rob the other. Did they live in such different worlds that were so far apart that they did not see each other as human

beings worthy of one another's respect? What had the woman in the car had been thinking, looking over at her boyfriend standing in the glare of a police searchlight, arms handcuffed behind his back? Did she feeling sorry for him; angry for being dragged into this, scared, or had they both done this sort of thing before and she was just pissed off because he was stupid enough to get caught? Amanda didn't feel any animosity toward either of them, just curiosity. She wondered what they thought about her and Peter. The two outside hadn't seen them visually but they knew by now that there were two people in the apartment they had supposedly just tried to rob. Peter was right, she should have been more positive in her i.d. Two more off the street. No, what if their presence out there had just been a coincidence? She slumped back into the cushions and watched Peter fiddle with the door lock.

"Maybe I'll go out and get the cordless drill that I was looking at today," Peter said to the door frame, "then I can screw this thing in permanently to the frame. No one will be able to get it out without taking the screws out, and that will have to be done from the inside." He seemed rather pleased with his idea, "If we don't get him this time, I don't want to take a chance at having a next time."

"Yeah, I guess so," Amanda absently answered. She felt his last statement had been directed at her. He didn't have to visit her, she thought. There was another knock at the door and one of the policemen from before entered.

He stared directly down at Amanda making her want to crawl between the cushions of the couch. "Well, we can't take him in for this because there's not enough to go on." He turned to Peter, "But it turns out the woman is wanted on several counts, and she's not really his girlfriend. He just picked her up in Wilmington and brought her back here, for obvious purposes," he flashed a knowing grin at Peter, which was returned. "The car they were driving is illegally registered. We're taking it apart now."

Amanda was shocked at the frankness of the officer. She thought police would never tell you anything. Peter shot her an "I told you so" glance. She glared right back. It still doesn't prove anything, she thought.

"If you're ready, we can start the report," he said to Peter.

Amanda watched as they walked into the other room and sat down at the table. She turned and looked out the window. She thought how out of place they seemed to be. They lived in totally a different world and yet they were occupying the same space as the couple outside. Well, they wouldn't be taking him in for anything more than a car registration violation. He would be back home that night. But the woman would have more of a problem to deal with. She couldn't help running the picture of the shadowy figure at the door over and over again in her mind. Was it really him? She just couldn't be sure, and she didn't like the feeling of controlling someone else's fate. She wished she could be more like Peter..., maybe. Guilt didn't fall in only one place this night.

She heard Peter and the officer come in from the other room. She turned to them and saw the patrolman glance at her then turn his complete attention to Peter to give some final instructions. She could feel a burning sensation spreading across her back where she knew Peter was staring, even though she had turned and was looking out the window.

DETOUR

By **Melissa Pollack**

A red light and screeching halt snap Jen's attention away from thoughts of him and back to the road. The bright green of the light sets routine into motion. She loosens her grip on the wheel as visions of him, once again, envelop her thoughts.

She follows the familiar broken yellow line and makes a quick right turn into the parking lot of the 7-11. She decides she should pick up a card to cheer him up. She flips through the rack until she finds one that makes her laugh. The outside of the card has a fat, bald man in polka dot swimming trunks walking across the sand and the inside says, "On the beach, women would dress Bob with their eyes." He would smile and realize it was her way of dealing with his accident.

Jen brings the card up to the counter and gives a smile to Bill, the attendant behind the register. He looks at her curiously and then hands her the brown bag.

"I didn't recognize you at first." Bill says, "You look different all dressed up."

"Oh, I'm going to visit my boyfriend in the hospital." She pauses, "I didn't realize how bad I must look."

"No, you usually look normal. Today you look pretty." Bill smiles and walks behind the hot dog grill.

Jen gets back in her car and looks in the rear view mirror at herself. She combs her hair back and thinks about what the 7-11 attendant said.

She always wished she could be naturally beautiful. Her features would be outstanding and she wouldn't need any makeup to show them off. She was getting used to how people would comment about how much nicer she looked with makeup on. On her second date with him, they went out shopping and he surprised her with pink lipstick and green eyeliner. She decided to listen to her friends and she wore makeup. No one ever compliments her anymore, not even him.

The turn signal clicks as Jen makes a left and passes the Texaco station. She notices the red volkswagen, that had been sitting in the lot for six months, has finally been sold. She looks for a dead animal alongside the road so that she may see something unexpected. Grazing cows chew on green blades of grass as Jen drives past the dairy farm on Route 363. Carole King's voice filters through the car speakers singing, "I feel the earth move."

She thinks of him in his blue Chevy Cavalier driving on the New Jersey Turnpike, going back to med school after spending the weekend with her. She didn't even get out of bed when he left yesterday morning. She just let him slip out the door as she pretended to be asleep. The door wouldn't

close, so finally he poked his head back in and said, "I'm going to have to slam the door, but it's nothing personal." She imagined his smile as the door slammed and the ceiling shook.

Jen cries as she thinks about how bad his car looked last night when she saw it alongside the road. The front windshield was shattered and blood stains darkened the front dashboard. At least she didn't have to look at him.

She never really looks at him anymore. She used to love to look into his bright green eyes as he talked to her. She loved the way his forehead would wrinkle when he didn't understand something. She used to tease him about the freckles on his nose and about the stubble on his chin when he would kiss her. Now his eyes don't seem as bright and there is no intensity in his stare. When they kiss there's no passion it's just another part of their routine.

Cowpath Road comes up on Jen's left and she slows down to cross over the dotted yellow line. She thinks of things to say to make him laugh and feel a little bit better. She created the conversation in her mind. She makes gestures with her face and moves her lips as she pretends to be talking to him. She practices her smile. He will be expecting that smile.

It seems like everyone expects something from her. She is expected to be home by six for Sunday dinners. She is expected to be smiling and telling jokes to make everyone laugh. Jen is expected to go to law school and become the best lawyer ever to cheat a client out of his money. Her mother was thrilled when she found out that she was dating a medical student. "Marry a doctor and you'll never have to worry," that is what her mother said. Jen goes along with the routine to make everyone happy, including him.

Instead of going straight through the light at Line Street toward her house, she makes a left and follows the signs toward the North Penn Hospital. She can tell the car senses that something is different as the road makes new curves and Jen watches to figure out where to turn next.

The roads don't change enough to be exciting for Jen. If only the road would form a sharp curve and surprise her as she came around at forty-five miles an hour. That never seems to happen. Instead, the road looks straight ahead.

She thinks about how scary it must have been for him to collide with the oncoming car. It must have been exciting to be surprised. He said he doesn't remember the pain, only the surprise. He got away with doing something totally unexpected.

The entrance to the hospital comes up on her right as she makes the turn and follows the winding path to the parking lot. She glances in the rear view mirror to make sure she is ready to see him and then slams the door.

As she walks down the corridor, she thinks about how this accident will change their lives. He will need someone to take care of him while his leg heals. She could take care of him and do all of the things they never seem

to have the time to do; breakfast in bed and making tents with the covers.

Her stomach tightens as she gets closer to his room. She can feel her heart beating faster, as a tear rolls down her cheek. She wipes it away with her hand and pushes open the door.

He sits in his hospital bed reading *Sports Illustrated* and making funny faces. She watches him as he looks at her and gives her a smile. Something is different about him. She feels like she is meeting him for the first time. She walks over to the edge of the bed and wraps her arms around him tightly.

"How are you holding up?" She whispers.

"I'm fine. The doctor says I should be out of here in a couple of days. I can't wait. I already feel like I'm going to be so behind in school." He continues to glance at the article in the magazine.

"I thought maybe I could take care of you for a while."

"No, you don't need to. I'm going back to school as soon as possible. I'll still be able to make it for the weekend if I catch up with work."

She hands him the card and watches him read it. He smiles and looks at her as if to say thank you.

About a half-hour more of conversation and she kisses him and walks down the corridor back to her car. On her way out, she stops at the pay phone. She calls her parents and tells them that she is on her way for Sunday dinner. She hops in the car and pulls away from the hospital.

She follows the road with all of its familiar curves. She thinks about her visit and the way things ended. She realizes that the relationship is over.

She comes up Bridle Path Road where she usually makes her right and glances at her backyard as she glides past. Jen is looking for a new curve in the road, one that will surprise her as she comes around at forty-five miles and can't escape its presence.

PATRONS

Jane Agostinelli
William Akin
Blanche Allen
Dolores Arnold
Shirley Barndt
Patricia L. Benes
Berman Museum of Art
Nicholas Berry
Barbara Boris
Barry Bowers
Dottie Bowman
Anthony Branker
Richard BreMiller
Barbara Brynan
Douglas M. Cameron
J. L. Cobbs
Continuing Education
Jeanine Czubaroff
Randy Davidson
Robert & Ellen Dawley
Mary Ellen DeWane
Hiroshi Dezawa
Richard DiFelicianantonio
Rich Dillon
Carol Dole
Sue Donato
Shirley Eaton
Andrew Economopoulos
Eileen M. England
Juan Espadas
Ingrid L. Evans
George Fago
Mary Fields
Gerard J. Fitzpatrick
John and Edwina French
Judith Fryer
Stewart Goetz
Tammy Green
The Grizzly

Nancy Hagelgans
Colette Hall
Elizabeth Hankel
Jeffrey Harp
Cindy K. Harris
Faye Heidel
Joyce Henry
Ronald E. Hess
Steve and Mary Hood
Jeff & Nancy Hughes
Barbara Imes
Charles Jamison
Peter & Linda Jessup
Auda May Johnson
Houghton Kane
Margaret D. Katz
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Richard King
Donna Landis
M. Scott Landis
Joyce Lionarons
Annette V. Lucas
Deborah Malone
Pat Mancuso
Linda Marchetti
Brian McCullough
Glenn A. McCurdy
Stephanie McNulty
David Mill
Jay K. Miller
Lilo Mueller
Douglas Nagy
The Nightingales
Frances Novak
Dominick O'Brien
Beverly Oehlert
Heather O'Neill
Mary Lou Panner
Peter Perreten

John Pilgrim
Constance Poley
Bonnie Price
Royden Price
David M. Raible
Jill L. Randolph
Sally Rapp
Joan Rhodes
Kenneth Richardson
Richard P. Richter
Bruce Rideout
Carla Mollins Rinde
Joan Rojas
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James Sidie
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Evan Snyder
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