

manuscripts

To the man with an ear for verbal delicacies —
the man who searches painfully for the perfect word,
and puts the way of saying a thing above the thing said—
there is in writing the constant joy of sudden
discovery, of happy accident.

— Henry Louis Mencken
A Book of Prefaces, 1917



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The *Manuscripts* editors and staff dedicate this issue to Patricia K. Meszaros, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Admiring the courage with which she has faced her recent setback, we wish her a quick recovery and encourage her to keep dreaming of the seacoast of Bohemia.

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If Green Is Alive

Linda Leroy

Tell me turtle man

so small and crippled.

Age is seen on your face in a wrinkled message.

If green is alive, then are you dead?

Like the epitaphs you are decaying.

Who knows when you were brought into this world?

I can't read the date of your departure.

Tell me, is the air that keeps you alive

worth breathing? Or shall I climb the mountain
to meet the bearded man you speak of?

Or stay and complain like the willow does?

Tell me turtle man

so small and crippled,

You say you are not afraid to meet earth,

Should I also cover myself with dirt?

I don't believe a great power exists.

Where is all His Love? I have not seen it.

Tell me turtle man why you smile and weep?

"You are dead my son

down in the ground d

e

e

p."

The Singing Wood

Betty Garrigus

The golden wood holds silence in a case of fragile beauty. The curving body joins the straight stretching fingerboard whose arching neck winds forward to a shell's scroll of gentle curl. Four strings, tracing the length of body and fingerboard, are held and guided to the tuning pegs by a slender bridge above the undulating wood. Their tensile force pulls across the polished wood with the sharp strength of pencil lines on paper.

The wood's luminous finish changes the rich color like cloud filtered sunlight on water. A ray turning now the dark wood to reflective silken shimmer.

How can the straight strength of trees become this soft shape of elliptical lines? Trees birthed by screeching saws to pale naked planks whose splinters pierce and hurt. Do they live within this form where each deflecting curve is pleasure?

Delighting in its form, my fingers trace the satin finish, surprised to find the fragileness a solid thing. The tree still there inside. Each level spot a resting place balancing the miracle of round flowing wood. The golden form holding an inner space in which is born the resonance of singing sound-silent now within the waiting wood.

Burning

Sarah Hill

The sound was dim at first, a hum in sleep
like hundreds of mosquitoes tuning wings
but it was voices on the street.

Today

they're burning that abandoned house, the one
behind the mill — the mill is shut up too
but it's the landmark of the town — it took
them only half a day to do, the doors
were almost off, but how they rose and warped
before they burst to ash, the windows sprang
from sills — no one had tried to save the glass —
and when the ceiling dropped (a silent dis-
appearing into rush of flame) the voice
of every watcher leaped, the reddened face
of every child turned dark — they threw their sticks
upon the fading fire and cried to see
the house collapse again—

the voices climbed

up to the window where I'd stood, unmoved,
since I rose to their call (I wake so late).

Mr. Fear Catches Up

Lisa A. Bucki

Her high heels clicked, striking pavement
steady beating, rapping.

Blond hair twisted down her slim back
like lithe lovers grappling.

Building faces receding from
heavy, darkling gloom
sculpting in them wrinkles deep as
those that signal man's doom.

Between the orbs of street light glow
darkened fingers pressing,
tickling ankles, pulling blond braid,
her pale face caressing.

Rapping faster, passing buildings,
alleys, empty faces.
Footsteps ringing in the night's calm
faster, faster paces.

Rap-thud, rap-thud, faster, closer
her eyes bulge out, rims white —
Now two sets of rapid paces
ring out in still of night!

She turns her head, braid snaps an arc,
empty street behind.
Her legs stretch out, rapping, running
black glass blurs past eyes blind.

She passes from the lamps' dim light,
fingers dark surround her.
They started searching the next day, and
No — they never found her.

Maybe, Tomorrow

Debbie Edwards

Hope is dangerous; it is a delusion. And "maybe" is for liars, I think as I listen for a break in the silence on the other end of the receiver. Laura is crying. She got halfway through "malignant" when her voice cracked. And now I wait, temples pulsing and fingers growing numb with apprehension, for her to finish her sentence. Then, it will be my turn to speak, to console. But not with hope. Hope is a mirage of optimism which crushes those who are naive enough to let themselves be comforted by its ambiguous promises. She is my best friend, and she is weak now. I must be strong. I must protect her, keep her from falling into the trap.

I press my lips together and hold them tight. By the time she finishes, I can taste the salt of my own tears as they seep through the cracks and dissolve on the tip of my tongue.

I give her comfort, the only kind I can give. I tell her I'm sorry about her mother. I remind her that there are more tests which will show the spread of the disease. I tell her not to be afraid of what she doesn't know and that she must wait, hold her fear, until we get all of the facts.

And still she wants more. She wants me to paint a dream for her, to comfort her with false security. She wants me to tell her that everything will be okay. But I won't do it; it's not true. We are both biology majors; we both know the odds of surviving intestinal cancer; and we both know the side effects of its treatment. No, everything will **not** be okay, and I will not lie to Laura.

I grab a flowered, paper napkin from its flimsy, plastic holder and wipe the tears from the mouthpiece. I breathe deep and let the air out slowly before placing the phone back in its cradle. I will stay with her tonight.

But, then, I will stay with Laura always.

"Best friends 'till the end," we had chanted when we were younger, hand in hand, jumping the giant asphalt squares of the sidewalk along Berwick Street. Some days the mercury would dip well below zero, but I never felt the chill.

Together, we were impenetrable. She always said that as long as she had me beside her, she could make it through anything. She never realized — never found out — that she was the strength behind our

union. And, even now, I hide my weakness well. She calls me for consolation. I am her touchstone.

But I am made of clay.

I arrive around 8 p.m., turning on lights as I pass through the rooms. Laura doesn't seem to notice how dark it is and smiles at me apologetically. The apartment is small, but "plenty big," Laura's mom had said, "for two girls." They moved in only two years ago, after her father had died, and yet it is already hard for me to remember them any place but here. They made it into a comfortable home, full of lightly-stained wood, plants, and needlework. It always seems quiet, a peaceful tranquility reflecting the harmony of the two women who share its space. I visit often.

Laura heats a frozen pizza, and I try to keep the conversation light. She tries hard to participate, but most of her replies are slow nods from a head with red, puffy eyes and a mind filled with worry.

After dinner, we fold laundry and watch Wimbledon highlights on the late-night news. I prompt Laura to give me some tips to improve my game, and we even laugh once. But with the darkness of early morning comes fatigue. We have worn out all defensive chatter, and we begin to talk about Laura's mom. I repeat what I said earlier. I explain that all you can do, in any situation, is to wait. You prepare yourself for several outcomes, and when all the facts are known, you make decisions and follow your course of action. The facts will help you plan your future, and you just have to wait and see what they are. There is no virtue in speculation.

She agrees with me, but tears spill, and I see the pleading in her eyes. She is begging me to create an illusion, to build her a fantasy. But fantasies are easily destroyed. I hold fast. I will cry with her; I will cry for her. I will hold her and share with her my strength. But I will not promise her happiness. I will not lie to Laura.

Weeks pass, and I become Laura's fortress - at her side through hospital visits and sleepless nights. I protect her from the well-wishers who attempt to soothe her with false statements. They mean well, but they don't know her like I do. She doesn't need empty comfort - she needs truth. Her mother is much worse, and Laura grows more pale with each day. I won't let them set her up for devastation. I constantly remind her of the facts.

I won't let them trick her like he tricked me. Holding me close against his work shirt and stubby cheeks, he whispered that she

would come back. That I had to wait, be a strong little girl, don't cry.

I made plans for my mother's return. I even made a list once.

They would not let me visit her in the round, white building on the hill. But I sent her letters, made of colored construction paper, crayon, and Elmer's glue. On good days she would write back, a wide and irregular scrawl on yellow paper.

I kept every one of those letters. Everybody said I was brave. For 15 years I was brave.

Until, inside the walls of the round, white building, I looked into her frightened and confused eyes. I bent down to hold her, and she shrank from my trembling hands.

"You forgot to bring me my medication this morning."

She stared at me, eyes full of accusation.

And I had run, from the rejection, from the pain, but mostly from the deceit. I had cried on Laura's firm shoulder, as she held me, filling me with her strength.

In time, I became impenetrable once again, a mirror reflecting the stability of my one and only means of support.

And, still, Laura believes that I am the brave one.

And even when Laura tells me of her mother's death, standing in front of me - half hysterical - quaking with each word, I am strong for her. Her shrieks pierce the solitude of the apartment. She falls to her hands and knees, head hung low, telling me that she is alone, and afraid. Her fingers bury into the thick, shag carpeting and hold tightly to the strands. She says she is unsure of whether she can go on with her life . . . I sit with her, using one of my hands to cover hers and the other to rub her back. I hold her for hours, rocking her gently. I remind her that there are relatives to be notified and funeral plans to be made.

The rain falls in a heavy mist as Laura and I, in silence, walk the grounds to her mother's burial site. The sky is overcast, and the trees and grass below share a somber shade of dark gray. The flowers on the casket aren't enough to brighten the setting, and the cold dampness of the spring shower finds its way deep into the heart of us all. I reach down to grasp Laura's lifeless hand, placing it between my own. But she remains silent. She stares at her toes through the entire service and through the condolences which follow. I help her when I can.

And, after an hour or two, we are the only two left at the grave site. We have made it - I am proud. I have shielded Laura from the deception of hope. There are no crushed dreams to lament or whis-

pered promises to regret. She is strong, like me. I want to look into her eyes. I want to see, through her tears, the gratitude she feels for my protection. But her head is turned away. I realize that she has hidden her eyes from me since early this morning.

I made a motion in the direction of the car and wait for her to turn and face me. Our eyes meet, but her gaze does not give me the comfort I deserve. She is not crying. Hers is not a look of thankfulness but one of betrayal. My heart swells to my throat, and I find it difficult to swallow. Her eyes rivet mine with the resentment of a troubled soul, a soul which longed to be placated, to be fooled, by hopeful promises. A soul which received no solace in the honesty of my words. And, now, she has scars, perhaps even deeper than those left by shattered dreams. Thunder pounds the afternoon sky, and I stand helpless at Laura's side.

I have failed.

I reach to hug her, but she is indifferent to my touch.

And as I lead her back toward the parking lot, the rain begins to fall in big, heavy drops. I cannot look at her, and my jaw is tight, but I manage to choke out one phrase, barely audible, into Laura's cold ear.

Maybe, tomorrow, we can picnic in the sun.



Another Brick in the Wall

Gustaveous Miller

I remember very well the first time I went to an institution for higher learning. I was unaware that I would learn anything because I thought I knew it all. Mother told me how much fun I would have meeting and playing with the other children at the Speedway Christian Church kindergarten. And to this day I have not disputed her theory. She was, as she always was, wrong. But I was disciplined to never question her.

I walked into the kindergarten with my mother and noticed the three women who were to become my teachers. The three teachers all seemed happy to see me. They didn't know me, I thought, so why were they so happy to see me? This was a question I should have contemplated, but I was too young to burden myself with such thought. I assumed that my devastating personality and genius level IQ were the reasons for their excitement.

The teachers, as I pictured all teachers, were old. The three were in the prime of their teaching careers with an average age of 81. My teacher was younger than the other two. She was 74 and her name was Mrs. Grey. We couldn't sneak anything past her. From her many decades of teaching, she knew all the tricks we attempted. Mrs. Grey always snuffed out our rebellions before we could overthrow her. For these reasons, I soon came to detest her, as well as other old people in general (excluding my grandparents, of course), and finally I grew to dislike the color gray itself.

Mrs. Grey yelled constantly at everyone and at the same time no one. Her fingers were crooked like the hairline from her wig. Whenever she pointed and yelled at a troublemaker, she actually was pointing at some little girl who never did anything wrong. Mrs. Grey could often be seen beating a child, usually a boy (don't all teachers hate boys?) with her dreaded paddle. She held the paddle as if it were a perfect extension of her hand. This infamous paddle was made by a blacksmith who was unaware of how his creation would be used. He, no doubt, thought it would be a conversation piece like many other medieval weapons he had made. I know for a fact that even today grown men who had Mrs. Grey as a teacher still awake from nightmares of the paddle which torment their sanity.

The paddle, as I remember it, embodied small circles of sharpened needles which caused a blistering effect on the area struck. The

opposite side had large electrodes which burned the victim. When Mrs. Grey's arthritis was in remission she could change sides with each strike. We called this the B-B effect; blister-burn, blister-burn. Optional leather straps could be used when crowd control was deemed necessary. Fortunately for us, her aim was rather poor. Mrs. Grey hit herself more than she hit troublemakers.

The child who best knew the paddle was Tim Goddard. Tim was labeled a "one of those" by the teachers. A "one of those" can do nothing right in the eyes of the teacher. Mrs. Grey beat him everyday simply for showing up. One day Tim made the mistake of pulling a girl's hair. And this girl happened to be one of Mrs. Grey's favorite boot-lickers. I distinctly remember hearing Tim's screams as he was beaten by the paddle. Tim never returned. Many years later I saw Tim in a bar. He was in a wheel chair. I figured it was from that excruciating day. I began to approach him but stopped, reasoning that seeing my face might induce flashbacks too horrible for him to bear. There was, however, one good thing about Mrs. Grey, and that was that she was the nicest teacher there. The other two teachers, Mrs. Feeble and Mrs. Decrepit, were so mean they maimed more than half of their students. Mrs. Grey maimed only a few, and did it humanely.

After observing Mrs. Grey, I attempted to become integrated into this nose-running, pants-wetting, and pencil-chewing population of room number seven. There were many different types of children at the kindergarten: funny kids, quiet kids, loners (which was what I was), talkers, and of course, teacher's pets. Some boys were more liked than others but no boy was ever given the title of teacher's pet. That title was reserved for girls who loved the teacher. The girl who was chosen head Boot-Licker was named Melissa Smith. Melissa not only genuflected in front of Mrs. Grey's desk, she lectured regularly that we, as a class, should canonize Mrs. Grey. Like all teachers, Mrs. Grey loved this treatment and encouraged Melissa to "keep up the good work." Mrs. Grey allowed Melissa to daily kiss her feet. Melissa's love for Mrs. Grey ended as the school year went on. She developed a severe case of athlete's tongue from smooching Mrs. Grey's toes.

I knew absolutely no one when I entered the school and soon came to realize it would stay this way by my own choice. Being intellectually superior to the other students, I thought associating with them would only lower my high standards. Even as a child I had my priorities.

Since I did not hang around any of the kids, most of my time was devoted to playing with the games or going to the rest room. The toys were donated by families who had 12 kids and were so thankful to get

rid of the last one that they gave all the toys to the one place that couldn't reject them, the Speedway Christian Church. Needless to say, the toys were not in working order. Why play the games, I'd ask myself, when the dice spinners and playing tokens were missing? They just didn't challenge me. The toys weren't much better. How much fun can a child have with a Big Wheel that has no big wheel? The only entertainment left for me was to pick up the crayolas. I was above average and could crayon one hell-uva Scooby-Doo. I had dreams of my pictures being compared to the Mona Lisa or the Last Supper, but Mrs. Grey told me in her infamous yelling voice that my pictures would not make it past her closet door. I was crushed. I gave up my artistic ambition and resorted to watching the others entertain themselves. Some of the boys played with blocks, others played with cars, a few who were low on the development scale simply sat, stared, and let snot drip under their noses. The girls did whatever girls do. (I felt like a scientist studying the habits of immature and lower life forms.) So, there was only one choice left for entertainment.

Bathroom time, a high spot in my day, was fun because Mrs. Grey did not have control over us. We could be little boys again. I often witnessed two rowdies causing trouble in the bathroom. The rumpus would make Mrs. Grey come into the bathroom with her cane poised in the striking position. But Mrs. Grey's big mistake was howling her tribal war scream before she entered the rest room, which would warn us to mobilize, separate, and look surprised. She would see 15 little boys and myself (I was above the little boy stage) all at an equal distance apart, with their pants half zipped, looking surprised.

Despite its foibles I knew this kindergarten business would have one bright spot when I was forced to sleep in a co-ed room. Actually nobody forced me to do it; I enjoyed seeing the girls in the Wonder Women Underoos. I even managed to sleep on the girls' side a couple of times and I never spent the time with the same girl. I was one suave dude. Nap time taught me two things, which over the course of my life I have treasured, defended, and preached. I never fully realized these two qualities until I graduated into the first grade, which was where I belonged. The first lesson was that it is proper to sleep at school. I've done it all my life. Teachers are always attacking me for it, and these same teachers also say I musn't forget what I learned in my earlier grades because we build on the things we have studied. The second quality I learned was that I could sleep with girls and not get into trouble. I cannot, however, convince my mother to agree with me on this.

Building the Pyre

Ed Steele

In the dark of the house
boxes grow everywhere
laying down shadows
in the dark of the house
laying down dark upon dark
and I moving through it all
a ghost
my son watches t.v.
his face lost in the silver
wash of its numbing
does not see me

these are her things
neat rows in the closet
here is the dress I gave
her last christmas
here are her shoes
do you see how neatly
they sit in a row?
here is the shirt
she used to wear
when we worked in the yard
here are her cowboy boots
the boots she wore
on our first date
these are her things

I spend all my time
in the yard
rusting hoes
and hammers
bushes planted randomly
I have high hopes for it though
over there, under that tree
I plan to build a pond
and build it so it flows
down to this small one
here, you see?

the illness was sudden
but here
here in this house
in the darkness of this house
everything moves
in slow
motion
I turn on the lights
but it only destroys
a portion of the dark
is dull like the light
before or after a storm

everything is quiet
there in the house
in the yard
among the rubble
I stoop and pick up sticks
and I am God
removing the miniature trunks
struck in the precision
of the white flash
and I neatly, patiently
assemble the sticks
neatly, patiently
build the pyre

Watchwoman

Joanne Keaton

Finding her hands moving toward each other, Angela stifled the impulse to clap. She had just spotted a For Sale sign on the Stevenson's lawn. With a contented sigh, she continued her walk through the neighborhood, but she couldn't stop smiling.

In the next block, something puzzled her in a side yard. "Never noticed that before," she said softly. Her eyes darted about till she discovered the house number. Instantly she memorized it. Under such circumstances, she always wished she could carry a notebook and pen. That wouldn't do, of course.

Soon she passed a large L-shaped ranch and noted that only a shiny station wagon stood in the driveway. It worked, she thought, and nodded her head several times. How she had hated the old cars that the teenager used to work on in the drive.

She adjusted her floppy-brimmed hat and strode on. It was difficult to keep the hat in place on a windy day, but that never stopped her from wearing it. The years of protecting herself from the sun had paid off. Although she was sixty-one, she knew she had the face of a much younger woman. And she intended to stay looking better than her contemporaries.

At home she took out her file box. On a fresh card she wrote down the address she had memorized earlier and added the words, "large cement statue of lion under tree." I'll give them three weeks, she decided; after all, if it was a prank, it would take time to get someone to haul it away.

Flipping through the cards, she came to the one for the Stevensons. Trying to straighten out that family had been one of her toughest projects. Their house was especially important because it stood at the entrance to the subdivision. In nearly everything, the Stevensons had used such poor judgment. In March they still had a Christmas wreath on their door. For six months they had put off repairing their mailbox post after it had been hit by a car. The lawn was never mowed often enough, their shutters clashed with the color of the house and their trash overflowed the cans on garbage day. None of that mattered now for they were leaving. She would never know if her little anonymous notes had driven them away. Leaving the neighborhood was the only reasonable action for the Stevensons; they would never learn how to

live properly in Emerald Grove.

Now she had a note to write that was especially important to her. This morning she had found that cocker spaniel relieving itself again by her front hedge. The dog's owners should really be reported for breaking the leash law. Although they were undeserving of any consideration, she was going to give them the courtesy of a warning.

Angela had an expensive electric typewriter, but for her helpful letters she always used her manual machine from the '50s; she couldn't risk having anything traced to her. She put a sheet of paper in the old Royal and typed: "I am extremely displeased to keep finding your dog's excrement in my yard. To avoid trouble, please keep your pet at home."

No, she couldn't send that—the message sounded too much like her. Though the word, excrement, made her cringe, it was the one she used in public if it became necessary to speak of such matters. Droppings was another word she thought of but soon decided wasn't quite right either.

Then she had it, something so appropriate for such crude people: "I'm sick and tired of your dog's shit on my lawn, and so are a lot of the neighbors. I don't have a gun, but I know someone with a lot of bushes who does."

The next day she put on her hat, pulled on her gloves and stepped out for another tour of the neighborhood. Richard, her husband, had always teased her about wearing gloves whenever she went outdoors. She had never minded for she had achieved the results she wanted: there was not a single brown age spot on her hands. Gloves were every bit as essential as a hat if a woman wanted to protect herself from the sun.

Before his death last year, she and Richard had walked every day. She supposed they had looked quite a pair, he with as much skin as possible exposed for a tan, and she covered up to stay attractive for her husband. He had loved this area where they had lived for over 30 years. So, after he died she decided to scold people who might ruin the neighborhood—she wanted it to stay the way Richard had known it.

She walked past the house on the corner of Teel and Pickford. This was the site of one of Angela's special victories. The first year the new people had lived there, they put up an enormous nativity scene in their front yard in December. People only did understated holiday decorating in the development, and this was the first time a nativity display had appeared there. Her note about this had said, "The Christmas season will soon be here again. We hope you won't be erecting that large,

vulgar display on your lawn this year. It is not the type of thing Emerald Grove does." This approach worked, for all those people had outdoors last year was a tasteful wreath. She felt well thanked for her effort when two of her neighbors mentioned that the new family had used better decorating taste this time.

She made a point of going along streets where people would receive messages from her today. There was a youngster she had to report to his parents. Twice she had heard him yell obscenities at other children, and twice she had refrained from doing anything. But last week's use of "motherfucker" had really been too much. He seemed a nice little boy, even saying hello to her sometimes, but she knew he had to be stopped from saying those awful things. She'd want to know if a child of hers talked that way.

There was a family, too, who would receive a suggestion about their new draperies. If they wanted to decorate in red, fine, but they should have linings on those draperies. All that expanse of crimson in the big front window was really too much. She was sure the people were unaware of the bordello effect they were creating; they would be grateful to hear from her.

In the distance she saw the white Jeep of the mail carrier. She knew his route by heart since she was out on the streets so much. If he was on Sylvan Trail, he would have delivered her mail by now. She hurried home.

She gathered her mail from the box and took it inside. She separated the letters from the junk mail and then slit all the envelopes at once. There was one with no return address and unfamiliar handwriting. Inside was a brief message: "I'm sure all that exercise is good for you, but do you know how stupid you look walking around the neighborhood every day with the ugly hat and gloves?" It was signed, "A Neighbor."

A Poem

Rebecca Lee Horne

Careful winds push unthought clouds
To a rolling storm
Darkened greys take their places
In the comfortable curve above the earth
Falling lower, seeming sleepy—
Stretching their tendrils in low roars,
Emitting the sweet scent of water
That will surely bounce hard off
Of the dusty, dry dirt

Jagged light born among the darkness
Chastising the complacent
And accepting the earth
Though she burns with pain,
The lamb of land
Soothed by the covering,
Blanketing clouds, moving unaware,
Rolling away.



The Balancing Act

Nancy J. Crowe

Alice rolls her chair back and approaches the counter, remembering to smile. The woman is about Alice's age, but she is dressed in a tasteful Shetland sweater and wool skirt. She is Linda Danby, city desk intern, says the voucher.

All is silent in the office as Alice counts the money into the well-manicured hand. Should she speak to Linda? She wants to ask her what it's like to do something you're trained for, something you love.

But Linda thanks her and clicks out the door in her leather pumps before Alice can get a word out.

"These college kids get high-and-mightier every year," sniffs Caroline, sorting the morning's mail into painfully precise stacks.

The phone rings, yanking Alice back to her desk. "Cashiers' office. This is Alice," she intones. It's Charlie Davis again, calling with a problem on one of his routes.

"Just a minute—I'll let you talk to Georgia about that." Smiling apologetically, Alice holds out the phone to her supervisor.

Georgia frowns, her gnarled fingers grasping on the phone. "Yes, can I help you? . . . All right, let me look it up." She sets the receiver on the desk with a **clunk**, and stalks through the back room into the vault.

One of the pressmen comes in to get change for the cigarette machine. "Well, don't you three ladies make a picture of loveliness today," he says, smiling at Georgia, back on the phone now; at Caroline at her desk; and at Alice hovering in the middle of the room.

"Good morning, Howie," Alice waits on him, grateful for a friendly face.

"That a new dress, Alice?" he asks.

"It sure is," she says, dropping the silver into his ink-stained hands. She doesn't tell him it was on special at Target.

It's nine forty-five. If she doesn't finish ringing up those checks soon, she'll have Georgia and half the circulation department down her throat. Back to the register.

Amount—enter. OK. CTY CRC. Operator B. No, it's not an error correction. Double print. The machine coughs and sputters rhythmically, printing the information in purplish-blue dots on the check and ticket. Alice is amazed at how pale and worn her hands look under the fluorescent lights. No wonder the plants dry up so fast in here, she thinks.

Caroline cackles over a letter apparently intended for the editor. It's from the state prison, a complaint. The inmate probably meant to say he had found maggots in his food, but he wrote that he had found *magnets* in his food. Caroline and Alice laugh so loud that the security guard peeks around the corner to see that they are all right and maybe get in on the joke. Georgia just shakes her head, not even looking up from the bank statements spread out on her desk. After 31 years here, Alice thinks, Georgia couldn't possibly find anything to laugh at.

She hastily rings up the rest of her checks, then sits down at her desk to run a tape.

Unbind the batches of checks, run them, make sure they balance, bind them up again, and pick up the next batch. The tape spurting from Alice's adding machine grows longer and longer, coiling like a dead snake at her feet.

It must be awful to be locked up, she thinks as her fingers tap-dance over the keys.

Some people call this the cashiers' cage, even though the cashiers can get out if they need to.

It's still an accurate name, Alice decides. We are behind the counter, they are in front of it, and they come in here so that we can perform for them.

Georgia wordlessly thunks a stack of her own rubber-banded checks onto Alice's desk. Alice carries them into the back room and runs them, batch by batch, through the endorsing machine. She has to stand and wait for every check to flip through, while the knocking rattle drowns out Caroline's ex-husband woes. Alice doesn't mind that a bit. After working in a beauty shop for only five months, all of the stories sound alike.

The idea of working anywhere longer than that is still foreign to Alice. She had dropped out of college in the middle of her sophomore year, seeing no reason to stay. She had sat through classes every day and crammed right before finals, and then it was lost. The ideas dissipated into some scribbled paragraphs in a blue book, notes she would throw away, and textbooks she would post signs all over the dorm to sell. Having thus cleared her mind three times, she enrolled in beauty school, then worked at The Hair Affair until she and the job wore each other out.

She had waited tables, taken money at a Shell station, and boxed french fries at Hardee's before turning herself over to Baxter Temporaries. They tested her and found that her skills were strongest in language, which was no surprise. She had always had the "gift of gab,"

and she composed long letters while she was at college. Therefore, she **was** surprised when the agency sent her to work in the cashier's office of the daily newspaper. The new mother she was filling in for never returned, so the company conveniently adopted Alice.

I've been here **fourteen months**, Alice muses, putting another batch of checks together. She has lost touch with Baxter and their talk of word processing and data entry jobs. She hasn't written anything longer than a thank-you note in years, and she is often shocked by the sound of her own voice.

Alice returns to her desk with the branded checks just as the door swooshes open. Linda is back.

"Can I get change for the parking meter?" she asks, holding a dollar bill between two fingers.

"Sure." Alice goes to the petty cash drawer and picks up some coins. "Here you go."

"Thanks." Linda's cheeks are pink, and she leans forward a little, smiling at Alice. "I'm so excited. Mr. Wilson just told me to go down to the State House and cover . . ." She stops, frowning, examining the coins in her hand as if they are fool's gold. "You gave me ninety-five cents."

"Oh, I'm sorry." Alice's face flushes a moist red as she grabs for another nickel, feeling two pairs of eyes burn holes in her back. "They haven't taught me how to count yet," she says, grinning.

The corners of Linda's mouth turn up just slightly. "Thanks." She is gone.

Damn.

"Alice, I've told you before. Count the money into their hand before you take theirs," Caroline says flatly.

"I know. I'm sorry." Alice sits back down, every limb going limp.

"I see a bunch of tickets on your shelf up there," Georgia says. "Don't you think you better ring 'em up?" Her eyes glitter like rough green crystal behind her glasses.

"I haven't finished the bank tape yet."

"No, no. The bank tape goes **last**."

Alice fetches the tickets and rushes them through the register, her neck muscles taut. It can't be long now, she tells herself. Another few hours, and the day would be thrust behind her. Another few weeks, and the season would change; the birds would begin to fly south, and if she had any energy left, she might fly, too.

Two o'clock. All three of them must stop and balance their cash drawers, hopefully a statement to the rest of the world that nothing

given away hadn't been taken back.

Alice is eight dollars and seventy-one cents short. Caroline is a dollar over.

"Gonna have to start knockin' heads around here," growls Georgia.

Alice calmly re-checks the figures on her balance sheet. This happens nearly every day. She used to be terribly ashamed when she didn't balance. Later, she had to struggle to show the slightest bit of concern.

Today the deficiency disturbs her. She runs the tape again and again, always coming up with the same amount. Usually, it's a silly mistake that has thrown her off, and she corrects it and balances.

I can't have **lost** anything, Alice thinks, her heart pounding as she re-counts her wrapped money. I just can't have. With all I've done, what could I have overlooked?

"I guess you better write up a special ticket," Georgia sighs at four o'clock, after Caroline has balanced and all of them have searched for the missing figure.

Alice pulls out her receipt pad and writes, "Operator B was \$8.71 short on today's business."

She takes the slip of paper to the register to make a permanent record of it, like her school transcript and her resume. Tears spring to her eyes as the machine dutifully prints out the information.

A Poem

C. R. Rowland

A fallen sepal-
Lifted by a warmer wind
That is Mariah.

A Detour for Helen

Mary Zdrojkowski

The "Goodwin's Lakeview Restaurant" sign was not some spiffy spotlighted expressway billboard with giant painted people smiling down at you and enticing you with huge succulent lobsters and festive cocktails. In fact, not only was the sign not spiffy, it was downright dull—a white, crudely-lettered unmanned sandwich board standing stiffly between the two white gas pumps at Bob's Shell, the only filling station in Old Cedars.

No, this was no eye-catching expressway visual. Most people traveling this heavily-forested and sparsely-populated stretch of Northern Michigan interstate went right on by the generic GAS-FOOD-LODGING exit which led several winding and wooded miles down Rt. 46 to Old Cedars. Most people drove on by the exit, talking over CBs, playing "I Spy" with whining children, spraying crackers with cheese from aerosol cans or listening to tapes.

People who did take the exit either had empty gas tanks or full bladders. Helen Cooper had both. Helen took the exit at 82 mph and screeched to a halt at Rt. 46, frightening a flock of finches into flight and causing a crow to abandon its feast of roadkill.

Helen turned east and left two parallel lines of smoke as her tires spun out towards Old Cedars.

Running low on gas was not typical of Helen. She was a careful planner who nearly always anticipated what might go wrong. In fact, this same ability to foresee problems was what had advanced her so rapidly in her career as an investment counselor in the Detroit firm of H. Alders Development Co. Though Helen's rise from secretary had required long hours and exhaustive work, her uncanny avoidance of snags distinguished her from her colleagues. While others struggled up the ladder of success, it appeared as though Helen merely rode the elevator.

At the top of that elevator, at least the one in the H. Alders Development headquarters, was the office of Neil Alders, son of H., and the reason for Helen's failure to fuel fully before heading north to Traverse City to begin the Harbor Crest project. The previous evening, Neil had proposed marriage, though he made it sound more like a merger or a joint venture.

Helen and Neil had just finished presenting their plan for Harbor

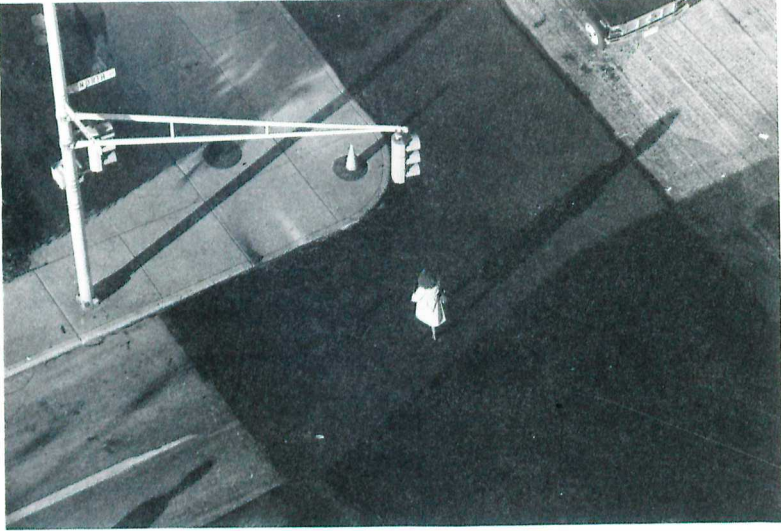
Crest, a multi-million dollar Lake Michigan condo complex complete with a 500-ship marina, wet and dry bars in each unit, and a half-mile stretch of sparkling shoreline along the great sand dunes. After a round of applause for this new pocket-lining project, the 12 stodgy white-topped and wing-tipped board members shuffled out of the posh meeting room leaving Helen and Neil alone. Neil had turned to Helen and without the faintest hint of romantic trappings said, "It's silly of us to continue maintaining separate residences, Helen. I think it's time we consolidated our homes as well as our lives and became an official team. We could do it next week at the Caribbean Conference—turn it into a sort of honeymoon."

Helen was dumbfounded: not because he had asked her, but because she found herself saying she would have to consider his offer. And consider it she did—all through the night with no decision and no sleep. The next morning she had to leave for Traverse City to begin the preliminaries for Harbor Crest. She packed her weekend bags in the trunk, packed the bags under her eyes behind a pair of sunglasses, filled her thermos with freshly brewed coffee, and her stomach with day old Danish.

So, there was Helen Cooper speeding down Rt. 46 with a nearly empty gas tank and a nearly overflowing bladder. Her eyes darted left to right scanning the horizon for the GAS promised by the GAS-FOOD-LODGING sign. The morning's accumulation of caffeine added quick jerky movements to her overall birdlike appearance. Her nicely shaped head was crested by yellow hair shorn short on the sides and permed frizzy on top. Helen's long thin neck seemed to continue through her streamlined body and emerge as long, thin arms and legs. Her angular face and slightly sharp nose were softened by rounded lips and blue eyes with luxurious lashes.

Helen's eyes focused straight ahead as she raced on irritated by this detour for fuel. She had planned to arrive at the Traverse City Inn, relax in her room's Jacuzzi, and then spend the evening working. She had no desire to take in the roadside beauty of Rt. 46. She was on edge from the caffeine and tried to concentrate; she became absorbed by the whirring of the car's engine.

Helen sped down the road caught in the illusion that the sleek gray body of her Datsun 280-Z was a giant vacuum cleaner sucking up the road beneath it. Her peripheral vision caught not individual oaks, birch, outlines of delicate Queen Anne's Lace or feathery goldenrod, but rather blurs of colors which were, like the road, swept up by her car.



After a few miles of gently rolling hills, Helen began to see the gray of her car blending and becoming one with the gray of the pavement. As the car rose, so did Helen. A swift descent down a hill caused her stomach to feel heavy as if she were going down in an elevator. "Shit," she said, "Where the hell is the station?"

She suddenly did not feel in control. She felt as if she were in a giant game of Crack-the-Whip with the road being the undulating whip and she in the car being tossed about on the end. She felt as if circumstances were forcing her, against her will, to go down this road. She felt, for a brief moment, helpless.

Helen emerged from an S-curve and found herself barreling down on a pickup truck with a camper on top. She pulled out to pass, but had to slam on the brakes and jerk back into her lane to avoid the oncoming car. "Shit," she said, "Two other goddam vehicles on this road and they have to meet here."

She tried to pass again, but saw the "No Passing" zone and was forced to follow the pickup. She wondered how many millions of camper-topped trucks roamed the country with trout decals leaping across the windows, folding lawn chairs tied to the back doors, and cute names written on the spare tire cover. Helen noticed "Chuck and Arlene's Sex House" in front of her and was not amused.

When she was at last able to pass, she glared at the portly driver and his wife and was irritated when they both smiled and waved. Helen was glad to see them shrink away to nothing in her rear view mirror.

The motion of the fading couple in the mirror was like a home movie of Helen's life. She remembered another time and another waving couple in her rear view mirror — only she hadn't looked back then.

Helen had grown up in a town not unlike Old Cedars—two bars, two churches, a gas station-convenience store, a Ben Franklin's, an IGA and a two-story cement block building which housed her parent's home upstairs and their restaurant downstairs.

Helen's life in her hometown, "God's Country" as her parents called the north, was her life in the restaurant. Until she was old enough to work in it, she stayed upstairs with her ancient grandmother. Helen listened to the rattle of heavy dishes and pans down below and learned to tell time by what aromas wafted upstairs.

Her father used to jokingly say that the restaurant owned him. Helen never saw the humor in the remark—she took it as fact. Her parents shuffled upstairs every night at 9:00 p.m. and shuffled back down every morning at 6:00 a.m. to start coffee for the regulars who would mosey up to the speckled linoleum-covered counter and drink

from personalized mugs bearing names like Little Eddie, L.J. and Big Mama.

Helen's parents never wanted a big business and they got just what they wanted. What Helen got, as she grew older, was a progressively more intense yearning to see other faces, to read menus that didn't have 'cold slaw' or 'ho-made pie' on them and to see the world beyond the five-mile radius of her house.

On her 16th birthday, having just served the latest customers' burger baskets, Helen stood behind the counter filling catsup bottles and pondering the people. She decided that there were three kinds of people born there: the kind that eked out a living running dingy little businesses, the kind that dreamed of one day leaving, and the kind that got the hell out at the first opportunity. Helen knew her opportunity when it came.

For Helen, freedom came in the form of four wheels. Her grandmother had died and left Helen an old, but little used car. The afternoon of Helen's high school graduation, Helen loaded her three plastic milk crates of belongings into the car, waved back to her parents in the doorway of the restaurant, and drove downstate to begin a new career as a secretary.

Eight years later, Helen reached Bob's Shell in Old Cedars. There was no "Please pull up to the last pump" sign, so she stopped in a cloud of dust on the right of the first two pumps. On her way to the restroom, she shouted to the gawky attendant, who was reading a comic, to fill it up.

Finding the "LADIES" door locked, Helen flew back to the car where the boy was inserting the hose. "The key!" she demanded, "Where is the key?"

The adolescent flushed at this obviously big-city woman with her stylish lavender suit and matching heels mentioning the bathroom. He lowered his head and hurriedly fetched the eight inch piece of wood marked "LADIES" with the two inch key dangling from it.

Helen came out of the restroom shaking her hands to dry them as there were no paper towels. She asked the boy to please clean the bugs off the windshield and got in the car.

The attendant went to the big galvanized pail between the second pump and the sandwich board sign advertising Goodwin's Lakeview Restaurant. As he reached for the squeegee in the bucket of cleaning solution, his pointed butt jarred the sign nearly collapsing it upon himself. It was then that Helen noticed the sign.

As the lank lad returned red-faced to the car and proceeded to make

overlapping swipes across the rear window, Helen read the sign, "Goodwin's Lakeview Restaurant. Daily specials. Good ho-made food. Newly remodeled. Open seven days." She looked across the street where the arrow indicated and saw a sided building. "Yeah, right," thought Helen, "This sign translates: burger baskets and two-day old pie, cement block under siding and can't afford a day off."

Helen watched the boy come around and begin his swipes over the splatted bugs on the windshield. As he reached to the right side of the window, she noticed that the large circles of sweat under his arms almost reached the twin "Bill" patches sewn on the pockets of his blue gas station shirt. Not wanting to look at Bill, she turned her eyes out the driver's window.

Just at that moment, "Chuck and Arlene's Sex House" rolled to a stop on the other side of the pump. Helen remembered the glare she had given them and hoped that they didn't. She fumbled in her purse to avoid eye contact.

Chuck and Arlene were a nicely matched middle-aged pair of pear-shaped people. He slowly emerged from the driver's seat, stopped and stretched, and then ambled over to Arlene's side to help her out. She leaned on her husband of 30 years as she, too, slowly emerged. They both had on khaki colored Bermudas that contained round bellies and left plenty of room at the bottom for their spindly white legs.

Helen looked up as they squeezed between the pumps and waddled by in front of her car. The attendant, who was beginning to get a bit flustered with two customers at once, said, "Be with you in a sec, Mr. Goodwin." Bill began doing double time on the windshield.

"No hurry, Bill," said Chuck Goodwin. "We'll just get us some bait around back. Besides, the little lady there's in a hurry," he added as he put his arm as far around Arlene as it would reach. He gave Helen a quick wink.

"Yeah, up yours sideways," thought Helen. She grabbed her thermos from beside her only to find it drained along with her allotment of patience for the day. Helen made a dramatic gesture of looking at her watch, hoping the boy wasn't too dense to catch the hint. Continuing his previous rhythm of swiping the window and wiping his squeegee, he evidently didn't notice.

Helen searched her map for the fastest way out of Old Cedars. The combination of lack of sleep, too much caffeine, and the all too familiar small town began to close in on her. She was beginning to feel trapped and a little suffocated.

"Will that be it, ma'am?" asked Bill.

"Air!" shrieked Helen, startled out of her drifting thoughts.

"What?" gasped Bill.

"Air. See if the tires need air," explained Helen. "The left rear one might need some." She remembered that tire had a tendency to get soft and she didn't want a flat once she got going.

"It's a little low. Wanna pull over there?" said Bill as he motioned to the right of the station where the compressor was.

As Helen pulled over, Chuck and Arlene came with their bait from behind the station. She could hear their conversation as they stopped to chat with Bill.

"Saw your dad yesterday, Bill," said Chuck. "Was tellin' him how our Jeannie's gettin' good at takin' over the restaurant. Your dad says he's leavin' you in charge a lot now."

"Yeah, well school's almost done and then I'll be in charge more," said Bill trying to untangle the air hose.

"Jeannie says you asked her to the senior prom," said Chuck as he gave a quick wink to Arlene.

"Yeah. Just two weeks away," flushed Bill, his arms pretzled as he tried to untwist the hose.

"Shit," thought Helen. She tapped the steering wheel in frustration at the boy's slowness. She breathed a sigh of relief when he at last straightened out the hose that would, like an umbilical cord, hook to her tire and give it new life. The thought of squeeling her tires out of the town caused the muscles in her foot to tense on the accelerator in anticipation.

Helen looked in her outside mirror and saw Bill coupling hose to valve stem. Chuck started to say something and Helen saw the downward pressure of Bill's hand on the hose shift in unison with his eyes as he looked over at Chuck. At the same instant Helen saw the valve stem bend too far and snap; she heard the whoosh of air escaping from her tire.

Bill was bewildered until he saw Helen's face; then he was terrified. As she leaped out of the car, he tried to stand, but like a dog on a waxed floor, his feet would not cooperate.

"WHAT IN THE HELL HAVE YOU DONE?" shrieked Helen whose face had become hawklike and whose gesticulating hands looked to Bill like claws.

Bill tried to explain, but couldn't get the words past what he felt was his heart about to come out of his throat.

"YOU IDIOT," ranted Helen, spewing spit in punctuation. "CAN'T YOU EVEN FILL A TIRE? YOU GET THAT FIXED BEFORE . . ."

"Now just a minute, young lady," interrupted the heretofore silent Arlene. "You got no right to talk to the boy like that. He didn't mean to do it."

Helen spun around and saw Arlene standing by the Coke machine, chin stuck out, her flabby upper arm echoing the movement of her finger as she shook it at Helen. Helen suddenly felt like a naughty child.

She saw Chuck, arms folded across his chest as if waiting for her reply.

Helen looked at Bill, crimson and almost crying, and remembered how awkward and intimidated she felt at his age when outsiders gave her a hard time. "I'm sorry. I know you didn't mean to do it," she said to Bill. Then to Arlene, "It's just that I'm in such a hurry."

"Out-of-towners always are," said Arlene. "You probably didn't have time to eat lunch either.

"No, I was going to get something when I got to Traverse City," said Helen.

Arlene stuck out her hand. "Well, you aren't goin' anywhere for a bit, so c'mon over and have a bite while Bill and Chuck fix your tire."

"Won't take but half an hour," squeaked Bill.

Helen would just as soon have waited at the station, but she realized she was hungry. "Besides," she thought, "I can fill the thermos."

Helen expected a bell to jingle when she opened the door and was surprised to hear nothing. She was not surprised when the people at the counter spun around on their stools to see who came in, or by the baby in a high chair throwing crackers, or by the teenaged girl - probably Jeannie - delivering burger baskets.

Arlene motioned for Helen to sit near the window, which overlooked the lake. While Arlene went for coffee, Helen's trained eye assessed the shoreline for development possibilities. The lake was about two miles across with bits of beach scattered among cedars and a few boats held people whose fishing poles poked out of the weeds.

Arlene returned with the Bunn-o-matic decanter and poured two splashless cups of coffee. She motioned for Helen to take a menu from between the napkin dispenser and the catsup bottle and said she would be back as soon as she refilled everyone's cups. Helen saw Arlene chitchatting and Jeannie signal that she would be right over. Helen thought it strange to be a customer when, such a short time ago, she was a waitress about Jeannie's age. She felt a wave of pity, but wasn't sure for whom.

"Howdy," said Jeannie setting down a glass of water. "What can I get for you today?"

"I don't know. What do you suggest?" said Helen.

"Well, our senior class voted our cheeseburgers the food most likely to be in Heaven," said Jeannie.

"Sounds good— guess I'll have one. And some fries, too," said Helen. Then she asked, "Are you a senior?"

"Sure am. And glad to be done with school. I got plans."

"I'll bet you do," said Helen, understanding. "Moving far?"

"Movin'? You kiddin'? I got plans for this place. Gonna put in a dock down there for starters. Then people can come by boat. Be nice, don't ya think?" explained Jeannie.

Helen just nodded her head. Jeannie took the order slip back and Helen stared out the window.

"Nice - ain't it?" asked Arlene, sitting down. "God's country. That's what we call it."

"Yes. It's very - uh - peaceful," said Helen.

"On vacation?"

"Oh, no. I haven't been on a vacation since . . .," Helen tried to think.

"I'm on a business trip."

"Sounds like the business owns you," laughed Arlene. "I know how it is when you're young and tryin' to get ahead. We're lucky now. Jeannie takes over quite a bit."

Helen tried not to think of her departure from her parents' place as well as from their lives. She was spared the agony of insight by the sight of Chuck in the doorway.

"Tire's fixed good as new," said Chuck.

"Thank you so much," said Helen. She started to leave, but sat down when she saw Jeannie bringing her order.

"You sit and enjoy your lunch—no charge," said Chuck to Helen. Then to Arlene, "C'mon, Ma - fish won't wait all day."

Helen's food was indeed heavenly. She ate as if she were starving and only stopped when she saw "Chuck and Arlene's Sex House" pull up to the lake. She watched the couple unloading tackle boxes and poles and saw Chuck help Arlene into the small fishing boat. He waded out to just below his Bermudas, gave his wife a kiss, and then boarded the boat.

It was a simple kiss and a simple scene, but as the couple grew smaller as they trolled away, Helen wondered if she and Neil would ever 'go fishin.' Or would all their trips be like his proposed honeymoon—blending business? She thought of her parents, too, and wondered if they had ever 'gone fishin.'

Helen got up, left a generous tip and made two calls on the pay

phone. The first was to Traverse City to cancel her reservation. The second was to Neil's answering service to say she would be in the office when he got back from the Caribbean.

As she went out the door, Jeannie came running with Helen's thermos. "Hey - you forgot this," said Jeannie.

"Thanks, but I don't need it. I'm on vacation and I know a place where there's plenty of coffee."

Why I Smoke in the Library

Jenny Towler

Taking small sips
from cigarette
to cigarette
to cigarette
Gradually I
bury myself alive
in ash
upon ash
upon cold ash
A burnt paper cairn where
uninspired
I bored myself to death.

A Story

Monika Armstrong

The dishes in my sink are piling up. I haven't put my hands in soapy water for a week now. I tell myself that I'm too busy to do them. That would seem a valid excuse, but I know the real reason. I was going to do them Monday, but an encyclopedia salesman came to my door. He reminded me of Mark Spitz. His eyes were even the color of Olympic pools. I wasn't going to let him in at first, but then he told me his name. I wondered how he knew that his name would compel me to let him enter my house. At the time, I simply reacted — as if it were reflex.

George Gordon Byron sold *Encyclopaedia Britannicas* to put himself through college. He was studying English. I could not ignore the blatant parallel between him and the writer, so I asked him if he was related to the Lord, by any chance. He said that he was, although distantly. His mother had named him George Gordon for reasons of posterity. I told him that I thought that his mother sounded like a reasonable woman.

George Gordon proceeded to give me a sales pitch on the encyclopedias. I did not listen to him because I was too busy staring into his cobalt eyes.

I ended up buying the entire series. Deep down, I wanted to get to know this man. I knew that I would never seem him again if I didn't buy something.

He told me that he would be back in about a week to complete my order. When we two first parted, I sensed a hesitance. He left and my life has not been the same since.

That was Monday. Today is Saturday, and my dishes still sit in my sink. I was going to wash them Tuesday, but I kept thinking about George Gordon. It gave me a strange happiness to know that I would see him again.

I thought of this Tuesday morning while I brushed my teeth. As I was standing in front of my mirror, I realized that I had put on a few pounds. I decided to go on a diet. I joined Nautilus that morning and spent the day working out.

Wednesday, I noticed that the paint on my walls was becoming drab, so I went to Central Hardware and bought some Sherwin Williams Latex interior house paint. I spent the day redecorating my house in

cobalt blue and grey.

George Gordon called Thursday to verify my order. He told me that it wasn't standard procedure, but because I had been such a receptive customer, he felt that I deserved preferential treatment. Before we hung up, George Gordon asked me about my husband. I told him that I didn't have one. He had left me a year ago. I knew that I shouldn't have said anything to him about my marital status, but his voice compelled me to trust him.

I woke up yesterday and wondered about my sanity during my drive to Nautilus. I tried desperately to be diplomatic about the situation, but all I could think about was seeing George Gordon again. I knew that I was being irrational, but it didn't matter. I worked out and then went to Walden's. I bought myself a book of poetry.

Today, my arms and stomach are sore, but I've lost three pounds. Now I feel an urge to call George and I'm scared. I do not know why I'm behaving as I am. I have never done anything impulsive in my life.

My dishes are still in the sink. I am looking at them as I realize that I want to see George Gordon now. I want to see George Gordon Byron. I want to hear him speak to me. I want to speak with you, George, about intellectual things. I want to be witty and impress you, George. George, I want to make you laugh and I want to make you admire me and tell me that you find me attractive, even beautiful in my own way. I want to be written about, George. But most of all, I want to kiss you, George, and make you fall in love with me.

Could I be insane? Why am I so obsessed with a man that I don't even know? I feel giddy, like a teenager in love for the first time. My life has changed because of a virtual stranger who sells encyclopedias.

I think of what we could name our children. If we have a boy, we'll name him George Gordon to keep it in the family. If we have a girl, we'll name her Lucy.

Maybe I'll invite him to dinner one day next week, and I realize that I have to wash dishes if he decides to eat with me.

I am insane. What other explanation could there be? I always think things through before making a decision. I don't feel crazy, though. I actually feel quite sane and in a funny way, I feel free — liberated.

Actually, it hasn't been all bad. I've lost weight and my house looks better than it has in years. The only problem is that my dishes are still in my sink. I'm going to do them, George. I've been thinking a lot about you since Monday and it's made me neglect doing my dishes. I'm washing them now, George, but not for you. I'm doing them for me. Really, George, I did it all for me. But I needed you as an excuse.

My door bell is ringing, and my hands are in a sink of soapy water. I run to the front room and open the door. Soap suds are dripping from my hands.

"Hello. I decided to drop by and see how you're doing. I tried to call you earlier, but you weren't home. I'm really sorry for dropping by without any notice, but I've been doing some odd things lately."

"That's quite alright, George. Come in and have a seat. Would you like something to drink?"

"No, thank you. I really came to just talk, be intellectual and maybe laugh a little."

"That sounds nice, George. Could you do me a favor?"

"Of course."

"Write me a poem, George."



Four Poems

Tori Kensington

I Stole Francis Picabia's Brain and Used It for a Paperweight

They told me there was art and I would grow.
They told me about art in the world and.
How it was supposed to be nature.
Or at least nature perfected some way.
They told me how my soul might find "it," what
ever "it" is supposed to be. I have
Found the "it" alright. But not in art.

Free Morning

The love that love's labors leave dry
And sterile as a stone,
Can ever be as fruitful and free
As our parent's own.

This love that earns all men's contempt
And likewise all their lust,
Has been; will be; its ubiquity
Is as common as the dust.

That love sighs of an ancient song
Some say as old as sin,
But no bell of hell can so loudly knell
As that of the unsung din

Of those that feel the mighty song
And keep fast closed their heart,
For their desire shall be their pyre
And burning shall be their part.

These loves that earn all men's contempt
And likewise all their scorn,
Has been; will be for eternity
As free as each new morn.

A Poem

She stands sturdy
with the rod of her office,
seeing nothing
anymore:
With the authority of a bailiff,
the children
as her youth
behind her.

Her hands,
brown, cracked, old,
like a basketball
that was used in a winning game of a high school sectional in 1937
now encased in the dark end of a hallway,
seldom seen,
among the bright loving cups and plaques
and photographs,
are there every day
nonetheless.

She is without a victory score,
painted and faded,
only the dust and dryness remains.
Brown and aged,
she is surrounded by bright and gleaming youth,
rushing by —
unfrozen trophies
for running and jumping.

And she, stopped
and stopping,
animates;
and makes youth younger.

French-kissing Oppenheimer

Pink and white flowers,
in water
in a brilliant white
vitreous china bowl,
must ignore the chain
and its reaction.



Turtle in a Shell

Chris R. Rowland

In high school I was given a book containing *The Heart of Thoreau's Journals*. I was flattered because the person who gave it to me considered me a protege of Thoreau. Although I admired Thoreau and appreciated his writing, I am certainly no protege. In my mind the book represented an object of Thoreau's thought, an ornament of his ideals. I placed it with all the other ornaments on my bookshelf, after barely glancing at it.

Recently, after I read an excerpt from one of Ayn Rand's books, one of Thoreau's passages popped into my mind. It was a short, simple entry which stated, "It takes a man to make a room silent." At first I did not picture the peacefulness in these words. I pictured a wild-eyed man sitting on a wooden chair, in the middle of a room, surrounded by four white walls — staring at nothing in particular and mumbling to himself. I think this morbid interpretation evolved after my reading of Ayn Rand's existentialist views.

I believe Ayn Rand idealizes individuals who are separated by the walls of their own silent rooms. In this isolation of quiet solitude, our minds would be our sole companions, and the popular maxim "I think, therefore I am" would be the only assurance of our existence. "I" or the "self" would be the only purpose for living.

Identifying with Rand's idea of an "I" world is not difficult. I do, occasionally, dream of existing in solitude — even of wishing the entire population of the world into oblivion, except for the single female companion of my choice. I call it my Adam and Eve complex, apple included. My reason for this dream may be the same as Rand's wish for isolation. It comes from a frustration with human faults and an overwhelming inability to do anything about it. Since we cannot control this world, why not create our own "world"? But, to live in a world we create for ourselves is to live in a "world" of nonexistence.

Because existence cannot be comprehended by a single mind, a person living within the parameters of his four walls also lives within the parameters of non-existence. "I think, therefore I am." was a maxim developed for society, from within society. A mind needs other minds to reassure it of its existence. If a tree fell in the forest, but no one was there to hear it, would it make a noise? If a man lived in solitude, and none was aware of his existence, would not his life be a noise unheard?

But I am missing the point. Existence is a social concept not important to an existentialist. People like Rand would describe themselves as tumbleweeds being blown across the plain - free of social concern, responsible only to their "self." I would describe them as turtles hiding in their shells. Rather than advocate change in a world which exists, they retreat to a world they idealize. What these retreatists fail to realize is that turtles may be boiled or baked in their shells, and events occurring in the real world affect them in their world. If a nuclear warhead were to detonate in Washington state, the persons enclosed within their shells of isolation in Idaho would most likely die from the fallout. If the person hiding were to live as part of society and remain worldly conscious and locally active, they might be able to prevent their own untimely demise. Clearly, no one can live completely separate from society or totally alone.

Society consists of the people within it, obviously. Attempting to live apart from society is no less than co-existing with it, like it or not. The idea of an existentialist existing with society is as absurd as the term "jumbo shrimp." It is contradictory to the Rand doctrine. Perhaps this is why Rand's character in *Anthem* proclaims her separation from society atop a mountain — it is not conducive to social gatherings. But I would wish to see her spend her life on top of that mountain; it would be a short "non-existence."

An "I" can neither live within society, nor with other "I"s to be true to belief. "I"s have selfish needs exclusive of anyone else. An "I" is ignorant of other's needs and is concerned only with its own. An "I" in society would be an island in an ocean, slowly being eroded by the actions of the tide until eventually it is gone or covered by the waves. An "I" existing with another "I" would be as pleasant as two carnivores fighting for a carcass. They are oblivious to cooperation as survival and will die hungry because of it.

To die hungry and alone, or to be covered or ignored are the fates of individuals who believe their walls will hold back the progression of society. They may sit in their solitudinal rooms and mumble to themselves until they become drooling effigies to the world around them, or they may choose to leave the sterile white walls they hide behind and come into the warmth of the multitude of men and possibilities. As Thoreau wrote, "It takes a man to make a room silent," but it takes many men to fill the room with the din of existence.

Monumental Recognition

Don Miller

Walked worn trail. Tree lined foot path overlook
led toward ridge and gnarled edged rock.¹
This ground 'we' natives scan viewing 'our' past
savage battle² shimmers in Autumn
heat. Is it Prophet's vision of³

Toils of agrarian community
foregone, return to native instinct? —
Predatory migration, or armed conflict:
Early morning battle—field . . . decimation?

The unpassionate flare of aggression
trampled his town⁴—north bank encampment.
We post monumental reenactment:⁵

LOSS

American	Killed	37
	Wounded	151

Indian loss unknown

and harvest corn fields. A mechanical drone,
while wind thru aisles of hand cut stone
markers, unsettles the cypress stand.

- 1 Prophet's Rock
- 2 The Battle of Tippecanoe
- 3 Prophet's vision to unite the Indian nation
and return to their native way of life
- 4 Prophet's Town
- 5 Sign on the Battlefield Monument

A Story

Jeff Easley

It was the summer solstice, June 22, 1984, the longest day of the year.

Patting his hand against the steering wheel, he shifted the car into fourth gear in time with the rock music on the radio. As he shifted gears, the afternoon sun caught the glass face of his Timex watch. He looked to see what time it was—5:15. He still had 45 minutes to get to Michelle's house.

The road was long and straight. Billy forced the gas pedal closer to the floorboard. The engine responded instantly; he watched as the speedometer's thin red needle swept over 70 m.p.h. The legal limit was 40. The music on the radio had stopped and a Pepsi commercial was in its place. Billy looked down to change the station. The sun gleamed off the mirrored dials of the radio. Billy grabbed the right knob with his right hand and twisted it; like magic a new station came blaring through the car's speakers. For several minutes the loud music paled the roar of the engine as the car traveled along the road. Billy noticed that at this speed the telephone poles resembled picket fences. He slowed the car down quickly when he saw a stoplight off in the distance. He was looking for a street called "Valla Vista."

The stoplight reflected its dull red light into the front chrome of the car's bumper. Billy looked up at the street sign; it said Valla Vista. He was at the corner of Valla Vista and Western. He needed to turn left, so he turned on the left signal. Billy looked up at the stoplight and adjusted his sunglasses with his left hand. The light was still red. In the front yard of a small ranch-style house across the street Billy saw a young boy playing in a lawn sprinkler. Billy watched as the boy squatted over the jets, his skin tanned and cold. The wild water formed a mist around his head. In the bright sun Billy saw a rainbow in the mist. The light was still red. Billy looked at his watch; it was 5:21. The exhaust streamed into the open roof of the MG. Billy decided to count the number of cars that passed by; there were seven. Finally the light turned green. Billy forced the car into first gear and twisted the wheel to the left. The car lurched forward. Gaining speed he shifted the car into second, and then third.

The '78 MG had been his father's toy. He kept it inside in the winter and only drove it in the summertime when it was nice outside. Billy remembered sitting in the convertible when he was young; he pretended to drive the car everywhere. When he finally got his driver's license, Billy was given the keys to the car. He kept the car perfectly clean. Every Friday he took the car to the "Rocket" Car Wash across the street from the high school. He had the red MG cleaned and waxed; it only cost him \$2.75. When the car came out of the wash, Billy would wipe the sun-faded seats and dark interior with gentle care and concern.

Valla Vista Road turned out to be a small old country lane dividing two tall fields of corn. The rows of corn towered high above Billy's head. The tassels glistened white in the light of the sun. Billy remembered that his grandfather had told him that cornfields were really graves. He told Billy that each stalk represented the grave of a dead soldier. Billy looked at these cornfields; they did not look like grave markers. Valla Vista was the world's largest graveyard. Driving through the cornfields also reminded Billy of walking through the hedge maze in New Albany. The hedges were seven feet tall, and all you could see were their furry green branches. Billy reached over and turned on his lights. He leaned back and looked at the sky.

Shouldn't it be getting dark? The sun seemed too high in the sky for the time. What time is it? 5:25. Billy looked at the sun. It looked strange. It was the wrong color. The sun was a burnt orange, like it gets at dusk. He reached over and turned off his lights. He looked at his watch again; it was 5:27.

Michelle had said on the telephone that her house was 12 miles down "Valla Vista." She had also said to pick her up at six, and he still had to stop at a gas station. Billy glanced at his gas gauge. It was on "E." He began to hope that there would be a station on Valla Vista, but from the looks of the cornfields there wasn't much chance.

It had taken them a long time to decide what to do. They finally decided on a movie. Billy was taking her to see a horror movie: *Halloween II*.

Billy remembered their conversation on the phone. She didn't want to go to a horror movie, but finally she had agreed. She gave him directions to her house, but Billy decided not to write them down because he was sure that he could remember them. Now he wished he had written them down. He'd been driving on Valla Vista for a long time. He twisted his arm to see the face of his Timex. He forgot to look

at the time. Frustrated, he looked at his watch again — 5:31.

Billy knew that there was no way Michelle would be ready when he got to her house. He also knew that he would have to talk to Michelle's parents; this is the part he hated most of all about the dating rituals. The parents always asked him strange questions. Where did you meet Michelle? Do you two go to school together? "I wonder if her parents are scared, too."

What would he say when they answered the door? Hello, Mr. Thomas. My name is Billy Tavel. Is Michelle here? Hi, Mrs. Thomas. Is Michelle here? "Is Michelle here," — what a fool I'd be if she decided to leave. "She's not here?" Well, can you tell her that Billy dropped by? This was one of Billy's biggest fears, to go pick up a date that wasn't there. Billy also feared being late; he was never late. He always left early so he would get wherever he was going early.

Billy looked down at his watch — 5:36. Still no sign of a gas station. Billy thought about what time he left home. Only 25 minutes ago he was still at home. time traveled too slowly for Billy; maybe his body moved faster. He looked up. Billy was able to see some stars. The sun was still a huge mass of orange in the western sky, but he could see several stars off to the east. Billy tried to think. "Let's see, I've been on Valla Vista for about ten minutes; speed 40; I've gone about eight miles. Michelle said that her house was 12 miles down the road so I must be about four miles away. Billy noticed a small gas station up ahead and signaled to turn in. He wasn't even sure if it was open, but he stopped.

The station had only one pump: regular. It was a good thing that the MG ran on regular. It was also a good thing that he made it to the station; the tank was empty. Billy started to get out of the car. Just then an old man came stumbling out of what appeared to be a house, with a chicken leg in one hand and a green cloth napkin in the other. "I'll get the gas, Bub," the old man yelled as he crossed the short distance between the house and the pump. Billy looked at the old man for a long time — almost 20 seconds went by before anyone said anything. The man was really old, his face wrinkled and his hair white, but his eyes — his eyes were on fire. Billy saw the old serviceman's eyes and realized they were the same color as the sun; that same burnt-orange. Billy knew the man was alive and young inside.

"F'ller up, bub?" the old man asked.

Billy waited. "Yes. Does that pop machine work?" Billy asked the old man.

The old man looked to the sky. "Red skies at night, sailors delight," he said.

"The machine?" Billy called.

"It works."

Billy walked over to the machine. When he reached into his pockets for the change, he looked at his watch. It was 5:40. "Great," I'm 20 minutes early."

Billy examined his soft drink choices: Coke, Tab, Sprite, Fanta Red Cream Soda. He put 45¢ into the machine and pressed the Fanta button. A sweat-beaded can of soda rumbled out of the bottom of the machine. Billy picked it up and pulled the tab. He brought the drink to his mouth and drank until his throat burned. The cold cream soda cooled and refreshed Billy from the ride in the open air.

Billy looked back to the old man. "How far is it to Allen-Gale Estates," he asked.

"Have you ever seen the sun look that orange this early in the night, bub?" the old man yelled. "Orange skies come across time," the old man said.

"What did you say about sailors and red skies? I think I've heard that before."

The man's eyes lit up even more when he realized that Billy was interested in what he had to say. "That old saying don't apply 'night," the old man said. He smiled. "'nights the summer sols'tis the longest day of the year, maybe time."

Billy gave the old man a puzzled stare. "How much do I owe you?" he asked.

"Be eight dollars and 37 cents, bub," the old man said. Billy handed him a ten and took another drink of his red cream soda.

"Out'a ten." The old man slowly gave Billy his change.

The car purred to life as soon as the key was turned. As Billy pulled out of the station, he heard the old man say, "Allen-Gale's just on the other side of the stream, where the corn turns to beans, and there's a one-lane bridge." Billy got the car going 40 again and reached between his legs for his pop. The can was making wet marks on his jeans. Billy grabbed it and took another drink until it burned his throat. The can was empty. "Aaah."

He reached over and turned on the radio; he turned the music on low. The entire sky was orange; the clouds were dark blue; nothing was right. Billy thought it was going to storm.

Billy drove along the last few miles of Valla Vista. He saw the one-lane bridge the old man was talking about. It was made of stones and

covered a rapid stream. The water in the stream forced some fallen leaves down the creek out of view. Billy slowed the car down, but he wasn't quick enough because the front of the MG hit and bounced up. Billy felt his stomach rise and fall, like he was on some ride at King's Island — the Beast, or the Racer. He shook the cobwebs from his mind. Billy looked around and realized that the old man was again right. In fact, Billy couldn't even see the cornfields any more. He heard the running gurgle of the stream and saw row after row of soybeans. Billy looked at the rows of plants and thought they looked like G.I. Joe's and Barbie's apple orchard. The bean plants looked exactly like mini-apple trees. Billy wondered if soybeans tasted like apples; he didn't think so. He looked at his watch; it was still only 5:50.

He thought he saw the sign for her addition; he wasn't sure. Billy slowed down to 30 and turned the radio down; he wanted to make sure he made a good first impression on Michelle's parents. He knew that his little sports car would worry her parents enough, without them thinking he was a loud, wild teenager too. Billy didn't want anyone to think he was a wild teenager, especially Michelle's parents.

Billy saw the entrance to her complex, signalled, and turned onto Wonderland Drive. "Wonderland." Where do they get the names, he thought. Billy stopped here to think about what Michelle had said. "Fourth house on the left, tri-level, half stone . . . half wood. The wood's painted blue; the address is 11090 Lana Court; and the name is on the mailbox." He was sure he could find it. Billy slowly glided the car along; he pulled up next to her mailbox.

11090 Lana Court — The Thomases. Billy slowly glided the MG into the driveway. He looked down at his watch; it was 5:54. He made it with six minutes to spare. That was good for not knowing how to get there he thought. He parked in the shade of a maple tree, in the driveway turnaround. The turnaround, Billy noticed, was also a basketball court. The lines were painted on the blacktop drive and the basket was mounted off of the side of the mini-barn.

Billy slowly shut the car off, its engine purring to a halt. He took out his keys and opened his door. He swung his feet onto the asphalt. Billy rested for a few seconds and looked at Michelle's home. It was just as she described it, but Billy never realized there were homes this far out into the fields.

As he got out of the car, he took a deep breath and looked at his watch again. It was 5:56. Billy walked to her front door thinking about summer. This summer wouldn't end. He had been ready for school to start for days now. School wasn't scheduled to start for another six

weeks. Billy knew the weeks coming up were going to be boring; there are just so many things a 17-year-old can do with all his time.

Billy stood at the front door of Michelle's house. He used the glass in their stormdoor to fix his hair and clothes. He looked at his watch one last time; it was 6:00. Billy knew that everyone must be watching him. He believed that there were several pairs of eyes staring at him, but he wasn't sure where they were coming from. Billy took one last look at himself in the glass. He looked good.

He straightened his shirt and pulled at his pants. He reached over, and with a shaky hand, pressed the doorbell. A series of gongs exploded somewhere in the house and there was running. Billy waited for someone to answer the door; anyone.

Michelle opened the door. She looked surprised to see Billy. "Here I am, right on time," Billy smiled. Michelle had a puzzled look on her face. Billy looked at her face. Makeup really makes some girls look older; Michelle looked really good, but she didn't look ready to go.

"Is this some joke?" Michelle asked.

Billy looked at her. "Joke? I'm right on time. Friday, June 22nd, 6:00 p.m."

"Billy, I haven't seen you for a year, not since you never showed up for our date," Michelle said.

Billy looked around him. It couldn't be true, but somehow he knew it was. "What did that old man do to me?" Billy yelled.

Michelle opened her mouth to say something, but then closed it without speaking.

"I just stopped for gas on Valla Vista," he said.

"Hell of a long fill-up. By the way, I hate you."

"The old Man."

"Wait, there is no gas station on Valla Vista," Michelle said.

Billy slowly walked back to his car.

"Does this mean you're back in town, Bill? Bill?"

He could barely hear her, over the rumblings of the stream.

Billy got into his car and backed out of the driveway. Michelle stood on the patio and waved goodbye. Billy glided the MG back to Valla Vista and headed for the orange giant in the sky.

CAT Flambeau

Don Miller

Engulfed flaming CAT (previous)
completing tedious
regulated excavation:
Buried mysterious

Jar dug, struck, exploded into
engulfing flames. Now singed
and as quick as this crackled
paint flutters the wind.



Memories Never Die

Maha Addasi

From what the doctors were saying, there was no hope. I listened to them, from behind the closed door of my living room, discussing the statistics of my deteriorating health. Judging and concluding my condition and my very life's blood just like it were the latest fad. I had to endure it, praying for a spark, a hope, a word of encouragement. Alas - it was too late. But that is impossible!

That couldn't be, and as the doctors filed out from their mini-conference, I scanned their faces for any signs; a nod maybe or a wink telling me all this was just a joke, a game they were playing on me. Surely it was a rotten trick, but I forgive them for it in advance.

There was nothing of the type and I slowly absorbed the truth about my approaching demise. But no! I must last a little longer and hold onto this life of mine in order to reminisce on days long gone.

I could see the beach from my rocking chair window and the noises made by the children were glass sharp as they ran, screamed and shouted around like the chips of a kaleidoscope; dressed colorfully in their summer attire. Amongst all that was a beach ball which was being snatched and grabbed as if their existence depended on it.

Slowly I realized that I recognise these children — that the boy is Brent, leading with the beach ball in his hands, running as his sun-bleached, arrowstraight hair glistened away. In the green swimming suit is Connie with her healthy bronze skin and hawk-sharp eyes trying to get the ball for her team, and to one side are Jerry, Nell and . . . and me! In the satiny blue water Kevin is swimming all by himself. The blue sky and blue blue waves seem overwhelmingly immense — with Kevin's head, a blob out there, so far away.

The warm air is velvety against our cheeks and we don't mind the branding sun which looks like it is about to burst with light intensity. No, we don't mind that at all. All we want is to play games while we still can.

The thought that we will not stay together forever as school friends and neighbors is tantalizing our happiness. It is like a drop of ink in a glass of water. You cannot see it, but it is there and so are our thoughts.

The doctors were saying something to me from behind me and I, in my rocking chair, ignored them for I must not waste time. They were insistent and I felt as if I were being invited to drink poison. They wanted to tell me what was happening to me, but I already knew so I stubbornly held onto the handles of my chair with my knuckles that jutted out with age, having barely enough skin to cover them. My expression was a strict setting of what I knew was a face cracked with wrinkles, and my white fire of hair gathered at the top of my head in a bun.

We are running towards the beach house, laughing with all our remaining energy. But that's not the beach house. This is the stage. We are proceeding towards the stage, preparing to receive our certificates, and my hair is a rich, chestnut, care cut. There is no bun; instead there's my graduation cap and I am smiling so wide that my teeth seem so many. I have a twinkle in my eyes and my chin is held high with pride. As I look around me, I see that Diane is doing the same, and Joe and all the rest of us. We are ecstatic that we have achieved. Our expressions are clones of each — very proud.

We are in our school playground, as if by magic transformed there where we are bidding our school farewell. How emotional should we be? Tearful, excessively friendly, or should we keep our feelings solely to ourselves and act as though this is the most natural thing in life, which it is? Should we remind ourselves how many times we told ourselves that we hated this school? All the while we meant that we loved it. Hate it; who were we convincing? Surely not ourselves. We love this school, always have and always will. We love its walls, its corridors, its doors. After all, we spent hours there scrambling into our classes. Every corner and every tile means something to us.

The water receded into low tide. The children packed their beach equipment and reluctantly left before the darkness consumed them. The robin at my window moved with staccato footsteps, bent over every now and then like a fat man with a red shirt, and ate what scanty food it found.

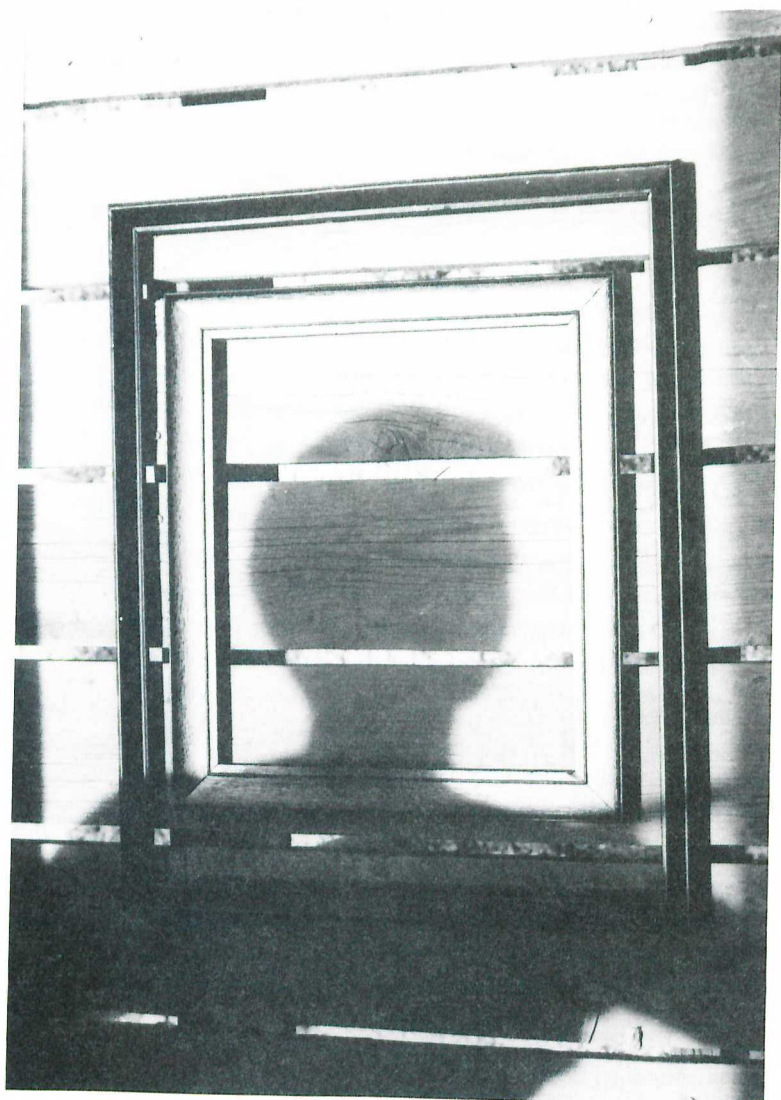
The red of the robin's breast was like fresh blood, and the pain in my chest felt like a sword sliding slenderly beneath my skin, penetrating my heart and staying there. The red of the robin's breast was like the blood held in my heart by the sword. The blood now became the sun, blazing into sunset. A martian sky.

I grabbed my heart and watched as outside it got darker . . . and darker . . . and darker.

Kill Deer

Sarah Hill

Before the sun has lowered to the hill
where sugar trees stretch, black on orange sky,
I hurry home; my traps of blood-stained steel
and rifle clank each step on hip and thigh.
Beyond these woods a mile the hay fields lie,
my boots are weedy, wet, I'm half way there.
Brown birds wheel out from underfoot. They fly
off, skimming grass, their black stripes pierce the air;
they call to me, kill deer, the bird-cries tear
the sky, that once fell soft as guitar notes
when I would walk the fields. The name is theirs
if we can name what rises in their throats.
And still they sling the cry at me, kill deer,
or that's the way it sounds against the ear.



November 19, 1986

Jennifer Comfort Bingham

Shadowless-composed of shadows-
The muffled half light curves away.
In the colorless world outside my window
The sunless, moonless, dirty bandaged sky
Fades slowly from my sight.

Dull crumpled leaves
In mass extinction
Carpet the yellowed, unseen grass.
And agonized black trees struggle
Twisting against the threatening winter sky.

Hunting for Tin Cans

Betty Garrigus

A worn grey angel, wings dragging,
he walks enduring sunless cold
along the highway.

A red cap on his head
nods up and down intensely
birdlike stabbing broken lines
across the sky. Like a large
winter-crazed bird pecking frozen
grass searching the sliver
of consumed elixir.

His grey blanket poncho
trails tattered wings across
the burlap sack whose sagging
entrails are the food
of his survival.

The beginning and end
of his pilgrimage
the hollowed ditch
beside the road.

Choosing Sides

Sherri Leibring

Morning

Mornings were always the same — always, except on the weekend; those mornings were different. On Monday and on Tuesday and so on, though, I'd always wake up the first time to the sound of hurried shower water and to the scent of no coffee brewing. Mom always came into my room to rush my morning giggles and to gather what I'd need for the day. Six o'clock and we, hand in hand, knocked on the bathroom door and kissed the face that peeked from behind it. In the mornings Daddy was only a face. Out of our house, my mom would buckle me into my side of the car, which was her side in the evenings when my daddy was along; away we'd roll into the summer-morning dawn or into the winter-morning darkness. We always passed the same houses and trees and paperboys, the stoplight was always red, and Judy, my babysitter, was always waiting when we got there. Unbuckled and kissed good-bye, holding my sack of clothes and some toys, I'd watch my mom drive away to work and I'd wipe at the new sleep in my eyes.

Morning II

When I woke up the second time in the morning, there was noise — lots of noise. Cartoons argued: channel four, channel seven, channel four . . . Young voices laughed and teased, whined and rambled. Bacon sizzled and Judy whistled as she loudly scrambled eggs; moments later, she'd call us in to eat breakfast. Eleven of us and Judy took our places at the long table, her own five kids on one side and five other kids she took care of on the other side. I sat alone on the end way across from Judy. Cereal boxes rotated, forks and spoons clanked, and someone always cried if he didn't get the cereal box prize or if he spilled milk or was spilled upon. I never said I wanted the prize and I always said that I didn't remember when voices would ask in rage just who had had the prize the last time. There was always big noise at the big table; one side was never louder than the other . . .

Who we were

Judy was my mom's sister, my aunt. I was seven and I was twelve

and all the years in between. Perry was older than me; he was Judy's oldest, then came Joey, Marty, Amy, and the baby Debbie. Kim and Kelly were the twins who did not look alike. Greg was their little brother. And Staci and Eric only stayed at Judy's on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. We were all cousins, related on our moms' side.

Judy

Judy was nice to me and I liked her, too. Sometimes I'd help with dishes and she'd tell me about when she and Mom were little and hated to do dishes. Standing at her side and half-smiling, I'd wonder if she'd grown to like doing dishes because now she did them every day — it's a perpetual thing.

Judy was a housewife to the fullest. She cooked, she cleaned, she canned . . . and had a job babysitting. Not quite Supermom but motherly all the same, Judy consoled, entertained, scolded, and, at times, ignored us all. I think Marty was her favorite even though they fought all the time. Often caught in the room they were arguing in, I'd be the sidelines; when asked for a call, I couldn't agree with either Mary's wrongdoing or Judy's assumptions. So the one who debated the loudest or longest won.

Me

I was, I am an only child. I have always like it that way. I was never alone unless I wanted to be, and sometimes not even then. I was always in the middle of some argument, of some decision, of some crisis; in the middle is where I was loneliest. I couldn't take sides; I was my own side.

Them

Judy's kids fought a lot. They always picked on each other unless someone else who wasn't Judy's kid was doing the picking. Then, they stuck together—siblings united. When Judy's house wasn't a happy place to be, even the other sitter-kids could look at each other—a brother or a sister—and see home. I'd look at them or even in a mirror and not be comforted. All the others pulled me in, and at the same time pushed me out. They knew that I would not always agree with their ideas; this bothered them. They knew that deep down I wasn't on their side. It angered them when I wouldn't agree or disagree, whether they were right or wrong. They never stayed mad long. I always liked them.

The house

It was big, red, and made of brick. The white trim was cracked and

peeling on the outside as were some of the painted rooms in the upstairs. The house was 'homey' but it really wasn't pretty or even nice. It took abuse and heard abuse. It also heard our secrets. It was where we all cried and laughed the most. It was old and had high ceilings, steep stairs, secret closets, and narrow hallways. Inside, I felt captive and scared, needing to always be near a window so I wouldn't be swallowed in the house's secrets. Outside, I felt left out and curious, wanting to be inside and included in its secrets. I never called it home, or even my second home; yet, I never said I didn't like it there.

Indoor games

To make afternoons a time when we wanted to be outside, Judy made us stay inside until lunch. We passed the time pretending and playing games. Hide-n-seek was impossible for us to play inside (or outside), but we still tried. After doing "one-potato" until the loser was one of us who wouldn't cry or quit because he was "it," the counter would count and the rest would scatter and hide so sleverly that would count and the rest would scatter and hide so cleverly that several minutes later the counter, the "it" would be tired of seeking and make his way to the t.v. room to watch gameshows with Judy. Inside we played board games like "Monopoly" and "Life," though we never finished a single game without an argument. Every game ended with some hostility; when Judy asked who won, I always said I thought it was a tie. Good guys and bad guys, team one and team two, or every man out for himself, we always divided.

Lunch

On pretty, summer days Judy would let us eat lunch outside at the picnic table. Peanut butter sandwiches with grape jelly and slices of banana on them, too . . . somehow baby Debbie always ended up with her sandwich inside-out.

The yard

The front yard was mostly porch, where we played on summer afternoons when it rained. The porch is where Judy would sometimes sit and pod peas or break beans that she'd picked from the garden to can. The backyard was much bigger, with a garage so filled with toys and bicycles that a car couldn't even be squeezed in on its side. There was the picnic table, one big oak tree, and a swingset with only two swingseats. Surprisingly, we were all good about taking turns, but the littler girls bickered over who got to take their turn as I took mine—

each wanted to swing beside me. Since there was only room for one to do this, there were always tears. I thought that even the room for only one was room for too many. A rock driveway separated Judy's yard from Shorty's yard. Shorty was the fat boy who lived next door. Perry didn't like him and had hit him once, so then all of us had to stay on our side of the driveway. Sometimes, when no one else was around to tattle, Marty would sneak over to talk or pitch ball with Shorty. And sometimes, I wanted to.

Outdoor games

Choosing sides in the overgrown lot behind the library, the 11 of us merged with the other neighborhood kids to play kickball, "steal-the-bacon," or "red-rover." Neither team ever wanted the very young ones on their side, but we always let them play. Teams were never fair because having two sides meant one side would lose. Perry's team always won after a long fight. Even when I was on his team, I'd silently agree if he was accused of cheating and I wouldn't stick up for him. "Whose side are you on, anyway?" he'd scream at me.

Parade

We all had something to ride at Judy's house. I kept a second bicycle there. None of us was allowed to ride in the street because the littler ones might follow us. So, in a long line we'd ride up and down the sidewalks, pretending time and time again to stop for gas. We were such a parade of bicycles, tricycles, scooters, and wagons! Up and down, back and forth, we stayed on the correct side of the walk at all times; there was a side for going and a side for coming. I'd ride up and down on my bike for a while, then I'd park at my best friend Jane's house and sit on the steps to her porch with her; we'd watch the parade go by. Jane wanted to switch the sides of the parade route to make the going coming and the coming going. She asked if I'd vote for the change if we got all the kids to vote; I told her that it really didn't matter to me which side I rode on . . .

Going home

Every day at five o'clock my daddy and Mom would pull up in the Pontiac in front of Judy's house to get me and take me home. I was always ready to go, but we never left right away. Of course I always got hugs before Dad would turn aside to help Joey fix a broken model airplane or to talk to Perry about hunting. And I got hugs before Mom and Judy sat down for a chat and a cup of coffee. Yet, this last half of an

hour at Judy's was the hardest and the longest. Trying to be patient, I'd sit on the living room floor and listen as the women discussed grocery prices, birthday gifts for my grandpa, and some things I just didn't understand. From time to time, Mom would tell me to quit biting my nails, or Judy would tell me to quit twisting my hair. Then, they'd talk about me, and to me at the same time, often wanting me to show the other something I'd done or to fetch something off the table, from the car. When they did make different requests simultaneously, I was unsure who to listen to first, unsure of whose side to go to. So, I'd stand, unmoving, until one of them repeated herself. Later, finally driving home, my daddy sat on one side of me in the driver's seat, my mom sat on the passenger side, and I sat in the middle, feeling almost secure. I talked to both my parents, trying to look at each of them an equal amount of time. I wasn't about to ever be accused of being a momma's baby or a daddy's girl. I stayed out of their spats.

Spat

One night when I was twelve I heard my parents through my open bedroom door.

"... but she is only 12 years old, and that is too young to stay at home alone . . ." protested my father.

"... needs some responsibility. It would be good for her, and she'd probably be happier . . ." rationalized Mom. On and on the discussion inched, flowed, raged. It ended with a mutual decision to let **me** decide if I wanted to keep going to Judy's house to be babysat or if I wanted to stay at home alone. Though I wasn't supposed to know, I knew that Dad didn't want me to be in the house by myself and that Mom thought it was just what I needed.

Climax

I was told to decide. I felt as if I had to choose a million different sides of everything I'd always managed to resolve by choosing not to decide. This time there was no way I could say that it was a tie or that I didn't know or that it didn't matter. There was no middle road, and I knew the choice I made would be a permanent one. I wondered if I should do what Dad wanted me to do, or what Mom wanted me to do. If I stayed at Judy's, I felt I would be on Dad's side and Judy's, but I'd also be choosing to go against what was my own side—being my own side, my own person. In the end I found my side, and I didn't consider it Mom's any longer . . . just mine. I still woke up twice in the morning, once to the running water and once to my alarm. I sat on the left side of the bus, trading stickers (taken out of a box of Trix cereal) with my friends. I

played kickball after school and told Perry that he was **too** out, even though he was on my team (I had chosen him). I had Jane over for a snack. We rode our bikes to the park on the correct side of the street and we swang side by side. . .

Walking by

I walked by Judy's house often going to visit Jane. Sometimes Judy would be on the porch breaking beans and watching the bicycle parade, and we'd talk. Sometimes, though, no one would be outside and I'd look up at the big, red brick house, wondering what was happening inside, what secrets I was no longer included in. I wondered, but I was glad to be in the outside instead of still left out on the inside.

Reunion

At a family reunion of my mom's side a few years back, but after I'd started staying home alone while my parents worked, I overheard Marty teasing the once-baby Debbie about how skinny she was. "Skinny-minnie slid down the drain . . . beanpole, beanpole, beanpole," he taunted.

Out of curiosity and perhaps some meanness, I agreed with Marty. "Debbie," I said, "you're going to blow away. You're looking as light as a feather. . ."

As Debbie blushed, Marty interrupted, "She looks just fine; you leave her alone." Shocked at Marty's tone, his change of mood, and stern expression, but yet familiar with the sibling defense system, I smiled . . .

Now

Years and years have passed since I used to wake up on two different sides of bed, to different sides and sounds of morning. Decisions still aren't easy for me to make, but I'm making them. I still feel a longing to be outside when I'm inside, and inside when I'm outside. And though I have learned to choose just one side and stand beside it, words still echo in my mind: whose side are you on? and which side? is it safe?

Poems

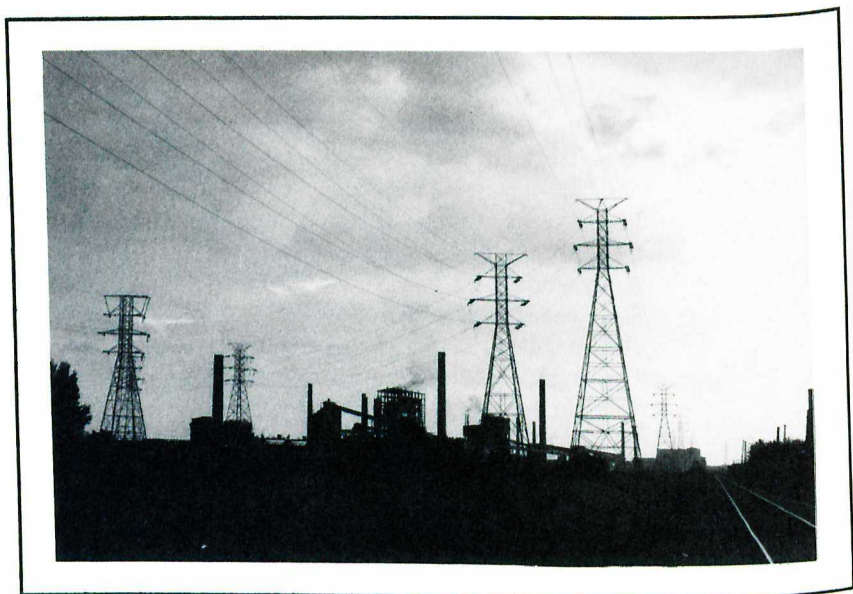
Glenn Michaels

Prescription glasses (for Mildred)

We both sit on the porch
Wedged into the thick heat
(but I wouldn't say we sit on the same porch)
I see in the lenses themselves
Thousands of faint scratches
Like in the gentle curves
Of an hour glass
Beyond the lenses I see
(where I expect eyes)
Two points of intense heat
Geometric and flat
Energy
(I wonder is it just refraction?)
And we both look out
Across a road
I see the jutting architecture
Bustling people, jerking cars
She sees the drooping willows
And sighing she bends
To join them crying
As she walks with her husband
(where her legs will never again take her)
In nineteen and twenty-six

Turning to the wind
We glance up that road

I see the irritating yellow
Of a double line, running
And become restless
She sees the waning yellow
Of the setting sun
Turning to me, looking through her glasses
She can see my tears
As I can see hers
And I am glad that her lenses are two way
And that she is too old for sunglasses



Eruption

Sweltering ground
Bursts
Splattering sticky hotness
On bare flesh
Of sleeping stones.
Distant rumblings
Muffle pain-filled cries,
Until drowned
In molten sorrow.

Ebb

Salty broth

Turning, churning

Tossing spray.

Throbbing sea

Oozing over

Silver sand,

Leaving

Specks of froth

Stranded.

Wasted time

The sound of stone
Scraping stone
As the cinder block hands
of a time worn
Clock
Grind across
Its withered face
Counting
the seconds
of a wasted
Day

Visiting Father

The eager flame
Twisting, leaping
Writhes like wonder
In sister's bright hard eyes.
The jack o'lantern
shakes with laughter
In her tiny hands.
How she gasps
With each silvery ring
Of shiny spade
Dancing in dirt, oh wicked blade.
Her shallow breath
Mixes with the pitter
Of rustling shower of sand.
I hear her heartbeat
Match the knocking
Of my shovel on his rotting door.
Creak of door swing
In dim illumination
But we would know our father
Anywhere.
Rickety click of hallowed bones
Swollen stench of strips of flesh
As he warmly winks a corroded coin.
Silent reach of sunken hand
Into our very soul
To clutch the flowers we have brought him
And crumble into dust.

Wooden Man

Debbie Edwards

A small, nervous-looking man walked out of his dark, corner office. He stared at me as his right hand searched the left inside pocket of his suit coat. He glanced downward, briefly, as he pulled out a new cigar and started to unwrap it. He removed the band and then fumbled with the cellophane packaging. He looked up again as he crammed the crinkly mass into an outer pocket of his jacket. He carefully bit the end off the cigar and took a step closer, placing the nub in a nearby wastecan. He smiled at me, but his eyes searched mine. He turned away, lit up, and puffed back into his tiny office. Stay there, little man, keep to your own life.

I like to look through the black Venetian blinds which screen the windows of my stark, 6th-floor office — especially when they're slanted, a little more closed than open. The top of the window is dark, and you can't see out. But, if you look through the bottom part, really close up, the horizontal slats gape to show the world of buildings, vehicles, and pedestrians below. And all you have to do is tilt your head to make them all disappear.

I wait in line at the cafeteria. It's far too crowded; we are shoulder to shoulder, tray to tray. Eyes follow the plastic-wrapped meals spinning slowly on the merry-go-round server. My hand shoots out, over the food and under the hot, orange lights. Necks crane, feet shuffle. My hand comes back - empty. People behind me are waiting, watching. A cup of coffee and a cigarette are my lunch.

"Honey, come and look. Aren't they just darling children?"

I keep my head down; my eyes remain riveted to the sports section.

"Come to the door and listen. It's 'O Come All Ye Faithful.' Remember when you used to sing that with the kids on Christmas Eve?"

I go to the bay window and push aside the heavy, white drapes with my wrist, my hand still clutching the paper. I peer out of the corner pane. The children sing with great feeling and compassion. They are young; they don't see the world clearly yet. I let the curtain fall back into place.

It's 7:27 a.m. I reach over and flip the alarm switch to "off;" no sense in waking Kaye. My toes curl as they hit the cool, white tile floor of my private bath. That's one thing I'd insisted on when we got married - separate baths. Kaye keeps mine spotless, a sterile chamber, thoroughly uncluttered except for the necessities of soap, toothpaste, towels, toilet paper and one marble ashtray. Kind of a tile, chrome, and glass sanctuary. I turn one of the gleaming brass knobs in the shower stall. A rush of hot water pounds against my chest. I twist the other knob to reduce the heat. Then, I close my eyes and place my head under the powerful jet of water. My pulse throbs, and a light cloud of steam rises to the gold and white flecked ceiling above. I am deep inside myself. I am alone.

There's an award banquet at the Sheraton tonight. It'll be the same as last year's and the year before that. Only the names of those recognized change, and sometimes not even that. Harold Flynn has got the suggestion-box award three years running. They fill you full of liquor and then sit back and watch. And listen. Just one wrong word, one slip, and they've got you. Boy, have they got you. I'll have one social Martini - no olive. Then, it's tonic water and a seat in the shadows. I won't get caught, not this time, not this way.

I hit the brakes hard. The seat belt is the only thing that keeps my head from meeting the windshield. The middle-aged woman driver of the Dodge wagon in front of me throws an angered stare over her right shoulder. I wasn't tailgating. She'd better not try to pull that with me. The damage isn't bad. We can pay for our own repairs. Why make a fuss? I unfasten my seat belt and unlock the door.

I caught a half-reflection of myself in a clear, glass deli-window today. My hair is graying (well, what there is left of it). Deep furrows mar my forehead. Heavy brows knit close together over my small blood-shot eyes. What color are my eyes? I think they used to be blue, but I can't tell now. Everything looks gray and distorted. It's probably the supermarket lighting.

"What can I get you, sir?"

The young girl's voice pulls me back to the outside world. My head jerks upward in nervous apprehension. I motion to the German potato salad.

Bud Keaton is dead. We used to be close. Kaye and I have to wait in

line to pay our last respects. Hundreds of darkly clad mourners file past the open box, each peering in. Some of them even cry. They don't touch Bud, though. They can't. He's far beyond them - us, now. He has found serenity. I tug to loosen the knot in my necktie and glance down to see the soft, sewn-smile on Bud's lips.

"Grandpa," calls little Kaye, running down the porch steps and over to the car. She jumps into my arms as I open the door. Soft, curly, blonde hair brushes against my neck and collar. She hugs me tight, her bright blue eyes smiling into mine.

"I have a special secret. But I can tell you because you're my **best** friend. Aren't you, Grandpa?"

I hold her closer. Yes, my eyes had been blue, too.

Sometimes, on Saturdays, I work in my woodshop. It's not really a full-scale work area, just a small, dark room off the north side of the garage. I take a sack lunch and spend the whole day there. Amazing how a block of hard wood can become anything. With just a few changes, a solid piece of lumber can be made into something truly useful. Yesterday, I was working on a wooden man - a toy for little Kaye. I pressed the iron tool harder and harder against the spinning lathe. It was just about perfect. But the wood was soft on the inside, or maybe it had been treated too roughly. Either way, the wooden man crumbled and fell to pieces in my hands.

I lean over my bathroom sink and cup handfuls of warm water into my face. I look up and stare into the mirror on the front of the medicine cabinet. My un-dried skin gleams in the glow of the fluorescent lighting. My hair is still gray. The furrows in my forehead are just as deep. My pin-point eyes are nothing but red.



A Story

Monika Armstrong

I remember the smell of Sears — the nut and candy booths in the middle of the aisle, directly in front of the entranceway. What child could resist throwing pride to the wind and making himself a circus attraction over double-dipped chocolate peanuts? I thought that the counter girls were goddesses. I couldn't think of anyone else who would deserve working in a Sears nut and candy booth. It was all so perfect. Even the bags had character — white and aqua striped with "Sears" written in script. They were wax lined so not one bit of chocolate could be wasted. When I was eating Sears' double-dipped chocolate peanuts, I knew there was a god.

As I stand here now, waiting in the checkout line with my 3-year-old on my ever-widening hip, I remember. Sears has changed. Nowhere do I see a candy booth, or smell that smell. I look around and notice that all is chrome, and the air reeks of new carpet.

That reminds me that I need vacuum cleaner bags. The perky checkout girl with dimples and braces rings up my Clairol home permanent. She looks at me in a kind of sorrowful and almost condescending way, as if to say, "It's not going to help, but I'll let you buy it anyway." What does she know? I look at her with the wait-til-you're-my-age-with-a-kid-and-no-husband curse in my eyes.

As I leave the little bitch and walk to the vacuum center, I realize that I'm only 28. What am I doing to myself? Just because he left doesn't mean that my life should end. Who gives a damn? He's gone, and I know that he's never coming back.

I think about my youth at Sears. Mom would buy me a pound or two of chocolate peanuts and we would leave the candy booth, Mom clutching my arm and I clutching my candy. We would walk past the tools and washing machines and vacuum cleaners. There would always be a man standing near the aisle on a piece of red carpet. In one hand, he held a vacuum cleaner, and in the other, he held a jar of dusty, ashy, hairy junk. I knew he smiled because he got to pour the mess onto the nice, clean carpet. I remember hearing all of the mothers in the crowd gasp as he began to pour. The man would then stomp on the dusty, ashy, hairy junk to make sure tht it was ground in well. He would then turn on his super-duper, ultra-deluxe Kenmore vacuum cleaner and all of the dusty, ashy, hairy mess would disappear — all of

that work sucked up in an instant.

The vacuum cleaner man is gone now. He left years ago. I walk through the aisles and finally find bags for my vacuum. I wonder where the man got his miraculous vacuum. My Kenmore sure the hell doesn't work that well.

An acne-plagued, awkward boy rings up my bags. I remember that I need a couple of towels. The His and Hers set that was given to us as a wedding present has become thin. Besides, I only have half of the set. When he left, I ravaged all of the His towels with my Fiskars and mailed them to him.

The towels are upstairs, so I decide to take the escalator. When I was young, I thought that the escalator was an amusement for kids. I thought that Sears had the best ride in the universe. I would clutch my candy until it felt like an extension of my arm and ready myself for the adventure. Mom would always have a checklist to go through. I used to think that she had aspirations of being a pilot.

"Slow down." (check)

"Shoes tied?" (check)

"Gimme your hand. NOT the one dripping with chocolate. (check)

"Let's go."

I get to the escalator and check to see if my daughter's shoes are tied. I take her hand and she hesitates at the take-off. The teeth of the stairs always scared me a little, too. Past that point, I would be a-okay. About halfway, the ride would become a little boring, so I would start making faces at myself in the shiny metal that enclosed the escalator.

They don't use shiny metal to enclose escalators anymore at Sears. Now, we're kept in with plexiglass, so we can look down at the shoppers. This frightens my daughter, so she clutches my hand and stares forward. I pick her up before we get to the top stair because I don't want her to trip. I was so busy staring at myself when I was her age that I would generally end up face-down and sprawled out on the landing strip. God, my mother could be a bitch. She would pick me up, laugh and drag me through Sears for what seemed like days.

I remove my daughter from my numbing hip and let her walk. My mother tells me that she's surprised the kid **can** walk, considering how much time she spends being carried.

I spot the towel section and walk toward it. God, what plushness. I want maroon towels with the texture of shag carpeting. Blue, yellow, orange, green . . . There they are. I pounce on what remains of them. Maroon must be a popular color this season.

I go to the checkout counter with four, brand-new maroon towels.

They aren't as thick as I would like, but they'll do. God, cheesecloth would be better than what I have now.

I look to my side and realize that my daughter is gone. Oh, shit. She's been kidnapped. I just know it. Oh, why didn't I buy one of those leashes? "I'll be back as soon as I can. I promise."

I run through Sears, yelling my daughter's name. Suddenly, I realize I'm on the second floor. This is the toy floor, and I remember what I used to do when my mother bought towels. In the time it took for her to locate the gaudiest pink bath accessories, I would be ensconced in toys, aisles and aisles away.

I find my daughter by following the sound of a banshee. I dig her out from under a pile of He-Man action figures and apologize to the toy clerk. I whisk my child away and descend the nearest stairs. In my shame, I have forgotten my towels and my purse. I take the escalator back up to the second floor. I calmly approach the towel center so people won't think that it was my kid who had caused the commotion. I make my purchase. The towel clerk looks at me knowingly. He has a disgusted air about him.

At this point, I don't care. I look at my watch. It's almost one. "Days of Our Lives" will be on soon. I ask for a large bag to put my smaller ones into. I think that I piss the guy off.

My daughter is still sobbing as I walk down the steps. My mother used to threaten me when I sobbed. "Just wait 'til we get home. Your father's going to hear about this."

I can't do that to my daughter. I feel too sorry for her. Besides, her father isn't home. That makes me feel sorry for her, too.

As I drive home, I remember that Daddy and I used to be buddies. When Mom threatened me, I would look worried for her sake. I knew, though, that Daddy wasn't going to do anything to me. I was his precious. By the time we got home, I had achieved the most pitiful expression that I could muster. Daddy always fell for it. Mom would order me to "march right inside and tell your father what you did." Very slowly, deliberately would I walk up to my father. I would tell him all that I had done, at least the parts that I remembered. He would smile and pull me onto his lap.

I remember the smell of Daddy. It was a smell of comfort and strength. When I sat in his lap, I knew that I was safe.

I always shared my chocolate peanuts with him. He knew that they were the best, even if they were a mushy, melted mess. He didn't even care if I dropped a few on the carpet. He dropped a few himself.

Sometimes, I would spend Saturdays with Daddy. I was his little helper, or so I thought. Mom would always have jobs lined up for us to

do. I would carry the tools if we worked on the car, the brushes if we painted, or the gas can if we mowed.

We didn't like mowing. Daddy and I thought that it was useless and only created more work. We both dreamt of having a jungle for a front yard, but Mom and the neighbors wouldn't have that. Daddy and I decided that they had no sense of adventure.

After we finished our work, Daddy would often take me out for a treat. We would get ice cream, go to the zoo, or ride the Giant Slide. I thought that it belonged to the Jolly Green Giant. I loved the Giant Slide.

They don't have Giant Slides anymore. It's alright, though, because my daughter doesn't have a father to take her for rides.

My Daddy and I would have to sneak to the Slide because Mom didn't want us to go. She had seen something on television about Giant Slides being bad for the back. We didn't care. We had a sense of adventure.

Daddy would pick the piece of burlap and arrange it just right. He would sit down on it and I would sit on his lap. I felt grown up in a way because I knew that Daddy liked to ride the Giant Slide, too. I was always glad that I didn't have to ride by myself, though. Daddy was there to protect me.

It was slow right after we pushed off, but after the first bump, I knew we were traveling the speed of light. When we hit the rest of the bumps, my stomach would be in my ears, my eyes would double in size, and my hair would go wild. I didn't care that Daddy's vision was blocked, or that my back was in pain. I was riding the Giant Slide.

I remember our last ride on the Giant Slide. I landed in the pillows and bit my tongue. I couldn't move my back. My father stood above me and screamed, "Get up, goddammit! Get up! Why the hell didn't you get your goddamn hair outa my face? It's your own fault. Jesus . . . get up."

I tried to tell Daddy that I couldn't get up, but he didn't hear me. My face was buried in our piece of burlap.

I remember the smell of burlap. My ex-husband and I used burlap to pack our china and glass when we moved from our apartment to our first house. I had to hand wash each piece to get the flecks of burlap dust off of the glass. My hands got itchy and red. It was the first time that I took my wedding ring off.

We had met in high school. He was one of those people who didn't care about what people thought. I should have remembered that when I said "I do."

He wore Sex Appeal cologne by Jovan. My mother called him a hood and asked me if I had any pride, being his girl friend and all. She reminds me of this every time I call her on the phone to cry about how lonely I am since he left. God, my mother can be a bitch.

I have always wondered what my father would have thought of my husband. I still don't know. I haven't seen Daddy in quite a few years. Actually, I probably wouldn't have cared what he thought after our last ride in the Giant Slide.

I certainly didn't care what my mother thought. All I cared about was the fact that when I was with my boyfriend, I would get sweaty palms, my mouth would go dry and my stomach would solidify. When I was with him, I was happy. Now, I achieve the same physical state by drinking enough so I'll have a hangover.

The house that my husband and I moved into needed a little work and a few appliances, so about a week after we moved in, we went to Sears. I bought a pound of double-dipped chocolate peanuts. He told me that I didn't need them. He bought a hammer and I told him that it was a good investment.

We looked at Kenmore washing machines and decided to put a down payment on a top-loading, three-cycle, two water level, white model. My domestic dreams were coming true.

We passed the vacuum cleaner man who stood on a piece of red carpet, because Aunt Agnes and Uncle Charlie had given us a Kenmore upright for a wedding present. I still use it. I bought bags for it today.

I felt so much in love with my husband as we went upstairs to the paint department. We used the stairs because the escalator was too crowded. We held hands on the way up.

I let him choose the colors for the house. I figured that he knew about these things because he had taken art classes in high school. He had even won an arts and crafts award. He had made the furthest-flying paper airplane. He was such a worldly man. I was so impressed with him.

We drove home that day with paint, brushes, hammer, and anticipation. We worked on our one-bedroom, half bathroom house during the entire weekend. Our kitchen seemed much brighter in canary yellow and our bedroom looked much warmer in red. He said that red was the color of passion.

We painted the house again a few months later because the bright colors were giving him headaches. The smell of paint was giving me headaches. He thought that it was an excuse.

We moved to a different house about two years later. He had gotten

a promotion at the construction company. He started to make better money. It was about that time when my mother began to notice positive points about him. She was in debt, so we loaned her some money. In her eyes, my husband had become an angel.

A few months after we moved, he began to change. He started to wear different cologne. When I asked him, he said that he was tired of the same routine. I told him that we had just moved. How could he be tired of it already? That wasn't it. He said that he needed excitement in his life.

I suspected that he was having an affair, but I was too scared to confront him. All of the evidence was there . . . the change in appearance and working hours. I knew that these were the signs because I had a subscription to the *Ladies' Home Journal*, and I had read the article "How to Tell if Your Husband Is Having an Affair" in the December issue.

He even began to dress differently. Instead of overalls, he wore Levi's. His flannel shirts disappeared. He began to wear men's bikini underwear. He was acquiring a sort of class. I knew that something was wrong.

I thought that it was my fault. Maybe I had driven him away. I tried so hard to get him back. I told him that we could paint our new bedroom red — I could drop a few pounds — I could start shaving my legs again. No, that wouldn't do. You can never go back again.

I soon found out that I was pregnant. I didn't tell him about it, though. I didn't want him to feel as if I had trapped him.

I was realizing that I was losing him. And the hardest part was that I couldn't do a goddamned thing about it. I tried. I honestly tried. I tried harder than ever before in my life to try to alter a relationship with a person I loved.

I eventually told him about the baby. I realized that he had a right to know.

We made a concerted effort to patch things up. For a while, the relationship was looking brighter. We even decorated the nursery.

Ultimately, things fell apart again. A girl named Christy kept leaving him messages. I began to realize that he had been right. We had had our fun and there was no way that we could recapture it. We could never relive the good times. I was tired of the smell of paint.

He began to spend more time away from home. I started taking ceramics classes at the Y.

I remember the day he left. I came home from the grocery store. (I bought white grapes and five Hershey's bars.) I found a note on the

television. He was leaving me, it said. I should have known that this would happen all along. He still loved me, but he needed more. He would support me and the baby. He would keep in touch. P.S. He was sorry about the mess in the bathroom.

I could smell it all the way in the den. I went into the bathroom and found his bottle of Sex Appeal shattered on the tiles.



Reflection

Linda LeRoy

And life continues to throw me all curves
I will duck down and again pray for sun
It does not matter; no more impulse nerves
If I sit, I should stand or walk the run.

The familiar expression is broken
He fits the pattern of my mixed up life
And for this game I have one last token
With it one more play, loser gets the knife.

It hurts that you can't tell I've worked at this
It has always been no rewards for failure
Not even a shoulder to promise bliss
Listless I find comfort in the end lure

A red muscle deserves the blame for tears
True love only is reflected in mirrors.

Fire

William Creighton

Macys
weathered
second-hand
carried proudly
one handle broken
in December when *The Times* might be scarce
when she saved up seven issues
two Sundays
in preparation for the cold
the weight
proved too much for the bag
and the burden
too much for the woman
she realized
that the only cold that touched her
through a tattered wool coat
and layers of *The Times*
came from
inside
the only fire
thawed memories of misfortune
except
for a tiny silver ring on her finger
given to her by Madame Sinclair
outside
the Rivoli's backstage door
as Madame retreated
into a
waiting
limousine

When the day ends . . .

Lisa Bucki

The sun of dusk hangs lower in the sky
Surrendering as night's oppressive cloak
Cascades upon now red-hued waving rye
And cools the autumn warmth of leaves of oak

A pasture, fenced, soft green and rolling land
New shadows stain thick carpet, hillocks wane
A chestnut filly prances to its dam
They nuzzle, laying down on grassy plain

Two men whose shirts are coated with road dust
Are knocking at the door whose sign says "Inn"
They glance at peeling paint, stained streaks of rust
But bite their lips at stomach's rumbling din

And soon the stars are brave, release their light
They are the kind gatekeepers of the night