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The Lantern Vol. 58, No. 2, Summer 1991

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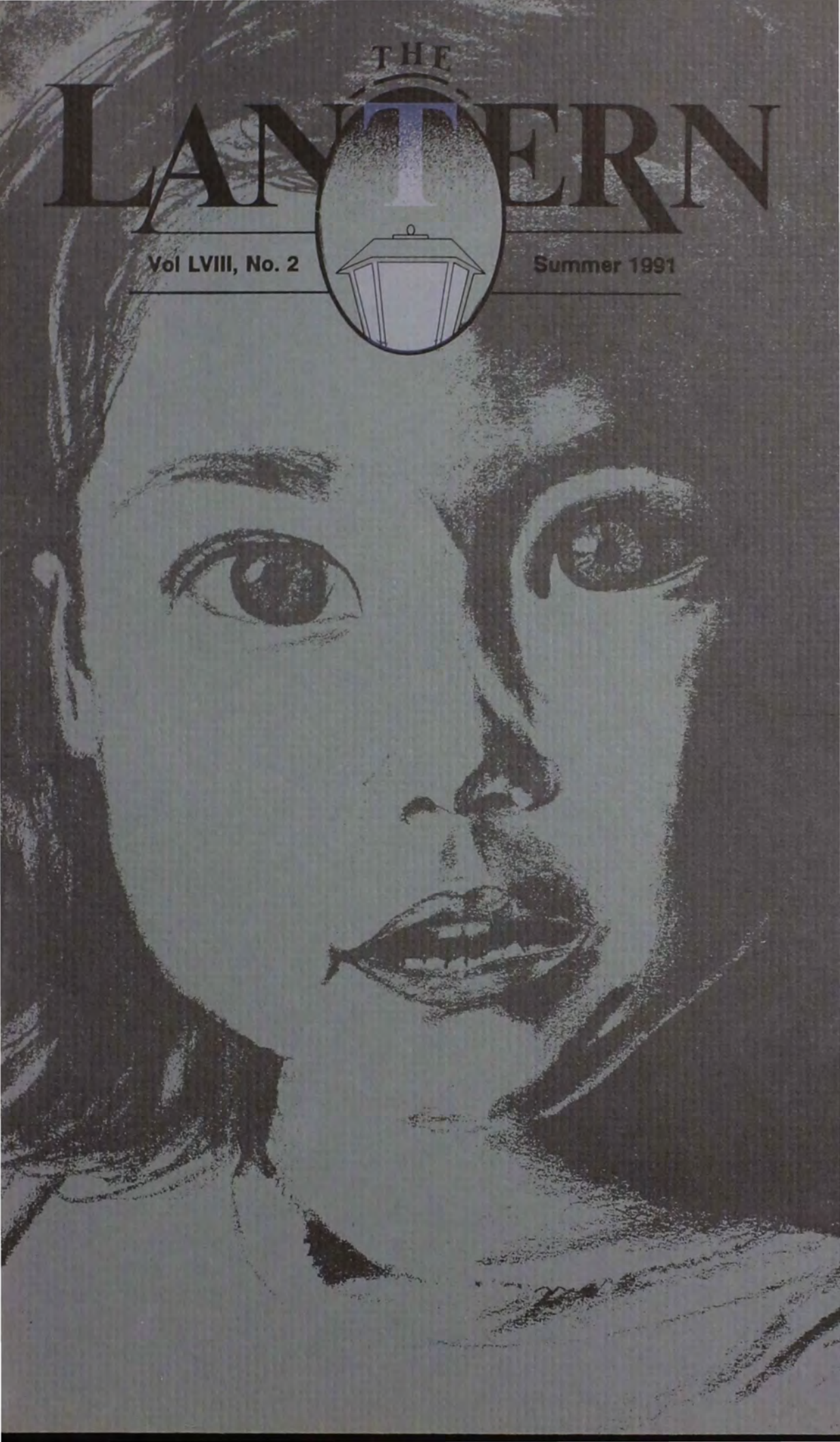
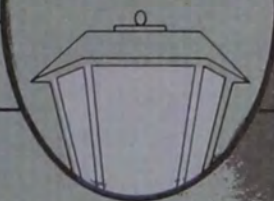
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THE LANTERN

Vol. LVIII, No. 2 _____ Summer 1991

Jill Persico--WE ALL FALL UP _____	3
Gar Donecker--CLERICAL NIGHTMARES _____	4
Michele McCabe--THE BRASS BED _____	5
Karin Hoerner--art work _____	9
Kate Phillips--MON AMOUR _____	10
Jill Persico--THE LADY OF J. ALFRED PRUFROCK _____	11
Elissa Long--FORBIDDEN PLACES _____	15
Mary Messina--EDGE OF THE DANCE _____	16
Rebecca Heyl--photograph _____	17
Donna Cuddeback--CRYSTAL WORLD _____	18
Bob Lane--SATURDAY, JULY 12, 1978, 4:59pm _____	24
Kate Phillips--OF YOU I THINK _____	25
Christina Steffy--JUST ANOTHER STATISTIC _____	26
Neil Schafer--A \$16 WORD IN A \$4.99 TRASHCAN _____	29
Donna Cuddeback--SOUVENIR _____	30
Ted Manser--art work _____	31
Paul Gagne--THE JESTER _____	32
Krishni Patrick--AGAINST A ROCK _____	33
Bob Lane--I WISH I WERE A FISH _____	39
Tony Barber--TOO SMALL, TOO WEAK _____	40
Jennifer Blay--SOMWHERE'S IN N.Y.C. _____	42
Ted Manser--art work _____	47
Dhinesh Samuel--STUCK UP _____	48
Kate Phillips--PATTERNS _____	49
Keith Leparulo--I SHOULD TELL YOU NOW _____	50
Chris Major--ME, TOMMY, AND MISS MAY _____	51
Dianne Gabel--TWO HANDS _____	58
Kristin Facciolini--art work _____	59
Kathleen Bowers--ALL-NATURAL... _____	60
Jeremy Trinidad--IRONY OF A SUBURBAN DEATH _____	63
Patrons _____	64

EDITOR'S NOTE

In its 57th year of production, this semester's issue of THE LANTERN features poetry. THE LANTERN staff congratulates visual art contest winner Nicole Alu whose winning work is featured on the cover, and our two poetry contest winners Jill Persico and Gar Donecker, whose poems WE ALL FALL UP and CLERICAL NIGHTMARES, appear on pages 3 and 4.

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JUDGES NOTE

THE PALMS FOR POETRY. Aristotle reminds us that unlike history, poetry focuses on events as they might have occurred, stressing universals and not particulars. However, the description of poetry's projects has taken many forms, for example: the desire to define an ideal, the quest for beauty, harmony or the instant of emotion and the crafting of equivalences among contiguities. Nevertheless, none of the definitions can prepare us completely for the experience of the individual poem itself, which is at once strange and familiar. In the two examples honored in this issue, "We All Fall Up" and "Clerical Nightmares," the compelling questions are not only about what happened, but about how what has happened is remembered and utilized. In both cases, the poems--each in its own way--do not strive to compete with history; rather, they labor to supplement it.

We All Fall Up

By Jill Persico

Silly twelve year-olds, unaware.
High-pitched voices rising above
The churning jacuzzi motor.
Preoccupied, displaying their
Sex through undefined bikinis,
As unexperienced male fingers grope
Blindly beneath the explosive liquid

Surface. Cold, blue tile
Someplace...everyplace
Bubbles burst along jagged edges
Hiding behind that heavy curtain,
Never lifting, forever rising,
Separating thought from body...
A bloodless decapitation.

You cannot watch your blood freely flow,
Seeping through each fold of my towel.
"No, you won't lose the finger, Den,
Though it will bleed for quite some time."
My voice had quivered, but still, I knew
Because I was seventeen
And I had bled before.

Clerical Nightmares

By Gar Donecker

To no sounds save dream whisperings
I glide, a hoary satellite,
a dove, or cloud, perhaps, past Greece.
The Aegean sloshes like wine,
purple-rose in the breaking dawn.
Something, the subtle, the sublime
orchestration of pale islands
and drunken waves and sheer heavens
seems soothingly appropriate
from this peculiar, tall vantage.

The dream abruptly swoops downward;
a narrow shaft of light pierces
from an angle the murk beneath
one isle. Even Leviathan
might offer nominal comfort,
but the deep horror now revealed
chills my tightening chest and bowels.
Colossal, algae encrusted,
cobalt hued chain links span the depths.
Delos. "Mother!" Wide-eyed, awake,
I cross myself, over, over.

The Brass Bed

By Michele McCabe

I was twenty years old when we were married. Kevin and I dated for most of our high school years, and after much begging and pleading, he finally convinced me to marry him. He said he would always take good care of me and would never stop loving me. He coaxed me with an engagement ring on Christmas morning in front of all my relatives. That night after everyone went to bed, we both got drunk on the vodka we found in my dad's liquor cabinet. In the morning I awoke to find myself engaged.

I reasoned it was the next logical step in my life, so what else could I say? I decided I could deal with his addiction to sports and his habit of playing pool with his buddies in the bar downtown till all hours of the night and even with the way he chomps on his fingernails until they bleed. I wasn't going to college, couldn't afford it. He did say he would take good care of me. Six months later we were married. That was five years ago.

March had just arrived, and it was our anniversary. We were headed in our old, beat-up Chevy Chevette, Kevin calls it "Hot Mama," to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. It wasn't Hawaii or anything, but at least it was somewhere. We lucked out and got this great deal on a condo. The salesman said all we had to do was tour the agency's condominium complex and attend a sales presentation, and we could earn four nights and five days free vacation. Kevin had just gotten laid off and was fumbling around for something to do, and I had vacation time coming so we decided to take it. I thought it could be a second honeymoon. But it seemed that the batting cage that was advertised as being down the street from our condo was the only thing on Kevin's mind.

So there we were puttering along I-95 headed south, listening to a sports talk show on our AM radio. I felt guilty because I hadn't said much on the way down, but then again, neither had he. I couldn't help thinking about how great it felt to get away from that cubicle my company calls an office. I swear it's the size of the bathroom at the corner Texaco station. I do miss the people though, Rob in sales in particular. I love our little game to see who can make the most shots with our trash through the little hoop above the waste basket. We total the score at the end of the day. I know he lets me win.

I still feel uncomfortable with the silence. "Kevin, did I tell you about the new girl who started work? She just graduated from college and seems ready to take on the world. She sits right next to me."

"Oh. That's nice."

"Yeah, I was thinking of taking her out to lunch next week, just to get to know her better. She's such an interesting girl. So, what do you think?"

"Michael Jordan!"

"What did you just say?" I demanded.

"Michael Jordan. Didn't you just hear the DJ ask what basketball player got picked in the first 1984 draft? I can't believe this! I wish I could get to a phone. I always know the answer when I can't get to a phone." He smacked the steering wheel with his fist. I turned forward, staring at the endless stretch of highway ahead of us.

Then, I started to smell something funny. "Do you smell that?" I snapped.

"Smell what?" He blurted just as steam began seeping through the cracks on the side of the hood.

"That!" I screamed.

We turned off at the nearest exit, the sign read "Pleasantville, South Carolina." We rode the hunk of metal for a few more miles, looking for a service station, then coasted to the side of the road. I sat in sheer disbelief. I had asked Kevin before we left to make sure the car was OK, but I guess he forgot. So, I sat planted in the passenger seat with my arms folded across my chest as Kevin popped the hood and let billows of steam out. Then, he plopped back in the seat beside me, and we both just stared forward at the dash. I fingered the garter that was suspended from the rear-view mirror. Kevin hung it there right after our wedding, the sun had stripped it of its color.

Kevin opened our trusty road atlas and informed me we were about fifty miles short of Myrtle Beach. Without a word I flipped up the lock, flung open the door and slammed it behind me. I started down the road, kicking the tire as hard as I could as I walked by. It made me feel a little better.

A crisp breeze rushed against my face as we walked along the side of the road. My body had a chill so I wrapped my coat around me tighter and hugged my body. Kevin and I used to take long walks all the time, holding hands and talking of how our life would be when we were married. My pace was quick and deliberate, and Kevin straggled a few steps behind me, shuffling through the gravel in his old Reebok sneakers.

We walked for about three miles as darkness set in with each step. The streetlamps were fully lit by the time we found an old, white three story house with black shutters. A sign out front read, "Room for Rent-Inquire Within." Seeing there was no hotel anywhere in sight and feeling intense burning on my feet, I decided we should go in and ask if we could stay there for the night. We

approached the front door and Kevin knocked. As we waited for a response he leaned against the porch railing and stared down at his feet. I picked the paint chips off the front shutters near the door.

After minutes of waiting, a plump, middle-aged woman in a brightly flowered housedress came to the door. I explained our situation and she agreed to help us out. She led us to Apartment C around the back of the house. Kevin fumbled with the lock for a few seconds, he's always been a little clumsy, but finally unlocked the door. And that was when we found the brass bed.

The bed sat right in the middle of the room on an intricately designed oriental rug. It was such a peculiar place to put a bed, most peculiar. A street light on the walkway barely penetrated the textured bay window behind the bed, enough however to cast a shadow on the two antique end tables which stood at either end of the window. Matching pewter candlesticks rested on the tables and were covered with layers of melted wax which flowed over the edge to form a beautiful cascade frozen in time and space.

Kevin flicked on the light and threw his coat on the highback chair which stood in the corner. "Will ya shut the door? You're letting the draft in," he grumbled.

Why didn't he notice anything? The bed was so beautiful that even the green film which tarnished its once beautiful shine did not detract from its presence. Kevin just chucked off his dirty sweat-sock on it as he peeled his clothes off and searched for a bathroom to do his duty. As I peered around the room, I wondered who had slept here, and I wondered where they had gone. I wondered if they felt the draft which snuck through the window panes and made the sheer white curtains quiver. I wondered if they were married or if they stayed here by themselves or if they stayed here with their lover. The bathroom door slammed behind him, and I just stood next to the bed wondering.

Kevin emerged a few minutes later and started to rip down the covers. I pulled down my side as though unsure about what I was going to find. The pillows were fluffed up so high I thought they must be brand new. Bright lace trimmed pillow cases covered them. I pressed my hand on the mattress and found the sheets so crisp and clean I was almost afraid to lay in them. Kevin just clambered in on the other side. "Our sheets are never like this," he blurted as he made himself comfortable. I turned to go use the bathroom, leaving him behind. I found the toilet seat up, so I put it down, sat down on it and began to cry.

I finally composed myself, returned to the room and climbed in bed. I lay there and heard the familiar grunts and sighs right before he falls asleep. "Do you love me?" I asked into the darkness.

"What kind of question is that?" he groaned, turning over. His back was to me now, I could tell. I couldn't fall asleep, so I lay there staring at the ceiling. I wondered what Rob was doing.

Morning came too soon, and we packed what bags we had and started back for the car. Kevin left the room before me, he said he needed some fresh air. I made the bed so well it was like we were never there. I turned to say my own silent goodbye to the room, and still the brass bed stood in the middle of the floor just as before. When we made it to the car, it had cooled enough to make it to a gas station. On the way we passed a roadside diner, and we decided to stop for eggs and coffee.

As we walked in the front door, we were greeted by close to a dozen old men wearing flannel shirts with no front teeth and whiskers grown way too long. The waitresses sat around the counter on their large rear-ends and shared the gossip for the day. We chose a booth near the back and waited for the waitress.

I fingered the old crumbled straw wrappers which sat in the ashtray waiting to be discarded. Pepper sprinkled the middle of the table, but with one swipe it all scattered to the floor. Even the local newspaper was carelessly folded and shoved behind the plastic holder which read the morning specials. Kevin wasn't saying much, he just sat watching the stock car race showing on the black and white TV set mounted on the wall. He mumbled something about Richard Petty making a comeback.

Uncomfortable and fidgety, I reached over and snapped open the newspaper. I skimmed through the first few pages, not really reading it. But then something caught me eye. It was on the fifth page in the top left hand corner. The headlines read, "Pleasantville Man Kills Self After Wife Leaves." I choked on my coffee and began to shiver.



Karin Koberner 3/91

Mon Amour

By Kate Phillips

Dusty pictures
top the bureau,
and wrinkled letters
line the drawers.

Reminders of my life-
my ways-
feelings, evenings, touches-
all the way they were before.

Fill the tub
and add the gleaming bubbles-
I can hide deep beneath,
and there, safe, let my dreams soar.

He finds me.
Even there - in my frothy hide-away
and torments me.
His voice calling, "Mon amour..."

When he breathed still,
he would say to me, call me,
"Mon amour..."
These words strike at my core.

Now - even now
I can hear him calling - trying
"Mon amour..."
as I held his head beneath the bubbles.

The Lady of J. Alfred Prufrock-- Her Reply

By Jill Persico

I will go and follow you,
 Provided the night's clear and I'm home by two.
 But let's explore a quaint village; not the city.
 Let us be among those walking arm in arm,
 Absorbing all the charm
 Of restful nights in houses by the sea
 And quiet inns for wine and cookery.
 Cobblestone paths that follow like an unreal dream,
 Aren't as unreal as they seem
 And they lead you to a new discovery.
 I can't say what you will find;
 You need only open your mind.

Some women read Shakespeare's poetry
 'Cause they want to. Can't you see?

That feline will become nestled within security.
 That feline finds exquisite comfort in security.
 But curiosity killed the cat, and not you,
 So while you can, see all you can see.
 The dust on the hearth will accumulate soon enough.
 Get yourself up now, don't be late
 For now is the time to experience
 Life. Quickly now because it just won't wait.

For time is ticking away
 And that feline remains beside the fire
 Becoming nestled in security.
 Ticking away, ticking away.
 Prepare only to be yourself, and then, retire.
 Now is the time to change and multiply.
 Work hard now so as to enjoy later
 All of life's pleasures in abundant supply.
 Our time's now, I have a hunch.
 All of this indecisiveness is absurd.
 Must you sit and ponder each and every word?
 Decide now, we'll continue after lunch.

Some women read Shakespeare's poetry
 'Cause they want to. Can't you see?

I now know there is not time

To stand back and observe things go awry
 I must fight for life; I must not die.
 I know I am growing old but I'll not cry.
 Yes, they will surely notice my gray hair
 But my silver locks will fly just like the mane of a mare.
 And my dress and made-up face will shine like an ancient gem
 so rare.

(They will say: "She really takes the time to care.")

I can't sigh

And just watch the world pass,

For every second in time

Brings hope. And change can be initiated amidst earth's grass.

How can I inform you of all you do not see?
 Evenings, mornings, afternoons free from woe,
 Allow each coffee spoon to mature and grow.
 Savor every moment, for this can be your key
 To knowledge's door. It's not what you know,
 But how you know it's so.

Yes there are eyes out there and I have known them too.
 Glue doesn't hold forever and nor will their gaze.
 And you have wings with which to fly, and flee from their stares
 To your cocoon where things will change for you.
 Look inside yourself; there's
 The place to begin the metamorphosis phase.
 Then you'll know that it's so.

No, it won't be easy. I have known arms as well,
 Arms that are muscular, and tanned, and strong.
 (But in the moonlight, wrapped in gentleness!)
 Is it the scent of his face
 That makes my thoughts displaced?
 Arms that often need to stretch or to pick up that which fell.
 I will know with my eyes.
 Will my glance be returned?

I too have traveled through those lonely streets at dusk
 And seen the flickering of candlelight
 Through windows, behind which women cry themselves to sleep.

Oh, little crab please come out of your shell.
 For the sea, like emotion, consumes you.

Afternoon passes, nightfall brings a quiet hush.

Caressed by its curtain
 Alert...anxious...and yet uncertain,
 A transparent barrier between us.
 But upon taking those last sips of wine,
 Turn and see your reflection in these eyes of mine.
 They will put you at ease, for they have fear too.
 I myself have not slept for days and feel as if drained of all
 my health.
 I am no princess, but you bring me wealth.
 Before I lose my courage, tell me how you feel
 Because as my anxiety grows, my dreams begin to congeal.
 Overcome your fear, please do!

It would be more than worth the price you'd pay.
 For when the fruit and wine have been consumed,
 If the candle burns out, our relationship is doomed.
 Please prevent this courtship's death
 Through your words. The flame will be fueled by your breath.
 There's no need to fear that which you want to say.
 There's no need to fear that I will close the gate.
 There's no need to die, to speak of worthy things.
 I'll listen to everything you have to say.
 Your words will be a song a sparrow sings,
 And I will say: "Yes, I do feel that way.
 Yes, I feel the same way."

I feel that it's more than worth any price
 And extremely worth while.
 For after moonlit walks, and flowers, and knowing glances;
 After the slow dances, after that first kiss, after picnics in the
 grass in spring--
 And yes, even more things
 That have created comfort between us. I know
 They'll allow you to say just what you mean, and they'll allow us
 to grow.
 It's sure to be worth while
 When I, lying beside you under a clear night's sky
 And turning toward the sea shall whisper:
 "Yes I do feel that way,
 I really do feel the same way."

No, you are not Prince Hamlet, yet you are my prince.
 Attendant lord, I need attending to.
 Make me your progress; declare our love true.
 You're my prince, and to me you always bring

Your sweet smile and then hold me tight.
Caring, sincere, and sensitive;
Always making everything all right.
Of my feelings, you are so perceptive.
My prince, you are a king.

I'm still young...I'm still young...
My dresses will flow along, like a bell rung.

I shall let my hair down and pick fruit fresh from the tree.
I shall wear a floral sundress and hold you close to me.
Together we'll run along the surf, so free.

The tide rolls in especially for us.

We will imagine those mermaids of the sea;
For us they sing. They'll never cease their song.
They know we were meant to be, all along.

Let us remain close to the sea for always;
It has brought our dying romance alive.
We'll swim in emotion, but we'll survive.

Forbidden Places

By Elissa Long

This bizarre knack that I have
for going places that I do not belong
leaves scars. These scars are each
named for a man, not a place, but the
place is where I will never belong.

Each place he produced this mark is
a signal of the healing that took place
after he was gone. Like finally falling
in a secluded bog where trees camouflage the
stinking, bubbling, decomposing mud; I knew

that it was inevitable. Here, where
the insects alone send signals that having
blood is enough reason not to be there. And
yet, the attraction is still amazingly strong
even after the bleeding and then the healing.

I still feel that I must go back and meet
the impossibility of the situation, and
overcome what attracted me in the
first place -- exotic, hypnotic, dangerous
places that pulled me in like quicksand.

Edge of the Dance

By Mary Frances Messina

The surprise in your eyes
when you came to the door
was well received
In fact, anticipated.

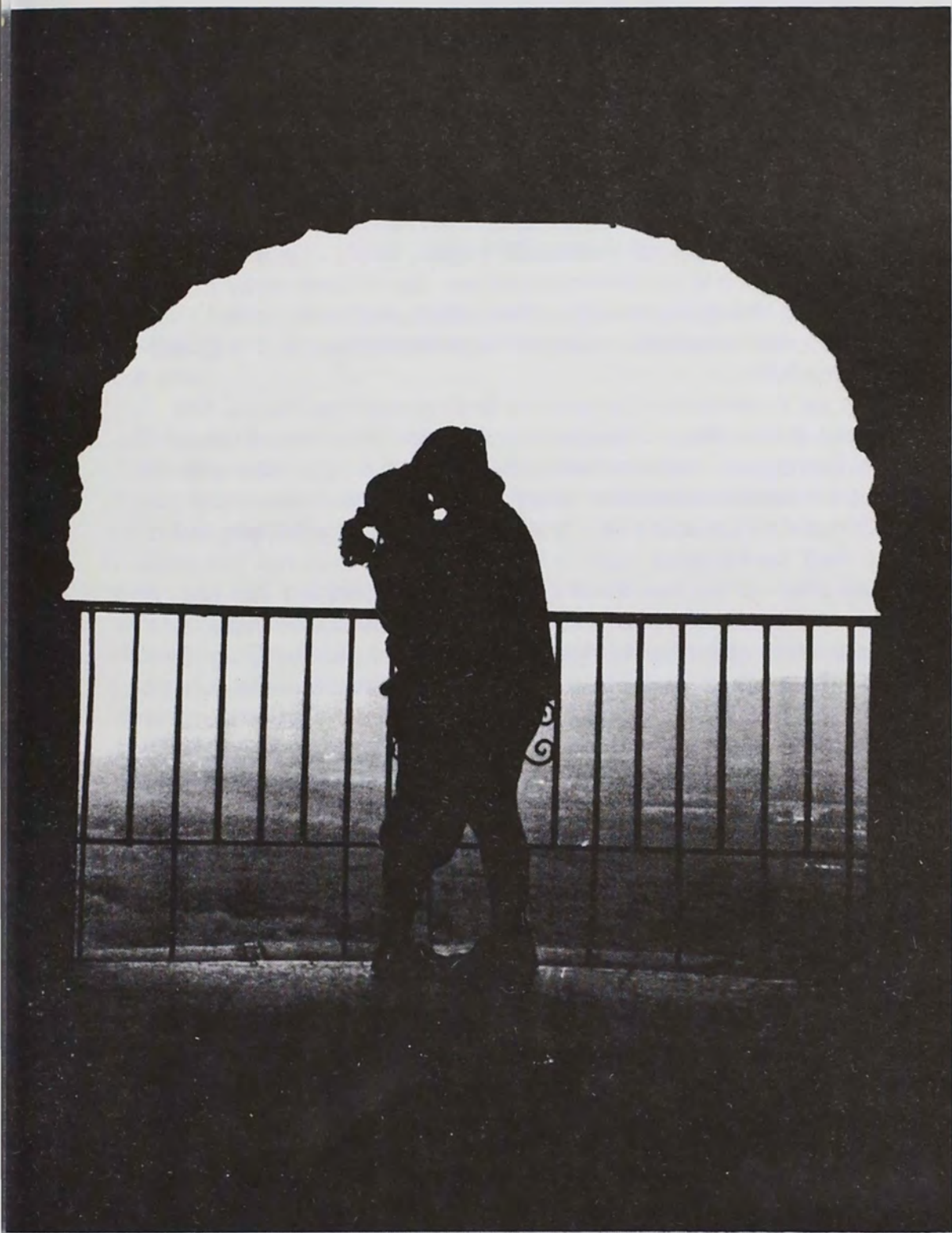
I laugh at the thoughts
that must have gone through your head.
Where did the skinny girl
in jeans and baggy sweaters go?
Who was this lady in the skin tight dress
and black seamed stockings?
Certainly, not the girl
you knew.

The excitement may have been too much for me
or it might have been the greasy chicken and Slammers.
I was about to escape to the bathroom
when you asked me to dance.

I smiled when you held me close
but your touch warned me.
Did you turn back to my friend?
I wasn't ready for that yet.

With each rotation that we made
we became our former selves
you were you
and I, me.

The magic of the evening ended
All I had left was two half glasses of wine
one I savored,
the other flat.



89

Rebecca Heyl

Crystal World

By Donna Cuddeback

Jen stood by the bay window watching the snow fall delicately, exquisitely, to the ground outside. Night was slowly descending. The outdoor Christmas lights twinkled between the branches of the rose bushes surrounding the lawn in front of the house. Sometimes a snowflake would land on a particular bulb, dousing its glow for maybe a split second before melting away.

The house was almost completely quiet, except for the hum of the water pump in the basement below. Jen moved away from the window to check the fireplace. She added another log and watched the flames dance around it. She switched on the Christmas tree lights.

Jen sat down in front of the fire and warmed her hands. She glanced at the tree and spotted her favorite ornament: a handmade yarn Snoopy doll her aunt Louisa had given her when she was five. The yarn had frizzled some over the past fourteen years and one of Snoopy's ears was missing, thanks to their dog Bridget, but it remained her favorite.

Jen checked her watch. In a couple more hours her dad and step-mother would be back from the office Christmas party, and her two step-sisters would probably be back from shopping. She knew her brother wouldn't be home till very late since he was out with his new girlfriend. She didn't want anyone to come home and intrude on her peace, yet Jen felt somewhat lonely. Maybe Katie and Laura would ask her to help wrap presents. Probably not. They didn't even ask her to go shopping with them.

This was to be their first Christmas together as a family. Last May, Jen's dad married Sally and their whole world turned upside down. Kind of like those little crystal balls with the tiny scene inside and when you shake it up all the snow becomes a flurry of whiteness and the whole picture changes. Jen thought this change was the best thing that ever happened to her dad. He needed a wife. But Jen never quite felt comfortable with Sally's daughters. There was an edge of competitiveness in everything they did. They felt some sort of need to dominate all conversations, especially Katie. Katie loved to talk about herself. Of course, it didn't help matters that both Katie and Laura had perfect grades in college, while Jen was lucky to get a B.

Jen walked back over to the window to watch the snow. Winter was her favorite season. She watched as two bright, round lights would their way up the road and into her driveway. The lights blinked off like two weary eyes. She watched the figure approach and waited for the doorbell to ring.

Jen opened the door to find a young man with blonde hair hulking before her. He had to be at least 6'3".

"John! I can't believe it's you!" Jen reached up to hug her old friend. "My God, you got so TALL!"

"It has been a while, hasn't it?" he said with a grin.

"At least, what three years?" she said. "Come in, come in, it's cold out there."

"I thought maybe we could take a drive and catch up on things. I got a sixer down at the lake house chillin' just for you. And..."

With a mischievous look in his eyes, John reached inside his jacket and pulled out a bottle. "...some Blackberry Brandy to warm your toes."

Jen's face lit up into a smile. He hadn't changed a bit.

"Let's go," she said, tugging on her Sporto boots and grabbing her coat.

The lake house John was referring to was actually a beat up, old trailer his uncle owned. It overlooked Owasco lake in upstate New York. There were windy, wooden stairs built into the side of the cliff that made the lake accessible, and a long creaky dock.

John and Jen used to go there late at night to get away from everyone and everything. He always knew how to cheer her up when things went bad, which was quite often, especially after her mom died. They'd sit on the dock all night, in all kinds of weather, just talking. But then they discovered each other: tentatively kissing, tentatively touching. It was here, when she was sixteen and he was seventeen, that John proposed to her.

"John, you know I love you and you're the best friend I ever had. But I think we need some time apart. Things are moving too quickly for me. I'm not ready to give you what you want." Jen looked up and saw the pain on his face. She didn't want to hurt him, but she knew that eventually he would resent the fact that she always made him stop before things went too far.

"I love you, Jen. I can wait till you're ready. You know I'd never push you into bed." He held her hand tightly.

"I know that, but it's not fair to you. We just need some time, that's all," she said.

"Will ya wait for me, Jen? No matter what happens or who you date, will ya wait for me?"

"You bet," she said.

"Will you marry me? After college? We'd be great together. I don't want to lose you. Promise me," he begged.

"I promise. My life wouldn't be the same without you, either. I'll come back to you, just let me go for now." She held fast to his hand.

"I love ya, Jenny." He looked so sad. those eyes.

Jen followed John down the wooden steps. He carried a blanket in one hand and the Blackberry Brandy in the other.

The lake looked silvery in the moonlight. It was iced over in some parts, but not completely for the water still rippled with life. John stopped at the edge of the dock and pulled a six pack of Bud out of the snowbank. They walked out to the end of the dock and John cleared off the snow so they could put the blanket down to sit on.

"So how's college life, Jenny? Straight A's like high school?" he asked, popping the tab of his beer can.

"More like straight C's, she laughed. "And I have a Philly girl for a roommate. Let's just say our personalities clash just a bit." She took a long sip from the brandy. It was her favorite.

"How about you? I heard you decided to go to college, after all. Two year school?" she asked.

"Yup, I graduate in May. In fact, I made Dean's list this semester," he said.

"Get out! YOU made Dean's list? Now how's that for a switch." She laughed.

"What can I say? I am the man. So how's the old step-mummy? I heard your dad got married."

"She's fine. She makes him happy."

"But...come on, you can tell me. I know something's wrong, I can see it in your eyes. Fess up," he prompted.

"I don't know, I just feel out of place. I mean, I could be out all night and no one would notice or wonder where I was." She took a long swig from the brandy. "And my dad just adores Sally's daughters. They're perfect, how could he not? You just don't know how happy I was to see you at my door tonight."

"Well, you know, I wanted to bring you this," he said, reaching inside his coat and pulling out an envelope. He handed it to Jen.

It was a birthday card.

"Happy nineteenth! I bet you thought I'd forget after all this time."

"Oh, it's sweet! Thank you so much." She gave him a big hug.

"I'm glad someone remembered." ·

"Yeah, right," he laughed.

"I'm serious. No one remembered that today was my birthday." She traced patterns in the snow with her gloved hand.

"They really forgot?" he asked in disbelief.

"Yup," she said.

"Well, you know, birthdays during the holiday season. It's understandable that it would be overlooked," he joked. Seeing her

downcast face, he said, "Okay. Time to change the subject. When are we getting married?"

Jen laughed and threw a handful of snow at him. "Sorry, hon. My boyfriend at school wouldn't be too happy about it."

"Oh! I'm crushed! You promised!" he yelped, falling down backwards with his hands over his heart.

"You are such a goof!" She threw more snow at him.

"That's okay," he said after a pause, "my girlfriend probably wouldn't be too keen on the idea either. That is, if she's still speaking to me." He let out a sigh and sat up. "We kinda got into a little fight tonight. Actually, it was a pretty big fight. I went out to a bar with a couple of girls in my Economics class to celebrate passing the final, and she flipped. They were just friends, honestly Jen, but Christine didn't believe it. She gets so jealous sometimes. So we had a big fight, and I left. And, well, here I am. If Christine knew I was here with YOU, she'd really flip. She always tells me that first loves never die out whenever I so much as mention your name."

"Well, I guess that's true. You know more about me than anyone else knows, and we've helped each other through a lot of tough times. That's something she'll never share. But there are things you two have shared that I'm not a part of, so it equals out. You just have to make her understand that." Jen sipped her brandy.

"I'm not sure if I want to," he said.

Jen looked into his twinkling blue eyes and wrapped herself up in their warmth. She hadn't realized quite how much she had missed him till now.

"How does May of 1992 sound?" he joked.

"What about Christine?"

"If you'll forget about what's-his-name, I'll forget about Christine." Something in his face told Jen he was serious.

"May of '92 is good for me. But it better be a big rock," she said, pouting and crossing her arms across her chest.

"Anything for you. Happy birthday," he said, giving her a light kiss on the cheek.

She looked into his eyes and realized that she still loved him. And that she wanted him back.

John reached out and gently brushed the hair away from her face, and then ran his fingertips along her jaw line. "I love ya, Jenny," he said, kissing her slowly, tentatively.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and returned his kisses. It was like they'd never been apart.

"Let's go upstairs to the house," she murmured.

He stopped and looked her in the eyes. "Are you sure?" he

asked.

"I'm sure," she grinned.

They gathered their things and climbed back up the stairs. John went to find the spare key his uncle had hidden in an old bird house in a tree. He unlocked the door, and led Jen through the dark to the bedroom. He asked her again if she was sure. She was.

They were in the car listening to Christmas music. John was babbling something about his plans for after graduation. Jen felt her head bobbing to one side, but couldn't seem to control it. She was so sleepy. It had to be after four in the morning. She watched drowsily as the snowflakes hit the windshield and disappeared as the wipers swished them away. She watched as the trees along side the road spun nearer and nearer.

Jen tried to open her eyes, but had trouble focusing. Did I fall asleep with my contacts in, she wondered. Something different about the room. It was awfully bright. Where was she? There was some sort of curtain enclosing her. And tables with shiny objects nearby. Somebody was calling her name.

"Jennifer? Can you hear me, Jennifer? My name is Dr. Murphy. Your parents are right here behind me. Try to relax."

Jen tried to focus once more. She saw her father and Sally standing behind a man in white.

"Hi, honey. You gave us quite a scare," Sally was saying "and you missed the Birthday party we had planned for you. We'll have another as soon as you get home. How's your head? Do you hurt anywhere else? Can we get you anything..."

"Where's John?" Jen asked softly.

"You know, Katie and Laura are outside, and your brother is on his way, would you like to see them?" Sally asked.

Jen noticed that her father wouldn't even look at her. What was wrong? She tried to sit up.

Sally was still chattering away, "...I know things have been tense around the house lately, but things are going to change. I was hoping this birthday party would get us all off to a fresh start..."

"Can I see John, Dad?" Jen asked.

Jen's dad came over and sat at the edge of her bed. He paused, and let out a sigh. "I don't know how to tell you this, Jen. It was a very bad accident. The roads were terrible. John didn't have his seat belt on. Thank God, you did." He paused again. "I'm sorry, Jen. He didn't make it."

Oh God, not John. Please not John, she thought.

"I know this is a bad time, but there's a girl outside who said

she's a close friend of John's and that she needs to talk to you. I told her I didn't think you'd want to see anyone but family. Should I send her away?" Sally asked.

Jen laid back against the pillows. What could she possibly say to this girl? "It's okay. Send her in."

"Would you like us to wait outside?" her dad asked.

Jen nodded. Those eyes.

Saturday, July 12, 1978, 4:59 pm**By Bob Lane**

With squeaky screen-door eyes the cat studied our bicycles and roller skates from his perch on the red-brick front porch of Toms Avenue.

The growling and clicking from my motorcycle grip of black plastic echoed up into the blue that hung above us like a flannel sheet.

My incandescent red bicycle sailed by Mr. L's plastic trash cans dragging a clothes-line tail that pulled my glee-squealing companions.

Their rough metal-wheeled roller skates cruised over the softened black-top street. But Scott let go, and my bike's tail wriggled like a snake.

I finally caught up with that balding little snake. The Cherry Hill Mall's fountain drowned out my vocal attempts to get his attention.

I would have asked him if he wished he had held on. Probably not. Not to his son, not to his wife, not to his job - not to the rope.

The green Ford dinosaur stepped out onto my bike's tail, its handlebars slipped under me as the pedals grabbed at my legs in a vain attempt to save me from the asphalt.

The five-o'clock-siren wailed as if to shake the tears from my stunned eyes. I left that stupid bike there in the street, and hoped a car would run over it.

Steaming and stalling I slowly staggered up the drive-way. Scott stood laughing on the grass, I cursed him good, just like a wizard would, for the rest of his life.

Of You I Think

By Kate Phillips

Of you I think
when the thunder comes.
The television screen flickers
and the war returns.
Prime Time,
and homework to do.
I wonder if the bombs
are like thunder for you.

Of you I think
when the wind blows.
Leaves rustle across the campus
and our steps
ring hollow on the walk.
Running to class - a time race -
When the wind blows,
does sand sting your face?

Of you I think
in my warm bed at night.
While the radio plays soft
- then the special report -
blares out of the blue
and as always,
I pray for you.

Just Another Statistic

By Christina Steffy

The man stared dumbly at the hospital ceiling alternately thinking and trying to avoid all thought. Only yesterday he had been a "liberated man," single, employed and happy. Today he was a government statistic, or would be as soon as he reported his desire to press charges. "Press charges," somehow the words seemed to make the crime seem even more real than the throbbing pain in his groin, "press charges."

The doctor came in. "Ah," she said, "I see you're awake. Good. I have called your place of employment and told them that you are suffering from pneumonia. As you probably know, in cases like this it is customary to create a mythical disease to report until the victim's chosen course of action is known. Your history of respiratory problems made the pneumonia the most logical choice. Please take your time in deciding what you wish to do. You will be here for at least a week, so there is plenty of time to decide."

The words "customary procedure," "victim," and "pneumonia" floated randomly through his brain. He closed his eyes until he heard the door close behind her as she left. "Castration." He said the word silently to himself, trying to comprehend what it would mean to live without a penis or testicles, "castration." Until yesterday that word had been used only to apply to tragic strangers. Other men were attacked in dark alleys and castrated, not anyone he knew. Sure he knew it was stupid to walk home from work at two in the morning, but it was only four blocks and he liked walking. "Castration." His mother had worried about him living alone. "Don't worry, Mom," he protested, "It's a safe neighborhood, besides if it comes to that, I can defend myself." "Castration." He closed his eyes again, unwilling to think further yet unable to turn off his thoughts. He contemplated calling the nurse and asking for a sedative but didn't think he could stand the pitying look he was sure to get, for the nurse, after all, still had his parts.

Two days later a police officer came and asked what he would like to do. He said, "I want to press charges against the woman who did this to me."

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"In that case we will need a sworn deposition..."

In 1987, the FBI reported 91,110 forcible rapes. However, experts estimate that 75 percent of all rapes are never reported.

* * *

The man sat in the room with his eyes closed and his mind reeling. The trial was over; the jury was out. It had been a nightmare almost worst than the night of the crime itself. The prosecution had an almost air-tight case. The accused was one of his ex-girlfriends. When they had broken-up six months earlier she had vowed in a letter to "fix you so that no other woman would ever want you." That letter was entered as evidence. Soon after she sent it, however, she had moved to a different part of the country. He had almost forgotten about her, until that night. "Castration." The prosecution found airplane reservations, hotel accommodations and other evidence that she had been in the city that night.

* * *

Almost half of reported rape victims were in some way acquainted with their attacker before the assault.

* * *

She had no alibi, but when the defense took the stand they didn't even seem to notice. They did not even bother to deny that she had committed the crime. Instead they asked his boss to testify that he had asked for a closing shift. From that they implied that he didn't mind walking alone at night. This allowed them to call a famous psychiatrist to testify that "Men who walk alone at night, especially in cities, often display a subconscious anger at being born male and hope that through castration they can vicariously 'become' female."

"Furthermore," the defense argument went, "the penis which was found next to him on the street was of relatively small size. This condition often leads to fears of being lost or overwhelmed during engulfment in intercourse, which when coupled with the aforementioned anger can lead to castration fantasies. That he had castration fantasies is undeniable because he did in fact ask for the closing shift, which would necessitate walking home alone at night." Their final argument was simply to state that "In cases of this type, with these sorts of psychological disorders, self-mutilation is not unheard of."

The man felt sick, but could not summon the necessary energy to go and look for a glass of water. While he was contemplating this dilemma, the call came that the jury was back. They had been out barely fifty minutes. The thirteen-member jury, with its five male members, filed silently into the courtroom. The man didn't hear anything except the centerwoman's voice saying clearly, "Not guilty." Three of the men on the jury looked pleadingly at him, silently asking for forgiveness. The other two looked stonily away as if in full agreement with the implication of his complicity.

* * *

Of rapes that are reported (and considered "founded"), approximately 45% result in arrest. Of those arrested, approximately 9% go to the grand jury. Of these cases presented to the grand jury, approximately 34% result in indictments, and of those indicted approximately 53% are convicted. This means that if 2000 rapes are reported, 900 arrests will be made; 81 of those men will go before the grand jury; 28 will be indicted, and 15 will be convicted.

* * *

The man sat at his kitchen table the evening following the trial. He had managed to escape the reporters asking "How do you feel about this decision?" by telling them that if they had to ask, they didn't deserve to know. The prospects of his life loomed before him. Even worse than the physical loss, which was, of course, significant, was the sense of violation. What would make a person do this to another human being? Maybe it was true, what his radical friends had always claimed, that women really didn't think of men as human. For certainly no one would commit such an act to a person she recognized as a human being. Men assaulting women was almost unheard of and severely punished when it did occur.

Thoughts of the trial came back to him like a poisonous gas. His fault? He wanted this to happen to him? The sheer absurdity of it made him want to scream and throw things, but he sat unmoving instead. Who wanted to live in a world where things like this happen and the victim is called culpable? How could this be happening? When would the alarm clock ring and end this nightmare? But simply crossing his legs was enough to remind him that this nightmare was for real; there would be no alarm clock. As the room grew dark around him, he sat thinking about a life alone, for no one had called since the trial; he'd heard from only a few friends since it happened ten months ago. At three-o'clock he got out of his chair and walked to the gas stove. He stood contemplating it for a full minute before he blew out the pilot light and turned on the gas. He walked to the telephone and dialed 911. "Yes," he said, "I'm calling to report a suspicious smell, kind of like gas." He gave the address of the apartment-next to his and walked back to the stove. He pulled up a kitchen chair, leaned his head on the counter next to the stove and inhaled deeply as a distant siren began its plaintive cry.

A \$16 word in a \$4.99 trashcan

By Neil Schaffer

Licking the powder off a doughnut
is hard enough when I'm not drunk.

Clemency is a word found readily
in Mid-Eastern 19th Century Philosophy.

An open shirt reveals a lot
more than a tightly buttoned one.

Melting chocolate invites trouble
for the dieting wife in the next room.

Cheating at cards is fun
when you can see your opponent's hand.

"Mom can I lick the spoon?"
Butterscotch brownies tumble to the floor.

A google is too many zeroes than you want to count
and my dictionary doesn't contain the word ain't

You never get lunch for free.
Nothing in life is simple.

Souvenir

By Donna Cuddeback

A shiny triangle of pink
That mars the skin upon my knee,
Is like a torn ticket stub
Saved from a special movie.

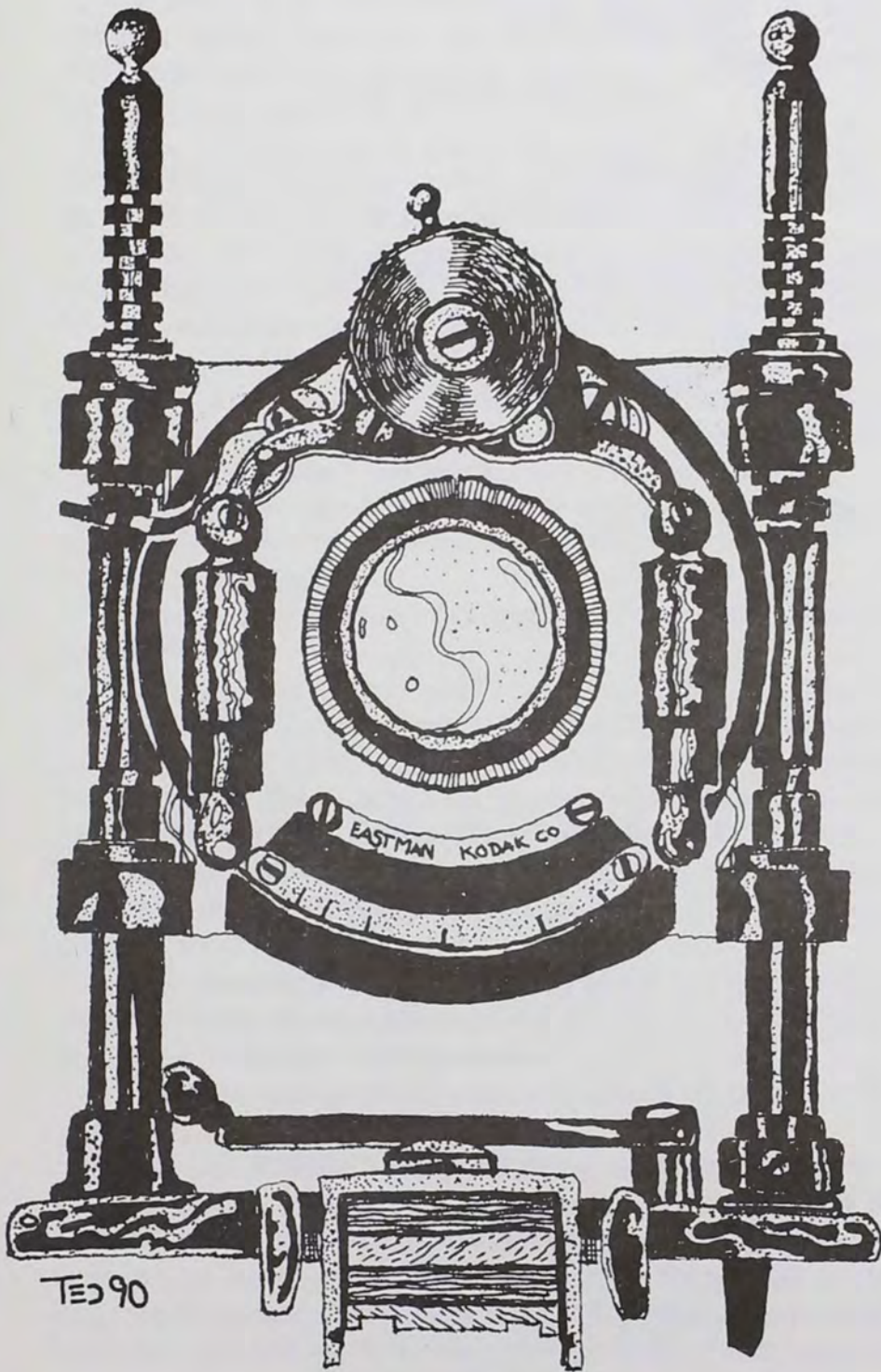
That begins as I am harnessed
To a red-yellow parachute
Pulled by a speeding boat below;
I soar higher, and higher still.

The azure sky kindly greets me
As I glide up into its arms,
The bright sun winks mischievously
From behind a startled white cloud.

Little people in neon that
Sprinkle the beach like confetti
Gaze up from their towels and wave;
My winged shadow skims across the water.

I descend as the rope slackens,
The floating platform looms larger
And larger. Someone grabs the rope
To guide me in, the others cheer.

My feet stumble, no longer weightless
I scrape my knee. A souvenir.
But I don't see the oozing red,
It's nothing compared to the blue.



The Jester

By Paul Gagne

This window-filling tree, a grey jester
no longer jaunty, daily mocks itself
with dropped juggles

(acorns, crumpled kin and

tin)

for the perpetual chuckle and
chatter of the rifferaffey royalty.

Sparse ashen leaves hang against the white sky
while faintly flailing like filaments strewn
by a careless spider;

hang against my

stripped mind

Against a Rock

By Krishna Patrick

"The family is all you have, Brenda. Your friends come and go, but your family, they're all you can count on in the end." Over the vinyl seat I could see my mother gripping the wheel with both hands as she yelled this wisdom back to me.

"Mom, I just wanted to stay home, okay?" My father asleep in the front seat was oblivious to my mother's spouting as we ticked the last few minutes off our fourteen hour trek.

"Brenda, how could we let you all alone at home with all kinds of weirdos roaming around. My God, if anything happened to you, do you know how long it'd be before I could help you."

"Mom, there're weirdos everywhere," I paused, "even in Michigan." I looked out the window. Rows of trees on the side of the road whizzed by like a big picket fence. "Lisa, next-door, stayed at home when her parents went to Williamsburg."

"Lisa is in high school and babysits all the time. She knows how to handle herself. You're in seventh grade."

"I watch Sherry."

"It's not the same thing. Besides, there's no point now. We're almost there."

"So, why should Sherry go?"

"Brenda, what is the matter with you! You're acting like a complete child." The car was silent for a moment save for the steady beat of the tires against the road. Finally, she glanced back at me in the mirror. The top of her face was all I could see. "Sweetheart, baby, you're growing up so fast. Look at you. You're becoming more and more a lady every day. I don't want your Uncle to miss that."

A lady. My mother's way of talking about the disgusting things growing on my chest. I hunched my shoulders forward to let my shirt hang loose and hide my shame.

"You know, your Uncle Harry loves you so much and misses you. He asks about you all the time."

"Mom, Uncle Harry." We were going to see my mother's favorite brother. He and my mother were only three years apart, a united front amongst all the petty family squabbling. Even now, living so far away, she still called my uncle for advice, about the dog, the house payments, and even me. People always said my uncle was a good man. He had worked all his life to make life better for the ones he loved. He and my father went to the same college. Dad always said, "Saturday nights we'd come in around four or five, and your Uncle Harry would be waking up to begin studying." He'd laugh, but then his face would change to one of

solemn respect. "He'd got out in three years and landed his job right after."

The car lurched as we hit the final road to the house. Dad woke up rubbing his eyes. I shook Sherry to wake her and put on her shoes. The gravel path was overgrown with branches from overhanging trees scraping the car as we past it. I watched the roadside where rodents and rabbits darted out, dodging the cars. I saw a snakeskin the wind had blown against a rock.

Aunt Sue ran out to greet us with hugs and kisses. My cousin Charlie gave me a shy hug and bent down to kiss Sherry who was holding my hand tightly. "Just got my driver's license," he grinned.

"What do you think of the new wing?" Aunt Sue exclaimed. "we just put it in in July, so it's a little rough. Harry's out getting a finish for the floors right now."

"It's beautiful, Sue. I can't believe you did it." My mother smiled the way she always did at Uncle Harry's. "You've been cramped in this old house for so long."

"Well, no more of that. There's a spare bedroom now that the girls can use. No more two to a couch, Brenny." Aunt Sue laughed. "God, do you remember last year when we squeezed Brenny in our bed."

My mother smiled. "This really is wonderful, Sue. Why don't we get the girls settled so they can get ready for tonight," she said.

Tonight. Aunt Sue's tradition was to invite all Mom's and Dad's old friends, have a grand old bash, and then the whole bunch of them would get roaring drunk. At some point they'd see me standing in a corner and plead with me to play the piano. Then they'd all laugh at my shyness and prod me on. I'd never know what to play. Last time I tried some Mendelson, and it hushed them for almost five minutes until my father cried out for something with some oomph. I crept away.

I pulled the covers up onto Sherry still tired from the long trip and kissed her forehead. I sat on the edge of her bed sorting through my sheet music. I could hear the buzz of my mother and Aunt Sue chatting away in the kitchen. I closed the door quietly behind me and walked toward the piano my mother had played at my age.

I opened up some Beethoven and tried to adjust the piano cover so it wouldn't hang over the keys too much when I played. Then behind me I heard a low "Brenda." My throat tightened as I turned to greet my uncle.

"Hello, Uncle Harry," I said. He stood behind me with a can of floor finish in his right hand. He leaned toward me to kiss me on the cheek. I could smell the sweat on his body. I turned my back to him, keeping my eyes on the music in front of me.

His chest brushed up against my back, and he leaned down to surround my shoulders and neck with his arms. His fingers clasped together just below my neck in what from the kitchen looked just like an affectionate hug.

"My, my, you're so much bigger than when I last saw you."

I kept my eyes straight ahead.

"Practicing for tonight?" he asked.

"No, I just wanted to."

"Well, go ahead. I don't want to stop you."

I struck the first few chords and tried to get lost in my playing. A cold set of fingers crept down inside my shirt and cupped my breast. I kept playing as best I could til the end of the stanza.

"What's wrong, honey?" he asked.

I kept my eyes straight ahead. "This Beethoven. It's difficult." A tea kettle whistled in the kitchen. "I can't get it to work. It doesn't matter how hard I try." The hairy arm in the corner of my eye moved as he squeezed me tight.

"Brenda, you're too smart. You know you'll get it."

"Harry?" His fingers flew out from my shirt. "We're in the kitchen," Aunt Sue called.

"I'll talk to you later." He placed his hand on my shoulder.

"Maybe we can go for a walk with Sherry."

I tried to resume playing. We would only be here for five days; we'd leave on the sixth. Maybe I could get Charlie to go into town a lot during the days. But the nights.

"Brenda! Brenda!" my mother called. "Come on, I want to take Sherry to the fortress." The fortress was my mother's old haunt, a large boulder with two trees on either side. It was at the edge of the woods just off the main path, the perfect hideout. The adjacent ground had been reinforced through years of childhood play with rocks and mud to make the spot a small shelter in the woods. My mother spoke fondly of the place. On a cold Michigan night, she'd say, the sky would be so clear, you could count the stars. Nothing could harm you; you were safe and protected from all evil.

I walked into the kitchen where my mother was drinking a cup of tea. "Mom, I'm tired. I think I'd rather just stay."

"Oh, Brenda, come out with us. It's so peaceful."

"I know." I just looked down at my feet.

"Well, don't just stay here and mope. Uncle Harry needs help out back. Why don't you spend the afternoon with him?"

"You're right, I haven't been to the fortress in a long time."

She looked at me a minute and shook her head. Then she turned and looked out the window.

That night the party turned out even worse than I expected. No one called me to play. In fact, no one paid attention to me at all. I

wandered around munching on a can of honey roasted peanuts. Around nine I went to bed after I tucked in Sherry. Images of cold, wet hands and rustling sheets kept me awake. I found myself shaking, afraid of this dark room with only sherry beside me. I got up and slipped on a pair of jeans and a sweatshirt.

From around the corner I could see my mother sprawled out on the couch, my uncle's arm around her. They were lying only a few feet away from the piano where my uncle had stood only a few hours before. Mom was laughing, one of the few times I'd seen her look so happy. Uncle Harry just seemed to be staring into nowhere. For just a moment I thought he saw me, but I pulled back just intime.

I yanked my coat out of the closet and headed back toward the spare bedroom. I slipped my arms under Sherry's neck and knees and carried her down to my cousin Charlie's room where my parents were staying. I stroked her forehead with my fingers. I walked to the door and locked it from the inside. I climbed onto my cousin Charlie's desk in front of the window and peered outside. It wasn't far. I hoisted myself up onto the windowsill and slid my legs down onto the ground below.

I watched my breath trail out in front of me as I made my way to the hideout. In the Michigan sky the moon hung high, clear, and full, blazing a trail in front of me. I was glad for I had no flashlight to guide me.

Behind the rock shelter I sat down and looked up into the sky. Dad had once tried to teach me the constellations down in Baltimore, but I had never looked at the sky here. The night silence soothed my stomach, and I closed my eyes to sleep.

I dreamt of my mother and her soft, gentle hands. I dreamt of her holding me in her arms and stroking my hair. I looked into her face mesmerized by its beauty. I reached up with my hands and tried to touch her. But ever time I got close, she slipped away into nothing and I was all alone.

"Damn, rocks." My eyes flew open to see Uncle Harry stumble into the fortress. He leaned down to brush the clods of dirt off his knees. "Brenda, honey, what are you doing out here?" He walked toward me slowly.

On the cold ground I pushed back with my legs and tried to blend myself into the rock. "I couldn't sleep with the party." I whispered. "I thought I'd come out here for a while."

"Aw, Brenny, you look cold. Let me hold you, honey." His face grew larger before me. Then, his arms squeezed my body and picked me up into the air. He placed me down on the flat ground mumbling "Poor baby." He unbuttoned my coat and pulled apart my shirt. I shivered as my bare skin hit the cold air.

I could no longer see the moon. His body above me blocked it from sight. I closed my eyes and listened to the sound of a zipper coming undone. I cleared my mind and tried to ignore what was happening at my breasts and below.

"Harry?" I opened my eyes to hear my mother's voice at the hideout entrance. "Harry, what are you doing? Brenny?" I could see her figure leaning against the rockface as if to hold herself up.

Uncle Harry froze above me. Finally he rolled his body off mine. The sound of his zipper refastening was the only sound. He stood up and pulled his coat tighter around him. "I'm sorry, " he said to my mother as he walked out of the shelter.

My mother leaned her head against the rock, silent. I pulled my clothes back on me and walked over to her. I tried to see her expression, but the clouds covered the moon.

"Mommy," I said. "Mommy, Uncle Harry, he..."

"Oh, sh, honey, sh. Don't say anything bad about your Uncle Harry. He had too much to drink, too much wine. I don't know what came over him tonight."

"Tonight? Mom, not just tonight."

"Sh, honey. Don't talk about it. He just lost his head, that's all."

The way back was quiet, not a word spoken between us. My mother had this look on her face, a look I couldn't understand. She seemed as if she was just moving, moving on, moving on leaving everything behind her.

The next morning my mother stood outside the car with my father, Sherry, and I already bundled inside. "I'm sorry, Sue, I can't believe I forgot the church meeting. I wouldn't leave, you know, if I wasn't in charge of the whole thing. It's really kind of funny, don't you think? I put the dog in the kennel, cancelled the mail and yet I forgot something like this."

"What meeting," my father muttered.

Aunt Sue had given up her protests now that we were in the car and ready to leave. She looked over at my cousin Charlie standing in the doorway of the house. "Why don't you at least wait for Harry?" She looked over at Sherry and me in the car. "He took off for the woods first thing this morning and should be back any minute now."

"It's too long of a drive to wait for Harry. Who knows what he's up to?" Mom laughed.

"But, Carol."

"Sorry, Sue, we've got to get going. She stooped down to pick up the bag at her feet. "Bye, good-bye, good-bye," she said as she turned from the car.

"What's going on?" called Uncle Harry. Emerging from around the side of the house he walked toward us.

"Harry." My mother raised her chin abruptly. "We're leaving."

"But, why?" He looked at my mother with hurt eyes. "All of a sudden like this."

From through the car windows I could see my mother's back rise as she took a deep breath. I clenched my fingers in my lap and waited. "They forgot a church meeting. Carol's in charge," Aunt Sue said.

"Yes, and I'm sorry, but we have to go." My mother smiled at the two of them.

"Well, you know best." Uncle Harry smiled, too. He walked over to my mother and put his arms around her and kissed her on the cheek.

My mother opened the back door and stepped inside. "Good-bye, good-bye," she called.

"Wait a minute. Let me say good-bye to my girls, first." Harry reached for the front door.

"We have to go, Harry." My mother's voice raised a single pitch. "Anyway, you'll wake Sherry."

"It'll only take a second." He opened the door and leaned his face in. He could barely squeeze his broad shoulders sideways into the door. But, he pushed and put his face in front of mine. "Give me a kiss, Brenny," he said. I leaned forward and kissed him. As he pulled his face out the door I felt his hand slip into my pocket.

"Drive." My mother said quietly from the back seat.

The car began to move forward, and I reached into my pocket. I pulled out an index card folded in half. In a thin, black pen he had printed, "Don't stay mad at your Uncle Harry."

It was eight o'clock and we were rolling down the same gravel path. This time I was in the front seat, and Sherry and my mother were in the back. I looked at my mother and wanted to say something that would make her come back to me. But she kept her face away from me the whole trip back. With Sherry asleep on her lap, she leaned back on the vinyl and watched the landscape. I watched the frantic cheeriness she'd used with Aunt Sue disappear and fade. Her lower lip was trembling, and she had on that look, that look I wished I could understand.

I Wish I Were A Fish

By Bob Lane

The glass block sun
streaks in pointed pencil paths
from the open air.
The air that waits to embrace me.

The thinning Scuba tank oxygen
tastes of a metallic fork flavor which
feeds my dry mouth.
The mouth that dreads its terminal breath.

The thick icy waters
employ their viable vice-grip vigor
to grasp my throat.
The throat that soon will suffocate my baffled lungs.

The smooth plastic mouth piece
shaped like a shot glass
is covered by my numb hands.
Hands that attempt to squeeze out one more minute of air.

My nose registers no discernable odor.
Not even the medicinal scent of anesthesia
could bring me out of this.
This everywhere blueberry-colored world that desires my presence.

I know the surface is up there,
but its ever-increasing distance
forces me to accept
the perverse peacefulness that lies in its pie-filling sustenance.

Too Small, Too Weak

By Tony Barber

A crystal clear glass bottle,
3/4 filled to its skull,
braced itself proudly by the Arm and
Hammer Baking Soda protected by the
ice-box in the corner of the kitchen.

Opposite, the conventional super-
power, a youth, Caesar at eleven,
who wore a luminous red jersey with
proud numerals upon his chest--
an emblem of his will for combat;

"I Thirst" he stated stubbornly,
as the box watched with anticipation.
Easily the youth approached. "Open!"
he commanded, while he pried at the
cold steel handle arm of the box

tearing the hinge from its foundation.
The youth snickered at the bottle.
He could not help but to notice the blood-
shot eyes of the bottle, this due to the light
that is constantly burning on inside the box.

Bravely, he bombarded the front line,
jostling aside the chicken and beans.
Now the second hand entered the scrimmage
as the box whispered to the bottle. But
after numerous attempts, the bottle ceded.

"Perfect" thought the youth. With the capture,
he began to squeeze the POW's tissue forcing
the lethal liquid onto his chapped lips.
This liquid stained and spilled
onto the floor, like blood on a white

T-shirt. Suddenly, without any siren, the youth
lost the grip of his strangle hold on the
neck of the bottle. The bottle had launched
itself upon the lower ledge of the box--a place
where no Patriot could ever intercept.

The youth stumbled when the shell impacted.
Pieces, zillions of living pieces implanted
themselves into the veins of our hero.
The youth shuttered at his salty lesion.
"I'm hit" he cried, as the ice-box cheered.

Somewheres in N.Y.C.

By Jennifer Blay

Andrea pulled John to the bar, giggling, "Buy me a drink. Pleeeaze buy me a drink."

As John ordered two Long Island Iced Teas from the Bartender he noted how closely Andrea, in her black lace skirt and black silk T-shirt, resembled Madonna.

"What's your name?" Andrea asked the bartender.

"Desiree."

"Desiree, you make wonderful drinks." Andrea grinned and slid a five dollar tip to Desiree. "Come on John, I wanna dance." The woman skipped through the dark lobby, gracefully pawing the men and women who stood in her path. Andrea liberated the two drinks from John and placed them on a triangular lounge table after imbibing heartily from both glasses. Glancing guiltily at John through her disheveled blonde hair she grabbed his hands and enticed him onto the dance floor. Swirling together to the music of Erasure they covered half the dance floor before the song's end. As the next track began Andrea pranced to her drink and gulped half. John followed her to the table, but drank more cautiously.

"I hafta dance to this song, it's one of my favorites." Andrea trotted away, abandoning John.

John watched Andrea flirt with another woman on the dance floor. The woman Andrea chose as a partner looked bewildered, but did not resist Andrea's tantalizing lead. Andrea choreographed their dance. She grabbed the woman's waist and swiveled them both downward. They rose to a standing level slowly, Andrea remaining taller until they were both standing erect. The stranger mocked Andrea's movements and glowed when Andrea smiled an encouragement. Within the duration of a single dance track Andrea had manipulated a stranger, and, by the nature of their kiss and embrace at the end of the song, John assumed she had gained a friend. John marveled at Andrea's wild spontaneity; he doubted he could ever gain a stranger's confidence so quickly.

"Hey, White Boy," Andrea greeted before gulping her Iced Tea. "Ready for another round, I'll buy." Andrea started for the bar, John at her heels.

"Ann-dreigha," a gruff voice stage whispered from the direction of the men's room. A balding man winked and cocked his head towards the rest-room door.

Andrea, without turning towards John, stuffed a twenty in his hand. "Get me a White Russian. I'll meet you at the bar." Andrea slithered her way into the men's room.

John shook his head and resumed his journey to the bar. John

had met Andrea in a painting class at Fordham. In class she seemed scholarly, yet playful. Not until they went bar hopping in Alphabet City a few weeks ago did John realize how dangerously Andrea flirted with life. "I'll have a Rum and Pineapple Juice and a White Russian, please." John settled himself on a stool and watched the unfamiliar mating rituals of the crowd. A small part of him wanted to become a participant, but John caressed his glass and tried to remain ignored.

"Did you miss me?" Andrea re-appeared, her arm around the balding man's shoulders. "John, this is Mike. I've known Mike for ages."

John extended his hand and grinned. Mike returned the gesture with a nod. John wondered what Andrea saw in him.

"We're going to another club, do you wanna join us?" Andrea implored of John while staring saucer-eyed at Mike.

"I've got to work tomorrow, actually today." John ventured. He would have preferred returning to Andrea's apartment and spending the early morning hours talking and smoking, as they had last Thursday.

"You're not going to stay out and play with me?" Andrea sounded indignant.

"I thought you said he wasn't a pretty boy," Mike growled at Andrea.

"John's being a wet rag. He'll come just to make me happy, won't you?"

John coughed, pretending to have choked on his drink. Refusing Andrea's invitations was like treading on a puppy's paw. She would whine, pout, and stare with sorrowful eyes. John also knew that saying yes received the reward of Andrea wagging her tail and becoming affectionate. "Right Andrea, You know I can't refuse any offer that you make."

Mike jerked his head in approval. "Hurry up, then, and finish your drinks."

Andrea and Mike started for the coat room as John put down his glass. Mike brought his car to the exit while John and Andrea waited in the foyer. Andrea babbled incessantly about the lack of stars in Brooklyn and what a beautiful painting the sky would make and maybe one day she would paint it herself. Andrea chattered through most of the car ride. John was awakened from a trance-like state when Andrea initiated a solo of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Bat." John focused on the streets of Manhattan and was soon able to exclaim, "There's my church," as they whizzed past St. Vincent's on the West Side.

Mike sighed and muttered, "Great, not only a pretty boy, but a Catholic pretty boy."

At that point John lost his bearings and when the car finally stopped he doubted he was on the correct planet. The street lacked the customary throbbing music of the city after hours clubs.

Andrea spilled from the car. "Ooh it's dark, somebody turn on the lights. If there were stars in Brooklyn we could see."

"We're not in Brooklyn. The club's at the bottom of the steps, go ahead down" Mike snarled.

"Mike, hold my hand, I'm dizzy" a twirling-in-place Andrea slurred.

John watched Mike steady Andrea by putting his arms around her. The pair followed John down the steps which delved behind the sidewalk. Burgundy wool slapped John in the face. Andrea giggled.

"Helps to open those, Pretty Boy." Mike's voice was light for the first time. He produced a key which opened the door John had rammed.

"Stars," Andrea exclaimed.

The club was the size of the average living room and was painted a flat black. There was a door in the far wall marked by an ornate brass knob. The stars Andrea saw were the sparkling bits of glass which made up the candle-lit chandelier. The music was Madonna and the crowd was homosexual.

Mike picked their niche to be the farthest corner from the door. The trio had full view of the make-up plastered drag queens and iron-faced women who dribbled into the club. Mike nodded at a few men and scowled at a few women as the crowd thickened. Andrea's eyes darted about the room as she danced with her back against the wall. John silently debated the sex of the person in the red fishnets and black leather dress. If it was a woman he considered her attractive.

"Don't stare," Andrea hissed, "his boyfriend might notice you."

John turned his eyes from the man and noticed Mike was beckoning Andrea from the brass knobbed door. Andrea followed John's eyes and leapt through the crowd after grabbing John's arm. The pair bounced against the wall. The crowd was like Jell-o, it was originally loose and flowing, but had become dense and rubbery. By sliding themselves along the wall, Andrea and John reached Mike.

Mike kissed Andrea on the cheek and handed her two small brown vials. John realized he was being locked into a bathroom by Mike, and if Andrea had not been so excited he would have been nervous. He watched Andrea's chest as she fumbled for a mirror in her jacket pockets. John wondered if she was as creative in bed as she was on the dance floor while she inhaled her lines. As she

demonstrated the art of cocaine to him John observed how well her perfume mingled with cigarette smoke. When she replaced the mirror John saw his hand touch her cheek, and muttered, "You've grown a freckle tonight."

Andrea retrieved her mirror and responded upon examination, "Mascara, well I'm too woozy-doozy to fix it now."

Mike opened the door and beamed "How ya feeling Pretty Boy? Ready to dance?"

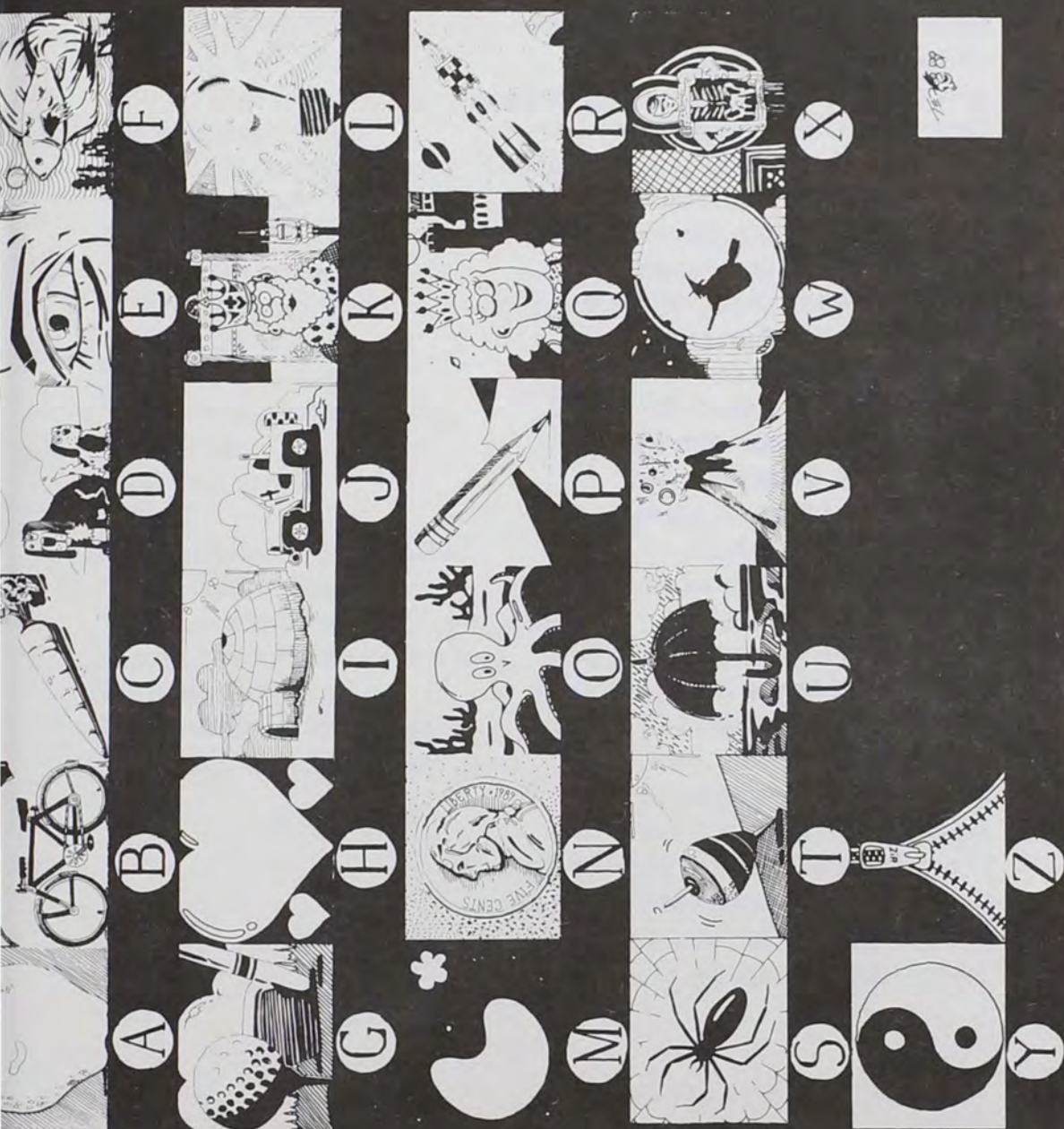
Andrea nudged her and John's way to the middle of the dance floor. She chose John as her partner by cementing her body onto his. Lost in Andrea's hypnotic green eyes John did not become aware of the other dancers until he felt a pair of hands slide down into his front pockets. He smiled at Andrea. She nodded, mouthed "Later" and wriggled into an available woman's arms. The hands in John's pockets delved a little deeper. John knew by the size of the hands his new partner was male, but the alcohol and cocaine allowed him not to care. Andrea's place was soon occupied by a man in a purple leather jacket who insisted John was not close enough to him until John could feel the Jacket's zipper through his shirt. John became the center of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich which was being flattened by the solidifying crowd. John knew escape was not an option so he decided to make the most of the already arousing experience. A petite orange clad creature thrust John's sandwich sideways, dislodging the hands from his pockets. One of the hands stroked John's ass and the owner whispered in John's ear, "You dance well for a Pretty Boy."

John and the Purple Jacket tempted and toyed with each other's flexibility. John found himself enchanted by the strange sensations. A trip to the bar, which was behind a door that had no knob, refreshed John's buzzing senses. He was able to stop thinking about what he was doing and succumb to the pleasure of being desirable.

A smoky stream of daylight now entered the bar when dancers exited, and the Jell-o had started to melt. Once or twice John scanned the room for Andrea or Mike, but did not see either. Not until Purple Jacket responded to a voice calling from the entrance and left John with lipstick on his cheek did John become concerned that he had been abandoned. One of the handful of people remaining in the room told John that Andrea and Mike had taken off more than an hour ago.

Outside, in the brisk morning air, John was lost. He wandered to the left, hoping to recognize a street or a landmark. By seven a.m. John was a few blocks from the Cloisters and the A-train. An hour on the subway and a few blocks of walking, John arrived at his apartment. Exhausted he collapsed on his cot after pushing the

play button on his answering machine. "White Boy!" Andrea's voice sang, "Last night was amazing. Shall we try something new tonight?"



Stuck Up!

by Dhinesh Samuel

I had a friend in the eleventh grade,
Tick-Tock, the time goes back.
He used to drink a lot of lemonade,
Slurp, Slurp, the cup goes slack.
He used to chomp on all the cake,
Chomp, chomp, it all goes down.
And eat all the food they could make,
Chop, chop, his face goes brown?
"Why did his face change its color?
Why? Why?" the question rang.
Let's carry him to a doctor.
"Yes! Yes!" the answer sang.
My friend was hustled to the door,
Push, push, his classmates went.
But then he yelled out with a roar,
"Help! Help!" I'm stuck he meant.
They all tried to set him free,
Think, think, to get him out.
But he was fat, I will agree,
Tug, tug, it was a bout.
He did get free in about a year,
Oh, oh, that's a relief.
But he was thin, as thin as a hair,
Ha, Ha, well that's his grief.
He never did eat again like a boar,
Snip snap, the celery bent.
He never did stick again in a door,
Tip-toe, his little feet went.
May this be a lesson to you out there, for
Chomp, Chomp, who eats up the store.
And let me tell you, you'd better beware, or
"Help! Help!", you'll be stuck in a door.

Patterns

By Kate Phillips

"Those are flowers dear,"
she said.

"Look like bees."
He was depressed.

"Look at these!"
she cried.

"My mother's housekeeper has those."
He was depressed.

"Would you please help me?"
she demanded.

"I like these."
They were striped.

"I don't want striped china in MY kitchen,"
HER kitchen??

"This is a cute pattern,"
she was getting annoying.

"I don't care."
And he didn't.

"But..."
tears ran down her cheeks.

He reached to hold her,
and bumped against her swollen belly.

She dropped the plate she held,
it bounced.

Cheap plastic K-Mart dishes,
and she tried to call them china.

I Should Tell You Now

By Keith Leparulo

Just sprouting, we have imagined ourselves
(as do other young pups out there dating)
infinite, like magical moondancing elves
and nothing but us at all relating.
We failed, but some good has come from us, though,
when I cast back to a warm summer field
or my first glimpse of your dazed-after glow.
We ignored reason for instincts and appeal.

Because we didn't know the cost of dreaming,
because you had to be on your back screaming,
I lumber through town in the car going
to fetch some provisions at your behest.
Stolen away by lovely women, legs flowing,
I recall diapers. Going to town is the best.

Me, Tommy, and Miss May

By Chris Major

Sure, I remember the first time. Once in a while, when I get one these days, I think about it and still get a good laugh. I told my wife the story once. Now she jokes about it too. Dear, she'll say, you're deformed! What's wrong with it? Make it stop!

I remember the young and innocent days of waiting at the bus stop. The early mornings began to warm up as we got into May. Tommy Durgin and I were waiting at the corner for the bus, throwing rocks at Kevin. Kevin McMurphy had just moved into the neighborhood. Who started the third grade at St. Mary's in May anyway? I lobbed a good sized rock high into the air. As Kevin gazed up into the blue morning sky, tracking the bomb, Tommy hauled off and rifled him good in the arm. Kevin started to cry and the game was over. Kevin plays for the New York Giants now. Middle Linebacker. I see him once in a while when we're in the old neighborhood. We go to Duffy's Tavern. I usually pick up the tab, hoping he doesn't remember the third grade.

Tommy was the trouble maker and I usually went along for the ride. Tommy and Timothy. Mom called us Heckyl and Jeckyl. Tommy was my best friend at a time when being best friend meant that you could beat the shit out of each other rolling through the Fischer's yard and still share your Devil Dogs and Fritos at lunch the next day.

I plopped down on the curb and took out the latest Spiderman comic book. My grandma worked at the Topps factory and managed to get me some free copies.

Tommy stared at me with an anxious look in his eyes. "Put Spidey away, Timothy, I got it."

After weeks of waiting, he got it. I know exactly what "it" was. As promised, Tommy had managed to pilfer the latest Playboy from under his brother's bed. Like Kevin, Tommy also turned professional. For pilfering from the company escrow accounts Tommy's currently doing five to ten in upstate New York. But, back then I was excited. Outside of the Sear's catalog, I had never seen a naked woman before in my life.

The canary yellow St. Mary's school bus stopped at the corner flashing its red lights. Me and Tommy scrambled up the little steps and slid into the green vinyl seat, directly across from Betty Ann Burns.

Betty Ann was my girlfriend. She just didn't know it yet. She sat there, blue and green plaid uniform falling flatly against her pre-pubescent chest, reading one of those Judy Blume books girls

always read before they got their first period.

"Hey, Betty Bookworm!" I squealed. "is that your face or did your neck throw up?"

Tommy laughed and slapped me on the back. Betty Ann turned and gave me the raspberry. Geez, it was love.

Tommy gave a few quick glances around him, then reached into his blue backpack and pulled out the May 1971 Playboy. Ann Margaret graced the cover, hands folded across her breasts. To this day, I have never missed an Ann Margaret movie.

"Wait'll you get a load of this," Tommy could barely contain himself. He glanced around again, holding the magazine close as we huddled around it. He flipped the pages with a delicate touch, as not to wrinkle them. Slowly he unfurled the prize at the center. Miss May 1971, Tracii Starr, no doubt her real name, in all her naked splendor. "Can you believe the size of those things?"

I looked down. Holy Smokes. She was beautiful. Her shiny, naked body. Her robe falling off behind her. Droplets of water cascading between two lovely scoops of vanilla with cherries on top. I began to tingle all over. I looked over at Betty Bookworm to see where she would eventually develop these things. Boy, I wondered what they'd feel like. Again I looked down, this time past the stapled belly-button to where the difference between boys and girls was. The Treasure Patch, Tommy called it. His older brother, Brad, told him all about them. Brad was old enough to date. I, not having any older brothers, had to rely on Tommy's stories.

"That's where you stick your widdler in," Tommy said. "then you jump and down 'til she starts praying."

"What?" I asked, not sure if I heard right.

"I watched Brad and Kim do it on our couch one night."

"Oh," I said, still not quite understanding. Now that I'm married I understand, since my wife gets religious in bed too.

I started to squirm and felt prickly all over. My blood seemed to pump through my veins like the Mississippi River. My heart pounded in time to the music blaring at the back of the bus. I always thought it was Zeppelin's "Living Loving Maid." Something was definitely going on down there. The more I squirmed, the weirder it felt. Sister Augustus was right, it was falling off! No, it was moving. Great, how was I supposed to stick my widdler in Betty Ann Burn's treasure patch if it wouldn't sit still?

I didn't know it, but there it was. My very first erection, right there on the canary yellow school bus. I thought I was deformed. My wife still gets a kick out of that.

The bus pulled into the school yard as Tommy slid the revered

magazine into his backpack. I was afraid to look at it for fear of what would happen next. I had to check things out.

"Tommy," I said, "I gotta pee."

I dashed through the yard and darted up the stairs to the bathroom. Zip. I yanked down my antique-car underwear and took a peek. Looked okay. I forced a squirt to make sure it worked. The bell rang, so I tucked myself in and ran to Sister Augustus' classroom. I was afraid to make any sudden movements for the rest of the day.

The final bell rang and Tommy and I boarded the bus. He was itching to break out Miss May again. The bus was too crowded for another peek. Undaunted by the setback, Tommy made plans for tomorrow.

"We can leave it under the dumpster and take it behind the school at recess." Tommy stammered out the words in unchained anticipation. I just wanted to get home and check my widdler again.

The bus driver dropped us off at the corner and Tommy and I sprinted to my house. Tommy always ate over on Wednesday nights while Mr. and Mrs. Durgin worked late. Mom had a plate of Oreos waiting for us, two cold glasses of milk, and the new color TV tuned to "Speed Racer". God bless Moms.

I ran upstairs after tossing my parochial-school-issue clip-on tie on the floor. One more check. I used my mom's bathroom with the full length mirror. Once again I yanked down my drawers and had a look. I shook it around and gave it another squirt. Still worked. With my penis under control, I headed back downstairs.

After a good hour-and-a-half of "Speed Racer", "George of the Jungle", and "Quickdraw McGraw", all was right with the world. My mom called us in for dinner as Dad folded up the paper muttering something about "those damned Yankees."

"Hey, Sport," he said, messing up my hair, "anything new and exciting at school today?"

"No, nothing Dad, nothing at all, matterafact. Great chicken, Mom." Normally I was a cornucopia of information about school, but what was I supposed to do? Tell him my penis almost fell off on the way to school?

"Yeah, really great," Tommy said, kicking me under the table.

"Timothy, honey," Mom said, "you're red as a beet. This wouldn't have anything to do with little Betty Ann Burns up the street now, would it?" She always got that voice. That insinuating voice she used when she figured I was up to something.

"Stay away from them son," my dad said, "you'll live longer."

"Now George, I think our Timothy likes her."

"Yuck," I said, gulping my milk.

The next day Tommy brought the Playboy, as promised. After we were dropped off at school, he managed to slip it under the dumpster before the sounding of the morning bell.

Tommy and I sat at the front of the class, right in front of Sister Augustus and her ruler. Tommy because of his reputation and me because of my last name. Timothy Aarons. I didn't mind. Tommy and I were still able to get in trouble and Betty Ann Burns sat right behind me. I could always spend a little extra time leaning over underneath my desk to peek at her underwear.

We always drew cartoons in class but since becoming acquainted with Miss May we stopped drawing Sister Augustus' habit flying off in the wind to expose her bald head. We both swore that nuns were as bald as my uncle Pete under those things. We were on to bigger and better things. Buck naked women. It went like this: Tommy would usually start, and while Sister Augustus was occupied at the board or instilling the fear of God into us, he'd pass it to me and I'd add something. Each of us took turns and added a body part. That would hold us over to recess.

Recess was to be the high point of our day. Waiting for us under the dumpster was the glistening Tracii Starr in all her wicked nakedity. St. Mary's was situated adjacent to a clothing factory and between the two was a large macadam lot that served as our school yard. Grades one through four had the first recess shift, so we knew Miss May was safe. Apparently some of the parents felt that the seventh and eighth graders played too rough for us younger kids. Besides, some of them took to a thing called necking behind the factory. At our time, the girls played hopscotch or four corners. The boys played bulldog, trying to bean each other in the head with Eddie Siskell's socks rolled into a ball. The game ended when somebody started to bleed. The rectory occupied the third boundary of the school yard. Next to the dumpster, under the shade of the maple trees, some of the more sophisticated girls played house.

Sister Gabriel, the recess monitor, was perched directly in front of our dumpster, keeping an eye out for the Devil's work. We had to stall for time. Tommy seized the moment and bent down.

"Hey, Timothy," he said, "you want to slip this frog down Scary Mary's shirt?"

"I'll hold her down," I said.

We walked over to the shady maples where Scary Mary, Betty Bookworm and their friend Missy were playing house with Kevin. They had found a Heineken bottle, no doubt Father O'Dougherty's, that Kevin was using in order to be the daddy. Tommy seized yet another moment, and let the frog hop off into the bushes.

"Hey, you guys ever play spin the bottle?"

Spin the bottle, was he crazy? Somebody might get pregnant. I didn't even know what it was. I had heard some of the older boys talk about it on the bus, and by the way they said it, it must have been a sin.

Tommy grabbed the bottle. "Okay, here's how. You gotta sit down in a circle, and the bottle's in the middle. You spin it and whoever the bottle points to, you gotta kiss them."

Oh boy. My eyes lit up with unbridled excitement. Here I was, sitting right next to Betty Ann Burns. If I could just put enough oomph into it so that it pointed to her.

Kevin spun the bottle first. Poor guy got Scary Mary right off the bat. She was a skinny kid in red pigtails and freckles. Just lost her two front teeth. Kevin fidgeted and everyone giggled. Finally he puckered his lips, closed his eyes and leaned into it. Apparently, and to this very day I don't know if it was intentional or not, he leaned too far and knocked heads with Scary.

Betty Ann was next. I prayed harder than I ever did in morning prayer. I swore I'd never throw rocks at Kevin again. The green bottle spun around sparkling in the midday sun, and began to slow past Scary, past Tommy, past Missy. Great, it was going to stop on Kevin. I looked up at the sky and thought of the brick I was going to heave at his head tomorrow. The wind kicked up and gave it enough oomph to just nudge the green bottle in my direction. Kevin's life was spared.

Boy, was I ready for this. All those days of insulting her on the bus and peeing up her dress had paid off. She puckered those bubblegum pink lips and

SMACK!

What a week. First I got to see Miss May in all her dripping nakedness, then Betty Ann kissed me. Full on the lips no less. Boy, I'd never wash my face again.

Recess was all but over and Miss May was still stuck beneath the dumpster. Tommy managed to snatch it and stuff it part way down his pants and tucked in his shirt. It was the only way to smuggle it back inside to his backpack.

As we headed back up to Sister Augustus' classroom, he tugged on my arm. "Hey Timothy, did you stick your tongue in her mouth?"

"What?"

"You know stupid. Did you French Kiss her?"

"What are you," I said, "an idiot? I'm not getting her pregnant!"

I remember being home sick one day in the winter, my mom made me some lunch, hot dogs and Fritos, while one of her soaps was on. "All My Children", I think. She still watches it. This guy

was really kissing this lady. Their cheeks kept puffing out. She pulled him down to the couch as they cut to a Tide commercial. Next thing you know, the lady's pregnant. She said something about her husband to the guy she kissed. That's when my mom turned it off. Tommy hadn't told my why you stuck your widdler in yet.

Tommy slugged me in the arm and ran into the building, despite the goods tucked in his pants. I caught him for paybacks before he reached his desk.

Tommy pulled out our latest naked picture. "Quick, before Augie gets back. Finish the Patch."

The Treasure Patch. Whoever got to the finish that was the winner. I pulled out my black crayon and was ready to add my Michelangelo signature in the form of a black triangle. Tommy pulled the Playboy out of his pants and prepared to slip it into his backpack.

I looked back to see Sister Augustus, eyes fixed on Tommy, obvious glee on her stone cold grey face, knowing she had caught him in some illicit act. As she rumbled down the aisle, I winced and brushed our foul artwork off the desk and watched it float to the ground. Half out of curiosity, half out of displeasure in breaking stride, she snatched up our drawing in utter disbelief.

"Sinners!" She erupted, parting the silent air with the wrath of the heavens. "Mister Aarons, I, I..." She glared down upon me searching for the appropriate biblical verse.

By the looks of things, I was going to be spending a lot of time in purgatory for this one. At the very least she was going to lop off my widdler with that damn ruler of hers.

"Both of you. Father O'Dougherty's office, right this instant."

The office. Never had we done anything so vile as to qualify for a visit to Father O'Dougherty's office. Not the whoopee cushion on Sister Augie's chair. Not the finishing nails in the eraser scratching up the blackboard. Not even bringing Tommy's dog, Zipper, to class when it wasn't even show-and-tell.

The office meant excommunication for sure, possibly Hell. Father O'Dougherty might even call our parents. Surely we'd be made examples.

Tommy and I made our way to the door. Father O'Dougherty had heard the ruckus of Sister Augustus. He was waiting for us outside the door. Just the sight of him scared me.

"Boys," he said, "you'd better come inside."

Tommy peed in his pants.

We weren't excommunicated. Father O'Dougherty actually said it was natural for young boys to explore sexuality. Just don't let

Sister Augustus catch you, he told us with a wink. To this day I hold a special fondness for Father O'Dougherty. We both got a rosary and six Our Fathers for good measure.

After our spectacle, we stopped the drawings and the Playboy peeping altogether. But it wouldn't be the last time an erection got me in trouble.

Two Hands

By Dianne Gabel

I see two hands, their shade pale cream
With bones too big, uncomfortably.
Gloved with deep grooves that intersect,
Grooves cut like roads and rivers deep.

Two hands made smooth with Pond's cold cream--
Unmistakable smell coming towards me.
Fingers in motion, each on its own,
Like legs of a dog dreaming at noon.

Spots of bright specks on yellowed nails,
Color of bright coral, three layers thick.
And now, two hands on my kid cheeks
Pulling me gently towards her face.

I hear her voice singing out loud
Familiar words, surprise to none.
"Well hello there!" she chimes like a prize has been won;
A song that praises the changes she sees.

These two crooked hands comfort to all.
To brown-eyed susans along the wall
And to feverish heads of patients in beds
And to my kid face, eleven years old.

Two hands as gentle as a breeze
That eases the heat of hazy days.
it's two years ago now, or is it three?
that she called me Petunia and touched two hands to me.



All-Natural, Organically Grown Macadamia Butter (imported from Hawaii)

By Kathleen Bowers

Ashland was a little town in southwest Oregon. It snuggled into a deep valley in the Cascade Mountains that ran along the Pacific coast through Oregon and northern California. Ashland might have been just another isolated leftover-hippie town in the forests that edged the great Rockies. But Ashland had a Shakespeare Festival Theatre. And the leftover-hippies, no matter how they tried, could not stop the wave of Californian artsy tourists from invading their food co-op.

The homes of secluded survivors spattered the looming mountains for twenty miles north of Ashland. When these highway hermits braved the trip into town on treacherous Highway 66, their first destination was the U-Save grocery store in the north outskirts. U-Save was a do-it yourself supplier, with a massive hoard of bulk food barrels containing flour, raisins, noodles, brown sugar, rice, and other staples. The floor was bare cement and service was rare, but the prices were low.

Farther into town, past the college and most of the houses, the unimposing Ashland Food Co-op stood on a corner. Here the mountain residents joined the in-town Ashlanders. Sometimes a skinny, stringy-haired, middle-aged man hawked wildly colored, crocheted beanie hats on the sidewalk by the Co-op entrance. Or sometimes a woman in an African-print wrap-around skirt and moccasins stood by her rack of beaded pocketbooks.

Just inside the door, on the right, was a profusion of organically grown vegetables. Lettuce, beets, kale, tomatoes, bean sprouts, carrots, turnips, and three kinds of potatoes crowded together on the fifteen-foot long refrigerated rack. These hard to grow and high-priced goodies were in high demand by Ashlanders who despised venomous chemical fertilizers.

The middle aisle housed the Co-op's bulk foods, and what glorious bulk foods! The protein seeking vegetarian could find falafel mix next to the whole wheat flour and pearl barley. Organically grown oatmeal sat next to bulgar wheat, and the soy-burger powder even came with a recipe. An alluring aroma hovered over a huge vat of all-natural, salt-free peanut butter. A fat wooden spoon stuck through the floating oil and into the solid peanut remains on the bottom. Now and then a freshly scent-seduced mountain man would step away with a nut butter blob in his recycled glass jar.

Long-haired women with naturally unshaven legs and unmade-up

faces scoured the back section. Behind the tofu and under the cottage cheese sat their favorite yogurt, cultured with no preservatives in a dairy just up the road. Some also hunted through several hundred bulk spices and gathered the perfect piquant herbs to pep up their rice and beans.

The far left aisle displayed an outstanding variety of dry goods. Afghan bedroom slippers, knitted knee-high in many colors, were stacked above bright all-cotton turtlenecks. Cones and sticks of incense tantalized the atmospherically sensitive. Sensible Chinese rice bowls filled the shelves beside locally hand-dipped and scented candles.

At the register, a volunteer cashier would often chat with an Ashlander customer while they both packed the purchases into a box or a backpack the customer had brought. Occasionally a well preened and stiffly coiffed woman or dignified man in khaki pants would stand staring at his or her jumble of purchases on the end of the counter, then at the cashier who was already helping another customer. When a puzzled stare turned to an irritated glare, the cashier would sigh and explain that bags cost five cents extra each. Paper bags speeded the death of the Great Northwest's trees that loggers had already mowed into patches, and plastic bags smothered the earth in landfills.

The necessity of this explanation seemed odd. Ashland was tiny and secluded, and everyone there knew that trees and natural harmony were sacred. And how did these stray artsy-tourists find the Co-op anyway? The Shakespeare Festival was another five blocks away, on the south end of town where the road from California entered Ashland.

Now one would think that the Shakespeare worshippers could stay in the Shakespeare neighborhood. Benny's Yogurt Shop, a sixteenth century costume shop, The Bakery, and other quaint little shops lined the little square next to the Festival. A natural-spring mineral water drinking fountain rested gracefully on a small plot of bright green grass and peeping flowers in the center of the square.

For the artsy tourist with wanderlust, Ashland provided a three block long walk of used book stores, cafes, a movie theatre, and couture clothing boutiques. For Elizabethans seeking a Cascade Mountain experience along with their Macbeth, two top-of-the-line camping and outdoor gear shops set lures of top-grain leather backpacks in their plate glass windows. All this Ashland offered the tourists on its altar to Britain's greatest artsy playwright. But it was not enough. One block beyond the northernmost cafe, the Co-op and its leftover hippies were an irresistible tourist temptation.

And so the gusts of California wind swept through the Co-op

and mingled their Polo and Chanel #5 with wafting crunchy peanut butter. The beanie salesman became spiteful after repeated questioning on the fiber content and artistic design of his suspiciously inexpensive little floppy hats. But when the yogurt loving women had endured one too many searing stares at their legs and armpits from a salon fresh tourist, the Co-op decided to fight back.

Before long, a rack of mass-produced tie-die hip packs, content labeled and priced at \$16 each, appeared at the end of the bulk foods aisle. Then a shiny new darkwood shelf of organically grown gourmet coffees found its home by the spice rack. Then a jar of eighty-five cent all-natural almond meringue tortes showed up next to the twenty-five cent soy-oatmeal-raisin muffins. Soon the buzzing visitors swarmed the new Indonesian batik scarves, mostly cotton but 35% silk, and swept them swiftly away.

Then one bright and beautiful morning at the height of Shakespeare season, a little crock of all-natural organically grown macadamia butter sat next to the humble peanut butter vat. Never before had the Co-op witnessed such seductive powers from globby nut mush. The macadamias emanated that sumptuous scent that no classy Californian can miss. It intermingles with Chanel and Polo like salt and sand on a sunny Hawaiian beach. They filled the empty jars that the beanie man now sold for \$1.50 each and blew home in all-natural delight. The oatmeal, turnips, and yogurt were once again safe from sneers.

Irony of a Suburban Death

By Jeremy Trinidad

Grass, Grass, Grass, Grass, Grass, Grass. Driveway.
Grass, Grass, Grass, Grass, Grass, Grass. Driveway.
Grass, Grass, Grass, Grass. STAY OFF GRASS. Grass,
Grass, Grass. Bang! Bang! Bang! gRaSs

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