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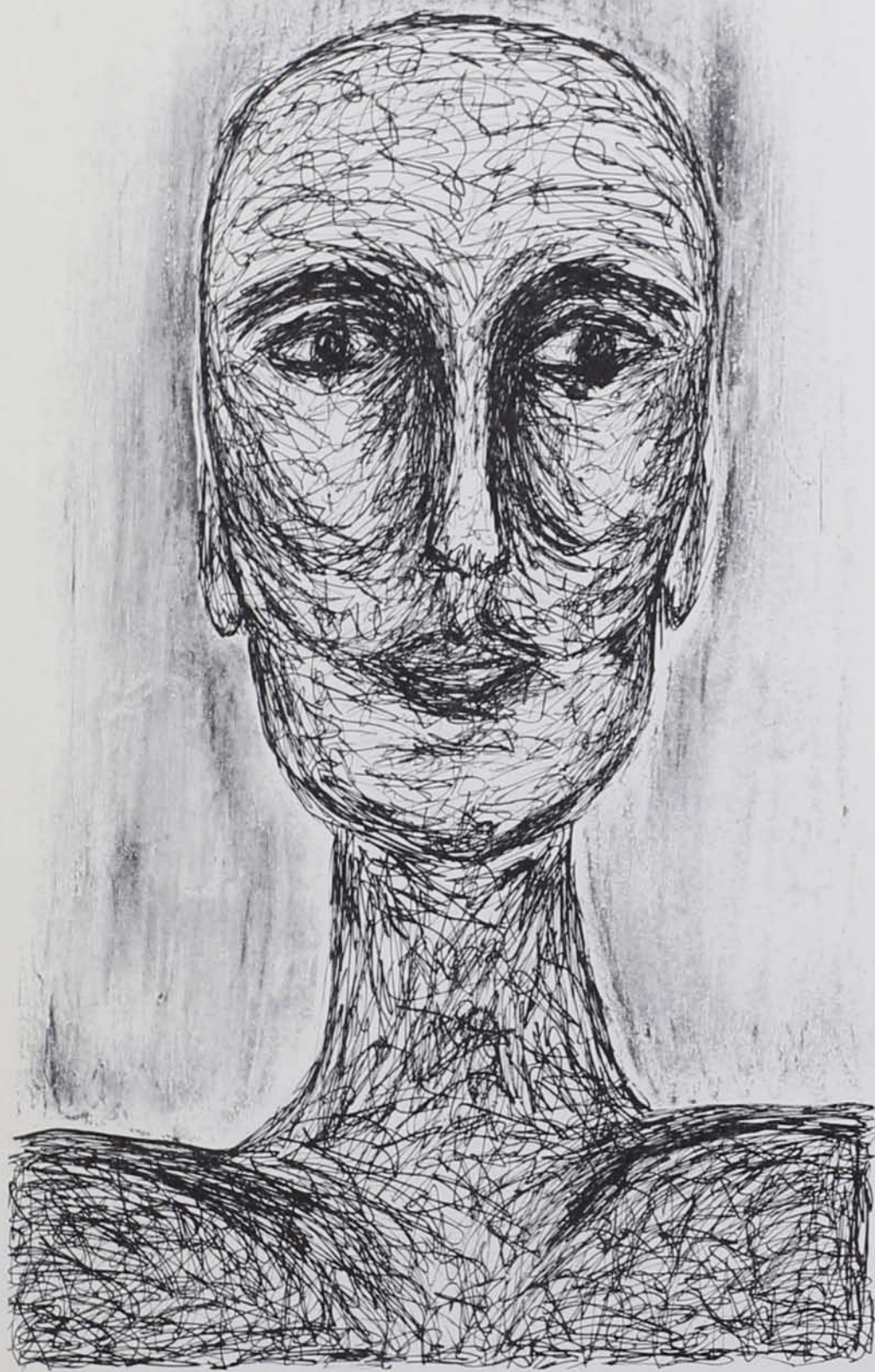
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Edmond Knowles, George Bause, James Popelka, Eva Joyce Morgan, Kathy Morris, Peter Dabback, Scott Wagner, Doug Stewart, Alan Bartholomew, and Fred Reiss





ALISON BRESSI

THE LANTERN

1973

FALL

Editor: Thomas P. Loughran, Jr.

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Contest Awards:

Art: Alison Bressi and Becky Grant

Poetry: Doug Stewart for "Ode to a Possum"
and Edmond Knowles for "You, Sisyphus"

Short Story: Scott Wagner for "Eric"

Honorable Mentions:

Art: William Kenealy for "The Saucer"

Poetry: George Bause for "Observation"

Short Story: Fred Reiss for "Lightning Bugs"

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DR. CALVIN D. YOST, JR.

I, The Poet

I, the poet, (the fool)
caress your mind and move your soul
with words (mere words) . . .
Come with me and share my world:
the beauty in a flower,
or the truth that's in a dewdrop;
and we may capture inspiration
and imprison it with ecstasy . . .
Have sympathy for this madman,
my insanity is not my own,
the whole world shares it;
You, too, are mad,
and reach for security in self-delusion.
It is cool and damp here,
among dismembered realms of thought;
but I stay, and reap what warmth
there may be,
in the shadow of my dreams.

EDMOND KNOWLES

Observation

Near a verdant knoll of Nature
 An earthbound viewer bides his time,
 Ignoring all that stirs about him,
 Save a lone celestial spot
 'Bout which his passions intertwine,
 As if a god were what he'd wrought.

On an adjacent mound of green
 A rival scanner sights the star,
 And, claiming it as all his own,
 He returns the first man's glare;
 They each engage in verbal war,
 For neither one desires to share.

Then a third man passing by
 Confronts the yet embittered pair
 And, taking sides with one of them—
 Declining thus to referee—
 Adds a third twist to the snare
 Of warped Obsession's lunacy.

GEORGE BAUSE

Haiku

The petals of the beech fall
 from the banks and float
 in silence down a stream of bubble bath.

JAMES POPELKA

"Smile and Lift Me Up"

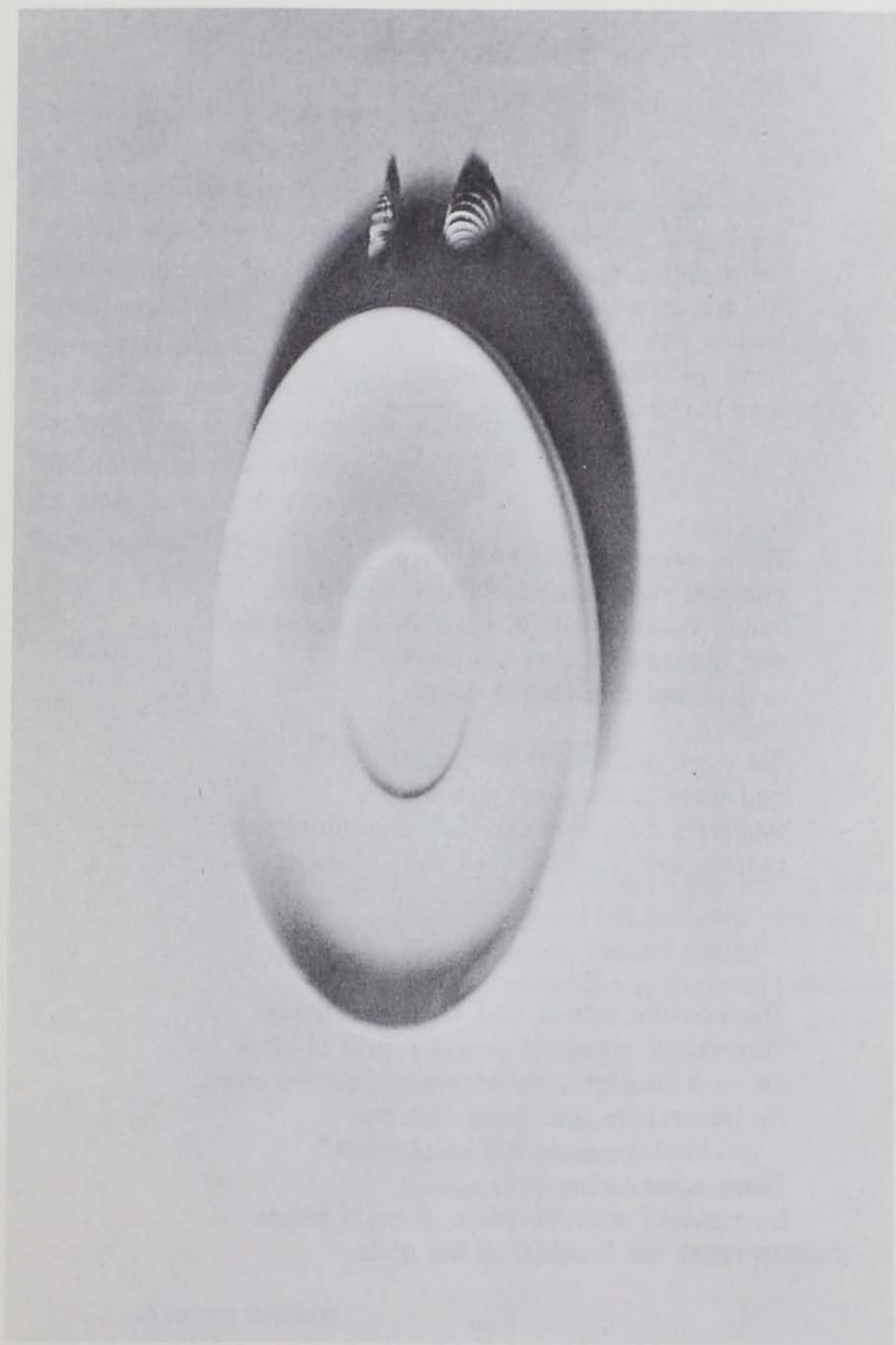
I can't always tell you
why I'm down
just give me your hand
and help me up
the reasons are often small
vague
but little things mount
and drag me down

smile
and lift me up

sometimes it's just me
nagging at myself
sometimes just my wanting
to bathe in sunlight
and wrap myself in its warmth
sometimes my body cries for need
of sun, of you
and sometimes I just need
the accompaniment of your voice

someday it'll be my turn
to smile
raise you up
or soothe the hurt
but for just now
be my sun
and show me warmth.

EVA JOYCE MORGAN



WILLIAM KENEALY

The Sacrifice

I

The virgins enter softly,
 their eyes screaming quiet fear;
 'tis spring, a time for sowing righteous lies.
 His words, unheard upon their ears,
 excites the callous crowd:
 "and the gods will be pleased . . ."
 then the altar, blood and flame . . .

II

There were many fathers there,
 masking deep-remorse with self-delusion,
 losing their 'selves' in the roar of the crowd
 and almost believing the priest,
 and almost forgiving the gods . . .

But there is always 'the people'
 and there is always 'the whole'
 reflecting their hopes in the suffering of few
 placing their trust in the magic of death.

III

The peasant stands and views his fields;
 'tis autumn, a time for reaping fruits of labor . . .
 no, — a time for early snows and ruined crops.
 He remembers blood and flame:
 ". . . and the gods will be pleased."
 Tears come to his eyes
 for mingled with the voice of frigid winds
 he hears the laughter of the gods.

The men building rainbows fight
 And throw the colors at each other
 Allowing the bridge to retain its gap
 Through which words are hurled,
 But seldom heard,
 Hands extended,
 But rarely shaken.
 Hurt prides and broken promises
 Compromises and misleading agreements
 Tentatively bridge the gap
 But totter at the first footfall
 That descends upon it.

KATHY MORRIS

Prints in the Snow

A walk in the snow
 alongside an open field
 with the slight rustling of dry falling flakes.
 Rows of prints forming side by side,
 then a gentle stirring pause
 as eyes wander o'er the pure panorama.

Two pairs of prints
 shuffle in the cool carpet
 and toe to toe rest.
 Prints in the snow—
 thoughts of a season ahead.

PETER DABBACK

Eric

By SCOTT WAGNER

I suppose I'll never forget the day Eric was made. Eric was (and still is) quite a guy, as far as I'm concerned. Of course, he had a way of making me feel inferior (*then again, he made everyone feel inferior*) and, to top it off, he took my girl away from me. But in a way I suppose it was my own fault.

* * *

The editor-in-chief of the college newspaper called me into his office on one of those lazy spring afternoons. Since I was the number one man on the staff, this was not unusual. But his assignment was.

It seemed that our paper was getting stale. It was becoming more difficult to come up with fresh ideas. He wanted me to dig up something to rouse our readers' interest.

Back then everyone was talking about artificial creation of man—birth from a test tube, so to speak. Was it legal? ethical? practical? The topic had stirred up quite a few heated debates. This was the basis for our fearless editor's idea.

As I sat down in his office, he looked me straight in the eye. I proceeded to yawn in his face.

"Ken, I've got a different assignment for you—no politics this time."

Oh, hurrah, I thought.

"I hear that everyone's been talking about artificial men. I was thinking about the idea for our feature story."

Nothing like being right on the ball. The "tube-man" debate had been going on for almost six months.

"Now I want you to go on over to the Biological Institute—they're doing some of this work there. Get a good story, and maybe—junior editor next year?"

Whoopee—after only three years of hard work.

* * *

Early next afternoon I caught a ride to the Institute. I met Dr. Robinson, chief of something-or-other, and got the grand tour.

Before I go any further, I should give you some background to this artificial man bit, in case you've forgotten. Somebody got the

idea how great it would be if we could produce people artificially. They would be under genetic control, so if we suddenly needed a nuclear physicist or the Yankees needed a third baseman, we could just mix one up.

Putting the idea into practice was a different kettle of fish, though. The pros and cons battled each other, with the resulting delays. The Church was especially uptight about the idea. But, science marched on, right over the Church.

Earlier, artificial parthenogenesis (as it is known by the educated) had been done with lower life forms, with some degree of success. Sticking an egg with a needle, shocking it, poisoning it—even shaking it—all proved successful on certain eggs. But where to get human eggs to experiment with?

Well, this problem was solved easily enough. Women who could not give birth any more for various reasons were asked to "donate" unfertilized ova. Psychologically, though, this became a problem. Women began cracking up when they started giving up their "potential children." So then the doctors had to psychologically screen their would-be donors, and when less than two percent passed, the supply of eggs dropped off rapidly.

Anyway, our particular institute was lucky. It had five human ova that were busy sitting, doing nothing. In fact, in the eight months experimenting had been going on, not one egg in the country had done anything. But history was in the making during my visit.

Dr. Robinson was showing me one of the eggs when it happened. The egg was sitting in a large, open petri dish. It was submerged in some new type tissue culture which the good doctor elaborated upon, but which I did not bother to write down, since I didn't understand him anyway. Then along comes this other doctor with a tube of something—some amino-protein complex that he'd just discovered. He was just setting it in the refrigerator when it slipped from his hand and fell right into the egg culture. Dr. Robinson practically tore his hair out, looking for something to pull out the uninvited test tube. But it was too late—the offending test tube had altered the culture, which had disturbed the egg, which (though we didn't know it then) had been activated.

* * *

I'm sorry I lost Suzy to Eric. She was a real knockout, one of the best looking girls on (and off) campus. I don't know what first attracted me to her—her tight sweaters or her halter tops. Anyway, I was in her dorm room that night, reading her my first story about the Institute.

"... however, the practical aspects of such a..." I stopped and looked at her. "You're not interested," I said.

She pressed a little closer, and my temperature went up a few degrees. "No, not really." She looked up and smiled—one of those inviting little numbers that drives right to the core of any male chauvinist.

"Listen, Suzy," I said. "I've got to do this for the paper whether I like it or not, and you're my best proofreader-listener, so..."

She put her arms tight around my neck, and... The subject was closed for *that* night.

The next morning I didn't have any classes, so I went back to the Institute. The whole place was in an uproar. I soon found out why—the egg had started to grow.

I entered the lab and was promptly ignored. They had moved the egg into an incubator-type device. Everyone was crowded around it. I finally spied Doc Robinson and asked him what was going on.

"Fantastic," he blurted. "Apparently that proteolytic complex, coupled with the cortical damage to the egg, has activated it. It's growing!"

I looked—it was. But it didn't look like an egg anymore.

"It's growing at a fantastic rate," Doc continued. "It's starting to slow down a bit, but still—it's already at the thirty week stage of embryological development."

It was almost ready to be "born."

* * *

I'll scan the next week rather quickly, since the place was off limits to everyone but the doctors. The thing—by now named Eric—had grown quickly. After two days, it was the equivalent of eight years by normal processes. Luckily, by the end of the week, Eric had slowed down to almost normal aging—at twenty-one.

As it turned out, they couldn't do much with Eric, teaching-wise, until he slowed down with his growing. But the doctors were in for a surprise. When they decided that it would be safe to let Eric out of his germ-proof cocoon, Eric sat up stiffly, stretched, and extended his right hand. "Thank you, gentlemen. I was becoming rather lethargic in your device."

That's the way I got it from Dr. Robinson after he recovered from his shock.

* * *

Two days later I met Eric—on a confidential basis, of course. I was the only real outsider to have seen him at that time. I wasn't allowed to write about him, but Dr. Robinson was nice enough to me, so I kept my end of the deal.

Only one word could describe Eric then—perfect. He had perfect posture, perfect coordination, perfect features, and perfect intelligence. Eric, I, and some other doctors were in the room. Dr. Robinson was attempting to explain what had happened.

"Apparently Eric's physiology is slightly different from our own, especially in the brain region. Obviously, the extract that accidentally contacted the egg caused this difference."

Eric sat quietly, absorbed in the desk lamp.

"Unfortunately," Doctor Robinson continued, "the extract was newly discovered, which means there will be some delay in pinpointing it again."

I watched Eric. He looked as if he was trying to communicate with the light bulb, he was staring so hard.

"The amazing thing about Eric is his knowledge potential. It seems to be unlimited. We've taken EEG's on him while he's working a problem. Simpler problems evoke little response. It's as if the answer's ready beforehand. The more complex problems result in an increase of activity. We matched him up with the EMVAC-1000 computer, and he performed just as quickly and accurately."

Meanwhile, Eric had picked up a pencil and was scribbling furiously on a piece of paper. Doctor Robinson noticed this and stopped talking. In a few moments Eric was finished.

"Dr. Robinson, it occurred to me that there is a great waste of energy in this light bulb. With a few simple modifications, we can harness this wasted energy and . . ."

Eric had invented a light bulb that would burn indefinitely.

* * *

"Think of it, Suzy," I said. "A light bulb that will never burn out. In a hundred years we couldn't make one, and now . . ." I stopped short. No one was allowed to know about Eric.

Luckily, Suzy wasn't very inquisitive or very impressed. "Silly boy. What would we want with a light bulb that would burn forever?" She reached up, and the room plunged into darkness.

I saw her point.

* * *

I almost died the next day—literally. Apparently someone thought that I was trying to sneak into the Institute without an ID. This doesn't seem too bad a thing to do, but the person who suspected me was a gung-ho MP with a nasty-looking carbine.

In the few hours that I had been gone, Uncle Sam had gotten involved. But I finally got in after convincing the MP to let me see Doc Robinson. I nearly fainted when I saw Eric. Nearly every brain in the country was with him.

To put it mildly, they were all astounded with Eric. It didn't seem possible that such a person could exist. They were all probing him with questions, questions, and more questions.

What happened next can be partly attributed to my presence. Eric had never been outside the building. In fact, he had never even seen what was outside—the Institute was one of those air-conditioned windowless jobs. Anyway, in his free time (what little he had) he would bombard me with questions about the external environs. I answered as best I could; he comprehended everything, but, like any normal person, he would have to see it for himself. Apparently, his curiosity had grown tremendously, or perhaps he was tired of being questioned. Anyway, when he saw me something must have popped. As I entered he looked up; then, everyone else was flat on his back. Eric stood up and walked over to me, smiling. "Ken, how about taking me for that tour. I'd like to see the world."

As we left the room, he looked back at the flattened scientists. "Gentlemen, I really must take a rest. We can continue our sessions tomorrow."

Someone has estimated what percentage of our brain we use. I remember someone else saying that if man could use one hundred percent of his capabilities, he could, for starters, move mountains. Eric must have been close to that, because he had knocked those men down.

When we tried to leave, everyone made a big fuss. But after Eric's super-logical argument as to why we should leave, they gave in. But the colonel in charge of security wanted to send two MP's along with us "in case of trouble." But Eric wanted no part of them and insisted that he could take care of himself. The colonel insisted that

Eric could not, that he had never fought in his life. Eric insisted that he could, and seeing an empty jeep, proceeded to crush it *mentally* to prove his point.

"Do you need any further proof?" he asked, smugly.

I still remember the look on the colonel's face.

Eric was delighted with the world. He behaved just like a small child, except for the fact that he was very logical about it.

"So this is a 'car'," he said.

"Not any car," I replied, proudly. "This baby'll eat up anything on the road." I opened the hood, revealing 440 cubic inches of raw power. "This little hot-shot turns out over 500 horsepower . . ."

He cut me short with a wave of his hand. "How does it work?"

I proceeded to explain to him everything I knew about an engine; he pulled out the ever-present notebook and wrote and sketched while I talked.

He was still writing as we left the parking lot. Then he handed me the notebook. "How about this, Ken? This engine will turn out more horsepower, won't pollute, and will run on any non-volatile liquid."

I think he was just showing off, but he achieved the desired effect. My ego deflated faster than a punctured balloon.

* * *

I'll say one thing for Eric—he was very tolerant with the world. He was fairly impressed with our TV's, radios, phone system, and transportation; but he kept coming up with improvements for everything. In the few hours we were out together, he devised pollution-free engines, a chemical compound that would "eat" smog, a wireless phone system (without a satellite), and a few other goodies.

Eric still spent his time at the Institute amazing the scientists, but he began taking more time off with me. Of course, I was spending more time with him, and as a result my grades suffered. I never told him, but one day he just *knew*.

"C'mon, Ken, microbiology isn't that bad," he told me.

I started. "What makes you think I'm having trouble with micro?"

"I read your thought patterns. It was quite obvious." He smiled, adding, "Another talent of mine."

Eric was picking up human attributes more and more. Now he even had a sense of humor, although it was a bit sick. But he helped

me out. With a few additions between my TV and tape recorder, my grades shot up and my study time went down.

He'd built me a "learning machine."

* * *

Like I said before, Eric was becoming more and more human. One day we were downtown, window-shopping, when a rather striking blonde, mini-skirted and sans-bra, strolled by. Eric stopped, turned around, and stared. "Holy . . .!"

Eric never failed to amaze me. After two months, he had finally discovered the female of the species. It was incredible—he acted as if he were going through puberty. It was almost embarrassing to be with him for a while. He had a hard time controlling himself, but not for long.

About a week after his "discovery," the same blonde walked past us. She must have been the equivalent of a "first crush" for Eric. Anyway, she walked by, and he fell in step beside her. That was his first mistake. His second followed quickly. "Say," he said, as he put his arm around her, "what do you . . ."

Then Eric experienced his first pain—a heavy shoulder bag in the groin. I shouldn't have, but I was doubled up as he was—only I was laughing.

* * *

Eric seemed toned down a little after that incident. How much it shook him up, I don't know. But a few days later Dr. Robinson called me into his office.

"Ken, I'm concerned about Eric. His mind seems to be less sharp. He still does what we ask, and God knows that's enough, but he takes longer, and he doesn't show any interest in his work. He almost seems depressed about something. Any idea what's wrong with him?"

I told him that I didn't know; that I'd talk to Eric and try to find out. But I didn't bother—I already knew. It's like when you're twelve or thirteen—you get interested in "other things." It was pretty obvious to me—that shoulder bag had activated something in Eric.

* * *

I haven't mentioned Suzy for a while. She was pretty good those months I spent between class and the Institute. Believe me, between Eric and studying I had less and less time to spend with her. When we were together, though, we made up for it. But I still think she was hurting the whole time.

Then I made The Mistake. I introduced Eric to Suzy. I hadn't even finished the introductions when I knew. It's something that only happens in the movies. Eyes have a way of talking—and I read Eric's and Suzy's loud and clear. I realized it was time to start shopping around again.

I suppose I could have put up a fight, but I'm an old softy anyway. Eric was a great guy, and I've already given my opinion of Suzy. They made a fine couple, especially the way they hit it right off the bat. I even felt patriotic by helping Eric. Obviously Eric was important to the country, and to work he had to be kept happy. And Suzy could fill that last requirement quite sufficiently.

* * *

A few weeks later, I was awakened at five-thirty on a Sunday morning. Normally I would ignore such nonsense, but my rousers were two MP's. I knew right away that something had happened to Eric. I dressed hurriedly and went to the Institute.

Dr. Robinson greeted me at the entrance. "Eric's gone," he said.

I realized immediately what had happened, though I didn't say anything. Eric and Suzy had eloped. And you can bet it was Suzy's idea.

What followed was one of the most extensive manhunts in history, although it didn't make the papers. Doc Robinson figured it was futile from the start—Eric was too smart to get caught. And of course, Doc was right.

* * *

But I found out where they were. After the heat of the search had cooled down, they wrote me a letter, telling what had happened, how they couldn't wait any longer, etc. That was eight years ago, and they're still happily married. They have two kids, a boy and a girl. And they both love their Uncle Kenny. But I got a letter from Suzy the other day; it seems that they're having a little trouble with Eric, Junior.

So Eric's not so smart after all—my kid would never flunk third grade.



D. L.

Ode to a Possum

(Dedicated to Walt Kelly)

O Pogo

O Pogo

Whatever did you go fo'?

I was bona fidely learning

Your philosophy discerning

When one day upon returning

You were gone

O Pogo

O Pogo

I hope I go where yo' go

We can joke amongst the trees

Watch a sunset, shoot the breeze

Point out real life foibleties

After I'm gone

O Pogo

O Pogo

Still I hope my days may slow go

For there's one thing that I've learned:

You can do it 'fore you're urned

(Being happy yet concerned)

In real life too

DOUG STEWART

The Flower

Our love was a flower,
born from the seeds of friendship,
It prospered in our spring of dreams
and mellowed in the summer.
But it squandered autumn ecstasies
and died in winter's cruel reality.
Now all that remains are
faded petals, withered leaves,
shades of shattered fantasy,
shrouded with the scent of dusk
left by the dying day.

EDMOND KNOWLES



BOB CARTY

Yamato

There seemed a silence in length unending.
The sun in golden armor clad,
For night was preparing.
And came a sigh, so very sad
As the wind's warm breath met the cool night air
And the sun to the moon did yield.
She, in a faint green glare,
Entered in to the sea's gray field.
A cold light poured down from the pale moon's stare
And shown upon a lonely shield
Which lay upon the sea.
Painted there on its rusty face
The rising sun, in red of watered blood.
Beneath, a wounded ghost with mace
Battled the empty flood.
Fallen warrior of wind, she
Who, dying, struggled in barbed agony.
Screams of the knight rose from the sea,
"The sun! Where is the sun?
Death delay, that I might see the rising sun!"
But her cries fell away,
Unheard in the twilight of yesterday.

ALAN BARTHOLOMEW

You, Sisyphus

Here, cast down beneath the sun
to feel the changes coming on
deceived to think it's just begun
and trying not to reach the end.

Here, wondering where one's youth has gone
while noting how the seasons pass
life and death matched one to one
with faith and doubt our only friends.

Here, stood up before the looking glass
peruse with care one's wrinkled face
and think absently of Sunday's mass
and how you'll vow your ways to mend.

Here, one among the human race
at the mercy of a jealous god
trying hard to keep the pace
but growing old as do all men.

Here, thinking how it's all so odd
believing that it's all in vain
as through another day you plod
wishing that your fate would bend.

Here, wondering if you're quite insane
and note that winter's coming soon
autumn's loss is springtime's gain
—all must die to live again.

Here, cast down beneath the moon
to feel the changes slowing down
deceived to think you're facing doom
and trying hard to reach the end . . .
—and hurry to begin again.



BREWSTER

The Love Song

Let us go then, you and I,
making love and getting high,
preserving friendship at all costs,
share our feelings but not our thoughts,
'to be or not to be ourselves'
it doesn't really matter.

Let us go and shock the world,
and throw our lives in vague turmoils,
with bold freedoms and vain passions;
better now to weave our spell,
and, by chance, we'll reign in hell,
when Satan counts our 'brownie points.

Let us go and sell our dreams,
lies more potent than they seem,
deluding both the young and old,
laughing when we see they're sold
their souls to vain endeavors.

Let us go then, You and I,
making love and getting high,
preserving friendship at all costs,
share our feelings, not our thoughts,
selling dreams to weave our spell,
and, by chance, we'll reign in hell,
You and I,
Together.

EDMOND KNOWLES

"Goodbyes"

I wish I'd known you sooner.
I wish
we had been more eager to share.
We wasted
too much time as strangers
afraid to be near,
sacrificing warmth for fear.
Time too soon
separates friends and lovers,
spacing first our bodies
then our minds.
I don't know why
I become nostalgic at goodbyes.
Why I always need
to look back,
what I might find
behind.
Someday
I'll no longer be nostalgic
just satisfied.

EVA JOYCE MORGAN

*Clyde Crashcup's Chocolate-Covered Consciousness Cupcakes With
That Chewy Catshup Frosting In the Inside Presents:*

**Living High With Gary Rutledge in Markevitch's
Cucumber and Gourd Patch: Grabbing
Lightning Bugs and Stuffing Them
in My Hellmann's Mayon-
naise Jar!**

Flying

In my blue skies, = FREDDY REISS

Doing loops.

Facedy, Rutledge, and me were sitting on my front steps. Facedy had a punk in his mouth, Rutledge was chewing eight pieces of Bazooka Gum, and I was sucking on a weed with a furry tip on it. I looked at the porch light that had mashed gnats in it and watched the moths fly around it. Boy! Are those bugs stupid! I mean, I could think of better things to do than fly around a light all night. One thing I can't figure out: how those gnats get inside the light. Gnats must be stupider than moths.

Then I leaned back on the cold screen door and looked over at the Kistiers' house. I heard them talking on their front porch and saw the red light of Mr. Kistier's cigar in the dark. There wasn't much to do, because all the TV Shows were repeats. Anyway, Mom wouldn't let us in the house because it was so messy and she didn't want any one to see we lived like that.

Facedy sat down on the steps, took his punk out of his mouth, looked at it, and said, "Ya know, it shore feels good to have a smoke."

Then I said, "Whaddayewmean Jellybean? My Dad tolded me punks aren't like seagarettes, 'cause you can't breathe them in."

"Yeeee-ah," Rutledge said.

Facedy started hanging on the railing and said, "Shore ya can. Coosey tolded me he does it all the time . . . and Coosey don't lie either."

I said, "Yeah, but yew ain't Coosey, and there ain't no way you can do it." I stood up and put my finger right in front of Facedy's nose. "Haaaa. Haaaa. Haaaa."

"Yeeee-ah," Rutledge said.

Facedy started shaking his head and moving his lips real fast. "I don't care what ya guys say. I do, I do, I do, inhale, inhale, inhale!" He stuck out his tongue.

"Shure Face," I said back.

Rutledge moved down to the bottom porch step and started pulling the grass out of the cracks. Then he turned around, and said, "How

do you know when it's raining cats and dogs?"

I shook my shoulders, scratched my head, and said, "I dunno h—"

"Don't say it! I know it!" Facedy put his fingers on his eyes and said, "I know it! Don't tell me . . . it's aaaa—"

"When you step in a poodle," Rutledge said.

We both laughed, but Facedy didn't. He was mad.

"Boy, Gary. Why did ya tell me? You just didn't want me to guess it . . . and I knew it too!"

"Shure, Face."

"Yeee-ah."

REN REN CLACKA TINK CLANG REN REN CLANGA TINK CLANG

We looked up and saw Hammerhead coming up my driveway. His basket clanged and rattled, his Baseball Cards were flapping on his bike spokes, and his pushed-in pedal was clicking on the lower bar by the kickstand. Hammerhead stopped in the driveway, got off his bike, and put the kickstand down. He took two steps away from the bike—and then it fell down. The basket clanged, and the bike rattled like an alarm clock thrown at a wall.

Hammerhead looked at his bike, watched the wheels spin and cards click like a spinning wheel, and said, "Forget it!" Then he ran right over to my front steps. His eyes were real big. He said, "Hey yew guys: The Lightning Bugs Are Out Tonight!"

I started . . .

Boy! Lightning Bugs! I mean, what could be better than catching Lightning Bugs? School had been over for two weeks and none of us had seen any yet. Rutledge told me that the Lightning Bugs were slow in coming because they flew south for the winter. I asked him why they flew south and he told me because it was too far to walk. Boy, that Rutledge is a funny guy! He's smart too! I never knew Lightning Bugs flew south in the winter—Zag!

"Are ya shure that ya saw them?" Facedy asked.

Hammerhead moved his head up and down. "Yup. I'm sure. I saw tree of them in Miss Multasha's back yard when I was riding here."

I said, "Well whadda we waiting for?"

We all went into our houses to get jars. The Lightning Bug Season was here! GREAT!

When I got to the kitchen, I saw my Mom wiping soapy dishes and putting them into a plastic cage.

"Hey Mom, dew we got any jars?"

Mom stopped wiping the dish, moved her eyebrows into her hair, and said, "Do I HAVE any jars?"

I rolled my eyes, breathed out of my nose, and said, "Do you HAVE any jars?"

"For what?"

"Lightning Bugs!"

"Why do you want to catch *lightning* bugs? I don't see any point to it." She started wiping the dishes in the sink. "Besides, you just let them go anyway."

"It's fun!"

Mom looked out the open window with moths hanging on the screen, ticked her thumb nail with her teeth, and said, "I don't think you should go outside. It's getting dark out and it's eight-thirty."

I jumped real hard on the floor, and said, "But Mom! Hammerhead, Rutledge, and Facedy are doing it! There's no school!"

"Another Outburst Like That Young Man And You'll Go Nowheres!"

I looked down at my feet and walked out of the kitchen with my hands in my pockets.

"There's often a jar under the sink," Mom said real soft and nice.

I slid on the floor like I was going into second base. When I opened the cabinet under the sink, I saw a Clean Brand-new Hellmann's Mayonnaise Jar sitting right between the Brillo soap pads and the Grand Union dish soap.

"Tanks Mom."

I grabbed the jar, ran outside to the garage, hammered some air holes in the jar top, and ran back to my front steps. All the guys were there: Hammerhead had a Tang jar, Facedy had a Gerber banana baby food jar, and Rutledge had a Yoo-Hoo bottle with a cork in it.

"Hey Reissy Cups, what kept ya?" Facedy asked.

Hammerhead tossed his jar in the air and almost dropped it. Then he said, "We been waiting for yew about tree hours."

"Yeee-ah," Rutledge said.

"Face, I coudent help it. My Mom was yelling at me."

We split up. Rutledge and Hammerhead took my front yard, and Facedy and me went around back. We figured if we split up we could cover more ground and catch more Lightening Bugs.

It was getting dark because it was almost 9:00! The grass was getting our sneakers wet, the crickets were squeaking, and the ground was under our feet. I looked up and saw the half moon in the sky. I felt a little better—I mean, I didn't want a Wolfman to get us.

"Fred."

"What, Face?"

"I just saw one."

"Where?"

"Over by the mimosa tree."

Both of us squeezed our eyes to see where the Lightening Bug might light up next. We waited. There was no light at all.

"Hey, Face. Are yew shure yew saw one?"

Facedy just looked straight ahead. "Honest injun. Cross my heart an-" Facedy moved his head and his eyes got big. "I just saw another one."

"Well then, how come I didnt see it?"

"I tell ya, I saw one, and he had a light bigger than a light bulb."

"Face, you're cracked! You didnt see no Lightning Bug!"

"It could have been a moth, maybe." Facedy's eyes got big again and he said, "I just saw another one."

"Bug-off, Face."

"I'm not kidding."

I looked and didn't see anything but a sagging mimosa tree.

"Shure Face . . ."

Facedy was good at some things, but he was no Lightning Bug catcher. The only way he could catch a Lightning Bug was if it flew into his jar, or if he found a stupid one lying in the grass. About the only thing Facedy could do with bugs was: step on ants, swing at gnat tornadoes with a baseball bat, and kill moths on a screen door. One day he asked Hammerhead for one of his Lightning Bugs. When Hammerhead gave it to him, Facedy let it go and tried to follow it. He said he was doing it so that he could find their daytime hiding place. The Lightning Bug gave him the slip—Zonk!

"There's one of them now!" Facedy turned my head to make me look. He was right.

"Yeah Face. But we can't get them, 'cause they're in the Kistiers' back yard and we're not allowed to go in there."

"How come he won't let us?"

" 'Cause yew stepped on his tomatoes when yew tried to catch that praying mantis in his garden."

Facedy scrunched his nose, curled up his lip like a horse, and said, "Ya mean he's still mad about that? What a creepol!"

After Facedy and me both figured out that the Kistiers were Rat Fink Creepos, we both got an idea. We put our backs together so that we could see behind and in front of us. (This is the best way to catch them. Usually, when I go out catching Lightning Bugs on my own, I have a lot of trouble. I can't see behind me, and I always have to turn around to check if any might be lighting behind my back. Then after that, I have to turn around real fast to see if I missed any, when I turned around to see if they were behind me. Sometimes I just spin in circles and get dizzy—and then I can't see anything.)

Facedy had his half covered and I had my half covered. We still couldn't see the whole yard because we couldn't see between us. No matter what you do, you can't cover the whole yard. The only thing you get is dizzy spells.

I looked by the rose bush, by the fence, and even in the grass! But there were no Lightning Bugs in sight.

Behind me I heard Facedy say, "I see one." I heard him run after what he had seen.

"Shure, Face."

I didn't even bother to turn around, because with Facedy's luck, it had to be a moth. So, I just held my ground and kept my eyes peeled. Then I thought I saw something flash by my sandbox. I waited. I saw something. It was a real smooth soft yellow-green

light. I ran right to the spot where I saw the flash and tried to figure out where he would flash next. A light flashed by the fence. This time I saw those black wings that spin like a helicopter's. I reached out, took a swipe at him, and missed. The Lightning Bug started flying up in the air. I took another swipe at him and missed. He just kept on going up and up, with his smooooth, soft yellow-green light blinking on and off and his black wings spinning around him like a fan. There is nothing worse than watching a Lightning Bug fly too high for you to catch him. I tried to follow him, but he stopped blinking his light. I lost him in the dark.

"GOT 'EM!"

I turned around and ran to where Facedy was. He had his hand all scrunched up, and he was trying to get the lid off his jar.

"Hey Fred. How about lending me a hand."

"Which one?"

"Very Funny! Very Funny! That was so funny I forgot to laugh."

I bent down, twisted the lid off, stuffed some grass in the jar, and waited for Facedy to drop the bug in.

"As soon as I drop him in the jar, ya better put the top on fast, 'cause if he gets away, ya owe me a Lightning Bug."

"Don't worry about it, Face."

Facedy opened his hands and into the jar dropped a crushed, crinkled, dead and wrinkled, white moth.

"I cudda sworeed it was a Lightning Bug."

"Shure, Face."

Facedy started moving his head back and forth, smacked his lips, and said, "Boy, and I thought I was gonna haul them in so I could make a light."

"Facedy, I looked at my Bonomo Turkish Taffy Science Fact and it said you need a towsand Lightning Bugs to make a light."

"Whaddayamean! All ya need is about twentee five of them and a little pill jar."

"Shure Face."

"No--"

"Hey Face, I'm gonna check the front and see how Hammerhead and Rutledge are doing. Ya wanna come?"

"Yeah. I'll c--" Facedy turned his head towards my Mom's clothes line. "Nope, I'm staying. I just saw one."

"Shure Face."

I ran to the front yard and saw Rutledge putting something into his Yoo-Hoo bottle.

"Hey Gary did yew catch one?" I ran to the front fence where he was sitting.

"Yep."

"Let me see." Gary handed me the bottle. I looked at it and said, "Let me see how many yew—HOLY COW!"

There were at least twenty-five Lightning Bugs in his Yoo-Hoo bottle. They were blinking their light grey-yellow lights, crawling in the grass, and climbing up the side of the bottle. I hit the bottle to

knock down the bugs climbing up the sides. Then I handed the bottle back to Rutledge.

"How many did yew catch?" Rutledge asked.

"None. They were all over Kistiers' yard."

Gary smiled and said, "Well you know what they say: The Lightning Bugs are always brighter on the other side of the fence."

"Where did Hammerhead go?"

"His Mom called him in because he didn't take a bath—" Rutledge looked at a bush next to my front steps. He ran over to it, moved his arm back, bent down, and swung at the air.

"Got 'em," he said.

I didn't even see the bug light!

"Hey Gary! How did yew dew that?"

"Well, all you got to do is look for black spots on your house. Say, like your house is pink, and it's easy to see bugs on it. The Kistiers' house is green and in the dark you can't see nothing on a green house."

"Yew making fun of my house 'cause it's girls' cootie pink? I tolded yew that was like that when we moved here."

"Nope. I'm just trying to tell yew how to catch them."

"Don't yew have a hard time trying to catch them all by yourself? I mean what about the ones that light behind your back?"

"I don't worry about them. I just look for where I think they are, and I find them." Gary blew through the hole in the cork of his bottle.

"Hey Fred, do you want to go some place where there are a zillion trillion million Lightning Bugs?"

"Yeah. Where do we get 'em?"

"Right in Markevitch's Cucumber and Gourd Patch."

"Won't we get in trouble?"

"Naaaah. The only way we'll get in trouble is if we get caught, but we ain't getting caught."

"I dun—"

"What's the matter? You chicken?"

I figured that if Mom found out I would get killed. But how could I pass up a chance to catch all those Lightning Bugs? I'd do it!—Zingo.

I told Rutledge that I wanted to ask Facedy if he wanted to go, because even though Facedy is a cheapo weirdo, I wouldn't want to leave him flat and hurt his feelings. I ran up the driveway and whispered, "Hey Face. Me and Rutledge are gonna look for another spot. Yew wanna come or not?" I said it loud enough for Facedy to hear, but soft enough so that my Mom couldn't hear it.

Facedy yelled back, "Are ya kidding me? I got the best spot. Hey—there's 'nother one now! Reiss, ya oughta get Gary and come here."

"Shure Face."

Rutledge and me walked down Sherman Place, cut across Harrison Street, and then cut through our army field. We walked through the field till we were right behind Markevitch's house.

I looked around at the real dark field of high weeds and watched the clouds blowing across the moon. I thought any minute the boogey man was going to get us. I was ascares! The light was on in Markevitch's kitchen and right through the back screen door we could see the blue light of the TV. I was going to ask Gary if I could leave, but I didn't want him to think I was chicken, so I just kept my trap shut.

Rutledge said, "We got to wait five minutes . . . that's when the Lightening Bugs come."

"How dew yew know?"

"I know what I'm doing!"

We crawled under Markevitch's metal back yard fence. It was easy to crawl under the fence, because we had dug a fox hole right next to it for our army games. I felt like Sergeant Saunder on that army show *Combat*; we were raiding a German bunker, and all we needed was the black stuff to smear on our faces.

"It's about time for the Bugs to come out." Rutledge pointed at the cucumbers. "There they are!"

I looked, waited a couple seconds, and saw three flashes. Then I saw a whole mess of light yellow flashes. I mean, it looked like fireworks on the Fourth Of July—they were all over. Rutledge and me ran to the cucumber patch that was right by the fence. Bugs were flashing right in front of our faces. GREAT! Lightening Bugs flying in our ears, in our hands, and even in our jar and bottle. I'd never seen this many Lightening Bugs in my whole life!

Rutledge was catching them with his left and right hands. I was just glad to catch them with my right hand.

"Hey Fred, try using your left hand," Rutledge said, as he grabbed two Lightening Bugs with his left and three with his right.

"I can't dew that."

"Sure you can. All you got to do is try." So I did. I missed on my first try, but I got one on my second shot. Pretty soon I was catching them with both of my hands! Rutledge and me were side by side. He was throwing them in his Yoo-Hoo bottle and I was chucking them in my Hellmann's Mayonnaise Jar. Lightening Bugs were all around us, spinning their helicopter wings, and blinking their real soft and nice lights on and off. We smiled at each other with our eyes. I started to get this tingling hum inside my chest. THIS WAS GREAT!

We were raking them in so fast, we didn't care if some flew out of our jar. THIS WAS REALLY FANTASTICAL! It was like lifting up a log and finding a thousand ants, or picking up a rock and seeing a giant nightcrawler, or finding that last cupcake under the lettuce in the refrigerator (where you hid it so that your sisters wouldn't find it), or after landing on Park Place rolling a nine, landing on Chance, and getting that card that says, "Take a walk on the Boardwalk."

We were both laughing and grabbing Lightening Bugs. Rutledge looked at me, and said, "Fred this is th—" Markevitch's back porch light turned on. Gary and me hit the dirt. Then we looked up from the ground and saw Mr. Markevitch. He was standing on the back steps. He was wearing a T-shirt with no sleeves. There was a cigar sticking

out of his mouth, a beer in his left hand, and a flashlight in his right.

"AOOOOOOOCATAAAKAAAA TAAAA OOOOCK!"

That was the loudest burp I'd ever heard in my entire life. It sounded like a giant toilet bowl swallowing water.

"HEY YOOSE KIDS, GET DAH HELL AWAY FROM DOSE GOURDS!"

Then Rutledge yelled, "Misster Markevitch is a big bad burpo!"

I pushed Gary on the shoulder and whispered, "What did yew dew that for?"

Mr. Markevitch shined the light by us and we hugged the ground. It was just like those P.O.W. movies.

"SO YA THINK IT'S FUNNY HUH? WELL WE'LL SEE ABOUT DAT!"

He started walking right to where we were. Gary and me started feeling through the ground for dirt bombs. When Mr. Markevitch got about fifteen feet away, we opened fire and chucked them at him as we ran for the fence.

Mr. Markevitch stuck his hands up so the dirt bombs wouldn't hit him. Gary and me were firing them so fast that they were bouncing off his head. Mr. Markevitch started running at us, yelling, "WHY YOOSE DIRTY ROTTEN KIDS!" He kept coming, and I fired dirt bombs at him while Gary crawled under the fence. But Rutledge got his sneaker lace stuck, and I ran out of dirt bombs! Markevitch was only about eight feet away, getting closer and closer all the time.

DELINKGANG KAABONK SLUSH CHUCUNK!

"Aieeeeeeeeeeeeeee!" Mr. Markevitch screamed like a baby mouse falling down a well.

THONK!

Old Man Markevitch fell flat on his face! He rolled on the ground, beer flying in the air like it was coming out of a hose. He looked like a turtle on its back! IT WAS GREAT!

GODDAMN IT, MILDRED! WHEN ARE YOU GONNA TELL ARNOLD TO PICK UP HIS TOYS!"

Saved by a Tonka-Truck Steam Shovel!

As we were running through the field, Rutledge yelled, "See you later, alligator!"

I'LL GET THE POLICE ON YOOSE KIDS, IF ITS DAH LAST THING I EVAR DUE!"

Rutledge and me kept running till we were out of range. The Lightning Bugs in my jar rattled like dice in a Parcheesi cup. Finally, after all that running, we lay down on some guy's lawn and started laughing. I mean, it was so funny seeing that big guy fall, spill beer over himself, and mash his cigar right into his face.

Rutledge said to me, "Did you see that face after he fell on that steam shovel, and the way he fell?" Then he rolled on the ground and laughed.

As I sat up on the grass, I laughed some more and said, "What about when I hit him in the neck with that dirt bomb?" Then we both leaned on each other and laughed.

"When he fell, he looked like a worm on a hook—he was wiggling and squirming all over the place." Rutledge laughed a little bit more. Then we both laughed again.

Our stomachs hurt a lot from laughing so hard, but it was fun, and I was glad we caught all those Lightening Bugs. Gary and me walked to his house.

Rutledge started swinging on his front gate and said, "Well Fred, I'll see you. And don't forget about that army game tomorrow."

"How could I forget about that?"

"Just checking."

Rutledge hopped off his metal front gate and said, "I'll see you tomorrow." He went up his front steps.

I started running back home.

"Hey Fred!" Rutledge yelled.

I stopped running, turned around, and said, "What??"

"Say Hello to Chester for me."

"Chester who?"

"Chester minute and I'll see." Then he closed the door and went inside.

I couldn't figure out what he meant by that. Then I remembered! It was nearly 10:00! I'd never been out that late in my life! I could almost feel that belt coming down on my dupah.

When I got home, I opened the door real slow, and went through the living room on my tiptoes.

"FREDERICK REISS JUNIOR! WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?! LOOK AT ALL THE MUD ON YOUR SNEAKERS!"

I just stood there and looked at my sneakers.

"YOU KNOW YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE BACK WHEN IT GETS DARK! WHAT WERE YOU DOING?"

"I was out catching Lightening Bugs." Then I stuck my jar up. "See?"

"LIGHTNING BUGS SMIGHTNING BUGS! PUT YOUR SNEAKERS OUT ON THE STEPS, WASH UP, AND GO TO BED!"

"Okay."

I walked away with my hand over my dupah, so that if Mom hit me, it wouldn't hurt that much. But she didn't and I was safe anyway.

I put my sneaks out on my front steps, washed up, and put on my Wells Fargo Cowboy pj's. Then I jumped into bed and pulled the covers over me. I looked at my Mickey Mouse Nitelite shining on the wall but didn't want to see it. I hopped out of my bed and took it off the wall. So I jumped back in bed and pulled my baseball covers over me.

I just lay there and watched my Lightening Bug Jar on the floor near my bed. I saw them blinking their soft gray-green lights, as they made the grass move in the jar. I got this humming tingle in my chest and said, "Good night, Lightening Bugs."

"All that glitters may not be gold, but it still shines as brightly."

— Chango Rag



AL. B.

