

5-1-1998

1998 Forces

Peggy Brown

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Recommended Citation

Brown, Peggy (1998) "1998 Forces," *Forces*: Vol. 1998 , Article 14.

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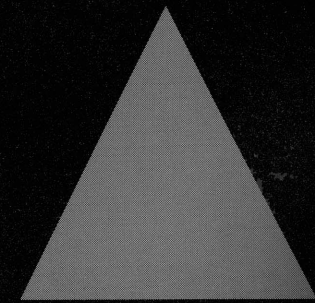
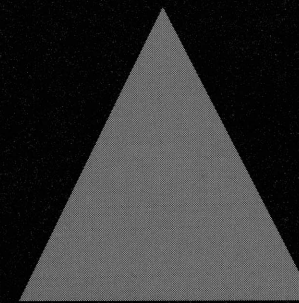
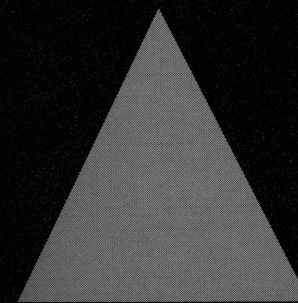
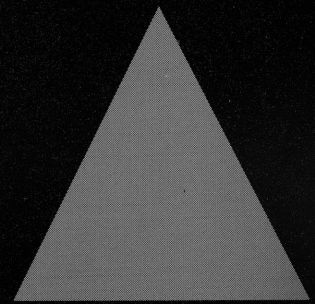
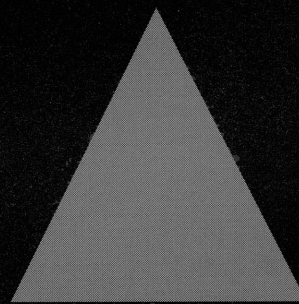
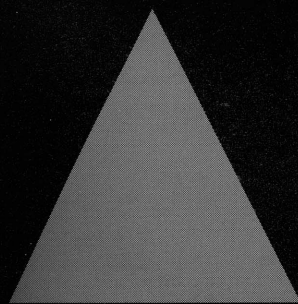
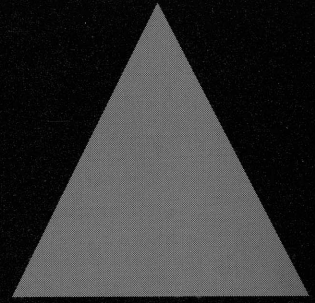
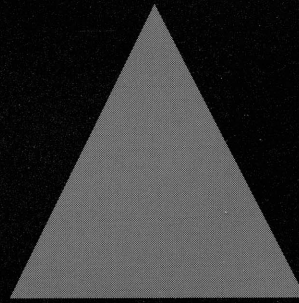
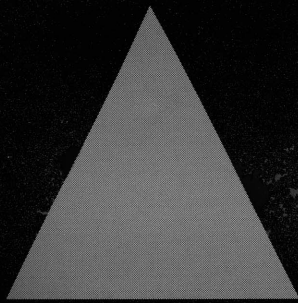
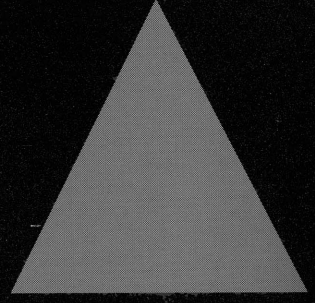
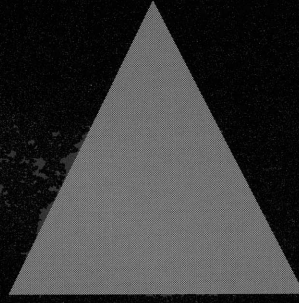
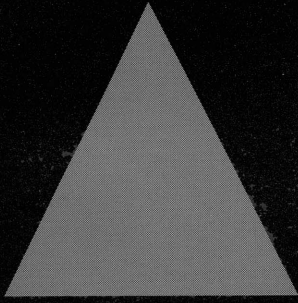
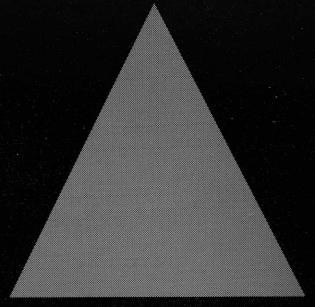
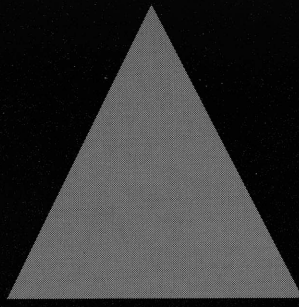
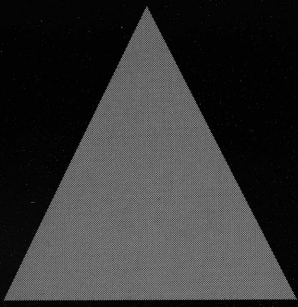
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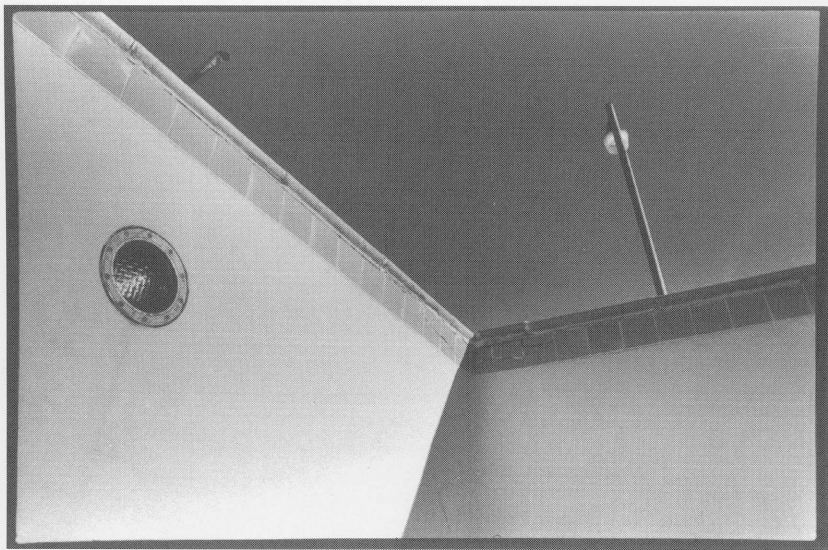
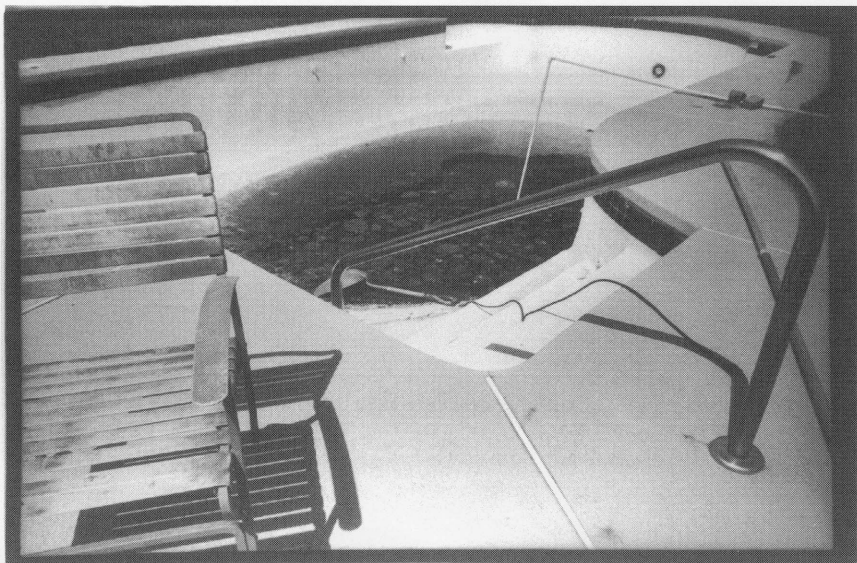
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fall tree S

snuggle
neath colourful,
crunchy, leaf quilts
winter approaches





It was always Moons Over My Hammy Two eggs over two hams over two biscuits smothered in country gravy at the local Denny's was a **post-breakup tradition** for Miss Marianne Melissa Maybelline. Marianne Maybelline usually didn't smoke, but within the tradition, after every breakup, each more **tumultuous** than the first, she would lounge for hours upon hours over a midnight breakfast, swooning in a Camel cumulus, inhaling cigarette after cigarette [giving the food just a dash of ash], sobbing out bits and pieces of "Come on Eileen" while tugging on brown, heavy locks and humming to the collaboration of Denny's muzak, and dwelling on the hopelessness of her romantic life.

When she turned sixteen, Marianne Maybelline decided to make an organized effort to date as many men as possible wherein she would find that perfect mate, her cannibal lover. She left it up to **fate**; it was inevitable. But, now, as she was rocketing towards thirty-one, she doubted her idealism. She had the uncanny ability to encounter the most bizarre of people, those who laughed in the face of social morals and values.

It started out as small things, but then progressively got worse. **Fate.**

Edward, the doctor from New Hampshire, was too **conceited**. Jamison Lynch from Georgia was **racist**. Scott Amillion ended up being married with five kids. Carlton came out of the closet, went back in, and then took up nude Celtic dancing. Harold was too dull, and Peter's feet smelled horrible. Marcos Allegro de LasCasas del Sol peddled various drugs and is presently serving sixteen years. Joe Jimmy Bob James had a fetish for snakes. Kevin Chameleon left for another woman, while Martian MacDoogle, Benny, and Brock [all brothers, by-the-way] had blizzard dandruff. The list was more extensive than this, but I think you get the picture.

Marianne Melissa Maybelline did have a certain obscurity of her own. She had another tradition of collecting little memorabilia from her list of lost, loser lovers. As the relationship was making a beeline for Splitsville, Marianne would rummage through the partner's belongings and take something that represented him. She had a rickety, six-tiered encasement adornment above her bed, wherein she erected a **monument, a definitive work of art**, above which a banner read IN MEMORY OF LOVE, and filled it with spoils of her romantic crusades. From Edward, she had an anal probe, and from Jamison, his sacred "Kill Whitey" knit sweater handknitted with love by Mama Lynch. From Scott she stole a wedding ring, hoping to cause some trouble for her time. She had Carlton's plaid nipple tassels, Harold's favorite baby blue bowling ball "Betty Blue", a pair of Peter's sandals, and Joe Jimmy Bob James' prize winning Annie, dead and stuffed in a see-through box. She kept a kilo of Marcos' finest hash, which she reserved for monetary crises, and, from Kevin, the **two-sizes-too-big**-to-be-her's brazier she came across in his belongings. From Martian, Benny, and Brock, she had a bottle of Head and Shoulders and also a bottle of whiskey which she would ritually down in order to overcome the disgust of the scapular dust. Miss Marianne also had pounds of dead flowers, a trophy or two, a police badge, an empty fishbowl, a toupee, many a diaphragm, and an assortment of crusty toothbrushes.

As new men would come over, she would restrict sex to only her room and **upside down** on her bed, so with the progression of the inevitable squish and squiggle she could marvel at her shelf and decide how and where her newest items should be arranged.

And then one day she met a man named Claude. He was a very decent gentleman; medium-height, devoid of facial hair (which Miss Marianne Maybelline loved), had an iodine tan, a humble smile, a twinge of a French accent [which was probably just a gimmick], and loads of money in the bank. He had no little “discrepancies” and actually seemed to love Marianne. She, however, was just focusing on the negative. She figured he must have problems somewhere; **it was only a matter of finding them.**

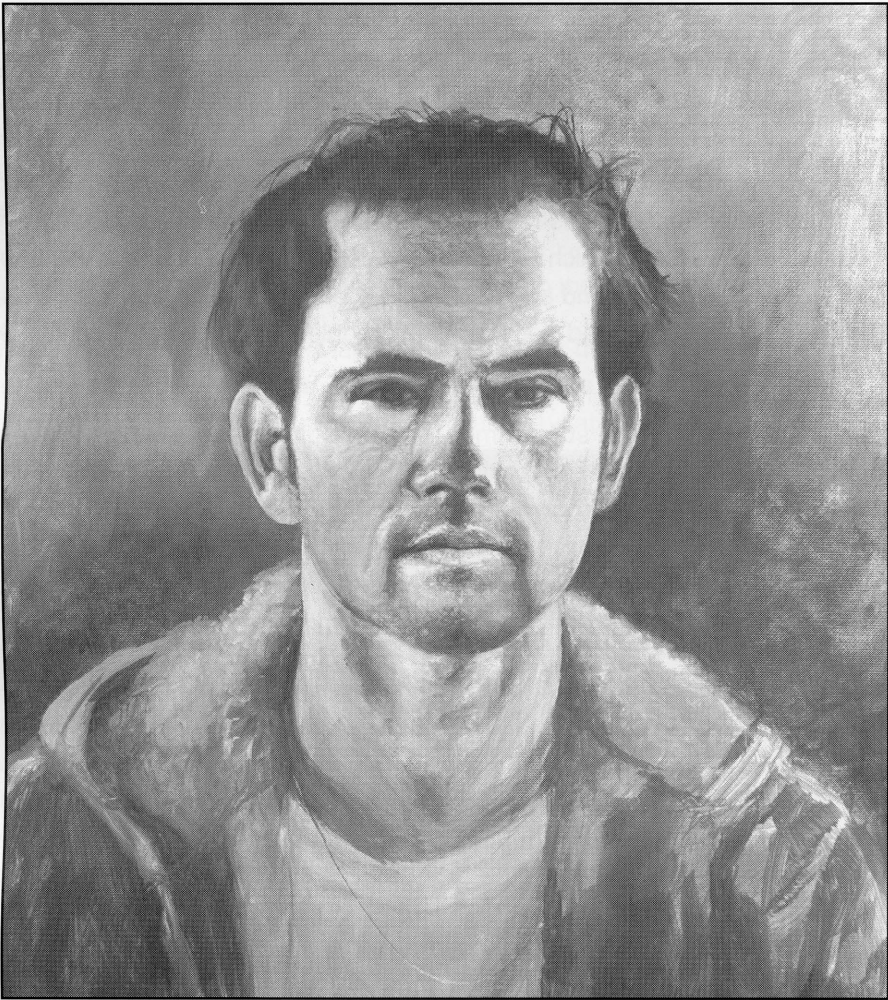
But as the relationship wore on, he still seemed **sincere, gen-u-wine.** He never stayed the night and would tuck miss Marianne Maybelline in her bed overnight, **just like a daddy**, and tell her how much he loved her and how he would be here [where? there] for her forever and give little kisses and quietly let himself out. She loved it. And furthermore, she decided she loved **him.** She was beside herself. She was ecstatic and immaculate. She had finally fulfilled her life’s only dream, and was now living **it.**

One morning she awoke to a little, velvet, black box peering at her from her nightstand, with a little note attached’ “To love”. Marianne Maybelline was so excited she bolted up in her bed, grabbed the little box, opened it exposing a diamond ring. She clasped it tight in her hands and kissed it, then pitched it up in the air, like someone might a lucky penny. The ring went higher than Miss Marianne Melissa Maybelline had intended, clinked the top shelf of her monument, and then bounced back to her hands.

“Whew.” She smiled. But **the ring proved to be the straw that broke the camel’s back, for the shelves cracked all the way**

d
o
w
n

the middle due to centrifugal force, and the entire thing in its full monstrosity, the rings and probes, the tassels and sweaters, the toupees and the toothbrushes, and the serpents and dope, all heaped upon her, locking her in the bed, the crumbled shelving affixing the body to the bedframe like a bug under the fly-swatter, and “Betty Blue” clocking her over the head, rendering her dead. The **IN MEMORY OF LOVE** banner drifted down over her body and covered her like a mortician’s sheet, and there she remained, under a confetti of withered flowers and contraceptives, for poor Claude to find his beloved gone, departed. **Fate.**

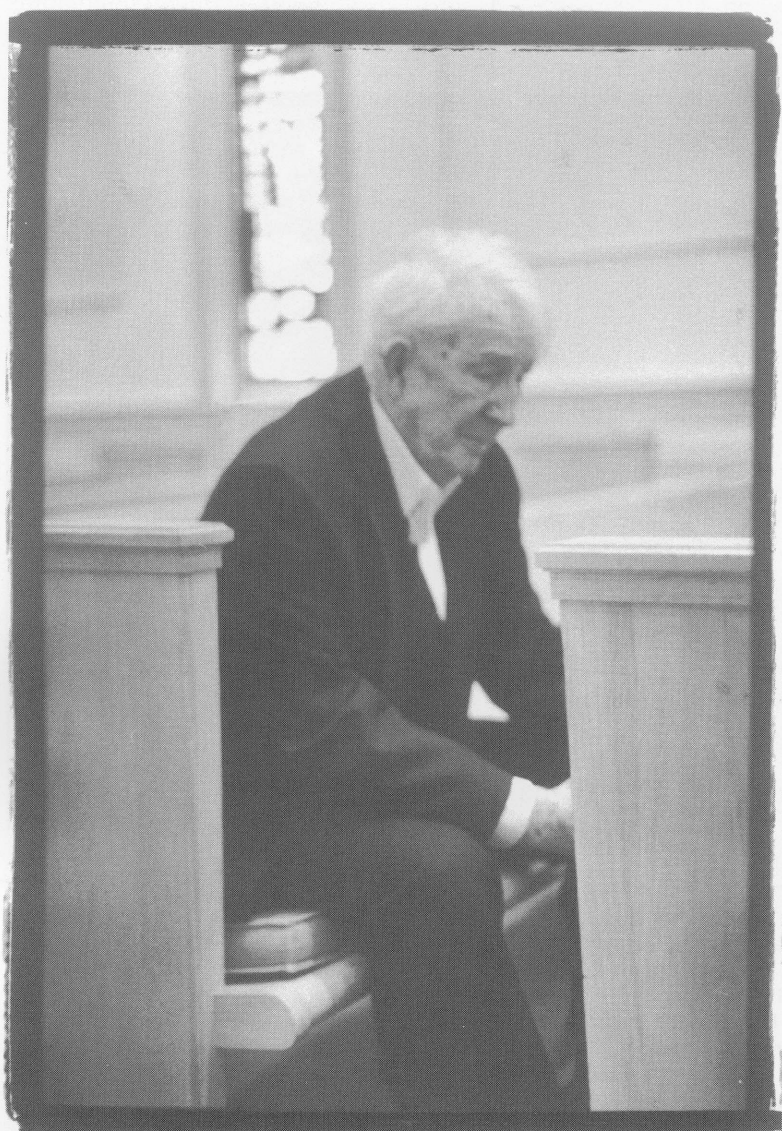


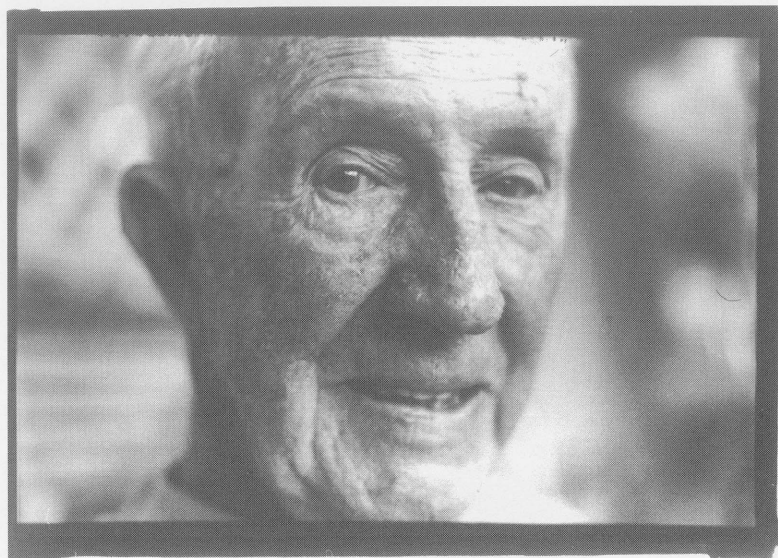
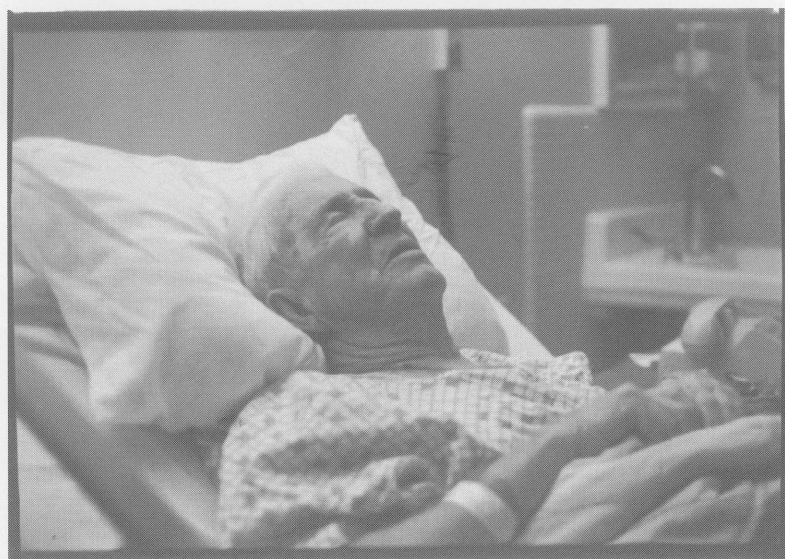




hands

in his arms he cradled her
and in his palms her tears disappeared
but in her mind he was a stranger
they'd known each other so long
she forgot who he was
and in her dreams she was visited by so many
that could have been him
so many faces
so many hands touching her
so little love...







musings

MELANCHOLY CREATURES WE,
A PRODUCT OF THE SAND AND SEA;
OF MOISTENED DIRT OR POTTERS CLAY,
IT MATTERS NOT WHAT FORM WE TAKE--
FOR ON THE OUTWARD WE APPEAR AS DRONES,
WITHOUT A PURPOSE, CLEAR,
BUT OF THIS DUST TO WHICH WE MUST FADE
SO ALSO ARE THE HEAVENS MADE.

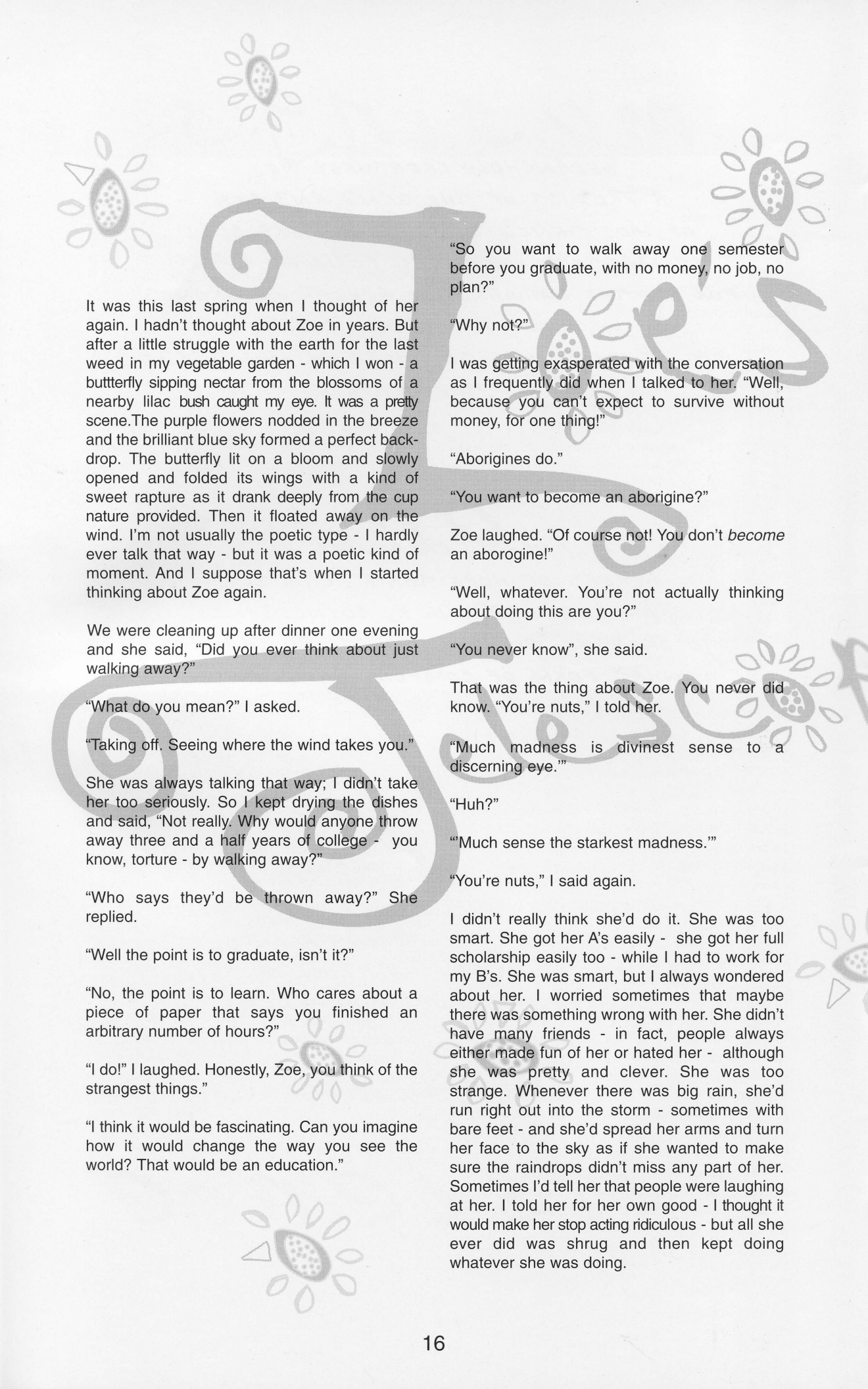
on

MELANCHOLY CREATURES WE,
BEREFT OF HOPE THAT I CAN SEE;
FROM CHAOS SPRUNG BY COINCIDENCE,
TO BREATHE, TO LIVE, TO DIE BY CHANCE--
WHAT FORM OF COMFORT CAN I TAKE
WHEN EYES GROW DARK AND I FORSAKE
THE VERY NATURE OF MY BEING . . .

"NO," I CRY, AND MUST REBEL
(FOR NATURE FAVORS NONE THAT WELL)
THAT I WITH CONSCIOUS AGENCY
COULD BE NO MORE THAN ROCK OR TREE
OH, MELANCHOLY CREATURES WE . . .

IF THERE'S NO GOD--NO DESTINY.

existence



It was this last spring when I thought of her again. I hadn't thought about Zoe in years. But after a little struggle with the earth for the last weed in my vegetable garden - which I won - a butterfly sipping nectar from the blossoms of a nearby lilac bush caught my eye. It was a pretty scene. The purple flowers nodded in the breeze and the brilliant blue sky formed a perfect backdrop. The butterfly lit on a bloom and slowly opened and folded its wings with a kind of sweet rapture as it drank deeply from the cup nature provided. Then it floated away on the wind. I'm not usually the poetic type - I hardly ever talk that way - but it was a poetic kind of moment. And I suppose that's when I started thinking about Zoe again.

We were cleaning up after dinner one evening and she said, "Did you ever think about just walking away?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Taking off. Seeing where the wind takes you."

She was always talking that way; I didn't take her too seriously. So I kept drying the dishes and said, "Not really. Why would anyone throw away three and a half years of college - you know, torture - by walking away?"

"Who says they'd be thrown away?" She replied.

"Well the point is to graduate, isn't it?"

"No, the point is to learn. Who cares about a piece of paper that says you finished an arbitrary number of hours?"

"I do!" I laughed. Honestly, Zoe, you think of the strangest things."

"I think it would be fascinating. Can you imagine how it would change the way you see the world? That would be an education."

"So you want to walk away one semester before you graduate, with no money, no job, no plan?"

"Why not?"

I was getting exasperated with the conversation as I frequently did when I talked to her. "Well, because you can't expect to survive without money, for one thing!"

"Aborigines do."

"You want to become an aborigine?"

Zoe laughed. "Of course not! You don't *become* an aborigine!"

"Well, whatever. You're not actually thinking about doing this are you?"

"You never know", she said.

That was the thing about Zoe. You never did know. "You're nuts," I told her.

"Much madness is divinest sense to a discerning eye."

"Huh?"

"Much sense the starkest madness."

"You're nuts," I said again.

I didn't really think she'd do it. She was too smart. She got her A's easily - she got her full scholarship easily too - while I had to work for my B's. She was smart, but I always wondered about her. I worried sometimes that maybe there was something wrong with her. She didn't have many friends - in fact, people always either made fun of her or hated her - although she was pretty and clever. She was too strange. Whenever there was big rain, she'd run right out into the storm - sometimes with bare feet - and she'd spread her arms and turn her face to the sky as if she wanted to make sure the raindrops didn't miss any part of her. Sometimes I'd tell her that people were laughing at her. I told her for her own good - I thought it would make her stop acting ridiculous - but all she ever did was shrug and then kept doing whatever she was doing.



And there was this one time when I went into her room and found her studying by candlelight. "How can you see?" I asked her.

"You can see by candlelight.", she said. "You just see differently, that's all. Some things you can see better by sunlight, some by lamplight, some by candlelight. And some things you see best with your eyes closed, don't you think?"

I just sighed and shook my head slowly and closed the door. I don't know how she could even read in there. And I know she was studying something hard - something like history or astronomy - because I asked her later and she said she was reading about Galileo's telescope.

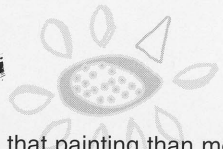
But she was smart, all right. Although she did spend a lot of time thinking about things that aren't very useful like poetry and art. And it was never enough for Zoe to simply read a poem or look at a painting. She'd go for walks with a book and read poetry aloud as she went. I'd go with her sometimes - not often - telling her all the way that people were staring.

"Maybe because they're enjoying it."

"No, they're not enjoying it. They think you're strange." I insisted.

"Poetry means so much more when it's read aloud," she said. "A poet goes to a lot of trouble to create something that's almost music. To say something with sounds, not just words. You can't get that by reading it silently. Listen to this.." and she would continue, oblivious to the rolling eyes and the snickers of the people around her. William Blake was bad enough, but when she went through her Allen Ginsberg phase, it was really embarrassing.

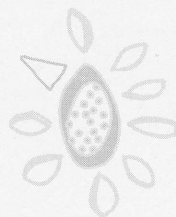
Or she'd drag me to the art museum. I hated that because she made a bigger fool of herself there than anywhere. She was always very quiet and polite, but she'd do things. "Hello Vincent," she would say to Van Gogh's self-portrait as she looked into his eyes. "What were you thinking when you painted this?" She said she could almost see the spark of his soul if she looked close enough. She especially loved Salvador Dali's painting with the droopy clocks. It looked like silliness to me, but she often said



there was more truth in that painting than most people ever experienced. One day she actually got kicked out of the museum for lying down on the floor. She wasn't hurting anything, but they sure didn't like it. The next day she went back and said that she was sorry if she had upset people but that she really needed to see what this painting looked like from down there. It was another Van Gogh. She showed it to me later - I wasn't with her the day she got down on the floor - and it was a picture of a tree and a bunch of stars. She had a thing for Van Gogh, but I didn't see what was so great about this painting. Stars are supposed to be tiny points of light and these were big and swirly. I didn't think it was very realistic.

And eventually, she did it. One day Zoe just left. I was angry for a while. Why did I have to have a roommate - a best friend - who did such bizarre things? I always cared more about important things like security and stability than seeing what it felt like to stand in the rain or talk to pictures. I did the right thing. I graduated, got married and had a family. Sure Edgar drinks a little more beer than I'd like. And sometimes I think I'll scream if I look up and see WWF wrestling on TV one more time. But he is there, And he kept the kids in Pampers when they were little, and now Osh Kosh's. And there's always food in the pantry. But sometimes I wonder if Zoe found what she was looking for. Sometimes I wonder if there are things you can see by candlelight that you can't see by a lamp.

Since that day in the garden, I've thought about Zoe more often. I hope she's OK. I think she is; she is a smart girl. I still think she was a little bit nuts. I can't imagine wandering aimlessly around the city, or the country, or the world - or doing most of the things that Zoe did, for that matter - never having settled down with Edgar and having the kids. We do so much together, and it's the kind of life I always wanted. Just last week we had a little family outing and it was really nice. The kids wanted to go to the Natural History Museum, but I told them I'd rather go to the park since we still had a little summer left. Who wants to see a bunch of insects pinned to the wall?







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