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The Vehicle, Fall 1983

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V E H I C L E

FALL 1983

THE VEHICLE

Vol.25,No.1

Fall 1983

3	Devon Flesor	Amish Boy
3	J.Maura Davis	Syllogism
4	D.L. Lewis	Ten Seconds
4	Bridget M. Howe	The Cedar Chest
5	Steve Long	A Christmas With Carol
7	Michelle Mitchell	Teeth
8	D.L. Lewis	An I-Love-You Poem
8	Susan Grady	The Dragon Slayer
9	Amy J. Eades	A Definition
10	Suzanne Horn	Fingernails
10	Brook Wilson	The Liar's Table
12	Steve Long	Fifi's Last Party
13	Suzanne Horn	Absence/Presence
13	Amy J. Eades	From the Rantings of a Mad Astronomy Student
15	F. Link Rapier	In the Name of the Father, the Son, and Machiavelli
16	Becky Lawson	Errant Lover
16	Kevin Lyles	Daddy
17	Gary Ervin	Ghosts
17	F. Link Rapier	Tango
18	Becky Lawson	Grandma's Slippers
19	Amy J. Eades	Edges
20	Devon Flesor	Having Children
21	Kevin Lyles	Young Black Girl
22	Suzanne Horn	Cat
22	Michelle Mitchell	Breakfast for One
23	Brooke Sanford	A Modest Proposal
26	F. Link Rapier	Post Mortem
27	Lynne Krause	Who Said I Forgot?
28	Maggie Kennedy	The Corner Booth at Stuckeys
29	David Bryden	The First Day
30	Lynne Krause	Down
31	Devon Flesor	Fairie Ring
32	Kathy Ford	The Laundrymat
32	Bridget M. Howe	Sunday In October
33	Maggie Kennedy	The Kitchen Window
34	Christina Maire Vitek	Untitled
34	Michelle Mitchell	8th Grade Field Trip to Springfield
35	F. Link Rapier	Children of the Forties
35	Gary Ervin	one winter and i was eight
36	Thomas B. Waltrip	Don't we all know?
36	Maggie Kennedy	The Traveler
40	Kathy Ford	The Visit
40	Maggie Kennedy	Cubism

THE VEHICLE

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Amish Boy

Handsome young boy
holds six taut reigns.
Clydesdales in the field
proudly stomping the cool,
black dirt.

In a new, foreign car
I stop along the road
to watch him work
and the tow-headed boy
turns to see me.

He points to the car
with a smile, thumbs^aup
then turns back to the task,
the earth,
the horses.

And I slowly move dodging
the bumps, hearing the
sounds of a sharp word
and the snap
of a whip.

Devon Flesor

Syllogism

Birds legs like
 Sticks
are used to poke it
 Hard
to understand with a child's
 Mind
your grandma, now, wash your
 Hands
of darling angels will carry it to the
 Lord
Child, don't cry. Dying comes to all
 His creatures.

J. Maura Davis

Ten Seconds

Seventy miles per hour
the smoke filled Impalla
laughs.
Wha'd ya think of the Chem test?
... he sure knows how to throw a party...
Two cling together in the back seat.

Impala meets tree, face meets window.
Laughter stops.
Cigarette drops
to unfeeling lap.
Radiator hisses
secrets
to a silent night.
Twisted steering wheel
clings
to broken Segrams bottle
for dear life.

D.L. Lewis

The Cedar Chest

It preserves her childhood,
The scrawny, grinning
 kid
The big black velvet
 ribbon
That she never quite outgrew.

Patiently keeping her memories,
 Child-like relics,
For the adult who sometimes feels
 all too grown-up.

Bridget M. Howe

A Christmas With Carol

(A One-Act Play)

The SCENE is a complaint booth in a major department store in a big city. Christmas Eve. Black except for one spotlight on an Information Booth at CENTER STAGE. AT RISE, we hear a small desk bell ring.

Carol: (From outside the light) So, anyway, I just told her, I says — (bell rings again) Oh,uh, COMING! Listen — gotta' go, ok? I'll call back tomorrow. . . (ENTER CAROL from either stage left or right. SHE talks to a customer whom the audience does not see for the duration of the play.) Can I help you? Yes, if you want information, you've come to the right place. Say, you in a hurry? You. . . you look like you could use a rest. Doing a little last minute shopping? Look, why don't you come back and sit down and have a little lunch with me. Will I get in trouble? No — no, c'mon back! I'm not going to get in any trouble. It's allowed. I'm Carol. (pause) Just Carol. (she smiles) You know, I was just thinking about my sister. Yeah, I just got a Christmas card from her (SHE shows it to the "customer") Here, go ahead. It's one of those fifteen dollar a box jobbies. Pretty snazzy, huh? She lives in Texas. Sends me a box of goddamned grapefruit every year. I hate the things but she loves to send them so I guess I love to eat them. Been gone about ten Christmases now. . . my sister has. . . moved away with her husband, Sam — or "Sammy Can, the Piano Man" as he used to be known. Calls himself "the entertainer." (She laughs cynically) What a joke! Used to play an old spinet at the Holiday Inn in Kankakee durng "Happy Hour." Happy is one hour only, though. Then he'd go into the lounge and get bombed and get home to play with his electric race cars or his little army men for awhile. I'm serious! He sells insurance now. God, talk about obnoxious. . . Sammy is the king. He tells this story — about this time he went fishing. All the other old farts caught dozens but, old Sammy, he only got three little bitty ones. I told him, I says, "Sammy, I figure a guy like you, if he had a couple a small fish and a couple loaves — he could feed a whole crowd!" He's taking my sister on vacation for Christmas — to Arizona — the Grand Canyon, or as Sammy puts it, "That big hole." (Pause) Who me? Married? (She laughs) No. My husband — well — it's really kind of a long story. You see, I took quite a fall to end up in this "booth deal." Tom, my husband, was a writer. Yeah — was working on this book, see. For about fifteen years, as a matter of strict fact. Took a typewriter on our honeymoon — but that's a whole different story. Children? Do we have kids? Very funny. (Pause) Reminds me of thing I did last week. A woman was trying on a dress in the store. She comes over and says to me, she says, "Have you ever seen anyone look like this in a dress?" SHE thought she was absolutely gorgeous, know what I mean? "Have I seen anyone look like that in a dress," I says, "Not since Milton Berle went off the air!" (She laughs loudly) Was that a SCREAM!

No, finally two years ago he gets it done — in June. The book, I mean. Yeah, so I read it and told him — get this: “It sucks.” Can you imagine me saying a word like that?! HA! No — actually I said I didn’t like it. I guess I was just afraid that now that the book was finished, so was the marriage. Guess what? I was right. We got a divorce in September. Two days before our wedding anniversary. Hey — remember that: “For the girl who has everything. . . give her a DIVORCE!” (Pause) What? What did he call what? Oh — the BOOK. Oh, I don’t know what he called it. “Promoting Intimacy” I think. Some sort of stupid psychology book. I hear it’s doing shitty, though. Who says there’s no God, huh? (Pause)

So anyway, here I was — this overweight divorcee with a toothbrush, a house payment and an English degree. That and a quarter will get you a cup of coffee, right? So I sold the house, got an apartment and a Boston fern, and I got a JOB. . . writing copy for Sears and Roebuck catalog. Quite a change from being a housewife, believe me. Everything was in its own section. Sporting goods, shoes, summer wear. . . and if you can’t find it — look in the index. Who knew life could be that organized? (She laughs) Oh, it was hard at times, too. It wasn’t what I was used to. I hadn’t been in school in years and almost overnight I went from *The Odyssey* to overcoats to small, medium and extra-large. But I did alright for awhile. Really I did! But then they switched me over to writing furniture copy. Now apparel — that was no problem. Oh — there were some things I didn’t understand. Like, what’s the difference between maroon, plum, and cranberry? Hell, it’s all PURPLE to me! I tell you, there were days when I’d have given anything to go back to making major decisions like whether to make egg salad or tuna surprise. Those days are gone.

Furniture? Same problem. To me, furniture is furniture. It’s either French Provincial, Modern or Colonial, right? Of course, I’m right. It’s like I told my boss, Harvey. “Harvey,” I says, “what do I know about furniture? I lived in the same house with what’s-his-name for twenty years and I was STILL bumping into the end tables!” Some other lucrative career moves like that comment and I end up here talking to a complete stranger on Christmas Eve. (Pause. The suddenly:) Say, who the hell are you anyway? (She realizes what she’s said) What? Oh, I’m terribly sorry. I didn’t mean it. Really!

No — listen, don’t feel sorry for me. I’m alright. It’s not all that bad, really. . . giving directions and listening to complaints. People all have a gripe. Now, take my Mother? A born bitcher. Go to visit her — take her a perfectly good pan of jell-o. Leave out the fruit, she wants fruit. Stick a banana in there, it affects her colitis. Jesus!

And in here, you see, they keep moving the crazy merchandise around. Things keep on changing — changing floors, changing aisles, changing shelves, changing husbands. . . (Pause. Again she realizes what she’s just said) It’s all the same stuff —

just in different places. And thank God! People ever figure it all out, they write a book on it and they don’t need you anymore. Then, POOF!! Your whole life? Right down the toilet. Take it from old Carol. People are

awfully worried about the ability to choose. They always pick the same things year after year from those damned catalogs, but they still want. . . options. Spontaneity. Sure, I could easily be replaced by one of those maps — you know, the kind that says “YOU ARE HERE.” “You are here.” Wouldn’t that be great? To know exactly where you were in relation to everything else? You know, sometimes I got a feeling I’m in this long dark aisle just before the store is closing and I got this cart that has one of those funny wheels on it that makes it so it won’t go. What should I do? Abandon the cart or get locked in the store? How do you like those choices? (Pause)

Well, look — I’ve been taking up too much of your time, haven’t I? You better run. Oh, say! What did you want to know about — I mean when you first came up to me. Were you looking for something? The. . . bathroom? Are you serious? (she laughs) NO! I’m not laughing! It’s to your left. It’s right over there and to your. . . your left. Thanks for shopping with. . . with us. (She calls after him) Oh, and uh — Merry Christmas!

Steve Long

Teeth

In a building the color
of grade school restrooms
he takes out his teeth.

In the glass
the ivory bites through
the bubbles surfacing
like a diver.

He dreams in puckered sleep
of his fourth year,
of goldfish lipping
the clear sides of a bowl,
gills waving, scales stretching
over the darting organisms.

The quick splash of two,
startled by the boy
and his flashlight,
dipping in his fingers
to catch one,
grabbing up
the dank coral and pearl
of teeth.

Michelle Mitchell

An I-Love-You Poem

I want to write you an I-love-you poem,
but I-love-you poems are properly
filled with blooming passages and
violet-scented memories.
Mine can't be like that.

There is nothing proper
or structured in
my love
it's full of holes and imperfections,
torn from frustrations and conflict,
and it's not visible in pressed
Forget-me-nots lovingly placed
in a padded scrapbook,
but instead in snowballs
study hours and backgammon games.

D.L. Lewis

The Dragon Slayer

His mother told him to kill dragons,
But he found no weapons,
Instead he used his mind,
Which eventually took over his body.

He lost himself in 1970,
And never wrote home,
So he sings to his books,
And finds comfort in the dark.

It's Mother's Day
And he walks into a room of smoke,
Raising his shield,
To proclaim war.

Susan Grady

A Definition

Darkness.

What does it mean?

Maybe darkness to you
is the absence of light,
the opposite of day,
the herald of Night.

It greets you with outstretched arms
inviting you to sleep
when your work is through.
It is a comfort when you're weary,
like a warm, black blanket.

Soft,
safe.

I know Darkness.

I call it by name.

It is not warm,
but cold and still.

It comes even in the brightest sunshine,
the warmest day,
bringing shadows
That haunt me,
memories of dead dreams.

Like a blanket of another kind,
it wraps itself around me —
the icy embrace of a ghost.

It calls me down, not to sleep, but
Into cold aching fear,

Emptiness,
pain.

I know Darkness.

I know it well.

It is a mist of icy black despair,
my lonely frozen hell.

Amy J. Eades

Fingernails

Red tap shoes wiped off
plastic souls stripped of colour
wearing down their heels.

Suzanne Horn

The Liar's Table

A swirling fog of blue, acrid smoke billowed through the open doorway and embraced me as I entered the small cafe. The L&M Cafe, once a feed store and once a hotel, was owned by a frugal old couple whose chief ambitions and accomplishments were to while the hours away drinking bitter coffee and smoking cigarettes at a wobbly table in the corner of the building. From such a vantage point they could easily survey the entire premises and could hear the gentlest whisper or the faintest clanking of spoon against cup. They each gave me a broad, dentured smile as I waved to them and walked to a long coffee-stained table where nine or ten men sat arguing mildly as to whether Pete McClosky's Walder bitch had twelve or fourteen pups. The only point they agreed upon was the fact that only nine of the pups had lived. Without my asking, Betty, the divorced, middle-aged waitress, brought me a cup of coffee and dropped two creamers beside the cup.

"Here!" Dink Mattox hollered, throwing out a dollar bill. "Get that boy out of hock. It's my turn to pay the dues."

"Thanks, Dink."

"You bet," he replied, winking.

The table at which we sat was lovingly referred to as the "Liar's Table." It was at this infamous plateau that iniquitous and dubious tales were spun. Many an ordinary feat was inflated and magnified to the extent that any hope for belief was immediately and unmercifully squelched. For the most part, those auspicious characters who sat at the table were at least three decades my elder. They spoke of their youth — of days when the world was better and of nights when the senses were more alive. A table of history was laid before me; and I drank deeply the wormwood of the thirties, the wine of the forties, and the coffee of the eighties.

The primary reason I frequented this table was to associate with the coonhunters who congregated here every afternoon at four o'clock. Coonhunting, due to the exorbitant price for raccoon hides, had mushroomed into one of the most popular sports for those who enjoyed

a long, laborious jaunt on a cold winter's night. The members of the "Liar's Table," however, were those who, regardless of price or conditions, could be found every night roaming the creeks and river-bottoms of Clay County, searching for and chasing the ring-tailed mammal that released their adrenalin and challenged their minds. The prejudices of a coonhunter are strong; and to obtain the pelt of a raccoon by any means other than a dog would be scandalous, depraved, and almost unforgivable. This is completely understandable, for men often rank their sports right alongside of their wives and their favorite beer.

Like farming, coonhunting was a tradition — a legacy to be passed on from father to son. Perhaps it has something to do with breeding. Just as dogs inherit certain hunting instincts from their parents, so do people. Nevertheless, to be a registered member of the "Liar's Table" one had to have a long history of devoted hunters in his pedigree. This was no obstacle for me, for at least three of my uncles regularly attended the "Liar's Table Conventions"; and their yarns were reverently considered the most doubtful of all. The only impediment I found was my yearning for a college education. In some way or another, most rural people have a strong distrust of outsiders — and an even stronger distrust of those who wish to experience the outside. In one way they were proud of me, yet in another way they considered me a traitor to my heritage and to all that they had given me.

"Gonna be a teacher," one would say with disapproval under his breath.

I had proudly informed them that I was studying English.

"Yeah, I guess so. Somebody's got to do it," I remarked.

"Well, that's good. Saw your picture in the paper the other day," he continued.

I cringed. It didn't take much to get your picture in the local paper.

"Yeah. Well, it wasn't that big of a deal," I stated, starting to leave.

"Thanks again for the coffee, Dink."

"You bet," he repeated and winked again.

Outside I filled my lungs and nostrils with fresh air sweetened with the scent of dead leaves. My mouth tasted of coffee and my clothes smelled of smoke. Instinctively I looked towards the east and saw that there would be no moon tonight. It would be a good night for a hunt. Suddenly I felt the urge to go back into the cafe. I crawled into my car and drove away.

Brook Wilson

Fifi's Last Party

Our tulips were lovely,
So I was picking a bunch
When my fat, blue-haired neighbor
Said, "Do come for lunch!"

There women with poodles
And siamese cats,
And ladies with handbags,
Pearl earrings and hats
Sat sweetly discussing
Each soft, furry pet
While recording the name
Of a new, virile vet.

I began to get nauseous,
And started to leave
When the dear, little hostess
Took hold of my sleeve.
"Have you spoken to Fifi?"
She asked with a smile,
And pointed to pillows
Where he lounged in a pile.

And so I stepped over,
And quietly said,
"Fifi, you're ugly —
I wish you were dead.
When you go out walking,
Your nose in the air
With your fat, weird, old "Mommy"
And that sweater you wear,
That look on your snout
So pouting and bored
Makes me wish you could end up
'Neath the wheel of my Ford."

Two weeks later,
My dear neighbor died
“Survived by her poodle,”
I read, and I sighed.
I stopped by the funeral
And found, not a crowd —
But a sign that read:
“Sorry, NO DOGS ALLOWED.”

Steve Long

AbsencePresence

I squeeze rays of paint
onto a prism canvas
and brush it with sun.

Suzanne Horn

From the Rantings of a Mad Astronomy Student

Astronomy: the final frontier. I should have known better. But it seemed like a good idea at the time. I mean, after so much English and Humanities it's time for a change of pace. After all, I'm interested in finding out what really goes on up there just like anybody else. But I got more than I bargained for — nobody told me it would mess with my peace of mind. It did.

You see, it all started with the simple notion that I would be able to learn about stars and planets, take that knowledge in stride, and go about my merry way. What I didn't realize is that science just doesn't work that way. I have come to the conclusion that the purpose of science is to frustrate you to the brink of near madness so that you will begin to seek for yourself the answer to that age-old question: WHY?

Perhaps the reason that question is so old is that it's a very good question. I wish I had a dime for every time I've asked it in the last eight weeks. But somehow the answers don't quite satisfy me.

Not that I haven't learned anything. Considering what little I knew at the onset of this adventure, I've learned a great deal. It's my own inability to grasp what I've learned that frustrates me.

Take for example a light year. I am aware that a light year is the distance that light travels in one year. Now, that wasn't so painful. But then you have to realize that if a star is 30,000 light years away, the light you see from that star tonight is light that left there 30,000 years ago. I know that it's true, but I really don't think I comprehend it.

Then there's that tricky little thing called a supernova, probably the most violent thing that occurs in space. What basically happens here is a star explodes, throwing most of its former mass into space. This debris then collects to form new stars. So while the supernova is one of the most destructive events in nature, it is at the same time one of the most creative. What am I to think of a paradox like that?

I've learned of galaxies and nebulas, constellations and clusters, planets and satellites. I've heard of black holes, neutron stars, and comets. Red giants, blue giants, lunar eclipses, white dwarfs, solar eclipses, black dwarfs, mountains on the moon and spots on the sun. And the more I hear, the more I realize is left to hear. I just get a grip on one concept before another one comes along to further disturb my already befuddled brain. Where does it all end?

But you see, that's a question in itself. Space is infinite; or is it? I mean, how can anyone tell? OK, it's infinite as far as we know. I'll buy that. But how did it all happen?

Ah! beginnings. The day I heard that the universe actually had a beginning I was ready to throw in the towel. What? It wasn't always here? Well, "always" is a very long time, I guess.

Then there are the exceptions (every rule has one, you know). Neptune has a moon that goes backwards. Ridiculous. Jupiter has a giant red spot that's 300 years old. What is it? Uranus lies on its side. Why would it do a silly thing like that? There are, I am sure, reasonable explanations (or at least theories) for these happenings. I know I have heard them in class. But somehow it's all too much for me. No one has ever accused me of being science-minded. Even when I can grasp the mechanics of the situation, I'm left unsatisfied, uncomfortable, all alone with my "why's".

We also have the question of extraterrestrial life. In all this vast vacuum of space, to say that we are the only intelligent beings is, at best, arrogant. I'm sure it exists, I just wish somebody would hurry up and find it.

And what if, as Carl Sagan says, we are "children of the stars"? You must agree that he has a point. The materials that make up our very bodies are found in the stars, and the stars were obviously here first. Where else could our matter have come from? It certainly gives you food for thought.

I have just realized why all of this business makes me nervous. It's the unsettling idea that not only have we not always been here, but we will not always be here; and, in plain words, it won't make all that much difference. Whatever began it in the beginning will end it in the end, without our assistance, interference, or permission. We might do well to remember that sometimes. A little humility wouldn't hurt.

So what did I get in return for all my mental anguish? A handful of facts and a score of unanswered questions? No, I like to think I got more than that. There's the beauty of a dark sky filled with stars and knowing just enough to appreciate them more. There's the sense of wonder I experienced when I first understood why the sky is blue. And there was a dark and unfortunately cloudy night when, in between fighting mosquitoes and waiting my turn, I got my first glimpse of the heavens through a telescope. The colors of the stars, the majesty of Jupiter, and the incredible, awesome beauty of Saturn's rings.

And for one brief moment, when the clouds parted, I got a clear view of our closest celestial neighbor: the moon. The mountains and the craters — it seemed near enough to touch. Then to realize that we have touched it. We have walked on the moon. I must confess to a lump in my throat at that particular moment.

Suddenly it was no longer facts in a textbook, it was real. I was too excited to sleep that night. I remember feeling the inadequacy of words to describe such sights. I think I understand now why scientists are driven so hard. You can never explain it to anyone; you can't even discuss it intelligently. It's something you have to experience. And I'm glad I did.

Amy J. Eades

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and Machiavelli

Below the lid of silk, his body lies.
Unsure of what it masks, a rosary
Is held above His heart to show the guests
That though His body's cold, His heart's holy.
Acquaintances. They pass Him by, say much
Of who He was; a good word to and fro.
Some know what He really was and such,
But do not say for most there do not know.
In truth, He was not who they all had viewed;
She knew the man who'd twist her words around;
The feuds were no fault of his: hers alone.
Or guilty to have never donned her gown.
Imprisoned no longer, she rids herself of grief
Now dead; She hands Him Her dry handkerchief.

F. Link Rapier

Errant Lover

When you came to me
that cold winter night
I had already been warming
your bed.
You snuggled against my warm softness and,
like a child wrapped in the cocoon
of his mother's love,
you declared your love for me.
In the morning when you woke
you tossed me aside
and went about your morning tasks —
leaving me all alone, still warming your bed.
When you returned to me the next night
you were greeted with my fiery heat
and you learned your lesson once and for all.
Never again would you leave me
turned on and all alone in the morning.
No, you'd remember to take care of my needs
before you left again to go to work.
You'd remember to turn off your electric blanket.

Becky Lawson

Daddy

My old mans a great old man
Reading his paper, moving slow.

Doesn't say too much — not too loud
But yet, you always know.

I bigger than he, he always stronger than me
His years are long and wide.

Always smiling, laughing, helping
His pain always kept inside.

Kevin Lyles

Ghosts

In late October, railroad detectives
notice shadows, turn their heads.
The freight yards become haunted;
hobos climb into empty cars going south.

They stop at familiar meeting places,
abandoned factories, to ask about old friends:
always there are fewer than last year.
They die alone. Local police bury them.

If no one sees or hears from them
inside a year, they are guessed dead.
But no one is sure, no one sees the body.
Like ghosts they just disappear,
passing from one world into the next.

Gary Ervin

Tango

She did the
Dance of death;
A tango to
Save her life.
Up the corridor,
She struggled to free herself.
But her partner's embrace grew tighter;
She arched away, grimacing
As the lights went
Down.
Life whirled
Away as a
New partner
Took her
In His
Arms.

F. Link Rapier

Grandma's Slippers

A smile graced her still face
while all about her
people's souls were leaking sorrow.
She lay there in a peach fuzz nightie
tucked into a bed with luxurious satin sheets.
In her sleep I saw her laughing,
laughing because she was happy,
not to leave us, but to leave the pain
which had haunted her mind and racked her body.
Her eyes sparkled beneath closed lids
and I remembered her warm, enveloping love
which had brought such joy to my life, and yet,
I stood there crying being selfish to the end,
not wanting to let her go, to let her have her peace.
Then, I heard a whispered question from somewhere in the room.
"Mom, is she wearing the slippers?" the child voice asked.
"Yes, she is." came the solemn reply.
A picture entered my mind at that moment,
A picture of my Great Aunt Ruth in her beloved slippers
meeting — God — and asking Him if they went with her outfit.
The thought of those slippers carried me through the
painfilled days with a tiny bit of laughter tucked in my heart.
Somehow I knew that God had been looking out for her,
he had to if he had allowed a child's wish to be granted
and thus had helped make her death more bearable.
Grandma's slippers,
no better gift could have been given.

Becky Lawson

Edges

Standing on the edge
Again.
Afraid of moving forward,
terrified of turning back.

If only I could see
Past the edge
Through the mist
To the other side.
Any other side.

Something waits there
Calling me.
But I don't know what
 or how
 or why

I'm drawn forward
On to something
I can't understand.
Just one more step
and there's no turning back.
Is it the final step
to the realization
of a dream,
or only the first step
of a long walk
to another edge?

As I take this step,
There's no way of knowing
How far I'll drop.

But
if I knew
it wouldn't be

An edge.

Amy J. Eades

Having Children

If there were only such
a thing as a nanny
like Mary Poppins
who would work
for nothing more
than meals or movies,

Sure, then I'd have
your babies and
would love them
and you
so much when I got home
from work.

We'll dress them up
in crinoline and
have birthday parties
on weekends.

We'll give them
your name
your religion
and my intuitions.

We'll travel on luxury ships
to places unpronounceable
as a family,
yet, in our own
compartments to promote
that certain feeling of

Independence, but,lover,
you know that nannies
are extinct.
Polyester conquered crinoline.
And, the only compartments
are those, steel grey,

In this office where
No one's ever
heard of a pregnant,
junior, corporate lawyer.

Devon Flesor

Young Black Girl

Young Black girl
intentional fallacy, can it be?
you drive hard, run fast, fall deep
explored truly and covering your wounds
the battles just begun

You need attention, gifts and jewels
pretty flowers adorn your room,
your black paupers hungry tonight
the battles just begun

Take in a movie, the school dance
ain't buying no tickets, ain't ridin' no bus
the battles just begun

Hey, don't mention food,
Don't show black girl Micky Dees
got to be prime rib and chocolate mousse
(what she eats at home)
Can't be a cheap nigger,
or she's gone
make sure you have a ride,
and. . . plenty of gas
After all — black girl don't walk
That's what her mama used to do
The battles just begun

Black girl, in your man's corner? Hmm
Black girl in you own corner. You say. . . .
Black man still has to prove he is a warrior? and you're mad
leave him alone
He Is!!! was and will always be.
Rise up Black Girl
Rise up with a Black Man
The Battles Just Begun.

Kevin Lyles

Cat

Bathing in the sun
carefully, he doesn't expose
the zipper in his pajamas
there in the window
like a sundae
dripping with chocolate
he licks madly
at his driving gloves and toe socks
Finally, he collapses
still on the floor
dreaming,
of owning a porsche
or singing in a band
Warming his fur in the sun
his ears twitch
the stereo pounding below
He gets up with bags under his eyes
and saunters into the kitchen
to fry some fish
I draw some water to take a bath
listening to the pans rattling in the kitchen
and the grease popping and sizzling in the pan

Suzanne Horn

Breakfast for One

The sun in my egg
spreads on the plate
like the day spreads before me.

Rivers of warm
yellow rays lock
in the curve
waiting for the toast.

Coffee wisps, musk-rich,
fill the spaces of sausage,
bacon and juice — a likeness
of breakfast for one.

Michelle Mitchell

A Modest Proposal for Solving the Problem of Grade Inflation

Just as Johnathan Swift sought to aid his country with his "Modest Proposal" in 1729, I feel it is my duty to help EIU solve its most serious contemporary problem, grade inflation, by offering my own proposal.

The problem of grade inflation has reached serious proportions at EIU. A recent survey here reveals that 62% of EIU students believe they are graded too leniently, and statistics support their belief. All-University GPA's at EIU have risen from 2.45 in 1962 to 2.87 in 1983, while the average ACT score here has dropped from 26 to 20 during that same eleven-year period. In addition, a 1982 report by the Office of Academic Assessment reveals that grade inflation is not an isolated problem. This report claims that "in comparison with the national average, Eastern's grading practices are neither too strict nor too lenient." Because EIU's grading practices are obviously becoming more lenient, and because the national practice does not differ from Eastern's, we may assume that grade inflation is a national problem.

Students must be alarmed to find that their high GPA's will no longer ensure them the jobs which they desire and have worked toward; and faculty members must realize that, by inflating grades, they are not helping their students. Rather, they are giving students false confidence which is likely to be shattered when students enter the job market.

A statement by Hiram Firem, Personnel Director for Marathon Oil, suggests that businesses are aware that grades are being inflated. In a May 1983 interview, Firem said, "I used to rely heavily on grades when looking at an applicant's qualifications, but I have lately found them to be increasingly unreliable as indicators of performance potential."

To solve the problem of grade inflation on a national scale, I offer the following proposal. My suggestion not only alleviates the problem of grade inflation, but also decreases our national unemployment problem and increases our country's productivity and trading capacity.

I modestly propose that higher education be placed entirely in the hands of U.S. business, industry and government. Because so many of today's businesses operate their own training schools for new employees, it only seems logical that we should allow businesses to begin training potential employees at a younger age. They will be able to train people to their company's specifications instead of spending large amounts of money to retrain students who have finished university programs.

Let me first explain how our present university personnel will be dispersed. Liberal Arts professors will be sent to under-developed countries to write and to teach basic thinking skills to primitive and culturally

disadvantaged people. It will be necessary for these former professors to study the languages of these people so that we may later send Business professors to these countries to develop the country's economic capacities. Business and computer teachers, for the present, will remain in this country researching business techniques which will later be used in these newly-developed countries. Education professors will work with today's businesspeople on finding efficient methods of training and teaching those post-high-school students who will move into the business world's new training programs. Recreation professors and coaches will be in great demand because businesses (instead of colleges) will now have their own sports teams. The new, highly competitive teams will increase morale within individual companies and will also increase competition between companies. This, of course, will stimulate company loyalty and, therefore, production. All of our professors will then be industriously employed by working to better our country's businesses.

College administrators will be drenched in cement and posted in front of the universities (which will later become business training schools) as reminders that we are growing from a band of weakly educated pygmies into the world's industrial giant.

High school students will now take the Career Quotient Examination (CQE) instead of the ACT or SAT. Administered by the new U.S. Central Testing Board, this exam will determine what career a high school graduate will have. It will also determine which area of the national business scheme can best use that student's talents. (Today's college students will also have to take this test the first time it is administered so that they can be accurately placed in their new niches.) The students who score in the top 30% after taking the CQE will be auctioned off to the Fortune 500 companies. (I will explain later how they will be trained at the remodelled university sites.) The next 20% will be placed in retail sales, the next 10% in fast food, the next 10% at the candy counter at Walgreens, the next 10% in Mom-and-Pop stores, and the final 10% will become athletes for the new company teams. I have allowed for the possibility that approximately 10% of those tested will not be qualified for any of the above-mentioned jobs. These people will become laborers and will be put to work getting our now-vacant factories back into working order. For, when the professors succeed in educating and developing the new countries they are in, we will need to increase our pace of production so that we can trade heavily with these newly developed countries. The opening of vacant factories will alleviate the present problem of unemployment by creating factory jobs for everyone who is currently laid off.

Empty colleges and universities will be turned in Business Training Schools — one for each Fortune 500 company. By using the empty universities as training sites, food and civil service workers who presently work for colleges can retain their positions. Leftover empty colleges will be used as training camps for business-owned athletic teams, as government subsidized housing for our cities' underprivileged people, and as

new prisons. (I understand that we are in need of new prisons even now.)

The new Business Training Schools will be used to educate, brilliantly and efficiently, those who score in the top 30% on the CQE. Businesses will bid on these youths, and the chosen youths will then have the opportunity to train with our nation's biggest companies. For the next four years, companies will work to prepare the minds of these people for their specific niches in the world of business and industry. The trainees will have their food, clothing, room and everything else paid for by their company; but they will receive no salary until they have successfully completed the training program. Trainees will wear arm bands for identification — bands such as IBM #60472 and XEROX #H58 will enable companies to identify trainees quickly and to keep information on them in the company computers.

Trainees will enjoy attending the required Saturday sports events at company playing fields and cheering for their company's team. Complete loyalty to one's company is essential as it increases company spirit and, therefore, increases productivity. In addition, trainees will not be allowed to date or to marry during their training periods. After they have completed the four-year training program, they will be allowed to date and marry only within the company. Interbusiness marriages might cause conflicts of interest for employees and might endanger company loyalty.

When trainees have successfully completed their company's four-year plan, it will be their honor to parade across the main conference room, shake the hands of their new bosses and company presidents, and receive thin white pieces of paper — their first paychecks.

Thus, I have accounted for the industrious employment of all high school graduates, those presently connected with colleges and universities, and our nation's unemployed people.

I believe that in offering this proposal, I have successfully fulfilled my duty as an EIU student and as an American — to help solve contemporary problems at EIU and in America. My suggested solution eliminates grade inflation — indeed, eliminates the need for grades! — our present unemployment problem, ensures jobs for all young people, and stimulates our nation's economy.

I cannot imagine that anyone will find fault with this proposal unless they claim that people will no longer be educated in such areas as philosophy and literature. True, but there is no need for this type of education in a society which is business oriented and productivity minded. If my proposal is adopted, we will hear no more sad stories about Ph.D.'s working as janitors and about other people who have been educated beyond available openings in the job market. We all know that people are more content when they are working in capacities equal to their education levels, and the adoption of this proposal will make this possible for everyone. People's minds will no longer be bogged with lofty thoughts of existentialism or depressing philosophies such as those of Camus. Their minds will be perfectly tuned to their very own place in the business world.

I have heard other ideas raised as suggested solutions to the problem of grade inflation, but I find none of them as comprehensive or as beneficial to our nation as a whole as my proposal. Bell curves are unfair, for there is no way to be sure that a university class of 30 students will not have 20 "A" students in it — or 20 "D" students for that matter. Computerized grading systems have not yet been perfected to where they can accurately grade essay examinations, and essay tests are an integral part of higher education as it exists today. Additionally, there is no way to make sure that all university professors across the nation will adhere to any new grading system that is instituted in the hope of eliminating grade inflation. Professors' philosophies of education and methods of teaching are so diverse that we may never expect them to agree unanimously on any proposed solution that forces them to change their methods of teaching or their standards for grading. This is why we need a much broader solution — one which leaves no room for the errors made by human nature such as concern for specific students and grades based on effort and improvement. We need a solution which will not only benefit university students and professors, but which will also aid our country as a whole. To this end, I have humbly offered my "modest proposal."

Brooke Sanford

Post Mortem

My father came home with the news.
His words pierced the air.
My sisters hugged him.
My brothers hugged each other.

Shrouded, I found my way to
The living room.
I sat in her spot on the couch

Near the fragrance of her ashtray.
I ran my fingers along the white ring that
Her wet Pepsi glass had etched into the end table.
I wonder why the pop from her glass tasted best?

F. Link Rapier

Who Said I Forgot?

Who said she's not remembered?
Just because she lies
in a cold unmarked grave
somewhere in New York —
who says she's forgotten?

With bitterness, I remember
that frightful night.
The wind howled and
the snow was cold.
I can remember sitting outside
while they were watching her die inside.

I was sure she could hear
what my mama said, "We love you,"
even though she looked
quiet and dead.
In her room the Christmas lights blinked.

Wasn't it just yesterday when we decorated
the house and tree?
She sat back in her chair
and smiled at me.
That year, I got my braces
and a funeral for Christmas.

She died that night —
two-thirty a.m. —
and a major part of me went too,
never to return.
While the relatives fought
and argued over what she'd left,
a little girl, me,
sat in silence and cried.

Though the years have passed
and I've long since grown —
the memories of that last Christmas
stay with me.

They are my own.
And, my eyes blur and the tears
still fall,
when I remember her every Christmas Eve.

Lynne Krause

The Corner Booth at Stuckeys

Fascinated,
the freckled girl
holds prisoner
the liquid
within her straw.
Like a magician
defying gravity
she practices
again and again
to an audience
of pepper shakers
and napkin holders.
For the final act,
she waves her straw,
and chants
the magic words —
her orange drink
bubbling and fizzing.
Then clamping her finger
hard
onto the straw,
she screams, “Presto,”
closes her eyes
and lets go. . .
as the ketchup bottles
overflow with excitement.

Maggie Kennedy

The First Day

The move from the east seemed endless.
Weeks of preparing, packing and planning
Along with eating what's left in the freezer.
I was only six, no, six and a half
And heading into the first grade after
A rebellious year in kindergarten.
But now, I didn't know what to expect.
A new town, a new state even, a new school,
Which surely was on the other side of the globe.
I was scared. Did they even have children here?
Mom assured me they did and that I'd have
Many new friends before I knew it.
But what would they be like? Would they like me?
Or would they make fun of me? What will I
Ever do if I'm not accepted? All
Very real, yet very terrifying questions.
I had no answers. Certainly this had
To be the worst thing for anyone to endure.
I survived the move, but what of kids my age?
Our new house was in the country
So new friends would have to wait 'til school.
I became more and more apprehensive
As that fatal first day approached.
Finally, it arrived.
Mom woke me up with plenty of time
So I wouldn't be late. I couldn't stall,
And I realized the night before that the
Old "I'm not feeling well" scheme wouldn't work.
Mom finished packing an infamous brown bag lunch.
The drive to school was much too short
As I sat without talking at all.
We pulled up, and after telling me that
She loved me, mom gave me a reassuring
Hug and kiss. I climbed out of the car and
Stood there for a moment, or was it a year?
I watched as other children ran about
The playground. In one area a small
Group of boys played kickball — my favorite.
I walked slowly toward them, but then
Two boys from the group came up to me.
They looked me over, stood there a moment,
And then one asked if I would play on his team.
From then on I knew I might just make it.

This was all fourteen years ago but seemed
Fourteen days when just the other morning
I was walking by a schoolyard, and
I saw a small boy fumble his way out
Of a car and walk slowly toward a
Playground full of kids. It made me wonder. . .

David Bryden

Down

The winds came today
and blew my breath
of spring away.

And the rain poured
helping to disguise the tears
and the thunder roared.

The rain turned to hail
and beat me to the ground.
I never knew I was so frail.

The rainbow came out with the sun.
And, I hunted for the promised
pot-of-gold;
but, there wasn't one.

I shook my fists into the air
and the people walking by
didn't seem to care.

I went home
to a dark, cold house
and sat alone —
and no one even called
to talk to me on the phone

Lynne Krause

Fairie Ring

In green cotton pajamas
I followed my
mother into the tiger-lily garden.

Fragrant, summer's night breezes
whispering puff puff pixie girl
wiggling those skinny brown toes.

A clearing of wet grass
a magic circle of light shining,
spying me, beckoning.

Step into our ring of fun
little one, make a wish
pinch the freckles off your cheeks

Put them in a dish.
Run tee toe fitter fa fee
dance with mama, dance with me

Hee titter hee dee
Come and dance. I danced
making a wish to stay

With the strong ones wise
enough to know flowers
lend power to jump

To the moon, yes the moon,
Father of us all, and I
a magic lily.

Devon Flessor

The Laundrymat

We come —
Pilgrims to the shrine,
Offering our coins
To the gods.
Rainbows burst in dirty water.
Incense makes us sneeze.
Haggard women with
Wailing children
Look old at 25.
Multi-colored acrobats
Tumble round & round —
The whole circus for a quarter.
We wait —
Sipping luke-warm syrup
'Till our vigil is done
And we emerge
Absolved by holy water
And sweat.

Kathy Ford

Sunday In October

The chill of Autumn rain
is deep
Winter's cold is brisk,
sharp
The pain of an indrawn breath.

But the chill,
of Autumn rain
extends damp fingers
into your blood and
stirs the warmth from it.

Bridget M. Howe

The Kitchen Window

Steam rising
from the hot tap,
the water
pours over
the woman's hands
into the soap-filled sink.

She watches
from her paint-chipped window,
the small world
of backyard and alley,
as she washes,
then wipes.

The windowsill
cluttered with
clay pots and ashtrays,
a cracked vase filled
with dried flowers
and a tiny, gold bird.

She can see
Mr. Madigan today
pulling weeds
from his turnips,
and the neighbor kids
swinging from the willow tree.

As she pauses,
a coffee cup in hand,
the sun finds its way
from beneath the grey-filled sky
to fill her window with light,
turning her grey hair silver.

Maggie Kennedy

She lay in the perfect folds of his body as if molded in design.
The sun was being swallowed into the horizon.
In the peaceful coming of the dusk, the moon and her stars began
to color the sky.
They drift in and out of one another as one, as two.

And the sun hid from the rain that fell from the sky,
without warning.
A fresh new rain sprinkling the rich brown earth and quenching
the thirst.

Christina Marie Vitek

8th Grade Field Trip to Springfield

Someone steps on someone's
peanut-butter sandwich
on the bus where mothers
tear their hair and kids
sit kneeing the seats in
front of them, folding
paper into little machines,
finger-triggered, flapping
at random, telling the names
of who they'd marry and
hope it's not that guy who
eats everyone's refried beans
at lunch at the park,
discovering that someone left
his sweater at the House and Senate
where they bought, in the gift shop,
what they clutch all the way home —
20 wax busts of President Lincoln.

Michelle Mitchell

Children of the Forties

They bashed it out
In the jungles and sand.
They slammed their way
Through life.
The truths they sought,
Clear not blurred.
The tears they cried were
Never filtered for
Bits of falsehood;
They just settled on their cheeks.
The words they sang were
Naive, but
True to the hearts
On their sleeves.

F. Link Rapier

one winter and i was eight

one winter my family went to carsons lake
dad said nature would be good for boys
owls in snowy pines
ice fishing and skating
just like dads travel book said

the skies at the lake we saw were grey
not blue but it snowed a lot
dad said he liked the weather
and mom wanted us to leave early
it didnt look like the pictures in dads book

thursday my older brother learned
the lake was not like the pictures in dads book
the sound of his skates scratching ice stopped
into air hissing through chunks of ice like a soda
we never saw no pictures of broken ice

Gary Ervin

Don't we all know?

Don't we all know
which way those grand
thoughts passed the ones
that seemed so mystical
sudden and drastic that we
forgot to write them down?
Under the bridge of former
lives so complex that they
are all within this one;
contained, compact, and heavy.
My friend was beautiful
and young when he died:
the tragic stream so narrow
and polluted, sad in its
own solemn way, that stream
the one and only, we can see
occasionally from our bridge.

Thomas B. Waltrip

The Traveler

"I'm the assistant manager," George Corry said, clearing his throat. "Is there something I could help you with ma'am?"

"What? . . . What?" The woman stopped her yelling for a moment to size up George. He stood only a few inches taller than she and his hair, cropped short, was beginning to grey around the temples. His blue eyes were the only distinguishable features in his rather nondescript face, and even they seemed tired.

"Oh, it's you. This young twit here refuses to sell me my chocolate bar," she said, pointing to the cashier with her cane. "I've been buying my Hershey bars at this store now for the past. . ."

"Now ma'am," interrupted the cashier. "You know that you're getting up in years. Sugar's not good for you and I don't want to see you keel over just cause I sold you a candy bar!"

"Well, I never," the woman said, breathing heavy. "You have some nerve young lady. This is the last time I bring my business here and don't be surprised if your manager hears about this," she added, turning to George. With that she hurried out of the store, her steps heavy in her orthopedic shoes.

Shaking his head, George turned to the cashier. She was staring absently past George into the home repairs and hardware aisle, chewing a wad of gum and playing with her hooped earring. Her streaked hair was pulled back into a ponytail; and freckles, splattered all over her face, formed an L shape on her pug nose. Totally unaffected by the scene, she hummed a song under her breath.

"Why did you do that Kim?"

"It was for her own good Mr. Corry. I wouldn't of done it, but I've got this old aunt, my Aunt Agnes, who is just like her. She doesn't know what's good for her. Why if it was up to her she'd eat hot fudge sundaes and hotdogs for breakfast every day and then. . ."

"Alright, alright, forget it," he said, throwing up his arms. He turned into the newspaper and magazine aisle. "She hasn't even been working a week and all she's been is trouble," he thought.

A copy of "World Travel", resting on a shelf, caught his eye and he was becoming absorbed in an article on French cuisine when the store manager came up from behind.

"George! I thought I asked you to set up that pantyhose endstand!"

"I'm sorry Mr. Barker," George said, stretching to his full height. "I'll get right on it."

"Well, see you do. I'm leaving now so it's up to you to look after the store until after the holiday. It shouldn't be busy tomorrow so maybe you could get started on the inventory."

"Yes sir."

"Oh, and by the way George, try to have a nice Thanksgiving," Mr. Barker said genuinely as he turned to leave, his balding head bobbing down the aisle.

The last of the customers had left and the sounds of rush hour traffic came from outside the doors. Kim sat in the office counting dimes from her register drawer into stacks of ten when, making sure no one was watching, she opened her purse and quickly dropped in a roll.

"Where did you move the Lucky Strikes, Kim?" George asked from behind the front counter, his eyes scanning the rows of cigarettes.

"I rearranged 'em all," she replied. "I put them in order of their tar and nicotine count. Lucky Strikes are at the bottom where they belong. You really should switch brands, Mr. Corry, or quit altogether. My Uncle Fred just quit, at 87 no less, so that just proves you're never too old to change."

Finding his brand, George placed 80 cents on the register and turned toward the office. He could see Kim sitting at the adding machine. She was getting better at counting out her drawer, he thought. That first night it had taken her almost an hour.

"I'm making Thanksgiving dinner tomorrow for my boyfriend Heffley and me," Kim announced to George as he stepped in the office. "I'm not so sure I want to anymore though since he's been coming on kinda strong lately, if you know what I mean. What are you doing tomorrow? For the holiday, I mean."

"I have to work," George replied, searching through the filing cabinet.

"Work! On Thanksgiving! Why that's unAmerican. . . besides it's just not right, she said, falling silent.

George's digital watch showed 5 o'clock the next day as he pulled his keys out of his pants pocket and began the routine of shutting down the store. He checked to see that no customers were hiding behind the endstands before locking the doors and then walked up and down the aisles facing items and putting them in their proper places. It being a holiday, he could leave the register banks until tomorrow.

In the office he loosened his tie and unpinned his nametag, carefully shining it with his handkerchief before placing it in the desk drawer next to his calculator.

"Happy Thanksgiving, George," he said aloud, pulling out his lunchbag with a dinner of eggrolls inside.

As he sat down, he heard a banging on the store doors. "We're closed! Leave me alone," he thought. The banging continued until George went to see what it was.

Kim stood in the doorway holding a papersack stuffed to overflowing — a loaf of french bread sticking out the top. A large grin stretched across her face and her eyes were shining. She wore only a frayed cardigan for warmth and on her head sat an old hat with a peacock feather sticking out the top. She was almost beautiful, George thought, as he unlocked the door.

Later, George pushed away his plate, and patted his bulging belly. "That was delicious. I've never had spaghetti and meatballs for Thanksgiving dinner."

"Well, my boyfriend Heffley doesn't like turkey, only spaghetti. When he couldn't make it to dinner, I thought of you having to work all day and I brought it over. . . Happy Thanksgiving, Mr. Corry."

George, not knowing what to say, stared at the dustball growing under his desk and began fiddling with his tie clip. Minutes passed, the silence growing uncomfortable.

"Well, I better get going," Kim said as she started shoving the leftovers into the papersack.

"No!" George said, pushing back his chair. "I mean. . . don't go yet. . . we still have to make a toast." Running out of the office, his heels clicking down the aisle, he was back in a few minutes carrying a bottle of Andre champagne — saved for a special occasion, he said.

"Thanks Kim," he said, raising his paper cup.

Blushing, Kim's eyes rested on a copy of "World Travel" laying open on George's desk. Sheep were grazing peacefully on a French countryside.

"Do you travel?" she asked, catching George off guard.

"What? Oh no. . . well, I did take a week off last summer to visit my cousin who has a farm in Indiana, but I wouldn't exactly call that

traveling. . . I want to though one of these days. . . I've always wanted to go to France."

"Really, that's great!" Kim said.

"Do you really think so?" George asked, his eyes lighting up. "I bought one of those French language records and I've checked out all these books from the library on French culture!"

You'd probably fit right in," Kim said, resting her hand on his arm.

He looked down at her hot pink nails resting against his white skin. "Thanks," he said, almost smiling.

George walked through the store doors a few days later, whistling. A travel catalog stuck out of the pocket of his black overcoat.

He greeted the bent figure behind the register, but when she stood up he saw it wasn't Kim at all, but a much older woman.

"I fired her," Mr. Barker replied, leafing through the accounting books, the adding machine purring. George stared at the bald spot on his boss's head.

"But why?" he demanded.

"I caught her stealing from the register. Can you believe it? She wrote up phony refunds and took the money for them. I tell you these kids. . . she didn't even last a week.

George stood for a moment, silent, then stepped over to his desk. Taking the travel catalog out of his pocket, he glanced for a moment at the old man on the cover driving his bicycle down a French road and then he dropped the catalog into the wastebasket on top of the forgotten champagne bottle. Then, grabbing a price gun off the top of the filing cabinet, he walked to the back of the store and began pricing cough syrup — \$2.59 a bottle.

Maggie Kennedy

The Visit

Wait
Don't go yet.
Why don't they stay longer?
They're shaking.
I remember
I'm not asleep.
They're gone.
My hands,
Spring.
Thomas proposed to me in the spring.
What did she say, that lady
In the white dress?
They speak so softly here.
My glasses — I can't find my glasses.
I can't find the children without my glasses.
The leaves remind me of Thomas.
Where is he?
Oh, I remember
Gone.
Don't treat me like a child young lady —
So patronizing.
INDEED!!
Why can't I go home?
Thomas is waiting for his supper and
I must find the children.

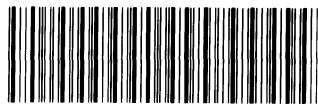
Kathy Ford

Cubism

Seeing
through Picasso's eyes,
Columbus fell off the edge.

Maggie Kennedy

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