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Cindy Groce

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## Authors

Gregory Manifold, Cindy Groce, G. L. Bullard, Dale Strohecker, Lee Martin, Nancy Cunningham, Thomas C. Howell, Mary McDaniel, Terry Kroenung, Joan O'Connor, Bob Welsh, Carolyn Perry, Sylvia Alderton, Cheri Clouse, Jeanne Hansen, Lafayette Wilson, Bill Cochran, Barbara Coleman, Joyce Bonwell, and Kathy Sanders

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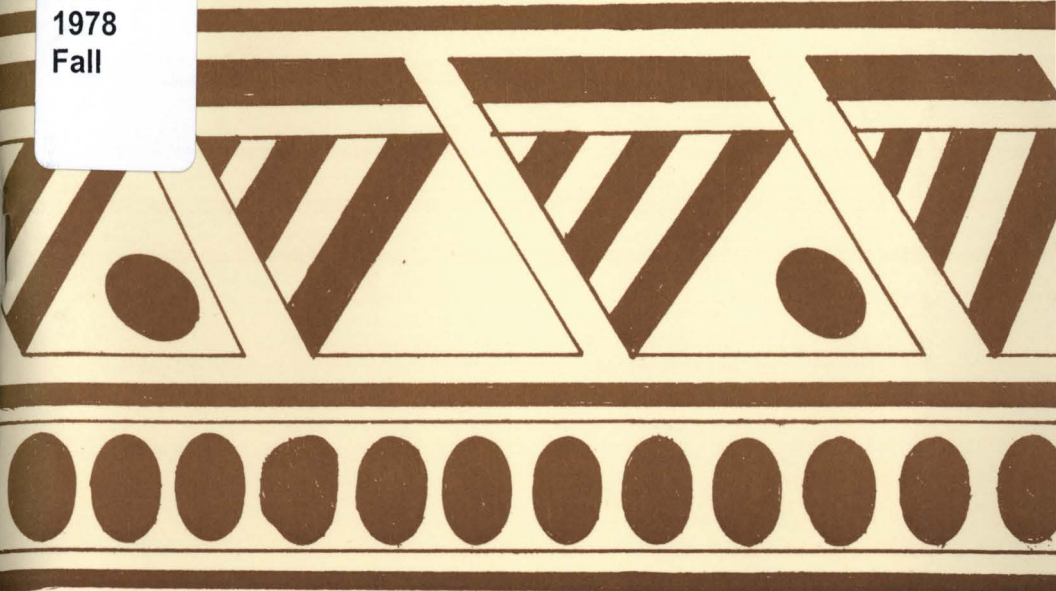
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Fall 1978



*Stinson*

# VEHICLE

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Fiction Coordinator

Cindy Groce

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Cindy Groce

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## Farewell

During the chill embrace of winter's iron night,  
The formless fog concealed a secret child  
Within the rusty flakes of the tarnished fence.  
Now, in the first warming streaks of dawn,  
She splits the pallid hue of the pasture  
And spills the shimmering flesh of her child  
Upon the stripped and waiting bones  
Of foxtail grass and winter hedge.

Beside the wooden gate my crunching boots  
Are suddenly still,  
And the naked skin of this crystal youth  
Seduces me from the morning tasks.  
Momentarily i forget the noiseless clash  
Between my fingers and the bitter cold;  
I am motionless before this fragile beauty  
Who veils the granite caverns of winter.

Wishing to linger immobile until the midday sun  
Gradually transforms the blushing flesh,  
I feel the impatient stares at my back  
And hear hungry Angus hooves stomp the snow.  
Another swift glance around and i drag back  
The gate, rattling loose its tenuous sheath.  
Chores begin again and i am gone  
As the sun inches higher.

**Gregory Manifold**

## Visiting Hours

Before I came here I had dreams  
Just like normal people do.  
When I was seven, I dreamed of  
The Brookfield Zoo and wished I were  
The white-clad king who served  
His subjects dinner at six through steel.  
Then I could watch the regal  
Orange and black pace his jungle  
In four steps every day. Oriental eyes  
Followed my popcorn-packed fist from  
Mouth to bag and back again until I  
Broke the rules and threw him a seed.  
Drooling, slick tongue rolling from  
Nose to chin, savored my jungle that  
Existed far beyond his eyes.  
My movements were his,  
My right to his, my left to his.  
Leaning over black barriers  
To touch glistening stripes, stretching  
Limb and paw to link our heritage.  
But one day I realized they'd taken  
his royal stripes, and when the light  
Shines right through my caged window  
His stripes are mine and we are one.  
And I wait for six,  
And for you,  
And for the white-clad king to serve me  
Through steel.

Cindy Groce



## The Deer Killer

I sighted the Winchester on the bank of the gully. But my hands were too shaky to do it right. So I left the can there and started up through the hayfield to the orchard. I saw Grampa among the rows of the apple trees.

"Ain't nothin' like a good Jonathan. Either for eatin' or cookin'. I just like these Jonathans, and you know they're bearin' pretty good this year too," Grampa said.

"Yeah, they bear pretty good I guess," I said as I took out my pocket knife and cored one of the apples. I chewed it, thinking how juicy it was and how good it'd be in apple cobbler.

"We gonna press any cider this year, Grampa?"

"I dunno boy; I 'spect so. Most likely that'll depend on your Gramma. If she's up to it, I suppose we will."

"I'd sure like to," I said.

"Well, maybe we can; we'll have to see," Grampa said. "Did you get the rifle sighted in?"

"Not real good, but it'll do," I said.

"Well, your Uncle Vern'll be here in a day or so, and he ain't gonna want to take you hunting if you can't hit a deer."

"I can shoot better this year," I said. "Think we can get a deer back on Aunt Cora's forty?"

"Well, there's deer back there all right. But you be careful messin' around back there with Vern," Grampa said.

I drifted off towards the house and thought about the hunting knife I was getting for my birthday in January. I knew I was getting it. Grampa said we'd have to wait and see. That always means it'll happen, just like the cider.

That night I dreamed of a thousand deer running through the woods. My gun fired and fired and not one fell—not one.

Uncle Vern arrived an hour before dawn two days later, driving his old blue pick-up truck up the lane into the yard. Grampa and I were waiting in the swing.

"Howdy, Vern, how's it going?" Grampa asked.

"Just like a sharecropper, with somebody getting my share." Vern replied.

"How's Alice and little Doris?" Grampa asked.

"Oh, they're okay—probably be a workin' in the flower beds after while. Them flowers take place over feedin' and housekeepin' sometimes. But that's a woman for you. We just got one problem there, Henry; they're the only game in town and they know it."

"Yeah, I guess so," Grampa said. Grampa wasn't overly fond of his son-in-law. Uncle Vern wasn't work brickle himself, but he thought Aunt Alice ought to be busy all the time.

"Well, boy, you ready to hit the woods?" Vern asked. Why he could never call me Lonnie, I'll never know. But it was always "boy" when he liked me and "kid" when he was mad.

"Yeah," I said, wishing I had my new hunting knife. "I'm ready."

Uncle Vern took the 30.06 deer rifle out of the rack in his truck. He reached in under the seat and pulled out a box of hollow points. He also got a pint of schnapps out and took a long drink, before stuffing it in his hunting coat. I thought of the time I found a pint of it in the road ditch over by Ted Gordon's old barn. It burnt like the dickens, and I threw it away. I didn't see how Uncle Vern could stand the stuff, let alone pay money for it down at Slim's welding shop.

"Wait a minute, Lonnie," Grampa said as he shuffled off towards the lighted kitchen. He came back carrying a paper sack.

"It's a little early for your birthday, but a boy needs a knife." He pulled the long black rigid hunting knife out. He handed it to me. It even had handle grips, and it for sure didn't come from Sears. I didn't know what to say, so I just muttered "thanks." I think Grampa understood. It was the first time I ever suspected Grampa might have been young once himself.

Uncle Vern and I walked out through the corn stubble field. The pre-dawn sun lit up the hoarfrost and made me think of the snow and sledding that was coming. We got to the end of the stubble field and walked down the old lane. It led us back to Aunt Cora's forty acres. It's Grampa's, I know, but we still call it Aunt Cora's. It is grown up with prairie grass, young persimmon saplings, and blackberry briars. Uncle Vern says Grampa oughta rent it out and make some money off it, 'stead of always paying taxes. But I guess Grampa don't like nobody on his ground but him. Nobody's rented it yet anyway. We walked out in the prairie grass, leaving a frosty trail.

"We'll put you over in that red maple by the old fence, where the deer has been crossin' the ridge," Uncle Vern said. "I'll help you get up in it." We walked up to the maple that was woven in the fence wire. The bark had grown around the wire. The deer had a trail about ten yards to the west. On the ground I saw some half-eaten apples turning brown.

"Look, Uncle Vern!" I said. "Somebody has baited our trail. 'Spose someone else has been back here?"

"I wouldn't worry 'bout it too much, boy." Uncle Vern shook his head and smiled. "Them apples just keep them deer comin' through here."

Uncle Vern boosted me up in the tree and handed the Winchester up to me.

"Now, boy, keep them eyes open. I'll be in that clump of persimmon saplings. So don't you be shootin' over that way." Uncle Vern said. "Don't be nappin' neither." He moved south into the center of the clearing.

The sun came up slowly. I searched the field in sweeps, starting every

time I saw a sparrow move. I could just see the white flash of Uncle Vern's schnapps bottle in the persimmon grove. I wondered if a deer could see it, too. I was beginning to wonder if Uncle Vern could see a deer. He did.

Midway in the arc of the bottle to his mouth, he dropped it. He jerked the 30.06 again. I didn't see it because I was watching the trail. Suddenly, the buck was in front of me. It was all reflex. I had done it a hundred times before in my mind. I sighted down the barrel and squeezed the trigger. I pulled the lever back and jammed it up, ejecting out the top and reloading. The deer was even with me now. I took him behind the right foreleg and I knew it. He kept going. I pumped the third .30 bullet into his flank as he sailed over the fence. He stumbled. I pulled the lever. Shot wild. He was up and I got him in the rump as he made it into the woods.

He disappeared from sight and I jumped to the ground. I jacked the slide and ran. He was fifteen yards in the woods, down and thrashing, trying to get up. Watching the hooves, I went in behind him and slit his throat. I wiped the still-running blood off my knife onto my pant's leg. I thought of Gramma, but I did it anyway. Uncle Vern barreled into the woods yelling.

"Son of a bitch, Lonnie, ya got him. Ya got that bastard. Shit. I shot three times. Any .06 holes in him? Well no, I missed him of course. Here, have a shot of schnapps, Lonnie."

The buck bled on as I took a sip from the clear bottle. It burnt and watered my eyes. I don't know why I took it. The peppermint stayed in my mouth, while Uncle Vern walked up and got his old truck. We dragged the deer out of the woods and loaded him into the old blue pick-up truck. I was getting excited. Back up through Aunt Cora's forty we rode in the morning. I thought "Boy, won't Grampa be happy?" as we crossed the stubble field. "I killed a deer. I killed a deer." I killed a deer." I couldn't think of anything else. We drove into the barn lot.

"Back early, ain't you?" Grampa asked from the corn crib.

"Lonnie got hisself a deer," Uncle Vern said. "Got him four times after I missed him three. Damn nice buck. He'll go a hundred-sixty, easy."

Grampa walked off to the granary to get a rope. Uncle Vern backed the truck up under the big oak tree limb. We drove nails in the deer's hind legs and wired them to a two-by-four. Grampa tossed the rope over the limb and Uncle Vern and I strung the deer up. I held the haunches apart as Uncle Vern started skinning.

I remembered jumping off that same limb when I was six and twisting my ankle. It was right before the family reunion. Grampa had to carry me all over the park. Funny, he must of been seventy then. I would have been pretty heavy. Strange, I never thought about it before.

I watched the knife roll back the skin. I liked the red marble pattern of fat and meat; Vern slipped occasionally and left a little meat on the skin. Grampa sat on the old plow by the tree, smoking his pipe and watching

me and Uncle Vern. As Uncle Vern gutted him, the knife slipped a little, and the stomach slit open as it fell into the wash tub beneath the deer. Grampa saw the apple seeds and undigested apple bits same as I did.

"Deer must of been up in my orchard." Grampa said, "but I ain't seen no tracks." He looked kind of puzzled. Uncle Vern glanced at me sort of funny, and I didn't say anything. Grampa didn't say much either, but the puzzled look went away; suddenly I knew where the apples on the trail came from. Grampa knew, too. Uncle Vern had baited the deer. I didn't like it. But whether I liked it or not didn't matter for soon the deer was skinned. We took it into the washhouse and Gramma got busy cutting it up and putting it in the freezer. Uncle Vern got washed up and ready to leave.

"We'll bring some meat over soon as it freezes," Grampa said. "Bring Alice with you next time."

"Sure will, Henry. Sure will. You folks get over our way soon," Uncle Vern said. "We'll see ya now." He drove off down the lane. Grampa and I followed, walking down to get the mail.

"Grampa," I said, "did you ever kill a deer?"

"Sure did, Lonnie," he said. "Must of killed a hundred of 'em."

"When did you get the last one?" I asked. He opened the mailbox, took the mail, and looked at it. He tapped his pipe on the bottom of his shoe; then he said:

"Oh, I dunno, musta' been nineteen-thirty-five or thirty-six, the last time I needed meat and couldn't buy it."

**G. L. Bullard**

## **Identity Crisis**

Walking by this stream,  
I remember July.  
Sticky toes drawing miniature  
Circles in icy green  
Pointed towards the core  
Of my existence,  
Stretching limb to crush  
My liquid face.  
Tipping water over and under  
My protruding bone  
Until I bored of my game,  
Leaving my face smiling  
Through a ripple.

**Cindy Groce**



## **I Scream**

My tree is yellow  
but not just in the fall  
or in the newness of Spring's tender days.  
It's yellow 'cause  
    I see yellow in trees and  
    I like yellow.  
I'm tired of green leafage  
    and green trees.  
I scream yellow.  
I display my tree.  
Everyone laughs, shaking their heads sadly.  
But I go on coloring my tree  
using my yellow,  
adding a little blue, purple, and magenta.  
I wear my tree  
    and I smile  
    and shake my head sadly  
    knowing all those people  
    are screaming yellow  
    on the inside.

**Dale Strohecker**

## John Robert

For five days now, John Robert Zeruusen had lain in the massive cotton swab hospital bed, hovering on the brink, wanting to tip over, but not quite ready. For five days he had tried to locate the haunting image that had checked in with him. He had seen the Chesire-cat smile of the image surface, then fade away. Sometimes in the bedpan. Sometimes in the tubes leading into his nose.

And every evening, John Robert's wife would force herself into that room, ashamed of herself for hoping it would soon end. Not wanting to go there and witness the decay.

"Adrian," her mother would say to her patiently. "He needs you there."

"But he doesn't even know I'm there," Adrian would protest.

Her mother would pat her hand and say, "Believe me, John Robert knows. Just the way your father knew."

*(They razed the farm house the summer Papa died. Mother watched stoically, clutching my hand the way she had done at the hospital. And I could feel the roughness of the calloused hands, could see the rigid outline of the blue-white veins, contracting and relaxing.)*

So Adrian would go every evening to sit by the bed and listen to John Robert's strained breathing.

*(I don't really believe he knows I'm here. Just like Papa never knew. Why should I have to go through this again? Isn't one death enough? . . . Well, it's expected of me, I guess. Just like when I discovered John Robert's infidelity. Then I was expected to go on with the marriage, not noticing that everyone was talking about me. And I did. A marriage shatters, and you're expected to go on. A man dies, and you're expected to watch without embarrassment.)*

And John Robert would sense her presence and would wish she would go away. . .

That woman has been clinging to me for twenty years, and now I can't even die without her watching. I feel like I'm thirteen again, and my mother has caught me masturbating. Doesn't she realize how embarrassing it is to die. . . THERE IT IS. . . WATCH OUT. . .

The image always tapped John Robert on the shoulder; and when he would look, it would be gone. It tantalized him as he lay in the bed. Teasing him like a woman. . . yes, that was it. . . a woman. . . that one

certain woman John Robert had wanted to love the way he couldn't love his wife.

"I want to write," John Robert had screamed at his wife.

"But you write smut," Adrian had shouted back, on the verge of tears. "Everything you write is pornographic."

"I write realism," the young John Robert had said. "Maybe you can't see life that way, but for God's sake don't pull the blind over my eyes too."

"But I want to understand," Adrian had sobbed. "If you'll only help me."

"My writing is something you can never understand," John Robert had replied. "It's something you can never be a part of."

"Before we were married you wrote me beautiful love poems," Adrian had said softly as the door slammed before her eyes. . . "Or do you remember?" . . .

No, I refused to remember (*But I remember. Things were different then. Why did they change?*) That was before the flood, and the ark just wasn't strong enough. (*But I was always there when you needed me.*) Yes, I admit you were. But not the way I wanted you. (*I really tried. I did.*) I know. . . maybe I didn't. (*We could try again.*) No, you enter in pairs, but soon you're left alone without the mate. . .

The presence of the image was paralyzing. Even more paralyzing than the death that steadily invaded John Robert. He saw it everywhere. . . sometimes in the bedpan. . . or in the tubes. . .

Maybe it was a smell or a certain taste held in my mouth. . . the scent of the bed sheets after sour love spilled out. . . or the lingering dampness of a kiss. . . It was perfume hanging in the closet. . . It haunts me. Since that day she had said to me, "You are the redwood and I am the willow reed." And then she had ridden the wind, swaying with the rhythm across the surface of the sea-green lake, leaving me with that gut sick feeling. . . and perfume hanging in the closet. . . Leave me alone. . . LET ME DIE. Let me. . . WATCH OUT!

Adrian sat rigidly in the straight-backed chair and wondered when the torture would end. She didn't want to relive her nightmare. . .

(*It's the waiting I despise. Having to wait for an already decided outcome. . . Like watching a summer rerun projected on the white linen from the silver-red neon exit sign in the hallway. The film is yellowed and aged from the constant showing to so many different audiences. . . and Mother and I would pay the admission price every evening. .*



*Papa before us, not resembling the man who used to give me pony rides. . . I don't want to go through it all again. . .)*

Now it was John Robert who lay in the silver-red light, vigorously trying to escape the haunting image, trying to concentrate on the numbness of his body. . .

The barber shop always smelled of Vitalis and Butch Hair Cream. And when I would walk to the chair, to climb up on the board prepared especially for a little boy's bottom, I would kick through the piles of hair clippings those before me had sacrificed. Like leaves on a sidewalk. A lollipop if I didn't twitch and a nick in my scalp if I did.

Adrian heard the nurse come into the room and knew that it was time to leave. She breathed relief, mingled with anticipation of the next night and the next, and God only knew how many more nights to come.

She stared at her husband—almost a shell before her, eyes closed, mouth gaping, the rasping breathing. She allowed her eyes to rest on John Robert's hands, pale and languid, the fingers shaped into a clutching, reaching gesture...They used to be so strong...

*(His hands were like Papa's, strong with lean fingers that seemed to reach endlessly into space. They used to comb my hair on those summer nights when sleep was lurking in the shadows, refusing to visit the bed..those sultry nights when he would cradle me against him with those strong but gentle hands, the way Papa used to rock me on his lap, the smoke from his pipe tickling my nose... I thought we had held time motionless, captured within our embrace....)*

"Is he in much pain?" Adrian asked the nurse.

"No," she replied. "He isn't suffering much now."

How do you know if I'm suffering or not? Of course, I'm in pain, but not from the dying. I can take the dying. It's this image I can't stand. It's worse than any death, any pain, any...WATCH OUT!...To lie here helpless as the image tries to mingle with the cancer in my lungs...Damn it! Let me see you just once before the cancer takes me down...

Picking up the leather handbag she had purchased earlier in the day, Adrian swallowed hard, feeling the dull ache in her throat. She had felt that ache many times before.

Adrian paused at the door and asked the nurse, "How long do they think it will be before...?"

"No one really knows, Mrs. Zeruusen," the nurse replied. "We're doing everything we can to make him comfortable."

Adrian Zeruusen nodded, biting her lip as she left the room.

Comfortable! I was never comfortable in my life and now they're going to make me comfortable in my death? Ridiculous! . . . Although I could be if that damned nymph of a memory would leave me alone just long enough for the cancer to do it's job. . . THERE IT IS AGAIN, WATCH OUT. . . Stop interfering, damn it. Leave me alone and let the cancer cleanse me. You left me that day in the park. You didn't want to be part of my life, but now just like a vulture, you want a piece of my death. The cancer is my friend. So leave me alone, just like you did in the park. For God's sake. . . .

"Don't," John Robert had shouted, his voice resounding through the cold January air. "I don't give a damn about redwoods and willow reeds!"

They had walked over the foot bridge, kicking snow off the side. She had spoken distantly of Vermont, of the life she had possessed once and yearned to have once again.

"I'll go with you," John Robert had said. "Just give me time and I'll..."

"No," she had said softly, cocking her head to the sky.

They had driven back in silence, speeding past the barren fields where the snow lay in the furrows, past the farm houses, and the Mail Pouch on slanted barn roofs.

"Is this the way it ends?" John Robert had thought, firmly gripping the steering wheel. "After the loving and the fighting, it ends in silence. Shouldn't one of us say something. . . ?"

I always thought there should have been a marching band or something. At least a blinking neon sign proclaiming, "It's over! Better luck next time, John Robert Zeruusen!" There had never been a next time. Vermont stole next times from me; and I went back to my wife, anxious to forget. But the memory never gave up on me. It haunted my life with ghosts from the past. . . smells . . . tastes. My life became a waking wet dream without orgasm. . . WATCH OUT. . . .

And at home, Adrian Zeruusen felt the coolness of the sheets. Opening every pore of her aching body to the night air breezing in through the window, she hoped that sleep would be merciful. She spent her days longing for the moment when she could slip into the sleeping world of blank dominoes. She prayed that it would not be the tormenting sleep that had frequented her bedroom since John Robert's illness.

*(It was the light from my father's den down the hall from my bedroom that used to mitigate the*

darkness. *That thin strip of white illumination stretching across my bed, bathing my eyelids. Immersed in it, the thunder never seemed as loud and the flashing streaks of lightening could never penetrate the golden halo surrounding me. After he died, I used to turn on that light before going to bed and would pretend that Papa was still there, somehow watching over me as I slept.)*

At the hospital, the night nurse stepped into John Robert's room to check the tubes in his nose. She felt his pulse, and it was weak but steady. John Robert felt the warmth of her hand and tried to reach out to caress it, but couldn't. . . .

It is the steady whirl of an old-fashioned wringer washing machine. That is my sound. I used to wake to it on Saturday mornings, letting it fill my ears, telling me mother was home. Five days was long enough to be dressed by grandmothers. A child needs to wake and find his mother when he scuffs his bare feet across the hardwood. That cold tingling, the sting of the first steps on a winter morning. That was Saturday. Finding mother on the back porch, humming as she ran the clothes through the wringer. . . through the. . . . The time tortures me. The hours are spoons with holes in the bottoms. I turn my head abruptly, jerking one way then the other. I know you're here, I can feel you. . . But where? . . . My God, IT'S INSIDE ME. . . in my lungs I feel it making diablerie with the cancer. A blood pact. . . Cross my heart and hope to die. . . spit in my hand. . . .

In bed, Adrian closes her eyes and waits, hoping the telephone will not split the darkness with its hideous scream the way it did the night her father had died. . . .

*(It is death that makes a telephone ring in the middle of the night. I learned that at an early age. First it was grandmother, then Papa, and now. . . The ebony darkness without sleep is unbearable. . . I want to forget. I can't live with the pain twenty-four hours a day. Won't you grant me a few hours of serenity. . . ? It's the only peace I know. . . . Now I lay me down to sleep. . . . I pray the Lord my soul to. . . .)*

The image was omniscient. It sifted into John Robert's lungs with the air he gasped for, curled up in the sparse pink tissue and waited. It wasn't supposed to be like this, he thought. . . .

She was golden, like an apple hanging delicately on the branch by a stem, slender and fragile. Waiting for any wind to blow her down. . . wispy like

gossamer. . .a floating silky shroud. . .I WON'T TAKE  
YOU TO THE GRAVE. . .NOW LET ME DIE. . .God,  
she was so golden. . .

They had thrown pennies into the fountain.

"Do you believe that if you tell your wish, it won't come true?" she had asked later during lovers' silence.

"I don't know," John Robert had breathed. "I never wished for anything before."

"Not even on your birthday before you blew out the candles?"

When I was seven I had one of those sudden ideas that a child devotes all his energies to. . .a party! I told my mother to invite my friends, and then not waiting for a reply, took the Christmas decorations from the closet and began preparing for the event to come. Finally fatigued, I fell asleep on the couch, holding on to a strand of silver tinsel. When I woke, it was dark and quiet. There were no friends, no party. The silver tinsel sparkled laughs at me as I sobbed. . . .

She had gazed at John Robert incredulously, almost believing, before the smile waltzed across her face. She laughed, tossing her hair and said, "You're really weird for a redwood."

Adrian sank into the haze of semi-sleep and almost lost herself there. But the comfort was not complete. For an instant she thought she could feel the warmth of silver light across her face. Once, she thought she saw her father standing in the doorway. . .and immediately before falling asleep, she thought she felt John Robert's hands around her, heard his steady breaths rising and falling against her. . . .

At the hospital, John Robert found himself within a cul-de-sac, and not having reason to retreat, forged on, searching desperately for the image that waited patiently at the end of the tunnel. . .

You'll take me, I know. You and the cancer working in unison. But before that happens. . .before they stitch my eyes shut, let me see you just once. Come into view and look at me the way you once did, when everything was golden apple boughs. . .Your face has grown dim. . .Alice through the looking glass opaque. . .I WANT TO SEE YOU. . .clearly. . .I want to see you clearly. The way I saw you the first time. Can't you see it's my last wish. I don't have a penny or a fountain; but damn it, I want to see you. What do you expect me to wish for? A last cigarette? That would be ironic, don't you think?. . .I guess I could make it low tar and nicotine. . .

Adrian sat up straight in bed, breathing rapidly, shaken from the

dream she had been having.

There had been a playground with a telephone booth in it. . . . John Robert had been in the booth trying to call her. . . . Adrian had run to the booth, pushing it over. The glass had shattered, fragments flying, slicing John Robert's face, blood trickling. The receiver lay outside the booth, its cord severed. Adrian had picked it up and had run away. . . .  
*(It was death calling. . . I know it. Turn on the lights. . . I want light. . . Death always comes in darkness. . . .)*

Adrian found the switch, and electric light flooded the bedroom. She checked the clock on the night stand and tried to push the dream from her mind. But the night no longer held solace for Adrian Zeruusen. The pink walls of the womb had exploded and sleep would not come again.

In the hospital room, John Robert began to moan softly. The image softened its heart and a face began to form behind John Robert's aching eyelids. Still swimming hazily back across the sea-green lake, but definitely forming. He strained, concentrating on that face coming into view. The collage blended into this final still life. . . First a nose, then an eye, then. . . .

Unable to sleep, Adrian Zeruusen made coffee, then took the telephone off the hook.

John Robert fought against the murky waters. . . slowly it came. Now two eyes complete with lashes, the outline of the face, hair strands draping the forehead. The room was silent. A pair of heels clicked on the tile in the hallway and John Robert pushed the sound away. He focused and re-focused, determined to accomplish this quest, to obtain the boon waiting for him at the end of the alley.

The smile surfaced last and for one brief moment, John Robert Zeruusen saw with clear distinction the image that had tortured him. It was exactly as he had remembered. . . A face filled with innocence and sensuousness, pain and joy. . . love and death. . . .

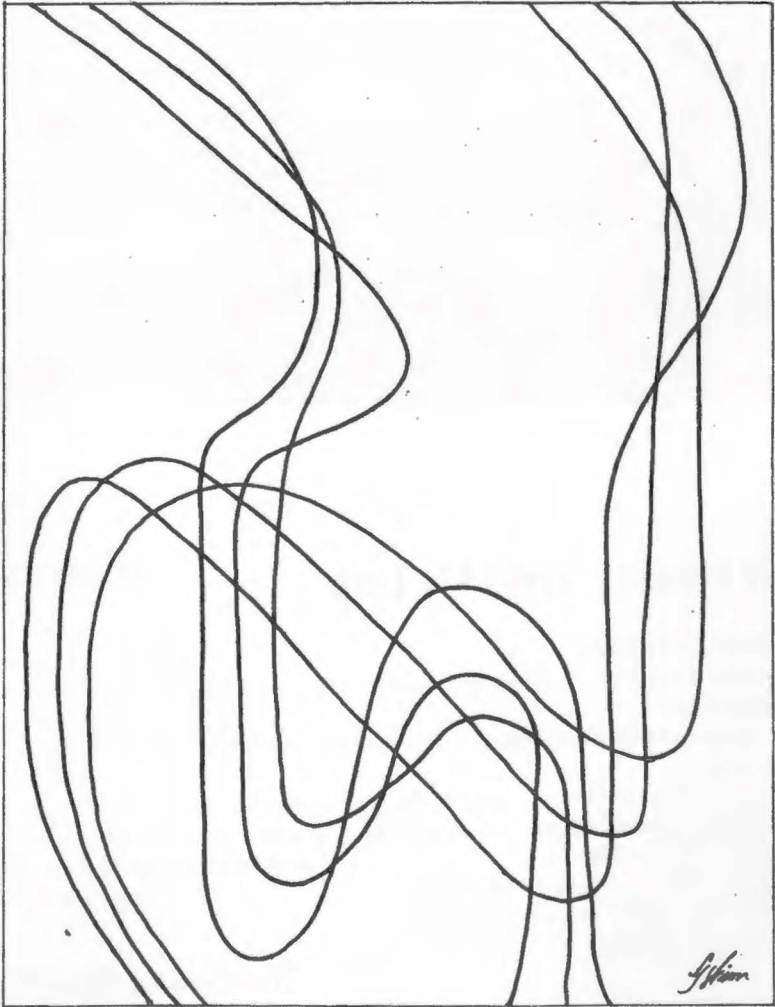
I've fought you and I've won. You can't haunt me anymore.

The brief manifestation flooded John Robert's soul and finally he felt at peace.

So this is what it all comes down to. *(I don't understand it anymore.)* It's not the loving, or the fighting, or the struggle to survive. *(I wish Papa were here to tell me.)* It's the chance to sort back through all the dust and the cobwebs—to reach down through the holes in the spoons and pull back something worth possessing. *(I can't bear the memory.)* Something held once, then lost, and to know that the worms, and the roots, and the dirt will not try to take it away. *(Papa! Don't leave me.)*

And at home, Adrian Zeruusen heard her telephone ringing. She forced herself to look and saw the coiled cord vibrating on the kitchen counter—dancing, wiggling, writhing in agony until it pushed the disconnected receiver over the brink and onto the floor.

**Lee Martin**



## Smiling in Winter

You say this music sounds like Blue Skies, and he says he likes your fingernails long, and you smile and wonder how his wife's hands feel, and he's quiet, and the Skies change to Mangioni, and you look at him, know he will smile with the jazz, and you pretend he's smiling at you, and you smile back, and he kisses you, pulls you close, lying back, and says it will be nice to be friends in winter, and you think of the music from the Snow Scene of an old movie.

You feel him making love to you, bursting you—painful pleasure—and you want to go on forever, and the snow pushes—icy to your back—swallows you in darkness and cold, and you feel the snow against you, hard, into you, and you wish that you could still hear the music, and he breathes in rhythm now. . .

**Nancy Cunningham**

## Walt Disney Told Us Lies

walt disney told us lies  
mickey was bi-sexual  
mini was a man.  
beauty wasn't really sleeping,  
she just o.d.  
while seven little men  
jumped in and out of snow  
walt disney told us lies.  
peter never flew to never never land  
and cinderella really does have nipples.

**Thomas C. Howell**



## Lakeside

Morning  
Parts the willow  
And pours the mallard's emerald upon the earth,  
Arches upward  
And gasps at her reflection in the rippled mirror,  
Stretches  
To tip the oaks with shimmering gold. Then  
Flicks a wisp of white onto her vast canvas  
And causes the watercolors  
To bleed blue.

**Mary McDaniel**



## Heavy Literature

"I'm afraid," Monty Bennett told the sullen quartet grouped around the dining room table, "that Dr. Lynche did not fall down the stairs."

This brought them to violent life, shrieking questions and accusations. Ellen Pollard, the chicken-bodied housekeeper/cook, spat that Monty was nuts. Lynche's son, Alan Jr., asked him to explain himself. Professor Cedric Bolt, the noted Renaissance authority, stated gruffly that he had never heard anything so ridiculous. The Oriental expert, pencil-thin John Yarborough, pushed his glasses up against his face and gave a contemptuous snort. I, good little wife that I was, simply took my notes and kept quiet.

Running a hand through his light-brown beard, Monty let the fever of agitation run its course. When relative peace had been restored, he stopped his pacing and said, "I realize that's a little difficult for you to accept. . .well, three of you. . .but believe me, it's the truth. I don't make unsubstantiated statements. The police, the doctor, and I are satisfied that Dr. Lynche was murdered. . .by one of you."

If the first outburst had been a "fever of agitation," then Monty's newest bombshell provoked a full-blown seizure. Bolt howled with righteous indignation at being implicated in a murder. Pollard announced she was leaving immediately, but couldn't convince the sheriff's deputy behind her of it. Yarborough snorted again, sounding like a hog in a dust storm. The younger Lynche remained relatively calm and asked my husband to prove his claim.

"Fair enough," Monty nodded, loosening his tie. "It gets involved, so bear with me, please."

"Dr. Lynche was seventy, very frail, and recovering from a severe heart attack. He was physically incapable of climbing his stairs. For that reason he had installed, a month ago, a chair lift to take him to the library and bedroom on the second floor, the third and fourth floors being unoccupied."

Pollard whined, "We know all that."

Retaining a hold on his temper, as usual, Monty said, "Yes, but I'd rather not assume anything at this point." He continued, "Yesterday Drs. Bolt and Yarborough arrived, at Dr. Lynche's invitation, to discuss, over the weekend, various aspects of history and historians. I was delayed until this afternoon by car trouble, unfortunately. Mr. Lynche has been here for a week, looking after his father. And, of course, Mrs. Pollard is always here."

"Please get to the point, Bennett," bird-beaked Yarborough sighed heavily. "I have an appointment at the Field Museum."

Monty let loose one of his smug smiles. "Possibly you'll have to cancel it," he remarked, resuming his pacing. "We'll see."

"But to get to the point, since that's what you want, we must take into

consideration the fact that Dr. Lynche, by way of his writing, was a very wealthy man, and that all four of you stand to inherit plenty of cash."

Alan Lynche II stroked his blonde moustache and chuckled briefly, "So greed is the motive force, eh?"

"As it stands now, yes," Monty agreed, removing his maroon blazer and tossing it at an empty chair.

"Then I'm the prime suspect?" Lynche wanted to know. "I mean, I do inherit everything."

"Right," he was told. "But it's a matter of percentages generally. Successful stockbrokers are usually less inclined to kill for money than, say, underpaid housekeepers."

Pollard hissed through false teeth. "That's the second time you've mentioned murder, but you haven't proved anything to me yet."

"Then I shall," Monty smiled, not kindly. "At five after one this afternoon lunch ended. Dr. Yarborough went to the living room to read; Mr. Lynche announced he was going to nap on the couch in the old parlor; Dr. Bolt went to the kitchen to get a fresh pot of coffee from Mrs. Pollard, who was cleaning up there; and Dr. Lynche was relaxing with his coffee in the dining room. Two minutes later Dr. Bolt returned to the dining room with the coffeepot and promptly left for the bathroom. This is all interesting, but the fact is that none of you has an alibi. For the crucial period—1:07 to 1:12—you all were alone and unseen. At 1:12 Mrs. Pollard says she emerged from the kitchen and found Dr. Lynche in a heap at the foot of the stairs, *Webster's Unabridged Dictionary* open beside him. At 1:14 the hospital was informed by phone, Dr. Lynche's physician was called, and the police were dispatched. . . I chanced to arrive at 1:21, simultaneously with the sheriff. The preliminary verdict, of course, was that Dr. Lynche fell down the stairs and broke his neck."

Pointing a crooked finger at Monty, Pollard croaked, "That's the way it happened. Quit trying to drum up business. Why the police always let you in on things like this, I don't know. You're nothing but a morbid ambulance-chaser, you and this Amazon wife of yours!" I would've punched her but that would only have backed up her comment. Monty gave her a supercilious smile.

"Mrs. Pollard, I am not an ambulance-chaser. I am a professor of History at McGuire University," he told her firmly. "My wife is not an Amazon, despite being over six feet tall and outweighing me, but a professor of Theatre Arts at the same institution. However, if you don't keep a civil tongue in your ugly, wrinkled head, she will feed you your ears." My husband pulled off his tie and swung it absently in one hand as he went on. "I can now get to why this is not a case of accidental death. The sheriff is a friend of a friend, and he allowed me to look at the body right after Dr. Lusk. I found a broken neck and fractured skull, which would not be surprising after a fall down marble steps. But there were, oddly enough, no other injuries whatsoever. Not one single

bruise. I find it difficult to believe that anyone could fall down that much marble without showing any signs of it. The doctor concurred. Also, and this is interesting, the chair lift was at the bottom of the stairs. How could Dr. Lynche have fallen down the stairs if the only way up was by the lift, which was at the bottom?

"So I ruled out an accident. In the second-floor library my wife and I found the space where the dictionary had been. Four tall stacks of books had been moved to get to it. Incidentally, it is a three-year-old edition, weighing nearly fourteen pounds. That Dr. Lynche would've gone through all the rearranging of those books and the lugging of that dictionary when there is an excellent *Oxford English Dictionary* on a stand in the living room is beyond belief. And as we left the library I noticed, right beside the door, on a stack of newly-acquired works, a four hundred-fifty year-old Bible, not in the best of shape. It weighs at least twenty pounds.

"In Dr. Lynche's bedroom is a roll-top desk and a filing cabinet. All of us in the history field have heard that Dr. Lynche was nearly finished with his masterpiece on the Plantagenets. I was, of course, eager to see it, incomplete or not. But it was not to be found—not in the desk, the filing cabinet, or anywhere else. Thinking he'd taken it downstairs, I sent Cherie to look for it, with the aid of the police. That it should be missing bothered me. They didn't find it. But I think they will. Odd it should be gone, isn't it?

"The clincher came at the fourth-floor landing. You know how the stairs curve to the left at the bottom, into the hall? Well, because of that, a straight line is formed between the landing and the last step, thirty-some feet below. I dropped a coin from the landing and it struck Dr. Lynche's body. Imagine the damage a fourteen-pound dictionary could do to someone's head and neck from that height."

"My God," Yarborough breathed.

Monty shook his head. "There's more of a Satanic influence," he said. "Did you hear anything at all between seven and twelve after one?"

The historian uncrossed his legs and answered, "I fell asleep over Gibbon. But I think. . . I heard someone call Dr. Lynche's name. It sounded very far away. And I can't be certain of the time."

"Thank you. Mrs. Pollard, didn't you say you heard a. . . thump?"

"Yeah," the housekeeper barked. "It was poor Dr. Lynche landing at the bottom. I went out to look, and there he was."

"All right. Dr. Bolt?"

The ox-shaped author glared at Monty and said, "I heard someone call out. I do believe it was Alan."

"This is when you were in the bathroom?"

"Yes."

"You were in a locked room on the other side of the house, yet you heard a cry that Mrs. Pollard and Dr. Yarborough missed, though they were only a few feet away?"

"Don't cross-examine me, young man," Bolt commanded testily. "I heard it. My hearing is very good." I wanted to ask him if his X-ray vision let him see through walls as well, but I resisted the temptation.

"I won't say it's impossible," Monty muttered. "By the way, how is your book coming? The one on Richard III and his kin?"

Bolt was a little taken a back. After a second or two he replied, "It—it's a few months from completion. Why?"

"I want to read it, of course," Monty told him. He turned to Lynche, who stopped him before he could say anything.

"I was asleep on the parlor couch the whole time. Didn't see anything, didn't hear anything. OK?"

"OK," Monty smiled. He leaned against the door and began, "Well, any one of you could've done it. Only one of you did. It's wide-open. All of you stood to inherit. Mr. Lynche as the sole surviving family member would get most of it, Mrs. Pollard a smaller but, I think, no less important share, and the two doctors would get—"

Someone pushed against the door, shoving Monty away from the wall. The tobacco-chewing sheriff poked his head into the room and motioned for my husband to join him outside. As they begged our pardons and exited, I played the old game with myself. Who'd done it? Every mystery writer from Poe and Wilkie Collins to Rex Stout and Ngaio Marsh has said that it's impossible to look at a man's face and tell if he's a murderer. I tried it anyway. Ellen Pollard, the acidic cook, was certainly capable of anything, to my mind. Of course, I was biased, because I wanted to break her nose. The son, Alan Lynche, Jr., was charming, but I'd met suave murderers before. I once found one in my bed at college, but that's another story. Cedric Bolt, the stuffy historical author, was almost too shocked and offended to be real, but maybe all upper-crust Englishmen acted that way. And John Yarborough, the Orientalist, was a gray man—he had no outstanding traits; he blended in. I knew from experience that an awful lot of people who kill come from the gray bracket. . .and an awful lot don't. It was, as usual, hopeless, so I gave up and started organizing my notes for the denouement, if there was to be one.

Monty re-entered, his tie still dangling from a bony fist. Only I and several people in prison would've recognized the look on his face. I got set to put a red star beside one of the four names on my list.

"As I was saying," he continued, as if nothing had happened, "the two doctors get substantial sums for their research. Dr. Yarborough, do you plan to accept your share?"

The angular American hesitated before answering, "Well, it is a shame that it comes to me under such tragic circumstances, but I'm sure Alan would want me to continue with my vase work. He was very enthusiastic about it."

"I see," Monty nodded. "And you, Dr. Bolt? Are you of the same

mind?"

"Certainly," the florid-faced Britisher replied. "It is too bad things came out this way, but I need the money to finish my book."

"The one about the Plantagenets?"

"You know perfectly well."

"Terribly ironic, isn't it?" Monty said pointedly. "Almost funny."

"What?" demanded Bolt.

"Using the money for your book. Dr. Lynche was going to publish his book, on the same subject, before you, and it would probably have been superior. He's always outstripped you in scholarship, hasn't he? But not this time. That's what's so funny. The man you murder leaves you enough to complete the volume that his would've outsold. You'd have had a good laugh over that, wouldn't you?"

Bolt's heavy eyebrows fell across his nose. "Mr. Bennett, if you seriously think that I—"

Monty's skinny arm stabbed out at the professor. "Every move you made was amateurish! No one else heard the cry you say you heard—a stupid alibi attempt. No one else would've gone to so much trouble to get a recently-published book of little worth to drop on Lynche's head when a much heavier Renaissance Bible was right at hand. Who but a Renaissance historian, with great respect for fragile articles of the period, would do that? You couldn't bring yourself to destroy such a beautiful book."

Jumping to his feet, Bolt cried, "You're mad! Mad! Alan Lynche was a friend! A great friend!"

Putting himself between Bolt and me, which was irritating (though touching), Monty said in a low voice, "But when the great friend told you he would send his book to the publisher any day, friendship took a back seat to ambition and greed, didn't it? That's why you went up to his room at 1:07, instead of the bathroom, and gathered together his notes and manuscript, planning to pirate what you could, then destroy them. The sheriff just found it, right where you hid it all. Your fingerprints are all over it."

"But that's—," Bolt muttered.

"Impossible?" Monty said, twisting the knife. "Because you know you wiped them off?"

Bolt no longer looked at Monty, but at his hands. A plaintive "No!" was repeated again and again, under his breath.

"You took the heaviest book of no historical value available, went to the landing, and called Dr. Lynche. "When he arrived at the foot of the stairs, you let the book drop. It was a long chance that it would even hit him, but you were lucky. With his brittle bones and frail constitution, the impact killed him. But you were unbelievably sloppy. It would've been better to have simply found him in the library and thrown him down. You read too many mysteries. It was more complicated than it really—"

"Shut up!" Bolt shrieked, bounding across the table at Monty, fingers clutching for his throat. My agile husband ducked beneath the bear-like arms and looped his necktie around the crazed man's throat. Bolt bellowed and tried to get the door open, dragging Monty with him as if he were weightless. By the time the deputy and Alan Lynche reached him and grabbed his arms, Bolt's roars had become sobs, and when the officer managed to lock the handcuffs on the thick wrists, tears of frustration had already subdued the historian.

Monty freed himself from the meelee and began to put on his tie. I asked him if he were all right.

"Oh, I'm fine," he told me. "Had an anxious moment there."

"Yeah, you could've been killed."

"That's not what worried me."

"What, then?"

"I was afraid he would figure out that the sheriff didn't really find the manuscript. Wouldn't I have looked silly?"

**Terry Kroenung**

## Old Friends

Dirty face, stray wisps of hair,  
Hid my hands behind an almost "Who?"  
Not ready to see that it really was you  
Without the second look, the smile  
That made me forget the geranium  
When an old friend stepped into mind.

'Just for a minute' invited him in  
But we know so many remember-when's  
And *used-to-be's*  
(And right now you look so good to me)  
That I can worry about *now's* tomorrow  
So can you.

Light the candle in the windowsill  
And tonight there'll be no more yesterdays  
To hide Orion in the midnight sky  
You and I  
Can chase the waves back to the sea  
Or let them find us in the sand  
Too late for the sun to rise on two old friends again.

**Mary McDaniel**



## **A Sunning Afternoon**

Sprawled across steps  
paws tighten  
and cross  
as a shadow steps over him.  
Sun stipples his coat—  
presses—like an iron  
and scorches a caress.  
He curls—like a roller,  
trapping heat between his paws.  
Claws expose a stretch  
then slip back into sleep.  
A breath of dreams  
ruffles his fur.

**Joan O'Connor**

## Always Tomorrow

They meet at the door at five o'clock,  
He, coming in,  
She, going out, plants a whack on her thigh  
tells him "Need a little exercised inners in the oven  
Billys at the house next door—  
Be back soon."  
She pedals the two miles to the edge of town,  
Down the tarred lane that winds around West Lake,  
Leaves the bike in a circle of dandelions  
And sits in the grass with the sycamore.  
She can see the two-lane highway, the only  
road in or out of the town,  
As she ties the longest stemmed white clover into a chain—  
And waits.

She feels for the clover between the strands of grass,  
Flicks a dragonfly from her shoelace,  
Turns her eyes to the north  
And hopes that John Joseph did know  
When he said that reality was only a word  
And not a game to be played,  
Waiting forever,  
For no one. . .

She ties another handful of clover,  
Turns her back on the couple walking hand in hand  
near the water's edge,  
Assures herself that there is a reason to wait,  
Shakes her head at the disbelief in her own voice  
And frowns at the two-land highway, the only  
road in or out of the town,  
Knowing that Billy's in the cookie jar,  
The roast in the oven is dry—  
And she did say she'd be back. . .  
She parts her bike from the dandelions  
And pedals to the intersection,  
Giving, to the north, a last, long look.  
To the south  
Her chocolate-mouthed, skinny-kneed child,  
Her impatient husband poking a dirty fingernail into the oven—  
Home—it was.



Her knees ache as she turns into the drive  
And meets his "Where the—what the hell?" as he yanks at  
the clover she wound absent-mindedly around her neck.  
There's Billy, chocolate chips crammed into each hand,  
That damn dry roast—  
A tangled chain of white clover  
And tomorrow.

**Mary McDaniel**

## **Four Sunsets**

1

The sun outstretches ruddy wings and gathers  
Airy shafts of dusty light about itself,  
Perched weightlessly upon the evening mist.

2

Conveyed on elephantine oak shoulders,  
Departing day sways victoriously westward  
Trailing golden clouds and streams of light.

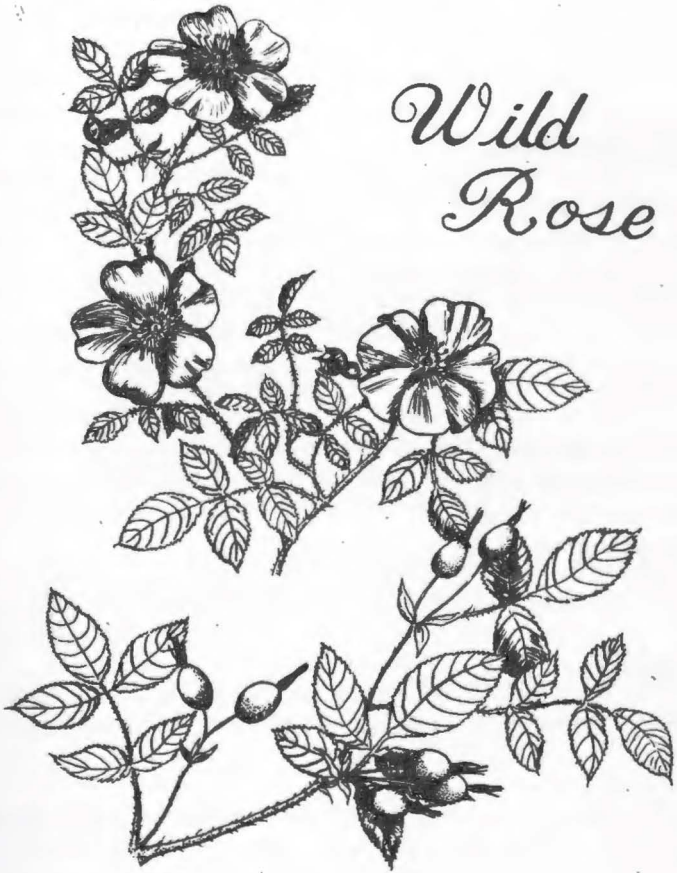
3

The stallion rears madly.  
His eyes are red hot drops of iron,  
His screaming breath, conflagrant torch.

4

Amidst the din of splintering masts and streaked  
With blood, the capsized galley drags her crew  
Beneath the hissing darkness of the sea.

**Gregory Manifold**



*Wild  
Rose*

## **Come Free**

come free, now come  
make yourself come to a stop  
come to a stop make yourself come  
to a stop yourself before you come to a stop  
become stuck in a place finally stopped and unable to come  
free of the place where you came to a stop became stuck at don't stop  
yourself

while you still can come  
free before you stop  
make yourself come  
free never stop  
always come  
stop

yourself

come

free.

**Bob Welsh**

# Faded Pinstripes

## (A Play in One Act)

*(The scene is a dingy one-room apartment. Located down right is a bed with a night stand beside it. The bed is unmade. There are several pill bottles on the night stand, all surrounding a framed, autographed picture of Mickey Mantle, which sits in the center of the table. There is an overstuffed chair left center, which is losing most of its stuffing. Two steps at center stage lead up to the kitchen half of the apartment. There is a cabinet-sink unit, right center with cupboards above it. There is a gas cooking stove up right center. Left center there is a dining table with two chairs around it. All of the furniture is old and rickety. The walls are a drab brown. There is a door up left, which is open. As the lights come up, shouting can be heard from outside.)*

**ROSSANI** *(from outside)* Damn you! You leave that alone. You hear me, damn you. You stay away from that or I kill you!

*(Rossini enters. He is an elderly man who walks with difficulty. At one time, he has been a big, virile man. But now, he walks in keeping with his age. He wears a seedy looking sweater, buttoned up, and a New York Yankee baseball cap. The cap is faded, and torn. Rossini holds the morning newspaper which has been torn to shreds.)*

Damn that Elbert's dog. I tell him, you keep that mutt away from my newspaper. But do he listen? No, he no listen! Now how am I gonna read about New York Yankees?

*(Rossini goes slowly to the dining table. He carefully separates the sports section from the rest of the newspaper, and spreads it out on the table.)*

Damn it! How I gonna read that score! *(He squints at the paper, trying to read.)* New York Yankees 7, Boston Red Sox. . . Damn it! I gonna tell that Elbert thing or two when I see him! *(He comes down to the night stand, picks up the picture of Mickey Mantle and carries it with him to the sink. He talks to the picture as he goes.)* Mickey, how I gonna find out about New York Yankees? I got no radio. I got no television. And I got no more money for another newspaper. *(He sets the picture on the cabinet and continues to speak to it, as he takes a coffee pot from the cupboard.)* It that damn Elbert's fault. He no keep his dog away like I tell him to. *(He takes a coffee can from the cupboard and scoops coffee into the pot.)* I tell you Mickey, I don't know why he no keep that mutt tied up. He gonna get killed some day, and whose fault will it be? Elbert's that's who. He'll come crying to me. "What am I gonna do? I'm so lonely Rossani, so lonely without my little Skipper." And I'll say, you got no

one to blame but yourself, Elbert. You should have kept that dog tied up. *(He turns on the faucet to fill up coffee pot, waits, but no water comes. He turns faucet off, picks up picture, and carries it to the dining table.)* You see that, Mickey. That's what that damn dog do. Now I no know if New York Yankees beat last night. *(He carries picture to the sink, where he turns on the faucet, waits, but nothing happens)* I worried about New York Yankees, Mickey. They no got the team they had when you play. *(He turns off the faucet and takes a slice of bread from the cupboard. He carries this and the picture down to the bed.)* I remember you, Mickey. You play ball like no one else. *(He sits on the bed and places the picture on the nightstand.)* I remember the day you sign this picture for me at Yankee Stadium. *(He sits in silence, as if remembering the exact day that Mantle signed the picture. He eats the crust from the bread, then rolls the rest of it into a ball, which he pops into his mouth. The door bursts open and Elbert enters. Elbert is about the same age as Rossani. He is a smaller man, who appears to have been frail all his life.)*

**ELBERT***(coming down to Rossani)* I got something to say to you.

**ROSSANI***(his mouth still full of bread.)* I goft somfhing say you.

**ELBERT** If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times—don't talk with your mouth full. Swallow that stinking garlic bread before you speak to me.

**ROSSANI***(rising)* Hey, you no call my garlic bread stinking. You shriveled cow's bag.

**ELBERT** What gave you the right to beat my Skipper? I've told you to leave my Skipper alone, you dago henchman.

**ROSSANI***(temper flaring)* You call me dago one more time, and I bust your head.

**ELBERT** See what I mean, Rossani. Always violence. I bet you work for the Mafia.

**ROSSANI** That's right Elbert. I'm big hit man for Mafia. And I gonna get that damn dog if he don't leave my paper alone. Then if you make trouble, I gonna snuff you too!

**ELBERT** My Skipper don't bother nothing. No, not my Skipper.

**ROSSANI** Pah! You come here, and I show you what your Skipper do! *(Rossani goes to the dining table and Elbert follows.)* There, that what your mangy mutt do to my newspaper. You must look at that, Elbert.

**ELBERT** My Skipper did that?

**ROSSANI** That's what I tell you, don't I?

**ELBERT** Are you sure it was my Skipper?

**ROSSANI** Damn it, I tell you, don't I?

**ELBERT** I'm sorry Rissani.

**ROSSANI** Well, I guess I sorry I called you name.

**ELBERT** I don't really think you work for the Mafia.

**ROSSANI** Hey, you right about that. I big hit man. I shoot tommy gun. *(He mimics firing a machine gun.)* Rata-tat-tat. They call me Killer Rossani! *(Rossani and Elbert both laugh uncontrollably, falling into each other's arms.)* Hey, you some pal, Elbert. Even if your dog do get hungry for my newspaper. *(He slaps Elbert playfully.)* Hey, I gotta make my bed.

*(Rossani goes to the bed and starts making it. Elbert goes to the sink, turns faucet on to fill the coffee pot, but nothing happens.)*

**ELBERT** *(waiting for water)* You should have had your bed made long ago, Rossani. I keep telling you, you got to take care of this place.

*(Elbert shuts the faucet off. Rossani raises his arms to the ceiling as if to say, "why don't he get off my back?")*

**ELBERT** *(rummaging in cupboard)* You're going to give the neighborhood a bad name, if you don't take care of this place. *(Rossani repeats his gesture as he finishes making the bed. Elbert comes down to Rossani.)* That's nice, Rossani. Tomorrow let's see you make it on time like a good boy.

*(Rossani is angry. He rips the covers off the bed.)*

**ROSSANI** There! How you like that for good boy!

**ELBERT** You're crazy Rossani.

**ROSSANI** Don't tell me I'm crazy.

**ELBERT** What are you going to do if the lady comes today?

**ROSSANI** What I always do. Tell her to get the hell out!

**ELBERT**She's going to take you away some day, Rossani, if you don't take care of this place.

**ROSSANI**No one's gonna take me away. This is my home. No one tell Rossani where to live!

**ELBERT**They tell you where to live Rossani!

**ROSSANI**You crazy!

**ELBERT**You're the one that's crazy. Just look at that stupid hat you wear.

**ROSSANI**Hold on there, Elbert! You curse me if you want. But don't ever call New York Yankee baseball cap stupid!

**ELBERT**It's filthy.

**ROSSANI**Shut your mouth, you!

**ELBERT**I bet you haven't washed it since you got it. That's how filthy the damn thing is!

**ROSSANI**Now you gone too far Elbert! You curse New York Yankees. Greatest baseball team in the world.

**ELBERT**(*going to kitchen*)It's impossible to talk to you Rossani. You want to know why? Because you're a fathead, that's why?

**ROSSANI**Hey, where you going?

**ELBERT**(*at door*)To have my morning cup.

**ROSSANI**You have it here like always.

**ELBERT**Not with a fathead like you, Rossani!

**ROSSANI**(*to the picture*)You hear that, Mickey, he call me fathead. Aw, what he know anyway. Right, Mickey?

**ELBERT**There Rossani, you talk to that damn picture all the time, and then you say you're not crazy!

**ROSSANI**(*in kitchen*)And who else I talk to? President of United States. Maybe he call me on the telephone I no got?

**ELBERT**The hell with you Rossani. I'm going to go talk to Skipper. Even he's got more sense than you! (*he exits*)

**ROSSANI**(*At door*)You keep that dog tied up Elbert. There too much traffic around here!(*he goes to sink*) Pah! He never listen. Calls me crazy cause I talk to Mickey. And what he do? Talk to dumb dog! (*He laughs as he puts coffee and pot back into the cupboard.*) "Here little poochie, you want something to eat. That's a good little Skipper. Elbert loves you and you love Elbert." Pah! (*He comes down to night stand.*) At least I got a real person to talk to. (*He sits on the bed.*) You sure ain't no dog, Mickey! I remember the days I go to Yankee Stadium to see you play. . . before I get too old. . . When I first get here from old country, everyone say to me, "Hey, you American now, and Americans go to Yankee Stadium to watch baseball. . . , so I go cause I proud to be American, and I see you Mickey. . . I see you hit home run. . . I see Yankees win almost every game. . . I eat hot dogs and curse umpire like good American citizen. (*He rises, saddened. He goes to overstuffed chair and sits.*) Now I got no money for baseball. . . I save few dollars out of social security each month for newspaper so I keep up on New York Yankees. . . Maybe I no citizen anymore.

(*the door opens and Elbert staggers in, shocked. He goes to the table which he holds on to for support. Then he cries out.*)

**ROSSANI**(*goes to Elbert*)Elbert! What's the matter? Here you sit down and tell Rossani what wrong. (*He sits Elbert down on chair.*)

**ELBERT**Skipper. . . .

**ROSSANI**What about Skipper? He eating more newspaper?

**ELBERT**In the street. . .It was the lady. . . in her fast car. . .She didn't even stop, Rossani!

**ROSSANI**Hey, you take it easy, Elbert. Rossani is here with you.

(*Elbert folds his arms on the table and lays his head down, sobbing. Rossani rubs his back.*)

**ELBERT**I hate them! Every damn one of them!

**ROSSANI**They go too fast, I know. But we got to stick together Elbert. We'll lick em. Every damn one of them!

(*Elbert rises and goes to the door. He turns to Rossani.*)

**ELBERT**They'll take us too, Rossani. Just like they did Skipper. We don't have a chance! (*he exits*)



*(Rossani stares at the door in silence. Then, he turns and pounds the table furiously.)*

**ROSSANI**Damn it! I tell him to keep that dog tied up! He should have listen to me. . . Damn it! Damn it! Damn it! *(He comes down to the bed and sits.)* Dirty bastards! They come down here in their fancy cars and wearing their fancy clothes. And they say, "You eating right? You got rats in here? We take care of you. . . Pah! *(He picks up picture)* I tell them, Mickey. I tell every one of the bastards. I say, you leave me alone. I won't go to your damn homes, with the wheelchairs, and the piss bottles. . . and the damn stinking sheets. *(He rises and carries picture with him to the sink.)* Hey, I'm still citizen, ain't I Mickey? I still read scores in paper. I got my rights I tell em! *(He sets picture on cabinet.)* Hey, you pulling for me Mickey? The way I used to pull for you at the Stadium? I was right with you, Mickey. Everytime you swing the bat I was there with you. . . Too bad you legs had to give out on you, Mickey!. . . You damn right, I was with you till the end! *(He turns on the faucet, waits, but nothing happens. He turns it off.)* Damn their stinking water!!

*(Rossani hangs his head and sobs softly as. . .*

THE LIGHTS GO DOWN

Lee Martin

## Windsong

Wind hushes the pines,  
Calling,  
Sighing,  
Running fingers through the willows;  
Lost songs  
In the after-twilight.  
Dreams that breathe  
Prayers blown away,  
Tears dried;  
Whispering  
Bleeding,  
Calling goodbye.

Carolyn Perry

## Silence

I can hear her!  
She is present between the  
thuds of perking coffee.  
Silence.

The noon bell sounds,  
There is a rushing of  
feet, and then  
Silence.

Supper dishes draining,  
still warm from bathing,  
T.V. off, she's present.  
Silence.

Relaxation in the  
softness of my bed,  
she surrounds me.  
Silence.

**Sylvia Alderton**



## **One More Time**

On Thursday, January 19,  
You finished your journey  
Quietly, without battle.  
While I laughed, unprepared,  
162 miles away  
Unaware that yesterday I would cry  
And search your empty red sweater,  
The one you outgrew two years behind,  
For some tangible scent of  
5118 unbeaten days.  
Now I can't finish even one  
without hurting and  
there is no relief in bleeding for  
fourteen years and eight days so  
I curse my paralysis and  
though I never liked loud music  
I'm only strong when I hate but  
if I were God there would be  
one more time for  
swimming in your hair, for  
tickling your ear with my heartbeat, for  
just two minutes and twenty seconds  
of holding you one more time.

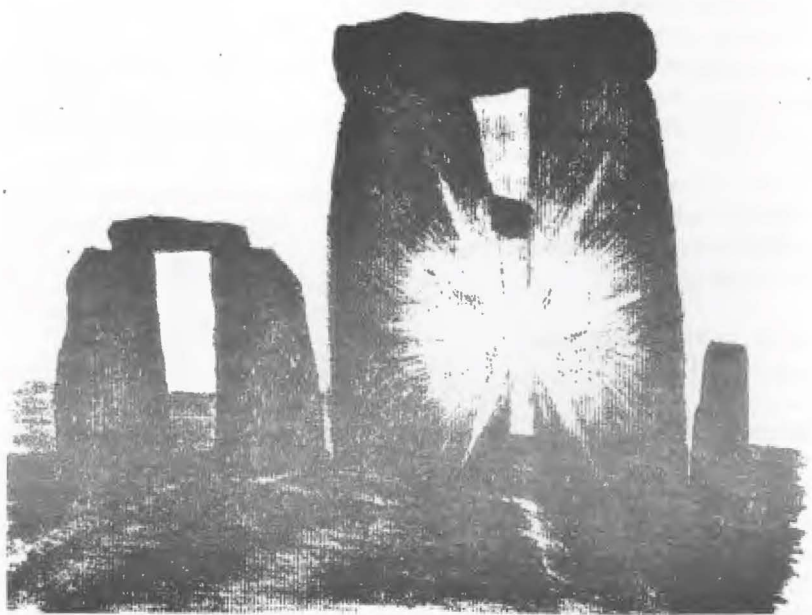
**Cheri Clouse**

## **Grandfather Was Illiterate**

Long, knobby fingers caressed each limb  
of the apple tree that filtered August's rays,  
firmly wrestled his ornery mule into harness.  
Knuckles peeled upside a tough jaw,  
but stroked my cowlick in place  
even when it was greasy enough  
to stay by itself.  
Warmth from his sandpaper hands  
soaked through when he sat me on his lap  
and I read gospel.

When I asked him to read  
a story back to me  
he wept.  
When his death was  
"Child-proof cap—push and twist to unlock,"  
I wept  
for him  
for me  
for his hands  
that couldn't speak and  
eyes that didn't understand.

**Cindy Groce**



## Stonehenge

We enmesh the sentinel stones with talk of feet above the sea  
And loose chatter of antique religions which invoked  
The great stillness of the sun to touch the gently rolling plain.

But our theories and our tongues—like winter falling snow  
Which is melted by a bed of coals, unstirred and long forgotten—  
Are soon dispersed by this circle of flame-like stone, for it is

That we are snow. We are every age lie heaped upon each other  
In cold piles of frozen culture except where red hot coals  
From our age of another dissolve the chill and burn away

The snowy hills to make revealed the rolling plain on which we stand.  
Burn, mighty stones. Give such heat until your lengthy shadows  
Alone remain to see the gentle rivered plain immerge.

Great silence of the sun, source of fire, hear us now.

**Gregory Manifold**

## Gabs

He lived three houses down from me on a little street called Kantuk, in the midst of other such formidable, reserved streets named Bellington Avenue, Clement Lane, and Adams Court. I never knew his real name. We called him Gabs, a name we overheard many parents dub him after an hour long delay in grocery shopping or taking the garbage out while he begged for "Just a moment or two of your time."

The adults, when they saw Gabs coming, would dash into their houses pretending not to be at home. But we never did. We liked Gabs. His stories thrilled us...so real they seemed. For hours we often sat listening to his delightfully horrid ghost stories, deriving great pleasure from the chills climbing up and falling down our spines.

Gabs was tall and fat with what we called a watermelon hanging over his belt buckle. His large mass of unruly white hair hung down around his face; and if not for his eyes, we might've been afraid upon first meeting him. He had laughing eyes. Even when his mouth stayed grim, his eyes crinkled up in a smile. When he was excited, it was almost as if someone lit a fire in them.

Gabs lent Dennis, my best friend, and me his fishing rod one time when we went up to Humboldt River which runs right by Golconda. We took turns using it and everything went fine until Dennis caught a turtle. I said the turtle was rightfully mine 'cause Dennis had taken his turn too long and had run into mine. Dennis said I should've stopped him. We got into a fight and accidently stepped on the rod and broke it. On the way home we made up a story to tell Gabs. We hoped he'd believe it.

"Gabs, you'll never guess what happened!" we yelled, coming down the hill waving our arms. "We caught a bass the size of a baseball bat almost. He was so big he broke your rod."

Gabs jumped up real excited-like and asked where the fish was.

"Well, he got away, but we still got your rod if you want it," we offered.

He kind of got this funny look in his eyes as he took the broken rod and headed in the direction of home. I thought maybe he knew we'd lied; but I figured no, otherwise he'd have told our parents or made us pay for a new rod.

Gabs lived alone, and the only visitors he ever had were the kids from around the block. On cold or rainy days we'd all gather in his shabby kitchen and tell jokes or just talk like man to man. We didn't think of Gabs as an adult or grown up. He was different. He never used big words that we couldn't understand or confuse us by saying one thing and doing another.

During the summer we divided into two teams to play baseball. But when we evenly divided, there were only eight players to a team. Gabs volunteered to be permanent pitcher for both teams. He had a great right curve that nobody could hit though we sure tried. My mom said it

was disgusting for a man his age to act like a child and Dad said he was trying to take away a son's respect for his father.

I didn't understand what they meant, so I asked Gabs. He said a lot of parents were so busy they just didn't have time to be with their kids as much as they'd like and that sometimes they got angry cause others had more time.

"Do they get angry at you, Gabs?" I asked.

"No," he replied, "they get angry at themselves. And that's worse."

Going to Gabs's after school became a habit. First we would all dash home to change into jeans and sneakers, grab a fistful of cookies, kiss our moms goodbye, and run the distance to Gabs's house. He was always waiting at the door with a smile.

"Just in time for a game of checkers," he'd shout as the last kid scurried through the door. Or sometimes it would be, "Got hungry and bought a whole gallon of ice cream, but I can't eat it by myself. Who wants some?" It was never, "Don't eat too much; you'll spoil your dinner."

When I went into the hospital to have my tonsils out, I asked Gabs if he'd come with. My parents didn't like the idea, but I insisted and got my way. Right before I was to be wheeled down, I started to cry. Dad told me I was a man, and men didn't cry. Mom said I was too big, and there was nothing to be afraid of. Gabs whispered in my ear, "Think of the adventure, Scott. You'll be able to dream in color because of the gas the pretty nurse will give you. You'll be the first guy on the block to ever dream in color. Make sure you get your money's worth and have them show you your tonsils before they plant them."

"They plant them?" I asked, forgetting to cry.

"Sure, I'll tell you all about it when you get back," Gabs said.

True to his word, when I came to, Gabs sat next to me and told me story after story helping me forget the ache in my throat. I was a hero among the kids on the block for a long time. Gabs and I were pals. So jealous were some of the guys over the time Gabs and I had spent together, they wanted their tonsils out too. Gabs just laughed.

We all loved to look around in Gabs's house. He had so many interesting things just lying around. His most prized possession, an American flag used during World War I, hung high on one wall in his living room. Lots of times he'd sit underneath it and tell us stories about the war. I decided there and then I was going to join the army so I could fight like Gabs and get my own flag.

Once when Gabs went to the kitchen to pop some corn, Dennis and I decided to smoke a couple of his cigars. They always smelled so good when Gabs lit them, we figured they must taste even better. Halfway through mine my stomach started rolling. I felt like I had a raging battle going on inside. Anyway, I barely made it to the bathroom on time. We didn't have to explain to Gabs. One whiff of the livingroom and he knew.



The same happened when I drank my first beer. I swore I'd never look at the stuff again. Gabs laughed and said it wouldn't be long before I could guzzle down a six pack without flinching. At any rate, he said the experience would do me good. Years later I could have a good laugh remembering my momentous first beer.

Sunday mornings in our house meant sleeping till noon. Gabs got up early, though, and went to Church. Every Sunday morning at eight o'clock we could hear his '59 Ford rattle down the drive. It surprised me that he went to Church and I asked him about it. He got a sad look on his face, and for the first time I saw the light go out of his eyes.

"When you're young, you think you don't need anybody least of all God. You've got a family, friends. You may not know it but the whole world is your friend. You're protected and sheltered. When you get old, though, and your family and friends are gone, you see how much you need somebody above you. Some men got the law; for others, their children are the authority. I couldn't see either one for me so I started talking to God. When you get old you realize all that wisdom with age stuff is a bunch of bunk, and it's kind of scary when all the people you thought were wise and knowing are dead or babbling like babies back in nursing homes."

It was Gabs who taught me how to shave without slicing my face into coleslaw. My father was out of town that week. When I showed him later what Gabs had taught me, he grunted and said that method went out with spats and bloomers. He bought me a brand new electric shaver and told me I was spending too much time with "that old man."

I turned sixteen; and with my driver's license came girls, dates, dances, loud music, and souped up cars. I spent less and less time with Gabs. Once when Dennis and I were working on an old car, we saw Gabs coming. Dennis moaned and suggested we dash into the house and pretend not to be at home.

"No, he's already seen us," I told him.

Gabs waved and Dennis stuck his head under the hood, mumbling. I nodded to Gabs but didn't say anything.

"Car trouble?" Gabs asked. Nobody answered so he went on. "You know, my Ford, she aint much to look at but she never did give me a minute's worth of trouble.

"We know Gabs. We've heard it all before," Dennis complained.

Gabs looked at me, but I busied myself putting a battery into a flashlight.

"Maybe I could give you a hand," Gabs offered. Dennis looked at me, making a show of gritting his teeth. I ignored him and told Gabs we were about through anyway.

"Well, how about stopping down at my place when you're through? I bought a whole gallon of chocolate ice cream, and you know I can't eat it all. I got some beer too in case you're thirsty. What do you say?" Gabs asked.

Dennis threw down his rag and called over his shoulder to me as he headed for his own car, "I'll see you. I've got some things to do around home. Want to come?"

I looked at Gabs. "We told his parents we'd paint the house. It's pretty important."

Gabs nodded and headed back down the hill. With his shoulders slumped and his head down he looked much older than I remembered. He walked slower too.

"Gabs!" I shouted, "I'll be down later. I promise." He waved to let me know he heard but kept walking never looking back.

When I came home from college my first year I noticed a sold sign out in front of Gabs' house. I asked my parents about it and they told me one day Gabs was out roller skating down the sidewalk; and since folks were afraid he'd fall and hurt himself, they called the police. The police located a daughter living in New York, and she came out and had him put in a nursing home outside of town.

I took a walk down the hill and stood in front of his old house with the peeling paint and unmowed grass. I never even knew Gabs had a daughter. My parents said it was for the best. Maybe they were right. It just seemed so strange. The wisest and most knowing man I knew now lived in a nursing home.

**Cheri Clouse**

## **Spindley Bare Branches**

spindley bare branches  
stretch towards the half-hidden sun  
erect skeleton

wind snatches crusty  
curls sets them gently adrift  
to tread seas of air

trembling colors on the ground  
in perpetual motion  
roll backward forward  
and spin in circles

sprinkled over the hard ground  
like crystalline grains of sand  
they accent the land  
and season the earth

**Jeanne Hansen**

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