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The Lantern Vol. 54, No. 2, Spring 1988

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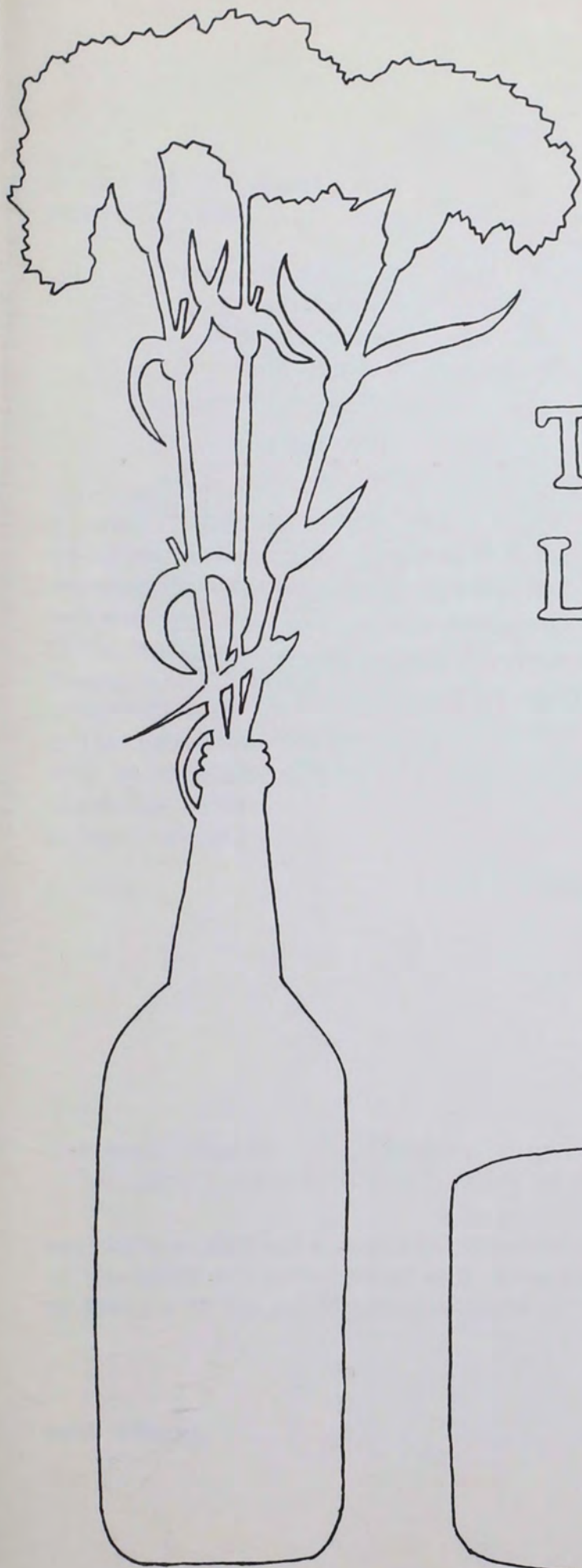
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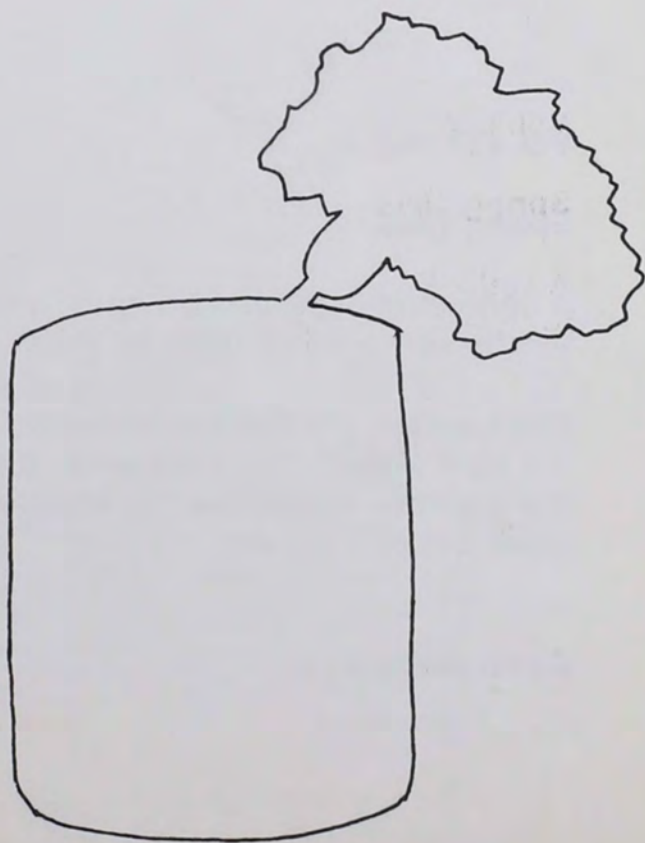
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The Lantern



What has become
Of the wise men
Who walked softly through the grass
With their eyes on the sky
Their fingers gliding across the rock,
Their spirits with the birds?
They stumble over construction litter,
Cutting themselves on new weapons,
And lose themselves in swamps of modern apathy
While their descendants fall
Into the abyss of the sleepers.

Laura Sassaman



DEDICATION

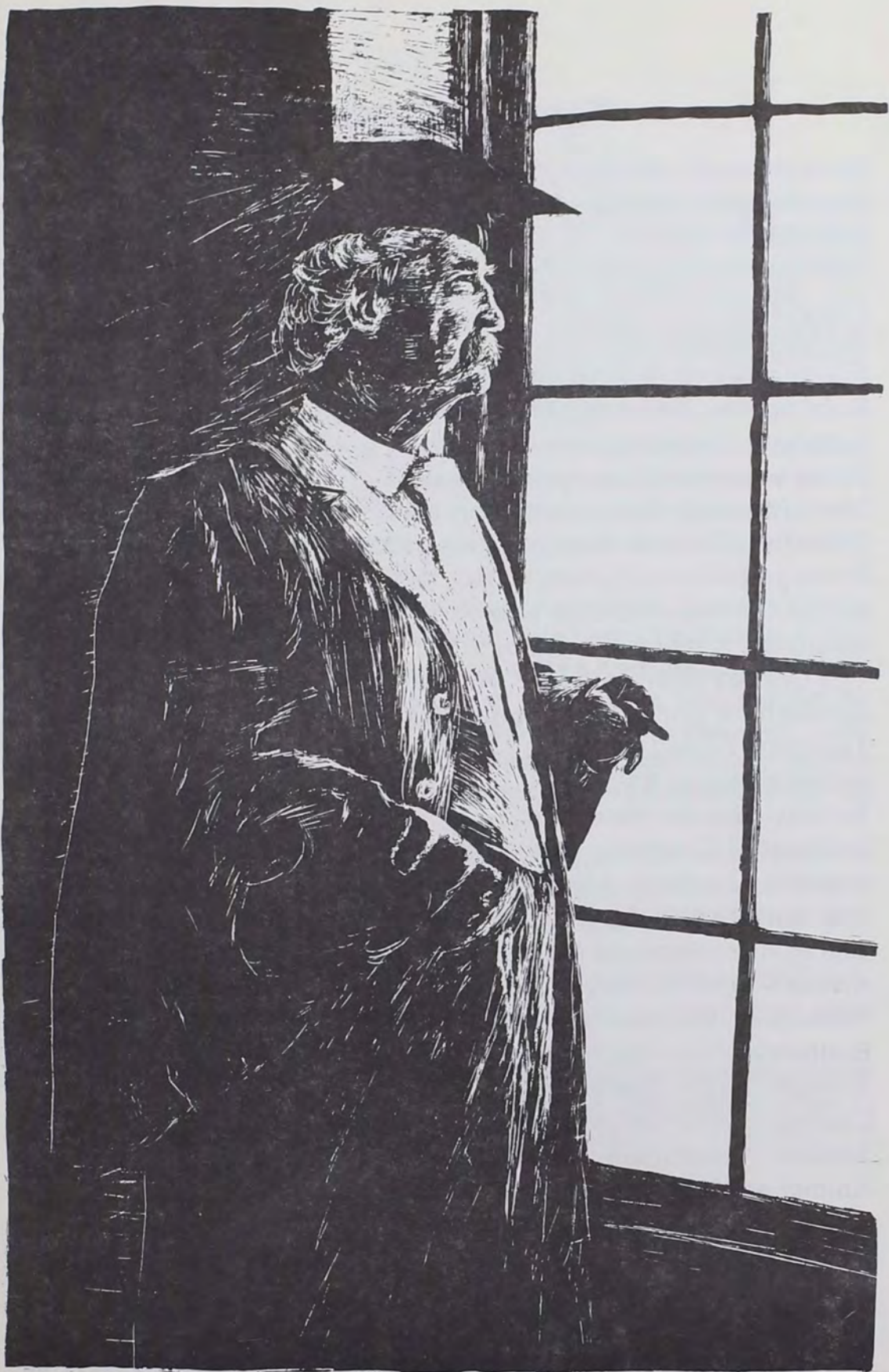
H. Lloyd Jones has been teaching expository writing and English Literature at Ursinus since 1947 and also held successive positions in the Admissions Office for over 25 years. This is his final semester at Ursinus, and we at the *Lantern* would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the dedication and enthusiasm he has brought to the job of a college professor. Over the years, his teaching has inspired many a reluctant student to push a little bit harder and produce the quality work of which he or she is capable. We hope that Mr. Jones has enjoyed our companionship, both inside and outside the classroom, as much as we have enjoyed his. We wish to extend both our thanks and our best wishes to him upon his retirement.

Trumped, a short story by Vince Leskusky, has been judged as the best entry in the Spring, 1988, issue of the Ursinus College *Lantern*. It conveys vividly and in gritty style the culturally starved lives of blue collar families in a dying community. The writer makes excellent use of vivid and specific details and admirably conveys a mood of deterioration and despair. While the theme of the homecoming is a familiar one, the pungent style treats that theme in a powerful way indeed, particularly in the passages dealing with the grandmother's death and funeral. The writer has a keen eye for detail and considerable skill in the use of dialogue. It should also be added that two other entries competed strongly in the final judgement. "Apartment 14B," with its aura of restrained hurt and humiliation mingled with a certain materialistic vindictiveness and vivid detail was a strong contender, as was "Burning the Christmas Guests," with its post-Christmas jaundiced view of an unspeakable collection of relatives.

H. Lloyd Jones

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1/10/1911
1/10/1911

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Editorial

As my last semester at Ursinus races to its finish, all of the usual clichés come to mind—about endings, beginnings—the same old things. I have mixed feelings as I write this, torn between thinking of the sentimental while wanting to say something unique about the end of my association with *The Lantern* and Ursinus College.

I'll be honest, then, and say that even though I complained to anyone who would listen, I'm going to miss this place—and this job. What I'm going to do after graduation instead of pound away at a typesetter is beyond my limited imagination.

Congratulations to Vince Leskusky, author of the prize-winning short story *Trumped*. Also, I would like to personally wish Mr. H. Lloyd Jones, our contest judge, best of luck upon his retirement from the college. A big thank you goes to Jenny L. Otte for her perseverance in putting together our cover.

True to form, I'm going to thank everyone in sight. First of all to the entire staff—THANK YOU for all your help over this past year. You all made doing what at times seemed to be a horrible job worth it. I especially want to thank the group of typesetters who helped me stay calm during the all night layout sessions. To Bex, Jen, Lisa, Drie and Erika—you are the most dedicated people I've ever had the pleasure of working with and I feel that this issue reflects all of the time and care you all put into it.

Of course, none of this would be complete without some mention of Jon Volkmer, who is probably the calmest advisor on the planet. If it wasn't for his support through this past year, I don't think you would have a *Lantern* to read right now.

Finally, I would like to wish next year's editor, Erika Rohrbach, and the entire staff the best of luck. Don't worry, I'm sure I'll be back to see how things are going.

"Goodbye" is the word that should end this editorial and somehow I cannot bring myself to say it. Instead, before I get bogged down in sentimental memories of the years spent at Ursinus, I'll just say, "I'll see you when I see you."

Maria A. D'Arcangelo

BURNING THE CHRISTMAS GUESTS

(with apologies to William Carlos Williams)

Their time past, I pulled them
Out of our beds,
Clubbed and pushed into the fire
--go up amidst agonizing screams.

Burnt beyond recognition, charred bones,
Bones of those I despised, the aqua
Of cousin Alvin's robe and aunt Blanche's
Pink curlers, smoldering
And a living red, nauseating red,
Red of uncle Hank's crushed velvet smoking jacket lingers
On the ash---

I poke at the fabric
With the poker
And erase all hideous memory.

On Christmas Eve,
They appeared on the porch,
Samsonites in hand,
Whining of the chill in the air
With loud bad breath.

At the thick of the dark,
I heard the refrigerator emptied
And the unwashed plates
Clattered in the sink.

And Fat uncle Stosh
Engulfed my bed
And he always has gas
So I slept in the den.

And Christmas Day came,
but uncle Fred ate all the eggs
And blew out the lights
With the toaster.

And cousin Brenda
Set fire to the tree
With a Marlboro Light
(From my pack, of course).

And their dog
Peed the rug
And their kids
Peed everywhere else.

The thought of violence
Leaped and appeared in my mind
At this festive time of year.
My Christmas smile! Roared to life!

As I pondered the jagged flames,
Flesh to red, searing the skin.
Flesh! quickly broiled . . . Gone!
Obnoxious holiday-wreckers.

And my wife and I
Breathless to be suspects
As we stood
Exhilarated before our
Christmas fire.

Bill Connolly & Dog Dude

A Song in Time

Time drips slowly
From the faucet
Of the overflowing kitchen sink.
Drops stop for a second
Then slide silently
Toward endless seas
Of similar droplets,
Losing all identity and significance.
The clock-faced octagon
Ticks a quicker rhythm,
Harmonizes with the whispering water.
Together they form a tireless trio with time
And hum hushed hymns of eternity.

Suzanne Kleintop

I ask a question:
Where are those who left no monument
but their harmony?

They are lost among the showpieces
of our world
and the grasses
of time.

Laura Sassaman

As if Raggedy Anne had chosen
her position on the shelf,
the luring smile,
and button eyes staring
endlessly to the window.-.
envisioning a greater dawn,
or, at least,
the fortune to fall.

Erika Rohrbach

One Man's Escape

By Kathleen Walton

The noise was not at all what he expected. The screams were different. That there were screams at all was a shock. But he had a number of ideas about the venture that weren't what he'd imagined. He would realize that the screams would be worse, the noises harsher.

Seventeen months ago his life was different. His wife was expecting then--a boy he hoped. She was full, round and cranky. But lovely. His child--she was going to give him a part of herself. He looked back on that idea in awe, but that was seventeen months before. The world was different now. Hell, he was in a different place--literally a different world.

By her ninth month his wife was past nausea. She was past getting happy about the baby; she just wanted to be thin and comfortable again. He was the excited one; he wanted this child. But then they were about to come for him.

They had found him. They knew about him and they were going to come. He had to take her and run.

The two of them got away. They managed to hide on a shuttle that would take them to the Korshner Zone. Had he time to think about it, the Korshner was not where he would want to raise his child, but there was no choice. Korshner was better than being locked in a cage on Crusla. He loved Crusla, but he loved his child more. Someday, he hoped to take the child back there. Someday, he thought he'd be able to--without being scrutinized.

The days on Korshner were long. The suns beat down as if inflicting the heat gave the powerful molten stars pleasure. Pleasure before they graduated to nova and supernova stature. Pleasure before they collapsed onto themselves into voidless masses. The sands blew violently across the flat lands, wrapping themselves around the bases of the Drumas. He had to get to the Drumas with her.

But the suns hurt, the heat and the light seared his eyes to the cores of his sockets. He knew he couldn't take her across the land--if the suns hurt him, he hated to think of what they would do to her, to the child. He had to find a way to get her to the Drumas by shuttle. The scream was bad, and he remembered that it made part of his brain shrivel, shrink away. But he got her to the Drumas.

Once he had secreted her away, under a lower cuboidal, he ventured out into the rest of the complex. By staying in the shadows, he made his way through the units. He took food. He knew it was wrong, and it hurt his pride to know that he had to steal to feed his family. But he could do nothing else. Even in Korshner he wasn't safe. It was just that if he stole, he wouldn't be seen. If he wasn't seen, he could stay.

He compared the Drumas to the Living Coordination Complex on Crusla. It was like comparing the Trushcee/Reagan/Modley Building to an ancient tent. He looked around the Drumas for long times on each expedition and he only saw about a quarter of the great housing complex. He went back, with his stolen goods, to his wife. She was very near the time.

The lower cuboidal that they hid under was filled with cooling machinery. The constant whirring of the fans and pumps drowned any sounds he and she made. From above, he had made sure that they could speak to one another without being heard. He remembered when they lived in the tunnels of the Astrid Space Explorer. They couldn't talk; every noise they made was picked up on the ship's sonar. They moved when the turbo jets kicked on because it was only then that the sonar was turned off. They weren't there long—a cough came up on the sonar and they had to run again.

Near the cooling equipment was a good place for them to hide. He found, in the Columnar Tower Piping, a leak. The fresh water, pumped from the middle of Korshner came through those pipes and was cooled there. With a container he had taken on one of his excursions, he caught the water. Clean and clear, he would bathe the baby when it arrived.

He thought of the baby often. Fatherhood, he hoped, would suit him. He worried though. He worried that he would not be able to teach the child enough about his past, his parents, or most importantly, about survival. But he hoped he would teach the child well, and he hoped the child would read his writings and learn.

He began to write when his wife told him she was pregnant. Every night, after she fell asleep with her head in his lap, he would write. Sometimes he drew sketches. Many were of his wife when she slept. They showed her stomach expanding, filling with life; they showed her beauty. He put down stories that his grandfather had told him. Other times, he wrote seriously about why he was being tracked, why he fell so deeply in love with his wife, how he was going to survive.

The baby was born in the late evening and the labor was long and painful. He felt, as most fathers, helpless because his wife was hurting and he could do nothing but wait. She was happy when it was over, but happier when he presented her with a bathed, beautiful, healthy boy. Their blood had come together and now ran together in the tiny child. He felt proud and strong.

He made many trips around the Drumas. He found routes where he was hidden and places where he could find food. When he stole, he took only what his family needed. He took books from the Galaxian Information Bureau—ancient books, biographies like Yersy, Iacocca, and Klestiv and he took picture books for the child. Education was as necessary as food if the child was to survive. His child would learn to escape the trackers and find the others, or so he thought.

His wife asked him after living in the Drumas for what seemed an eternity why they ran. She said she knew why they didn't want to be caught, but running was beginning to be futile. She was frustrated and scared. He understood and tried to comfort her but he knew too well how she felt. The night she asked that, he held her close to him and told her it would be different someday. He had never lied to her until then.

When the child was an infant, he was healthy and alert, but the Drumas hideaway was not good for him after all that time. The light from the suns would burn him, made his cheeks turn from white with sorrow to raw with burns. Instead of real sunlight, the child's body had to use the ultraviolet light that came through the cracks from the cuboidal above. Deep circles formed under his eyes. The same eyes that were once a clear, cool, shiny blue had turned a steely grey. When he smiled at his mother, it was a tired, aged smile. When he laughed at his father, his hearty belly-laugh faded to a meek grin that murmured approval. Inside the Drumas was as dangerous for the child as the suns outside. It was time to move again.

Late in the night, he moved his family. Before the scorching heat would burn their ivory skin scarlet, he took them back to the shuttles. The sands blew hard, each grain stinging the skin, embedding itself. The child wanted to cry but he knew better. His father had taught him to cry silent screams. It was safer.

The lights on the take off area were blurred. The wind carried the sands high into the air, diffusing the blue-green spotlights. He kept his family close to the shield wall where there was a shadowy darkness. He knew he had to do it again—for the child. He had to get his son to a warm, lush land where he could grow and play and find the others, if there were any. The scream was shrill and it made him feel sick, but it was for the child, for his wife. The nausea would pass.

The oxygen register was at High. He knew he could break through the Pressure Primordial of the Korshner Zone if the rockets held through the heat. He prayed then. To what or who, he was not sure, but he had to leave the Zone and any help at all was help. He prayed and they were safe.

Space held the same awe for him that his child's birth had. The universe reached out to him and its silence made him calm. There could be no end to the universe he had thought. The stars would spawn new planets, the darkness would find light. If it had an ending, what was on the other side? The God he had prayed to? An inferno? He wrote of those thoughts while he and his family drifted in a timeless wave of blackness.

Soon, they were after him. The shuttle was missing and they knew. The tele-com printer spewed the latest news at him. His picture was there along with the information. In 7,436 dialects the reward for his capture was offered. He felt a dull ache in his bowels. The vast expanse of the universe was suddenly small.

When the Hiblaja overtook their shuttle, he knew the running was at an end. He knew that it was over and he and his family would be taken—tortured by scientists from a hundred different worlds and galaxies. The Hiblaja pounded on the bay door. He didn't want his wife and son to suffer. He loved them.

The screams were different from the others he had killed. He thought because he loved them, that they wouldn't scream. The noise of their blood spattering on the walls was different. Maybe it was because he cared for them and wanted them to die with a loving blow, rather than with tubes and needles and radiation. Maybe it was because he was a man.

The Hiblaja burst onto the shuttle's upper deck just as he held the blaster to his temple. He was a human being, a man—for that, for being the last, he was tracked. He'd been destroyed, but not defeated.



Gypsy Caravan

Under the chestnut trees
Under the ice moon
Beneath the starry haze
We sit in the shadow of our wagons
Garish and bold and crimson and gold
Little room for colors lightened by the day
The changeling fire leaps and sparks
Burnishing our faces.
We sing in ancient tongues
Hardly remembering what we praise or
What we mean.
This is nothing, the ritual is all.
This is what the townsfolk never see
They give us silver for a tickling trace of the palm
A whirling, dizzying dance over dead coals
A drunken gaze into Vivonne's foggy crystal
And secret packets of dust to solidify their desires.
When the last has gone
Stumbling home to his frantic wife and spinning bed
Then we peer cautiously into the swirling mist
Listen for the wail of the banshee
And we begin.
All colors blend into black
And the mystery progresses.
The sweet reek of tobacco filters through the heavy air
The old men puff away and chant
And we, made dizzy by the smoke,
Must twist and twirl and waver to and fro
Dropping, finally, exhausted by the unending rhythm.
And when the morning raises its sleepy eyes
Matted grass, scorched earth and an oily smell
Reminds the drooping trees
And the curious children that we were here.
They will run home trailing dreams of flowing dresses
Jingling chains, perfumed hair, lightning eyes.
We slip silently into the hills.

Rebecca E. Moore

Apartment 14B

I see it's time for my inevitable departure.
The sun forces its way through wood slat blinds
Warming the empty side of our bed and the insomniac
Folds under my eyes
As I shut off the 7 o'clock alarm
Before it has a chance to ring.
Have you forgotten our apartment number?
It's 14B.

I smell her Chanel No. 5 on the Dior
Dress shirt I bought you last Christmas.
I notice a new cardigan hanging in our closet
And know you didn't buy it.
You always hated yellow.
I wonder at your lack of secrecy—
You knew I couldn't miss the obvious signs of faithlessness
Being tumble dried along with your
Underwear.

I hear you say you need space.
Fine.
You can have your old bachelor pad back,
But I'm taking the couch in the living room,
The integrity I brought with me to this relationship,
My microwave, stereo, and t.v. set.
And my dreams.
I'll leave you to your frosted flakes and spoiled milk.
And your new lover.

I touch your face as I walk out the door
Searching for some sign
Of apology in your eyes
But you jerk away
As if my fingertips
Snapped at you like a bullwhip
Or bit you like the sting
Of a scorpion.

I know you've forgotten the laughter
That used to echo off the bedroom walls,
The leftover chicken teriyaki we always ate for Sunday brunch,
Forgotten the steamy showers at 3 a.m.
You stand before me now
Oblivious to my humiliation,
Staring blankly past my tears.
I'll never forget
That blank stare.

Lisa R. Talarico

Canto I - The Dark Halls of Error

Midway through my college years
As I began to stray from the path
My mind filled up with brand new fears.

The only escape from such fury
was up a hill of such treachery and despair.
Reluctantly I lifted my eyes and began the journey.

No sooner had I made one step forward
when suddenly appeared the four beasts of Hell
and I was overwhelmed by a feeling of horror.

The great Cow of Illnourishment¹ hovered
over me. And when the Turtle of Procrastination
stepped out, by his great shadow I was covered.

The Hyena of Rudeness was next to walk out.
And when the Opossum of Irresponsibility
joined him, I just wanted to shout.

But just then I was rescued as my
savior arrived. President Richter
was he, there to stand by my side.

My face had a look of disbelief
that changed, after he fought the
beasts off, to a feeling of relief.

President Richter then turned to me
and said, "I will lead you out of
this college, but the trip will not be easy."

"I'm sent to you from above
by a great man concerned for you
and this school that he loves."

"Yes Zacharias Ursini himself is the one.
He shall take you through Paradise
when your tour of Hell is done."

¹The reader must be aware of the fact that this is a very big, scary-looking cow.

"I myself cannot go there,
my one great sin being the ugly art
I put on campus everywhere."²

So he then took my hand
and led me to that treacherous land.

Canto II - Administrative Crimes

I AM THE WAY TO A CAMPUS OF WOE
I AM THE WAY TO FORSAKEN STUDENTS.
I AM THE WAY TO ETERNAL ACADEMIC SORROW.

THOSE WHO ENTER HERE ABANDON ALL
HOPE OF GRADUATION FOR THEY
SHALL NEVER LEAVE THESE HALLS.

As I stepped down into the first circle I
heard the cries of frustration.
What had these people done, and why?

My guide pointed out souls driving in the dark.
Because their parking tickets were unpaid,
they had to search endlessly for spaces to park.

Neglectors of forums were forever
strapped to a chair listening
to the boringest speeches ever.

Upon a money covered floor stood
students who owed tuition. As
they picked up all the money they could.

It was blown out of their hands
by Nelson Williams of the Treasury
who was standing there with a big fan.

Those who frequently got into fights
were forced into everlasting battle
with the Ursinus bear and all his might.

²These large red ugly pieces of modern art are known as The Temple and The Aggressive Couple.

I soon noticed a guy I once knew
who was disliked for his instigating. But
now was revenge for what he put others through.

I told my guide I'd see no more.
But my fate he said, was to enter every door.

Canto III - Nutritional and Academic Sins

I descended to the circle filled with Wismer crimes.
The smell of rotten food pervaded my senses
along with the sight of grease and grime.

The rude and crabby Wismer servers had
their mouths painfully wired into a smile.
Now they all looked so sad.

They endlessly served the chef and the cooks.
Because the food was so gross,
they got quite a few looks.

But the cooks had to eat the food that they had made,
cold, dry, either raw or quite burnt.
The sad-looking chef looked at me and bade

Me to come over and help him eat.
But because of the raining grease and pool
of uncooked eggs³, he fell off his feet.

I'd seen enough, I was ready to puke.
President Richter pulled me out of
there, as we slipped on some gook.

Into the third circle of Hell we went.
Here academic sins were punished
and all the bad professors were sent.

Teachers of very boring classes were here.
They were forced to sit still as monotonous
speeches were given for them to hear.

³A Frequent, delicious Wismer breakfast.

Those who surprised their students with
many pop quizzes were quite surprised
themselves, by slamming doors that would give

Anyone a scare. They jumped at the constant shouts
from angry students coming up from behind.
The profs were quite uneasy and tense no doubt.

There were a few teachers I recognized there.
I saw Chris Baze⁴ run up behind Dr. Volkmer
and give him quite a scare.

Here also were students who arrived to class late.
Because of the disturbance they caused,
running forever was their fate.

I recognized another student that I knew.
J.R. ran by panting and gasping
but it was what he had to do.

Then I saw the diehard pre-medders lying in some grass.
Because they always brownied up to their profs,
they now had to forever kiss ass.

My guide now said this circle was done.
What was left was the most dreaded one.

Canto IV - The Final Depths of Hell

This final circle was the worst I'd seen ever.
My heart was filled with pity for these people
until I saw just who they were.

These people had been outright rude to neighbors.
They deserved just what they got;
they'd pulled some pretty mean capers.

First there were those who blasted music late at night.
They were screaming in pain from the ear-shattering
headphones they had to wear, oh what a sight.

⁴One of Dr. Volkmer's students who was quite fond of World Lit. pop quizzes.

Second was a large group floating in a vat
of boiling stew. They had stolen food from
all their friends, can you imagine that?

Next were messy roommates who always made a clutter.
They were drowning in a huge pile of junk
and their gasps just made me shudder.

Then we came upon a giant cloud of dust.
Gagging inside it were students who smoked
up others' rooms, I thought this was just.

I saw people lying down and being awoken
every time they fell asleep. I saw Lee Sermarini among
the rude ones who had run in rooms and spoken

Loudly while others were trying to nap.
Now they were so very tired and groggy,
and deprived of their REM.⁵

Soon I lowered my eyes to the most horrible sight of all—
Satan himself sat there at the bottom
Hell, in the very darkest hall.

His icy lair smelled of decay so much.
A very sleazy-looking girl
he held in his clutch.

She represented the ultimate in rudeness:
girls who always shacked out their roommates
and banged all night—such crudeness!

All night they had deprived their neighbors of sleep.
This vulgar, uncouth sin was why
she was in Hell so deep.

Satan's great icy hands were crushing her soul.
She screamed, begged, pleaded for mercy
but she had no control.

I cringed at the sight, buried my face in my hands.
I implored President Richter
"Get me out of this land!"

⁵At this point the author must have been tired of rhyming and didn't think the reader would mind if she missed one.

My guide was then sure I had seen enough.
I swore I'd change my ways and
never do any of this stuff.

He then took my hand and said to me
"You've learned much I'm sure,
now there's better to see."

He said "Our time here is over, let's keep right on track."
We slid down Satan's leg and I never looked back.

Lisa M. Williams

Somewhere under Manhattan

coming out of the tunnel
is the purification
the baptism in sludge
un-done
(for most for-gotten)
|
do not emerge
alone
my truth does not bubble out

In the window
I can still see the woman
rifling through the garbage
to the core of my twice bitten fruit..

Erika Rohrbach

Trumped

By Vince Leskusky

The town of Mount Carmel seemed never to change. Crammed into the valley between the Ashland Mountains to the southeast and the Marion Mountains around the entire west, Mount Carmel squatted on Route 54, a blue vein of a highway laid when coal was king and Mount Carmel was its heart.

It had not been since the start of cross-country season in August that I last made the two-hour drive into Northumberland county. Now, with an exhausting season behind me at last, I returned to my adopted hometown, the boyhood hometown of my father. He had been a legend-of-sorts who had wrestled to three PIAA silver medals as he led the red tornado powerhouse squads of the early Sixties. When he died they dedicated the trophy case in the new high school to him.

Coming by night through Centralia on 54, sights familiar from childhood displayed themselves for me. The Silver Bowl, a stadium that could hold the whole town, spilled incandescence onto its shelf in the Marion Mountain. All the men, and most of the women, would be found there supporting their tornadoes—the winningest football team in Pennsylvania history and the chief source of pride and conversation from July until February. But for the wind that perpetually vacuumed in from the open northeast, I could hear the static cheer of the crowd.

The sulphur streams of the Ashland, where my friends and I used to splash during the summers, appeared like vanilla milkshake spilt on black vinyl. Shimmering through the granular November snow, my headlights picked out the sign proclaiming Mount Carmel: "The first municipality with electric streetlamps." Shining off the white bases of shale mountains of strip-waste, the streetlights smothered the empty streets in luminescence.

Entering town on Fifth Street, I passed by Slippy's Bar, where I was served at sixteen. Slippy had known my father and the cops never gave Slippy a hard time. My pulse quickened as I drove through the glow ebbing into the darkness from the low-hanging lights drooping over the ever-present pinochle games. That light from the gameroom would burn until the streetlights had expired in the pre-dawn light—signalling the pinochle players to call it quits and head home.

I parked the car on a slant beneath the giant sycamore that grew out of the concrete to support the rainspouts of my grandmother's house. Pausing in the warm, sheepskin womb, I listened to the snow scratch against the windshield and smiled. In spite of the drab appearance, those narrow titled rowhomes were among the snuggest places to sit out a snowstorm.

The crisp wind shot into my nose as I turned to slam the Chevy's door. The air tasted of sharp peppermint in my chest and of Polish horseradish in my eyes. I shuffled my feet on the cindered macadam glossed with a sepulchral sheen. Man and machine again had lost in their battle with nature. Even the sooted houses were blasted in rhinestone-white.

"Hi Grammy," I said, coming into the parlor.

I didn't expect a response. There hadn't been one for five years. Swinging the food-solution pouch and feeding tube to the other side of the recliner, I kissed the hunched, soft figure on the forehead where the hairline receded.

I shed my jacket, removed my fogged glasses from my clogged nose and walked through the living room to the kitchen.

"Hi Grandpap," I said. He stared intently into his soup, eating slowly.

"Hiya Grandpap!" I said more loudly.

The eyes snapped alert, "How ya' doin' Eddie? 'bout time ya' got here," he said standing up to shake my hand. The power of the grip from forty-five years in the mines almost caught me off balance. "I thought you got stuck goin' over the Frackville. Want some soup? It's bean and there's some kielbasa in the fridge."

I shook my head, but smiled as I imagined the inside of the brown Westinghouse stocked with the kielbasa, devilled eggs and Yuenglings. I stripped down to my T-shirt, but the dank warmth of sickness continued to shroud me.

I walked from the narrow kitchen back through the narrow living room into the narrow parlor. The pastel drapes were closed, and on the walls dark blankets cascaded down to ease the glare. This was my grandmother's room, had been for five years.

Taking a seat across from her, I steepled my index fingers over my nose and rested my chin on my thumbs. It looked like she was sleeping but it was always hard to tell. The Second Law of Thermodynamics kept entering my brain: All systems proceed to disorder, that is, they break down.

Her whole body was curved like a relaxed hand. Her swollen face pushed the tinted George Burns glasses down her nose. Her saliva-smearred-chin seemed to merge with the puffy neck. From there her nightgown, her housecoat and afghans and quilts swaddled her except for her white knuckled, clenched fists and the tight, concave arcs of the toes and soles which left the tops of the feet outside their beddies.

As I stared at the motionless form in the chair, my grandfather shuffled through the living room to climb the steps to the bedroom. Wheezing through coal-dusted lungs, he stopped to rest on the landing. When he caught his wind, he brushed the thick, silver hair out of his eyes and called out to me.

"Eddie, she's SLEEPin'," he said in his coalcracker cadence. "G'on out and get some air."

Descending the steep, slanted cement steps to the pavement, I walked up Locust Street to Fifth. On Fifth Street I turned left and in three minutes made it to the door of Slippy's.

The warm and humid barroom air embraced me like an old friend. The noise and the colored lights from the beer signs were just as I had remembered them.

I stood inside the doorway and picked out familiar faces. Stanky Brankavage always reminded me of Ed Norton on the Honey-mooners. Yosh and Stosh Yacabonis sat at a table with a group of guys I didn't recognize. Johnny Lucekewicz had his hand on the zipper of his jeans as he returned from emptying himself of the evening's beer.

I walked up behind Stanky, gave him an elbow in the ribs and said in false slyness, "Come all the way to this joint to get a game. Ain't there any open?"

"Eddie! How the 'ell are ya'?" said Stanky, his face beaming in recognition. "What kinda question is THAT? Shore we gotta game. Like a beer?"

Stanky had Slippy draw me a beer while Stanky and I began a game of four-handed cutthroat pinochle with two guys I didn't know. I lost the first hand by one trick and tried to make it up by taking bids I knew I shouldn't even try to make—and didn't.

"Lose your touch in the big city?" Stanky asked.

I forced a smile—when the one with the greasy "Bear Cat" visored-cap laughed through his nose at me, "You're tellin' me he had a touch? Touch of what?—clap?"

The deal was mine when the door opened and a group with flushed faces and sniffing noses came in.

"How'd we do?" Stanky asked.

"Aw, Christ, it was really bad, 35-6. To Shamokin for Godssake!" said a fat man with cheap gloves and a nylon hat.

While Stanky and the other two pumped the guy for details, I dropped the pack into the handkerchief I had spread on my lap and after pretending to wipe my nose, shoved it into my coat pocket with my left hand. In my right hand I held an identical cold deck.

"Worst season I can remember," I said as I finished dealing. "What's it make them? Six an' five?"

"Like another beer Ed?" said Stanky. "Yeah six and five. Diminick's gotta go, he ain't no coach."

I declined the beer. An hour later I told the guys I had to call it quits. With each hand, I stuffed the pile of wrinkled ones and fives into my pockets. "See yas' later," I said smirking at "Bear Cat" as I left. "I think I need a bigger wallet—no room for this small change."

Back inside the house, I sat only in my shorts, sweating profusely in my chair as I waited to talk to Grammy. Looking into her tinted glasses, I remembered what she had always told me: Never wear sunglasses when playing cards, unless you put them on the table as

a shiner—an object that allows the dealer who is dealing seconds or bottoms to select what cards go to which people. She never cheated at cards, but she knew all the tricks and warned me about them. I wondered what she would think if she knew that my college books were bought with pinochle money, as was the gas in my car and the sheepskin seat covers.

For what seemed my whole life, I had dreamt of playing pinochle. I couldn't have been much more than three or four when I would sneak down the steps and into the kitchen at midnight on a Friday or Saturday, and crawl into my grandmother's lap.

She, my grandfather and other people encircled the table. The sliding of cards mesmerized me with the pretty pictures of men with swords and ladies with crowns.

"Now this is a club. See, it looks like a clover," Grammy explained. She did this for every card she threw. I sat there dozing until someone snapped down a card and yelled, "TRUMP!" which magically drew groans and cheers and caused everyone to gulp their beers. It wasn't until the morning newspaper slammed against the door that Grammy carried me upstairs and tucked me into bed. During the long afternoons I entertained myself for hours by sitting on the floor with my own deck, flipping cards and shouting, "Trump! Trump!"

"Trump is the suit that beats all others," my grandmother explained one early summer afternoon after I had completed first grade. "Unless someone leads it, you can only play trump if you don't have any more cards of the suit that was led."

"So even if you throw aces they might get trumped. Right?" I had asked her. She had told me what a quick learner I was and colored me a charted index-card with all the melds and points to remember. She, Grandpap and I had exhausted three decks that summer.

My grandfather came down the steps and sat down in the chair next to me. "Boy, she must really be TIRED, she's still asleep. Why don't you go to bed Eddie?"

"No," I said, "I think I'll just keep her company in case she gets up, but you go on up." He said good night and struggled back up the stairs. Leaning back in my chair, I looked at the violet housecoat my grandmother wore. It was hard to believe that I had given it to her seven years ago.

Seven years ago my grandparents had celebrated their fortieth anniversary. The house had swarmed with people. Cigar smoke and the indescribable scent of *Boylho*—a wicked Lithuanian concoction of rye, whiskey, and a shopping list of spices and fruits all heated to a simmer before serving—had made me pleasantly dizzy. People polka-ed or just swayed to an accordion squeezing out Bobby Vinton and Sammy Harmonski. The house didn't seem so narrow then.

In the kitchen, beneath the cigar smoke and music drifting in from the parlor, a pinochle tournament had been underway for the better part of the evening. Grammy and I were a team, and in the finals against my grandfather and his partner, Zip.

In the final hand, Zip led an ace of hearts. My grandmother winced as she played her ten of hearts, with my grandfather sliding on a king. Just as Zip reached to collect the trick that would have given them the championship, I smirked and flicked out a queen of spades.

"Trump!" I said gathering in the deciding trick. As my grandfather and Zip paid us, I wanted to celebrate but kept my eyes fixed on Zip as he counted off his debt. I kept remembering that Grammy had taught me when I first played for money, "If you win or lose in spades, the pot is double—ALWAYS DOUBLE." When I received my share, I made extra certain that I had been paid in double.

As I recalled it, my grandmother had stood up, smiling with pride in me and said, "Yeth, weun."

My grandfather laughed. "Jesus, Stella, you've had too many Boylhos. WHY you're talking like a WINO."

We had all laughed but she hadn't drunk too much that night. Two years later, unable to speak at all, she would be confined in the chair she now occupied. The doctors could not say what the sickness was. Some sort of musco-skeletal disease. Some type of renegade ALS, the one expert had diagnosed, and said she was fortunate that her mind was still intact—very alert in fact. Meaning, I supposed, that she had all the capabilities necessary to contemplate her condition and to suffer.

I grew tired of looking at her. Something on her face made me think of the huckleberries and blueberries she and I had picked on the Marion Mountain, filling two-dozen coffee cans. I'd eat those berries until my cheeks were blue.

I saw it then. Her tongue—it was blue. Charging from my seat, I sunk my fingers into the flaccid neck, but the only sensation I felt was my sweat beginning to freeze on my bare chest and forehead.

The 9:00 a.m. sun glared off the mirror-black hearse which led the early-Seventies Ford and Chevy sedans from Holy Cross Church through the salt-soaked streets. The banked, polluted snow dribbled to slush before gurgling down the corner sewer grates. Just beyond the abandoned Silver Bowl, the procession halted beneath a row of cracked and cinder-browened streetlamps to keep itself together.

The most luxurious car my grandmother ever rode in turned right and slipped and churned up the steep, private road to the cemetery atop the Marion.

The soggy cemetery ground seeped between the seams of my imitation leather shoes. While the pallbearers unloaded the Cadillac, I looked down on Mount Carmel—down on the town crouched in the Valley of Ash.

Although the sun was approaching its pinnacle, the jet abyss of the strip pit at the bottom of the mountain gaped like the mouth of a madman without the revealing a hint to the secrets deep in that empty artery of anthracite. Brown, yellow and blue-black cinders and shale chippings dripped together in sopping mounds around the mouth. Rivulets etched grotesque patterns into these piles as the foul water trickled into the floodplain of a sulphur stream gaudy with yellow-boy. Dyed orange-brown by a century of washing, the rocks and dirt and even the water itself emitted a rancid egg odor that bound itself to the inside of my mouth.

The sulphurous wind, combined with the omnipresent glare, intoxicated me and made me dizzy with nausea. I stood at the graveside as the priest rambled on in what might as well have been Lithuanian—one thing Grammy hadn't taught me. I itched in my black pressed suit for freedom. I laid my red camellia on the casket suspended by green straps. With a glinting silver crucifix in his right hand, the priest said firmly, "This casket is sealed until the second coming of Christ." At the voicing of "Christ," the Sign of the Cross was pounded into the lid of the coffin. The clang of metal-on-metal slapped me sharply in the face. The horrid grating sand through the trees shaping the glade, returning in echo to strike my other cheek. The sun's rays sneaked beneath the mourning tent, and I had to shut my eyelids from the reflection off the fake-alabaster coffin cover migraing into the rear of my eyes.

I didn't stay at the reception long. After eating mashed potatoes that looked like vanilla ice-cream, I could not stomach any more food. Returning to my grandparent's empty home, I snatched a bottle of Rock 'n Rye from below the sink.

As I drove back up the Marion my mind played static. The air had grown raw as the sun sat at its 4:00 position. Leaving the car near the entrance of the graveyard I struggled up the icy path. Four men shovelled dirt from a nearby mound down the six-foot rectangular hole.

"Where's the backhoe?" I asked them.

"It's busted. Naw auntie-freeze in the radiator or salmmthin'." he answered behind a cloud of breath.

I stood there, sipping at my bottle wrapped in a towel, watching the four spades fill the hole until it became a small mound. Turning to leave, I almost stumbled into a scraggy pile of huckleberry bushes uprooted for more burial space.

I wandered the streets of Mount Carmel well into the night. I stumbled over the cracked, dilapidated sidewalks—made of cheap cement or broken brick or macadam or tar—that were turning to powder. I walked slowly into and out of the smells of tomato sauce and cigarette smoke coming from the pizza joints and bars. Against the side of a '68 Impala I smashed my rye bottle. To the shouts of "Asshole" I walked down Market Street.

On Market Street, the darkness was black as coal. The solid wall of row homes boxed me in and vanished the sky, as if someone had slammed a lid down on the entire street. The homes, with their chipping clapboard, had separated from their porch steps with the settling of the earth as it crushed the mine tunnels seep beneath the town. Weeds and grass grew out of the cracks—kept alive by the coal furnaces stoked inside the homes. In two hundred years this might be a meadow—the Second Law of Thermodynamics and all.

Full of rye and emptied of philosophy, I found myself cornered by Locust and Fifth. Into Slippy's I went, plopped down at the bar and asked for a beer.

"Geez, I'm sorry, Ed," Slippy said. His red skin reminded me of prickly heat. "Stella was a fine lady."

"Yeah. Thanks. How 'bout a Genny?"

Slippy's forearms flexed as he dried a glass, "Jesus, Ed—you're sloshed. Why don't you go home?"

"Why don't you give me a goddamned beer?"

Slippy set the glass and towel gently down. "I can't." He looked over my shoulder at the card game behind me. Leaning towards me confidentially he whispered, "People don't come here to get robbed."

"Jesus H. Christ! Give me a break."

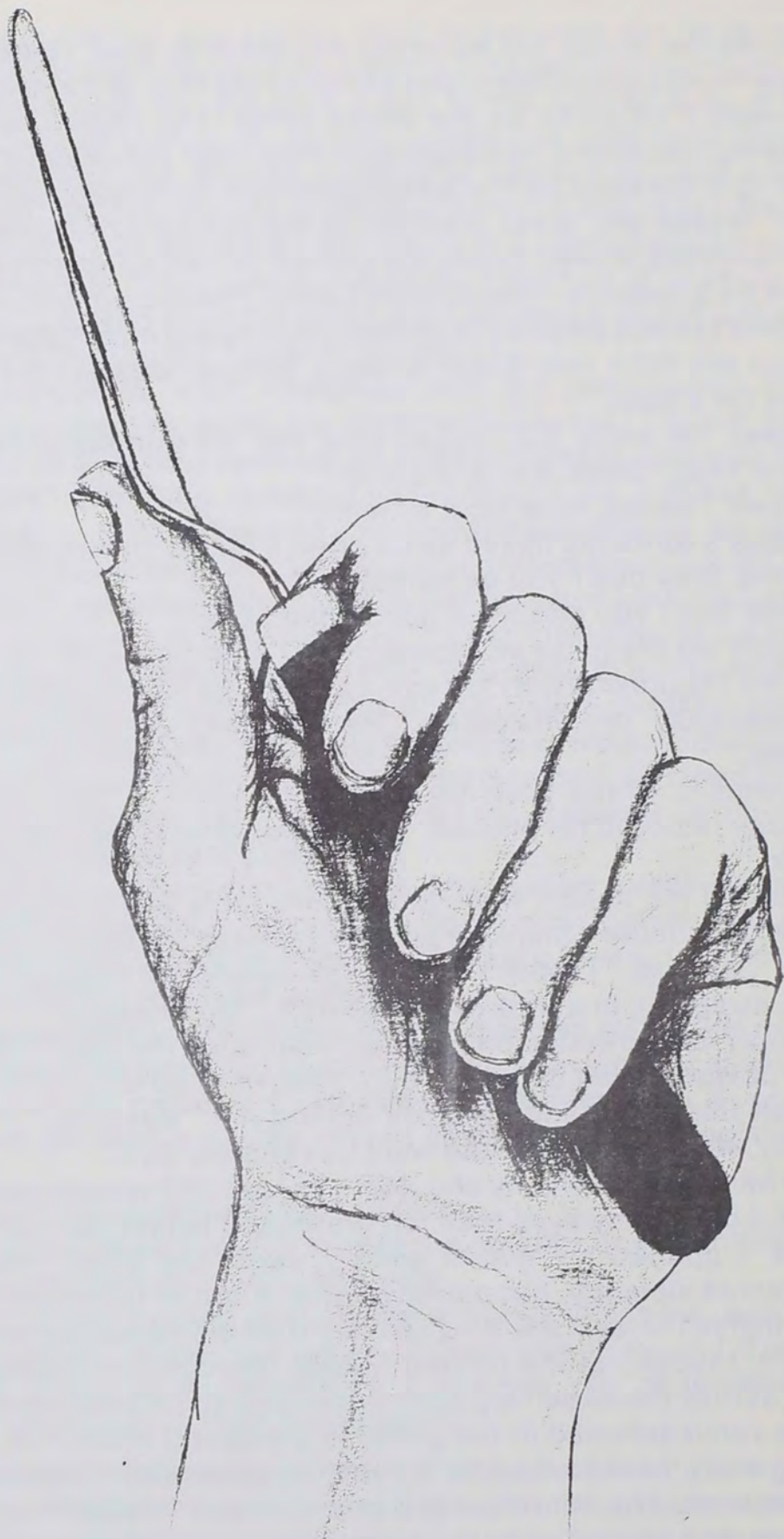
Slippy removed his glasses, "Ed, you'd better leave. You're pretty drunk."

Shaking my head I went to the card table and put an arm on Stanky's shoulder. Stanky's partner gazed at me from beneath his "Bear Cat" hat. "This is a friendly game and it's closed," he said flatly, sweeping in a trick of four spades. "No assholes."

Stanky concentrated on his hand—although the next three plays were obvious—and didn't look up. I began to go around the table, but felt Slippy moving up close behind me. "Bastards," I hissed, "Lousy, weak bastards," and went out into the cold.

My head ached into my shoulders as I sat on the curb across the street. I closed my eyes then felt gravel and jagged powder on my cheek. I opened my mouth wide towards the gutter, my chest contracted violently, but nothing came. Another heave came from deep inside me, as if a Brillo pad were working its ways through my bowels. I looked at the blurred figures through the fogged plate-glass across the street. My body wrenched again and I choked.

The vomit steamed in the gutter in a sopping mound of yellow-brown and I thanked God for the pole of a dismantled streetlight to lean against. The halo from the game seeped through the misted window and spilled onto the vomit. The scent of sour eggs and sharp sulphuric acid in the cold air made my mouth feel dry and toxic. I sat there studying my mess. I noticed how badly it stank and how long it smoldered in the glow of the night.



Megan
Klein

Sunday

I see the cycle complete itself again
some trail to the dorm late and happy
others stalk into their rooms early and mad
the rest remain in the middle of
drunken indifference.

I smell a faded weekend
half empty beer bottles, stale cigarettes
mingled with the law and order of
clean laundry and strong coffee
erasing the remains of a two day party.

I hear tired voices through the paper thin walls
speaking of who did what last night
relishing gossip, craving more
no energy for anything
but idle talk.

I touch the bits of reality
scattered about my room
as I tidy everything away
and settle down for a week of serious work
(recognizing that this is how I fool myself).

I know this cycle
has gone on longer than I've been alive
and will go on endlessly
as each eager new group settles in
and for the first time
I feel ridiculously old.

Jennifer Healy

In Quest of Creativity

Squeeze shut your eyes.
Block out the light.
Your mind is the only light you need.

Look closely now--inward, inward,
Into the depths--the pit of your thoughts.
What do you see?
See what you want.

...absurd, stagnant mass of bleak, bleary emptiness--
solid block of black, baffling mire...

No!! Look closer, closer, closer

...Complex pattern--racing coursing blending changing
color, yes, there's color now...

Stare at the puzzle;
Hoard the confusion
Follow the colors--configurations.

Pools of water, swirled with oil
--floating, whirling, nebulous.
Let the substance seep, seep
Through the pores of your mind
Into the abyss of thought that you

Call imagination
Call it forth--this nameless obsession
Call him--he will come.
Whistle shrilly, pierce the silence
Watch him bound boldly towards you
Bowl you over, boggle your brain
Then course past--onward into yesterday.

Chase him through the sanguineous streets,
 spinning seas,
 mystic mountains,
Through your memory.
Follow him this way, that way, this way
Once again eluding you.
One step further
Maybe just around the corner...
Stop and scream for it's too late
 to catch yourself.

Spiral swiftly downward, downward
Over the edge of sanity.

Plummet through various chasms of chaos
Twist and writhe in spasms of instinct
Relax and absorb inspiring dreamscapes

Open your eyes before you crash and
Write it all down before you forget.

Orena Herrold

Imperfect Healing

Cool, misty morning
scented with rain
the gymnasium door screeches open and
slams against the wall with a heavy, metallic thud
whining sixth graders clad in regulation polyester
shamble out, voices clamoring.
Militaristic gym teacher with a rigid, springy step
and a loud whistle
starts the quarter mile run.

I feel someone failing behind me
at the same time I am pushed to the damp blacktop
I stay there staring curiously
at torn leg and elbow
"Keep running" the teacher calls cheerfully
She gestures enthusiastically for me to obey
so I do.

I don't see much except the blood
which runs steadily down my leg
and stains my shirt where my arm brushes against it
I don't feel much except how it flows.
I breeze past Bob the class fat kid
as he chugs along
the only other person still in the race
the class cheers as I finish ahead of him.

I see Valerie, the girl who ran me down
standing there unscathed
the gym teacher's eyes on the blood
as she blandly suggest I see the nurse
I wonder at their lack of concern.

I've learned
that those who create such scars
are never sorry
and never allow complete healing.

Jennifer Healy

The Game

By Kevin Adams

BEEP! BEEP! BZZZ! Sounds were flying around me, making concentration difficult. Spaceships, autoracing, tennis, lasers, pistols, and demons flicked on and off, their video screen lives passing away and regenerating by the quarter. This was the arcade; my domain on occasion, and this was quite an occasion: I was about to make the all-time high score on "Hades and other Legends from Hell". Just one more vampire, just one more ghost, just one more anything and I would have the game. The owner was giving it away to the person with the highest score; and that was going to be me. It wasn't as though I just thought I could win the game, I could FEEL it. I was one with the game and the game with me. It was almost as if I was part of the game but with one exception: I was better. I moved my mystic warrior cautiously along the dungeon corridor when I saw them, two zombies. A quick pattern burst from my magic bow and they would bite the bullet, or the arrow in this case. A crowd had gathered around me, waiting with great expectation they knew I had beaten all the games I had cared to and I cared to win this game. Three quick successive presses of the fire button and it was all over, and the game was mine. In all my glory, I stopped, excepted my applause and waited for the manager to wheel the game, my game, out to my car.

"Congratulations, Don, You're the winner," said an underwhelmed fat man, the manager.

"Thanks, Jack. Shall we go into the back to sign the forms?"

"Yeah, I suppose, kid. I don't know how you've managed to win three of the most difficult games but you've done it. I'm watching you next time to see if you're using some new-fangled Jap device or something."

"You can look, but the game is an art. It isn't what I'm doing to the machine but how I become like it in order to beat it."

"Bullshit!" Jack muttered as he led the way to the back room. It was a cramped dusty place with the electronic organs of video games scattered about. In one corner were the relics of dead quarter-eaters: Asteroids, Space Invaders, Pac Man, and other, less famous ones. They dredged up nostalgia in me, these games I had beaten, so I lingered near them. One game caught my eye, not for its flashy colors, but because it looked so old and was painted a deep, dusty black. It was larger than the rest of the games, obviously meant for someone to sit in it.

"Jack, what's that game?" I asked, pointing.

"Some old game, I forget the name. I've never been able to get the thing running right and every time I try to open it up, it gives me a shock. I let it be. Here, sign these," he said, proffering some slips of paper.

I signed them quickly then asked, "Can I give it a try?"

"What?"

"That game."

"It doesn't work, but go ahead if you want. At your own risk though. Don't squeal to me when it shocks your pants off."

I went over to the creature. If there were any instructions written on the outside, they must have worn off. I looked for the quarter slot but couldn't find that either—they must be inside the game. Opening the door revealed deep blackness. My eyes adjusted and I could make out a control stick in front of a leather seat with a well-worn leather helmet lying on the seat. I clambered into the seat and grabbed the helmet and put that on my head, then once again looked for instructions and a coin slot. Once again I found none but I did become accustomed to the lighting and I did manage to make out one little sign that read: PLEASE CLOSE DOOR. So I did. Now the blackness was complete. For some reason my grandfather's war stories came to mind. I had always thought they were overembellished with mystery, but I decided to check some things out. My hand wrapped around the control stick and I felt for the directions of the lever. I felt the throttle on my right. My feet placed themselves on two pedals, probably the brakes. Rather simple layout, but why wouldn't it start? Remembering a secret my grandfather had told me about his old biplane, I felt under the seat for a switch. Not really expecting anything, I was shocked when my finger touched what felt like a little button.

I pushed. Instantly I wished I hadn't. A deafening engine kicked over, the whole game and the seat vibrated, a picture of a runway appeared in front of me, a dilapidated hangar was behind me on the left. The picture was extremely lifelike and if I hadn't known better I wouldn't have realized I was in an arcade. I had full 360-degree vision. A few gauges that showed fuel level and oil pressure lit up, and a compass was affixed on my left. This was no longer an arcade; I was sitting in a vintage World War I Dehaviland.

Overwhelmed by the authenticity, I gunned the throttle. The engine revved like a Chevy SS without a muffler. The seat went from vibrating to throbbing. The stick began to pressure my hand but I steadied it and kept the plane going straight, aiming for a runway that was hardly more than cleared, hardened dirt. I was going to fly! This was more than just being on the outside of a game, this was me as part of and living with the game. The plane kept accelerating faster and faster until finally I pulled back on the control stick. My plane was aloft.

Climbing higher and higher I wanted to reach cloud level but eventually the air pressure thinned too much and I had to level off. I was at least one thousand feet in the air when I noticed the other plane. Great, maybe this was somebody else who could tell me what was happening. I pulled back on the throttle and banked down and

closer to the new plane. It turned into what I thought would be a near collision course and was about to align myself for a talk with the pilot when it happened. Bullets scattered all about me, some hit my wings, some the back end of the plane. Obviously, this was no friend but that's not what scared me. What scared me was that I had FELT those shots as they went into the plane. This was real! I really was part of the game and feeling everything in it: the fear, the G-force, vertigo. I banked my plane away and noticed another plane. Now I was in deep shit.

I gunned the throttle, and pulled up and to the left. My plane followed orders superbly. I looked back over my shoulder; one plane was at 8 o'clock, one at 4 o'clock. I backed down on the throttle and let the other planes catch up, but kept them just out of shot range. A plan came to mind. I had flown in planes before and had played enough flight games to know a few maneuvers. I gunned the plane once again and spun to the right. Banking the plane around I was going to fire on them from their sides. Instantly however, I found this wasn't going to work; my bank had been too hard. The wings bent down slightly and all my blood seemed to be slipping down to my feet. The pressure was greater than anything I had experienced. Grasping at consciousness, I fingered the trigger on the stick and eased up on the turn. When I was able to straighten myself out, I saw a cloud of descending smoke; I had hit one! That was luck, though, and I knew I couldn't have hit both.

My eyes raced across the horizon. Where are those planes? My question was answered with a ripple of bullets through my plane. The pilot had dropped down, turned, and was now coming up, shooting me from underneath. Again I felt the bullets, but this time they were much closer to home, and I hear my engine cough. As black smoke spewed out, the plane lurched downward, and I felt something wet running down my leg. I reached down and tasted it; it was salty. My own blood. My leg was shot! The sudden searing was more than I could have imagined. Determined not to go down so easily, I focused all my energy and pulled back gradually on the control stick. The plane wanted nothing of it; we were going down. Black smoke poured into my eyes so I couldn't see, but I knew that I had to level off or die. I pulled back on the stick as hard as I could. Just when I thought the stick was going to break, the plane eased up and leveled off slightly.

I killed the throttle and the black smoke lessened. I was just a few dozen feet above the ground and heading for trees. I dropped the plane to as low as I could, then aimed for a small clearing between trees, knowing it was futile to try to go over them or to try to turn. I braced myself for impact. A tree caught the tip of the lower wing and snapped it in half. The whole plane wrenched to the left. The landing gear hit the ground and a wheel gave out causing the plane to lurch and drag to the right. The whole plane flipped end over end before

coming to a halt. Blood poured forth from my leg and now I could feel and taste some on my face.

I dragged myself out of the broken wreckage of the plane to get away, in case it blew up. I heard voices. I'm saved, I thought. Those people can help me. I opened my eyes and called out but it already seemed they were coming towards me. I closed my eyes and waited until they got here. When they did I had wished they hadn't. There were two of them, dressed in German army uniforms. They rolled me over and shouted at me, then pointed their guns at me. I knew what they were saying; they were going to shoot me. I could make out what I took to be "READY, AIM..." I looked into the muzzles of their guns. "FIRE!" Two banners came out of the guns, one read "game", the other "over". Was this some joke? The next thing I knew a light came on in the game and I was once again seated in the leather seat in the arcade. A bright "game over" sign flashed a few more times then went out. I felt my leg, my head, my whole body. Gratefully I found myself intact and without injury. I opened the door and light poured in, momentarily blinding me. Jack stood there with a screwdriver and a hammer.

"Are you all right?" Jack asked with more emotion than I had ever seen him put into words.

"Yeah, just fine, I think. This is a great game. How much do you want for it?"

Jack looked at me incredulously. "You won't want it now. What did you do in there?"

"I played the game," I tried to state matter-of-factly while stepping out.

"No way you could have. Soon as it locked you in I yanked the plug. But it must've shorted or something. Look," Jack said, pointing.

I looked. The black box of the game was riddled with quarter-sized bullet holes, wisps of black trailing out of every hole. I looked down at my pants, at two holes in the heavy denim that weren't there before. My denim jacket showed a large tear along the shoulder and heavy scratch marks down the front. I rolled up my pants and two large circular scars were bluntly apparent.

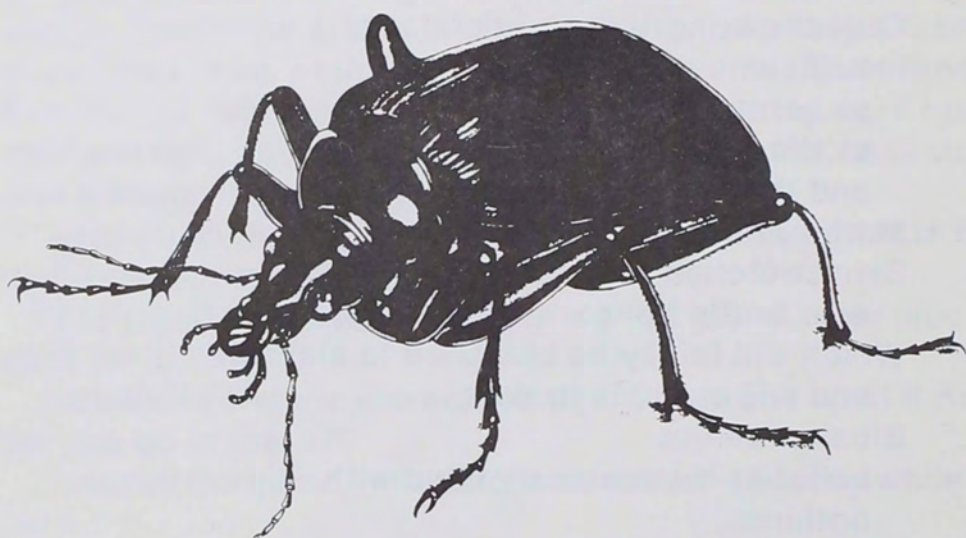
"Are you sure you're all right?" asked Jack as I stared incredulously at the smoking black hulk.

"No."

The Hunger

If anything
If it must be something
It's a starving wasteland
 in their eyes.
That blackening sanctuary
 turned empty and spinning
Drawing the greatest down
 down onto a level plain
Only the hungry can understand.
Insufficiency makes hope turn
 as barren and dry
 as the weathered desert
 and the stinging sand.
Marionette bodies
Skin stretched taut as leather
 over brittle bones
Which will finally be bleached to alabaster
 and will crumble to dust.
Bloated bellies
 balloons miraculously filled with
 nothing.
Only a prayer to rise up and
 float, to gently rock away.
The graceful will waltz with death,
 hold their partners close
Dancing dizzily, with emptiness to hold.
Eyes will flutter closed and a
Broken mother wails helplessly.
If anything
If it must be something
It's my own complacency,
 broken by intermittent
 bouts of confession.
The smugness of luxury
Stops my ears and
Shuts my guilty eyes.
In spite of profession of deepest sympathy
I still roll over and go to sleep.

Rebecca Moore



A. B. VICKERY 2/22

Peanuts on the Beach

peanuts on the beach
talk the pigeons
screech
falling down from heav'n
as black glass beneath our
feet

a world comes slowly
blobbing by

spot .
hail !
reach /

Erika Rohrbach

Battlefield Prom

By Matthew Noll

Trevor strolled down the hall to Molly's locker with the confidence of a man about to ask the devil if he could spare ten bucks.

"I have to ask you something, and it's pretty important," Trevor said.

"OK," said Molly, "but hurry, my mom's picking me up to go shopping."

"Look, I know we've been through a lot . . ."

"That's a bit of an understatement."

"Would you consider going to the prom with me?"

"I'll think about it," Molly said. A faint glimmer of hope came into Trevor's eyes.

"It would really mean a lot to me."

"I know."

"So you will think about it?"

"Yes!" said Molly, heading for the door.

"If I can't go with you, I don't want to go," Trevor cried down the hall.

"I know that too," Molly replied as she disappeared out the door.

It was true. Molly was the only person that Trevor could go with. If he went with anyone else it would be hell. They wouldn't understand him, or laugh at his bizarre jokes. They wouldn't see the world in the same putrid red glow that he did. Trevor walked away from Molly's locker and screamed at the top of his lungs as he jumped into the air to slap an exit sign. Everyone had already gone home from school but it made him feel better anyway. Then he stopped alive in his tracks. What if she said no? He hadn't stumbled across this line of reasoning before. His stomach turned and he thought he was going to faint. He slumped down next to the last ugly brown locker in the row. "I want Andrea's body" was scribbled on the side in red magic marker. Was that it, just her body? She was a cheerleader with a nice body, but nothing to die for; besides what was she supposed to do, get a lobotomy? Trevor thought about her and realized she had probably been braindead since birth and would be more than happy to give up her body for some good coke or a boyfriend with an equally exciting body and a BMW.

Trevor struggled to his feet and meandered outside where his father was waiting to pick him up. He threw his few books into the back where they clattered to the floor like fossils. He collapsed into the front seat next to his father. "Hello," his father said. He didn't look happy. Oh no, thought Trevor, he is definitely not happy.

"I got a call from Mrs. Graffert today. Remember her? Your physics teacher? You do go to physics, don't you?"

"Of course," said Trevor, and this was true. It was the class where he got some of his best songwriting done. It was amazing how productive one could be when one was bored out of one's skull.

"Well maybe you should consider paying attention sometime. You might learn something; you might even pass a test or two."

"I pay attention." This was not true. He had paid attention once and it had almost killed him. The numbers had surrounded his brain and started gnawing at it like crows on overripe road kill. Trevor had taken that moment to decide that physics was Satan's plot to take over the youth of the world, and turn them into mindless slaves. He had stopped paying attention to Mrs. Graffert. That was probably why he was failing. His father began to rant about the importance of going to college, the importance of being a well-rounded person, the importance of good citizenship, the importance of A, the importance of B, etc., all of which seemed to rely on his ability to memorize some funny little symbols on a chart. Trevor didn't care. He shut his father out, it was a one person conversation anyway, and he didn't feel that he had to be a part of it. His thoughts snapped to Molly. They had stopped going out two months ago, about the same time that Trevor had realized that physics was a plot of Satan. He still didn't understand why they couldn't go out anymore. Neither of them was interested in other people. They hadn't fought about anything important. One day Molly had given him a note that said they could still be friends, talk on the phone until one a.m., help each other through this giant play, with all its shallow characters and bizarre plot twists. Then the note said, "I love you." For a couple of weeks they hadn't spoken. Trevor was in shock. He loved Molly, he felt sure of that. And she loved him, or so the note said. So, where was the problem? Trevor didn't want to let go of the only person that could see through him like a glass bubble. Eventually they had started talking again, and it soon seemed that they were closer than ever. One night Molly asked him for a ride to a party at their friends' house. The evening had gone all right until Molly almost died. They were standing in the kitchen smoking; Trevor was brewing tea. Molly was on the other side of the kitchen table playing with a candle, making the wax run onto the table in little psychedelic swirls. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Molly's sweater go up in flames for what seemed a life time. The sweater was partly made of some marvel of science material so the flames didn't consume it. He had thrown himself over the kitchen table and over Molly. He beat the flames out with his hands. When the flames were out he scooped her off the floor and set her on the table. The fire had singed her sweater but not gone through the turtleneck she wore underneath.

"Are you ok?"

She looked sadly into his eyes and nodded. By then a crowd of people were swarming over her like wild trainee nurses. Trevor backed away slowly. He slammed the wall, ran out the door and stood shivering in the night.

Trevor caught reentry right in the gut as the car hit a pothole, and his father was yelling, "Don't you ever listen to anyone?"

After their wonderfully stimulating conversation, Trevor's father made it a point to hang over him all night while he studied physics. He just hung there like a disembodied head, that never said a word because it didn't have any vocal cords. Or, maybe its brain had died from lack of oxygen. The next day at school Molly was absent. Trevor was crushed. He had been hoping for a quick sentence. He was sure that it was a bad omen, that Molly wouldn't go with him. It was Friday and Trevor couldn't face the world at night so he retreated to the relative safety of his room and his loud-loud stereo. It helped to drive all the thoughts from his head. For a moment he almost envied the people who went through the world like cattle to a slaughter, the people who didn't recognize the loneliness and ugliness. The phone rang, and Trevor froze in fear. After a minute he began to relax, then his mother came in. "It's for you," she said.

"Hello?" Trevor was drowning in anticipation.

"Hi." It was Molly.

"How are you?"

"Alright, listen, do you think you could come over?"

Trevor's heart stopped. "Yeah, sure."

"I'll see you in a little bit then."

Trevor put down the phone like a delicate crystal and walked out the door calmly after saying goodbye to his parents. As soon as he was half a mile down the road, he slammed the accelerator and made it to Molly's house in half a heartbeat. Her parents were out at a church social. Trevor sat on her bed with his sweaty palms tucked safely under his legs.

"I've been thinking about you a lot," Molly said, after a short silence.

"Is that good or bad?"

"I'll go," Molly stared at the floor. "You're a very confusing boy, Trevor, but I think I'd rather be confused with you than alone. I just can't depend on anyone. I'm too afraid of being hurt."

When she looked up, Trevor was staring at her with a bit of water welling up in his eyes. She wiped his tear away and kissed him.

"Remember when I caught fire," she said, "I don't think it was really an accident."

"What!" Trevor was almost hysterical.

"Why do you care about me so much? You can't even care about yourself."

"Why didn't you talk to me?"

"You're too dependent on me. I might not always be there to protect you. Sometimes it's hard enough just protecting myself."

"Look, I don't understand much but I do understand that we've got something here that each of us needs."

Molly put her arms around him and buried her head in his chest.

As the prom snuck nearer, Trevor's confidence increased. He even managed to pay attention in physics without any long term cranial damage. He would walk down the hall almost confidently, with his hand in Molly's. She would stand outside of his classes and make faces at him trying to get him to laugh. She would come up behind him while he was talking to a teacher and muss his hair until he looked like a punk rocker in a hurricane. She was also occasionally moody. She was occasionally a real bitch, but Trevor expected that from her. Molly couldn't shut out the world the way Trevor did; she took more hurt from people's everyday actions than he did.

Finally, it was prom day. Trevor tried on his polyester rent-a-tux and thought how utterly foolish he looked. It was all rather absurd. God wasn't going to descend and shower prosperity and enlightenment on the well-dressed prommers. Trevor hardly saw Molly at school, and when he finally caught up to her it was a little frightening. She told him to shave and then went home. Trevor began to have second thoughts. After all, what was the point of getting dressed up, and putting out all that money, just to get drunk and watch a bunch of over-dressed yuppie-soon-to-be's dance like fools. He could sit in his room and drink for free after a carefully planned raid on his parents disused liquor cabinet, and to hell with the yuppies in training. Then Trevor thought she must be nervous; after all he was a senior and she was only a sophomore, people would probably be making rude jokes and snickering behind their backs all night.

Trevor picked her up around seven in his parents' sensible station wagon. She was wearing a white strapless dress. Together with her short blonde hair it made her seem slightly angelic. They tried to escape quietly but got caught and suffered through the obligatory picture taking which was unexpectedly traumatic. Trevor could have stood it if Molly had tried to make them both look foolish on film. But she didn't. She didn't try to muss his hair, or tug at his earring. She didn't pout at her father through the lens or squeeze Trevor's hand.

At dinner Molly hardly ate. She hardly talked either, at least to Trevor. He thought that it must be the company. They had been cajoled into going to dinner with a couple of semi-friends, people they liked, but not all that much. They were like Airedales, really friendly, but not too bright. What struck Trevor like a cement flyswatter was that Molly was nice to them. Normally in a situation like this she would have kept the conversation to a minimum, mainly so she wouldn't end up insulting their companions.

When they got to the dance, Molly sat down at a table near the back and put her head in her hands.

"Are you ok?" Trevor asked nervously.

"I'll be fine," Molly replied, "I just need to sit down for awhile."

Trevor stroked her cheek once and then walked up to the stage to talk to some acquaintances. He knew she wanted to be alone. He also knew that something was wrong. After a few minutes, she went into the bathroom. She walked right past him without a word. He sat down in a corner and began to go through cigarettes like penny candy. It was some time before she came out. When she did, she took a course around Trevor to some of her friends, carefully avoiding Trevor's eyes. Trevor was staring into his drink. He didn't need to see her to know what was happening. He had lived in fear of it ever since he had gotten to know Molly. She couldn't give herself entirely to anyone; it would drive her insane. Trevor knew that it wasn't him but it didn't ease the pain. He tried not to watch her move around the room. He failed. Molly had failed too. She tried to change for him but she couldn't do it. It would have been easier to enjoy physics.

The band finished their set and Trevor heard the lead singer saying, "We hear you have a pretty good band, so we're going to let them do a number or two." Everyone cheered. Trevor saw the rest of the band waving to him from the stage. "They're not," he thought. He threw his jacket over the back of the chair and strolled up to the stage, rolling up his sleeves, with a cigarette hanging from his lip. The bass player handed over his instrument which Trevor accepted gingerly. They kicked into the songs with their usual chainsaw killer on speed approach but Trevor watched Molly the entire time. She was dancing like a fool with a young corporate lawyer type. She never once looked up at him. They ground the beat straight through the back wall. But when they descended from the stage, Trevor still felt like a bulbous water balloon waiting to burst on some unsuspecting passerby.

He returned to his seat and lit another cigarette. The band started to play a slow dance. Trevor looked up and saw Molly dancing with a friend of hers. Trevor didn't understand why she liked Phil; he was, at best, a callous, insensitive moron. Trevor couldn't torture himself anymore. He headed for the bathroom so he wouldn't have to watch. As he passed the dance floor, Phil reached out and grabbed his arm. "She's your date, man." Little flamethrowers blazed up in Trevor's eyes as he pulled his arm back to knock Phil senseless. The he looked into Molly's eyes and saw something like sadness. She understood too. Trevor wrenched his arm away from Phil and stomped into the bathroom. He sat down in the stall and began to sip from a hip flask of brandy. It didn't matter to him whether he got caught. Nothing mattered to him anymore.

From an alcohol semi-daze he heard the band finish their last set. He straightened his cummerbund and walked out. Molly came up to him.

"Should I find someone to drive me home?"

Trevor wanted to say "yes" but heard himself say "no."

As they walked out to the parking lot Trevor took off his wilting pink carnation and heaved it into the bushes. They drove in silence. Molly looked at him sorrowfully as he sped around the sharp turns of the road to her house. They stopped in the driveway and Trevor stared straight ahead. He knew Molly wanted to apologize, but was afraid of him and even more of herself. Trevor knew that there was nothing either of them could say, nothing either of them could change. She pulled one of the white roses from her corsage and put it in his pocket. It had already begun to turn brown.

"Be careful driving home," she said. He knew she meant "Don't drive off a cliff."

"Why?"

"Because.....I'd miss you."

He looked at her for the first time and realized that she was crying. His stone face softened a little and she tried to smile. She got out of the car and walked to the door. Trevor didn't stay to watch. He sped down the road just fast enough to be angry, and just slow enough to not drive off any cliffs.



Megan
Klein

Confessions of the Untrained Eye

The "Art Goes to School" lady
gravely explained
Van Gogh's
Sunflowers
year after
elementary
year
until mercifully
we were promoted
to the upper grades
and art appreciation was left behind.

Du Champ
painted a
nude descending a staircase
so discreetly
that even looking twice carefully
fails to reveal
the slightest hint
of forbidden flesh.
Still, we can fool ourselves
into some understanding
that this qualifies
as genius.

But when I'm shown somebody's
snow shovel
snapped in two
gracing the art museum floor
what I see is a useless implement
what I feel is
less than inspiration.

Jennifer Healy



Susan K...
2/22/88

Animal Attraction

Fascinated, I watch your mane blow wildly in the wind
There's a fire in your eyes
And a countenance of steel about your face.
You pause—ready to pounce
And I, your prey, tremble.
As your rock-muscles tighten, a growl escapes your lips.
And I begin to fear.
Then a slow, shy grin crosses your face
And gone is the lion.
Your kitten-heart reaches out
And you touch me.

Jill Hanna

Street Lamps

By Julie Ann Corish

Two bright eyes peered out at me from the darkness. As I gazed back at them, it occurred to me that they were too far apart and too large to be in any real face. I imagined them to belong to a dragon who had just dropped in from Camelot in the Tardis--but such eyes would have been red and glowing from all those wild parties in the deep, dark, mysterious, medieval forests. Rather, these two shone steadily and brightly at me like two thick stars, as if to say, It's all right, we're just observing. Go back to what you were doing, don't mind us! But instead I stared back at them curiously--when I blinked, they blinked, I supposed, but those eyes stubbornly refused to close when I was watching them. They had bushy hair which bounced on its own above them, but I could not find a nose or a mouth, which made me wonder how they ever ate or breathed. Sometimes the eyes were friendly; other times I could tell that they wanted to be alone with each other, and sometimes I think they questioned my motives. But I watched and waited until daybreak, and then they finally closed and went to sleep. And I noticed, as the sun peeped up from behind the slight rise in the landscape that their tears had solidified into columns so that those eyes could stand on their own, shaded from the glare of daylight or the pounding of the rain by convenient caps which reminded me of quaint little oriental hats.

Hey, Old Man

He had a nasty whisper that went
Right through my hearing aid.
I never even saw him.
All I saw was the dirty city streets
Before me with no one on 'em.
For God's sake, it's broad daylight--
Where is everybody?

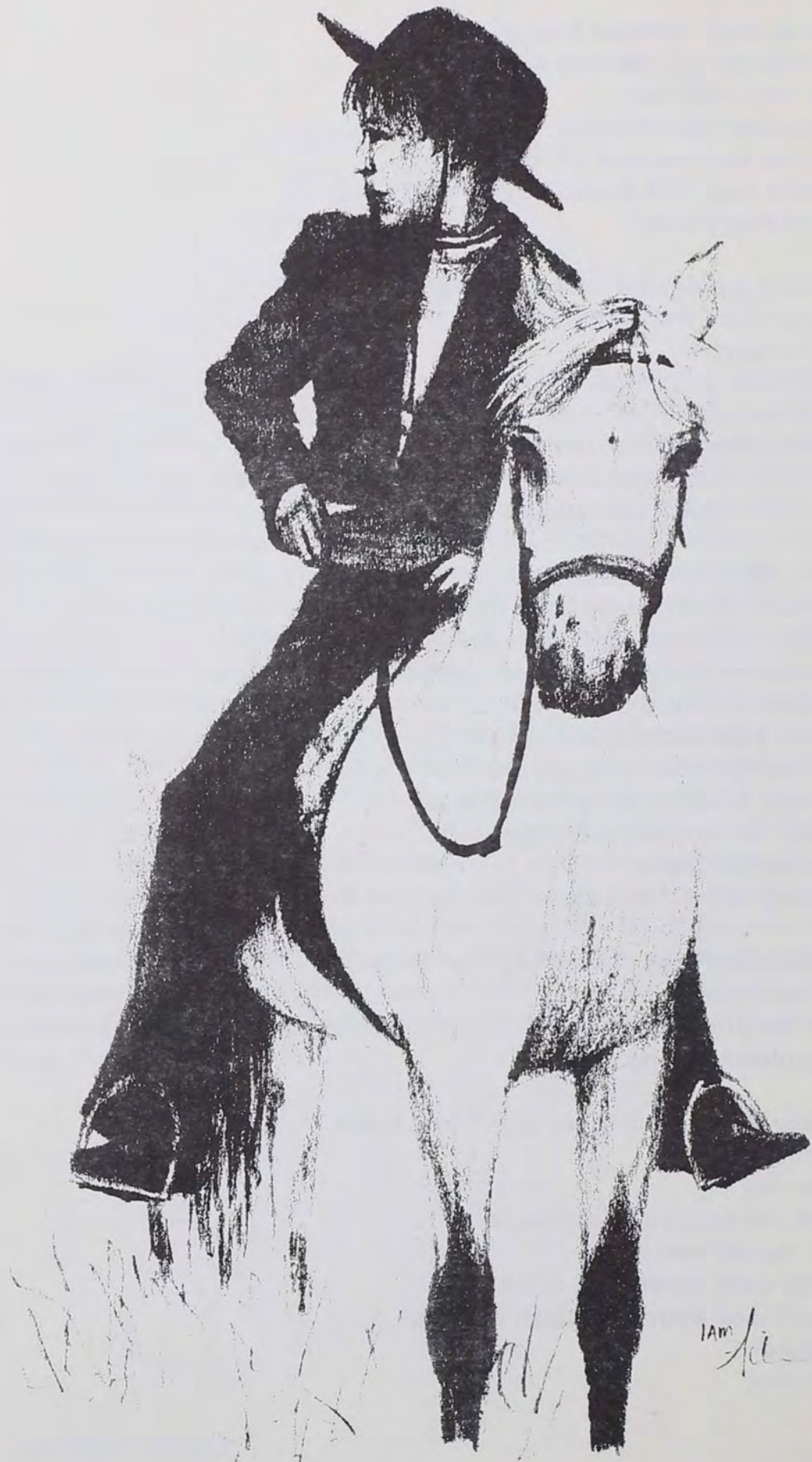
He shoved me against the brick wall
Of a row home only a block away
From my own.
I knew Hattie would yell at me
For bein' late.
She always has supper on the table by four
An' it had to be ten of when this punk grabbed me.
We're havin' split pea soup an' ham today.

I think I got most scared
When he reached around me from behind an'
Held that shiny knife in fronta my face
An' started to feel around in my pockets
Real quick an' rough.
"Where's your money, old man?"
He was gettin' mad and I could feel
His smelly breath right beside my ear
The knife in his hand with the
Brown leather glove
Beginning to twirl real slow.

I wanted to tell him my money
Was in my shoe
Just so he would go away
But I couldn't say nothin'.

He finally gave up. But he didn't just leave.
He hit me first
With his fist
Right at the bottom of my back.
I heard myself yell out
An' I slid right down that brick wall
Wishing I was young enough to chase
That bastard
An' kill him.

Lisa R. Talarico



In Search of Self-Actualization

I have a yearning, a
Desire, an aching
Need of

Expression!!

Thoughts, feelings, shapes, abstracts
(without words to fulfill them);

I throb--I am
Bursting--yet
Unsatisfied...

Mere words on a page are ambiguous;
Black-and-white is inadequate for
The vibrant colors and
Delicate pastels of my visions...

I want to SHOUT---DANCE---share my soul,
Tell everyone (who will listen to my ravings)
How magnificent it is
To be me--!

But the words are stubborn
They mock me with their
Sterility--

My breast tightens with the
Pressure of my frustration

so I sit, the thoughts
dissipate
hands clenched in the paralyzing
agony of my impotence

Julie Ann Corish

Cousin Joe Bob's First Visit to Pulsations

I see lots of broken light bulbs
that keep blinking on and off and off and on
and there's smoke comin' outta the floor,
but them folks just keep swingin' their legs and arms
just the same.

I smell pretty women. Women with class.
You know, the kind of woman you'd see on a playin' card.
And some of the fellers smell just like the women,
but I ain't gonna bother with them. I don't smell
no cigars or whiskey like in the back room at Rusty's,
I tell you that.

I hear some god-awful pounding in my head.
Their jukebox must have a busted speaker,
'cause you can't hear what the songs is sayin'.
But they got it on so loud that I can't hear
what any of the folks is sayin',
though they ain't talking to me anyways.

I touch all them shining chrome things
and that solid gold railing around the bar.
Ain't no wonder you gotta pay to get in here
with all these expensive decorations.
Why, you even gotta pay to wash your hands!

I know that these city folks is supposed to be smart,
but they pay a awful lot of money
to step on each other while them broke records is playin'
And you can't talk to nobody
and them bartenders steal your money
by fibbin' that a beer costs three dollars.
I'll take the church hall dances over this anytime,
I tell you that.

Bill Connolly & Kiteman

