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Exile Anthology: A Special Sesquicentennial Issue

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Exile Anthology: A Special Sesquicentennial Issue

Authors

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EXILE ANTHOLOGY

1947-1979

Introduction

Exile Anthology

A Special Sesquicentennial Issue

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Introduction

For me and many others, the creative writing program at Denison is synonymous with Paul Bennett. It is not merely that Paul initiated the program and, for a decade or so, was the sole member of the English department who taught Advanced Composition and directed student Honors Projects in writing. Nor is it only the assurance of stability and continuity which identifies Paul with creative writing at Denison. Even more important is the low-keyed but vital encouragement he has given to his students and colleagues. When an aspiring writer leaves Denison, he or she knows that Paul's active influence has not suddenly ended. Whenever an alumna, alumna, or former student needs advice or encouragement, Paul is the one to whom he or she turns. Over the years he has remained in touch with an astonishing number of Denison writers--never overbearing, never harshly negative in his response, always generous with his encouragement and praise.

Thus it is very appropriate that this special issue of *Exile* features the contributions of Denison alumni, most or all of whom have experienced Paul Bennett's support and stimulus for their writing. These contributors testify to Paul's lasting impact on their college careers, and on their view of creativity as a lifelong endeavor. Some are published or professional writers; others write as an avocation, an extension of their liberal education into later life. All of them exemplify the results of Paul's encouraging motto.

As an alumnus with enormous gratitude for Paul's teaching and collegueship, I join *Exile's* contributors in resounding this motto: Write on, Paul Bennett, right on!

John Miller

Index

Horses		1
Deborah S. Appleton	'72	2
Man and His World		12
Clark Baise	'61	13
South Dakota, Route 34		17
Bonnie Bishop	'69	18
Heads And Tails		19
Tim Cockey	'77	20
When The Bough Breaks		27
Alison Orleans Conte	'77	28
Poem		29
Christine Cooper (Oosterbaan)	'64	35
Flood on the Jemez		36
San Antonio Canyon		39
Canyon Poems		40
Doug Cox	'73	48
Busy Being Born		51
Lindrith Davies		52
The Queen is Dead, Long Life The Queen		53
James Funaro	'62	54
The Gates of Hell		55
What The Chorus Said		56
James Funaro	'62	59
Coronado		60
James Gallant	'60	61
The End Of Art		65
Dianne L. Goss		72
Visiting Relatives		74
Cynthia Hohn		77
Swinging		77
Kathy Kerchner	'72	77
The Big House		77
Kim McMullen	'70	77
Seasons		77
Dan Pancake	'61	77
Besho's Road		77
Back Home		77
D. Patnode	'77	77
Basket Charm		77
Angela Peckenpaugh	'65	77
There Is Something		77
Deborah Pope	'72	77
Twilight Loneliness		77
Molting		77
Robert Smyth	'74	77
Parkman		77
Mary S. Treco		77
The Guest		77
Dennis Trudell	'60	77
The Wormwood Review		77
Dennis Trudell	'60	77
Milkweed		77
Bonnie L. Verburg	'77	77
Orion Falling		77
Lawrence Weber		77
Third		77
Lawrence Weber		77

Horses

by Deborah S. Appleton

I keep horses in my stalls at night,
And you, what's that burning, ever so dimly,
Casting shadows on the trim front lawn?
Shadows that I trip upon, when, at dark,
Quietly I creep to your windows,
And press my wet nose against the icy panes;
Peering at the cold light and wondering;
Sitting my shadow down on the grass to wait.
He isn't coming back you know.
They have changed his silhouette
Into a shadow too.
But he is waiting.
Waiting for you.
The horses are getting restless.
It is almost morning.

5320 Tanbark Road
Dallas, Texas 75229

Man and His World

by Clark Baise

1.

In the season of dust with the sun benign, a man of forty and a boy of twelve appeared at the Tourist Reception Centre, asking for rooms. Failing that, a house, with cook and servant.

The Centre was a modest concrete bunker with thirty rooms and a dining hall, and it was full. This was winter, the time for migrating Siberian songbirds and their Japanese pursuers. For the man and boy the situation was potentially desperate. Udaipur was a walled, medieval town baked on an igneous platter a thousand feet above the desert. To the east, no settlements for two hundred kilometers. To the west lay twenty kilometers of burnt, rusted tanks and stripped, blood-stained Jeeps, a UN outpost manned by a bizarre assortment of ill-equipped troops, then barbed wire, mines, and fifteen kilometers of more trophy tanks and blood-stained Jeeps. In the winter, buses dropped off passengers twice a week, picked up freight, and returned to the capital.

The man--who gave his name as William Logan--really should have booked a room through the central authority. That way, he would have saved the trip and, who knows, maybe his life.

2.

They had been on the road six days from New Delhi. Sleeping on buses, standing on trains, paying truckers. By day, the thin air required a sweater, through the hot sun burned with its mere intention. From March, when summer returned, the town would disappear from tourist maps and the national consciousness and the road become the world's longest clothesline and camel dung kiln.

Wealth was counted in camels. Camels outnumbered bicycles in the district. Camels pulled the wooden-wheeled carts and plodded around the water-screws, drawing up monsoon rains from the summer before. They yielded their carcasses more graciously than any animal in the world. The first sight of camels grazing in the bush had been a wonder to William Logan. Something half-evolved to mammalhood, comic and terrifying in its brute immensity. It had confirmed him, for the moment, in the rightness of what he was doing.

In the desert near the Rat Temple, the government maintained a camel-breeding station. The sight of a hobbled cow being mounted by the garlanded bull, their bellows and the swelling of their reptilians necks, suggested to the Japanese naturalists on their guided tours an echo of the world's creation, a foretaste of its agony and death.

3.

Before the invasion of Aryans, Greeks, Persians and British, the desert people had their own cosmology. The Mother of the World had given birth to identical pairs of camels, tigers, gazelles, elephants and rats. She did not distinguish between her children. She did not have a particular aspect or appearance; whatever their size or ferocity, her children all resembled her, perfectly. The people of Udirpur are still known as ratworshippers.

When she was nearly too old for child-bearing and the world was already full, she found herself pregnant again. And for the first time, she suffered pain, foreboding, fatigue. She bled, lay down frequently and grew thin. And from her womb came rumbles, lava, fire and flood. When she gave birth, only one cub emerged. His strangled, identical brother fell from the womb and was hastily buried under the great stone mountain in the middle of the desert.

It is said that one brother was evil, but which one? They had struggled in the womb but the secret was kept. The tribes of animals divided. Those giving allegiance to the survivor became his servants. Others retired to the oceans and to the air and to the underworld, growing fins or scales or feathers, or shrinking themselves to become insects. They all kept faith with the one who had died.

It is said the survivor, be he good or bad, is born with sin and with guilt and is condemned to loneliness. Nowhere on the earth will he find his brother or anything else like him. And with his birth, the Mother of the World died and the creative cycle came to an end.

4.

Ten years earlier, over the mountains a thousand kilometers to the north, a woman had arrived in Udirpur: the palest, whitest woman the people had ever seen. She'd been discovered outside the Rat Temple by a lorry-driver who'd been praying to the God for a successful trip. He had offered sweets and lain sill while the God's children had swirled over his hands and feet, licking his still-sweet fingers and lips.

Clearly the girl was a hippie--the only English word he knew--one of a tribe he'd heard about but never seen. She carried a new-born baby and nursed him like a village woman by the temple gates. She wore a torn, faded sari, something the lorry-driver's own wife or widowed mother would be ashamed to wear. But she wore it well and seemed comfortable in it.

He spoke to her in his language, offering a ride to Udirpur, where at least there were facilities for foreign women and for babies. To his surprise, she answered in a language he knew. She gathered her sleeping baby and the cotton sack that held her possessions and followed him to his truck, without question. This was the way she had travelled and lived for the past three years. At some point in time lost to her now, she had been a girl in a cold small town on the edge of a forest, near a river frequented by whales, and she had left that town on a bus to work in the city, in the

year of a World's Fair. And after that summer she's not stopped her traveling, until it brought her here.

The lorry-driver knew where to take her. In Udirpur, the city of rats, the Raja had travelled the world. He spoke every language and he welcomed whatever remnant of the world that managed to seek him out.

5.

He lived in a tawny sandstone palace two kilometers from the center of town, at the place where the igneous mesa began to split, where a summer river fed a forest and residual privilege permitted the luxury of a gardener and his family, the appropriation of water, and the maintenance of a very small game sanctuary.

In the British days, the various Nizams and Maharajas had been afforded full military salutes. The British, with their customary punctiliousness over military symbol and social hierarchy, assigned each native potentate a scrupulously-measured number of guns. Thus, powerful rajahs like those of Jaipur and Baroda enjoyed full twenty-one gun salutes, and the no-less-regal but less prepossessing rajahs of Cooch Behar and Gwalior and Dewas Senior and even Dewas Junior (the latter a one-time employer of a reticent young Englishman who introduced Gibbon to the royal reading room) were granted fifteen, or twelve, or eight guns. The Rajah of Udirpur, grandfather of the current resident of the Tawny Palace, had been assigned a mere two guns on the imperial scale. He was therefore called the Pipsqueak Rajah, or Sir Squealer Singh, for the twin effect of his popgun salute and for the only worthy attraction in his district, the notorious Temple of Rats. It is not written how Sir Squealer, a genial and worldly man by all accounts, felt about his name or his general reception.

The grandson, Freddie Singh, occupies two rooms in the sealed-off palace. In those rooms he maintained the relics he'd inherited: swords, carpets, carvings, muskets, tiger-claws, daggers, and the fine silk cords designed for efficient dispatch. Freddie Singh's private Armory was as complete as any Rajah's but no visitor ever saw it. He kept in touch with his subjects, or those few hundred who still acknowledged his rule, and kept out of the way of the State, District and Conservation authorities who actually ran the town.

He had been out of the country once as a young man, then just graduated in business administration from the Faculty of Management in Ahmedabad. The first National City Bank (India Nvt. Ltd.) had hired him as a stock-analyst, and after two years of the fast life in Bombay, he'd been sent to an office in Rome, then Paris and finally New York, to learn stocks and bonds and how to trade in futures.

Those had been the beautiful years of Freddie Singh, those years on the Strand, in the Bourse, on Wall Street, an exiled princeling, smelling of licorice.

6.

She and the baby--a rugged little chap, half-Pathan by the look of him--opened up a room on the second floor, assisted by the old Royal Groom and keeper of polo

ponies (now reduced to cook and gardener and feeder of the royal animals) and his widowed daughter and her very small daughter who became a companion for young Pierre-Rama.

She seemed to bring some order, perhaps some beauty, into Freddie's life. For the majority of people in his ancestral city, the Rajah (though still a youngish man) was either a relic or an embarrassment. When he at last took the unwed foreigner as a wife, they were prepared to call her Rani if it pleased him. Other names as well, in front of her but never him. The camel, bountiful in all things, provides an anthology of choice insults. The Rani was made to feel as worthy as the slime off a dead camel's tooth. Weeks, then finally years went by, without her ever leaving the compound.

7.

Pierre-Rama was nearly ten when the man and his son appeared in town that cool day in late December. Since the Tourist Centre was filled with bird-watchers, someone asked if the visitor would object to accomodation in the Rajah's palace. No, he would not. Would the visitor mind sharing the floor with the beautiful, exotic, mysterious Rani? No, decidedly, he would not. Would he be patient with the Rajah, who, if he could not marry his guests, would often confer upon them land deeds or Mogul miniatures or dusty carpets that had been his grandfather's privilege to disburse, but which now belonged to the state? Yes, he would be patient with the old gentleman.

They put the man and his son (a frail lad given to sneezing in the dust and to whining for the newly-outlawed American soft-drinks) in Youssef's camel-drawn cart and drove them to the gully-hugging yellow palace. They made their own way through the garden to the main gate, and pulled on a rusty chain to alert the **chowkidar**.

It was the Rajah, clad in pajamas and a shawl and smoking an English cigarette who opened the door. He was younger than the guest, a vigorous man no more than thirty-five, with a head and mane of glossy curls, a rounded face and rounded body that glowed with a kind of polish the visitor had never seen. "My wife is upstairs. She is just coming down." He called up from the stairwell. "Visitors, Solange! Come quickly!" Seeing the confusion when a young, familiar-looking woman appeared at the head of the stairs, bowing shyly and murmuring, "Bonjour," the Rajah winked and said, "My wife, the Rani. She is from Quebec in Canada. And where, sir, do you come from?"

"Winnipeg," said William Logan. "In Canada."

8.

That is how, this night in February two months later, under a sky pierced with stars, with meteorites flaring and bright silent things making their way across the heavens (not planes, satellites, possibly, if indeed so many had been launched under a sky that would embarrass a Planetarium, a sky that thrills the way to

ocean or a mountain range can thrill, a sky that suggests mythologies and seems explicable only in narrative and divine inspiration, the two are talking, have been talking, for hours. She nurses the baby, Jacques-Ravinder, the Rajah's son, two months old, honey-colored, plump and good-natured.

How perfect a garment is the sari for nursing babies, thinks the man, William Logan. They sleep under a lavender or green or yellow gauze, free of flies and the glare of the sun, the mother sits with her baby anywhere, nurses him in a crowd with only the little toes peeking from the crook of her elbow to give him away.

Such is the posture that night. Logan talks. The Rani listens. The Rajah is almost asleep in his wicker chair, contributing nothing but his benign royal presence. The older boys run through the palace undisturbed, chasing rats, confining them when possible to the unused rooms.

9.

The stars over the winter desert are mythologically potent tonight, portending stories. The sky is an ocean, thinks William Logan; I could watch it forever. The Milky Way a luminous smear, the rip and tear of meteorites, blue-white stars glittering like messages, like interference; he thinks of old movies, the sputter on a sound system for every break in the film. But here is no sound but the sucking of milk. Logan is speaking. "Now this is a night for sea-turtles," he says very slowly, because English is the Rani's last language, the one she learned here, with a local accent, from the gardener and his widowed daughter. Sea-turtles she does not understand, but lets Logan go on.

"When sea-turtles are born, they have maybe twenty minutes to memorize the exact location of their birth. Their exact twenty feet of sand, in the world. And these are among the stupidest animals on earth--can you imagine?"

"That is amazing," she says.

"But I've seen them down on the beach at Grand Cayman. Caribbean sea-turtles. The old she-turtle waddles ashore and digs a deep trough about fifty feet up from the water. And she drops in her eggs and pats down the sand and goes back to sea."

"That is beautiful," said the Maharani.

"But they don't make it, see. No, no, the natives hide behind the trees, waiting for the old she-turtles to lay their eggs. They are too tired now to move..."

"Yes, I am knowing that tiredness..."

"And so the natives attack them, turn them all over on their backs. And after a few hours they build fires on the beach and heat iron spikes red hot and then push them under the shell--"

"Oh, Mr. Logan, please. This is terrible. No more, please."

"Please do not be upset, Solange," says the Rajah, snapping awake. "I too have seen this." What we are witnessing, he goes on to suggest, is the death of a species from over-specialization. It had lived two hundred million years in one form or another, an insult to intelligence, without enemies, enjoying near-immortality. It is a model of organization, more like a religion than a living creature.

A long silence ensues. "I have seen skies like this only up north," says Logan.

"I have seen skies like this every night since I left Europe," says the Rani. "The nights on the Black Sea and on the Caspian and in the desert of Kandahar and in the mountains of Kashmir were all like this. I could not live without stars like this. It is a head full of jewels, the people say. And in the monsoons when the stars are covered, the people say the camel has closed her eyes and people get sick."

Mr. Logan had not yet spent a monsoon.

"I was saying, about turtles. Not about the she-turtles--that is sad and barbarian. I grant you. I was thinking of the babies. Just seconds after they hatch and climb up through the sand and they're no larger than fiddler crabs and move just as fast, and there are hundreds of them all on the same night racing from the dunes down across the wet sand of high tide to the water. Thousands of birds have gathered and all the natives who were there for the mothers are there for the babies. They carry baskets and they scoop up turtles with both hands the way we'd pick berries, and that's not the amazing thing. The amazing thing about those baby turtles is this: they have only ten minutes to break out of the egg and get into the water. And they must survive odds that would stop the most intelligent beast on earth. And they must know what they're thinking about. What they must do beyond anything else is plan for their return to this beach, this very beach, for spawning. And they do it by printing the stars indelibly in their brain. A perfect star-chart. It's as though they are born with the most perfect sensitive instrument in the world, they use it once, remember it perfectly, and then when they hit the water, if they get that far, the mind snaps shut and they live on instinct for the next three centuries."

"That is very beautiful," she agrees.

"We are the only animals who can get so lost, Mr. Logan," says Freddie Singh. Under the sari, the Maharani shifts the baby to the other breast. For several minutes they watch the meteorites and the steadily-moving things that the Rani thinks of as extraterrestrial.

"When our geese are flying south," says Logan, "it is said that they can hear the Gulf waves crashing on the shores of Texas and they can hear the Atlantic surf on Ireland. From Winnipeg, or Montreal."

The Rani says nothing but she feels that she has travelled as unerringly as any turtle or any goose and that even tonight she could hear every voice in every language that had ever been spoken to her. This man Logan, a country-man, was over-impressed with the brains of lower animals.

"You are a restless man, Mr. Logan," says the Rani.

10.

The three-block frontage of William Logan's birth was Stiles to Raglan, between Portage and Wolseley, in the city of Winnipeg. Though life had stretched him, he often returned to that original scene, in his memory, to his house built by his father on land purchased by his grandfather, on the Assiniboine. In his way he had swum the world ever since. He had lost his bearings.

He had been in Montreal in 1967, living in Westmount and working in textiles. He'd just been divorced. He was thirty that year with a two-year-old boy and he

remembered Westmount Park, the library, the sandboxes and the slides. He was, then and now, a tall, lean, bald, elegant man--in textiles, after all--walking slowly, confident and attractive. They shared an idleness those afternoons--he was frequently in and out of Montreal and found himself with half-days to kill--there was a power in being the only man in the park, with a sturdy little child.

In ten years with his mother, the child had grown less sturdy. He was better now. There was a day when a new adventure began, when he sat a reasonable distance (but on the same bench) from a blond, maturing woman in a lavender sweater. It was late April, perhaps snow still was pushed in ridges but the earth was dry and dusty. A little girl, pursued by an **au pair** girl, ran to the lady and took a good long look at William Logan.

"Mama, that man is **bald**," said the little girl.

"Damn," said the mother.

Logan, who'd never minded his baldness or the reputation it carried, found it a handy prop in establishing his essential harmlessness with younger women, said, "That's OK. Out of the mouths of babes, etc."

The mother straightened the little girl's jacket and motioned for the **au pair** to take her back to the swings. "Oh, it's not that. It's that now I have to sleep with you to restore your almighty male ego."

"Pardon me?" He'd been out of the country.

She gave her address--a brick house on Lansdowne, just up from the park.

The Rajah stood and poured a final cup of tea.

The baby was sleeping and he took him back to the palace, bidding his guest good night.

11.

"I'll never get back," he said.

"To Montreal?"

"To Winnipeg. Not that I want to. I can't anyway. I'm a fugitive."

The Rani was not disturbed. He had established his essential harmlessness.

"Tell me about the lady on Lansdowne," she said.

He sipped slowly. God forgive me, thought William Logan: she reads minds and her breast excited me though she's my hostess, a Maharani, and nursing an infant.

The lady on Lansdowne was Hungarian. Thirty-five and very beautiful and bold and angry. She was an actress and her husband had left his wife for her. He had much older children, and that obnoxious little girl.

"Her name was Laura," says the Rani.

"Yes, I believe so."

"Now, Mr. Logan, tell me about the **au pair** girl."

Before he can answer, he remembers it all. By God, he thinks. He'd lived long enough, accumulated enough points of reference, for his experience to start collapsing, growing dense with coincidence.

"You looked familiar the first time I saw you. Solange--of course."

"That day in the park. You called me the *au pair* girl but I noticed you alone in the park and I watched Mrs. R. watching you and I could see you were both very experienced in the world...I was not, not at all. I wondered how you would get together." She took a long breath, and wrapped the sari-end over her head.

"You speak a lot more when your husband is gone."
"My husband is never gone."

She listened awhile to jackals on the plain, the leathery sway of palms in the desert, the distant clatter of wooden wheels, a cart and camel over cobblestones.

"May I call you Solange?"

She pondered the question longer than he thought necessary. "I cannot stop you."

"Then what are the chances of our getting together? Surely it means something, no? It can't just be (he thought of the stars) just coincidence."

"You are perhaps too restless, Mr. Logan."

"It's just that I don't wait for things anymore."

On his last flight from Egypt to Montreal, Logan had sat next to a pleasant, moon-faced man bound for Athens, and maybe Montreal. He's asked Logan shrewd job-hunting questions and Logan had been flattered by his interest. Then he'd asked he what time it was. They were south of Athens. Logan told him and the man jerked into a new posture. He stood and opened one of the Red Cross emergency medical bags that was in the storage area immediately overhead. At the same time, six other young men stood and opened other emergency boxes. Oh no, Logan had thought: the boxes were full of grenades.

There is nothing in the modern world quite like eight days of siege to focus a man's attention on final matters. They had landed a few hundred yards from the hillside home of the Delphic Oracle. **Low has fallen the prophet's house**, quoted one passenger. Women and children were released; Logan made his peace. As good a place as any to die; as good a reason as any. His life was a hostage-taking anyway, he was a passenger only, detained by fanatics. He vowed, if he survived, to live his life from that moment on as though the person next to him were a terrorist, that every package contained grenades, that every flight would end on a hillside, surrounded by troops.

12.

Just a few weeks before, but a millenium ago, he had landed in Montreal, flown to Toronto, taken the airport limousine to the door of the expensive school he paid for and asked for Billy Logan, a boy who was a stranger to him and whom he'd come to dislike just a little. He'd taken Billy with him back to the airport and they'd flown to London, bought tropical clothes and Logan had sent telegrams to his boss and ex-wife. **Resign effective immediately...I have Billy don't look you'll never find us**. He bought tickets to a dozen destinations, under various names. Not merely restless, he'd become impulsive.

Some nights, sleep is an act of will requiring as sharp a focus as thought itself. Under such heavens there could be no sleep. Listening to the Rani was like listening to an Indian woman--the accent, that is--only better. It's strange but familiar.

because behind it is something he can understand. It's erotic, terribly erotic. He cannot control his love, not for her, not for his host, not for his child; he wants to displace the Rajah, he feels he has found his home.

In the second week of residence at the Tawny Palace, Logan had boldly proposed to the attractive lady who did his rooms, the gardener's widowed daughter. Perhaps she had not understood; the daughter, an exquisite child of--what? thirteen?--had appeared. And then to say to her, "No, I meant your mother" when she had presented herself so wondrously to him would have offended his morals as much as taking her. To turn from beauty is a sin, to refuse the daughter would embarrass us all, and be insulting, he feared.

But he had not intended this, any of this, and there could only be one honorable way to act. To enjoy the love of the girl and to try to love the mother. What incredible complications this would lead to. William Logan could not say: only that he was ready to face them. The adjacent space, he had learned, may always be evil, or it may open into the next world, the next level, a higher existence. The girl comes to him after bathing while the mother prepares his lunch. The Rani and Rajah have no suspicions. It is a very private, second-floor affair. The daughter must know--though she has never asked--that in the evenings after the main meal has been cooked and the sweeper has cleaned the rooms and the daughter has washed the dishes that her mother returns, laden with fruits and a small clay pot of sweets, makes tea, then lies beside him.

Is this corruption? At one time he would have known but now he cannot say. He feels at times that he has entered a compact, nothing down, no interest, small monthly payments, but that an unpayable price will be extracted. It is like a nightmare in which he is ice-skating out on the Assiniboine, and he can feel the dark waters oozing from the slashes of his blade; there is still time to skate ashore but a wind is pushing him out to the black open water and he can't turn back.

13.

Freddie Singh sits in his Armory, wondering if this is the night. He has come to like the visitor. The boys have become inseparable; there is hope for the boy. But Freddie Singh is still the Rajah of the Tawny Palace; he knows what happens on his grounds as his grandfather once knew what happens on his grounds as his grandfather once knew what happened in his larger **darbar**; he knows that an uprooted man is the principle of corruption, will spread it wherever he goes. When you announced yourself from Canada, the Rani said **get rid of him immediately** but I could not. You needed rest, just as the Rani has needed rest. But she has healed, and you have not, my friend.

The people here know of dualities, of coincidence. Every day they see the sand turn to embers. Every night to ice. Ten months of the year, never a drop of water. Two months, walls of mud.

The Rani arrived in India with a friend, another girl from Que-beck. But the other girl met a handsome Frenchman at the airport and the Rani struggled onward, to the desert. Her friend followed the boy to Bangkok, Hong Kong, Djakarta, Nepal. She loved him, she cooked for him, she helped poison people for him, maybe

South Dakota, Route 34

by Bonnie Bishop

We have been watching the landscape for days now.
Here is something we have discovered:
Where the road runs high along the Missouri
The shapes of the trees beside the wide river
Repeat the outline of the nimbus clouds behind.
This same design also appears, in white, on Herefords
Who graze between the road and the river.

Pastures undulate across the valley.
The distant slices of their receding swells
Receive the shadows of the clouds,
Reiterated pattern of themselves.
Blue light, the color of water
In shade, falls on everything.

Further on, power lines appear and converge
At a generating plant set back from the road.
These repeat nothing in the landscape but themselves
and the lines on the map spread out on my lap in the car.

11 Boston Street
Somerville, Mass. 02143

dozens of young travellers, like her, like the Rani. She may be in jail for the rest of her life. She was not evil, not born evil, but she had become lost.

We have known others, thinks Freddie Singh. A four-teen-year-old girl given birth in a paddy field in Bangladesh nine months after a week of raping, after her mother's rape and murder, her village's rape and butchery. She slashes the infant's throat and wrists, hacks up the body like a fish's, then throws herself successfully on the knife. But someone came by, picked up the smaller body and took it to the hospital, and the corpse was resurrected. And the baby was adopted by a family in Levis who named her Marie-Josée and now she's the best student and the best figure-skater in her school.

The people here have seen enough of life to know that coincidence itself is no motive for action. Coincidence on your level, Mr. Logan, is a turtle's coincidence, nothing but instinct.

Coincidence is coincidental, thinks Freddie Singh.

14.

"My husband is back."

Logan, sipping the last of his cold tea, turned in his wicker chair. "Freddie, I—" In Freddie's hands is stretched taut a valuable artifact from one of the desert tribes. In the old days they had joined caravans across the desert, offering their services as entertainers and animal-handlers. And the caravans never reached their destinations. The people were called **thuoqus** and they worshiped the principle of creation no less than other tribes, though their ultimate loyalty was to the brother who had died.

Death moves swiftly across the heavens, obliterating the stars at a point just short of meaning, and across Logan's brain like some long-sought solution made suddenly apparent, only to retreat again. He looks up, about to speak and across to the Rani who now is standing, and turning away. Then he looks down, at himself, sees his head perched crazily on his chest and the widening dribble of tea on his luminous white **kurta**, and the stain spreads to fill his universe.

45 MacPherson Avenue
Toronto, Ontario

Heads And Tails

by Tim Cockey

"Well what the hell would you have done? Danced around her room playing finger cymbals?"

Peter Diaz slammed the car dash with his fist.

"I might as well have," he muttered to himself, "for all the good it did me."

He hit the dashboard a second time; the brown plastic Buddha rattled against the windshield glass.

Peter Diaz glared at the benign little statuette. Whatever happened to the old Happy Face?

Have a Nice Little Crummy Day, Fleaface.

Peter turned the key and rocked up and down with the car.

"Come on, baby, come on now..."

The engine sparked and kicked into life. A cloud of oily smoke belched from behind the car. Peter set himself in the seat and pulled away from the curb.

As Peter drove into the city his car radio squealed out urgent demands that he wash up, eat right, drink beer, and shop around for low priced appliances. Peter wanted none of it. There was talk of news at the top of the hour and of music in the next hour.

"What hour?" Peter muttered, but nobody seemed willing to surrender the moment to the airwaves.

National security, thought Peter; state secrets.

How Peter wished for an old locomotive style cow-catcher for his car! With a little armor around the front and sides of the car, he pondered, the drive down St. Paul street might wax productive. Doors flying open suddenly from parked cars, as they always did, could be clipped clean, inquisitive bumpers inching into intersections might be tested, and those cars that muscled or weaved nonchalantly between lanes would simply have to suffer a 40 m.p.h. scrape and escape.

Peter set his upper lip to do battle. Where in the world the dashboard Buddha got off laughing on a day such as this was beyond him. Peter doubted there could have been a worse way to begin the day than to have had another needless argument. He knew he'd have to call her, he always did.

He took a quick right turn.

The sun was high and bright in a cloudless sky. Peter rolled down his window and took a deep breath. As he passed the park in the next block he saw a man and a woman standing nose to nose on the walk. An Irish Setter a short ways off stood barking at them. Peter noticed that the large tree in the middle of the park, merely an umbrella web of branches these past months, had gone suddenly green. A young girl in a short dress was leaning into a water fountain, and a man who was kneeling in the dirt of the flower bed straightened up to reach for one of the several cardboard boxes that were sitting on the grass behind him.

Peter consulted the Buddha.

"When did all this happen? Did I miss something?"

Have a Pacific Day, Oyster Ears.

Peter pulled over suddenly and parked the car. He went into a drugstore to buy some cigarettes. The lady behind the register blinked.

"You been working on the pipeline?" she asked in a scratchy voice. She wore a light green open jacket with her name punched on red label tape on the pocket.

Sherri.

"No, I... what?"

"Nothing by it, hon," she said. "Just thought you were a bit over bundled."

Peter looked down on his sweater and boots.

"Oh."

"It turned overnight," the lady said, moving away from the register. "It is beautiful outside. I wish I could get out there."

Peter nodded and hurried outside. Skirts and shirts. Everybody was showing their legs and arms. Men had their jackets hooked on their finger and thrown over their shoulders. Girls' necks were bare, their toes were exposed.

Cupping two dimes in his fist, Peter walked down the sidewalk looking for a phone booth. The first one he found was occupied by a short man with a grey moustache. Peter raised his eyebrows through the glass, but the man shook his head vigorously and continued talking. Outside the next booth a tall girl stood stiff arming the door and tapping against the glass with her fingernails. Someone, her boyfriend probably, was inside, hunched over, his back to the girl.

"Will he be long?" Peter asked the girl.

The girl lifted her free hand and let it drop against her side. She smacked her lips.

"Who knows?"

Peter forced a smile and moved to a bench on the curb where he sat down and lit a cigarette. His palms were sweaty. He decided to take his sweater off. He grabbed it from the bottom, brought it up over his head and pulled it down across his face. A great rush of cool air ran through his shirt and up his back.

When Peter's head popped out from under the sweater, the girl was standing in front of him.

"Do you have a cigarette?" she asked. Peter dropped his sweater on the bench and pulled out a cigarette. The girl took it and sat down next to him.

"Match?"

He handed her his cigarette.

The girl was thin and angular. Her dark brown hair was short and straight, styled in a way that the ends came to a point on either side of her jaw, reminding Peter in the uniformity of its roundness of the old college football helmets. Her lips were painted red and her eyes highlighted by a symphony of blues. Two dark slices above the eyes suggested eyebrows, and an unflagging flush of the cheeks, Peter supposed, was intended to represent a sort of gaunt vigor. He wondered that her pillow case might not rival a Peter Max poster or a Leroy Neiman some mornings.

Breat and water diet. Lots of fiber.

Peter sensed, though he displayed the good sense not to stare, that the girl was sending her cigarette smoke through an intricate series of steps, up the nostrils, around the tongue, through the lungs, and out the lips, with each puff. He fancied

a few smoke rings on his own, though the wind proved prohibitive. He tossed his cigarette away before it was half finished.

He pointed, at length, at the phone booth and asked, "Your husband?"

She turned her colors to him and smiled.

"Not on your life," she said smoothly.

"But you're with him," Peter said, swallowing hard. "Or are you waiting for the phone, too?"

The girl pulled on her cigarette. Peter waited through the gymnastics for her answer.

"No. The phone is your's next. I'm with him." She tapped her dark burgundy fingernails on the bench. They were long and curved like a hawk's beak.

"If you're in a hurry, however," she added, "you might want to try another phone. Charles is so slow he might be in there until spring."

Peter sat up.

"It is spring," he laughed. "It's funny you said that. I would have said that, too, this morning, except somebody tipped me off. Look"

He held out his feet for her to see his boots. He also laid a hand on his sweater and smiled.

"It was winter when I got up," he added. "Cold as hell."

The girl tapped her cigarette out on the bench and flipped the butt away.

"It is still winter," she said evenly.

"I don't think so," he started slowly. "Look around. The leaves are back, it's warm out, everybody is running around with their sleeves rolled up....Look at you. You don't have a coat on."

He blushed immediately. The girl's dress, a blue crepe outfit with a tailored slit up one side, was ripped nearly to the waist. Peter had not even noticed. The tear extended upwards from the slit. The girl's entire leg was exposed.

"I don't have a coat," the girl was saying, "because Charles over there insisted I would not need one. One god damned robin and he's jumping into his swim suit. All this gung-ho for spring nonsense is ludicrous. We are still involved with winter."

She caught Peter staring at her dress and she pulled down on the material to cover her leg.

"And I'm glad to see someone dressed properly," she added, indicating Peter's boots, "even if you think you're not."

Peter said nothing.

Holding her dress, the girl crossed her legs and leaned slightly towards Peter, forcing him to look at her.

"Is your phone call important?" she asked in a milder voice. "He really might be awhile."

Peter lost, for a moment, the reason for his call. He was studying the girl's eyes. Then the events of the morning flooded back into his head. He rubbed the bridge of his nose.

"I had a fight with my girlfriend this morning," he said. "I was going to call her up."

"To apologize?"

"No. I've thought of some nastier ways to phrase what we already yelled about.

Some real spinners. I don't want to waste them"

He grinned at the girl. She laughed.

"Don't you hate when you can't be clever the first time?" she said, letting go of the dress. "That always happens to me. I should be working up some gems for Charles, but I don't think he's even worth it. You've got to really like someone enough first before you want to impress them like that. Don't you think so?"

"Did he rip your dress?"

She shook her head. Peter was surprised at how attractive she had become all of a sudden. He wondered what she really looked like out from behind it all.

"Charles didn't rip it. It was an accident. I'm not even sure how it happened. A bike came by, real close, and the wind took my dress at the same time; somehow it got tangled, and luckily I didn't fall down. The damn thing ripped."

"That's horrible."

"He laughed," she said in a huff, pointing a long finger at the figure in the booth. "It jolly well made his day....the creep."

Peter started laughing.

"I'm not laughing at your accident," he quickly explained. "I'm not. I...I just think there is something funny in his being a creep. You've used the right word, I think."

She laughed with him.

"Do you think so? Well, I'll try it on him."

Peter offered her another cigarette and they sat smoking in silence. The girl did not resume her smoke tricks.

Eventually the man hung up the phone and emerged from the booth. He appeared to be in his late thirties, though his blonde hair was thin and receding rapidly. His swagger belied the fact that he was very slightly built. His eyes were small and bright blue. A bristly reddish moustache tottered below his nose. As he approached he pulled a pair of aviator sunglasses out of his vest pocket and planted them on the top of his head.

Peter grabbed his sweater and stood up, but the girl grabbed his sleeve.

"Wait."

Charles stepped up to Peter and thrust out a hand.

"Hello," he snapped, "Charles Dickey."

Peter could not return the shake because of the girl's hold on his sleeve.

"I'm Peter Diaz," he said.

"And he thinks you're a creep, Charles," the girl piped up. "And so do I."

Charles let his hand drop.

"Oh?" he said mildly.

The girl jumped up.

"Damn right!" she snapped. "He didn't laugh when I told him what happened. He'll think it's funny when it is funny...and that is later, not now! Right now I am freezing cold and wretchedly uncomfortable, and Mr. Diaz will take care of me."

She took three steps away and added, "For the rest of the day, Charles, for the rest of the day. Come along, Peter."

Peter stood a moment, nose to nose with Charles, who smelled slightly of rum

and Old Spice. His skin was a waxy pink. The moustache looked like a propeller.
"Glad to have met you," Peter mumbled and stepped aside. The girl hooked her arm around his. Peter whispered something in her ear as they moved away. She laughed and yelled over her shoulder, "Have a nice day!"

704 Gladstone Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21210

When The Bough Breaks

by Alison Orleans Conte

There's a family of yellow birds out back,
Darting through branches
Blending in with the dandelions.
These immigrants from Baltimore,
move too fast for sight to catch.
A nest emptied in one of the trees.
Its contents spilled,
 fluttering aimlessly
 never touching ground.

30 N. Old Oak Drive
Beaver Falls, PA 15010

Poem

by Christine Cooper (Oosterbaan)

I used to walk and watch my feet
squash prints in the uncut grass
or break the crippled twigs
from a long-dead tree.
I lived to swing up high
and breathe in hard,
pumping, pumping into the feather clouds.
I raced with butterflies.
Grass tickled when I rolled in it
or hung it through my toes.
Sometimes I bunched it up in blankets
for broken eggs. It kept them warm.
Glassy fairies lived in the poison mushrooms.
In the orchard I watched caterpillars
web the trees
or let them itch my fingers.
I ate the still-green cherries
and kept the seeds.
When it rained I skipped stones
in the oozy puddles
then hid in the kingly trees.
I think I was twelve when I stepped on a bird's egg.

Suite 250, Kalamazoo Center
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49007

Flood on the Jemez

By Doug Cox

working late,
osamu, stacking
rock to save
a hot, murky,
bath

O Moon!
Rising with
your beard
of pine

Look out
fleas! Leaves
are falling!

To cool
myself
i jump
into full moon

San Antonio Canyon

By Doug Cox

not knowing
where there's a
trail: just walk

Canyon Poems

By Doug Cox

Thinking like crazy, brain
gears getting hot, stop by
a stream: pissing on a rock

creeping down canyon
walls: it doesn't seem
even to move:
September sunlight

tasting the taste
of icy mountain
morning water:
does my mouth
remember?

Box 429

Mt. Baldy Zen Center
Mt. Baldy, CA 91759

Busy Being Born

By Lindrith Davies

Harley Casey had given up smoking cigars about twelve years ago. He hadn't given up cigars though; since it's easier to render the habit harmless than to quit it, he chewed them now. He was a cautious driver, but he chewed while he drove, at forty-five miles an hour, with pleasant mood-music on the FM, letting his mind wander. As he moved down the El Producto he would spit bits of tobacco that would land on the dash and windshield and harden there. Perhaps this was slovenly, but he wasn't ashamed--what else would you do with the stuff? Spit it into tissues? That was ridiculous. He was too careful a driver to spit it out the window, besides, the car was air-conditioned. His tobacco-specks were a more distinctive badge than the specially engraved nameplate on the dash. But he couldn't in good faith pry the damn nameplate off and still take his friend the dealer to an occasional lunch in the car. All in all, the tobacco-dots weren't a bad compromise. His wife always drove the newer car of the two--they drove that one to church on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation, and on their infrequent short vacations. He chewed in his wife's car, but never spat in it.

Harley Casey didn't hold much for the conventions and 'new products galas' that his business seemed bent on holding a few times each year. They were a wart on the ass of progress. In the auto parts racket, one does something with a product if its quality is acceptable and enough of it can be bought at the right price. Such products don't need to throw parties to get you to buy them. The meeting he was headed to this afternoon was especially annoying, because he was slated to be honored there--as if doing the largest volume of their brand over twenty years had been a selfless service to the lucky company. Sure, Casey wasn't really deeply concerned with the fate of the Fram corporation, but their award was the kind of formality, like being listed in the **Who's Who in Business and Industry**, that it was better not to fight. He was acquainted with the men who would be there; met them at conventions over the years. He disdained the gun-ho guys. But, with some of those who were just as bored as he was, he'd exchange stories, and pictures of grandchildren.

Harley Casey had no respect for all these people looking for a free ride through life. Doing as much driving as he did, he was always passing hitchhikers on the road, and they were the constant, ever-annoying symbol of that freeloader spirit. He had never, not since he had his first six-year-old Oldsmobile right before the start of World War II, ever picked one up. Driving was his time for contemplative solitude. He could still chew cigars with a stranger in the car, but what right did some freeloader had to interrupt his thought? And, thinking sensibly, if someone doesn't have the resources of a vehicle, or money for a bus ticket, or at least a friend with a car, one has no business traveling on the freeways. It was a practical objection, not a moral one--but then, morals and laws are, after all, very practical things--they prevent chaos. Then why did Harley court chaos at the on-ramp on Breezewood, Pa., by unlocking his door for a little blond in sandals, raggedy blue-

jeans, and a purple t-shirt with some kind of red tongue and lips printed on it? Maybe he'll never know why. But hell, Breezewood, Pa. is a pretty boring place. She lugged open the door, threw a duffelbag in the back seat, plopped herself down, and said: "Oh, Harley, You just don't **know**. I've been praying all afternoon for a ride with air conditioning and velour seats. I've gone delirious and this is all just a marvelous hallucination."

Harley loosened his tie and searched for a break in the westbound traffic. How in the hell did she know him? He scanned his memory. She also had freckles, and purple hoop earrings, and a purple sash tied in her hair. One of his grandson's friends? Wait, shit, of course, the nameplate. Clever girl. "Where are you going?" She closed one eye in great thoughtfulness. "West on I-70."

"That's where you're at, honey. Where are you going?"

"I'm on I-70. I'm going west on I-70. Hi! My name's Ramona."

"Thanks, now we're introduced. Ramona what?"

"No last name. Really--none. Just Ramona."

Frank Sinatra crooned 'something stupid like I love you' on the FM. Ramona drew a breath and settled down to a long hitch-hiker's rap. "Actually I'm not at all sure what my destination is right now, but the main thing is--"

"You have no last name, and no destination? Do you exist?"

"Oh, you bet I do!"

"And the deal is, you get out when I get where I'm going, get another ride, and keep going west?"

"Yes, that's pretty much the deal, Mr. Casey." She seemed baffled by his tone; perhaps he had been gruff, he hadn't meant to. "You don't--you're not one of these guys who has other plans for me are you? You don't look like the type--I'll bet you have three grandchildren, right?"

"Four."

She grinned. "Oh wow. I bet they're great kids. Probably spoiled as all hell." Then in a flash she had spun around and was leaning over the seat, ass in the air. "And you're in business--let's see here... tire prices, shock absorbers, ignition parts, exhaust systems--you're in auto parts! Jeez, this catalog is thicker than six bibles!" "If you don't mind--"

"I'm sorry." She spun around again and slid down on the seat, legs under her. "I was just curious. You're interesting. Gave up smoking?"

Harley suddenly laid his cigar in the ashtray. "Must be ten years now, or more, I had a monstrous cough. Emphysema."

"Emphysema? You inhaled your cigars? That's hardcore there, Harley."

"No, I smoked cigarettes too. I'd like to know where you get an expression like 'hardcore'."

She shrugged. "Picked it up on the streets. I don't know, it's an expression. Refers to a very ingrained habit--like a vice, right? Does it bother you if I smoke?"

"No, not at all."

Instead of cracking her window a sensible inch for the smoke, Ramona became fascinated with the power window button--zoomed the window up and down a few times, absorbed. She leaned over the seat, ass in the air again, and pulled a pack of

cigarettes out of her bag. Lighting one, she asked, "Would you mind terribly if I fiddled around with the radio?"

Harley shrugged. He made his best attempt to concentrate on driving, but he was watching Ramona's smoking and slowing down. Hardcore, that was her word. She took gigantic drags on the thing and held them in her lungs. The cigarette was handrolled, and the smell wasn't tobacco.

"What if some cop stops me right now?"

She waited, rolled her eyes, blew a gust of smoke out the window. "Oh come on, Harley, you haven't driven faster than forty-five since I've been with you. Minimum speed is forty around here though. Speed up so we don't get busted, OK?"

"We'll take our chances, sweetheart." But he caught himself pushing the gas a little harder.

She managed to pull a rock n' roll station out of the static, and then turned the radio down to a whisper. "I'm sorry. I can get pretty obnoxious. I guess you just impressed me as a guy I could bullshit around with a little. Please don't let me upset you."

The pot should be extinguished. The joint should be handed to Harley so he could try it. He shrugged to himself and gave up on both ideas. We must look like a father and daughter driving along in silence; perfectly normal, the eternal generation gap. He with his royal blue tie, she with her purple sash. Harley is everybody's father. That's how he runs the store--the old man, teaching customers how to keep their books so they could pay all their bills, including his; learning the meaning of Ramona's glib word, hardcore--reaching out to a pair of alcoholics, one inspired, the other alienated. Both customers and employees ran to him with problems; they called him "coach". And this little sexy rat here who said she had no last name--that convinced him that she did indeed have parents, no matter how long she'd been balling her way around the country, she was too young and too clean not to have parents who weren't worrying. Like Frank Sinatra's song, there he was--with something he had to say that wouldn't do a damn bit of good.

"You know, Ramona, if you really were an orphan, you'd be proud to have that last name."

She stared for a while--tried to pick up a little more about Harley Casey parts man than his cigars and his catalogues showed. He had a bit of a belly, but he was pretty trim for his age, and wore a well-worn wedding ring. He reached for that cigar with a patriarch's authority. Hmm. He listened. He had her, he didn't deserve to be bullshitted.

"I'm not ashamed of my last name, I just don't use it anymore. It is Washington. You gotta make some decisions in this world. Do you like music, Mr. Casey?"

"Everybody likes music."

A Pennsylvania trooper thundered by. Harley checked his speed. Ramona pulled a regular cigarette out of her pack and punched in the lighter. "Well, that's debatable. But since everybody likes music, what kind do you really like? Not that FM shit, I hope."

"You'll get a few of those pretty teeth knocked out of your head one day. That

FM shit, as you put it, I find soothing, like a bath. You're soothed by your ma-
juana, I'm soothed by that FM shit."

"Fair enough. But what kind of **music** do you like?"

Harley sent a little tobacco flying at the windshield. "Well, I'll tell you. I enjoy organ music. I play the organ at home--I can't think of a better way to wind down after a long day. But--it's funny, I haven't thought about this in I don't know how long--I've always hankered to play a cathedral organ. To play a Bach fugue on a cathedral organ. I don't know if I'd know a fugue if I fell over one. But the idea always turned me on. Years ago I went out and bought a record, of Albert Schweitzer on an organ in France, playing Bach. But then when I listened to that damn thing, it was nothing. How the hell do you record a cathedral?"

"Well for God's sake, Harley, go to Europe and play a cathedral organ! You can afford it! What are you waiting for?"

There was some bitterness in his little chuckle. "If it feels good, do it, right?"

"He who is not busy being born is busy dying. Bob Dylan said that. Probably stole it from somewhere."

The cars on I-70 traveled smoothly. Predictable. Go to Europe and play a cathedral organ. The Caddy swished along; most of the rusty little Mavericks and Mustangs passed it like it was standing still.

"What a sunset! Man, how can they talk about Heaven being somewhere else? What a farfetched idea! There's a window of Heaven, Harley. Imagine that scene over the great plains, the continental divide, the Pacific!"

"This may be **your** heaven--"

She laughed. "No, **this** is **my** heaven: I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting, Amen. Aw, man..."

The Apostles Creed. Her parents must have substituted prayer for sleep since she skipped out. "Well, if you're going to find your Heaven on earth, baby, be prepared to find your hell here too."

"Damn straight."

They passed through a short mountain tunnel and crossed the bridge through Wheeling, West Virginia. They both detested the structure, a many-tiered steel-and-concrete bridge, eye-level with the smokestacks. Ramona finally closed her window to shut out the rumbling echo.

Suddenly she jumped at the radio. "Oh! Wow, wait a second. Anybody who fantasizes about cathedral organs owes it to himself to hear this song. I want an honest opinion, OK?"

Apparently the rock aesthetic required tremendous volume. You're gonna compare cathedral organs to this woman wailing amid all this beating on electric guitars? Still, it was the stuff of power-fantasies. He tried to catch the words. Storm threatening. If I don't get some shelter. Mad bull lost its way. In one quick motion he clicked the radio off. "Ramona, what are you running away from?"

"Hey, Bub, you realize you just turned off the Rolling Stones, the band whose emblem is emblazoned across my tits--not down, mind you, but **off**--"

"What are you running away from?"

"To answer your true question, I am running away from Washington's grocery and package store, 3131 Howard Street, Baltimore, Maryland. Now please don't try anything funny. And if you don't mind--" She reached for the radio again and caught the song at its climax:

I tell ya, love

sisters

It's just a kiss away

It's just a kiss away

kiss away

kiss away yeah, yeah

After that, somehow, ice was broken. She asked his opinion of the song; Harley said he had trouble relating to Rock Music. Ramona talked nonstop for the next half-hour. Harley learned that rock was our age's contribution to serious music--jazz came from an earlier age--and that Jimi Hendrix was destined to take his place in history beside Wagner and Tsaichovsky, not to mention Coltrane and Parker. And Satchmo.

"Louis Armstrong. There I'll agree."

"That's white of you."

Ramona went on to explain that the music of the sixties was the voice of a real people's movement. "And the Woodstock nation isn't dead, either. Just you wait till they start trying to turn the Rocky Mountains into a row of slagheaps to mine their synthetic fuel--you'll see that nation rise. I guarantee it. Think we could stop somewhere and maybe get a burger? I'm famished."

"Sure. I was getting hungry myself. But Ramona--I think your politics are full of shit."

"I love it! Harley, you're a conservative old fart. But I like you a lot."

They got out of the car; she threw her head back to gaze at the stars and stretched every muscle. Harley found himself watching her; she wasn't stretching, she was radiating.

Harley Casey walked through the gift shop of the truck stop to the restaurant, with his little Ramona dancing along on his right arm. "Oh wow, Dad, wanna sit at the counter--remember like we used to at the drugstore, where you taught me how to eat a chocolate two-scooper so it wouldn't drip, like this..."

So they sat at the counter. "Would you be able to find it in your heart to spring a quarter for the jukebox?"

"Haven't you got any money either?" He handed her the quarter.

"Thanks. You're sweet." She turned to the waitress, a tired, kindly redhead in a baby-blue dress, smiling at such a father-daughter rapport. "He's such a worrywort. He's convinced I have to stay in college for four consecutive years. I try to tell him that's not a very educational plan, but...Where do you suppose I got my stubbornness?"

He found himself saying, "Ramona, I doubt that this lady wants to hear our argument."

"Guess you're right. Sorry." She confided to the waitress, "Beneath all his conservatism and grumbling, he's really a softie. We lost my mom when I was little, and

we've been buddies all along. He's spoiled me a bit though." She winked at them and danced off to the jukebox. Harley braced himself for the cacophony about to issue forth and Ramona scampered off to the ladies' room.

The lady behind the counter gave him a wrinkled smile. "I bet she keeps you young."

The jukebox played Frank Sinatra: That's Life!

She couldn't possibly be older than eighteen--and for a few dollars she probably would keep him young all night. "That she does--or maybe ages me before my time--sometimes I don't know which." The waitress laughed politely. The burgers went down on the grill. It was time for Harley to walk directly across the restaurant and make a phone call. His heart was suddenly pounding, what of that? There were forces in him that didn't want crazy little Ramona sleeping with one or two of these truck drivers on the way to Missouri, or some God-forsaken place. Certain things had to happen; he allowed himself no more than a good long sigh, till he swung his stately and suited carriage off the stool and walked straight to the pay phone. The call went through. He reported a runaway, a girl, seventeen years old, blond, wanted in Baltimore, five feet tall, named...

The phone went dead. And then the receiver was jerked out of Harley's hands. "A woman hitching needs a good knife." She clicked it shut. "Goddamnit Harley, you even played Daddy and goofed on the truck stop with me. You're a dumb shit, you really are a dumb shit. Go pay for the burgers, old man-- Feed them to your Cadillac."

"Now you listen--" She jumped away before he could grab her arm, gave him one more chilling stare, and ran out the door and out of sight. He heard a car door slam. Must have been getting her duffelbag. Harley went and paid for the burgers, left a business card so they could send him the bill for the phone, and drove away.

Mr. Harley Casey very seldom talked to himself any more. When he was twenty-five or thirty, and off alone on business trips, he used to talk a blue streak to himself, and when he was in form, he could come up with some very entertaining monologues. In recent years there has seemed to be less and less to say. He hadn't thought about it much; in fact, it only came to mind this morning because, after he'd been awakened by his appointed call from the motel desk, he found himself unable to shut up. One little speech she made last night stuck with him. Right in the middle of all her talk about the sixties and the Woodstock Nation, he had asked her what contribution she could make, hitching around. She'd said, "I don't know, you know, it's probably the craziest idea you ever heard of. But every time I went to church and they talked about the Apostles, I didn't think, what a faded old legend of so long ago--I thought, what has changed? And why not me. So...we're all in this together, the message is simple. We can start accepting that and each other and build our truly human world society, or we can stay divided, and suspicious, and perish. I'm here to lobby for that first one." Indeed.

Harley shaved and dressed. He had a nine o'clock breakfast date with a jobber from Gary, Indiana and a jobber from Philadelphia, both toting new photos of the grandchildren. He heated some water with a portable coil that someone had given him for Father's day, and had some instant coffee, talking all the while about

whatever was in front of him, the ugly turquoise curtains, the stale old coffee he had in his suitcase. And the hitch-hiking prophetess. He unwrapped a cigar, moistened it for the road, and started out to his car. Where do you suppose she is now? With some trucker? He nodded to the chubby girl pushing her cleaning cart; he looked over the pool and remembered he hadn't brought anything to swim in, though a dip after the meetings would be relaxing. When he unlocked his door and climbed in, Harley noticed that his rearview mirror was turned down all cockeyed; must have bumped it getting out. It reflected the back seat, where he set the six-bible-think catalogue. Where Ramona now was sleeping. Lord, when I went back to pay for the hamburgers...

Her head rested on her folded hands; she drooled a little. She was angelic, she looked the way all sleeping children look, a face washed pure by good dreams. When Harley laid his hand down on the seat beside him, it fell on a pair of purple hoop earrings pinned into a purple silk sash. All right...

All right, hell with breakfast. Harley didn't start the engine. He didn't even lower the power windows. He stared at her face in the mirror for quite a while as he chewed and spat tobacco-bits, but he had thinking to do. When his first cigar was down to the last inch, he unwrapped a second. She had tested him, tried to shame him out of calling the police again, and gambled that he wouldn't. The phone in his room was only ten paces away--but with Harley's luck, she'd wake up just as he got out of the car. That wouldn't do at all. He hoped that his friends wouldn't come around to the motel to see what had happened to him. That gave him a laugh. He put on his best scheister--Jew accent and said, "Vaht are ya ganna do? Vaht the hell, de kids says she wants to be a prophet, vy stop her? Eh, ve don't got near enough of dem these days."

Just then, Ramona opened her eyes.

La reine est morte, vive la reine **The Queen is Dead, Long Life The Queen**

by James Funaro

(Excerpt from *The School of Animals*)

(Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy,
Our Life, our sweetness and our hope...)

I am the great Queen Bee, mother of mercy,
Mistress of honey, the bloodless sacrifice.
I am the waxing moon with court of stars.
My virgin daughters are my ranging thoughts
That flit among the minds of men and swarm
Over the grains tending unborn cells;
We teach the highest wisdom in the world:

Here, the womb's regina to the realm,
Not head or heart; for egomaniac man,
Tangent to our circle, must create
The therapy of art and state and war
To compensate for marginality.
I've outlived a thousand quickleg kings
And am driven by no inner droning needs;
What I am is my reason to be.
We here are organs in a single body
And each becomes an integer of One,
Hence greater, as the chord exceeds its notes.
Systems at one level coalesce
To form a higher being at the next.
Such is the universal principle.
Be ruled! I am the transcendental way.

Stand before me, Man, and learn the secret.
I am forever my own genetrix,
Mediating passage in and out
Of the sacred path of life and love,
And in my lap you die and are reborn.
I am at once your mother, wife and child.
My gentle humming soothes your anxious glands;
My prism eyes clothe you in shining aura
And turn your every gesture to rippling light.
Come to me, my Son, I will remake you:
Female, loving, immortal.

***The Gates of Hell**

(Per me si va nella citta dolente...
...Maestro, il senso lor m'e duro.)

(Excerpts from *The School of Animals*)

By James Funaro

We are Vultures, striking first for the eye.
Seers, we live by probing entrails,
And our skulls are naked from bloodbaths.
Unbiased lovers of mortal meat,
We black sisters, in cowls and shirts,
Are the oldest conscience of mankind:
Our beaks pluck the corpse so cruelly
That it dances as though it could escape
While we free its soul to hell.
Yet, in the air, we are queens of the wind,
And our babies are blue and violet,
As tiny and fragile as flowers.

What The Chorus Said

(Brekekekex koax koax)

I am Frog, blue in twilight
Veins palepulsing, eyes like pearls,
My throat swollen with a song of sperm
That mocks the rivercrossing dead.
With my brain reamed from its stem
I still could kick myself to orgasm.
And I say to you: Chaos, chaos.

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Coronado

by James Gallant

Fr. Marcos, whatever his commitment to the conversion of the heathens, seemed a man who loved having a good wilderness to hack through. It was soon apparent to those of us who went on the expedition to the Seven Cities that his reports misestimated the practical difficulties of travel in the North. What seemed an obstacle to the ordinary voyager obviously did not strike him as one. Our men grumbled against him.

He had led us to believe there were gold and silver near the Seven Cities. That was simply not true, of course. And the "cities" turned out to be small, widely spaced villages of mud houses looking somehow crumpled together.

If there was no gold at Hawikuh, the first of the cities we conquered, there were turkeys and maize. Our condition being what it was upon our arrival, we were thankful for that. We had a meal. Then we surveyed the place. The men began once more to grumble against Fr. Marcos. After darkness fell, Fr. Marcos vanished. He was never seen again.

In time, the chieftains and priests from the other villages came to Hawikuh to pay us homage. No doubt they had heard of the size of our company and the nature of our weaponry. They were conducted to the pueblo where we had our headquarters. Coronado was not in, so I went to find him. He was beside a pueblo wall with an old Zuni and one of our interpreters. There was a sizable hole in the wall. The old Zuni slung adobe up into the hole with a spade. Coronado tamped the mud into place with a long-handled tool. The adobe covered Coronado's face, hands, and clothing. The Zuni might have just stepped from his bath. Seeing me coming near them, the Zuni laughed and pointed at Coronado. He said, through the interpreter, "The Indian builds a pueblo without dirty fingers. The white chief patches a hole and becomes a black chief."

I looked at Coronado. I could see the whites of his eyes. He grinned and waved his tool around in the air.

What was he doing?

I had first seen Fr. Marcos in the northwestern frontier settlement of Neuva Galicia some months before the expedition to the Seven Cities was organized. Coronado was governor up there at the time, I his private-secretary. One day Marcos and company came galloping into the outpost with their tale of the discovery of Hawikuh.

Coronado, the Friar and I went off into a cabin together--I was to make a record of what was said.

One of the Friar's interpreters, a fellow whose earlier successes with the Indians had made him overconfident, had rushed into Hawikuh without permission of the Zunis, who promptly filled him with arrows. After that, Fr. Marcos decided against trying to enter the city with his small company. But putting together what he had heard from Indians about Hawikuh, and what he and his men had seen from a

distance, he concluded Hawikuh was the center of the great Indian civilization. There were stone houses four and five stories high, and great caches of gold, silver, and turquoises, according to the Indians.

When Fr. Marcos left the cabin, Coronado remained seated. He appeared to be reflecting on what the Friar had said. I revised my rough notes. Finally, he said, "How much of that do you believe, Castaneda?"

I glanced up. Believe? I had been living the past year in Neuva Galicia. I was certainly in no condition, emotionally, to disbelieve a word of it.

I had followed Coronado to Neuva Galicia.

The two of us had been sitting in Coronado's office at Mexico City (he was a city-councilman then) when the courier from Mendoza arrived. Coronado opened and read the letter. "I am offered the governorship of Neuva Galicia," he said. I smiled knowingly.

"Will you accept it?"

"For the greater glory of the One True Church and the Emperor Charles," he said quietly. His face was expressionless. His black eyes, set a bit too closely together, revealed nothing. We had heard of Neuva Galicia: Indian priests who bedded with nubile maidens in a rite of first fruits; fiery Indian insurrections in the night; rampaging unicorns that speared the Emperor's sheep; native women down on all fours in the noonday sun mounted from behind like dogs. There were those stories of the sodomites and the offal-eaters.

There were not even bullfights in Neuva Galicia.

"I suppose you'll haul me up there with you?" I said.

"Unless you have some other prospect of employment, yes," he said, smiling.

We had small cabins at Neuva Galicia. Living arrangements were more satisfactory than one might have imagined. The sodomites and incendiaries were off in the safe distances. No one there had ever seen a unicorn, except in a woodcut.

Coronado heard a few cases in criminal and civil law each week. Now and then he played innkeeper for itinerant traders. In general, the governorship seemed to be part-time work. It was as if the Governor's main responsibility were to wait for something to happen. "I am going fishing," Coronado would say. I would have the morning off.

At Neuva Galicia, Coronado somehow arrived at a theory of "correct" fishing days and hours. The first "correct" day that came along, he went fishing. I had the day off. He caught (I quote him) "three of the largest fish ever caught by man or beast in the New World," and the next day an aureole of grace shone about his face. That was the day he first met Dona Beatriz, who had been visiting a friend at Neuva Galicia. I introduced Coronado to her. Two months later, they were married.

Coronado could scarcely have made a better match. Dona Beatriz I had known from childhood. She was beautiful, lively, and intelligent. Her family was wealthier by far than his. At the wedding party, she said to me, "Pedro, how can I ever thank you enough? Except for you, I might never have come to know Don Francisco."

"You weren't acquainted before in Mexico City?"

"I was aware of him, one might say. He seemed a rather dull figure to me--

always off by himself doing some odd thing or other."

"What changed your mind?"

"That day you introduced us...there was **something about him**. I don't know." She looked off over my shoulder. "He seemed a man who might have just conquered the world."

Shortly after the wedding, Coronado disposed of his fishing calendar as worthless rubbish.

As for myself at Neuva Galicia, I had long thought of writing something about the Spanish experience in the New World, and there I found the time for it. Coronado encouraged me. Instead of making my usual, short journal entries, I gave my pen liberties. Soon it was producing little essays each day or two. In a few months I had written hundreds of pages. But then my interest flagged. The sense of overall purpose and direction I had hoped would emerge as I wrote had **not**. And it began to seem to me my problem in composition adumbrated the larger problem of the Spanish destiny in the New World. Over here the question always coming to mind was, **what for?**

What **really** were we to do in and with these lands? Surely it was better for us to **havethem** than **not** to have them? (If we did not have them, someone else would have them.) True, we were beginning to draw some gold from the mines, but the provinces were (as they still are) economically dependent on Spain.

Two hundred young Spanish noblemen, second and third sons of their fathers, without substantial inheritances, had come to Mexico City full of hopes. No doubt there were opportunities for them here--if only we could find them. Meanwhile they roamed the streets of the city and dawdled about Mendoza's estate and stock farm. When a new shipment of spinsters came in, they were down at the docks. Shortly before the expedition to the Seven Cities--which created the momentary illusion that occupations for these young men had been found--Coronado composed a letter which he sent to Viceroy Mendoza. It was occasioned by two young noblemen having killed one another in a drunken duel over the reputation of a young lady of Seville.

Neither had ever met the young lady of Seville. We learned in time that the young lady of Seville had died a year before the duel, having been kicked in the stomach by a mule.

This is what the letter said:

*I hope Your Excellency does not believe that if these cheveliers are given the essentials of life as charity we will have peace and order in Mexico City. Young or old, a man must have his **challenge in life**. When that **challenge** is clear, he will venture forth to meet it, whatever the hardships and deprivations he may encounter. He will easily be persuaded the very stars and planets revolve around his **challenge in life**. In the presence of it he will be as contented as a woman surrounded by her children. But when a man has not discovered his **challenge in life**, first he will suffer silently, then fall into a groaning, then into a melancholy, a murderousness, a licentiousness, a heresy, a rebelliousness, or a what have you. Every wise prince should acknowledge that the provision of the means of life to idle men, far from assuring the continuance of civil order, will tend rather to the promotion of civil broils.*

It will be noted that while Coronado's letter gives a cogent **description** of the problem, it offers no recommendation about its solution. It struck me at the time that Viceroy Mendoza must be more in need of the latter than the former. And how consonant was the letter with Coronado's own life? He was himself a son of Spain without an inheritance, after all. He might be a city-councilman in Mexico City, but had he found his **challenge in life**? But I remember the light in his black eyes as he banded me that letter. "Criticize the prose style mercilessly, Pedro!" he said. And how elated he was when I found little to correct! (Somehow I could not bring myself to tell him I did not see what the letter was **for**.)

At any rate, before I gave up my literary project at Neuva Galicia, I wrote this note to myself:

*In retrospect, most of the acts and utterances I have recorded in my essays seem to me but means to undeclared ends. Given the state of development of our provinces, one cannot reasonably expect anything else, perhaps. But how can I compose a work for readers in Spain whose purpose is to declare that we are over here across the sea **temporizing**?*

Having given up my project, I had no pastime, so I became very gloomy. The society of our colony, never very stimulating, had been tolerable as long as I was a man of letters in hiding. But it was intolerable now. I vowed never to pass another night at their damned card table. I sat in my cabin staring at a wall. I slept poorly.

When Fr. Marcos came along, I was in no condition to disbelieve anything he might say about the fantastic North.

Before I left Spain, if someone had told me that I would soon be a cheerful member of an expeditionary force pressing through a wilderness, I would have laughed at him. Natural inclination and training had both prepared me for the life of a city; when I first came to Mexico I used to look with foreboding at that while ocean over Mexico on the map and those slender black letters cowering in shallow water to spell "Terra Incognita". But with a year at Neuva Galicia behind me, I was willing to go absolutely anywhere--and for his expedition to the Seven Cities Coronado needed a secretary.

Most of those who went on the expedition wanted pieces of the land up there for starting ranches. (I didn't want a ranch.) Some believed gold and silver would be lying along the Indian trails for the plucking. (I didn't believe that.) A few hoped to pay a visit to The Great Khan. Wasn't China up there somewhere? (I didn't know where China was, and I really didn't care.) Who but I went on the expedition in quest of the **je ne sais quoi**?

I kept a journal of our travels--not a very absorbing document, filled as it is with entries like these: "Twenty miles from Compostela lay Jalisco and by the time we had come there we had climbed numerous hills." "We traveled today along a dry gulch." One night after our return to Mexico City, while reading through the journal, I fell asleep in my chair. I slept very soundly through the night, too. It occurred to me the next morning what a treasure for humanity a select library of such charms would be.

Reading through the journal one might suppose my literary skills were rudimentary--or had I gone on the expedition blindfolded? I have often noticed that when I am on the move my mind's acuteness and eyes' sensitivity are reduced.

Really there is nothing I am less inclined to do while travelling than write. Travelling is an absorbing pastime, rich in forgetfulness-I would not wish to denigrate it. But my Traveller is a fellow with neither subtle observations nor eloquence. The gravel rattles pleasantly in his head as he jogs along.

My journal's silence concerning what we found when we reached the Seven Cities has its own eloquence, though. After we occupied Hawikuh, we spent some weeks making exploratory excursions into the surrounding countryside. It was quite remarkable how little of interest we found.

Eventually we went up to the Northeast. We had been told the "prosperous" Pueblo Indians dwelt there. By Indian standards they **were** prosperous, because on the plains up there the buffaloes were as numerous as fish in the sea.

It was among the Pueblos Coronado met the Indian we named "The Turk," and one day The Turk told Coronado that near the village of Quivera lay deep mines of gold and silver and fishes the size of horses.

Following the Turk's directions, Coronado led our company toward Quivera—so we **thought**. One of our interpreters insisted from the beginning that The Turk was misleading us. We eventually discovered The Turk had intended to lead us into a wasteland where we would perish for lack of water. When we found that out, Coronado had no alternative but to order the execution of The Turk.

But I am ahead of myself in telling the story of The Turk, and I have left out the most interesting part: when we had first reached the villages of the Pueblos, Coronado had expressed his desire to learn how the Indians hunted buffaloes. The Pueblo chief assigned to him The Turk as a mentor, and the two men went on a hunting trip. The Turk showed Coronado how the Indians on horseback rode alongside buffaloes and thrust javelins into them. Coronado tried this technique. Then he devised one of his own. He stood a distance from the buffaloes. Using their large heads as targets, he shot them dead with his arquebus.

The truth was that buffalo-hunting did not appeal to him. One night beside the campfire he took out his chessboard. Through the interpreter he explained the game's basic rules and principles to the Turk. Soon the two men were hunched over the board in the firelight.

In the first game, Coronado soundly defeated The Turk. The next day, the two men did not hunt the buffalo. They sat on the plain under an awning. The sun went up, down. Coronado won three games at chess that day, and the next day the two men did not hunt buffalo, either, and The Turk won his first game of chess and then his second.

At night, by the fire he won his third. After that the two men played chess each day and Coronado never did defeat The Turk again right up to the time he ordered his execution. And when Coronado **was** informed The Turk's throat had been cut from ear to ear, he wept. It was the end of the chess games.

Also, of course, it was the end of the expedition. We were then quite without a destination, and our supplies were nearly exhausted.

I found Coronado sitting by his fire alone that night poking at the dying coals with a stick. I sat down beside him.

"So," I said, "it has all come to nothing."

He sat in silence a moment. "We have learned what is not--knowledge good as gold, for a philosopher."
"Is Mendoza a philosopher?"
He seemed to enjoy that. "Historians amuse themselves deciding what is important in time. Maybe some day one of them will find significance in our efforts."

"What significance?"
"They will think of something."

"What will we do now?"

"You and I?"

I nodded.

"Return to Neuva Galicia or Mexico City, I imagine."

Coronado's black eyes slanted toward me. "We will think of something....But there can be few difficulties along that line for you, Castaneda. Obviously you must write some account of our expedition."

"For posterity I should write a history of the discovery of nothing?"
"O, an epic," Coronado said quietly, "at the very least, an epic."

Coronado has been much concerned since our return to Mexico City with the possibility of communication over long distances by pigeon.

He drew from his cage a fat, calm bird and placed a square of folded paper in the receptacle strapped to its leg.

"Do you know where Tovar's office is over there?"

"Yes," I said.

"Watch this." He tossed the bird out the window. It sank nearly to the ground, then rose heavily and crossed the courtyard to enter Tovar's window. In the sunlight we saw Tovar's teeth flash, his hand salute us. Coronado waved back. I waved to Tovar.

"There might be some military application," I suggested.

Coronado gave me a look. I stood corrected.

Dona Beatriz seems to me as madly in love with him as ever these days.

The End Of Art (who took six years to graduate)

by Dianne L. Goss

Sifting bathroom graffiti,
Irate wives search
Remote husbands
Disconnected by a missing phone.

The somnolent card-playing drinker
Tosses a beer to his waiting throat.
Anxiously searching the recesses of the barroom,
He guards the door with his heavy eyes.

As the clock ticks reproachfully,
He settles back for one more
Quick game of euchre,
One more beer
For the road.

Concentrating steadiness,
He slows the Chevy
And coasts to the floating door.

Unsuccessfully he paws through his mind
For the key to his home,
The entrance to his wife.
Angry glares deny access
Searching unfound explanations
In the comical bleary-eyed face.

Familiarized with the procedure,
He trots to the car to wait for his summons.
Softly, his flannel-covered belly begins to snore.

Visiting Relatives

by Cynthia Hohn

It was a half hour ride on fast, bumpy roads and now she felt sick. Isabel told her mother that she knew she shouldn't have come, that she was probably going to throw up on their plastic coated furniture. Her mother slammed the car door and bent down close to Isabel's face, then hissed through clenched teeth and stiff red lips to please behave. The family entered the apartment building. The thick smell of food and people living together surrounded them as they entered the pale green foyer. Isabel began breathing out in short, loud puffs so the smell wouldn't get in her lungs. Her mother turned around slowly and glared at her. Isabel whined that she was really going to throw up and anyway, she should be home studying for the spelling bee. Her mother turned her body sharply back to face the rows of white buttons on the wall. She picked one, pressed it firmly, then released it. Somewhere above them a door opened and an excited babble fell, echoing metallicly, through the stair well. Her mother called up something in a light, cheerfull voice and marched on up the stairs. Isabel was the tail end of the parade. Her mother and father were leading the two bouncing blonde heads of her sisters. They were too young to know what they were in for, thought Isabel. The noise of their shoes banged madly against the walls, as they made their way to the third floor. Isabel caught a glimpse of her parents' faces as they turned and began the next flight. They were both frowning. Her mother was saying something about "old Nana Dear", but she could only make out a few words of the discussion.

Isabel couldn't keep breathing out anymore, so she clapped her hand over her nose and mouth and inhaled carefully. The familiar smell of her own hand covered some of the apartment smell, but as she rounded the last landing, her father caught her eye and held it while her mother was being engulfed by the pudgy arms of Aunt Rose. Her father shook his head at her, which was his usual silent way of expressing his disappointment with someone. Then, he let himself be embraced by the bunch of fat, chattering women blocking the doorway. Soon she was going to have to pass through it.

The last of her sisters was sucked lovingly through the entrance, and it was her turn. The three women pulled her into their cluster of reaching arms. It was like being eaten or at least tasted by an octopus. They petted and stroked her hair, pinched her cheeks, kissed her forehead, encircled her wrists with their fingers, frowned, smiled, hugged and cooed at her. Isabel waited. She stood perfectly straight and pretended she was in the nurses' examination room at school.

Soon the arms of the woman ushered her into another room. It was dark, and a faint smell of sickness mingled with the cigar smoke. People sat in the over-stuffed furniture. The chairs and couches had been pushed against the stained wallpaper. A half eaten display of silver bowls of puddings, platters of cold cuts and old pictured china plates lined with fancy Italian pastries was spread across a lace table cloth. The thick wooden legs of the table protruded from beneath the white lace. Isabel was given a plate and two pairs of hands were quickly transporting spoonfuls

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of assorted foods onto it. She held the plate straight armed and watched the plate grow. Finally, the plate was loaded to their satisfaction and the hands patted her head, pinched her cheeks, then left her. She continued holding the plate in front of her as she looked for a place to sit. Her mother was sitting primly on a couch between the two well dressed lumps of flesh known as Uncle Wilbur and Aunt Clara. Her mother was wearing her tan skirt and matching vest. It was her every other Sunday outfit. Isabel loved to touch its soft corduroy. She wanted to snuggle into a tiny circle on her lap and sleep until it was time to leave, but she knew by the way her mother was watching her that she wasn't allowed. She scanned the room for her father. He was perched at the edge of the other couch balancing his plate on top of his knees. He took turns nodding back and forth at his plate and at the woman next to him. She kept readjusting her sitting position, pulling her dress down over her knees, and leaning closer, then further away from Isabel's father as she giggled her way through the conversation.

Her little sister, Jennifer, had found a spot in Uncle Henry's lap. He was smoking a cigar and blowing smoke rings for her. She was resting comfortably against his soft, bulging stomach, shrieking happily as she poked her finger through the rings.

Uncle Wilbur began calling something in Isabel's direction. She stared unbelievingly at him. His arms were stretched out and his palms, facing upwards, kept opening and closing like a huge baby calling for his mother to pick him up. She tightened her grip on her plate and tried to ignore him. The rest of the room seemed undisturbed by him as they continued their chewing and chattering. Then Isabel's youngest sister pranced past her and into Uncle Wilbur's immense open-armed embrace. His white cotton shirt sleeves enclosed her green-pinafores like the giant clam she had seen in a Walt Disney movie. Isabel sat down cross-legged where she stood in front of the table. She set the plate on the floor and stared at the food. Her eyes met her mother's. They were narrowed and her lips were pressed tightly against each other again. Isabel stood up immediately. Her mother was pointing at something underneath the table. She put her plate on top of the table and lifted the table cloth to find a small foot stool. She knelt down, pulled it out then looked up at her mother. She was wearing a tense smile as she mouthed the message to Isabel to please sit down. So she did and crossed her arms and stuck her legs straight out. The place for her heel was lumping up strangely on top of her foot since Isabel hadn't bothered to fix the one twisted leg of her tights this morning. She leaned down, tucked it underneath the strap of her patent leather pumps and glanced back at her mother. Her mother was still watching her and mouthing something else now. Eat. Isabel twisted around and slid her plate off the table behind her without standing up. Her mother shook her head and turned to Aunt Clara with a fierce smile. Aunt Clara patted her hand, laughed and resumed talking.

Directly across the room sat the frail, staring body of Nana Dear. Her hair was a transparent veil of white, and the pink of her scalp showed through the shiny comb. Isabel remembered her from her previous visits. They both had the same last name, which seemed reasonable to Isabel since they were both the oldest in their families. But Nana Dear's brothers and sisters had never seen the Bronx; they had

all died over in Italy. Isabel had never talked with her because Nana Dear couldn't understand English. She used to pinch her cheek, but not in the same rough way as her aunts. Nana Dear pinched them as if she were simply squeezing them to see what Isabel felt like. The touch of the old woman's fingers against her face felt almost comforting, but the sight of her veiny skin was frightening.

Nana Dear seemed to have grown smaller since Isabel had seen her last. She appeared only as big as Isabel herself as she sat sunken, motionless in the paisley chair. The dark, wrinkled gap of her mouth opened and closed as if she were speaking. One hand was limply curved over the arm of the chair. Isabel watched the pale fingers moving in shaky nervous gestures independently of each other.

Isabel poked at the rice ball on her plate until it fell apart and the meat and raisin center was exposed. The tomato sauce in the filling made it look bloody, so she covered it with a lump of ricotta cheese.

The old woman leaned forward in her chair and struggled to straighten herself. Her mouth twitched in exaggerated movements. No one noticed. Her sunken eyes seemed to focus on Isabel. But she couldn't be sure; they were too glazed. The emerald brodered pillow which had propped up her head now slipped behind her back, and she sat in a strange, arched position. Her head had fallen backwards in an odd and obviously uncomfortable angle. The dry, shrunken edges of her mouth moved excitedly, revealing its decaying insides. Isabel stood and walked through the blue-gray layer of smoke hanging in the still air. It swirled around her back as she passed through it. Her father looked up at her, quickly smiled and continued his emphatic nodding. Isabel stood looking down at the face, which was more discolored than she had realized from across the room. There were hundreds of tiny dark veins radiating upwards from the loose skin around her jaw and across her eye lids. Her eyes glowed a brilliant blue and her pale, freckled fingers were stretched out straight and shivering. Her palms were pressed flat against the cloth of the chair. Isabel was amazed at the strength left in Nana Dear's hands. Her mother complained that she already had arthritis in her fingers.

Her sister was still laughing at Uncle Henry's smoke rings, which bothered Isabel. She wanted to touch the slightly transparent skin of Nana Dear's hand, but instead she stood watching the eyes that were focused up at her. Then, the hollows of the woman's cheeks moved upwards, forcing more wrinkles around the glassiness of her staring eyes. The hand fell limp and still. Isabel reached forward and finally touched its pale blueness.

Swinging

by Kathy Kerchner

With him I rose
Starting slowly till my legs
Gained confidence,
Pulled farther from
Hard earth,
Rose, head back
Seeing only sky,
Sun lighting my face,
Wind lifting my hair.

When he cut the rope,
I laughed with him
But my throat locked
In pain.
The whirling fall
Tore my numbed limbs,
Emptied me
On concrete.

He kissed the bruises
With cold lips,
Soothed my body with
Casual hands.
Through tears
I watched him leave
And smiled,
He ran so awkwardly.

Scottsdale, Arizona

The Big House

by Kim McMullen

I peer at the big house through a gap in the azaleas and tick off the possibilities. I think venus fly trap, the house of seven gables, Circus Maximus. I keep it light, picturing packing all those boxes of books and music scores and moving out again, haunting the bulletin board at the Coop for another rental ad.

In a corner of the garden behind a clump of manzanita, the peacock drags its tail limply through the droppings in its tiny cage. A siamese dangles a paw through the mesh overhead, absently terrorizing the bird. She sometimes takes a sparrow up there to eat, snowing feathers down on the neurotic peacock. No one ever bothers with it, but sometimes I hear it squawk at night, rasping like a woman with her throat cut. Then the siamese will cry like an abandoned child. I say to myself: PEACOCK. CAT. Sometimes I even manage to roll over without checking the chain lock.

And today I search for images, the things I understand best. It comes careening down the hill like a runaway circus wagon, wreckless but familiar. Were it anything else--a face glimpsed on the bus perhaps, an old queer with touches of mauve at the eyelids--one might have a right to suspicion. But it is just a house, sprawled in its walled garden the way houses in Marin County do, with its requisite pool, redwood deck and orange trees. And its garage apartment with its requisite student tenant parked next to the BMW.

Even before I moved here I knew these places. Hired by the hour for weddings and soires, I'd sit at the baby grand watching the water rings spread from misplaced glasses. I would eye the silver and the Chinese porcelain, and occasionally catch the eye of someone's husband. The guests would break and wash around me and always, bobbing through it all like a lost beach thong or some other piece of incongruous jetsom, the student--a sleepy-eyed dancer in a green leotard, an anthropology major in dirty pants: hungry-eyed, charming, as exotic as the brass Buddha on the patio. They gestured emphatically, drank earnestly, and disappeared into rented lairs until next summoned.

But I returned home to Berkley and a coed household, still suffering culture shock after six months away from Atlanta. I was banned from cigarettes in my own living room; Barry sold grams of cocaine out of the kitchen to buy books for med school; Elise was worried that ours was a strictly hetero household and didn't I think we should recruit a gay. I was on the verge of raving fascism, ready to throttle the whining Spanish brats next door. Then it came to me one day, spreading itself as gloriously as the spray of Birds-of-Paradise behind which I played Chopin for a reception: I was not occupying my appropriate space in the scheme of things. If a dusty anthro student could do it, what about someone with my promise? Comfort, la dolce vita, the tasteful excesses of the very rich--mine for a song. The minute I saw the ad on the bulletin board I tore it down to make sure no one got there ahead of me. "Garage apartment, pool, garden, music room" it read--such matings are made in paradise.

"Sarah, is that you lurking in the shrubbery?" Erica calls from the deck. I do not answer her. I am sitting on a legitimate stone bench, I do not lurk. She glides into the yard, stooping to pick snails off the artichoke plants. As far as I can see it is the only attempt at gardening made in weeks. There are oranges rotting exactly where they fell and the pool is clogged with maple seeds. Flashes of pink underpants appear under Erica's Peter Frampton t-shirt each time she bends over. It is all vaguely obscene, and for my benefit no doubt. Every time I see Erica with clothes on I feel like she is taunting me. I tug my black tank suit over one cheek and wish I had gone to rehearse.

Erica was naked when she handed me the key. I memorized the design in the oriental rug, and gazed determinedly over her brown shoulder at the mahogany gleam of a distant piano. I tried to respond appropriately, as mother had raised me. "The T.V. room is yours to use," soothed the mocha voice. "The hot tub library, and of course the garden." With a little work--coiffed, brassiered, and suited up--she could have been vice-president of a Junior League. In Atlanta she would be tasteful in her eccentricities, collecting brass andirons or working one day a month in a day care center. But this was California. And that was why I stood before this fifty year old matron, avoiding her fifty year old breasts, pubic hair, and appendectomy scar, trying to concentrate on her pearl earrings.

"Really dear," Erica said, "anything in the big house is yours, except upstairs of course." And if I hadn't been rationalizing, hadn't thought 'her tennis-colored face the mahogany piano,' I might have seen the wink. Call it paranoia, but I'm sure it was there.

Instead we took tea--Erica with her legs tucked gracefully underneath her, me feeling perspiration slither between my breasts and into my bra. Andrea, Billy, Susan she said--we'd meet, we'd all be friends. She leaned for a cookie and a breast dangled over the sugar bowl. The boy who had had my apartment was off to Nepal; Linda did scrimshaw. And this--Erica patted an enormous Great Dane who loomed from a hallway--was Alice B. Toklas who was an angel if you rubbed her belly. She laughed brightly and jumped from her cushion in the yellow breakfast room. "We're quite an ark here since my husband died."

The sporadic clinking of snail shells dropped into a bucket ceases, and I hear the squeak of damp skin against vinyl. I put down my music theory and pull aside the vines. Erica is naked--unfurled in her full glory on the deck, a pair of plastic sunblocks like egg yolks over her eyes. It is a distinct parody of Rubens; not supple pink pig's flesh, just gold gold gold.

The gate creaks open and one of Billy's friends wanders in with a soccer ball under his arm. I telescope in, enjoying the possibilities--the lump in the adolescent jeans, the tongue run over dry lips. Would it be lust or shock? Any response for Billy's ripe mother.

"Haven't seen him," calls Erica.

"Shit," says the boy, and he stoops to pick snails off the artichokes and flick them into the pool sludge before wandering back out.

I try to return to my theory, but the augmented fifth has lost its wonder. A normal teenager would have crawled through a chink in the fence, masturbated to the scene for weeks.

The one image I refuse to acknowledge is the obvious one: this is one of those Marin County enclaves that caters to rich loons. There are no clinicians, no straight jackets, but these are advanced times. You could easily pay good money to live out your favorite neurosis in the comfort of suburban sprawl. I glance at the upstairs windows and wonder if I am the control subject, my reactions measured in alpha waves or nervous ticks, R. D. Laing set up in the solarium nodding sagely every time I tug at my bathing suit.

But no. I think CIRCUS WAGON. GYPSIES. Things simply change tone out here, washed bright in all this gold.

"They have a special room to fuck in," Megan from the conservatory told me. "We all do," I said, "it's called a bedroom."

"No this one is different. Weird." Megan herself was wierd. Nearly a dwarf in a Jean-Pierre Rampal t-shirt. Megan did not like me, a natural animosity I'd imagine, part of being a mezzo-soprano and four feet tall. But more, she wanted me to be like the Atlanta in my voice: dogwood blossoms. She did not feel my sophistication warranted. Megan had studied in Paris.

"It's got mirrors and strange carpets. It's got devices," she said.

I nodded. "Devices."

"Devices. The usual I'd imagine." There was a smugness in her voice. She lived on bean curd and gossip.

"Trapezes maybe? Uneven bars and trampolines? Sounds like fun."

"Be absurd," she said. "You'll see. Anybody in the City can tell you." She tugged her t-shirt and Rampal's eyebrows arched over her droopy breasts. "You know how he died..."

"Mid-air fornication with twin contortionists?"

Megan sniffed. "Nitrous oxide," she said proudly. "At a party. He stuck his head in a garbage bag and never came back out. Yale Law, '49. A real pillar of the community." She picked up her portfolio and as I watched her fat ass disappear I thought how Erica would look standing next to her: elegant and smooth, with just the right amount of noblesse oblige. The image routed Megan, sending her home to her veggie roommates. As if someone like Megan could know what goes on behind those tall redwood fences.

I stare curiously at the upstairs windows, finding myself at it more and more these days. There's a great shot from one corner of my bedroom and another from behind the peacock's pen. I can't say exactly what it is I'm looking for--but I'm sure if I ever saw it, I'd recognize it immediately and everything would make sense. There is a wall of windows like a second story greenhouse, and someday there are billowing curtains like Isadora Duncan scarves, or oriental screens, but never the windows thrown wide open. Occasionally Erica will appear at one and glance out, or Linda or Andrea or someone I've never seen before. Sometimes the stereo is playing Ravel with the speaker pointed out at the garden, then I'll notice it's turned back inward, then out. Then Frank Zappa plays, but soon replaced by chants in a minor mode or a mass. Today there is nothing more than the California sun reflected in plain glass although I watch closely, and I decide to find some place to study which has no view, so that I can get some work done.

As I'm leaving the garden, Erica plucks the egg yolks from her eyes and rolls over.

"Linda's been wondering why you'll never go hot-tubbing with them," she says. "She thinks you don't like her."

"Oh no, it's not that," I reply quickly, not wanting the responsibility for an adolescent identity crisis. "It's that I never have the time. If I'm not practicing, I'm reading. If I'm not reading, I'm practicing. Busy, busy." I sigh to demonstrate my plight. The truth is, I cannot bring myself to even imagine sitting in a hot tub in a naked circle with six other people, rubbing knees. The thought makes me swallow. There would be bacteria that could crawl almost anywhere; there would be nothing to say; there would be nothing to do if everyone suddenly began to play some sort of est sensitivity game with feet under the water.

Erica smiles her most maternal smile, assigning me to idiocy. She knows, god damn it; I know she knows. And before I cower completely, and confess to every one of my inhibitions, tugging her arm for forgiveness, I retreat to the gate. But she halts me once more to deliver a final challenge.

"We're having a party Saturday. Linda is sweet sixteen. Just some friends for dinner." Her smile is like a password which I obediently repeat.

"Sure," I say. "Sure." Because it all sounds innocent enough. Kids and ice cream, sweet sixteen.

A dark man swoops in on me before I can set my present down, clutches me chummily around the shoulder.

"You must be the musician," he smiles. "Erica promised you'd be here. She's told us everything." He looks like Rasputin in cowboy boots, forty and weirdly magnetic. What's everything, I wonder.

"I'm Derrick and we really must talk." I search the room for help, but the kitchen is populated by unfamiliar faces, tanned and shagged, with abalone jewelry. All looked ridiculously middle-aged, like my parents would in caftans.

"I'm an artist too you know. I'm a writer. I write I have a cabin in the Sierras," Derrick buzzes. When he pulls my arm I nod and smile. "It's really important for artists to communicate, don't you think? Exchange ideas across mediums?" I nod again. Cocktail party swagger. Of course, he could well have written the latest Pulitzer winner. To dodge, I become engrossed in the niagara of platinum hair on the man to my right. He turns, and I realize the color is not platinum but white, and his face reads sixty-five whatever the Mexican shirt proclaims from behind. He creaks over in haraches and touches my chin.

"Erica always manages to find the young and beautiful, doesn't she?" He and Derrick stand back as if examining a sculpture, and I feel like the next virgin sacrifice.

"You were born in September," the old man announces. "It's the amber flecks in your eyes. September." He kisses me beatifically on the forehead and squeaks away.

"October," I shrill. "The same day as Ike." Several people stop to look at me and I turn anxiously to Derrick.

"Isn't Frances compelling?" he asks in an awed voice, sliding his hand down my wrist. The grasp is not seductive, but possessive; the grip of a shopper with a good buy on bath towels. "And you--you're interesting. And I think we should talk, being two artists in the midst of this madness." I look around uncertainly. "Would you like

to talk? Read my work?"

"Sure," I say absently, ready to move on. The music has changed from Debussy to vintage acid rock and I smile. Erica is certainly fond of antiques.

Derrick pulls me along, snaking through the crowd, but we pause before the bar only long enough to snag a bottle of wine and two glasses. I recognize no one. It is as if Erica has rented out the place for the night, played a joke on me. Suddenly Derrick pulls me through a door I had always assumed was a broom closet, and we are in a small study lined with books. "Feed your head," Grace Slick's voice calls faintly through the walls. Down the rabbit hole I think with a panicky giggle.

Derrick pours wine and pulls a manuscript from his jacket pocket. I feel suddenly relieved.

"Oh," I say dumbly. "Oh--I didn't think you meant read it now. I thought you meant SOMETIME. There's a party out there."

Derrick dismisses them with a wave. "Nero fiddled while Rome burned."

"Yes. Of course." I reach for the manuscript.

"No, no," Derrick says. "I must read it. It's so much better when I read it." He pulls out a pair of glasses and props them on his nose.

"Her thighs rose like glistening humpbacks sounding off Point Reyes, and her body held the distinct odor of the sea."

I swallow, fiddling with my shoelace and staring hard at the door as Derrick glances up. He bobs his eyebrows. "It gets better."

"Andre had been a warlock, servicing a coven of thirteen, and after the black heat of their needs, this woman washed around him like cool coastal fog."

Jesus, I think, Jesus. And I feel like I've eaten the wrong half of the mushroom and have grown too tall to leave the room. On the other hand I'm safe: if he's reading, he can't make any moves. But God knows what would happen when the verbal foreplay stopped.

But then that seems absurd. Derrick perches primly on his chair, as innocently as if he were reading **THE CHRONICAL**. And I am left to consider precedents: D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller. The writing itself was pretty good. What if he really was somebody famous and I bolted like a school girl? Because there is a level upon which this is all innocent. Strange but innocent, like nearly everything that happens in this house. It is a ritual of manners I have not yet achieved, as precise as my mother's buffet dinners or Father's Sunday bridge. "A lady is at home in any situation," my mother used to say, and only someone as crass as Megan would bolt.

"Well what do you think?" Derrick asks at last.

"Interesting," I offer lamely. "Detailed. You've a good eye for details. There are a lot of nice adjectives."

He shakes his head impatiently. "No, I want an honest reaction. Did it affect you at all?"

Affect? At all? And as I consider the possible meanings of the question, the possible interpretations he might give any answer, and whether the existence of a Pulitzer Prize might somehow alter either, I hear miraculously through the walls someone call: "Dinner--come please. This way."

I rise obediently. I walk directly toward the door. "We can't be rude and miss dinner," I tell Derrick, and plunge into the cool air of the dining room.

We balance our plates on our knees, the dark sauce of the coq au vin pooling near the salad. The scene has become comfortingly familiar again as we scatter ourselves among the maroon persians and frothing fern stands, and I can see Mother worrying over the chafing dish. Father would turn to the woman in the wing chair. "Nicholas," he would say. "Wasn't he an inspiration on the fourteenth green? It took my breath."

"You know I've had a terrible time finding decent acid," says the woman in the wing chair. "I don't know what it is."

"It's since Owsley retired," says a sad voice at my elbow as Francis' white niagara splashes down beside me. "Owsley-- what a mind."

Lights, colors, they say; watching the fog cover Big Sur from someone's yacht. A Dead concert. Nostalgia is as thick as if someone had mentioned Benny Goodman. Why couldn't someone have mentioned Benny Goodman? These were hardly young hippies--they were people's parents. What right did they have to crawl around on the beach with strange creatures from a Hunter Thompson novel? What would happen if they were about to close a sale, deliver a brief, and suddenly were hit with a flashback that left vague objects fluttering in their peripheral vision? Pillars of the community indeed. I gulp my wine indignantly.

Frances nods his head, passes me a joint. "Tim, Alan and I would hike up Tamalpais in the dark, drop a few hits of White Lightning and wait for the sunrise." He smiles vaguely.

"Tim?" I say. "Alan? Friends of yours?"

Frances beams. "Watts would do mantras of course, to the sun. And Tim was the only one I'd trust my son to on his first trip--twelve years old and flying."

As Frances turns to accept another joint I scan his forehead for lobotomy scars. The room has grown warm and the dim lights have tangled the rug's patterns into dense cobwebs. I feel far too drunk and out of it, but Frances is watching and I must hit the joint anyway.

"Erica always manages to find the young and beautiful," Frances says breathily, grasping my wrist. His teeth are yellow as walrus tusks and his nose is riddled with pores.

"Were they lost?" I giggle nervously.

He fingers my wrist. "My dear, your pulse is racing and your pupils are dilated. You should be more relaxed." He adopts encounter group tones and caresses my hand. "There is too much fear in this world, and there is really nothing to fear. I'm a psychologist and I see people like you every day. Tense, suspicious." My eyes trace a single tosette woven into the rug, but I can't seem to get the pattern straight. "Look at me, dear, look up. You can trust me."

A hand slithers across my shoulder and, for a moment holding both of Frances already, I am afraid he has grown a third. But it is Derrick back again, and I turn to him in relief.

"Linda's opening her presents," he announces.

"Presents," I repeat stupidly. "The birthday girl."

"I got her a novel," I offer Frances' bared tusks. "EMMA--a comedy of manners." The room is crowded and Frances and Derrick draw closer. I spot Erica at last and she waves, calling gayly "Watch those two!" like any carefree hostess

Once again the scene rights itself, becomes almost normal. And Frances wanders away, taking the tightness in my shoulder with him, I even begin to enjoy myself. Linda smiles over the gifts and mugs for Instamatics, and I wonder if the party was her mother's idea or if she really has no friends her own age. The only one in evidence is a small girl in a black pants suit with a tuxedo shirt. She seems stylish and assured until one arrives at the mouthful of braces and the oatmeal complexion. It is charming the way she interacts with Linda, playing Abbott to her Costello, handing gifts, acting the straight man. I like Linda even better for this ugly friend.

"Do you feel you're more Dionysian or Apollonian?" Derrick is asking me.

"Scorpio," I say.

"No, no. I mean we all have both possibilities within us, but one dominates." He peers into my eyes. "Apollonian, obviously. I myself am Dionysian to the point of no return. Sometimes it worries me. But it's better than being Apollonian and totally out of touch." He sniffs. "Don't you feel alien to yourself sometimes? To your body I mean. A message might help."

"You're tensing again dear," Frances says, sliding his returning arm around my

waist. "We're discussing her Apollonian dominance."

For awhile I try to argue, point out gray areas, times that I too have been frivolous and abandoned. I argue the beauty of the mind. Then it occurs to me that there is no winning this. It is simply a hustle: my body, your body, let's all go out to the hot tub and grok. Humanity, they whine, emotions. I pull away abruptly and feel like I've stolen the finger cymbals from a Hare Krishna.

"It's Apollo," Frances says, "censoring. Flow with it dear, don't fight it." And his hand works busily down my back.

Vaguely in the marble foyer, I see Linda with a piece of birthday cake for her friend. They stand awkwardly at the door, as if returning from a date, saying goodnight. Suddenly Linda giggles and strikes an ironic pose. "Goodnight, goodnight! Parting is such sweet sorrow. That I should say goodnight till it be morrow." I smile at the line everyone has used sometime to achieve such exits, but the girl does not stop at the single irony. She bows over Linda's raised palm. "Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace on thy breast! Would I sleep and peace, so sweet to rest!" Their embrace is quick and the kiss is brief, and I try hard to pass it off as a charming piece of theatrics. But Frances catches me watching and runs his tongue over his lips. "Cute kids."

Suddenly I feel sick, hot and nauseous, unable to take any more. I sway on the snaking carpet, first into Derrick then into Frances, my ears ringing, the lights hazing. This isn't right, any of this. I try to blame the alcohol until it occurs to me that the stew must have been spiked, the wine electrified, that I'm in the middle of my first acid test and failing miserably. My eyes dart from Derrick to Frances. Both of them wait expectantly.

They expectantly. Flow with it, I think, But I really want nothing more than to sink into the arms of some white-coated intern. Halt the experiment.

It is Erica's cool hand on my arm that steadies me finally. "You've held her captive long enough," she says to Derrick and Frances, in smooth hostess tones that

would have done any of my mother's friends proud. "Now you must share her with us all."

My flush dissolves and I smile in relief. Then I panic. Share? With us all? Misperceptions come rushing to mind and I see the room upstairs, with crowds of people and devices waiting to dig out the Dionysian impulses cowering in my Southern soul.

"We're showing slides of the wedding," she soothes, "in the garden this spring. It was beautiful with all the trees in blossom." Tiny diamond and jade earrings dangle reassuringly against Erica's Oil of Olay skin.

"Do I know the bride and groom?" I ask as we stroll arm in arm down the hall. The surprise is not that they are naked, every last one of them, but that I am not surprised. Yet even now the sheer nakedness of the scene takes my breath. The bride is naked, the groom, the minister--priest?--and dowager aunt. They stare down from the screen, gathered around the swimming pool and smiling at their naked reflections. No one hides behind the azaleas, no one lurks in the shrubbery parting the vines, and the sun shines shines on follicles, moles, goosebumps, wrinkles, pimples, and stretch marks, and everyone smiles smiles smiles.

"Doesn't Harry look well?" one of the guests asks.

"That's not Harry," she is told.

"Oh," she says, lifting her glasses. "I guess not."

"Where are you going?" Erica calls, but I do not even bother to answer.

So I am back in the bushes again, peering in the library windows, locking the back gate, making sure they're all in there where they belong and I'm out here and in control. The peacock squawks when I lean against its cage and I cringe further into the azaleas. I figure I can wait them out this time, until the last motor starts and the last window is dark. But I'm not budging. The house sits like a broad-shouldered matriarch in the moonlight, and it suddenly occurs to me that if you were to happen upon this garden accidentally, standing uninformed in the blowing vines, and smelling the scorched-sugar bitterness of rotting oranges, you might simply blame a summer of overgrowing, merely too much indulgent sunlight.

Rt. 2 Box 489
Hillsborough, N.C. 27278

Seasons

by Dan Pancake

Imagine seeing you
In a rain drop
Or in the mist of
Morning

I wonder often
If I melted you
On fingertips in
Winter

And did I feel you
Brush my cheek
In Fall
As you tumbled
From elm
To earth

In Spring
Were you a cloud
That held me still
Or flower
That bloomed
When touched

When Summer came
I thought I heard you
Whispering through trees
and watching me through
Sunlit haze

It's almost Winter now
And I listen to the
Change in season
For the new sound
Or sign
Of your being

One day
I will
See and hear
You clearly
When your weather
Is mine

And when
I come to you
And others
Look for me
A leaf might fall
On wind that
Never tears

If you listen
Carefully
If you're aware
No one ever
Really goes
Away

Class of '61
185 Cascade Drive
Indian Heads Park, Illinois 60525

Basho's Road

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Autumn nightfall
floods the road

no other
traveler
chose.

Back Home

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Insects complain
in the old village.

My parents' voices turn
among the leaves.

75 Sheburn Circle
Weston, Main 02193

Basket Charm

By Angela Peckenpaugh

I am putting a center down
and winding reeds one by one
to make of grass and twigs
a place of worship.

The red and black
you see on each corner
will spin when I
throw my platter to the sky.

Your feet are across from mine,
our arms bent out like
the heron's question mark
Wind sails the grasses
like airborne boats.

Who will remember how we
dug cool mornings to find
the roots. Who remembers
the winters of wet knuckles?
The dust increases your heat
and the dice fall into a square.

All the figures run.
All the circles spin.
I have a hat and we
have a boat.

You will remember when
you caught the prize.
You will leave
as I but the grasses will grow
and the boars sail through the
years. Fingers have formed

what we know
and they may read
and they may dance
what we loved.

This basket may be
placed in your home.

2513 E. Webster Place
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53211

There Is Something

by Deborah Pope

There is something of every good-bye in this.
Somehow it is always winter,
there is snow at the curb,
the driveways are gray.
The soles of your shoes are turning dark and wet.
She stands there in her bathrobe.
She has just come from packing sandwiches.
You are pushed by some schedule
and the weather,
compelled by her voice,
which is speaking.
She kisses your cheek
and hands you your life in the neat paper bag.
For this moment, in her face,
all your seams are mended,
your habits white.
You hug her and smile.
Your gift is your silence.
You leave.
Yet later when you remember
it will be that
always her eyes were sad,
her hand on your sleeve.

319 Allen, Dept. of English
Duke University
Durham, N.C. 27708

Twilight Loneliness

©1980 By Robert Smyth

The moon and pine trees
reflected in this granite quarry.
Crickets calling from the woods.
Wanting to carry this back to my apartment
with its distant train whistles across the river.

Molting

©1979 By Robert Smyth

In the last two days,
I've moved the spool table
into the bedroom's bay window;
bought incense and flowers for the coffeetable
I've moved under the window in the livingroom;
decided to build a loft
so I will have room for the blanket chest
my parents just gave me.

Tonight,
in the last moments of twilight
to the sound of
rain,
a neighborhood dog,
the poems of four strong
beautiful women
I light the kerosene lamp
on the back porch
feel my body shiver
slide out of this old skin of mine.

20 Tufts Street
CPNB, Md. 02139

Parkman

by Mary S. Treco

After the Spring when the blood of the womb
has dried on the calves,
great tractors bellow in the dusty fields
making furrows for alfalfa
wheat,
and the bells from St. Edwards call through open windows
as chicken fries in the vats.

Thick night, first of early summer-
George's Market smells of mildew, sawdust.
next door
The Hardware is lost in ceilinged cobwebs,
mouse traps and yellowed ribbons.

The gazebo is strung in lanterns and mist
while old women in polyester
pass paper plates of chicken and corn
into soiled hands of Christians.

Box 164

Gates Mills, Ohio 44040

The Guest

By Dennis Trudell

One day you are walking along
and suddenly decide to ring the bell
of a lower left flat near the center
of the city, and you do, and a woman
in a paisley housedress answers, asks
what you want and you can't think of
anything to say, just stand there
until finally she smiles, says you
must be Margie's friend and Margie
ain't home yet from whatchacallit,
beauty school, come inside and wait,
and you walk into a coffin parlor,
nod at a chairbound old crone who
smells like wet carpets, sit paging
Life for May 7, 1963 and listening
to the paisley women wondering from
the kitchen whether you've ate yet
and enjoy sauerkraut--and as you
say no you haven't and yes you do,
although you hate it, the door opens
and a girl in white with improbably-
colored hair, gum, and a rather nice
figure comes in, says hi and you say
hi and start to introduce yourself
when you hear the housedress coming,
ask instead to use the bathroom,
and follow the shrug and forefinger
into the dining room (nodding at
the paisley on the way), then duck
into the kitchen, out the back door,
and into the crowded kitchen across
the hall--whose door happens to be
open and where some sort of family
reunion or something is going on
and a female NCO-type is urging
everyone to come in and be seated,
and so you follow into the adjoining
room, are seated, and start helping
yourself from various bowls handed

round, meanwhile making small talk
with those on each side--a fat man
with a cold and a woman who suspects
her son has not married wisely--
and joining in the general laughter
at the jokes of a horny-looking man
spilling food at the far end--which
proves a mistake because as your
head is back in mirth, a hard roll
smotes you on the shoulder and you
can't decide whether it was thrown
by the small boy behind the peas
or the thirtyish woman with slattern
eyes who keeps looking over at you,
and who either by design or accident
slips into the chair on your right
when dessert is over and everybody
is herded into an ashtrayed parlor
to watch slides of the host's recent
trip to Columbus, Ohio: which slides
go on and on until you begin losing
interest and stick your hand up into
the beam of light and start making
shadow animal heads while everyone
either laughs or whispers "Sssh"
and the host says "Okay, let's knock
it off", but you don't and he says
it a couple of more times and you
hear even the horny-looking fellow
and the small boy and the woman
with slattern eyes join in with
"Hey, enough is enough" and so on,
but you keep doing it until the host
moves cursing to a wall and turns
on the overhead light just as you
softly click the front door shut
and hurry across the hallway
to knock upon its twin.

The Wormwood Review

By Dennis Trudell

The Light In Our Bodies

After supper, the children go out to play.

It is a holy truth.

Notice I did not say, "After supper
we go out to play".

We went out to play, as we walked

back and forth to school,

full of the light in our bodies--

which the adult world didn't know

what to do with.

Having lost their own,

they became teachers or irrelevant

to us behind their newspapers.

My parents' love

was as holy as hide-and-peek,

but I couldn't **play** with it.

So I cleaned my plate and ran away,

and came to this place where every night

after supper, the children go outside . . .

418 Elmside Blvd
Madison, Wisconsin 53704

Milkweed

by Bonnie L. Verburg

It was not love, to be carelessly
snapped from her dreams, a milkweed pod
whose gnarled body succumbed to the prying
fingers of a preoccupied visitor.

Propping her open, he sought nor found release
in the arms that let loose
a thousand white and downy fairies
dreams lifted and scattered by wind.

Each word from her quivering mouth
disappeared, unheard, in the flurry; lost
on a man sighting his mission and stepping away,
letting her crumpled hull fall to the field.

It was not love, but the brown-grey of October
that swallowed her body silently, without sympathy,
as every particle of down became
a seed for next year's harvest.

P. O. Box 1003
Santa Monica, CA 90406

Orion Falling

By Lawrence Weber

"Keen as are the arrows
Of that silver sphere,
Whose intense lamp narrows
In the white dawn clear
Until we hardly see--we feel that it is there."

Shelley (from *To A Skylark*)

The voices
you have built

you seal
your secrets shut
and offer them
to the stars
like food or blankets
hoping that in return
they will stay, and change with you.

around you
are like stars:

And these
are the stars above
a distance much farther
than touch, these are the stars
that wrap themselves in clouds
the clouds that have changed your history
But the stars within,
frighten you and are dim.
They are blind and hunt sight,
their eyes the sizes of childrens' stomachs.

stars you
listen to

and speak to
each night.

You wear gloves
when you touch them
because they are hot.
Arranging
rearranging
into circles and lines.

Tonight
you outline a lady
in a long bell-shaped
skirt, then you lie
back in cold tangled grass
and watch her dance
above the tips of spruce and juniper.

Moon light
sticks to you like wet clothes,
the energy of the dark makes you whole

And as you imagine
yourself the nineteenth
century mahogany desk
you saw in the antique shop
your breasts
are ink wells
your palms: paper
your fingers: pens.
And as you turn
on cold earth

The rush of sisters
lovers laces
fine webs over your eyes,
memory's spindle,
heavy grey thread.

In the empty
field
as moon descends,
you stand
scream
disturb
the silence
of high places.

Third

By Lawrence Weber

(She hopes
she never forgets
to love her

the way
she knows)

The sun hot
on shoulders
the water
cold on toes

In the stream
clouds like silver
white fish

reflect

Summer lit poplar
leaves swim
and branch-tied
demand space

She bends
and breasts
tiny edges
of winter moon
swing from her body

