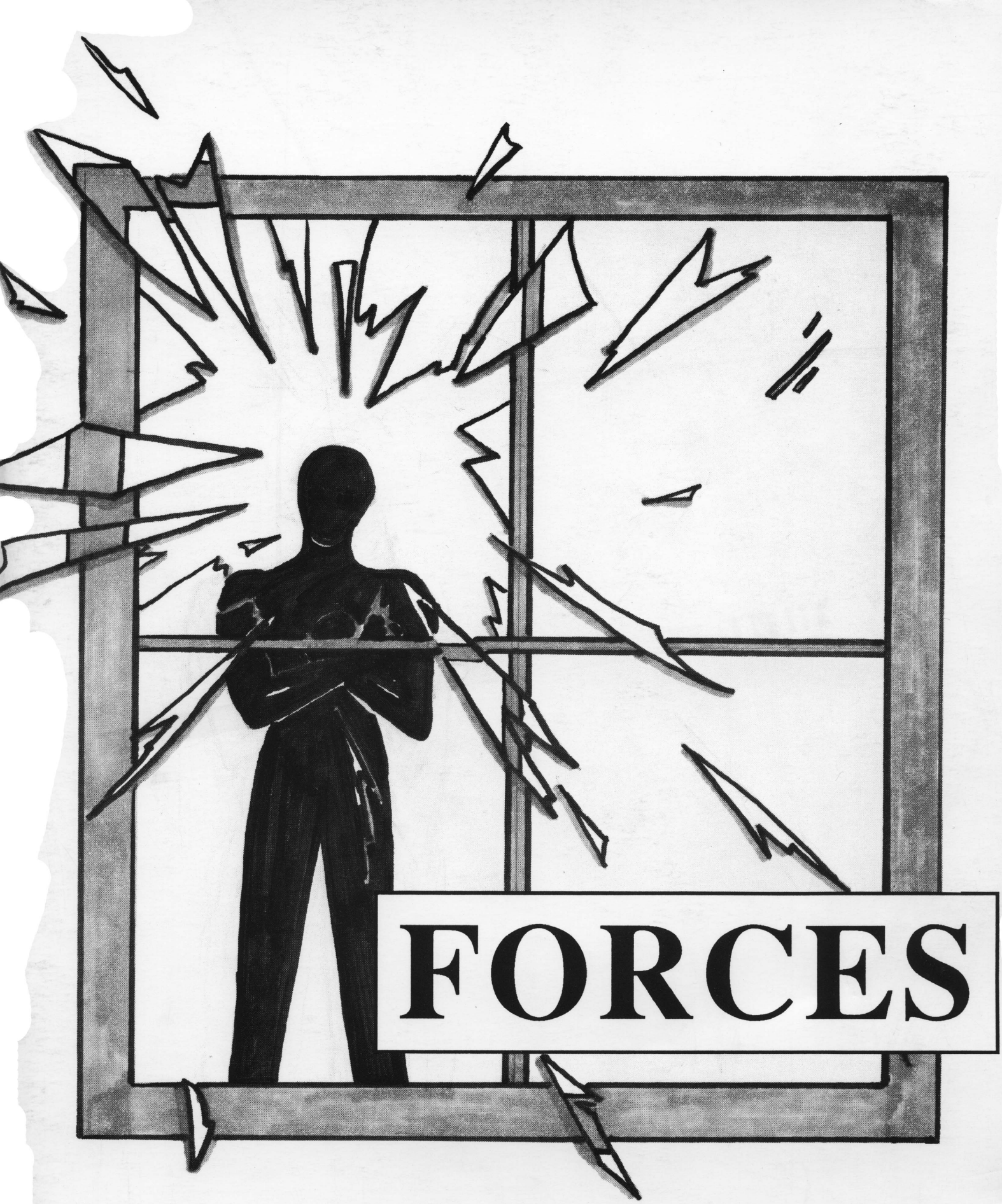
Forces

Volume 1991 Article 27

5-1-1991

1991 Forces

Peggy Brown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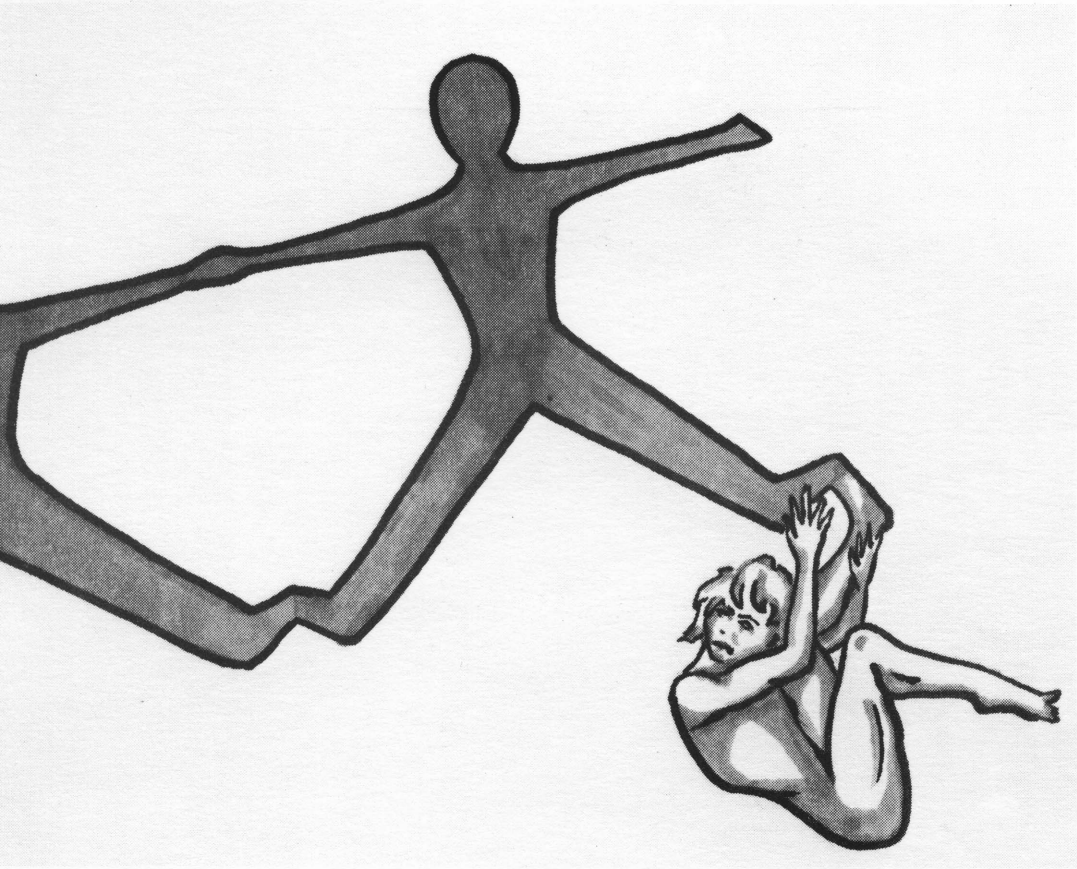

FORCES is a publication of the
Interdisciplinary Honors Program

Collin County Community College District
Plano, Texas 75074

All submissions to *FORCES*
are reviewed by students on an
anonymous basis

Submissions accepted for
Spring and Fall publications
Deadlines: April 15 and November 15

FORCES

Volume Four **November 1991**

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Marti Miles

Michael Anne

I should have been just Michael.
But the x's overpowered the y's;
my chromosomes forced me
into somebody else.
Still, with the name they gave me,
I received letters from the Boy Scouts,
Army recruitment information,
a request from the ATO's asking me to rush.

Stories were told of my parents at a costume party,
Mother's obstetrician dressed as a pregnant woman,
drinking martinis doubled,
when I, like a salmon attempting that upstream swim,
floundered in my mother's waters,
prepared for the spawning,
opened her floodgate,
demanded that Dr. Martini sober up.
Father shared his light blue rimmed cigars.

I arrived safely,
ten fingers, ten toes,
all body parts except one,
the one father wanted so long.
It would have been nice to be able to stand
but one part's missing;
that part would have opened a world for me,
another world, not the one I've known,
the bridge from one generation to another,
the key to unlock my father, and then my mother.

She put no bows in my hairthat was never braided.
My socks, a plain white,
never any lace, anywhere.
I pined for my friends' frilly pastel dresses;
my own, like sailor suits,
were the red, white and blue of the Navy,
with those ties,
always with those ties.

My name is Anne.
Anne.
Anne.
They could have called me by my name. Anne.
Even Annie or Annette. For Godsakes, even Anne-drogynous
They never called me Anne.
I flounder, sit on the bottom;
I wonder why they bothered.
I wonder why I'm Anne.
I wonder who I am.

De Kooning's Model

by Jerry Harris

If my memory serves me, Dr. Armsworth will visit today. He comes every Tuesday. Don't ask me why. I guess he's got his own reasons, his own stifling aesthetic, his own boring order, his own preconceived formula. Who knows why people behave the way they do?

I've been here five years, three months, and fourteen days—and he's always visited me on Tuesday. No, there's nothing wrong with my memory.

He's an average, static identity, and he's so boringly predictable. Today, for instance, we'll talk about Mother, and he will ask if I remember what happened to my wife. If I answer his questions correctly, permeate my answers with intellectual character and submit them to his external discipline, he may allow the orderlies to set up my easel near the big window. He may allow Nurse Turner to give me the De Kooning book—it helps me to remember Mother.

She was De Kooning's model and mistress during the early fifties. I use the color reproductions in the tattered book as informal guides when I paint my wife. De Kooning's theories are in there too. He was a continual identity.

Dr. Armsworth has never really studied Modern Art like I have, and so he only notices in my painting the slashes of brilliant red and the bold black stripes. He sees a schizophrenic's therapy, the meanderings of a sick mind—on canvas, in living color. But the color isn't alive for him. I tell him that my refusal to submit to his external discipline is, in itself, a discipline and that the painting embodies a continual identity, completely separated from my own continual identity. But he doesn't see it that way. He cannot see it that way. He says the painting—the only one I've worked on since I've been here—is by its very nature linked to me. He says that if I finish it, I'll be able to remember what happened to my wife, remember the action or reaction that put me here five years, three months, and fourteen days ago. But what does he know about Modern Art? Art is my life. He's never even seen Roualt. He can't accept my wanting the paint to build up so that it stands at least six inches from the canvas itself. I try explaining to him that I want a stained glass feeling. But he won't listen. He will not admit that a true Artist ought not be restrained by aesthetics, or rules, or morals, or preconceived formulas. He's an average, static identity, and he's so boringly predictable. No, there's nothing wrong with my memory.

Of course, I remember my Mother, even though she left my drab Father for De Kooning when I was quite young. She could see Modern Art and the Modern Artist in their pure, continual identities. She had large brownish-green eyes, almost Oriental, almost Romanesque, that seemed to float out at me—not quite round; indeed, if anything they seemed flat. Yes, now that I remember, her eyes were flat, like a carp's, like a Pit Viper's, clear and flat. But she had vision. When De Kooning offered, she joyfully accepted, leaving behind me and my Father and our pleasant boring middle-class home in Kansas City and moving forward into De Kooning's exciting paint-splattered studio in New York. Now her clear eyes stare from museum walls in every major city in

America.

No, make no mistake, there is nothing wrong with my memory. I remember visiting her once in New York, just before Father died. She had completely immersed her continual identity in De Kooning's theories and work. And even though I never met him, De Kooning's influence on my Art is clear. I remember in detail my visit to his studio. I remember that Mother slapped me until tears distorted my vision—making the studio come alive with liquid colors—when I insisted that Father was a "good" man. "No," she screamed, "he's neither good nor bad! He just is! He is what he is! She taught me a valuable lesson that has served me in my struggles for continual identity, my struggles of becoming, of being a true Artist: Any moral paradigm destroys the power of a continual identity, and this power of self is the source of Modern Art, the very soul and spirit of the true Artist. I have tried explaining this idea to Dr. Armsworth, but what does he know about Art? Oh well, if I answer his questions correctly, permeate my answers with intellectual character and submit them to his external discipline, he may allow the orderlies to set up my easel near the big window. He may allow Nurse Turner to give me the De Kooning book. It helps me to remember my wife.

My wife! Let me count the ways! Ha! Ha!

Of course I remember her. She wrote fiction. She wrote and wrote and wrote. She wrote for twelve years, eight months, and two days. That's how long I put up with her. She had no vision, all she ever used her eyes for was to question my every nuance, every attempt for continual identity. She had blue--soft, catlike blue--eyes, evaluating eyes. But she never saw; she was always too busy using them to ask, "Why?" She wrote several award-winning novels, and they were all nothing more than camouflaged versions of her only question.

In many ways she was very much like Dr. Armsworth. She made me laugh with her silly, blue-eyed absolutism. I remember the silliest comment she ever made: "There is Justice in the Universe." What Rot! For years she tried to harness me to her average, static identity, her ignorant value system. "True Art is the capacity to love another human being," she told me over and over and over. But what is love? I know nothing of love. I know Art.

I wish I could remember what happened to her. Maybe she moved back home to live with her Father. Dr. Armsworth asserts that if I can remember what happened to her, I will begin to get well. Get well? Who is sick? My silly, stifling wife certainly was!

I don't appreciate Dr. Armsworth allowing the orderlies to truss me up in this stifling white jacket. He must be trying to rob me of my essence, to take away my power, my Art.

Mother was right. The average static identity cannot understand nor accept the true Artist. And Dr. Armsworth is an average, static identity. He's boringly predictable. If I answer his questions correctly, permeate my answers with intellectual character and submit them to his external discipline, he may allow the orderlies to set up my easel near the window. He may allow Nurse Turner to give me the De Kooning book.

If I had a sharp-edged palette knife, I could slash my way out of this stifling white jacket. My life is Art. I am Art! I want to do what I do!

I hope Dr. Armsworth allows me to work on my painting. I might be able to finish it today. I hope he allows Nurse Turner to give me the book. I need to see it. I remember a brilliant red horizontal in *Woman II*, and if my memory serves me, Mother modeled for it. I want to paint a jagged, red horizontal just like De Kooning's below my wife's distorted chin, letting the red build up, letting it drip down to cover her pale breasts.

Marti Miles

REM Again

3:00 a.m. once more. Spirited shears sway
from ceiling to floor. Breeze blows silence past
my sleeping body. Night's rest has set in.
Nothing can be heard; then creaks of the door.
Unfamiliar footsteps walk across the floor.
Bag fits over my face to kill the breath.
Ten fingers wrap around my throat, squeeze and shake,
my neck breaks, my limp head falls to feathers.
Sharp blades impregnate my skin. Daggers forced further in;
daggers that wound my heart, puncture intestines.
Sliced skin forces red spurts to gush over me.
Each dagger thrown digs deep to bone; deeper to soul.
3:02 and in my bed I see me
floating on top of a high crimson tide.
Unanchored buoy bobbing up and down,
cadaver searching for burial ground.
Phantom creature takes me to deepest depths,
a million fathoms down, I gasp and drown.
Salt moisture on sheets, an ocean of sweat.
Night's realm of fantasy hard to forget.
Hands clutch the blanket, eyes open wide,
heart pounds—I'M AWAKE! I'M ALIVE!

"A rag-tag caravan of gypsies, minstrels and troubadours who call themselves the Dead family descended on New Orleans turning parts of the city into a psychedelic happening reminiscent of the 1960s. There were long-haired men playing guitars and teeny-boppers peddling tie-died t-shirts. There were quartz crystals and meatless hotdogs. There were flower children and LSD."

The Times-Picayune
10/19/88

Deadheads Boycott the Radius

by Marti Miles

Today on my
lunch break I saw
rainbows of peace
floating past Pontchartrain's
southern shores.
Explosions of times remembered
colored my mind
as these arched beings
sang 'round me, to me,
tunes from before
that reminded me of how life was then
and how rigidity
led me to the fall from grace
into this chaotic realm
I now call normalcy.
And now these curved spirits
warn me that straight lines are brittle,
should flex and curve,
wind, bend,
or spiral,
or they'll break in half;
that before I become too
burdened with the
quadrangles of life,
I should once again
allow strong forces to
make me the eye
of their whirlwinds.
Life itself is a circle
that needs no
radius or diameter.

But I remembered Dead music and college,
the sand storms of Lubbock,
and the white cashmere sweater
stained red my freshman year
by those grinding winds that
buffed me smooth.
I thought of the tornadoes
and the years it took me
to clean up the damage.
The few trees of those Texas plains
were lifted up and pulled apart
as if God were picking them as daisies
and playing "He loves me, he loves me not."
Tumbleweeds rolled,
rolled for miles on that panhandled
caprock with nothing but
piles of manure to stop them.
Then I thought of the forests of home,
and remembered what comfort there is in trees.

Watching these orbs
spread their colors
around the crescent city,
I was seduced by freedom,
then thought of my life.
For me to return, I'd have to stay between
the lines, a solid white on the right,
a dotted yellow to the left.
The road back was a straight one.
I thought of Mrs. Kline and kindergarten,
and my box of 36 crayolas
with the built-in sharpener.
She told us to keep the points sharp,
that sharp colors made it easier to stay
between the lines.
She yelled at me when I colored
my tree pink and purple;
she yelled when I didn't stay in the lines.

I bought a tied-dyed shirt
for my daughter,
stopped at K&B for crayons,
then forged a new and winding
route back to the office
to color away the afternoon.
I drew straight lines of yellow, red, blue, pink, and purple
remembering what comfort
there is in trees.

Untitled

Bill Wilkinson

An Extraordinary Dining Experience

by Kym Smith

I had just moved into a beautiful, new home in Delaware City on the Delaware River. The house was rumored to have been a station on the Underground Railroad during the 1800s. This rumor just added to the excitement and charm this old house held for me.

I was in the process of knocking out a wall on the lower floor. On the other side of the wall was an annex attached to the house. At some point the room had been closed off by this wall. I couldn't wait to see what was on the other side. I wondered if there might be some hidden treasure placed there during the Civil War. The time of the Civil War had always held a bit of fascination for me and I was holding my breath as, bit by bit, I tore the wall down. Throughout the demolition of this wall I thought I kept hearing some muffled sound. I assumed it was a television set left on by the children in some room in another part of the house.

As I broke through the last little bit of that wall, I gasped in fright! There before me was a short, black woman about five-feet tall just standing there staring at me. She was a little frightened too, I think. She stood with her hand in the pocket of her skirt and peered at me hard, as if the sudden light was hurting her eyes. This small woman had a broad face, a large scar across her forehead, and, in spite of her fear, she had very warm, kind eyes. She had a red bandana wrapped around her head, partially hiding that terrible scar. She wore a long, dark skirt and blouse. Both of them were tattered and dirty. We stared at each other for what seemed like a very long time, but must have been only a moment.

As my eyes became accustomed to the dark, I glanced around the room. It was small, scarcely six feet by eight feet, and was dimly lit by two well used candles. There was a door in one corner and a pile of rags in another. I noticed an old torn Bible lying on the rags and beneath them what appeared to be the remnants of a chain . The woman's sudden words made me turn my attention back to her.

"Are you a friend?" she asked, eyeing me suspiciously. I know she was startled by my clothing: cutoffs and a tank top. "Have you brought me a message?" she asked.

I was frightened but mumbled that I was a friend--I surely did not want any problems with this strange little woman standing in my house. I kept thinking to myself that I had seen this wizened little face somewhere before. Suddenly it came to me! This was Harriet Tubman! When I had read about her a long time ago, she had fascinated me, and I could never forget her appearance.

"You're Harriet Tubman aren't you?" I asked her.

"Who wants to know?" she asked, pulling a pistol from her skirt pocket. I could tell she had done this many times, as that gun came up in her hand easily. I assured her that I was a friend, that I didn't want to hurt her, and that I would be more than happy to help her in any way that I could.

After a few minutes of eyeing each other suspiciously, we both smiled and I knew she too began to wonder what was happening to us. She slipped the gun back into her pocket and breathed deeply; I had won her trust somehow.

"I thinks bof of us ain't from the same times, duzen't you?" she asked, with another funny look at my clothing. "Mr Lincoln says it done be 1857 and I sho believes him, don't you?" I nodded in astonishment.

"I 'spose you could set down and res' yoself and join me for some food," she said graciously. We both sat down on the packed dirt floor, and I was relieved because I wasn't sure that my shaking legs would have held me up for very much longer. She handed me a plate of rice and red beans.

"It ain't much. My friends lef dis here fo' me fo' supper. They knowed I was acomin' tonight. It might be jus' a little bit col'."

"Thank you," I mumbled, "Where are you going?"

She answered me as she ate her food. "Well, I was a headin' down south. I's gwine to see some folks down dere."

"Can you tell me about yourself?" I asked.

"Well, what you want to know chile?" she answered. I asked her to tell me where she was born and she seemed eager to give me the information.

"I was born in Dorchester County, Maryland, on the Brodas plantation.[1] My ma and pa still there--and my husband," she said with a bit of a smile.

"Tell me about your husband," I said.

"Well, I guess he ain't my husband no more. He done took hisself another woman after I left the Brodas place. He didn't wanna come with me when I left. I couldn't even tell him when I left, he say he turn me in whenever I talk about it. He thought leavin' was such foolishness. 'Cause he was free, he weren't no slave.[2] I guess he jes didn't understand. So after I left, he took hisself another woman fo' a wife.[3] So, I just drop him outta my heart like he drop me outta his."

"When was that, when did you escape?"

"Oh, it been' bout twelve years now I reckon. It was right after the young massa died.[4] When I was younger de old massa died and a man come to run things cause de young massa too young to run de place. After dat de young massa died and de slaves talk lots 'bout us being sold south. Real soon he sold two of my sisters south with de chain gang and I knowed dat I had to go.[5] I tried to go and take two of my brothers wid me but dey wanna go back so dey take me wid them.[6] But I knowed I would still go. One day I found out the new massa, Doc Thompson, done sold me south, so I knowed I had to go dat night in 1845. Dere was one of two things I had a right to, liberty or death; if I couldn't have one I'd have the other; for no man'd take me alive; I'd fight fo' my liberty as long as my strength lasted, and when de time came for me to go, de Lord would let dem take me.[7] I had to go dat very night. I wanna tell someone I's going', so I go up to de big house to tell my sister Mary, but de new massa come by so we couldn't talk. So's I sing and let her know I's leavin'."

"What did you sing?" I asked.

"Oh I sing,

"When that old chariot comes,
I'm going to leave you,
I'm bound for the promised land,
Friends, I'm going to leave you.

I'm sorry, friends, to leave you,
Farewell! Oh, farewell!
But I'll meet you in the morning,
Farewell! Oh farewell!

I'll meet you in the morning,
When I reach the promised land;
On the other side of Jordan,
For I'm bound for the promised land."[8]

"I sing dat song so Mary knows I'm agoin'. De new massa, he look at me kinda funny.[9] So's I wait till John Tubman 'sleep and I pack up some ash cake an' salt herring in a head rag an' I left.[10] I went to dis white woman's house. She don' tole me she would hep me ifin I ever needed hep.[11] So's I went to her house. Dis woman wrote some names on a piece of paper and tol' me dese places to stop. She tol' me dese folks would feed me and git me to de next safe place.[12] I found out dis was the Underground Railroad. De folks back home, dey talk 'bout de Under-

ground Railroad. I thought it was a real train dat folks could get on." She smiled a little at this.[13]

"So you started your journey north from there?"

"Yes."

"How did you find your way?"

"I jes took off and followed de North Star. I stopped at de places de white lady tol' me about. Dey gave me food and a place to sleep. I kept goin' and finally reached dat line to freedom. When I found I had crossed dat line, I looked at my hand to see if I was de same person. Dere was such a glory ober de fields and I felt like I was in Heben."[14]

"What was it like growing up on the plantation?"

"Oh, dat was a long time ago."

"When were you born?"

"I ain't really sure. I think it was 'bout 1820, or '21 near as I can figure.[15] My ma and pa didn't know how to read or write. Was 'gainst de law to teach a slave to read or write.[16] We tol' time by de seasons, by things dat happened."

"Where are your parents now?" I asked.

"Oh they still back in Dorchester County. I's goin' to try to git dem out dis time.[17] My ma's name Harriet Green. My pa called Ben Ross. Dey don't call me Harriet till I growed up sum. Wen I was little dey called me Minty. My name was Arminta Ross."[18]

"What was your life like on the plantation?"

"I was jes a little girl. Ma and Pa used to work in de fields and me and de other chi'ren used to play in front of de quarters. Sometimes we hept pick fruit from de trees and get de chicken eggs. We took dem to de big house. We didn't eat dat food. We et salt pork or salt fish an' corn meal mush or taters.[19] Dis old woman watched us while my ma and pa worked de fields. She was pretty mean. She jes sat dere watching us and she was always suckin' on an old pipe with nuthin' in it. She watched us to make sure we din't drown in de crik, git los' in de woods or get hurt. She was ole but she could sure use a switch. Sometimes she tole us stories 'bout Middle Passage, she called it. We din't know what it was but we was sure scart.[20] When I was 'bout five , de old massa hired me out to be a baby nurse fo' a woman. She named Mis Susan. De first thing dey tol' me to do was to sweep an' dust, but I didn' know how. I dusted de furniture de way dey say and den I sweep de flo' and de dust done git right back on de furniture an' Miss Susan, she whip me. I 'posed to be de baby nurse an I rock de baby. If'n I fall asleep, she whip me fo dat too. After while Miss Susan thinks I too dumb to learn anything, so she take me back to Massa Brodas." [21]

"After dat, Massa took me to work for Mr. and Miz Cook. He trapped de muskrats to sell de skin an Miz Cook, she gonna teach me to weave de cloth. I kept gettin' my fingers stuck in de yarn. Miz Cook done think I's too stupid to weave de cloth, so's I go to work for Mr. Cook tendin' de traps in de criks and de marshes.[22] Den one day I got so sick, dey thinks I's gwine to die, so dey send fo' my pa to bring me home.[23] After I got well, Massa hired me out as a baby nurse again. One day I saw somethin'. Dey was little chunks of sugar. I wanted to taste one of dem. De mistress saw me take one. She whipped me an' sent me back to Massa Brodas.[24] Massa Brodas figgered I couldn't work in a house no mo' so he let me work in de fields wit' my pa. I worked real hard. Den one day I was shuckin' de corn in de barn an another slave tried to sneak away. De oberseer, he saw him and tried to go after him wid de whip. I stood in de do' and de overseer pick up de lead weight fo' weighing of things and he threw it at de other slave an' it hit me in de haid."[25]

At this point, Harriet was rubbing the scar that was on her forehead. "You can still see where he hit my haid. I gets dese spells sometimes and I jes' goes to sleep fo' a spell. But, jes' fo' a few minutes, den I wakes up.[26] It scared me when I runned away. I was afeared I would have a spell an' dey would find me. But, I jes' tol' de Lord I would hol' on tight to him if'n he would see me through, an' he did."

"What did you do when you finally made it, and you were free?" I asked.

Her reply was a description of how she got to Philadelphia, got a job in a hotel kitchen, and saved all of the money that she could so that she could go back and get her family out of the

South.[27]

"When I saved enuf money, I go to see dis man and dey tol' me that his name was William Still. He tol' me dey gwine to sell my sister Mary an' her chi'ren.[28] I tol' Mr. Still dat I had to go back an' git my sister outta Maryland. He tol' me about a new law called de Fugitive Slave Law.[29] He tol' me dis new law say I can be arrested even in de North. I asked him where be a safe place to take my family and he tol' me dey be safe in Canada in a place called St. Catherines (now known as Ontario, Canada)."

"I knowed I was gwine to have hard times, but I had to make dis trip. Dat was de first trip I made back to de South. When I got my sister, her husband an' her children, I took dem to St. Catherines in Canada."[30]

"I can understand why you went back to get your family out, but why did you go back for so many others? If they had caught you, you surely would have been killed." I said to her. "Weren't you afraid to keep going back?"

Harriet answered, "Well, Missus, t'wasn't me, 'twas de Lord! I always tol' him, I trust to you. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I 'spect you to lead me, and he always did.[31] I ben a slave an' I knowed what it was like. I gotta go back to git out as many of my people as I can. I don' trust Uncle Sam wid dem no longer. I gotta take dem to Canada. 'Sides, if dey catch me, I gotta pistol. I will shoot myself before I let dem take me back."[32]

"When you are traveling with people do they ever want to turn back ?" I asked.

"Sometimes dey do want to go back, but I can't let dem. Once dey meet up wid me, dey know too much. I don't go back to de plantations. I stay 'bout ten miles away, so if dey get caught or if dey change dere minds, I can still go. Once dey meet up wid me, dey go all de way."

"Sometimes dey try to take me back, but I tells dem 'Dead niggers tell no tales' and I tells dem I will shoot dem, cause I have my pistol."[33]

"Have you ever had to shoot anyone?" I asked.

"No, I ain't never had to but I will ifin I has to. Ifin dey go back de Massa will whip dem until dey tell 'em 'bout me."

I asked her many questions. "Have they ever come close to catching you?"

"Sometimes we can hear dem on de road. We can see dem puttin' up de advertisements fo' us on de fences and de trees. An' when dey gone, we jes' laugh. We was de fools and dey was de wise men, but we wasn't fools enuf' to go down de high road in de broad daylight.[34] We usually sleeps during de day and den walks through de forests at night. 'Course I can't make dat many trips cause it costs a lot of money."

"How many trips south have you made?" I asked.

"Well, I reckon I made 'bout sebenteen or eighteen near as I can figger."

"Where do you get the money and what do you use it for on the road?" was the next question that I wanted her to answer.

"I git de money mostly from working, but I gits some from other persons too.[35] Dey is friends of mine and dey gives me some of dere money. I 'member de one time some persons helped me an' I din't have anymo' money, so I gib dem some of my underclothes to pay for dere kindness."[36] She snickered a little at her statement.

"Well, how do you travel so you don't get caught, and what special things do you do?" I asked.

"Well, we trable only at night and find a place to sleep in de day. We leabe on a Saturday night so's de massas don't generally know dat anyones done gone til' Monday morning and den dey don't git de advertisements out til' Tuesday, so by den we been gone fo' three days.[37] When I leaves de group fo' somethin, and den when I come back, I sings so dey knows it's me comin'."[38]

I had a number of questions that I still wanted her to answer before this wonderful time began to slip away from us.

"How many people have you brought out of the south? Do you think there will always be slaves?"

She quietly replied, "I don't know, I think ' bout two or three hundred persons, but deres lots more peoples dere.[39] Dere is only one way to free all slaves. We must make war against de slave owners and win.[40] I's gwine to hep my friend John Brown to get some people to hep fight."

I proceeded to tell her a little about how the Civil War

and the end of slavery came about. She listened intently and then said, "Maybe God sent you to tell me so's I know I'm doin' the right thing."

Harriet seemed to believe that God was leading her. I left the room that night and built the wall back. I've never heard her there again.

On long, warm summer nights, I think about this experience and the wonderful feelings I had for this woman who did so much good in her life. It often makes me feel inadequate. I remember choosing not to tell her about John Brown and Harper's Ferry, as I knew she had gotten sick and was unable to be there. I can still remember her soft words saying, "On my Underground Railroad, I never ran my train off de track and I never los' a passenger."

Notes

1 Ann Petry, *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), p. 1.
2 Petry, p. 74.
3 Petry, pp. 108-109.
4 Sam and Beryl Epstein, *Harriet Tubman: Guide to Freedom* (Champaign, Illinois: Garrard Publishing Company, 1968), p. 40.
5 Epstein, p. 40.
6 Sara Bradford, *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman* (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), p. 16.
7 Bradford, p. 21.
8 Bradford, pp. 18-19.
9 Bradford, p. 18.
10 Petry, p. 88.
11 Epstein, pp. 40-41.
12 Petry, p. 89.
13 Petry, p. 89.
14 Bradford, p. 14.
15 Bradford, p. 73.
16 Frederick Douglas, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglas* (Secaucus, N. J.: Citadel Press, 1983), p. 70.
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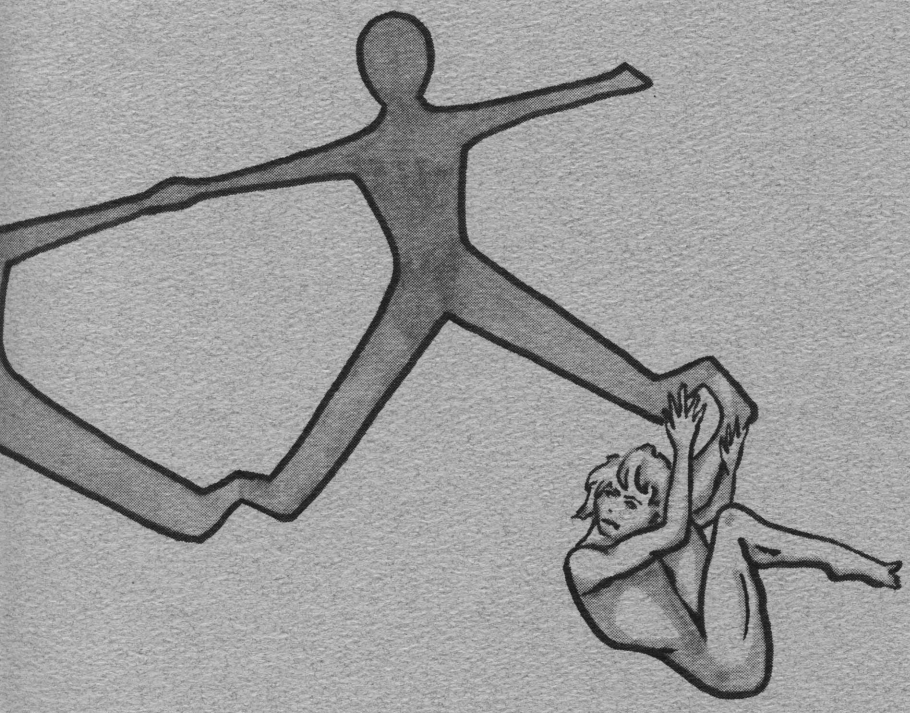


THE WINNER

by Linda Pinkham

Blanche was one of the few white faces from the Eskimo village of Kotzebue, Alaska. That probably meant one of her parents was a "sourdough," an imported Caucasian. She was very athletic and a good person to have for a friend if you were another 10-year old sourdough girl in a hazardous country. It was a hazardous country—unforgiving in the extreme.

Mistakes were deadly. All children of the icy regions learn cold, hard facts early. There are rules that cannot be broken. You never go out without telling someone where you are going and how long you will be gone. You never approach an animal, not living that close to the frontier. You never, ever, skate on gray ice. Those who made mistakes were sometimes found in the spring when the thaws came—or sometimes not found at all, like Blanche.

We were racing on ice skates, an art perfected by children of the north—the Aurora Borealis gang. Skating is a real trick when the ice doesn't freeze smooth—it has small wavelets in it. Approximately four to five inches high, they can throw you flat on your face. When you land, their brothers slice your hands like razors through cheese right through your mittens. There is a technique known to those children of the north (forced knowledge through experience): you skate on your toes. Never let your full blade touch the ice. Full-bladed skating is for smooth, sissy skaters who will return bloody from their encounters with the crystalline wavelets. Always skate on your toes. Not skating at all, really. Progress is made in a jerky, running, stumbling lurch across the eager mini-Alps of ice (awaiting their human sacrifices, almost undulating in their eagerness for wool, skin, blood).

We were racing. Blanche was winning, of course. I had been trying to beat her at any act of physical prowess since we had become friends. She was maybe two yards in front of me, skating (running, lurching) hard and low, her arms swinging in a racer's gait. I was pushing myself to catch her when she disappeared before my eyes.

It was sudden, but not instantaneous. She was there, winning one minute, and the next minute—in sharp combination with the cracking pop of gray ice—she was gone. I instinctively jumped in the air and spread eagled. I remember thinking how far through the air I was sailing with my legs and arms outstretched like a flying squirrel as that black spot of death, the lethally cold water, rushed closer. I was lucky. I landed, fully extended, on the gray ice. It groaned, but my body weight was spread out and I didn't sink.

The ice was mushy under me. My terror tasted like aluminum in the back of my throat. I wanted to yell to my friends, my companion skaters to help me, but I was afraid the added weight of a deep breath would send me underwater. I heard someone calling that they were going to the station to get help. I began to think about how hot my body must seem to this gray ice—ancient, white, hard, safe ice on its way to becoming water to greet the spring. I hoped that it would wait just long enough for someone to throw me a rope and pull me away from that black hole. I was afraid to move. I could hear one of the girls crying. One of the boys asked me if I could see Blanche. I was frozen in place. I couldn't turn my head for fear of death.

They got the rope. The gray ice held. I was saved. Blanche was gone. The Bering Strait's current was swift and her body was never found.

My parents wouldn't let me go to her funeral. I raved, "But I was there. I saw her die. Why can't I go?" So, I stayed home. The kids were subdued for perhaps a week. In school the next week, they sidled up to me and whispered, "Did you really see her go under?" "Were you scared?"

Just think, I could have been winning.

Flo and Evert

by Gail Blair

The events of one chill December day, viewed in retrospect, were, I suppose, an apt tribute to the congenial banter of the sexes entered into and maintained by my grandparents over the span of a lifetime. The fact that "D-Day" was never discussed by the family in their presence detracts not at all from the impact it had on them and, most especially, on their progeny.

A mental map of the disposition of certain houses and families in my grandparents' neighborhood is necessary for an adequate comprehension of the events of that December day. Flo and Evert lived in a two room house at the top of a rather steep hill; this hill rose up and formed a wall along their narrow street, causing them, of necessity, to look down upon their neighbors and passersby, as well as the local urchins playing stickball or hide-and-seek among the motor cars parked in spurts along both sides of the road. They were not a haughty pair looking down in disapproval, mind you, but were forced into a geographical separation from friends and loved ones by the proximity of the street to a stretch of railroad tracks that ran along the very top of the hill upon which their house sat. The distance from the street to the tracks was, if measured in linear feet, fifty yards, give or take a few. After the government's required right-of-way of five yards on either side of the tracks was measured, the city cut a swatch across the face of the hill and paved an eight-foot-wide path for cars and a twenty-four-inch sidewalk for pedestrians. The house perched on a plot of ground, then, that was thirty-five yards deep, more or less. There were no sideyards.

Because the first ten yards above the sidewalk were too steep to build on, the builder of the house installed fourteen concrete steps from the walk to what passed for level ground. These steps were nine inches high, six inches deep, two feet wide, and sandwiched in between concrete walls with no railing. After climbing the staircase a visitor would confront him or herself in Flo's pride and joy: a picture-glass window that spanned the entire front wall of the house. Unless the drapes were drawn, it was impossible to arrive unannounced by one of the grandchildren, and there were many grandchildren.

All of Flo and Evert's grandchildren lived in houses nearby, on the lower slope of the hill, and they took turns, when they were small, visiting Gramma with the sole intent of washing for her that immense pane of glass. Quite often visitors, after recognizing their own eyes and hat and hair in the glass, would be startled when a separate pair of eyes would blink, and then a separate mouth would start to open and shut as little hands would pat the pane in excitement as muffled squeals seeped through the glass; everyone knew then that "someone's coming!"

I am wandering from my original thought; allow me to continue with the incident uppermost in my mind. I mentioned that the grandchildren all lived on this hill near Flo and Evert. I should further add that none of their descendants lived on High Street, the street at the top of the hill. Their daughter, Imogene, lived around the corner on Straight Street, along with her husband, Odes, and their five children, Harold, Carol, Gerald, Beryl, and little Mike. Straight Street crossed High Street and continued north for three quarters of a mile, where it merged with Main Street. Along Straight Street, between High and Main Street, lived the balance of the brood begat by Flo and Evert. In the first house on the right, north of Imogene's and across High Street, Marvin lived with his wife Marian, their twin sons, Billie and Rollie, and baby daughter Kate. At the bottom of the hill, where Main Street met Straight Street, the ground was level and well travelled by people going to and from town. It was here that Raymond, the oldest son, built a grocery store and, after a few years of modest success, added a gas station. Raymond and his wife

Lenora had bought the two-story red brick apartment house on the south side of the intersection, facing Straight Street. Raymond's original plan was to sublet the upstairs rooms to help fill the mouths of Scotty, Lisa, and Bobby.

Flo and Evert made few trips across the winter terrain of High Street and down the sled tracks on Straight Street during the cold months of the year. This December was no exception to the Midwestern rule. A great northern blast of ice and snow had blanketed the hill, and neither of the two had any designs on descent into the frozen acres outside their front glass. They were not a feeble pair, but they had no desire to encourage frailty in the form of broken pelvis and collar bones; they also enjoyed countless attentions from the young people. Their grandchildren were eager and able to brave the steeps of the street and stairs in order to deliver goods to the older couple from Uncle or Daddy Raymond's store down below. Often they argued about who would make the climb and share cream with coffee at Gramma's table or stand in awe as Grampa demonstrated his skill at removing bent nails from battered two-by-fours in his bedroom-under-construction. It was, therefore, quite a surprise to the family, that particular day in December, when Flo and Evert set out to shop.

Flo and Evert didn't go together, as everyone who knew them knew. They had made a mutual discovery, over their years together, that what had caused them to become one was not stuff enough to balance their differences, and, if peace was to reign in their home, it would have to be a separate peace for each of them. Not that they quarreled, mind you, or that they didn't care for one another. They just had a tough time blending their priorities together and coming up with a matched set. Flo grew up on the farm, as Evert did, but unlike Evert she developed a taste for style, for class, for "proper behavio." Evert, while not a country bumpkin, had fewer changes that he wanted to make in his life. He was content to putter and fix and do odd jobs, mend his own house, grow his own vegetables, and all the while do his best to make sure that no one in his home was starving or naked. He wasted nothing and couldn't bear to see others waste anything; whatever was broken he could fix, or so he thought. He saw nothing wrong with wearing hand-me-down shoes and clothes, or with working burlap and flour sacks into clothes, for that matter. As a result he collected things, like potato sacks, flour sacks, straps of leather, paper bags, broken toys, cast-off electric razors, even magazines.

Flo, on the other hand, had little tolerance for used up things. She defied Evert once, when the kids were small, and went to work at a factory so that beans and cornbread could be supplemented by an occasional ham or rump roast. She saved things too, like pennies, nickels, and dimes.

Evert built a small shed behind every house they ever lived in over the years, and there he stored his treasures, but the shed wasn't enough at the house on High Street, because they stayed there longer than at any other house; the shed filled up with prizes and trinkets much too fast. Evert tried to bring a few things into the house once in a while, but each attempt garnered a stern look and one word from Flo. "Evert!" she would say, and the look in her eyes was his signal to turn around and find another hiding place. That was how the second bedroom came to be "under construction." Flo had a French Provincial collection set up in their bedroom: prim, white pieces trimmed in gold. Her closets were full of boxes stacked one upon another. Some were empty, waiting to hide Christmas or birthday gifts in, and others were filled with sweaters and shoes, ribbons and lace, pictures and paintings done over the years by the children, and so Evert decided to build on a back room, a large room where he could sleep and revel in his keepsakes.

I saw Grampa's room once. I was amazed. Every inch of wall was plastered with a shelf, or a calendar, or a chart of some significance, like the day of the week that February twenty-ninth would fall on for the next three hundred years. The floor was littered with newspapers and catalogues and magazines of every type, each holding safe an article or an ad that Evert wanted to remember. The space between the floor and the lowest shelves was stacked with gadgets and gidgets and wonders and widgets of indescribable nature. There was just enough space on the double bed for a man to lie narrowly down; the rest of the bed held more books and magazines and, of all things, comic books. Evert wasn't concerned with neatness. He wasn't dirty, he just wasn't tidy, and everything in his room held some secret that he would share someday when we were old enough to ask why. He talked a lot about new technology and ways to fuel cars with a glop of energy no bigger than a golf ball. Posters of the moon landing hung next to a painting

he had done in oils of a mountain landscape. He spent most of his spare hours in this room, dreaming and tinkering and reading up on the latest way to propel a man through time.

Flo didn't understand what Evert saw in all his keepsakes, and sometimes she riddled him with tiny insults about his collections, but for the most part she left him alone, content that she had her space, and he had his. Blues and purples and lilacs and lavenders adorned her rooms and her frame. When the children were grown and the need to save pennies lessened in intensity, she saved them anyway, letting the grandkids count them for hours (when the glass had been sufficiently scrubbed). She also collected snapshots and school pictures, sweaters and slacks and shoes to match for herself when she went out to shop with the girls on Saturday.

But I have again begun to digress from the fateful events of that day, the eighth of December, 1954. Despite their differences, Flo and Evert had their children and grandchildren to share, as well as great appreciation for the music of Lawrence Welk and Perry Como, not to mention Don Ho. They also enjoyed coffee with bacon and eggs and fresh fried potatoes in the morning. It was the bacon and eggs that got them out of the house that day. There were no eggs for Sunday morning breakfast, and only two slices of bacon remained in the icebox. Evert shuffled around the kitchen for a while and helped Flo clean up their lunch plates, and then he ambled back to his room to put on his overshoes and his wool coat. He came back out to find Flo buttoning up her boots and putting on her lipstick. "Where are you going?" he asked, a little surprised to find her dressed for the cold.

"I'm going to get bacon and eggs for breakfast, that's where I'm going." She looked up and chuckled at the sight of his hair sprouting through his scarf at random intervals. "I suppose you think I can't go out by myself?" "No! No, I don't think that. I just thought you'd rather stay in and keep warm, that's all. I was planning to go get our breakfast, too. Should we call the kids?" Evert was struggling to pull on his gloves and beginning to sweat under his coat. "Why call the kids? They'd have been here by now if any of 'em were coming up today. We're all dressed up and goin' the same direction; we might as well go together," said Flo. And so they did.

Scotty and Gerald had swept and salted the steep stairs and also Gramma's front porch that morning early, and the sun was shinning high as the two set out. It wasn't until they had reached the sidewalk that they were noticed. Mike, who was building his first snowman that day, had gone out to the street to get some stone eyes when he saw Gramma and Grampa crossing High Street together, elbows linked for support, boots crunching in the snow, slipping sideways a little when they met bare ice. He didn't think too much of it at the time. After all, he crossed the street in all kinds of weather, so why shouldn't they? He returned to his snowman. It wasn't until Odes, his dad, came out to check on his progress, that Mike set off the family alarm. "Guess who I saw crossing the street, Dad?" "I don't know, son, who?" "Gramma and Grampa." Odes raised his eyebrows a smidgeon. "Are you sure, Mike?" "Uh-huh. They were all dressed up like me, boots and all." Odes patted Mike on the head and went back inside. He reached for the phone from around the hall corner and dialed the folks' number, stamping the snow from his feet as he listened to the line buzz and click. Imogene came out of the bedroom, pulling her stockings up one more time after stretching down to push the broom all the way across the floor under her bed, chasing lint balls. "Who're you calling?" "I'm callin' Marvin, now." Odes had redialed and stood listening to another series of buzzes and clicks. "Hello?" "Marian, this is Odes. Say, did you just see the folks walkin' down Straight past your house?" "Let me check with the boys."

Odes looked up to see Imogene clutching her hand to her blouse. "Oh, my God! They'll break their necks!" "Settle down, Genie, they're not dead yet!" At that, Gerald, Carol, and Beryl stuck their heads out of the basement and said, in unison, "Who's dead?"

"Odes, Billie and Rollie went out to check. They're out there, all right, half way down the street at the Ferguson's old place. What the devil's goin' on?" "I don't know, Marian. I didn't know they were out 'til just a minute ago myself. Better call Marvin and let him know what they're up to." Odes hung up and spent several seconds shushing everyone but Harold, who happened to be helping Uncle Raymond at the store. Imogene was flushed, and she started circling the room, patting her hand over her heart. "Oh, m'God! Oh, m'God! What'll we do?"

"Now, just calm down, Genie, they're headed for the store, and Raymond can take care

of 'em from there. They'll be fine, but I can't for the life of me figure out why they got it in their heads to pull this fool stunt!"

Flo and Evert walked on, stepping half steps down the sidewalk, cautioning each other as they went: "Be careful!" "I am careful! You watch your step!" "Hold tight, Flo," "I'm holdin', I'm holdin'. You just watch your step." "I'm watchin', I'm watchin'." And so they went, unaware that they were being watched from behind. Billie and Rollie had dived into their snowsuits and out the front door to the sidewalk, and there they stopped. Rollie was not a cruel boy, but his mind latched onto and fed on the incredulous, and he got an incurable case of the giggles as he watched the two oldsters inching and pinching their way to the store. Billie, not as quick to see the humor in life, had become Rollie's straight man. "What?! What's so funny?" he asked. Rollie, giggling at first, burst into laughter as he tried to mimic the dance step he was watching. He grabbed Billie by the arm, and the two of them began inch stepping up and down the sidewalk, laughing and falling and standing again, mincing another few steps. Billie pulled his features into alignment every so often and sent Rollie reeling with another round of laughter at the dead-pan. "What?!"

Marian, when she couldn't reach Marvin, dialed the store and got another busy signal. She then dialed Lenora, who had just put her youngest, Bobby, down for a nap. She snatched the receiver from its cradle hoping to prevent Bobby from waking up, but he did anyway. So while Marian tried to get her to look out her front window, Lenora was stretching the phone into the nursery to pick up the screaming Bobby.

"Marian, what is so important?" she demanded.

"Look out at who's crossing Main in the snow. Try to stop them!" Marian hung up, determined to reach Marvin at the health club. Lenora carried Bobby to the parlor window and stood with her mouth open for a few seconds. "I don't believe it. I just don't believe it! They haven't walked together in years." She started back to dial Raymond but thought better of it and watched them cross the icy roadway, boots gripping and griping in the snow as they stepped in unison onto the far curb.

Flo and Evert walked into the store and shook their feet free of salt and snow and waited for the fog to clear off of their glasses. Harold spotted them first, almost bowling them over with the grocery carts he had retrieved from the lot. "Hi, Grampa! Gramma! Who brought you down here?"

"We brought ourselves down here, Harold," Flo didn't like being questioned.

"You mean you walked all the way down here alone?"

"We were together."

"Yeah, but, gosh,..."

"Oh, pooh, Harold! You sound just like your mother, acting as if we can't get around anymore," said Flo. "As you can see, we're just fine."

Raymond stepped out of his office just then. Even though surprised to see his parents standing, unannounced, at his front door, he still had a leak in one of the coolers to attend to. No plumber in sight and water running everywhere, so he set to with a mop while his assistant continued to call all the plumbers in the Yellow Pages. Marian was getting busy signals at the store and at the club, and she was losing her cool.

Harold, ever helpful, rounded up two cups of hot chocolate for the travelers before they headed back out. "What did you come out after, Gramma?"

"We ran out of bacon and eggs for breakfast tomorrow, so here we are," Grampa answered. "I got some coffee, too, and some juice for your Gramma."

"Evert, I didn't ask for coffee and juice. You forget we've got to tote all this back up that hill."

"Why don't I split that up into two small bags, and then you can each carry a little bit?" Harold asked.

"You're a smart boy, Harold. You'll go far," remarked Flo.

When next Lenora saw her in-laws they were again on Straight Street, elbows locked like chain links, inching and pinching their way across the snow and ice, wobbling slightly from side to side. Each carried a small sack in their free hands, paper sacks that swayed and bobbed with each step the couple took. They had ballast on Evert's side in the form of two pounds of coffee and frozen orange juice; Flo's ballast consisted of bacon and eggs. She insisted on carrying only those items she had set out to buy.

Marian had finally reached Marvin, but he had just stepped out of the shower and couldn't leave with his hair all wet. "I'll be there as soon as I dry off, but don't worry. Pop's ok and so's Ma. Tell Odes I'm coming to help settle Genie down." With assurance that help was on the way, Marian decided to look out for the folks on their way back up the hill. What she saw got her giggling as hard as Rollie and Billie, who were still

out front, aping aged climbers. There came two penguins, trudging up the sidewalk, paper bags swinging from either side. The weight of the bags was syncopated and stuttering, pulling the two apart with each outward bounce. The folks still had their elbows locked together, and, as they sensed they were moving apart, they cinched their arms tighter and bumped shoulders, and in this fashion they wobbled and weebled toward home.

Rollie and Billie observed this new variation in the snow dance and set out to meet Flo and Evert halfway down the hill, hoping to escort them to safety. Their progress came to a halt, however, as Rollie was overcome by the stern looks and silly movements of the pair. He and Billie landed on the ground again, rolling and laughing and wheezing in the cold air.

Evert, hearing the commotion ahead, glanced up and witnessed the two boys landing on their posteriors. The giggle that he had passed along to Marvin, and thus to Rollie, caught him by surprise. He was no longer watching his feet, and his sides began to shake, and Flo was alarmed.

"Evert! Watch your step! Evert, what's so funny? Evert, you're not making this any easier!"

With every comment from Flo, Evert laughed a little harder, and his laughter caused him to snap a little harder with his elbow when he felt Flo leaning away from him. He was laughing out loud by the time Flo realized that she was losing her balance.

"Evert! Stop it! This is no time for fun! Evert! Slow down! Evert! Evert!"

***

Marian tried for forty-five minutes to tell what had happened when Marvin got home. He had to buy her an ace bandage; she strained her diaphragm while laughing and rolling around on the floor. "Grampa was trying to reach the boys, and he started walking faster; his little sack was bouncing around in a circle. Gramma was hanging on, trying to keep up, and her little bag was swinging, too. She tried to grab Grampa with both hands. When she did, her feet flew out from under her, and she fell into Grampa, and then he fell on top of his sack, and the sack split and cans went rolling down the hill. Gramma landed on top and dropped her bag in the snow, and she kept trying to get up. Every time she tried to pull Grampa up he'd pull her back down again, laughing the whole time, and all I could see from here was scarfs and boots and feet and elbows."

That was the day in December that none of us ever forgot. Of course, we never discussed it in mixed groups. The children all blamed each other for not stopping their parents in the first place; Imogene fumed for a few days, angry that her parents had not told her they were going out. Flo always said: "Genie was jealous of anybody havin' a good time without her after that." Flo had a bruised knee, and Evert cracked a few ribs. Raymond and Lenora forgot most of the trouble the next week, since the following Monday Dr. Schadle told them that I, baby number four, was on the way. Their plans to move the folks closer to the store never were mentioned to the rest of the family. They needed more nursery space. They name me Flo.

Once, when I spent the night at Gramma's, I got up to get a drink of water after she and Grampa had gone to their room. I could hear her laughing, and Grampa was giggling. I heard what they said, but it didn't make much sense at the time. "It's a good thing we didn't buy potatoes, too!" They were still laughing when I fell asleep.

La Donna Genson

Grandma's Quilt

As we cleaned out the house
For the very last time,
I saw it lying there
Cast aside -

This colorful quilt had
Seen it all,
Sewed up patches, every
Color, I recall.

I turned it over
Once or twice;
A blanket of beauty that
Once was nice.

Colored with animals
Cows and horse,
All tossed about
The quilt of course!

The stitches weren't perfect,
You see,
Just like people,
You and Me.

As I searched through
Seams with blood spattered here and there;
The lives of others
Suddenly appeared -

There was grandma's skirt,
She wore to the dance,
Granpa's old suit;
How he loved to prance!

My old pinafore
That I'd worn awhile
Other clothes
Left in a pile.

I picked it up
Put it away,
Stood there speechless;
Nothing to say.

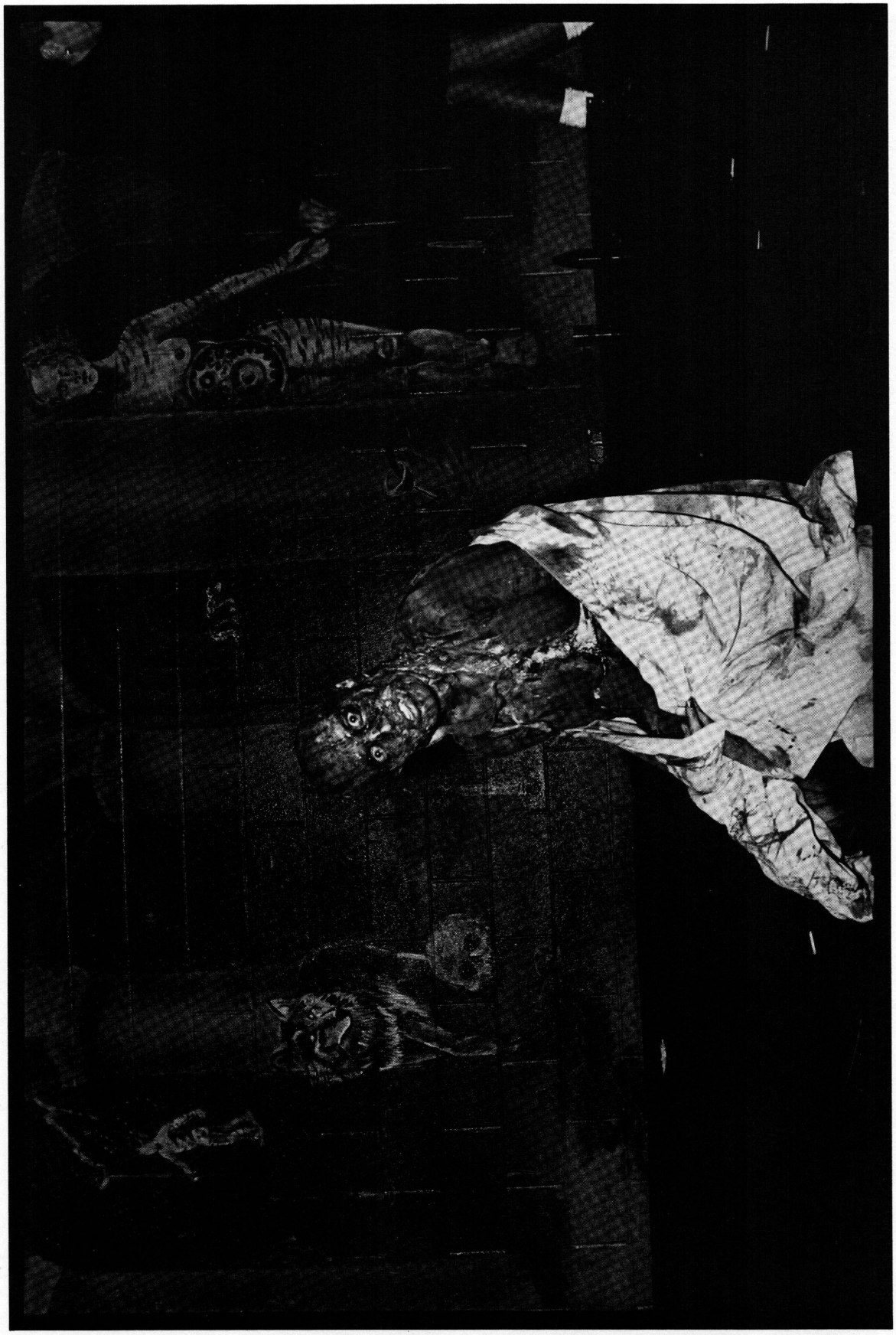
I closed the door
Put out the lights
But that old worn quilt
Slept with me that night.

Untitled

April Kao

Untitled

April Kao



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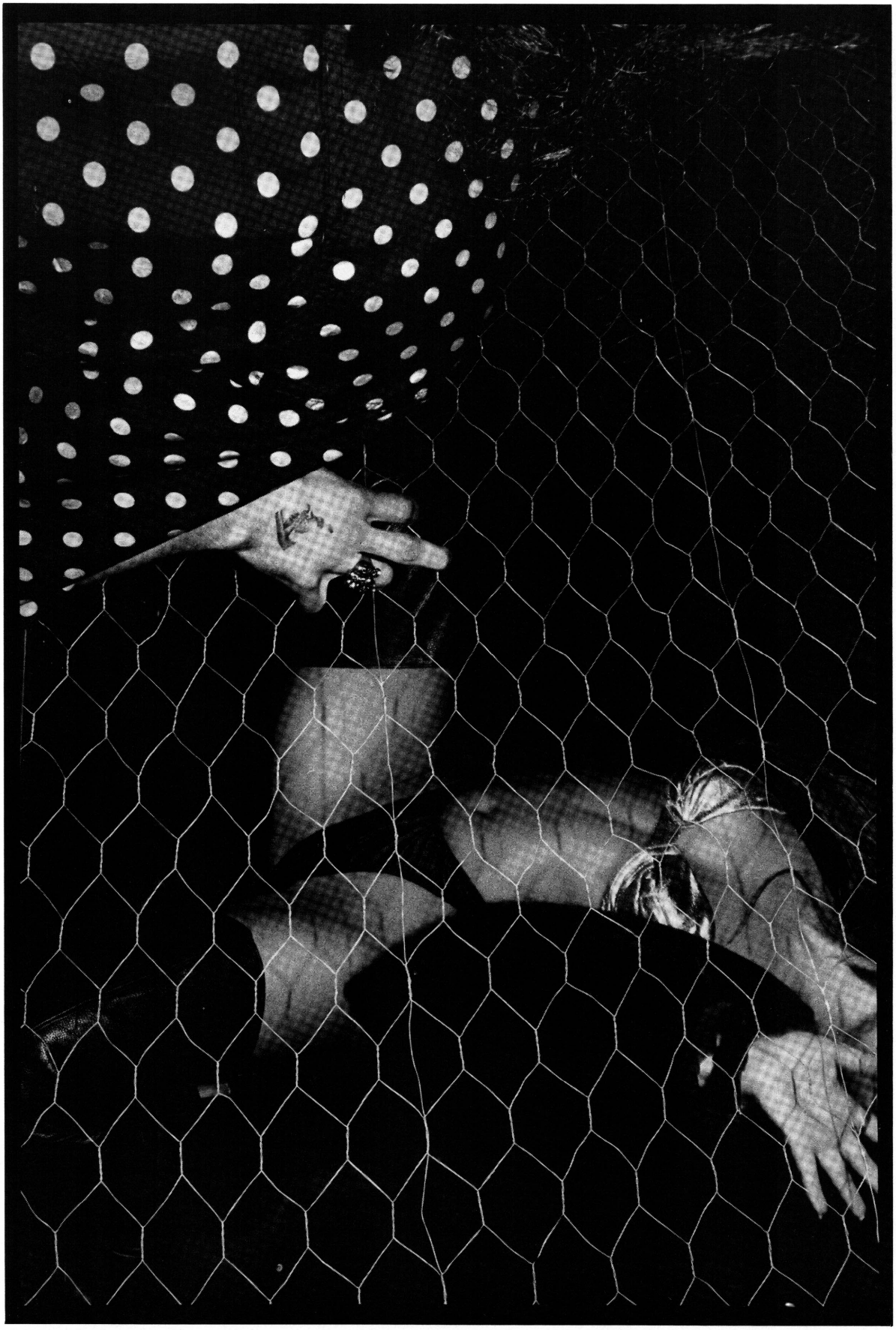
April Kao



Untitled

April Kao

Amy Tackett

Skinny in Denim

skinny in denim
and stoned
is where it's at
entering into the party
when life's been purely partyless
you take the drink
accepting the acceptance
swirling in the glass
glance around
at the absorbing crowd
where youth and purity
left an hour ago
in the middle of the misfits
you're the biggest outcast
and when the powerless monsters
try to reel you in
you decline
turn toward the wall
and dream of the drive home

Scott Huffmaster

Life's Folder

I think I know what I know today,
But I know I don't think what I thought yesterday.
And a wise man knows...that he's not really wise
'Cause the truth is something you cannot disguise.
Each day that goes by...I seem to feel more
Than I had felt just the day before.
Each day I grow older
I know I grow bolder,
Still...I wouldn't mind crying on somebody's shoulder.
But I keep my emotions inside of life's folder.
'Cause what I once felt seems so unimportant
Now that I know what I now feel important.
And I know how I feel...at least for today,
And I know it isn't how I felt yesterday.

Marti Miles

Mourning the Coon

Until the night dissipates,
until God agrees to smile,
until new life is born,
until there's not an until,
I will remain in mourning.

When Boots died, nothing was the same
until the new cat came.
New union, new life,
new joy ended my grief.

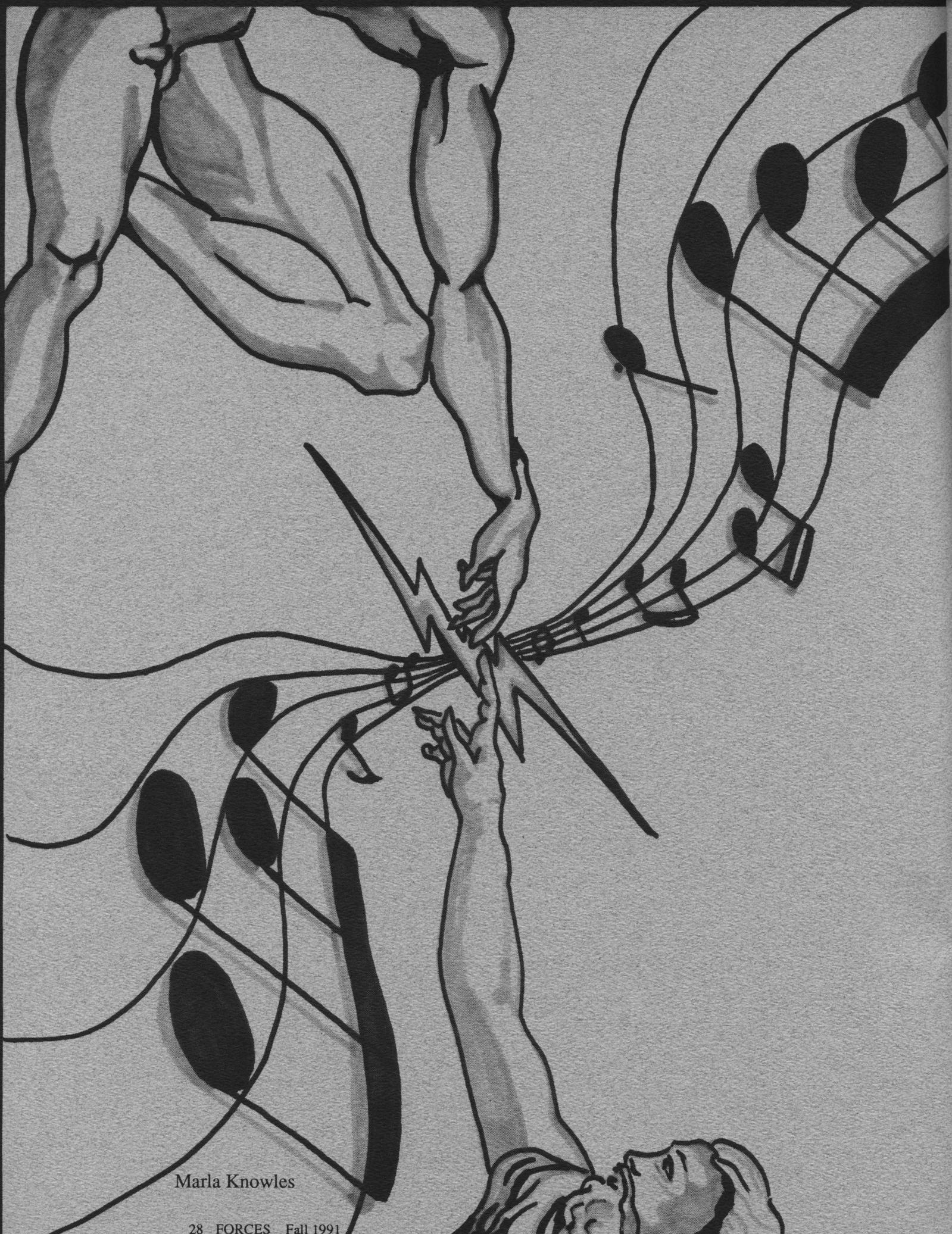
That year I wrote on the Guadalupe River,
removed from the fumes of the city,
I listened to the laughter of the rafters,
watched the moon swell
month after month,
Swollen with new light, I too laughed,
made friends with the bugs, the birds, the plants,
watched roly polies crawl over the hairs on my arm,
admired the tenacity of the fire ants
who moved twigs and pieces of leaves three times their size,
took care of their own, built a sense of community,
hurt only those who got in their way.
My best friend was a coon.
We talked daily. Tamed by ritual feedings,
he nodded or swished his tail.
He heard about the Sicilian lover in San Francisco,
the book on holistic healing I'd started to write
years ago, hidden in a drawer,
that West Texas grandmother I barely knew,
the pains of saying good night
to a borrowed dog named Dawg,
then hugging life into a feather down pillow.

"Sunrise, Sunset" plays in my head.
"Is this the little girl...."
Looking closely in the mirror, I see gray hairs
winding in and out of my once-young mane.

Soon I'll spend days with
Dr. Seuss, Curious George and Willy Wonka,
yet I long for those weekends spent with
Lady Chatterly, Madame Bovary, and of course Blake,
bowls of popcorn sitting around,
empty coke cans and yogurt containers,
crackling pine knots and the occasional wet oak
that refused to burn. I think of the Guadalupe,
how she, like a mother, coaxed me, nudged gently,
then slapped at my collar of dreams.
She pushed me into the rocks,
threw me into the crevices, lured me down,
downstream into the vortex of my future.

I returned to the world of concrete
where people envy my affair with the Word.
Her love flowed freely, nourished me,
pushed me away,
yet the coon remains.
Still, I mourn his absence.
I mourn for the coon and pray Kyrie Eleison,
Yes, for me, for the coon, for that magical time
when books were alive, the words and I danced.
I gaze at a star, the bright one in the west sky,
Lord have mercy.
Lord have mercy on me.

"Sunrise, Sunset" plays in the background,
violins of endings and of beginnings...
the gray Persian replaced the calico cat
that replaced the Siamese.
There can only be one coon.



Marla Knowles

Envy of an Apology

by Jeannette Baillie

I am a babe in the woods when it comes to Greek literature. Thus as I read *The Apology of Socrates*, it was with a sense of excitement; I had been aware of the gravity of the work before I had even started the first page. But as I carefully perused each line, chewing each sentence with my brain as a cow chews its cud, I was struck with a jealousy of Socrates. He had been afforded the opportunity to defend himself—but did not play into the hands of his accusers. How wonderful it must have been to have such clear-headedness!

When one is summoned to a court of law in the United States, whether as the accused or the accuser, it is a herald to form a team—to pull the wagons in a circle and establish a formidable prosecution or defense. Most consider it foolish behavior for the accused to attempt to argue his or her own case. Yet I was more than willing to appear foolish during my first official role as the accused.

I was fourteen years old. It was a cool morning, and I was due to appear at District 6 of the Cook County Circuit Court at 9 a.m. The summons had said that I was subject to a truancy hearing, based on a charge filed by the Superintendent of Schools. By Illinois law, the charge was not unfounded. It had been about five weeks since I had last attended any of my classes. I steeled myself as I walked through the doors of the courthouse, waiting patiently as the guard searched me for weapons. She directed me to the hall of juvenile courts. I had never been in a courtroom before. I was about to learn a lesson, but not the lesson my accusers must have had in mind for me.

As I took a seat inside, I was disappointed with the decor. I was hoping for something a little more authoritarian-looking, but I found the room much too demure. To be certain, there were many cops and court clerks and other official-looking people lurking around with stern looks on their faces, but how did they expect to scare the Bejesus out of a person when the place was so posh-looking? I silently scored one point for myself.

The clerk told us to rise, the Honorable-whoever was coming into the courtroom. I briefly toyed with the idea of not rising, then I stood up. The other people sat down; I sat down. My case was fourth on the docket that morning. I settled back to observe the behavior of those who were the accused (ages twelve to seventeen), and of those who were the accusers (too old to understand). Then came the rude awakening. Those who were the accused could play only one of two roles—either the defiant teenage thug, or the tearful, repentant, mixed-up good kid. I was neither of these. I began to panic.

When the clerk called my name I felt my stomach drop down to my feet. I was hoping that I still had a shot at appearing cool and rational. I advanced to the bench with a gait that I felt was neither too cocky nor too intimidated. An official-looking man began to read aloud the particulars of my case—lots of mumbo-jumbo—lots of numbers and statutes that I didn't care about one way or the other. The judge was nodding his head and writing on a sheet of paper with a gold Cross pen. Then my Meletus came forward—in

the form of a social worker whose "McDonald's drive-thru" analysis of my behavior was a cornerstone of the case against me. He proceeded to supply the judge with a slew of adjectives which allegedly described me. I listened with one ear; it was the dialogue of a movie I had seen two hundred times. To amuse myself, I mentally ticked off each epithet—perhaps I would hear a new one this time. No, they were mostly the same as always: "insubordinate," "arrogant" "cocky," "unmotivated," "subversive," "emotionally unstable," "showing insurrectionist tendencies"—(What the hell did that mean? I made a mental note to look it up in the dictionary), "rebellious," oh, and yes--"seemingly intelligent but without direction."

Then my Anytus came forward—I did not recognize this man. Evidently he was some drone from the office of the school superintendent. He addressed the judge—more statutes, more mumbo-jumbo. I found it unusual that someone who apparently was so interested in my behavior did not address me, or even look me in the eye for that matter.

The moment I had been waiting for arrived. The judge looked at me; he addressed me. "Why have you not been going to school?" he said plainly. I carefully meted out my reply, "I haven't felt like it . . . Your Honor." He grimaced, "Well, start feeling like it!" He then addressed Meletus and Anytus with some legal jargon. He gestured to the clerk and said, "Next case."

This was it? The square-dance of my accusers was finished? Weren't they interested in my defense; I had a good one, and I was ready to argue. Was I just another number in the system, another case on the docket? Evidently I would not be given the chance to offer my analysis of the public school system. My questioning had obviously irritated them thus far, and now they just wanted me out of the way. I was crushed.

Some hours later I walked into the second-hand bookstore on Halstead Street. The clerk, the mother of one of my friends, began her usual berating, "Still not going to school, eh? Well, you just see how far you can get without a diploma. You know if I had your brains I'd throw mine away. When I was your age, you know what I was doing? I was working ten hours a day. And not only that . . ." I tuned out her voice and went to the back stacks. I pulled a hardcover from a shelf at random; at that point I would have read anything to take my mind off my troubles. I opened the book to the first page; I saw it contained a quote. My eyes were tearing, I had to blink several times before I could make out the words. It said, "The Sharp edge of a razor is difficult to pass over: thus the wise say the path of Salvation is hard." The quote was attributed to someone named Katha-Upanishad. I turned to the title page; the book was called *The Razor's Edge*, by W. Somerset Maugham. I felt a smile creep across my face. I sidled up to the counter and said, smirking, "How much do you want for this old book?" "Don't be so goddamn cocky," she said, "a dollar-fifty." She shook her head in disgust as she took my money. She was my Lycon.

The years of my life both before and since that day have been rife with occasions when I wanted to defend my actions, wanted to defend my thoughts, wanted to defend my opinions. I learned that day that it is sometimes necessary to hold one's tongue, a piece of harsh advice that had been given to me many times. To this day, I still do not adhere to this rule as an absolute; it is unlikely that I will begin doing so at any time soon. But now I can't help thinking that if on just that one day, in that one courtroom, in front of that particular group of accusers, how nice it would have been to be Socrates for a while.

Browning's "Confessions": A Curious Dramatic Monologue

by Tony Jack Howard

The three essentials of a dramatic monologue are character, auditor, and situation; a character speaks to an auditor (who does not speak, but whose presence we easily infer by the speaker's actions) within a specific situation. Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" represents an apt, although worn example—"apt" because one can scarcely utter "dramatic monologue" without "My Last Duchess" leaping into mind, and "worn" for much the same reason. Remember? The character speaking is the Duke; the auditor is an ambassador who is negotiating marriage plans; and the situation is an unveiling of a portrait of the Duke's former wife. "My Last Duchess" is a fine poem; along with "The Bishop Orders his Tomb," "Fra Lippo Lippi," and "Andrea Del Sarto," it will forever remain linked to a poetic form given its fullest expression by Browning.

But what about Brownings's "Confessions"? In substance, clearly a dramatic monologue, but in appearance it is nothing like his other works in that genre. It is a curious poem, and one which deserves microscopic attention.

I

What is he buzzing in my ears?
"Now that I come to die,
Do I view the world as a vale of tears?"
Ah, reverend sir, not I!

Character, auditor, and situation present themselves in this first stanza, along with the alternating tetrameter/trimeter lines rhyming abab which comprise the musical score of the poem. The character who speaks the words of the poem is a dying man; the auditor is a priest, and the situation is that of a final confession at the man's death-bed. This first stanza sets the tone of the poem also; the speaker does not "view the world as a vale of tears," but as something altogether positive—an attitude the priest does not expect.

II

What I viewed there once, what I view again
Where the physic bottles stand
On the table's edge—is a suburb lane.
With a wall to my bedside hand.

Here, the speaker introduces the reverie which dominates the poem. "There" refers to "world" in the first stanza. The "physic bottles" become part of a landscape the speaker creates in the process of remembering/relating why his world will not be recalled as a "vale of tears." The bottles of medicine should remind him that he is a sick man who is about to die; instead, they become transfigured into the architecture of a pleasant memory. Something concrete and perceptual triggers something concrete and imaginal.

III

That lane sloped, much as the bottles do,
From a house you could descry
O'er the garden-wall: is the curtain blue
Or green to a healthy eye?

The speaker oscillates between the actual setting of his sick-room and the remembered landscape: as the physic bottles slope, so does the remembered lane. The speaker returns for a moment to ask whether the curtain is actually blue or green, but this perceptual question becomes irrelevant as the speaker immerses himself fully into his reverie.

IV

To mine, it serves for the old June weather
Blue above lane and wall
And that farthest bottle labeled "Ether"
Is the house o'ertopping all.

"Mine" refers to the speaker's unhealthy eye which sees a blue curtain which, in turn, "serves" as the blue sky of his remembered experience. The "Ether" bottle becomes the "house o'ertopping all"; ether induces unconsciousness and forgetfulness, yet the speaker remains intent upon remembering this important past experience. Also, ether could offer the cause for the speaker's metaphorical language; that is, the speaker's hallucinatory speech may be the product of his having been etherized.

V

At a terrace, somewhere near the stopper,
There watched for me, one June,
A girl: I know, sir, it's improper,
My poor mind's out of tune.

Notice these three important additions: the memory is about a girl; the priest is shocked; and the speaker is well aware of his mental condition. This is a seminal stanza. At a "terrace" (memory) "near the stopper" (real) of the ether bottle (drowns memory/triggers memory) we have a waiting girl (memory). At the confession of "girl," the priest winces or shakes his head or provides some other gesture of reproach, and this action causes the speaker to qualify the admission as an impropriety while claiming "sick-mind's prerogative"—as much as to say, "Sorry to alarm you, old boy, but 'my poor mind's out of tune.'"

VI

Only, there was a way . . . you crept
Close by the side to dodge
Eyes in the house, two eyes except:
They styled their house "The Lodge."

The speaker now resides wholly within his memory as he relates how he would travel furtively to meet his lover. This stanza is the last closed stanza; the remaining three flow into one another as the speaker becomes rapt with his memory, no longer distinctly alternating between actual room and imagined (remembered) landscape. We hasten to some resolution.

VII

What right had a lounger up their lane?
But, by creeping very close,.
With the good wall's help,—their eyes might strain
And stretch themselves to Oes,

VIII

Yet never catch her and me together,
As she left the attic, there,
By the rim of the bottle labelled "Ether,"
And stole from stair to stair,

IX

And stood by the rose-wreathed gate. Alas,
We loved, sir—used to meet:
How sad and bad and mad it was—
But then, how it was sweet!

The speaker makes his confession. He had enjoyed a clandestine affair with a woman. Does the speaker now feel he must repent in sackcloth and ashes, must view that experience as proof that this world is a "vale of tears"? Indeed not. The speaker has been laboring to recreate that memory from the physical apparatus of his death-room in order to affirm the worth of that experience, regardless of conventional Victorian morality. Hence, the priest's words are "buzzing" in the speaker's ear like some obnoxious fly. He does not confess this June affair because he desires absolution but because the memory is "sweet"—a fitter mood for death and a more positive attitude toward the world than the priest's.

What Browning accomplishes in "Confessions" is an affirmation of experience as experience. As a reverie, the poem reveals what it means to re/member; as a love poem, it demonstrates Browning's unconventional belief in the validity of passion; and as a dramatic monologue, it proves that Browning's tightly controlled, rhyming stanzaic verse can function just as effectively as the blank verse of his more well-known examples of that form.

Browning, Robert. *Poems of Robert Browning*. Ed. Donald Smalley. Boston: Houghton, 1956.

Untitled

Marla Knowles

Familial Hypercholesterolemia: A Killer that WILL Be Understood

by Jean S. Helgeson

Stormie Jones was a thirteen-year-old girl from White Settlement, Texas, who just wanted to grow up and be normal. She did not get to do either. On November 11, 1990, she died when her body rejected the transplanted heart that had kept her alive for over six-and-a-half years. North Texas and the world mourned her death, for she was a fighter and a pioneer, but she simply could not overcome her main obstacle. She was a homozygote for familial hypercholesterolemia, with two copies of a single gene that gave her extremely high blood cholesterol.

In 1984 a medical first occurred that was related to the work done over the previous twelve years in a laboratory at Southwestern Medical School in Dallas. Stormie, then a six-year-old child who had already had two heart attacks caused by her severely elevated blood cholesterol levels, was the first recipient of a combined heart and liver transplant. Because of work done in Dallas, it had been known that a liver transplant should accompany the replacement of her damaged heart. The liver from a normal donor had receptors for low density lipoprotein (LDL) on its cell surfaces that could clear out much of the cholesterol from her blood, something that could not be done by her own liver. The combined replacement of both heart and liver allowed Stormie to live until age thirteen, well past the time when she would have died without the transplants.

Doctors Michael Brown and Joseph Goldstein, of the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas, jointly received the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in Stockholm, Sweden, on December 10, 1985, twenty-two months after Stormie's pioneering surgery. They were quite young for this recognition, only 44 and 45 years old, respectively. This most prestigious international award in science was given to them for their innovative collaborative work since 1972 in the study of cholesterol metabolism. Because of that work, these physicians had known that a liver transplant was a necessary accompaniment to the required heart transplant as the best chance for giving Stormie a relatively normal liver.

Cholesterol has been important in medical and scientific studies since its discovery in gallstones over two-hundred years ago. Besides forming gallstones, this lipid is involved in the production of atherosclerosis, a form of hardening of the arteries, through its deposition in the walls of damaged blood vessels. Cholesterol is not only involved in causing harm to the body, however. It is required in the cell membranes of all animal cells, and is the main component of steroid hormones such as estrogen, testosterone, and cortisone. An inherited form of high blood cholesterol was discovered in 1938 and named familial hypercholesterolemia, abbreviated FH. The study of the inherited aspects of cholesterol metabolism by Brown and Goldstein has led to greatly increased understanding of the body's regulation of the amount of cholesterol it produces, as well as of the basic biological processes of cellular function and genetic control.

While mammalian cells are capable of making their own cholesterol, they also obtain it from the diet through delivery of low density lipoprotein, or LDL, by the blood from the digestive system to the tissues. The cholesterol molecule is relatively insoluble in water and must be moved through the bloodstream in a coating of the more soluble lipoprotein. An equilibrium between cholesterol made by the cell and that obtained from the diet was recognized in the 1930s, but its mechanism was not understood until it was explained by Goldstein and Brown. They discovered that LDL delivers cholesterol to the body cells by binding to a protein receptor on the cell surface, the LDL receptor, which then is carried into the cell. The genes and proteins involved in the regulation of the pathway of LDL and cholesterol metabolism have been extensively explored by these two scientists and their associates.

Brown and Goldstein had made their first and probably most major discovery in 1973. They found that a key enzyme in cholesterol production, HMG CoA reductase, could be regulated in culture in normal cells by the amount of low density lipoprotein in the culture medium, but regulation was absent in cells of homozygous FH patients. In normal cells, the addition of LDL caused the enzyme to be turned off, and the cells would stop making cholesterol. In homozygous FH cells, even high levels of LDL could not turn off the enzyme, so cells continued to make cholesterol even when extracellular levels were very high. The level of regulation in heterozygotes, the parents of the homozygotes, was intermediate between that of the normal cells and the homozygotes' cells. From this it appeared obvious that the defective gene must deal with the uptake of LDL and its entry into the cell, where it would be able to regulate the HMG CoA reductase. The defective gene was believed to produce a receptor protein that would bind LDL and allow it to enter the cell. This belief was further strengthened by the finding that cholesterol added to the cultures in alcohol, rather than in LDL, could enter the cells of both normal and homozygous cells and cause the HMG CoA reductase to be turned off. The defect was not in the enzyme, but in the delivery of cholesterol to the inside of the cell. The experiments done to test this system were well-designed and well-executed, giving clear-cut results. The level of excitement in the laboratory and among the faculty of the medical school was high. It was obvious even in 1973 that this discovery was of major proportions, the first proof of a mechanism for a genetic disease that involved a faulty cell-surface receptor.

Their discovery was recognized immediately for its quality and importance, leading to national prominance as early as 1974, when the so-called "gold dust twins" won the first of many awards in recognition of their lipid research. Four national and international awards in the 1970s were followed by twelve others in the 1980s, besides the Nobel Prize. President Ronald Reagan in 1988 awarded Brown and Goldstein the National Medal of Science, the nation's highest award for scientific achievement. Goldstein was selected as a member of the Program Advisory Committee on the Human Genome for the National Institutes of Health, overseeing one of the major international scientific efforts of the 1990s, the determination of the genetic make-up of the human.

The two young men had met during their internship in internal medicine at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston in 1966, after Goldstein had graduated from Southwestern Medical School in Dallas and Brown from the University of Pennsylvania Medical School. Their friendship continued when both went on to fellowships at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, in 1968. Goldstein convinced Brown to come next to Southwestern Medical School, where Goldstein had been offered the future position of head of medical genetics while he was still a student. Brown began working in gastroenterology at Southwestern in 1971, and Goldstein arrived in 1972 after spending two years studying medical genetics in Seattle, Washington. They began an immediate collaboration that continues into the 1990s, dealing with patients with genetic lipid disorders and the biochemistry of those disorders.

Goldstein had first seen patients with familial hypercholesterolemia at Bethesda. This disease usually causes the presence of very high levels of cholesterol in the blood, leading to atherosclerosis, skin deposits of

cholesterol, and heart attacks. In Dallas, Goldstein and Brown set up a tissue culture laboratory and grew cells taken from the skin of normal persons and the skin of patients with FH. The cells were analyzed biochemically after being treated with different protocols, and metabolic activities in the isolated cells were recognized to be the same as those in cells in a patient's body.

An important aspect of this research was that Goldstein and Brown had access to several patients with extremely high cholesterol levels. These were the young children of parents who each had one mutant gene for high cholesterol, and the children had received a defective gene from each parent. This condition happens once in a million people, producing FH homozygotes like Stormie. Cholesterol levels in homozygotes often surpass 1000, producing heart attacks by the age of four or five, and usually death before age fifteen from heart damage. The single defective gene occurs about once in 500 people, producing FH heterozygotes who have high cholesterol levels around 250-600, and tend to have heart attacks around age forty. A "normal" cholesterol level is around 120-220, although even persons without the FH gene can have higher levels that lead to heart disease, and most heart disease does not involve familial hypercholesterolemia.

In the laboratory, Brown and Goldstein found that receptors for LDL localized to particular spots called coated pits on the cell surfaces of normal skin cells, while no LDL receptors occurred in coated pits on cells of homozygotes for FH. Coated endocytic vesicles, small sac-like structures that pinch off from coated pits and move into the cell's cytoplasm, were found to carry LDL into the cytoplasm in normal cells, but again to contain no LDL in FH homozygote cells. The coated vesicles bind to lysosomes, sac-like structures that contain digestive enzymes within the cytoplasm, and the lysomal enzymes digest the LDL. This makes cholesterol available to the cell and causes the enzyme HMG CoA reductase to be turned off, so no more cholesterol is produced by the cell. The LDL receptors were shown to be recycled to the cell surface every ten minutes for reuse in normal cells.

A new kind of defect was found in the LDL receptor binding and internalization pathway. An FH homozygote known as J. D. was discovered to be able to bind some LDL to his cell surfaces, but the LDL could not localize to the coated pits to be taken into the cell, as was seen in normal cells. One of his parents had the standard mutation for FH, in which no receptors were made, while the other parent had the new mutation, which produced receptors that could bind LDL but could not localize to a coated pit on the cell surface and go into the cell. With both mutations, J. D. thus had no LDL entering his cells, and so produced a high level of cholesterol. The new defect was in the internalization of the LDL receptors.

The multiple mutations in the LDL system were found to cause different disruptions of the pathway of transport and processing of the LDL receptor within the cell, as first seen with J. D.'s cells and later extended to other areas of the pathway when new mutations were discovered. The genes for these forms of mutant receptor proteins were sequenced and described. Each different mutation, as shown in various family groupings, contained individual changes in the sequence of the DNA nucleotide subunits in the gene, or perhaps a loss of large portions of the gene itself. Cells from over 110 homozygous FH patients have been studied and are still being sequenced, showing different kinds of mutations in different gene regions. In one patient, the LDL receptor was found to be secreted from the cell rather than bound to the cell membrane. In another family, a new dominant gene was found which suppresses the expression of hypercholesterolemia although there is also a gene for defective LDL receptors. This could be an important discovery for FH patients, since the understanding of how this new gene works could lead to new methods of treatment for FH and for non-inherited high cholesterol levels.

The human LDL receptor system was not the only one being studied by Brown and Goldstein. Metabolism of the pathway was also explored in the liver and adrenal gland of the rat. The liver is where cholesterol is made into bile for lipid digestion, and the adrenal glands are a site of steroid hormone production, so both have high levels of LDL receptors. Fresh adrenal glands from cattle were used to provide large amounts of tissue for LDL receptor purification studies,

which eventually resulted in the purification and identification of the bovine (cattle) LDL receptor protein. A modified copy of the gene itself was produced in the bovine system by using a bacterial enzyme, reverse transcriptase, allowing production of the receptor protein in large quantities for study in the laboratory. Earlier rabbit studies were broadened when a mutant strain, called WHHL rabbits, was developed in Japan from a mutant that showed LDL receptor deficiency. This provided an animal model of familial hypercholesterolemia. In November, 1990, Goldstein and Brown reported that genetic engineering had enabled them to replace the mutant FH gene with a normal gene in living homozygous rabbits. These animal studies obviously open up a range of opportunities for future human treatments for this and other genetic diseases.

Basic research often leads to medical applications, as it did in this laboratory. A chemical called compactin, derived from a fungus, was used in studies on the LDL pathway. Compactin acts as an inhibitor of the enzyme HMG CoA reductase, and turns off the internal synthesis of cholesterol in cells exposed to it. Cells could be made dependent on cholesterol delivered by the LDL receptors, and it was hoped that a drug might be derived from compactin that could be used in heterozygotes and others to lower their dangerously high blood cholesterol levels. Later studies showed that another fungus-derived chemical, mevinolin, could do the same thing better in living organisms. Mevinolin was marketed in 1987 as lovastatin, now a major treatment for controlling blood cholesterol levels in hundreds of thousands of patients worldwide. The life-saving drug is the direct result of work done in Goldstein and Brown's laboratory.

Emphasis in the laboratory has recently centered on the molecular level of genes, proteins, and membranes. As the human LDL receptor gene was sequenced, its various regions, or domains, were examined. One domain was shown to be essentially the same as the gene sequence for epidermal growth factor, which causes the growth of cells lining the inside and outside of the body. This growth factor is taken into cells through a pathway similar to the internalization of LDL receptors. The gene for the LDL receptor was shown to be a mosaic of domains that are shared with other genes and expressed by them in making proteins. The finding of these shared domains has led to greater understanding of the molecular level of evolutionary processes that allow new proteins to develop. The overall understanding of how the normal cell function has also been dramatically enlarged by this effort. The observation of biochemical changes in the proteins and the clinical expression of the disease in patients with various mutant genes has been extremely important in the development of understanding of how membrane proteins work and how the receptor recycling of membranes occurs.

Additionally, new insights have been gained in the treatment of one of the most common and deadly diseases of our time, atherosclerosis. Treatment has changed as a result, not only in cases of FH, but also in people who have "normal" LDL receptors but high levels of blood cholesterol. Brown and Goldstein have theorized that the elevated LDL levels in "normal" people are due to acquired deficiencies in receptor production and activity, induced mainly by a high-fat diet rather than by inherited defects. Since it is thought that as many as half of all Americans have cholesterol levels high enough to cause atherosclerosis and heart disease, an understanding of the mechanisms of entry of cholesterol into cells and of how to regulate them is of vast importance to the majority of Americans and others in industrialized countries where cholesterol levels are high. Perhaps it will also be possible eventually, through these studies, to spare other FH homozygous children the problems Stormie Jones had to face with her transplanted heart and liver, and her early death.

The author worked in Brown and Goldstein's laboratory between 1973 and 1980, and has several publications with them on cholesterol metabolism.

Alone in the Dark

by Lin Kaillies Kasian

The night is so quiet that I hear the wheat bending in the field. I don't want to breathe; I want only to slip into the wall. In this foreboding silence, I strain to listen for another sound, for I know "he" will come in the night.

My brother will do no good, although he is just below in the bottom bunk, for I know he could sleep through an earthquake. I don't want to have to fight or scream but know I will if it comes to that.

Every minute seems like a day, as I curl against the wall. I know "he" is drunk, because I saw him empty four beer bottles into himself before my brother and I came to bed. Why do they all love to drink? I try to avoid them; I want to have my first love, have him walk with me in the square, play chase in the wheat. Just because my body has matured faster doesn't mean I'm ready to be a woman. I'm not, I'm not!

The silence is suddenly broken by his stumbling into a wall as he fumbles toward the room. My heart races as "he" nears the bed; I want to swallow but can't. I feel paralyzed. "He" reaches across the bed just as a new defense comes into my head. If only I can keep shifting as "he" tries to touch me, then "he" might think I'll wake up or that my brother may wake at any moment.

I continue to act as though I may wake up at any moment each time his hand tries to touch me. Between each attempt "he" makes, I keep praying "he" will give up and go away. It seems as if weeks have gone by, yet I know it's not morning because his baby hasn't started her morning cry.

After what feels like an eternity, "he" gives up and again fumbles back to his room. I sigh as I hear him fall into his bed. When finally I hear his snoring I feel safe enough to let the tears flow. I cry as I realize what I have lost: "He" would no longer be my favorite uncle, but a feared enemy as other uncles already were.

Untitled

Adanna B. Craft

A Portrait of Polluted Water

by Jeff Speed

Breakfast had started with the sun melting on my pancakes following the murder of my son. I remember telling him before he died that my father was a river and my mother was a bitch. He gave no reaction or made any movement of interest, so I took my fork and shoved it down his slender throat that was already lubricated with maple syrup. I told him I was god and that he must repent for not acknowledging me. I don't think he got the joke, because he died shortly afterward.

I doubt he ever really existed, not in spirit anyway. He never spoke to me because he didn't have a language. Right now I can't even recall if he had a name. But, of course, this doesn't matter now; I'm intelligent enough to realize that there's no sense in calling out to a corpse.

When I was his age I used to dream of demons with urine-stained teeth riding through a burning forest of grey, smokey mist on the backs of indescribable hounds. This pack of monsters was so immense that it surely would have eclipsed the sun had my vision provided it. Too tired to run, I stood by and waited until one of the demons with urine-stained teeth bent over the side of his hellish mount and grabbed me by the hair of my neck with a swift, effortless sweep of his blistered arm. As we rode he whispered secrets into my ear—all of them I have since forgotten—violent secrets that simultaneously thrilled and scared me. When the demon with urine-stained teeth had finished speaking, he landed in front of a burning gas-station and dropped me. I remember him saying before I woke up, "The water is polluted . . ."

The angel in my brain tells me what I did was wrong. That my son was special, authentic.

I used to wrap a blanket around my son and me in the cold months on rainy mornings. We didn't have a fireplace, so I'd turn on the television with the sound muted to allow the lights and colors to flicker around us. I'd read the final act of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* over and over until my son was asleep. When he dreamt, he took small breaths and consequently appeared dead.

Now I looked at his slumped body that was draped clumsily over the back of his chair. If it wasn't for his open eyes or the fork protruding from his open mouth or his blackened lips I would think at this moment that he was dreaming. His pale, porcelain flesh was not yet aware that its resident was gone, a light sheet of sweat shrouded the boy. I drank a glass of water, and it swam in my head.

The birthplace of my sins is in a quiet fishing port located off a tiny, non-existent ocean that I can only visit when I close my eyes. Because of this, I am blind there. I can hear the ocean, and I can hear the voices, and I can hear the colors. Bright colors that smell salty but perfumed in orange clouds. The colors tell me my name when I forget it. There are three of them; I suspect that they are soft, like pastels of some sort, but I can't see them.

I can only recognize them by shape.

Once one of the colors, an isosceles triangle, spoke to me of my son.

"Your boy has vision," it said. "He is an artist who is blind and deaf to reality. He can see my skin and speak my toes. He is a yellow Michelangelo!"

When the color shaped like an isosceles triangle finished he disappeared, and I was left alone and blind in a breezy wharf bar.

An old fisherman sat next to me. He breathed from his mouth, constantly expelling the sour odor that slept on his tongue. I could feel his worn and calloused eyes on me, and I could hear the liver spots on his hands jumping from one to the other like junebugs between two porch-lamps. Somehow I knew he was smiling.

Suddenly, the old fisherman grabbed my unguarded shoulders and screamed out in that sweaty glee that possesses the senile: "I hold the sun in my throat! In my throat! The sun burns in my throat! If you weren't blind you could see it!"

And then he laughed and stumbled away muttering something about a partridge.

At the time I had thought nothing of it. I went on eating the tasteless pretzels moistened by stale sea air that sat in a grimy-feeling plate on the bar. I listened to the faint sounds of the ocean and felt the whispery rhythms of the bar patrons. When I had had enough I opened my eyes. I was lounging in a lawn chair beside a hotel pool; the high winter sun winked at me; I forgot my dream.

"What would Jesus think of you now?" That was the angel in my brain.

I looked at my son again, and he makes me want to laugh. He looks like the worm of the butterflies I'd catch a long time ago. I'd catch them in jars and put them in the freezer. They wouldn't die; the cold would only kill their senses. When they were unconscious like this I'd cut their wings off as though I were a surgeon and carefully pin needles through their midsections. When the impaired butterflies thawed I would place their bodies near ant-beds and watch as the tiny ants descended on the huge prey like Indians after buffalo.

Unfortunately my son is too big to place next to an ant-bed. They could never get his head down the hole. That shadowed head with the annoying grey eyes staring vacantly at my kitchen ceiling. I hate that head, that face. There's no anger in it, no love, no deceit, no pain. It just hangs from his shoulders, expressionless like the portraits of floor-tiles hanging in "modern" art galleries. Today, we acknowledge the spiritless. We can only see the water, not the pollution in it. The polluted water that swims in my brain and makes the angel drunk. I can feel it now, sloshing from side to side, flooding the canals of my rubber head. It feels like the blood of abortion with chunks of flesh stirred in. Someday my son's body will flush through someone's head. The obscure thoughts of unfinished pancakes will occupy that person's mind.

When I was my son's age an old woman with long nose hairs and a copper smile would make me pancakes and sausage. She would speak German and cry a lot at night. But I didn't mind; the pancakes were good. One morning, though, she decided to make biscuits instead. She loved cats and eventually died.

I ate the rest of my son's pancakes. They weren't as good as the old woman's. I never learned how to make them the way she did.

I looked at my son again. I took the knife that the river gave me and cut into his numb flesh. I cut around his stomach and pushed my hand through the opening; it felt like jello. I began to eat. Although the shapeless, wet morsels didn't look like pancakes, the taste was there—but admittedly muted.

Breakfast had started with the sun melting on my pancakes following the murder of my son.

Scott Dwight Huffmaster

Some of Us

Some of us want what we know we'll
never have,
Some of us have what we know we'll
never want.

So let's get together and share what
we have,
So maybe some of us will have what
we want.
So maybe some of us will want what
we have.

Some of us will have what other
people want,
Some of us will want what other
people have.

No one is going to have everything
they want,
No one is going to want everything
they have.
So let's get together and have what
we want.

And then some of us will want what
we have.
And then some of us will have what
we want.

Untitled

Bill Wilkinson

Pithy Notes on Contributors

Gail Blair, student, explores the realm of written communication and enjoys freedom of expression as a respite from the rigors of mathematics. **Adanna B. Craft**, student with a creative vision. **LaDonna Genson**, student, believes we should "love life, poor as it is. [We] may perhaps have some pleasant, thrilling, glorious hours, even in a poor-house." **Jerry L. Harris** teaches English and "ponders the significance of pastels in peddle-depressed, panchromatic sequences." **Jean S. Helgeson** teaches biology and encourages students to take her genetics class in the spring. **Tony Jack Howard**: "When I'm not teaching, when I'm not enmeshed with student essays, I try to envisage the larger whole that gives my work its meaning. A glass of Chianti and a good book work wonders here. **Scott Dwight Huffmaster**, student, stands aside to examine the caring and sharing, the dying and violence bred by loneliness. **Lin Kallies Kasian**, student, never received her pair of rose-colored glasses. **Marla Knowles**, student, "runs naked through the streets of her mind and feels sometimes the sting of lashing branches, sometimes the kiss of butterflies' wings." **April Kao,** student, reveals life in its marvelous and sometimes frightening aspects. **Linda Pinkham**, student, still ponders winning. **Kym Smith**, student, composes adventures in imagination at a most unusual table. **Jeff Speed**, student, with more Blake and Beaudelaire than Emily Post, sets a kalaidescopic table of human fears, needs, and wants. **Jeannette Baillie**, student, uses writing like a file-o-fax to organize her thoughts. **Amy Tackett**, student, studies human nature in poetry and sculpture. **Bill Wilkinson**, student, opens doors to insight and beauty through art.