



12-1993

The Lantern Vol. 61, No. 1, December 1993

Dana Lin Fosbenner
Ursinus College

Sonja Regelman
Ursinus College


Doug Plitt
Ursinus College

Ellen Cosgrove
Ursinus College

Kristen Sabol
Ursinus College

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/lantern>

 Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Illustration Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Click here to let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Fosbenner, Dana Lin; Regelman, Sonja; Plitt, Doug; Cosgrove, Ellen; Sabol, Kristen; Rosenberg, Beth; Woodruff, John; Helverson, Jennifer; Rewari, Sona; Bowers, Chris; Gorman, Erin; Hill, Kevin; McCabe, Alan; and McCarthy, Dennis Cormac, "The Lantern Vol. 61, No. 1, December 1993" (1993). *The Lantern Literary Magazines*. 143.
<https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/lantern/143>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Ursinusiana Collection at Digital Commons @ Ursinus College. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Lantern Literary Magazines by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Ursinus College. For more information, please contact aprock@ursinus.edu.

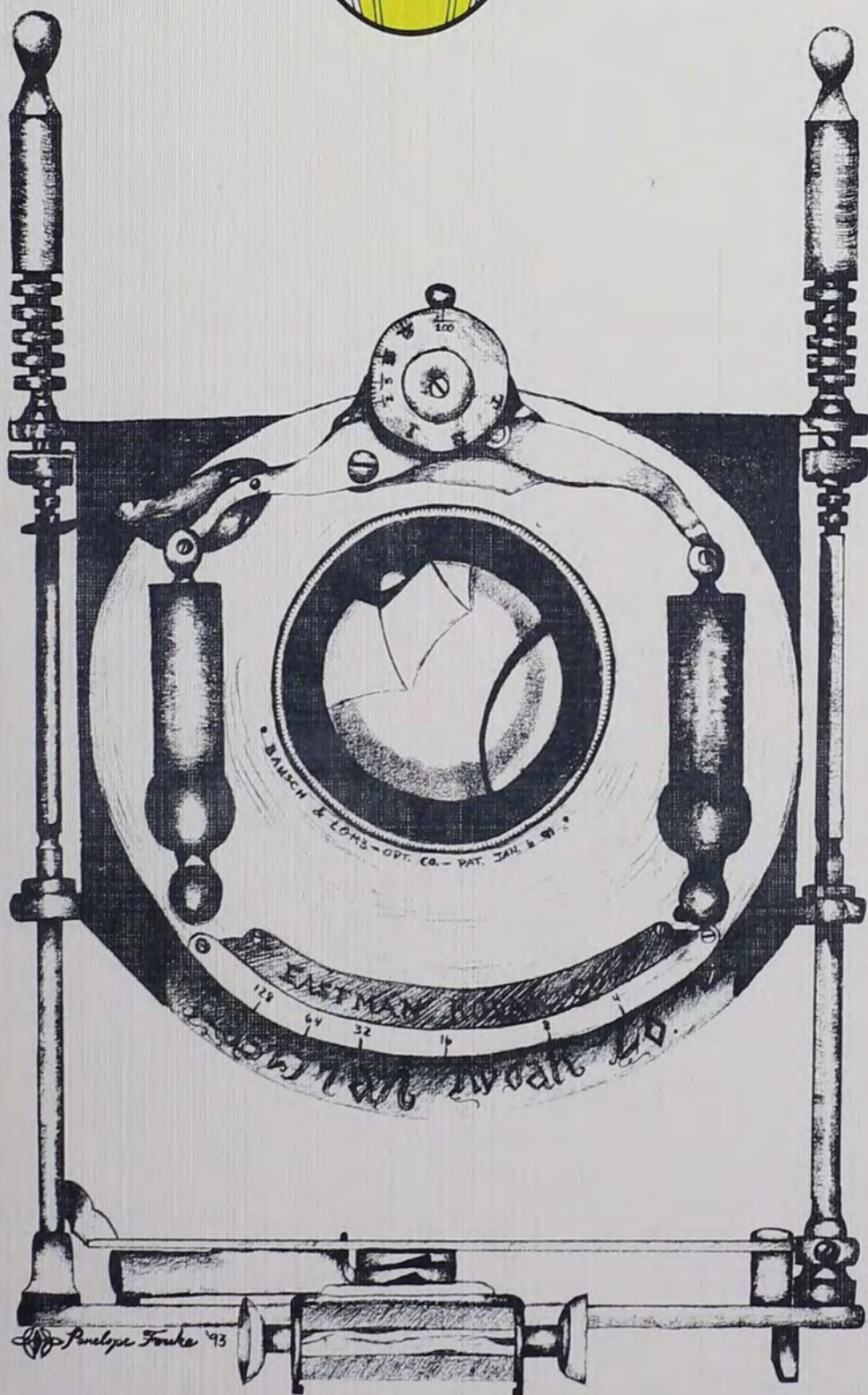
Authors

Dana Lin Fosbenner, Sonja Regelman, Doug Plitt, Ellen Cosgrove, Kristen Sabol, Beth Rosenberg, John Woodruff, Jennifer Helverson, Sona Rewari, Chris Bowers, Erin Gorman, Kevin Hill, Alan McCabe, and Dennis Cormac McCarthy

THE LANTERN

Vol. LXI, No. 1

Winter, 1993



THE LANTERN

Ursinus College's Literary Magazine

Vol. LXI, No. 1

Winter 1993

Dana Lin Fosbenner--IN ORDER TO SUCCEED	03
Sonja Regelman--ESSAY	10
Doug Plitt--POWER OF HUMAN SELF-INTEREST	11
Cormac McCarthy--IN SETTERICH	15
Ellen Cosgrove--WANDERING WANDA	16
Arsha Stephey--ARTWORK	22
Kristen Sabol--MAYBE KITCHENS	22
Beth Rosenberg--SALTINESS	23
John Woodruff--HOMECOMING	29
Jennifer Helverson--PERFECT	36
Sona Rewari--SINCERELY, JEN	37
Penelope Fouke--ARTWORK	43
Chris Bowers--A MIDTERM AND A PAPER	44
Erin Gorman--PROPHET JUNKIE	45
Kevin Hill--SOUNDLESS MEMO	51
Alan McCabe--AFTER IRELAND, PART 1	57
PATRONS	64

EDITORS' NOTE:

This winter's edition of The Lantern features fiction. The staff would like to congratulate Dana Lin Fosbenner, whose winning story, IN ORDER TO SUCCEED, appears on page 3. The staff also congratulates Penny Fouke, whose winning artwork appears on the cover. We would like to thank our contest judges, Richard DiFelicianantonio and Lisa Tremper Barnes, for judging the submissions. Thanks to all who submitted their work; we encourage you to submit again in the Spring!

Jen and Carey

THE LANTERN

Co-Editors

Carey Conover
Jennifer Woodbury

Layout Editor

Jaymie Burkhart

Patron Drive Coordinator

Sonja Regelman

Advisor

Jon Volkmer

Fiction Judge

Richard DiFelicianantonio

Art Judge

Lisa Tremper Barnes

Staff

Laura Bryans
Ivana Bukovsky
Erin Gorman
Mile Katusa
Renee Krykewycz
Laura Lecrone
Carrie Lumi
Jim Maynard
Sona Rewari
Beth Rosenberg
Kristen Sabol
Chris Wirtalla
Angie Zerbe

JUDGE'S NOTE:

IN ORDER TO SUCCEED is an entertaining, well-structured, technically strong effort. The foreshadowing of the runaway bull, the ironic, objective correlative "Catfish", the subtle handling of secondary characters, and the appropriate touch of the narrator's self-consciousness make this a professional quality story.

In Order to Succeed

By Dana Lin Fosbenner

The blades of grass leave dew upon the navy socks peeking out above my muddy old work boots. It is just after dawn. I had hastily thrown a yellow robe on over the Dallas Cowboys t-shirt I'd been sleeping in. I had only awakened a few minutes earlier when the sound of our rooster was met with the crashing of the pasture gate. This was the third time in two weeks the old Brahma bull had broken out of his pen, lusting after the cows Grandpa once owned. It didn't seem to matter that we had gotten rid of the cows nearly seven years ago.

As I make my way around the outskirts of the field over a small hill, I finally catch a glimpse of Catfish, the only reason I would be within a hundred yards of that crazy bull. My horse is just as touched as the bull, whose breathing can still be heard above the crickets, even though I can no longer see him.

"All right, Catfish baby, come here."

As I move closer, I reach out to put the lead rope around his neck, but as soon as my hand touches his light summer coat, a lightning bolt of fear and anxiety flashes between us. He flees, consumed by my fear but still unaware of the danger that has caused it. To run after him would be useless, for he would only become more afraid. I start walking back from where I had come, all the while thinking what a lousy horsewoman I am. I should know better than to let my horse see I am afraid, but then I could never hide anything from Catfish. An old trainer once told me that when a horse and rider have been together long enough, they develop the same personality and become one. I bought Cat nearly six years ago and he is one of the meanest, most unpredictable horses I have ever had the pleasure to ride.

I can't say I've ever gained control over Catfish, like great riders are supposed to; but when we get into the arena, he always does what I ask, even if I make no sense. As I step in a pile of shit, I am brought back to reality. There stands Catfish, head up, ears back, front feet pawing at the ground, staring straight at the intruder in his pasture. The mud he is making starts to cover the white markings on his front legs. Even though he's been castrated for years, he still hasn't gotten over that egotistical male need to protect what is his. The Brahma is beginning to take interest; like all bulls, he is distracted very easily, and the sound of a pickup truck coming up the drive is more than his little mind can ignore.

Before I can finish retying my robe and brushing off the gnats that are clustering around my legs, two burly cowboys grab Catfish while another coaxes the bull back to the barn. I stand there re-

arranging my robe, hair hanging in my face, dirt coating my legs and boots, the essence of a liberated woman.

"Hi Hon! Sure am pleased to see you!" I say, waving to the tallest of the three while putting on one of my best smiles.

Ted answers me with a sheepish grin while Dwight, his brother, and their tag-a-long friend take in my appearance.

"Well, we sure are pleased to see you, too, Casey!" reply the two dim-wits. They poke Ted as if they are some kind of geniuses. They think I don't realize how waving like this brings my robe up another two inches. By the time I reach them and plant a deliberate kiss on Ted's lips, he has turned two shades past crimson. Dwight and Tag sound like a couple of construction workers.

Ted removes what is left of the gate from its opening so I can get through without getting damaged. The rest of the entourage follows. I stop and survey the mess. Pushing my hair out of my eyes to look at the gate, I am happier to see these clowns than I had thought.

"Wow, that bull did a real number on the gate. Do you guys think you could help me fix it before we leave for the show?"

"Oh, don't worry about it," Ted says, putting his hand on my back. "We'll take care of it. You get Cat ready."

I turn around and head toward the house to avoid smirking in front of them. I have no more intention of helping them than they have in letting me. By the time I step foot on the porch, the boys have jumped to work like nothing else would give them more pleasure in their pathetic lives.

I go upstairs to pick out something to wear. I shed my morning outfit for a tight pair of denim cutoffs. Next, I put on one of my father's old shirts, the one that used to be blue but is now almost white from washing, and roll up the sleeves. I button the front, careful to leave the top two undone, and tie the waist off at my midriff. All the while, I can see Ted getting some dusty slabs of oak from the barn. Watching his muscles tense through his shirt as he opens the barn doors, I remember what had drawn me to him in the first place. Ted has the gentlemanly manners and God-given good looks any high school senior would be proud to be associated with. Yet, when I met him two months ago I knew he was a throw-away boyfriend--the kind you get to pass the time with before going to college and never intend to keep once you get there; your mother doesn't have to worry that you're a lesbian and your father has someone to drink beer with. The closer the time comes for me to leave, the more Ted has become my shadow, even though he would rather it be the other way around.

I sit down in the kitchen to pull on my boots and grab my black cowboy hat from the table. As I put it on, I pass by the hall mirror; catching a glimpse, I smile. I place the bag I had packed with my

show outfit outside the front door. Leaping off the front porch, I pat the head of our fifteen year old Airedale who has slept through the whole morning's affair. I stride over to the tall barn doors that were made by my grandfather, back when things were made right and people cared. My eyes are still adjusting to the change in light when I literally run into Dwight and Tag-a-long.

"Hey Casey, watch where you're going!"

"Sorry. I thought you'd be out at the gate."

"I was just trying to find some nails in this run-down place. Don't you ever clean up around here?" Dwight motions to the heap of rusting tools and fencing material laying at his feet, yet his eyes never move from me. Tag looks like he is about to say something, but refrains.

"No need to. I'm outta here in a week. Follow me. I think there's some nails over here." Truth is, with me working and Dad's bad back, no one has lifted a hand to fix anything around here. But I see no need to explain this to them.

They follow me over to the cement stall in which Catfish was stuck this morning. A few stray cats follow too, striving for attention. Dwight leans up against the wooden beam next to Catfish's door. Catfish walks over affectionately and bites Dwight's arm once he is in range. I had seen it coming; everyone knows Cat hates people. He doesn't even like me. Once, a neighbor had decided to pick some flowers on the other side of our pasture. Halfway across, Cat saw her and chased her to a tree by the stream that divides the field. She was still up there when I got home from school, her khaki shorts torn from her quick ascent and her hair ribbon lying half-in, half-out of the water below. In fact, she was still up there when I came out after dinner. Served her right for being that dumb.

Dwight takes a swing at Cat, who has fled to the other side of the stall. Then Dwight picks up the closest thing he can find to throw, a pitchfork. I manage to intercept it before he lets go; I am just about to beat him over the head with it when Ted yells from outside to get my stuff together for the show.

I put down the pitchfork and grab my saddle lying next to Catfish's stall door. I stroke the head of a tomcat licking his wounds from a fight the night before. He becomes a puddle of loving mush beneath my hand. I laugh sadistically. Then I lead Cat out while Dwight gets my tack box and Tag follows with a manure bucket. Ted has already hooked up the trailer to his truck and is holding open the trailer door for me to put Catfish in. I grab my bag from the front porch and soon we are loaded and on the road.

I notice that Dwight is sitting in the back with Tag instead of up front with us like normal. Ted is intent on telling me how good I am going to ride today, and how I shouldn't be nervous just

because Levi is one point behind in year-end standings. Levi and I have competed in over a hundred rodeos this year. In barrel racing, you place according to how fast you can navigate around three barrels set in an arena. It is amazing to have this tight of a competition, but he doesn't need to tell me this. My mind wanders to the jokes I can hear floating in from the window behind my head.

"What does a blonde say after sex?"

"Casey, are you listening?" Ted breaks in.

"Of course," I say. "You're right." Always an appropriate answer.

"Then you think we should get an apartment together instead of moving into dorms?"

"What, are you crazy? I mean, aren't you rushing things a bit? Besides, I won't have much time at college. I'll be studying." I manage to stop my voice from cracking. I am caught off guard, shocked that this has come from the same boy who blushes every time he does anything more than kiss me.

"I won't bother you when you study, but just think how wonderful it will be for me to be right there when you do have spare time. I even called some places that are for rent. I narrowed it down to two places. You can choose which one, of course."

"Oh, how generous," I think to myself as we pull into the show grounds. "I'll have to think about it. We'll talk later. I promise." This seems to pacify him for now.

Tag offers to tack up Catfish while Ted and I go pay my entry fees. We walk towards the little wooden building with a white banner adorned with red letters which read "Welcome Rodeo Fans and Competitors to the Dave Marin Rodeo!" I spot Levi approaching with Bud, a bull dog who is perpetually drooling. She is already sporting her competition attire.

The belt buckle around her trim waist announces her status as last year's champion. I think of how much pain I would be in if I wore my jeans that tight. I stick my hand in the back pocket of Ted's jeans, and he returns the gesture so quickly that it is impossible to distinguish who initiated it.

"Hello Casey, Ted." Levi stretches out Ted's name a little longer so that she has an excuse to eye him from head to toe. I use the time to pet Bud.

"How are you feeling after the fall you took last week?" Levi says. Her eyes grow wide with concern.

"She's just stopped complaining. You wouldn't have believed the bruises," Ted replies for me. "I think even her butt was black and blue." Levi snickers behind a mass of permed hair.

"Oh look, I think Dave has brought a new bull. I wonder what kind it is?" I show Ted which one I mean, and he searches to find its breeding.

I turn to Levi. "I saw Poco has his leg wrapped. Nothing serious, I hope? I had a friend who wound up in the hospital for weeks 'cause her horse's leg gave out while she was running."

"He is just fine. Thanks for asking," Levi says. "Is Cat still trying to run away from you at the second? It looks real slick there today." She motions to the arena.

"No. He hasn't done that for months."

"I got a 15.3 here last week. That's my best time this season." Levi is proud of herself, and takes on an appearance not unlike a snake who has just cornered her prey.

"That's not too bad. I have to warm up, so I'll see you later. Good luck!"

"You too!" Levi slithers off, dragging Bud.

"I think it's an Angus," Ted says confidently.

"What?"

"The bull is an Angus."

"Oh, right."

"Levi is sure a nice person."

"I think Bud is nicer." I can tell I have confused him.

We reach the entry booth. I pay my \$30 fee to the chain-smoking lady behind the wooden table. She tells me I've drawn first in the order of go. I am pleased because I like setting the time that everyone else has to shoot for. Spectators are just starting to fill the grandstand, and the smell of beer and hot dogs radiates from a nearby food vendor. As we head back to the truck, Dwight and Tag pass us on their way to get hot dogs, an obvious excuse to meet the two slender blondes who have just gotten in line. I tell Ted to join them, and he reluctantly agrees. I redo all the tack Tag has put on Catfish. I don't trust anyone to do my equipment but me.

I've been riding since I was five and showing since I was seven. Back then, I couldn't see an end to it. My parents would come to cheer, and Grandfather would help me with my horse. But Grandfather died, and my parents rarely come to watch. Soon I will be lucky to see Catfish on holidays. At least my parents have agreed to keep him for me, even though I know that it's a waste of a good horse who belongs in the arena, not locked in the barn. Mechanically, I change in the back of the trailer, even though I know how much Ted hates it. He thinks people can see inside. I slip into my black jeans and blouse. The blouse is covered with silver sequins in the shape of a butterfly. This is a sharp contrast to the home-maker's apron Ted thinks I'm going to wear, but this is who I am.

I go warm up Catfish in the arena. Lee Greenwood is singing "God Bless the USA" over the speakers attached to the light poles. Oddly enough, Ted never crosses my mind, even though I

pass him sitting in the third row of the stands at least fifty times. His eyes watch my every move, but I pretend not to notice. By now, the grandstands are full of little kids dressed in cowboy hats and parents trying to keep the kids' plastic six-shooters out of the heads of the people in the seats below. Kids, aprons, Ted, and me. I block out the image as my throat begins to constrict. Cowboys line up in front of the bucking chutes, doing their own type of aerobics to get ready for the bull riding. I watch one cowboy who has moved off to be by himself. The intense concentration needed for conquering has already consumed his face. Catfish shakes his head to let me know that he is thoroughly annoyed with the exercises I've been mindlessly putting him through. He keeps jerking at the reins in an effort to pull them out of my hands so he can run free. I give in and take him back to the trailer. There is nothing left to do but join Ted.

There we sit, the picture of the perfect couple, waiting for my class to be called. Luckily, the noise of the announcer, clown and crowd make it impossible to hold a conversation. That damn image of Ted and me and the apron keeps intruding on my attempt to enjoy myself. Reruns of "Happy Days" play in my head. Ted grabs my hands and we watch the first event, bull-riding. On a dare, Tag has signed up to ride. He barely makes it out of the gate before the two-thousand-pound animal slams him into the dirt and sends him crawling back to the chutes. The next cowboy is likewise dislodged, but is not as lucky in his escape. The bull circles around and knocks him over while simultaneously digging both horn and hoof into the cowboy's side. He is rolled under the fence to wait for the ambulance while the show continues. Overall, it is a good day for bull-riding. There is only that one injury and the announcer assures us the cowboy is fine, even though I know a true cowboy would rather die than be carried from the arena. Independent to the end. It amazes me that they continually put themselves in danger week after week, but at least they know what living is.

I climb down from the bleachers, getting tangled in the mass of kids throwing popcorn and yuppies dressed in their brand-new western shirts. I think of how little that makes them look like cowboys as I accidentally step on one of their boots, putting the first dirt mark on it. I make it back to Catfish in time to see him land a good solid kick on the big, fat thigh of a woman who had come to pet and admire the pretty horse. She threatens to sue, and I ignore her until she goes away limping. I shake my head. Why do people think it is their right to go up to any horse they meet? Why are people so ignorant as to think that they have control over such a wild creature? Cat opens his mouth so I can put on his bridle. I can see the blood pumping rhythmically through his veins. He reaches his head around to bite my foot, and throwing his foot out,

he stomps on the ground. He is ready to run.

Before I am five feet from the trailer, I decide that this is going to be the best run I have made all season. I'm not going to look back and wish I could do it all over again. I have done that too many times in my life already.

The announcer is just telling everyone about the beautiful ladies that are about to run in the arena for them when Cat and I walk past the entry booth. Our names are announced over the speaker along with those of the cowgirls who will follow me. Catfish's adrenalin is starting to flow and he gives out a half-hearted rear every time I pull back on his reins. As I try to find my starting position, I can see the three barrels through the open arena gate. I release the pressure on his reins and immediately he bolts toward the first barrel. Finally I am free.

Essay

By Sonja Regelman

Mistakenly I
attempt to sink my teeth into
some scholarly revelations
insight taken to the nth
literary rubbish

explaining what was
pure in first form
now contorted
"digested and reconstituted"
till wholly indistinguishable

to fathom the query
never even articulated
but satisfied in origin

like religion
the domination of the mute
fear of intimate creations
leading to a new conclusion

like the myths
contort and confuse
with endless name and place
the simple natural beauty
creating diverging satisfaction

like the artist who simplifies
form and suppresses the image
so that the observer
may have no doubt
abandoning passion
for the trough of entertainment.

Power of Human Self-Interest: Man vs. Car

By Doug Plitt

My car is silver. It is a Subaru GL station wagon. My car was manufactured in Japan in 1982. It was sold in America to a man named Salvatore Castiletti in 1983. I bought my car from Salvatore Castiletti in the summer of 1990 for \$1400. My car resides at 211 Bay Avenue in Bayport, New York. So do I. My car is dented, rusty, scratched and in need of mechanical service at all times. I am not. My car has more personality than whatever you drive.

When I got my driver's license at the age of seventeen my mother felt it necessary to bestow upon me all of the driving secrets that had kept her from having an accident in thirty five years. It was the usual Driver's Ed. drivel. Brake early in wet conditions. Drive defensively. Blah when traffic is blah. Blah, blah, and don't forget to blah at all blahs. So much advice. And all of it coming from the same woman who can't tune the radio and drive simultaneously.

I chose to look to my older brother Clay as my driving mentor. He can tune the radio and drive at the same time. His radio is a thing to behold, the type whose bass can be heard three blocks away. My brother Clay is two years older than me. Within the two years before I had my license, Clay had already gone through three cars. He had amassed six speeding tickets and was working diligently in an attempt to obtain a seventh. Clay is an offensive driver. All of this made him considerably cooler than my mother, the woman whose outstretched arm keeps me from flying through the windshield every time she brakes.

It took me less than two months to get in my very first accident. It happened in the high school parking lot. At the Bayport-Blue Point High School, seniors are privileged in that they are the only ones allowed to park in the school parking lot. I was a senior. I felt superior. Every morning I would drive J.P. Haggerty and Dan Jamison to school. They are my best friends. Every afternoon we would pile in my temperamental Subaru and head to Dan's house to hang out until his mom got home from work at five o'clock. On March 21st, things didn't go exactly as planned. I had an accident with David Privler.

David Privler was a junior. He sat next to me in Ms. Hodge's one o'clock typing class. Over the course of the semester, we had developed the type of relationship where we would greet each other at the start of class and exchange goodbyes at the end. No one at Bayport-Blue Point High School called him David, nor Dave for that matter. He was, for some reason, always referred to as Slave. Slave Privler. Even the teachers called him that. Slave stood about six feet tall. He was gangly and pale and his jet-black hair

was very afro-like. It was shaved around the sides and the back, but the hair on top frizzed out a good six or seven inches off the top of his head. He walked pigeon-toed and spoke in a crackling, high-pitched voice. I smashed into him with my car.

On March 21st, at approximately 2:15 p.m., J.P., Dan, and I piled into my testy Subaru. It had been a harrowing day for all of us, and we were ready to go to Dan's house to vegetate. I fired up my Subaru's trusty four cylinder and headed for the senior parking lot's exit, a gap in the chain link fence that encircled the school's property. It was through this gap that Slave Privler was walking as I approached at twenty miles per hour.

I assumed he would get out of our way. After all, we were seniors. Slave dodged one way, then the other, and then froze like a frog entranced by a flashlight beam. He somehow escaped major damage by leaping into the air and narrowly avoiding my front bumper. Unfortunately, he did not avoid the windshield. Slave landed ass-first on the passenger side of the car, coming to rest on the pavement behind it and leaving Dan with a lap full of glass. I wheeled the station wagon around to choruses of "holy shit!" from my cronies. I stopped next to Slave, who was groaning as he hopped around on the leg opposite the butt cheek that had smashed my windshield.

At this precise moment, my mother's driving advice entered my mind. She had told me, in the event of an accident, to contact the police. "When they ask you whose fault it was, never admit that you are guilty, even if you are," I remembered her saying. This seemed reasonable, but I decided to skip the police part altogether. Dan brushed the pebbles and glass off Slave's back as J.P. assured him that he was not injured, and his parents didn't have to learn about this minor accident. I offered to bring him to the Walk-In Medical Clinic, but for some odd reason he denied assistance. Slave's right elbow was scratched up a bit and he had a puncture wound on his right hip, around which a menacing purple bruise was forming. I felt that the least I could do was bring him to the local CVS for some Band-Aids and Bactine. As we got in the car, I made sure to look around for witnesses. There were none. Oh well.

Once at the CVS, I let Slave know that he was welcome to buy whatever first aid products he desired. This one was on me. He chose some ouchless gauze pads and some medical tape. As he was reaching for a bottle of peroxide, I told him that I had some at my house. This move saved me seventy-nine cents and ensured that Slave would not go home without being cleaned up first.

Once at my house, J.P. and Dan attended to their patient's medical needs in the bathroom while I paced the kitchen, wondering how I would explain my shattered windshield to my parents. A

foul ball. A hailstone. A random act of vandalism. That was it! We were in the mall, we came out, the passenger side of my windshield was smashed for no apparent reason. Foolproof.

Slave's elbow and hip were bandaged nicely, so I asked him where he wanted to go next. He said he had track practice, so that was where we took him. Dan and J.P. once again assured him that there was no need for parental intervention in this little matter. We dropped him off and he waved goodbye with his good arm as he limped towards the track. We went to Dan's to discuss our little adventure. My friends assured me that I would not get sued. Dan comforted me by saying that he would "lump him up" if Slave told his parents. Everything would be just fine.

I was reading the paper that evening when my mom came into my room to ask me how my day had been. I told her how my classes had gone, and then attempted to slip my little windshield lie into the conversation. "What?" she bellowed. It wasn't going to work. I tend to turn red in the face when I am embarrassed or lying. This occurred as I attempted the latter. I was no match for her motherly instincts. She had the truth out of me in about ten seconds flat. Her reaction was something to the effect of "Oh no! They're Jewish! We'll be sued for sure!" Her words did nothing to soothe my nervousness. After assessing the damage done to my car, she made me phone the Privler residence.

Slave answered the phone. This was a relief, as I wasn't sure whether to ask for Slave or Dave. The first sentence out of his mouth was, "I told my parents."

"You're dead, you lousy motherfucker!" I hollered into the phone. No I didn't. I was just as spineless as he. I told him that I had told my parents as well. My mom talked to his mom. His mom would take him to their doctor the next day. This made my mom nervous. My mom and his mom didn't seem to hit it off real well. My mom spoke through the phone with pursed lips.

A few days later, we received a business-like letter from Mrs. Privler saying that she had spoken to a relative who just happened to be a lawyer. This made perfect sense to my mother, she being of the belief that all Jewish people have lawyer relatives. Uncle Lawyer had told Mrs. Privler that little Slavid should be taken to some type of hip specialist as soon as possible, and that we should pay for it in order to avoid legal action. My mother wrote a business-like letter in return saying that we agreed to this arrangement.

About a week later, another business-like letter from Mrs. Privler arrived, this one assuring us that little Slavid was in fine condition, but another hip specialist would have to be visited just to be certain, and would we pay for this visit, Uncle Lawyer had suggested this, and this would avoid further legal action, and thank you very much. My mother wrote a business-like letter in return,

saying that we agreed to this arrangement.

About one month later a business-like letter arrived, this time from Mr. Lawyer. Its contents informed us that we should know that his clients, the Privlers, were seeking \$10,000 from my insurance company for injuries to Slave that may or may not be permanent.

About one month after that, a business-like letter arrived from my insurance company explaining that the judge decided in favor of the Privlers and that my insurance would most definitely go up as a result.

During Fall Break of my Sophomore year in college, I visited my friend Valerie at NYU in New York City. She told me that Slave lived in her dorm, twenty floors above. She explained that every time she would comment on his nice new shirt, or shoes, or jacket, he would reply, "Thanks to Doug!" This made me feel warm inside. I felt generous and compassionate. He had gotten revenge for my callousness.

In Setterich

By Cormac McCarthy

I cannot cross through that threshold
and recognize
that I will never again pass through it,
and so I do not close that door . . .
cannot close my eyes at that sunset
and make myself believe
that another day is spent,
that life leading into the sunrise is no longer life,
and so I do not sleep through that night . . .
cannot say that final word to you
and remember with the time
that people speak so only when the time has come,
to go away or end another day,
and so I do not speak a word to you again.
Let another separate these chapters of my life,
for I will never sleep through a night . . .
will never leave a place forever . . .
will never say goodbye to you,
will never close myself to this pulsing life
embracing me, ever boundless and insane.
But let me live still,
never reaching an end to my journeys,
always being, never having been.

Wandering Wanda

By Ellen Cosgrove

The four of us rumbled into the rec parking lot around 8:30 p.m., dressed like beatniks in black pocket tees and black jeans. My best friend, Jen, had persuaded her father to lend us his blue Ford pick-up truck so we would have plenty of room to stash the merchandise.

It was the night of the traditional scavenger hunt for the senior class of Heights Memorial, the April night on which we celebrated the end of our high school careers by stealing various lawn ornaments such as plastic deer and pink flamingos. All of the seniors were meeting at the town rec center where the hunt would start and finish. When we got there, Jen hopped out of the driver's seat and plopped herself on the hood of the truck. She was dressed in the appropriate black attire except for her Lee Press-On Nails which were bright orange. Her hair was pulled back in a tight French braid and a Steelers baseball cap was perched on top of her head. The sky was dark and when I looked at her, all I could really see were her nails and her cigarette butt glowing together in the darkness. There was a cooler of beer in the back of the pick-up, so as soon as we arrived Jen's boyfriend, Billy, jumped out of the truck to grab a few. He had a handkerchief around his head, covering up the mohawk I knew was freshly shaven underneath. I guess somebody had forgotten to tell him football season was over.

"Meg, Tim, want a beer?" Billy asked as he tossed two cans of Natural to where we were sitting on the curb.

I popped the can open, then reached to hold my boyfriend Tim's free hand. The air still had a March chill and his warm hand felt good in contrast to the cold beer in my other hand.

By the time Tim and Billy had finished their third beer and I had swilled my first, most of the seniors had shown up. The parking lot was illuminated by the headlights of cars. A combination of music blared out from various car radios. Dan, our class president, yelled for everybody to quiet down so the hunt could get under way. Eric Clapton and the Indigo Girls were stopped in mid-tune.

Dan was a tall fellow with a shock of curly black hair and a black goatee to match. He had on a dark flannel that was buttoned up only twice, exposing a Clockwork Orange t-shirt. He was an organized guy who was destined to go away to college and major in music and the creative arts.

"All right guys, listen up," Dan said. "There are a couple of rules for the scavenger hunt. First off, everybody must be back here by midnight or the stuff you have collected won't count. Second, only four people to a team. Don't leave the Heights area 'cause the cops in other towns won't be nearly as cool. Also, everything must be returned to where you got it from tonight and if..."

"Come on Dan, shut-up and just give us the list," Tim shouted from the back. Tim's temples bulged out from the side of his head when he yelled, and his buzz-cut seemed to bristle. He shifted back and forth nervously, as if there were pine needles poking at him from all angles. The beers inside him seemed anxious to be leaked out. I gave Tim a light punch in the side of his arm and pretended to be mad at him for yelling, but I was really rather amused.

"All right," Dan said. "Just remember to be careful and if some old lady is going to get mad for stealing her birdbath, just leave it and go find another one. I'll see everybody back here at midnight."

Our class started moving like a bunch of frantic flies. Tim went to relieve himself in the backwoods, Jen and I took a typewritten list, and Billy grabbed a flashlight from the glove compartment.

The list was on a piece of onion-skin typing paper and listed 14 items.

1. Hubcap: 10 points
2. Birdbath: 15 points
3. Manhole cover: 20 points (Don't take the one on Maple Street, my Dad was pissed when his car got stuck in the hole last year.)
4. Road Block: 20 points
5. Road block with blinker: 30 points
6. Polaroid Picture with a Midget: 50 points
7. Lawn Jockey: 50 points
8. Pink Flamingo: 50 points
9. Hanging Plant: 20 points (Sorry points are out of order, but I just thought of it and it's not worth 50 points.)
10. Some kind of fastfood sign: 35 points
11. Menu from West's Diner: 40 points
12. "I have an Honor Student at Westmont High" bumper sticker: 60 points
13. "My son beat up an Honor Student at Westmont High" bumper sticker: 100 points
14. Wandering Wanda: 200 points

"Wandering Wanda is only worth 200 points this year. Hardly worth smelling up the car," Billy said.

"We could just put her next to the pink flamingo," Jen suggested. The three of us all laughed at the thought of the town bag lady snuggling with a plastic flamingo and a flashing road block blinking next to her head.

In big cities such as Philadelphia, homeless people were in bundles and easier to ignore. Since Wandering Wanda was the only homeless person roaming the streets of the Heights, she was constantly ridiculed by high school kids. Everybody knew who she was, but to my knowledge nobody ever tried to talk with her. She had been on the scavenger hunt list for as long as I could remember. There were always stories that when kids would try to grab her, she would pull out a gun or something. She was kind of like the Boo Radley of the Heights.

I would go running everyday after school and I would always pass her right on Mearl Street. She was my three-mile landmark, and when I saw her I knew that I had one mile left to go. My breathing would sound like a dying helium balloon and my gangly legs usually felt like jello pools. The smell of her Colombian cigar and unwashed body always kicked me in the chest and left me wheezing for fresh air. No matter if the temperature was 80 degrees or 30 degrees, she always wore the same thing. The only exposed part of Wanda's body was her toes. All ten of them penetrated through her black canvas sneakers, exposing her unclipped yellow toenails. She wore a dirt-infested trench coat that covered the length of her body. I don't know why, but my eyes were always fixed on a hole the size of a margarine container on the left shoulder of her coat. Her face was the shade of stained oak wood and looked like it could be molded as easily as silly putty. Her thin lips formed an upside-down horseshoe, and she always had a stogie dangling from the left corner of her mouth. Wanda's eyes were usually half-closed, so nobody knew their real color. Her hair hung in her face like an unruly mop, but I never once saw her tuck her tangles behind her ears and out of the way. Whenever I ran by Wanda, she was always in deep conversation with herself. I could never hear what she was saying, but I never really wanted to, either.

Jen snuffed out the cigarette she had been smoking and pulled her Steelers cap down like she was the leader of a group of hijackers. "All right, how about we swing by Mrs. Signan's first to get her lawn jockey and then go to the Cul-de-Sac to get the

manhole cover on Maple Street?" Jen asked.

"All right, but then let's go try to grab Wanda after that, before anybody else gets her," Tim said.

We all jumped into the pickup truck--the four of us squashed in the front seat.

"Hey, your bony hip is cutting into my side," Billy joked with me.

I laughed and leaned over to flip on the radio. Jen gave a honk, and we pulled out of the parking lot.

When we approached Mrs. Signan's house, Jen turned off the headlights but kept the getaway truck's motor running. Tim and I leapt out of the car; we all thought it was better to steal things in pairs. I followed Tim up to the lawn, listening to his black jeans rub together and thinking that the material sounded like two nail files in combat. As we crept toward the green shuttered house, I could see the lawn jockey wedged in the garden between a clump of yellow daffodils and a white drainpipe. Looking in the front bay window, I could see Tom Brokaw on the television, his serious face seeming to reprimand our devious behavior. Tim went to grab the base of the jockey and I grabbed the statue's head. My Nike sneakers crushed the daffodils as I tried to avoid stepping on the drainpipe. Dirt and chipped paint flew everywhere as Tim and I hoisted the jockey over into a horizontal position. In a fit of giggles, we did a grapevine trot back to the truck, attached together by the statue. As we hoisted the jockey into the back of the truck, it made a loud thunk against the metal. We slid back into the front seat and Jen successfully drove away without hearing the sound of sirens.

After we obtained a pink flamingo, a manhole cover, and a couple of other things, Tim and Billy wanted to go for big points and grab Wanda.

"Come on, it's close to 11 p.m. If we're going to win, we have got to get the 200 point prize," Billy said.

"She's probably on the bench on Mearl Street. Meg, you see her there all the time, don't you?" Jen said.

I nodded, picturing my running landmark. It was probably going to be weird seeing Wanda in the dark rather than in the gleaming sunlight.

When we got to Mearl Street and saw she was there, Jen parked the car around the corner. Since Wandering Wanda was worth 200 points, it seemed like a job big enough for the four of us to do. Billy and Tim grabbed extension wire from the glove com-

partment to tie Wanda's legs together. Billy took the handkerchief off his head to use to tie up her arms. Billy and Tim, with their buzz-cut and mohawk, looked like they were part of a cult.

The first thing I saw as we approached her was the tip of her burning cigar. As we got closer, I saw that her knees were tucked into her chest and her trench coat was pulled over them. She was rocking back and forth, as if there were music playing on a radio that only she could hear. The four of us hadn't spoken since we left the car, so it was a shock to hear Tim's voice.

"Billy, walk around behind the bench with me," Tim hissed. "Meg, you and Jen ask her for a cigarette or something to make her look at you, then Billy and I will yank her from the back and carry her to the truck."

Nobody answered, so Tim seemed to take the silence as an agreement to his plan. I just wanted to go back to stealing pink flamingos and fast food signs, but I found myself instead standing a foot in front of Wandering Wanda.

I stared at her, but I don't even think she noticed me. I had never been this close to her before, and for the first time, I noticed her eyes. They were gray. The shade of gray the sky is when it's not going to rain but the sun isn't going to come out either. Her face had more wrinkles than I had ever realized, like a grape that had its life stolen away from it.

"Can I bum a cigarette?" Jen whispered.

Wanda started to come out of her music trance just a little bit when Jen spoke. Billy grabbed her under her arms causing her to drop the lit cigar. Jen snuffed it out with the tip of her Keds and then grabbed Wanda's two ankles to tie them together with the extension wire. Wanda was wiggling around trying to evade Billy's grip and kicking her feet to stop Jen from tying her ankles.

"Come on Meg, help us out, grab her other arm or something!" Jen yelled.

Jen's baseball cap had flipped up a bit, so I could see most of her face. She had the same look about her that she has when she is trying to figure out a problem in Physics, always determined to get the answer before the bell rings.

Tim had bent down to help Jen tie, and Billy was still struggling to hold her arms together long enough to fasten them with the handkerchief. With their haircuts, they looked like a couple of porcupines scavenging together in the darkness. Wanda continued to wiggle like a baby who didn't want to be held, but she didn't scream. She did not let one screech slide from her lips. I grabbed

her shoulders and felt the flannel shirt that stuck through the hole in the shoulder of her trench coat. I thought I was going to help Billy but instead I let my hands rest on the flannel shirt. The shirt was so tattered, I could actually feel her skin through the worn material. I felt my fingers close around her bony shoulders and, for the first time, I did not see her only as a running landmark.

"Billy, come on stop. Let's just go get something else on the list. Maybe that bumper sticker or something," I said.

Billy just looked up at me, his face all red from struggling to get Wanda's arms tied.

"Meg, what are you thinking? It is worth 200 points, now come on and help me," Billy said.

I wanted to protest more, to make Billy think of her as a "she" and not just an "it," but instead I just stood motionless. I gnawed on my fingernails as I watched my three fellow kidnappers carry Wanda away like Tim and I had carried the statue earlier. Wanda continued to wiggle as they carried her, but her enthusiasm diminished. I felt myself wishing Wanda would scream out or resist, but she just let them carry her away.

"Wanda, scream or something," I yelled as they were hoisting her into the truck.

"Meg, what are you yelling for, do you want us to get in trouble?" Jen responded.

Jen had gotten another rope and they tied her wrists to the blinking road block. She pulled the list out of her back pocket and crossed off number 14, just as she had done when we got other objects. Wanda just laid there in the pile of junk, the red blinker illuminating her face. My three friends all piled back into the front of the truck, and I could hear their laughing even through the glass.

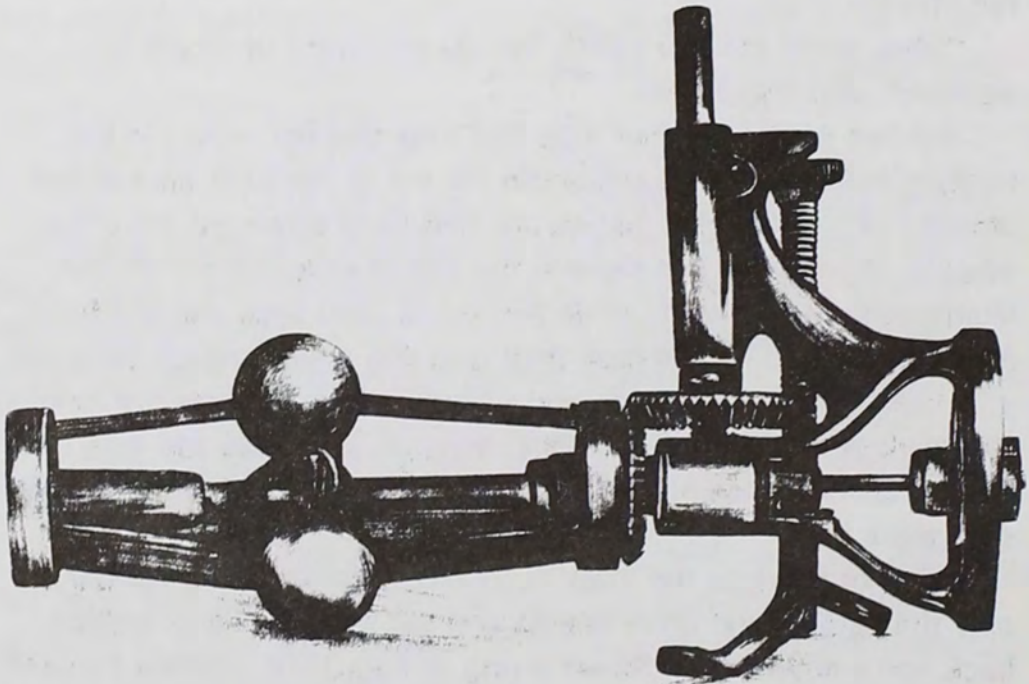
I looked at Wanda again, and hoped I might see only my running landmark in the back of the truck. Instead, all I could see was this fragile, tattered face blinking red in the darkness and wet from her own tears.

I did not hop into the truck with Jen, Billy, and Tim, nor did I play the heroine and untie Wanda and set her free. I just walked back home down Mearl Street trying to figure out whether I should be laughing or crying and what my new running landmark would be.

Maybe Kitchens

By Kristen Sabol

big daddy fanny
humpin out of fridge
while hummin n bummin
hell's angel curses
at only son
all the while peeking
'tween milky mayonnaise jars
of pride and prejudice.



Saltiness

By Beth Rosenberg

Ten minutes ago he threw the chick who lives here out of the room and I thought that was so cool but now he's all over me and it's pissing me off.

"Paul Paul no man just leave me alone all right-" I have that superdrunk citygirl accent on and every time I run my letters together he just smiles.

"What's wrong?" There's a slight male hum and more fumbling with my zipper.

"Really-" but I'm wasted and there's absolutely no use trying to get a boy off you when he's already seen you fall three times.

"Paul, John."

He stops. Huge silence.

"Amy, what about John-" and he has the accent on, too, so it's hard to keep track of what's words and what's leftover vowels. John John John rolling over and over in my head. He just keeps saying John but it's more like Jahn because he talks just like me. What's up smoothiepoop, you say my boyfriend's name just like me.

"What do you care what John thinks?"

I can't even think fast enough to push out an answer.

"I mean, Amy, John-" Jahn I think, fast enough to giggle. "He treats you wrong. He treats you like you're a baby."

"But I do really stupid things."

"Like what? What do you do that's stupid?"

"I just threw up in Kim's bathtub because I couldn't hit the toilet. Yesterday I walked in front of a car."

"And what did John do yesterday? He pulled you out from in front of the car and then he slapped you and called you an idiot."

"He was putting on a front for you."

My eyes are hazing over and Paul is getting really excited and punctuating every sentence with a bounce on the bed. You're rocking my world m'man.

"Amy, shut up. What I'm trying to say is that your boyfriend, who put me in charge of you just now, is just a totally cool guy when I'm not around?"

"He's your best fucking friend, Paul."

"Well he's an asshole. Amy," and his voice goes all sappy and sugary and he doesn't look into my eyes anymore. "I really think you deserve better than him. I just really think you're-" oh here it comes "-beautiful . . ."

Uh-huh. He's back on my neck again and his hands are still busy with my zipper. Really Paul? You think I'm beautiful? I could never have guessed from the way you're mauling my stomach

trying to get these fuckers off. He's not even bothering with the zipper anymore. He's just trying to rip them off me.

"Get off!" I'm trying to sound forceful but it's hard to fight when you're already pinned.

"Amy, if you mnph mnph me mnph mnph John."

"What?"

He gets his tongue out of my ear so he can talk and looks me right in the face. "Amy, I think you know what's going to happen."

He starts trying to get his hands inside my clothes and I just lie there and wait. It's all over now. I won't even feel him in me. I'll just lie here. He's all sweaty and sticky and he smells like beer and smoke and he's squeezing my tits and it hurts, but I don't care. Just go away soon, please.

"Amy, I'm going to go downstairs and get a condom. If anyone comes in just tell them that you're trying to sleep and that I'm in charge of you while he's gone, okay?"

While who's gone, Paul? John? My boyfriend? Your fucking buddy, Paul? Fine. Go. Just let me sleep for a few minutes and get me some water when you come back.

Paul kisses me on my forehead. Of course. I wish one fucking guy in the world would realize how much that pisses girls off. He gets up and tries to conceal his pitiful little boner under his shirt and then he leaves. I roll over and try not to listen to him asking somebody in the hallway for a "rubber." John, come back. How long does it take to get a fucking pizza anyway?

I can feel the lights come on in my head. If it was Paul he wouldn't have turned them on. I'm actually comfortable now so I don't look to see who it is and just yell that I want some water pronto, bitch. Bitch is the sound a period would make if people had to enunciate their punctuation. And WaWa would be a comma. They'd have to rename the store. Stupid name for a store anyway, bitch.

The person comes back in but doesn't turn the lights back on and I'm so happy about it that when she rolls me over I have this huge fucking grin on my face.

"Oh hey Kim."

"Hi Amy."

It's the chick that Paul threw out of here. And she has water. With ice. She's looking at me all weird. Thank you and goodbye. Please leave me alone.

I sit up to take the glass and she puts her arm around me to help me up and then she gets my hair out of my face so I can drink. How cool of her. John should have left her in charge of me.

I'm just so happy with the water and with being held that I really don't care when she sits down where my head was and then

pulls me back so I'm laying on her. Then she takes the glass and just tips it to my mouth with one hand and holds my hair with the other. You're great, man. This is the coolest person I ever met. She's talking to me and her voice is really soft and nice and it sounds like a car hmmm. I really hope she knows that everything she says is all garbled and I don't understand her at all.

Then she just kind of talks really close to my ear and I can feel my ear getting hot. And right when I'm about to drift off, my ear gets really hot and yuck man she's kissing my ear. You were so cool, man.

"Kim, what are you doing?" After I say it I'm all embarrassed because what if I just kind of thought she was kissing my ear?

She says, right into my ear, "I'm kissing your ear," and I know she was because my ear gets all cold because it's wet.

"Yuck, Kim. Get off me."

"I just thought you might want some company. John left you up here all alone."

"Paul's watching me. Get off me please. Thank you for the water." I try to roll off but she kind of holds me.

"Amy, you let me hold you and you didn't seem to mind. You were sitting there purring and smiling."

Jesus. How do you explain to someone that you thought they were cool because they brought you water? Everything is so messed up.

She starts stroking my hair and my face and at the same time she kind of moves her body around so her crotch is right against my back. Whoever said that women aren't as aggressive as men was dead fucking wrong. Girls are just smoother about it. The worst part is I'm so drunk and off balance that it's kind of tough to get up. She probably thinks I'm grinding her right back.

I'm trying to talk and move at the same time, but all that's happening is that I'm mumbling and pushing myself against her. She's making all these little noises. I don't even feel disgusted or turned on or anything. I'm just really tired and I'm hungry now too and I'm getting really annoyed at all this.

"Kim, please-" What do I do now? I'm trapped.

"What honey?" she says. Honey. Jesus Kim, this is ridiculous.

"Kim, please just leave me alone. I'm wasted. I'm really in no mood for this shit. Just leave me alone and wake me up when the pizza gets here."

Oh now she's all put out. She says some sort of apology and works her way out from under me and right when I'm thinking she'll leave she kind of half-sits herself down on the bed and bends over to kiss me. At least I think she wants to kiss me but before she gets her chance Paul walks in. Jesus Christ. All I wanted was some fucking sleep.

Paul just kind of is in shock for a second then he tells Kim that somebody just broke something and she jumps up and runs downstairs. He breaks out into this huge smirk and is looking at me like I'm bleeding and he thinks that's funny. He has two beers in his hand. I almost forgot about this one.

He slumps his big lanky self over to the bed with this totally concerned look on his face and sits down. The sight of those beers is making my stomach churn but I don't think I'm going to be sick again. He grabs my shoulder before I have a chance to turn away from him.

"What was going on in here?"

"Nothing, Paul. Go away."

"Everybody downstairs was saying that Kim told all of them that she was going to hook up with you. She's gay."

"Really? Well, who would have guessed? She's only been in here humping my back for the last five minutes." I let that register for a few seconds. I can tell Paul's disappointed he didn't walk in sooner.

"Are you okay?"

All this from the man who was trying to get my jeans off like his life depended on it fifteen minutes ago. I know what he's going to do next. Wait, wait, yep, he starts massaging my shoulder. You just don't quit, do you big boy?

"Yeah, Paul, I'm fine."

"I brought you a beer."

"No thanks."

He cracks his open and gurgles down half the bottle and I pretend to watch just so I don't have to see him slip the condom out of his pocket and onto the nightstand. I see it anyway. Trojan ribbed in the gold wrapper. Nothing but the best for me, baby.

He finishes his beer and I'm wishing he'd drink the other one too but instead he leans down over me and for the first time I notice how big his hands are because he's stretching his fingers across my chest and I feel like I'm in a life jacket. He's all over me now, slurping and slobbering on my neck and I can smell his spit. He's trying to kiss me but I keep giving him my neck because I think I'd drown in all that drool. I hate this. I hate Paul. I hate this.

And right now I decide that my whole life would just be easier if I give in. I figure that it would probably be quicker if I just jerk him off and then send him on his way than if I say no because if I say no I'd have to sit here and explain to him why I did. I'm still hoping to get some sleep in before the pizza comes.

He is trying to do something ridiculous to me and I wish he would stop because it will only prolong my time awake and embarrassed. I'm completely numb anyway. I reach down and attempt to get down to business, but Paul wears his pants really

huge and I just can't distinguish between organ and zipper. I don't know what I'm doing and now he's attempting to hump my hand. This is so pathetic and awful. I'm so mad it's sobering me up. I just want to be left alone.

I grab Paul's balls and squeeze them really hard to hurt him and he jumps back and yells something at me. He grabs my chin and wrenches my head around so his face is right up close to mine. His face is all contorted. I could actually laugh, but I'm kind of scared too. He's massaging himself with his other hand and I'm really happy about that because otherwise he would probably hit me.

"Listen to me, Amy. What the fuck are you doing, you little shit? I could tell John everything, you know that, don't you? You're in here fucking around with his best goddamn friend and then a fucking girl? You know I could fucking end you two like that . . ." and to emphasize the "that" he actually does hit me in the face. Then he grabs me by the hair and throws me off the bed. He gets up and stands over me. He's still holding himself and screaming at me and I'm scared now I'm really scared and he drops down on me and he's pushing me down and holding me down and I can't get up now. And he's still screaming and spitting all over me. And it's happening. There goes my shirt and it's happening. And if I just lay here it'll be over and everything will go back to normal in about fifteen minutes but guess what I'm in no fucking mood, Paul.

Guess what Paul it's over now and I bring my leg up and it's over now Paul. He goes over on his side and is panting on the floor. He's actually crying. I find my shirt and I'm outta here baby. I am gone. "Where the fuck are you going?" He's spitting through his teeth and there's drool all over his chin. Ha Paul. Ha fucking ha ha ha.

"Out, Paul. See you."

As I walk out the door he's still screaming at me to come back and yelling John's name but I barely hear him because the light in the hallway almost blinds me. I get to the steps and slip down a few of them but I steady myself before I get to the landing. I come around the corner near the TV so everybody sees me and they all kind of stare.

I don't want to deal with this. I want nothing to do with this. I'm sure they all heard Paul yelling at me up there, I can still hear him thumping around now. They're all quiet and then a guy I don't know says that John just called from the pizza place and he asked if I was being good. Everyone kind of laughs at that one. I'm trying to remember where the door is and I kind of stumble my way through them, holding onto shoulders to keep myself up. That girl with the witchy face is whispering to another bitch about me because they're both staring and giggling. I don't even act like I notice. I try to walk out like I have some sort of dignity, but it's no

use because everyone here knows everything and everyone here knows John. It's all these crooked drunk faces with wet mouths and smeared lipstick and stubble. They all look the same now they all look the same and I have to leave I have to go right now.

I'm almost at the door but it's right beside the kitchen and I can hear Kim's voice in there all soft and sleazy and I hate her too I hate your whole fucking party you goddamn bitch. I slip by the kitchen real fast so she doesn't see me and then I open the door and step outside.

The air is so beautiful and it washes me off and gets everything off me that I hate. Everything's beautiful, the city is beautiful and the houses are beautiful and it's so dark that the streetlights can't even make it light. The cold and the dry that burns my throat are beautiful beautiful pain and it's just me and the air out here and nobody is here to bother me now. I run all the way to the corner in a stupid drunk gallop, but it feels so good to be up and to breathe and it takes me a while before I realize that I have no idea where I am.

And then I hear them from around the corner. It's John's big bass voice over Joey's little ratty one. They're laughing about something. I could go get John and tell him everything first so Paul won't make me look like some kind of slut, but he still will. And John will believe Paul anyway because he always does and he'll yell at me and I'll pretend like I'm upset and hurt and he'll hug me and just put someone else in charge of me at parties. John could take me home right now if I asked him. I don't want to.

At the same time the two of them come around the corner I duck behind a truck. It's cold too and I don't have my jacket and I think John can hear me shivering. I peek around and there he is, swinging his ass all over the street with Joey trotting along carrying pizza boxes. And I want to call out to him but I don't. I can't do it this time. I'm crying now and it's stupid to stand behind a truck with no coat on in October and cry but fuck you all I'll do it anyway. I should have bummed a cigarette from someone before I left. John's going up the steps to the house now and when he goes inside I'll run.

I can see a bus stop from here. It looks positively lovely there. Whoever put it there is a genius. It's on the corner. Fifth and Bainbridge. That's where the hell I am. And that bus stop is for the 5. Only two buses to take me home. Only an hour and a half until I can sleep. And only a few seconds until John goes into that house.

He and Joey go in and I run and run up to another corner where the bus comes too so if John comes looking for me maybe he won't find me. Maybe he won't find me at all.

Homecoming

By John Woodruff

"So, how'd it happen?"

I look at Mic. As I'm thinking of how to phrase the answer, the undercurrent of drunken conversation floats through the bar on a tide of stale cigarette smoke. "Things just weren't goin' right. I couldn't hide from it any more."

"That why you came back to Baltimore?"

"Kind of. I just needed to get the hell out of New York."

"So, how was detox?"

The bluntness of the question makes me laugh. "I don't know. Didn't get the D.T.'s, though."

"Yeah. Remember how old man O'Connell used to get 'em?"

"Remember! The whole damned neighborhood used to rock."

Mic and I laugh as Gootch walks up, jumps over the back of his chair, and slams the two mugs down. He slides one of the mugs across to me, through the empty bottles and shot glasses littering the table.

"Mista' Woodrow MacIntyre, drink up!"

I slide the beer back and lift my mug of Coke. "Cheers, asshole."

"You're actually serious 'bout this shit?" He licks his lips and downs both mugs at once. "You really quit because some bitch left ya?"

"At first, yeah."

"And then?" says Gootch.

"I realized there was a lot more poison there than just this." I gesture to the empty bottles.

"I'm goin' back up to the boards," Mic says and leaves the table.

"Like what?" Gootch continues.

Before I have to duck the answer, Cheese comes stumbling to his chair. He pulls a scotch bottle from his pants while grinning in a way that would send chills through the devil's spine.

"Yo, fellas. I got flagged at the upstairs bar." He giggles and continues, "So I had to go covert and shit to snag this here bottle of liquid lovin'."

"Is that why you came runnin' out from behind the bar like a bat outta hell?" Schwampus asks, walking up to the table. He slams his Molsen.

"Ya better not get us fuckin' kicked out of here," Dummy says from the corner of his mouth as he flops into his chair.

Gootch starts to rock back and forth in his chair and makes a wolf call. He looks at everyone at the table with eyes that almost

seem to spin in crazy circles. "Kick us out! KICK us out! Kick US out! KICK US OUT!!" HE SCREAMS.

Everybody at the table slams. Cheese puts down his bottle, shakes his head violently and turns to me. "Easy on that stuff, Woodman. It's gonna make you a wiiiiild man." He slides a shot of scotch in front of me.

The cold ice hits my upper lip as the last drops slide down my throat. I slam the mug down, hitting the side of the shot glass, sending it back to him. "Damn straight, that's some strong shit!" Gootch stops harassing the ladies at the next table long enough to turn, wink at me, and turn back to continue his explanation that his cock is in fact large enough to fashion into a lasso.

"Yo, Woodman," Cheese says, "Zak's upstairs pitchin' spears. He's got some fuckin' yuppy on the rope for seven hundred beers."

"Wha'd the rich yuppy shit do, bring his own darts?" Schwampus says, sneering.

"How'd ya' know?"

"Guessed. LET'S GO KICK HIS FUCKIN' ASS!" yells Schwamp as he jumps, sending empty bottles everywhere.

Heads spin in our direction. Gootch pulls Schwampus back into his seat.

"Zak's been wipin' his ass with the most beat house set you've ever seen," Cheese continues.

"I'm gonna see what's goin' down," I say as I stand up. "It's gettin' late and I still gotta head over to see Robert." Dummy's head turns quickly. He goes to my parents' church. I doubt he knows the details, but he knows Rob and I haven't spoken for almost two years. "Shigelay, fellas, take it smiles. I'll catch up wit you all another night."

As I get up from the table amidst all the calls of "later, Wood," "take it chillin'," and "shigelay," I look at the litter of empty bottles and shot glasses that are strewn over the whole table and I think, "Damn, these are the guys who used to say that I was out of control!" I make my way up the stairs.

A man dressed in a fine suit hands Zak a slip of paper and walks off. Zak looks up and makes his way toward me. His tall, wiry frame looks awkward in the loose sweater he's wearing, as his long blonde hair sways around his square thin face. His hands are covered in the perpetual layers of faded paints from hours of retouching his graphic designs. His nostrils flare to the sides uncontrollably in the rapid fashion they always do when Zak tries to hold back an outburst of laughter.

"Sonofabitch owns a bank. Says he's gonna make good on the seven hundred and fifty beers he owes me. Up top, my brother!"

I high-five Zak and ask, "How shit-faced was the guy?"

"Not that bad. I've just gotten to be a chuckin' god since I moved to Richmond. Everywhere's gotta board, and that means ol' Zak drink fo' free!"

We both start laughing as Mic walks up. "Yo, Woodrow. You been hangin' downstairs with the crew?"

"Yeah. Those guys have gotten fuckin' nuts."

"Naw, Wood. They haven't changed, you have."

We move to one of the small round tables. Jumping up onto the stools, we settle in. I sit with my back to the wall, as Mic and Zak slide around to either side so they can check out the action discreetly. Zak flags down a tall blonde goddess of a waitress. Mic is actually starting to drool. Zak looks at Mic and says, "If ya keep starin' like that, your eyes are gonna dry up and fall out."

"Caught!" I yell as Mic's Irish face turns beet red.

The waitress comes up to the table with a slight apprehension, but we quickly bring our laughter under control. Zak leans back in his stool and says playfully, "Two 'Rocks of Rollingness' for Mic and myself, and a Coke for Woodrow."

She looks to me. Her eyes are ice-blue and never seem to focus on anything.

I look directly into her eyes and smile warmly. "Damn!" I say, looking to my friends and then slowly back to the waitress. I continue in a soft tone, "Eyes that beautiful should have to be registered as lethal weapons."

Her face softens somewhat, perhaps because of the sincerity, perhaps because the words are not slurred, or perhaps because my gaze never drifts from her eyes to her breasts.

"Thank you," she says, still somewhat apprehensive.

"Do you work every Thursday night?"

"Yes. Well, almost every Thursday."

"I can't think of anywhere I would rather be in Baltimore than here on any Thursday night. Well, almost any Thursday."

She doesn't say anything for a few moments, but smiles shyly as I continue to look into her eyes. Then, as if she has savored the comments fully, she says, "I'll be back with those drinks." She turns away slowly and drifts into the crowd.

"Jesus, Woodman," Zak says, "When the hell did you get so damn smooth?" He looks over to Mic. "That was almost as smooth as I could have been."

"What can I tell you, brother? I've been finding it a lot easier to be intoxicating when I'm not intoxicated."

"Amen, brothers of love," Mic pipes in his best southern preacher's voice.

"Yeah," Zak laughs. "Now, if we could only get the 'All-American Boy' here to actually talk to women, he might get laid."

Ladies droolin' over his ass. Pissin' us off. And you never see it."

"Fuck off! You guys are full of shit," Mic says quickly before his head scans the room. Just in case.

"So tell us," Zak says with a more somber tone, turning to me. "Was it alcoholism?"

"Nah," I say after a long pause. "Just abusive drinking to fill voids I couldn't bring myself to cope with."

Mic shifts uneasily, but is intensely interested. Zak continues, "Like Kasha?"

"Yes and no. That was six years ago. It wasn't so much dealing with her being gone, but rather what disappeared in me when we fell apart. I tried blinding myself from the fact that something was missing by making relationships with women into things they weren't. When that didn't work, and it never does, I'd hide in the bottom of a scotch bottle. It took a long time before the hurting started to consume me. It wasn't until this most recent breakup that I started to see."

"Is that when you went into detox?" Mic asks.

"No. I had to look deeper than that was. I was losing my life. My ability to achieve my goals. My family. You guys, who are as close as brothers."

Zak reaches over and puts his hand on my shoulder. My left hand is clenching the fist I'm making with the right as my elbows rest on the edge of the table. I slowly rest my brow against my hands as I whisper quietly to my friends, "I am so sorry for all the shit that I put you guys through. All the nights of drivin' drunk; putting your lives in danger. All the fights, and the shithead I became when I drank. I'm sorry."

With his hand still on my shoulder, Zak says reassuringly, "We're glad to have you back, brother. You've been away for too damn long."

There's a long silence before the waitress comes to the table with our drinks. I lift my head slowly. She glances at me. I can feel my face is still somber. "What's your name?" I say slowly.

"Elaine."

"Thank you," I say as she backs away.

Having apologized for the past, the remainder of the evening is a long ritual of light banter, discussing future plans and shooting the shit. But there is a comfort in the discussion that hadn't been there in years. Mic starts talking about starting another band now that I'm living in Baltimore again. Time seems in a dream-like state as I realize how close I came to losing these guys.

"Guys, I'd love to stay all night, but I gotta go."

"Where you off to?" asks Mic.

"To see Robert." My voice comes through with unexpected shakiness.

"Damn. You're nervous about this, brother." Mic has a look of concern.

"We...haven't really...spoken...in about two years. You know, family functions, the superficial salutation. It was always uncomfortable, considering we had been really close."

I start shaking as I remember all the times Robert confronted me. He understood; he had been there, too. Somehow in the last two years, it just fell apart. I couldn't stand to see him, and he couldn't bear to watch what was happening to me. Our father kept thinking it was just a phase. He knew about my drinking, but didn't know how bad it could get.

"Relax, brother. Take it shigelay," Zak says, rubbing my shoulder.

After making arrangements to meet with Zak and Mic tomorrow, I make my way through the noisy crowd. I pass the table where "the crew" had located themselves. Tim and Dummy are at the bar, swaying as they hit on coeds, Cheese is sitting at the table holding his hand above the flame from the tea light candle in the middle, and Gootch is "goin' baggin'." He reaches behind him for the handbag that belonged to a lady who he had been harassing earlier. He pulls the oversized leather bag to his mouth and proceeds to vomit. Then he replaces it with the same stealth. Gootch looks back up and sees me, tips his shot of vodka, and slams it. I turn, shaking my head, and continue toward the exit, but not before asking a certain blonde waitress for a date. She declines politely as she holds up her engagement ring. A brief, fleeting wave of loneliness rushes through me as I push through the crowd toward the door.

Stepping out the door onto Light Street, a cool mid-August breeze blows an aroma of salt air from Inner Harbor which is down the street to the left. I glance to see the lights that illuminate the tall proud clipper ships that now dock permanently, reduced to being museums on the waterfront rather than the proud vessels they once were. The sounds of people and calypso music drift up the street from the waterfront. I turn and head up the street.

Six blocks later, I'm at the corner of Light Street and Park Place. I light a Carlton Menthol cigarette and take a long drag while I wait for the traffic light. His apartment is only three blocks down Park Place. Looking down the broken brick sidewalk, I can see his Jeep Grand Wagoneer with the wood-grain paneling. He and Anne are definitely home. I take another drag. Further up the street, I see the high spire of a far-off church towering up from behind the shorter buildings.

Reaching the black door that leads into the foyer of the brick apartment building, I look through the glass panes and up the wooden stair case. A rush of anxiety wells up from my feet to my

head. I fight the urge to vomit and struggle to escape a sudden fit of tunnel vision. I clench my fists tighter and tell myself, "You are strong enough." My left arm reaches out to push the button marked "R. MacIntyre."

"Hello?"

There's a long silence before I can actually speak.

"Uh, yes..." It seems like an eternity passes before I can say, "It's, uh, Woodrow."

"Woodrow. Your mother said you weren't going to be back in town until next week." Anne's tone is soothing, as if she were glad to hear my voice.

"Yeah. I moved in early. Is Rob here?" I almost hope the answer would be no.

"Yes, he is. I'll ring you in."

The stairway has a homey musty smell. The quality of the wood on the stairs is exquisite, although they still creak with every step. The wide, wooden banister is brown and cold, yet smooth and almost pleasing to run my hand along. As I continue to climb the stairs, I find that rather than sliding my hand along, I am pulling myself. My arm seems to be the only part of my being that doesn't have the damned sense to be resisting. My legs begin to feel as if they're going to atrophy. My mind is reeling as the memories swirl. My nights of drunkenness--how they tore my brother apart. Can he forgive what I have done? Finally, I reach the third landing.

My fist knocking sends an ominous echo through the hall. I feel like Charles IV of Germany in the only painting I remember from two damned semesters of art history; he stands nude in the snow, begging redemption and forgiveness from Pope Gregory II.

"It's unlocked," I hear my brother's voice call from within.

As I turn the knob and push the door open, I begin to shake uncontrollably and tears stream down my face.

Just as the Pope came out and wrapped a blanket around Charles and took him back into the church, my brother, in a gesture sharply contrasting with his deeply stoic being, comes and wraps his arms around me.

My voice comes strained and faint with all the emotions of the outburst as I bury my head in his chest. "You wouldn't believe where the fuck I've been."

"I'd say you had to go deeper inside than most men could bear in order to come home." His tone is soothing.

"My brother guides me into the apartment as Anne comes over to give me a hug. I sit down on the sofa and gladly accept the Coke my brother offers.

After the short period of calming, I sit forward, putting my elbows on my knees and look at my brother.

"Do you remember when we were young, and we used to tear apart Rubik's Cubes and put `em back together solved?" He shakes his head yes. "Well, one of my center pieces got lost along the way. Probably six years ago. I kept trying to shove replacements into the empty space, but it never worked. Not the women. Not the alcohol. Not the drugs. Not the money. Nothing. Fuckin' nothing could fill it! You see, I was too damned busy trying to find the easy replacement to figure out...the only way to fill the whole is from within. I don't ever want to have to look in like that again. It's fuckin' scary."

"You probably won't have to. At least, not at something so dark. The nice thing about completeness...is that a look in gives strength rather than fear."

I stay at the apartment for the next several hours. Rob and I go to the roof to look out at the sea of lights and to catch up on two years of life we hadn't been able to share. The connection is there again -- the one we used to have when we were only slightly younger, having complete conversations without a word. It's not as strong as before, but I know it will be.

"So, when you gonna quit that shit?" he says, flashing a rare smile, while I take another long toke on a Carlton Menthol.

I blow the smoke out, and it's caught immediately after passing my lips and whipped wildly in the breeze high above the city. "I don't know. I think I need to keep this vice for awhile, otherwise my whole system, will rebel against the changes...Soon, though...Soon, I can take it on."

I leave my brother's around 3:30 a.m. I go back down Light Street to the inner-harbor. All of the water taxis for Fells' Point stopped running at twelve-thirty. But if you ask nicely and offer a dollar or two, most of the night fishermen will drop you there on their way out to the bay. I find a willing skipper. A true novice with a 25 foot Boston Whaler. It's not even rigged for night running, but what the hell, it's cheaper than a taxi and I love being on the water at night. Even for a short ride.

Back at the apartment, I ride the elevator to my seventh floor "penthouse." Actually, it looks more like an airplane hanger and is littered with boxes from the move. But the loft, where the bedroom is, was my first concern when I arrived the other day. Sitting in my rocking chair, I look out over the city. The lights from outside cause a bizarre illumination in the room. I stand and move to the window. At times like this I used to sit and drain a bottle of scotch, with a gnawing bitterness in the pit of my stomach; tonight, I know that is truly over. I whisper to the entire city below, "Good night, and thank you for bringing me home."

Perfect

By Jennifer Helverson

Counting ribs,
1-2-3-4
Not quite yet 5
Still too big,
or not **SMALL** enough
for the protrusion
of safe, beautiful bone

Run faster,
Push harder
Still not **SAFE** enough
-through the sunken valley,
combing walls of sharp, fleshless protection

Think hard for tomorrow
before you can cease today
-still not weak enough
to let go

Shall it be 1 spoon or 2,
A whole or a half?
-squirring restlessly
in the aroma of **CONTROL** . . .
"A little less, please.
I'm not very happy, I mean hungry."

Sincerely, Jen

By Sona Rewari

Jen scrutinized the young man seated across from her for signs of homicidal mania. His toothpaste-commercial smile and pinstriped suit looked rather suspicious. Schizophrenic, or possibly, a necrophiliac. What was someone this gorgeous doing in Dr. Rhoads' office? He must be a real sicko. Jen ran through her mental list of manias and phobias, trying to match one with the young man's face. She knew that the sexiest guys usually turned out to be murderers. Matt Dillon in "A Kiss Before Dying"?

Jen watched the young man out of the corner of her eye while flipping the pages of the October issue of *Cosmopolitan* at regular intervals. His raven-black hair was gelled back in that rising-executive style, and his socks matched the shade of his slate colored suit. With gloved hands, he rolled and unrolled a *Wall Street Journal*. Those heavy woolen gloves screamed tales of bloody murder. Off-white was such a tacky color for them that Jen considered suggesting that he invest in a pair of black ones. No one in their right mind wore gloves in the middle of Indian summer. If he was going to be a psycho, he may as well do it right.

Feeling the weight of her stare, the young man looked up. "Hi." He flashed her a devastating Colgate smile.

Jen blushed. "Hi."

"Are you here to meet with the S.H.A.R.E. group?"

"Uh, no. I have an appointment with Dr. Rhoads."

"Oh." He twisted the newspaper in his hands.

"What's S.H.A.R.E.?" Jen asked, anxious to keep the conversation alive.

"It stands for Support Has A Real Effect. It's just a few of Dr. Rhoads' patients getting together to talk about their problems and stuff with each other."

"Oh, that sounds nice," Jen said.

He folded his hands on his lap. "Is this your first visit?"

Jen nodded.

"Well, my name's Bill." Hesitating slightly, he extended his hand.

Fingering the teardrop earring in her right ear, Jen said, "I'm Arielle." She lowered her voice, "I'm a nymphomaniac." She watched with satisfaction as his brown eyes widened.

"Really?" He knit his brow and gazed at her sideways. "I've never known anyone who was a nymphomaniac." Stroking his Gillette-smooth chin with a gloved hand, he said, "I think the closest was probably a kleptomaniac, but he stopped coming to the S.H.A.R.E. meetings ever since he got arrested for trying to steal a 26-inch TV from Macy's."

"Yeah, I'm the only nymphomaniac I know," Jen said, trying not to sound too pleased.

"I'm sorry. That must be really tough for you."

"Yeah, sometimes it is."

"Well, maybe you should consider coming to our meetings. Everyone's really nice and understanding."

"I don't know." She leaned in slightly. "It's just that people get so uncomfortable talking about sex."

"It's all right. Everyone has problems. I'm sure they'll understand," Bill said.

Frustrated, Jen said, "It's not like it's my fault. I can't help it if I want to do it all the time." She gauged his reaction.

"Oh, I know exactly what you mean. Why do you think I have these gloves on?" He extended his hands palms up in front of himself.

The fingertips of the gloves were stained with dried blood. Jen imagined those long fingers wrapped around delicate necks, the fabric burning prints into tender, white skin. Had he come straight here from his latest killing? He could have at least bothered to change his gloves. Blood stains are murder to try to get out, especially when it's wool. His suit was still nicely pressed so Jen forgave him.

A petite blonde nurse appeared in the doorway of the waiting room, her jaw moving with the lazy rhythm of a cow. Probably has the personality of one, too, Jen thought.

"Miss Miller, the doctor will see you now."

Jen turned to Bill, "Gotta go."

"Well, it was really nice talking to you. Maybe I'll see you at one of our meetings, or if you're not busy, we can get together sometime." He shrugged.

"That sounds great." Jen heard the nurse impatiently cracking her gum. "My appointment shouldn't take long. If you're still here, I'll talk to you when I'm done." She rose and did her best Marilyn Monroe walk to the back. Her mind was racing. She could've given him her number, but what if he'd called her house and asked for Arielle? Her parents would flip and maybe even send her to a different shrink. Then she'd never see him again. She would just have to make sure that they ran into each other on the way out of the office today.

Dr. Rhoads' office was decorated like a study with heavy oak doors and shelves lined with thick volumes of books. A spotless desk sat in the left corner of the room while a cream-colored leather sofa set dominated the center. Dr. Rhoads sat in the sofa chair, arranging the magazines on the glass coffee table in front of her. She was a slim woman in her late thirties, with a light-brown pageboy haircut and hazel eyes. Jen was surprised. She didn't

seem at all to be the iron-bra type like Lilith on "Cheers" or the insidiously domineering type like Dr. Ruth. Jen decided that she must be the kind of woman who went to art shows, sipped white wine, and called vases "vahses."

On any other day, Jen would have welcomed this challenge, but today, her mind was preoccupied with Bill. She'd never been asked out by someone that old or that sophisticated. Granted, he only looked four or five years older than her, but next to him even Jimmy Logan, the cutest guy in the senior class, seemed boyish and immature. Maybe she could take Bill to the Winter Ball in December. She could tell everyone about how it was "love-at-first-sight." Maybe she'd tell them that he was married and that they were having a clandestine affair. The possibilities were endless, but Dr. Rhoads kept distracting her.

"Jen, do you think that everyone lies?"

"Sure." His smile was breath-taking, but were his hands breath-taking, too? How was he going to explain the blood stains on his gloves?

"Everyone? Even your parents?" Dr. Rhoads asked, her black fountain pen poised over a green steno pad.

Jen sighed. She would have to throw the poor woman a bone. "Oh, especially my parents."

"Really?"

"They've always lied to me. I used to believe everything they said. But when I was six, I woke up early Christmas morning and saw them stuffing my stocking." Jen pouted. "They actually had the gall to deny it. Can you believe that?"

Dr. Rhoads nodded her head sympathetically.

"You'd think that they would've just laid all their cards on the table then. But no, they still kept on lying about the Easter bunny and the tooth fairy. Of course, I found out on my own."

Dr. Rhoads scribbled some comments in her note pad. Jen figured that she'd given her enough fodder. They spent the remainder of the hour talking about some more of her traumatic childhood experiences. Jen promised to schedule another appointment and escaped back to the waiting room.

The waiting room was empty. Jen spent a full ten minutes trying to find a suitable time for her next appointment. It was made for exactly two weeks later, at the same time as the next S.H.A.R.E. meeting. Jen chatted with the receptionist, admiring the photos of her children on her desk and in her purse and listening sympathetically to the adventures of her three-year-old. Another ten minutes was spent looking in vain for an earring that Jen had lost somewhere in the room. She had to get two drinks of water and make a trip to the bathroom before she finally saw a side door open and a group of people walking out.

"Bill, hi!" she said with surprise.

"Arielle," he said, pearly-whites gleaming.

"How was your meeting?"

"Fine. How was yours?"

Her bottom lip quivered. "Oh, it was just awful."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Do you want to talk about it?"

She widened her blue eyes. "Would you mind?"

"Oh, not at all," he said with a wave of his gloved hand. "Do you want a cup of coffee?"

She smiled gratefully. "Funny, I was just craving one." She noticed that the stains on the tips of his gloves seemed darker and more pronounced.

They walked out to his dark blue Chrysler LeBaron. He stood fumbling with his car keys for a minute before Jen offered to unlock the doors for him. She scanned the car for any blunt objects before getting in but only saw a tennis racket and a couple of cassettes.

The Chipped Cup was a small cafe nestled between a bookstore and a hat shop in downtown Glendale. Bill led Jen to a table in the back of the dimly-lit room. He ordered a cup of chocolate-almond coffee, and she followed suit. She watched him struggle with the creamer, and then offered to pour for him.

Jen gave him her most seductive smile. "You know, cafes like this really make me, um, excited."

"Yeah, they're great, aren't they? You just have some of the greatest conversations in cafes," he said, a gloved hand bringing the cup to his lips.

"I once had sex in one. It was a small cafe just outside Poughkeepsie, New York."

"You know, I have a cousin who lives in Poughkeepsie. He says they have the most beautiful weather up there."

"Oh, I wouldn't know. I spent most of my time indoors."

"Really? I'm more of an outdoors person myself."

That wasn't surprising. Jen figured that homicidal maniacs had to be the outdoors type since they couldn't deal with society.

"Actually, I once had a great time in the woods. My parents took us all camping up in Flagstaff, and there was this really cute guy with a tent just near ours." She looked down into her cup and then, glanced up, blushing. "As you can probably guess, we..."

"Oh, I love going camping," he said. "I haven't gone since a bunch of us took a big van out to Prescott. Do you go a lot?"

She wondered how many of that bunch came home. "Well no, I'm usually too busy."

"Oh."

Desperate to revive the fading light of interest in his eyes, Jen added, "But my parents go quite often. They're even planning a trip for next weekend. I'm considering going."

"Wow! You're lucky." He signalled the waiter over. "Arielle, do you want a refill or something to eat?" he asked with a heart-stopping smile.

"You know, I think I'll have a double espresso. They're my favorite." Jen just loved the way the word "espresso" rolled off her tongue.

Bill turned to the waiter. "I'll just have another cup of chocolate-almond."

She tucked a strand of her strawberry-blond hair behind her ear. "Did you know that chocolate triggers the same receptors in your brain as sex?"

"Yeah, I think I read that somewhere before. I wonder if monks and nuns eat a lot of chocolate."

"Oh, I could never be a nun," Jen said, looking embarrassed.

He reached across the table and patted her hand with his gloved right one. "Don't worry. There are lots of other things that you can be."

That sounded like something a schizophrenic would say. "Well, I am thinking of majoring in marketing when I go to college next year." She giggled. "With a minor in men."

He raised his eyebrows. "Where are you thinking of going?"

"What? Oh, Arizona State, or maybe Stanford." Did he like the intellectual type?

"I went to ASU. They have a great business program. I was a finance major, but I took a couple of marketing courses. So, if you have any questions, you know, feel free."

The waiter arrived with their order. Jen poured cream into Bill's cup while wondering what she was supposed to do with the little cup of espresso in front of her. She glanced around casually to see what other people were doing with theirs. Okay, so you were supposed to drink it straight, but what about that little lemon rind on the side? She sipped tentatively, shuddering from the bitterness. Looking for an excuse to push the drink aside, she offered to pour Bill's sugar.

Sheepishly, he watched her spoon sugar into his coffee.

"Thanks, these gloves are a real pain." He stared down at his hands, shaking his head. "I don't know how I let things get this bad."

Jen wondered with alarm if he was going to strangle her here or wait until they got back to the car. There were a few other people in the cafe and he seemed to be an image-concerned guy so hopefully he'd wait.

"I mean, I knew I had a problem back in sixth grade, but I thought that I could handle it," he continued. "I should have gotten help then, but I just kept putting it off." He shook his head. "Just look at me now."

Jen thought that sixth grade seemed to be somewhat of a head

start for a serial killer. Maybe he'd had a horrible home life with a father that beat him and a mother who was a drug dealer. Or maybe, all the kids at school had picked on him. Childhood always seems to mess people up.

From all the movies Jen had seen, she knew that murderers usually revealed their problems to their victims right before they killed them. She took a big gulp of her espresso, blanching at the taste.

"It started with the Lehman account. Designing that building was my big chance to prove to everybody at work that I wasn't some dumb kid fresh out of college." He stirred his coffee clumsily. "I was just so nervous. Before I knew it, I'd just chewed my nails down to the stumps. I couldn't even stop there so my fingers just bled all the time."

"That's why you're wearing gloves," Jen said, disappointed. How could someone this well-dressed and handsome to be something as un-glamorous as a compulsive nail-biter?

"Yeah, this is my third pair. I bit right through the other two," he confided.

"Oh." She supposed this meant that she wasn't going to be on the eleven o'clock news tonight. But she couldn't discount the fact that he still had a killer smile.

"Look, I'm sorry. We came here to talk about you and here I am just going off about my problems."

"No, not at all." Jen knew she'd been playing way out of this guy's league. The compulsive shopper bit or even the dysfunctional family story probably would have worked better. She was still learning, though. "How long do you think it'll take for your fingers to heal?"

"They tell me a couple of weeks." His hands rested limp on the table. He stared at the point where his gloves met the sleeves of his coat. "I hope I'll have this under control by then."

"Did you know that you can buy a bitter-tasting, clear nail polish?" Jen asked. "It's supposed to keep you from biting your nails. I've heard that it works."

"I did hear something about it, but I've never tried it." He clasped his hands. "Do you think that it would work on me?"

Jen nodded. Tracing the rim of her cup with her forefinger, she said, "You know, they sell that stuff in the drug stores at the mall. Why don't we stop there on our way back?"

"You wouldn't mind?"

"Not at all." Leaning in anxiously, she lowered her voice. "I love going to the mall so much it's almost scary."

"Well, if you're sure it's not a problem, Arielle."

"Positive." She smiled. "Oh, and by the way, my friends call me Jen."



A Midterm and A Paper

By Chris Bowers

It was a swivel chair
and I'm sure I looked pretty
ridiculous sitting on it, the
chair of chairs which, as a child,
transfixes you into spinning
and spinning and spinning.
A midterm and a paper,
petty things but still I was tense,
and it actually turned out
to be surprisingly relaxing
to see the ceiling
and the room twist around me,
and to notice how by moving my arms
and legs a certain way I could
keep spinning, longer, forever,
like the dreams I had as a child
about flying, jumping
and not landing, sailing
over my neighborhood and over
cities and oceans and towns
and knowing how to move my arms and
legs a certain way to stay
airborne, thus proving to anyone who
saw me that I was not falling
or jumping, and that I was,
in fact, doing much much more.

Prophet Junkie

By Erin Gorman

"The prophets are everywhere, man, everywhere. It's the masses that got no religion, so they're blind. But you know. You see."

James lights another cigarette and does the Thorzine shake so the ashes sprinkle his beard like snow on asphalt. I smile and nod and don't say anything because I can never tell how he might react. Sometimes he's real cool and relaxed and other times he goes into a froth and then we don't see him for hours.

The smoke lingers in a halo around his head. James looks like an extra straight out of "The Ten Commandments", with his long black hair and beard. He is painfully familiar. I try not to look at him.

"Fucking, it's here and no one can see it. Blood like a river and the locusts of the soul and it's eating my brain, man. I'm unclean. God sees your filth."

He is glaring at me and I feel his eyes. Deep down I can feel him staring. If there were a place to run, I would. I am committed here. I can't run anymore.

"You know, don't you, whore? God got you, man. Put you in this purgatory, didn't he?" James screams at me from across the room. The others don't blink or breathe. They are suspended and unanimated. I suppose they are grateful they are not the target of James' wrath.

Alita is next to me and she sees the tears falling down my face. She takes the corner of her robe and wipes my cheek. Alita always has this comforting smell: a combination of fabric softener and cigarette smoke.

"James," she says, "I think we all of us got dirty linen, but it ain't none of your affair. Now leave the chile alone."

Alita is a strong woman despite her occasional bouts with depression. I admire her and wish I could learn from her strength, but I do not envy her. She is married to an army doctor, a massive Japanese-American with biceps the size of watermelons. The contusions and cuts on her face and back are precise and uniform: he is very efficient.

Despite her hard marriage she still manages to be friend and mother to me. We share a room in the south corridor, which is for the not-so-crazy lunatics. On Sundays and Tuesdays her children come to visit and since I am not permitted visitors for another two weeks they have adopted me into their family. On the off-days, we spend hours together, mostly in the smoking lounge with the others. Our only connection to the other patients is our mingling of

smoke. We have very little to say to them, except for Laura, who exchanges recipes and food gossip with Alita occasionally. As for the rest, Alita refuses to talk to a "soul who can't stay upright in their own chair."

I smile at Alita. I never have to thank her. She just smiles back and says, "Chile, I know."

But James has decided to ignore "Satan's witch," his pet name for Alita. He stares at me and lights another cigarette to add to his snowy beard.

"Do you think God knows your heart? Do you?"

Alita smashes her cigarette into the tray. "Now James, I told you to leave her be."

She smiles at me and says, "Chile, go get me one of my smokes."

I exit the room in a leap. It's not my turn to go light our cigarettes, but I use this as an opportunity to escape the lounge prophet.

The lone cigarette lighter is attached to a metal dog leash at the nurses station which is staffed by Nurse Margaret. All our "toys" as she calls them, like soap and cigarettes, are located in the station. To shower we must sign out our dangerous toiletries and return them within twenty minutes. This is so none of us attempt hara-kiri with a toothbrush or swallow mass quantities of shampoo. We are a much feared group.

I never mind doing favors for Alita, but lighting cigarettes for her is a hassle. She will only smoke Salem lights. Everyone else is doled out some harsh generic brand, but not Alita. After a major reaming-out from the head nurse, she now receives her daily pack of Salem lights, but not without Nurse Margaret bitching at me every time I go to the station.

I light the two cigarettes that dangle from my mouth. Nurse Margaret looks at me, her eyes just above the counter, and drones, "You shouldn't smoke like that. It will stunt your growth."

I grunt, in a feminine way, and return to the lounge where James spots me immediately. I try not to, but I tremble with fear and anticipation.

"I bet you went to Catholic school, didn't you? I bet you were so good and nice and pure and fucked boys on the bathroom floor! Didn't you? You fucking whore! Salome!"

James is headed for my chair. I'm holding two cigarettes; Alita's seat is empty. I feel crucified to my chair; James is drooling in my direction. A string descends from his beard and lands in my lap. I am too scared to be disgusted.

"Look at you, you whore! You are the whore that rides the beast. Your hair is black with the soot of hell and your skin is red with the blood of God's people," James continues, his voice

pounding like a hammer.

"You fucking prostitute! Did they bring you here from the streets? I'm going to wipe you out. Wipe out the devil's whore!"

I look up and see James before me, a prophet of mirrors, and I am crumbling before him. God is watching.

"JAMES!!!"

But so is Alita.

"Leave her alone!" Alita sits down next to me, territorial, motherly.

James starts to twitch and then stops, struck by some profundity. "I gotta piss."

He shuffles out of the mist and I wait until he is out of sight to start toward my room. Our room is down the hall which is a good thing since I can taste the vomit in my mouth as I reach the toilet.

After I purge my sins into the pot, I fall on the floor and weep. I know God hates me. Father always said that God knows our sins; we can't hide from God. He was in the seminary; he should know. I never deserved an almost-priest for a father. There is so much pressure in being a good little Catholic girl born with a rosary in her mouth. I am so ashamed.

Lying on the floor I know how Judas Iscariot must feel, eternally pinned to the floor of Hell. Forever exposed and expelled. I understand the abandonment and the confusion that comes from being confronted with one's sins and challenged to run from them. Poor Judas--the patron saint of suicidals.

Alita comes into the room, the light from the hallway gathering behind her. "Chile, what are you doin' on the floor?" She helps me up and sits next to me on the bed. She smiles. She is always smiling like she knows a joke no one else knows. It makes her look beautiful.

"Alita," I say, "He was...and I...I mean...why are you here? You don't belong here with us. I don't understand."

"Honey, what would you do if I weren't here? You would be hiding in that bathroom for sure." She laughs a moment, then stops. "Now listen to me. Don't nobody tell me what to do because it's my life. And that's your answer. That man o' mine wants me dead and I ain't gonna let it be. Here I'm safe. And with their grandmother, my children are safe. And I goin' to stay here as long as I have to."

Alita's face beams with fierce determination. I throw my arms around her, not for her sake but mine. I need her.

Alita puts her arm around my shoulder and I feel safe. "You know," she says, "we the only sane ones in here. Including them doctors and nurses."

"You're fine, Alita. I'm not. I've never been all right. I'm

fucked in the head. I'm being punished. I have to be here." I feel myself start to cry but stop, determined not to cry anymore.

Alita grabs me and says, "That's all James talkin'. Not you. There ain't a thing wrong with you but a lot of pain. That's all." We talk for an hour or more and I feel strong enough to go back to the lounge. James is gone. Alita leans over and whispers that they took him away for his electro-shock therapy which means he won't be back for days.

The next three days are the best ones I have had since I arrived at the hospital. Alita makes me attend all the functions like volleyball and art therapy. We make ceramic kittens for Alita's daughter and a football player for her son. Laura makes ceramic pastries and gives me a chocolate doughnut. Alita and I get kicked out of movement therapy for laughing at the instructor. He says our attitudes are not positive. So Alita and I have the smoking lounge to ourselves. Everyone is jealous. This evening her daughter brought us Ben and Jerry's and we talked until way past our nine o'clock curfew.

I couldn't sleep because I ate so much ice cream so I walk down to the lounge to sit and think. The door is open and I can hear a voice. James is inside conversing with the wall. I cannot run fast enough to my room. Alita hears me fall on the bed and cry and she rolls over and whispers, "Chile, I know."

At six o'clock she wakes me to go to breakfast. "I know you ain't asleep, so don't try this one on me." She shakes me until I agree to get out of bed.

I dread going and facing James, but meals here are not worth being missed. Firstly, if I don't go I have to listen to a never ending sermon about how eighty-six pounds is not a healthy weight and how I have to adhere to my doctors plans if I ever want to leave. But more importantly, there is Laura and her passion for food.

Laura is a flabby three hundred pounds, and despite the efforts of the staff to control her weight, she insists that she can eat whatever she wants, in as large a quantity as she desires. Confrontations with her usually end in food fights surpassing those of pubescent children. Today's would go down in history as the Great Chocolate Eclair Massacre.

Alita and I join the others and file down the series of electrically locked doors that lead to the cafeteria. We are escorted by ten nurses and orderlies. No matter how much they try, they cannot deny that this is a hell for sinners on earth.

We pass through the serving line and sit on the "A" side, which is not to be confused with the "B" side, which is for people who can drink coffee. Alita and I sit at the end of the table where we are privy to the activities of those in the room. Alita whispers "Chile, I know somethin' gonna happen today," and winks. She

nudges me to eat and keep watch. Alita is the instigator in the group. I am her sidekick.

Laura stays at the end of the line and goes slowly through the service area, stalking her food, eying the guards at the exit. Alita and I watch with great anticipation her next move, our forks suspended between mouth and plate.

In one thundering leap she attacks the pastry line. One éclair after the other, she shoves them into her mouth, not even pausing to chew. Alita stands up and screams, "Go! Go girl!" There is cream oozing down her face, and she keeps eating while fending off nurses from all directions.

"I can eat whatever I want! You are just jealous. Get off of me! Leave me alone!" Laura throws doughnuts at them and chocolate is flying everywhere. Nurse Margaret waddles over and strikes Laura's ass with a huge needle.

The orderlies take Laura away and we are ordered to resume our breakfast, the battle over, with a decided loss on the part of the eclairs.

Nurse Margaret comes over to our table, her face red and stern. "I don't appreciate you two provoking her like that. I expected more of you."

"Maybe if you just let us alone we wouldn't need to provoke anyone," Alita says without looking at her. She then resumes her breakfast and Nurse Margaret waddles away indignantly. She has almost reached the door when James stops her.

"You just gonna let them go, man? The devil's advocates, you just gonna let them go?" James is shaking his spoon at her. "You gonna let the whore and her nigger friend just be?" Nurse Margaret rolls her eyes and passes through the door that locks behind her.

James walks over to our table and leans over it, his beard with all its ashes in my face. I shake and can feel the room spinning. I am fixated upon his beard. I see that beard everywhere, with the snow and the long black hair. It followed me home from the playground that evening, it followed me through high school and it followed me to this hospital. I don't know where it came from. I was alone in the playground, and it was snowing, it was so peaceful. It wasn't my fault. I couldn't stop him. He had his fist in my mouth, and I couldn't stop him, even as I tried to rip out his black hair. I couldn't stop him and he left me with blood running down my legs, covered in snow. It wasn't my fault.

"Whore, you gonna drag us all to hell, man. You are our doom you slut!"

James is frothing at the mouth. Something is gonna happen, I just know it.

"You leave her alone, James. You hear me?" Alita holds my hand tightly.

"Why do you protect her, nigger? We all know what she's done. We all know who she is."

I do not understand. Maybe it's because I beat up that girl in the third grade for calling me a nerd. Or maybe it's because I hated my parents for trying to make me a saint when all I wanted to be was a normal little girl. Or maybe it's because I wrote secret hate letters to B.J., who would beat me up in the school yard, and then when he died, I was happy. Maybe I was wrong, but it wasn't my fault. I feel myself start to wilt.

Alita sees me start to crumble and squeezes my hand and whispers, "There ain't nothing wrong with you. Don't let him do this. Don't you let him."

James keeps preaching and I feel like I'm flying off a merry-go-round.

"You would rape Jesus, wouldn't you?" he shouts. I let go of Alita's hand and fly out of the playground. I can barely see James anymore. I can't hear him.

"FUCK OFF! FUCK OFF! JUST SHUT UP! SHUT UP!"

I kick over chairs and push food trays out of the way because I want to strangle him. I know I'm running toward him but I don't feel like I'm getting any closer.

I can't stop screaming and I feel myself being carried away, my voice still screeching.

When I wake up Alita is sitting next to me on the bed and she hands me a glass of milk like a very cup of salvation. She whispers, "Chile, I know." I just smile.

Soundless Memo

By Kevin Hill

Claude saw the mime every day, sharing the elevator with his painted face and mocking pleasantries. He even knew his name, only because they had shared a drink together at the Dugout on Fifth and Manor. Lloyd Anson, that was it. They had met accidentally, killing a couple Heinekens while the Red Wings handed it to the Devils. It wasn't that night that had turned him against Lloyd, not even when he admitted that he had no clue who Steve Yzerman was.

In fact, the problems didn't occur until Claude had checked his E-mail at the university, adjusting the chair's hydraulics until his slouching frame met the keyboard. Two messages flashed on the monitor, one from Dr. Kinner, another marked from a user named LANSON. The Kinner piece was bullshit, a status report from his thrilling night class, HIST 341: The Black Death and its Legacy. LANSON's was typically cryptic, a personal note from the mime. He had entered the network through a statistics class and discovered Claude in the user listing. A short memo with all the personality of embalming fluid.

The next two weeks brought three more messages from LANSON and a personal visit. The mime had woken him up on Sunday, interrupting a hangover by braving the dim hallway that separated their apartments. His wire limbs had curled up on Claude's tan leather sofa, his black eyes jumping about the room while Claude staggered across the stained linoleum in the kitchenette. LANSON's throat tensed, a sign that the frail lips wanted to speak.

"I need a favor. My Internet account is finished, ended with my class on Friday. I still have a use for the network, though. I was wondering if you would mind posting a message for me?" His sleek eyebrows flashed up, teeth set to hiss his thanks.

Claude swigged coffee from the shaking Intel mug in his left hand. "I guess so. I mean, if you want to send it elsewhere I'll need usernames, colleges. What do you need sent?"

Lloyd's shoulders writhed once, then settled in an asymmetrical hunch. Bony fingers twisted pallid lips, shaping them into a hesitant response. "I...can't really say. Or, I'd rather not, if you prefer a precise answer. Of course you do, you're a computer man." Claude held his eyes blank, forcing the mime to squeeze his

hands together and continue.

"Not that it's illicit, illegal. Not at all. No, it's only a brief goodbye to some of the people I've met on the system. It's somewhat personal, I tend to get emotional at partings. Do you understand now? I'll give it to you on hardcopy and you just zip it onto Internet. That simple. Will you do me this minor service?" Another arching of eyebrows, this time accompanied by a finger caressing his gaunt neck.

Claude agreed, eager to rid his apartment of the smirking neighbor who seemed as if he would never perspire. Lloyd left after writing down the usernames of his network buddies. Claude sat for another fifteen minutes, reading the long list of people that deserved a personal farewell from his effeminate acquaintance. He set the problem aside, laying it on top of the pile of magazines that had covered his coffee table for months.

In three days the mime had returned with his memo, leaving Claude standing in his doorway with a square disk and the faint odor of Obsession. LANSON had been a cornered animal, nervous twitches destroying his mouth and forcing his head to lean sideways like a confused dog. Claude tapped the floppy against his thigh, watching the thin figure glide back to apartment 416.

It took Claude another four days to return to the computer lab and claim his own sterile cube. Lloyd's file wouldn't copy to the mainframe, the monitor blankly stating that the file format was incompatible. Claude shifted through other programs, disk maintenance files and diagnostics, trying to discover the error's origin. Unable to question the disk, he booted the word processor to examine the memo. The screen blinked as he opened the file, ticking away the brief pause with fingernail taps on the keyboard.

Suddenly, the message shot across the screen, lines dropping down like closing a venetian blind. He blinked once, then squinted through a sleepy film at glowing words. &HY(FM::::\$324^ ^&. Garbage. The whole file read like Gertrude Stein on acid, jumbled characters that stretched on for seventy lines. Turning off the terminal, Claude felt his nerves pulling the corners of his mouth, stroking the stress of his spine. Memories of Robert Morris flickered across the CRT of his mind, a Cornell graduate student destroying Internet's intricacies with binary botulism. Slipping from the cubicle, Claude thought of his paper on the bubonic plague, slowly erased by LANSON's cool, glittering smile.

Two knocks on the door, right below the brass numbers which designated apartment 416. It swung in, revealing Lloyd in his work

clothes, white makeup still evident and black tights surreal. Mylar balloons flitted through the dimness behind him, signs that the criminal mime had performed at a birthday today. LANSON started to twitch, his movements mocking Claude's anger due to his comic appearance. He seemed intrigued and disturbed, his face shifting between scowls and peering intensity. Claude held the disk before his face, waving it slightly for emphasis.

"There's a problem with this file. It won't load, only spits out shit when I try to coax it up. I need to know what the hell is going on. I spent five weeks on a paper for that Kinner bastard and if your little game is going to fuck it up, I think I ought to know a bit about what your plans are, don't you?" He shifted his weight onto his heels, stuffing one hand in his ski jacket and waiting for explanations.

The mime faltered, replenishing his reserved manner with a broad smile. "Well, come in and let's see if we can sort this out. I may have the answer to our problem, at least, I may have one answer." The thin man turned, his back inviting Claude to follow him into the dimly lit room. Lloyd settled himself before a computer, flicking on the monitor and calling up his file editor. Claude watched the long fingers spatter the keyboard, lighting on keys with the confidence of a typist. Pulling a wire Ikea chair, Claude sat behind the mime and watched as he manipulated files on the screen.

Claude cleared his throat and spoke in cynical tones. "That isn't a word processor. Advanced file editors like that are only used for deeper things, programs that require security and access codes. What are you trying to accomplish? Don't you realize what viral infections mean to an organism like Internet?"

"Yes." Lloyd turned, his chair swiveling until he faced his guest. "I'm afraid I haven't been quite honest with you, Claude. I hope you'll understand, I mean, about not knowing what I was asking of you. I didn't think you'd help if I told you the truth, at least, I couldn't be sure."

A shift in posture accompanied Claude's response, a move that promised violent action. "Maybe you should try now."

"I suppose so. Of course, I didn't anticipate a problem with the file transfer. Without that oversight, the file would have spread immediately, entering systems across the country. I didn't have to send it everywhere, only those network stations which handled the most traffic. My program would be picked up and passed along, a parasite in the matrix, hmm?" The mime paused to light an

Indonesian Clove before continuing. "The program itself is a composite virus, a leech file that combines many virus characteristics currently on the market. I didn't invent anything new, only combined the old standards in a new way. This makes it invisible to virus scans."

The data took several seconds to clear Claude's brain, shaking him from his fixed stare. "Why in my name?" Sarcasm colored his words. "Do you hate me that much because of the damn Yzerman thing?"

Lloyd paused, adjusted his expression to quiet apathy. "Why your name? Well, they removed my access after they caught me examining mainframe security files. You're the only other person whom I know well enough to ask. Nothing personal, of course." The bland and tired face vanished, replaced by a tilted grin.

Claude analyzed the new information, letting it trickle coldly through his mind. "You bastard. Not only are you raping the electronic community, you're fucking up my access and projects. Didn't you give a thought to what this could do to the system, to other people's interests? Why the hell are you doing this?"

"Why?" LANSON looked at him as if he questioned the law of gravity. "I rarely speak so much, allow me a brief flame." Claude had heard the word before, a cyberpunk term that described the personal monologues left on E-mail. He leaned forward, unable to think of an acceptable excuse and wondering how to handle the twisted mime. LANSON resettled his face, resolving it into a pious, chalky expression.

"Because it is creation, it is the driving rush that has pushed man from cave wall to clay, and onward to fractal graphics. I might be called arrogant, egotistical. Who would place himself high enough to tamper with the religion of tomorrow, the digital network? I must create, that is in my nature. Unable to improve, I must degrade the systems, interfering with their progress to demonstrate my ability. You look at me as a lunatic, a man possessed by the need to express himself. They are all insane, creators: poets, sculptors, even gods. Only in imperfection can perfection be realized and appreciated. That is the reason I threaten the structure. Do you understand now?"

Claude fingered the zipper on his coat, twisting the problem in his mind. He began to pace, decided against it and settled on a sofa. "I can't accept that. What you're proposing is sabotage, not art. The process of creation doesn't involve the destruction of order and organization. It only relies on the desire to improve the

human condition."

Lloyd's face became stark again, pale lines illuminated by the deflected desk light. "Trust me when I say that you have the right concepts in mind. However, one must attack convention occasionally, threaten the order with chaos to test for impurities, weaknesses. I only seek to knock the digital audience around, refresh their tired minds and watering eyes. Information must remain free, decentralized for public consumption. The news is stagnating, becoming smug with its global reach. I cannot allow this to occur. It is abhorrent to me as an artist, to any artist. The barriers must be pushed, destroyed and redefined again. This virus will solve problems by creating them. When I expose the minor deficiencies in the network, the corrections will strengthen the whole system. That's worth a few moments of anarchy, isn't it?" The mime's speech had pulled him to his feet. Finishing his plea, he drifted to the sofa and coiled on the open cushion.

Claude observed the mime tracing the emotions on his face, watching for a fracture in his resolve. Unable to resist the dangling hook, Claude frowned, then nodded. "Perhaps."

LANSON's hand began to slowly smooth the nylon arm of Claude's coat. The mime's touch chilled Claude, his fingers trailing lightly, filling in the silence behind his words. "I can't tell you how important this is to me, to my dreams. Without this program, Internet will continue to degrade until it becomes a bureaucracy, as impotent as any government alive." His hand climbed the sleeve until the slim, white fingers were caressing Claude's neck. "Surely, you understand the danger in this?"

Claude nodded, pulling away from LANSON's touch. The pallid hand fluttered briefly in mid-air, then fell to the sofa. Wetness covered Claude's brow, his skin trying to hide beneath a film of sweat.

The mime smiled, rising from the couch in a fluid motion and stepping again to the computer. His hands danced across the keyboard, contrasting his slim and erect form standing motionless before the screen. He produced a disk, turning to Claude and allowing his eyes to whisper his happiness. "There. That eliminates all copies of the program which I have on disk. The final copy," he said with a weak smile, "is now lying in your hands." He transferred the disk to Claude, placing it on his palm as if it were a wounded sparrow.

Claude rose, wiping invisible grime from his flesh. "I understand your point now, I suppose. Anyway, the whole point of this

process is just to shake the system, give it a kick. Maybe things are too sedate. I guess it won't do any harm." He slipped the disk into his pocket. "Besides, I can access the mainframe without using my username. I could just creep in through the group password." He turned, backing towards the door. Lloyd followed him, slipping the door shut to hide his loose grin.

Hours later, Claude sat at his computer, staring at the list of commands that lay across the screen before him. He scanned the lines, silently mouthing the commands that he understood. The virus was complex, a composite of many programs that had lately tainted the network. He swirled the contents of the coffee mug, checking for grinds with blatant disinterest. The clock slipped the digital numbers past him, slowly turning the sky outside to gray. He wrestled with the program, hoping to find the lines that would provoke him to action. He remembered LANSON, his black eyes trying to seek out assistance, his pale flesh stretched around his skull. A silent man in white skin, looking for respect in the hatred of others, trying to upset the system. He could dump the program onto the network tomorrow, giving his acquaintance the anonymous fame he desired. He had already backed up his paper, already prepared to violate Internet and leave the system with a scorching virus and, in LANSON's mind, a valuable lesson.

His fingers called up a menu and, stretching his back to relieve the cramping muscles, caressed the key that deleted the program.

AFTER IRELAND, PART 1

By Alan McCabe

Dear Mom and Dad,

There's a lot I've never told you, and since Ireland you haven't had Sean to fill you in on things, so I guess you must be pretty tired of being in the dark. So I have a lot to tell you, and this is my last opportunity.

No one was more surprised than I when, for Sean's college graduation/my high school graduation, you gave us the tickets to Ireland. Until then, I was convinced you'd written us off as helpless idiots. Then you gave us these tickets, told us to go off and have a great time, and I was blown away. Remember how many times Sean thanked you guys, all the words of gratitude and appreciation? I hope you noticed that I stood next to him, nodding my head emphatically after everything he said.

Jesus. Sean. Never at a loss for words. I remember one afternoon after his classes he came home, went to his room, and threw his books on the floor so loudly I could hear it from my room. I walked across the hall and stood in his doorway.

"Hi," I said and pointed at his books.

"Goddamn cunt," he said and scratched his neck.

"Uh-oh," I said.

"Okay, so this guy I know on campus is giving a tour of the campus to some prospectives and their parents, right? I'm walking to my class and the tour guide guy yells to me, 'I want cigarettes, Nurse Ratchet!' Recognizing the allusion, I turn around, you know, smile and wave, and he says, 'Hey Sean! Where you off to?' 'Interpersonal,' I tell him. So he tells his tour group, 'Sean is one of our most visible Comm. Arts majors.' Which is news to me. He says, 'Sean was just in an excellent version of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, and he was awesome.' So I'm about to thank him when one of the kid's moms or grandmoms or whatever puts her hands on her knees and crouches down to my level to say, 'Don't tell me YOU go to college already?' So I say, 'Kay. I won't.' 'Well, DO you?' she asks. 'Ma'am,' I say, 'you've put me in kind of a bind here. If I'm to answer you truthfully, I'd have to tell you what you just requested I not tell you.' Her face got red, and she frowned. The tour guide guy sorta shrugged apologetically at me, then they were off. Bastards made me late for class."

His story made me angry. I hated when people assumed we were children, most of all because when it happened to me, I could never come up with a suitable comeback in time.

"I don't -- I mean the guy said, and still --"

"I know, Rob, I know. The tour guide guy made it clear that I was a student there, and when I talk I like to at least think, though

I don't have the most stentorian voice, that I sound like a twenty-one year old talking. Like vocabulary, and just the way I carry myself. But people see what they want to see. She saw a ten year old or whatever walking across campus and no amount of subtle or unsubtle hints to the contrary were gonna convince her that I wasn't a child. Oh well."

But back to Ireland. We had a great two weeks. That tour you set us up with was pretty cool; it travelled all through Ireland--we went through about three different counties every day and spent every night at a different hotel. And the scenery, Jesus Christ. Green green green everywhere.

The people on the bus with us were...well, they were all idiots. Real nice idiots. It was a small group, like fifteen on a bus that could fit fifty, so we could always spread out. The tour group was all older people--couples, widows and widowers, and they gave Sean and me all the "Where are your parents?" and "Aren't you scared in a big country all by yourselves?" bullshit (to which Sean replied Ireland's not all that big as countries go, and we weren't alone--we were together). After a day or two they caught on to the fact that we were eighteen and twenty-one.

They really were idiotic, though. Made you embarrassed to be American. None of them knew a thing about Ireland, just the cliched stuff. They'd say things like, "Paddy, where can I grab hold of a leprechaun?" and "Paddy, that little Irish couple standing in that doorway are so CUTE! Could we stop for a picture?" Paddy was the Irish tour guide. Paddy Plunkett. He was cool. Witty and patient with these idiotic Americans. He had all these great jokes and he told them like they'd actually happened to him; he had all the Americans thinking they were real stories. Like this one:

"A couple of years ago there was this one frightful old lady who'd brought her rather disagreeable little poodle on the tour. That particular tour group was a crowded one. There was one man, God bless him, a veteran with a limp, who'd usually be the last to get back on the bus, don't you know. And every time this happened, the one remaining seat on the bus would invariably be next to the woman with the poodle. Only she would let her poodle sit on the seat next to her as opposed to on her lap or what have you. He would ask the old lady, 'Ma'am, I wonder if the poodle could sit on your lap so I might have a seat? I have this war injury, you see, and standing on the bus is dreadfully tiresome.' She, with the face of a constipated ferret, would reply, 'No, sir. Foofy paid for her own ticket and so Foofy gets her own seat. It's not Foofy's fault that you can't get back to your seat in time, now is it?' Well, the gentleman put up with this idiosyncratic behavior, and stood for the rest of the trip. This happened all of five times. Till one day the tour came to the Ring of Kerry, and the whole time off the bus,

Foofy was nipping at the gentleman's heels, causing him more discomfort than his war wound had ever given him. Back on the bus, last as always, the gentleman said to the old lady, 'Ma'am, Foofy has been nipping at my heels all day. I am certain you will concede that this is aberrant doggie behavior. I wonder if, as a small punishment for her anti-social attitude, Foofy might be relegated to your lap, and I might enjoy the seat next to you?' And don't you know that the old lady gave him her customary answer, no, no, no, no! And so, the gentleman picked the poodle up off the seat, walked to the front of the bus, and pitched the dog out the door! Ladies and gentlemen, I blew my stack. I said to the man, 'You Americans come here and you use all the wrong words for things, you use your forks and knives with the wrong hands, you drive on the wrong side of the road, and now you've gone and thrown the wrong bitch out the door!'"

As the bus gasped, Sean and I laughed our asses off. The delivery! The timing! And the best thing, for me, was that I could tell he was gonna become one of those recurring characters, one of those family legends. I could just picture Paddy Plunkett coming up at the dinner table for years to come. I wish you coulda met this guy, or coulda seen Sean go on about him. He had a great impersonation of him, too. He had Paddy Plunkett nailed.

Another guy we met who was pretty amazing was a fifty-some year old dairy farmer named Michael Flannery. He lived in County Kerry. What a lot of farmers do in Ireland, to earn a little extra money, is take in tourists, give them tea and a tour of the farm and their home. So Mr. Flannery showed us around the farm, and we learned all about dairy farming in Ireland. They have this quota system; it had just been instituted when we were there, and the farmers are only allowed to own a certain amount of cows based on the farm's acreage. There's a maximum amount of milk they're allowed to produce, which means there's a maximum amount of money they're allowed to make on their dairy farming. Mr. Flannery had two kids to send to college, so to earn the extra money, he and his wife hosted tourists.

For a farmer with no tour guide experience, this guy was amazing, real cordial. He took us into the parlor, and we all sat down on couches as he stood before the fireplace and told us the Flannery family history. He could trace his roots back to when Cromwell invaded Ireland. Then he pointed to the room behind us and said, "Every member of the Flannery family was born right there in that room. I was born in that room, my brothers and sister were born in that room, and our parents and uncles were born in there, as well as their parents before them. And there's a room down the hall where almost all of the family has gone to die, when the time has come. But what I've always found strange is that my

father, when he knew his time was nigh...well, he went into that room behind you, and he lay on the bed and he died in there. He died in the room where we were all born. I have always found that strange."

He went on to tell us how he saw life as a road. When you're young, you always look ahead, and you want to run as fast as you can forward. But when you get older, you want to look over your shoulder now and then, and see where you've been. At his age, he wished he could just start walking backwards, but of course he couldn't. Then he said how happy it makes him when he realizes he has his wife and two children and dozens of cousins down the road. He said, "I've got a son to pass the farm onto, and over the years, that's all we Flannery men could hope for. Someone to pass the farm and some pleasant memories on to. You know?"

Sean went up to the guy afterwards and told him how much he admired him for taking in stupid Americans and sharing these huge chunks of his personal life with us. He didn't put it quite like that; in fact, I remember noting at the time that it was one of Sean's particularly eloquent moments. Mr. Flannery kinda messed up Sean's hair, what was left of it at the time, and told him he was a brilliant little lad, which discouraged Sean, I could tell, and made me furious.

On the last day of the tour, as you know, we visited the Cliffs of Moher, and I remember every word that passed between Sean and me that day. I want to tell you what he and I talked about that day.

Sean and I got off the bus and walked toward the Cliffs. There's a stone walkway that turns into a steep stairway, and there's a stone wall to the left. A yard beyond that, there's the edge of the Cliffs and the Atlantic about a thousand feet below. You get the spray of the sea whipping in your ear as you walk up the stairs, and these two minute rainstorms will happen out of nowhere, and then the sun will be out. Plus you have about one hundred other people, most not speaking English, walking up the stairs beside you. At the highest point, there are castle ruins. Sean and I took the stairs pretty slowly, taking a lot of breaks, because it was tiring for us.

We climbed the stairs in silence for awhile. Then, out of nowhere, Sean said, "You're a really good writer, Rob."

I was about to thank him.

"No need to thank me. It's a fact. I'm stating a fact. You're a published writer. Your stories have been published in magazines."

"Well -- just one," I blurted out.

"Hm?"

"Umm, I, just one. Um, magazine. You said magazines. One magazine published two of my stories. And it was just some

student writing magazine."

"But it was a national magazine. You've been nationally published. Twice."

"Kay."

"I wish I could get published. I'm always sending stuff out. Constantly. And those two stories--they were like the only things, you sent out, right? Right?" I nodded. "Jesus. How did you do that? Did you know somebody on the staff or something?"

"Hey."

"Sorry," he said. "I'm sure they were published because they were excellent stories. It's just...what's wrong with my writing?"

I had an answer. But it was a very long one, and I did not trust myself to be able to articulate it correctly and tactfully.

Another thing I never told him was how much I admired his discipline. Did you know he used to write from eight a.m. to eleven a.m. everyday before classes? He used to send off a story every Wednesday. I knew he had a pretty rigid writing schedule, but I did not know how impressive it was till afterwards. I went through all his computer disks and his files. He kept a log of all the things he sent off, and to what publications. And then he's got this manila folder filled with about three hundred rejection letters.

"Sean," I said. "I, umm. I've never been able to...like..."

"Speak for yourself, I know. But that's our thing. I do the talking for you, and you do the...oooh, I see what you're saying. You're writing boy and I'm talking boy. Okay..." It wasn't the point I was about to make, but I let him roll with it. "But I want to be writing boy. I mean, what can talking boy do? I mean, I like to act, but look at me for Chrissake. I look about ten years old. There's no place for an actor who looks ten. They gave me parts in college 'cause they needed the actors. Shit. I WANT TO BE ABLE TO WRITE!!" He said it so loud, it echoed off the cliffs, and tourists, English-speaking and otherwise, turned and stared.

"Goddamnit," he muttered. "You have anything to say to that?"

"..."

"Of course you don't." He scratched the back of his neck. "I'm an asshole. I'm sorry, Rob. I'm sorry I'm being an asshole."

I shrugged. I always felt any frustration he directed at me was deserved. I always meant to thank him for not getting fed up with me more often than he did.

"You're my best friend," he told me. "I like having you around. It's like talking to myself, but in a good way. I always know what you mean, and I'm there to say it for you. We're the team. We're the short guys. We get shit on together. These stairs are a bitch."

We sat down on the stone wall. Something occurred to me.

"Did Mom tell you?" I asked him.

"You're gonna have to be a little more specific, boss. Did Mom tell me what?"

There were two things to tell him. I mentally eenie meenie minie moed. "I'm...ummm...I'm, I'm, I'm --"

He stared at the ground and made that gesture that talk show directors make when the host has to wrap things up quick. It struck me as funny, and I laughed.

"I'm going to college," I said.

"Of course you are. I know that. You'll like college. It's cool. It'll give you good ideas. For stories and songs. Pick a good schedule, so we can still record in the evenings, like when I get back from work and you --"

"No, no, no, Sean. I'm going I mean, I'm living at college."

He looked at me for quite a long time. "You kidding?" he asked.

"Ummm. It's--no."

"Well, then, you're nuts. Come on, you're not living at college. I'll never see you for Chrissake. Commute, like I did, for you. For us. We're the short guys, for crying out loud, and you're the silent one. The silent one can't go off without his voice. Come on, Rob. It's our thing, we're the two guys. We just GO together, and we get shit on together, come on. We gotta stick together. Humiliation loves company. Humiliation needs company. Chrissake, Rob."

I had to tell him the other thing. I started to pull my hair out. "Sean, they, I, um, I, I, it's, they, I --"

"Rob, Rob, slow down." He put his arm on my shoulder. "Deep breath. What are you trying to say?"

Deep breath. "Protropin."

"Huh?"

"This drug. They're gonna start me on it. It'll make me grow. See, my bones haven't, umm, fused like yours have. So I can still grow. They have this new drug."

As you know, Mom and Dad, we had found out about this just before Sean and I departed, and we didn't know when or whether or how we should tell Sean. Well, I told him. On a wall in Ireland.

"It won't work, Rob. They told me the same thing years ago; they said there was this drug, it'll make you grow, but it turned out it didn't work on kids with our disease, so they never gave it to me. They're just gonna tell you, oops, we forgot it won't work for you."

I shook my head. "I, ummmm, I asked them that. I remembered that happened to you, and I asked. This is a different, new drug. It works on kids like us; it's been, ummmm, like, tested. They're very positive this will work for me."

"Yeah, but, what, you'll grow a couple centimeters, right?"

"Ummm...the doctor said I have a very good shot at being average height. I could grow like eleven inches, be 5 foot 6 maybe."

We sat there silently for about thirty days. Chins in hands, swinging our feet, which were several inches above the ground. I pictured being able to sit on that wall and have my feet touch the ground. Then I felt very guilty thinking that thought right next to my brother, who was, beginning at that very moment, because of me, totally alone in the world.

"Let's go to the top of the hill and see the Cliff," he said in the quietest voice I'd ever heard him use.

We walked slowly to the top of the hill, sat back on the wall and peered down at the Atlantic a thousand feet below. Sean said, "Remember that goddamn national spelling bee I was in back in eighth grade?"

"Yes," I said.

"Remember the word I got wrong?"

"Mohair," I said.

"That's right, mohair. I put an "e" in it. Hm. When you were in it, what word did you get wrong?"

"Easelback," I said.

"Easelback. How'd you spell it?"

"I, ummm...like, switched the e and the l. And I knew it was wrong as I was saying it. Just couldn't, ummm, couldn't say it right anyway."

"That'll happen."

My ass was starting to hurt on the wet stone wall. "I'm, ummmm, I'm gonna look at the ruins of Castle Mooher," I told him.

"Mooher sounds like mohair," he said.

I nodded. I scooted off the wall, turned around, took one step toward the castle ruins, took another, a third step, a fourth step. After the fifth step, I heard a chorus of shrieking women; I got this immediate picture of an airplane plummeting towards the Cliffs of Mooher and all the tourists, English-speaking and otherwise, standing along their edge. I turned around, and Sean was not sitting on the wall. I looked left, right, he was nowhere to be seen. There was a crowd of people at the edge of the cliff, some covering their eyes, some pointing to the Atlantic a thousand feet below.

THE LANTERN

PATRONS

Dr. and Mrs. William E. Akin	Joyce Lionarons
Susan M. Allen	Dr. Annette V. Lucas
Alumni Office	Christina M. T. Mahoney
Gretchen Ambach	William J. Middleton
C. Anaya	David H. Mill
Dolores Arnold	Donna Monheit
Paul Bashus	Elizabeth B. Moore
Irene Berkowitz	Lucia and Paul Murphy
Berman Museum of Art	Jeff Neslen
Nicholas O. Berry	Deborah Olson Nolan
Barbara Borris	Frances Novak
Dottie Bowman	Heather O'Neill
Todd and Cara Bowers	Peter Perreten
Richard S. Bremiller	John Pilgrim
Douglas and Nancy Cameron	Bonnie Price
Mona S. Chylack	Sally Rapp
Drs. Robin and Marcia Clouser	Richard and Margot Richter
Marjorie Connor	Carla Mollins Rinde
Vincent E. Coll, Jr.	Jean Rodenberger
Louis DeCatur	Leslie Roes
Richard DiFeliciano	William Rosenthal
Carol Dole	Beth Johnson Ruth
Ross S. Doughty	Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Sabol
Shirley Eaton	Hudson B. Scattergood
Juan Espadas	Kenneth L. Schaefer
Ingrid L. Evans	Patty Schroeder
Financial Aid Office	Jill Leauber Sherman
John and Edwina French	Martha Takats
Collette Hall	Kimberly F. Taylor
Cindy K. Harris	Lynn Thelen
C. Dallet Hemphill	Linda Thiel
Ronald E. Hess	Derk Visser
Auda May Johnson	Jon Volkmer
Margot Kelley	Cheryl D. Walborn
Richard D. King	John Walker
Steve Kneizys	John Wickersham
Donna Landis	Sally Widman
Scott and Janet Landis	Carol Williams
Bernard Lentz	Theodore A. Xaras



Printed on recycled paper.